

2. House and Universe

“When the image is new, the world is new” p.47.

Having stated in the previous chapter that, “imagination augments the value of reality”, Bachelard in this section continues to elucidate the oneiric (dream-like) characteristics and representations of houses and the spaces they generate; real and unreal. At the same time he attempts to illustrate the dialectical relationships between both houses and the external environment (the universe) and also between houses and those who inhabit them. Moreover, Bachelard argues that the poetic images of houses should not be regarded as mere metaphors, but as lived events. Despite its essentialist and nostalgic overtones, the chapter’s importance lies in its concern for everyday spaces and its challenge to the concept of representation itself.

1 *Reading houses written by great writers*

Baudelaire (*Artificial Paradise*): Kant, drugs and Wales on a winter’s day. Harshness of the winter transforms the house into a warm blanket, though Bachelard critical that the dialectic is oversimplified; the snow renders everything to nothingness and the house as unable to resist/struggle p.39/4.

Bachelin (*Le Serviteur*), p.41, winter, recalling virtual memories from history books.

Rilke (*Lettres à une musicienne*), p.43, a longing to be outside, but house and space are not binary elements of space, but awaken ‘daydreams’ in each other.

Bosco (*Malicroix*), p.43, La Redousse, anthropomorphic transformation of the house – “the house acquires the physical and moral energy of a human body”, p.46. Go beyond impressions and participate in “cosmic events”p.46.

“In this dynamic rivalry between house and universe, we are far removed from any reference to simple geometrical forms. A house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space” p.47.

Bachelard contends this is not just metaphorical word-play. Phenomenology of the imagination demands that the image should not be ignored as a form of expression, but instead, “lived directly”.

The house is an instrument of topo-analysis, but difficult to use as its geometric form lends itself foremost to rationalisation rather than metaphor. That said, they can attain a certain humanity if ‘cheer’ and ‘intimacy’ are considered.

Reality/dream complex never fully resolved, as such, Bachelard moves on to consider the ‘dream geometries’ of houses in the past.

2 *Memory and regret*

Bachelard encourages us to daydream houses, to go beyond objective drawings. Bachelard himself is excited when he realises that what he thought were naive daydreams actually coincide with the poetic images rendered by fellow authors, including André Lafon. p.49.

The images are no longer mere representations. Instead, Bachelard imbues these images with agency. “...lines have force” p.50., “The print house awakens a *feeling for the hut* in me” p.50.

“Geometry is transcended” p.51., as daydreaming expands and Spyridaki’s house begins to breathe. Bachelard deploys lines from René Cazes to illustrate the spirit of poetry, namely to “give unreality to an image attached to a strong reality”. This, for Bachelard, is the power of suggestion owned by poets and which rescue us from the strictures of philosophical concepts. The achievement of imaginary dialectics is that the image is “no longer descriptive, but...inspirational” p.53. Bachelard uses the opportunity to take aim at the ‘positive man’, p.55., part of his broader critique of the positivist excesses of science and philosophy.

In dealing with sensations of regret, p.56., Bachelard intimates that memories are not static images stored in a repository of the brain, but might actually “assume a living possibility of being”... that these virtual resonances can live in the present and overwhelm us. Bachelard does concede however that the past can be situated elsewhere and thus unsettling. Using William Goyen’s *House of Breath*, There follows a page of angst concerning the reality/unreality of memories, Bachelard concluding that the image is created through the fusion of real and unreal, a “geometry of echoes” p.60.

3 House of the future

“It is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality” p.61.

Bachelard appears to be claiming that short-term projects of finding a larger/better house are bad for the soul; rather a “daydream of elsewhere should be left open” p.62. Bachelard extols the cinematic qualities of train travel and embellishes his account with the overt romanticism of Thoreau. Bachelard also discusses the continual tension between dreaming of grandeur and intimacy.

Bachelard invokes a rhythm analysis, p.65. to suggest that the need for both “retreat and expansion” is not contradictory, but a function of inhabiting.

4 Reality strikes

Bachelard poses the quandary, how can housework become a creative activity? By practising phenomenology while polishing furniture, of course. As “men only know how to build a house from the outside”, Bachelard enters into an unashamedly romanticised and sexist account of housewives “awakening furniture that was asleep” through polishing. Bosco too is particularly enamoured, “when she [the servant, Sidoine]...polished a brass candlestick... little movements of joy mounted from the depths of her heart” p.68.

Despite the nauseating romanticism of this section and dubious nostalgia for domestic labour, it might be worth reflecting on the agency afforded to objects and the way in which they *talk back*, or affect movement, behaviour, sensation and transform space.

Simple images, Bachelard concludes, “reveal a psychic state” p.72., and by attending to the minute details of drawings/images, one can become a psychologist of houses.



Discussion

Is there a tension between the creativity/dynamics of the imagination versus static dwelling and intimacy of the house? Everything external to the house seems to resemble Lefebvre’s absolute space.

Wind // Ted Hughes

This house has been far out at sea all night,
The woods crashing through darkness, the booming hills,
Winds stampeding the fields under the window
Floundering black astride and blinding wet

Till day rose; then under an orange sky
The hills had new places, and wind wielded
Blade-light, luminous black and emerald,
Flexing like the lens of a mad eye.

At noon I scaled along the house-side as far as
The coal-house door. Once I looked up -
Through the brunt wind that dented the balls of my eyes
The tent of the hills drummed and strained its guyrope,

The fields quivering, the skyline a grimace,
At any second to bang and vanish with a flap;
The wind flung a magpie away and a black-
Back gull bent like an iron bar slowly. The house

Rang like some fine green goblet in the note
That any second would shatter it. Now deep
In chairs, in front of the great fire, we grip
Our hearts and cannot entertain book, thought,

Or each other. We watch the fire blazing,
And feel the roots of the house move, but sit on,
Seeing the window tremble to come in,
Hearing the stones cry out under the horizons.