

# The Interweaving of Consciousness and Poetic Space

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## ABSTRACT

Imagination vitalizes language, language creates poetic space, and space serves as the “residence” of consciousness. The operation of poetic space and imagination has been discussed and interpreted by Gaston Bachelard, a French philosopher, in his <The Poetics of Space>. The subtle connection between space and existence was also unveiled by Martin Heidegger in his <Introduction to Metaphysics>. Consciousness is the source of thoughts, the objective existence of which has also been corroborated by the space as its carrier. Therefore, space-based poetic research on the dual fields of philosophy and architecture has certain positive significance for modern architects.

**Keywords:** *Home, Poetic Space, Consciousness, Phenomenology, Literature and Architecture*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Space, an objective existence, is ubiquitous. And architecture concretizes space on the material level. It is through experiencing and perceiving the “material” space that people construct “spiritual” space, where human consciousness lies in and the reason why people resonate with an existing building. The churches in medieval Europe, as a tool for the Holy See to spread religious thoughts, were formally manifested as a combination of architecture and religion. In these churches, the staunch priest preached devoutly, and the foolish people longed for salvation and detachment. However, people’s excessive adherence to the “Old Testament” gradually stagnated cultural development and even caused civilization degradation. The architectural style within the same period was basically fixed-the well-known Gothic architectural style was born in this period, such as the Chartres Cathedral in France, the Salisbury Cathedral in England and the Church of Duomo in Italy. Although the excessive respect for the sacred makes these buildings look magnificent and solemn, the price is the loss of space dynamics and vitality. Afterwards, with the Renaissance thought spreading throughout Europe, literary works increased along with the awakening of minds, and architecture also ushered in its style optimization. Thought is the embodiment of consciousness, and the carrier that can accurately express human thought is language and writing. Martin Heidegger, one of the

founders and main representatives of Existentialism in the 20th century, once put forward that “The key is to learn to live in language. To this end, a lasting test is needed to see if and to what extent we can make the original response.”,[1] from which the important role of poetic language in the construction of the human inner world can be seen. It is systematically proposed by Gaston Bachelard, the French philosopher, in <The Philosophy of Space> that imagination should be used as a medium to construct human inner space to explore the value of humanity within. It can be said that his research direction has opened a new ideological trend in the field of Western philosophy. By reading <The Poetics of Space>, a series of studies have been carried out on space and consciousness. And this paper aims to explore the relationship between the poetic space within architecture and the human “spiritual” space, as well as the interaction between consciousness and space.

## 2. DIALECTICS OF POETICS AND ARCHITECTURE

Speaking of poetic expressions, people tend to generalize it into language and rhetoric, while the creation and superposition of space are more considered concerning architectural expressions. These two, seemingly from different sources, however belong to the same category of art, originating from the subjective thoughts of the creators. It is proposed by Hegel that “People use language to express their own thoughts to be

understood by others. Artworks share the same function, as artists present their thoughts and concepts through various means. And the task of architecture lies in processing the exterior naturally to make it a flesh-and-blood connection with the heart, establishing it an exterior world that conforms to art.” An exquisite building that contains artistic aesthetics and humanistic poetry is not only a combination of design and technology, but also an excellent blend of consciousness and reality. The word “poetic” is defined in contemporary Chinese dictionaries as follows: poetic feeling; the content and artistic conception of poetry; the sense of beauty given to people through the expression of poetry. Therefore, whenever the characteristics of a thing can inspire inner aspiration and move them, people tend to regard it poetic. Undoubtedly, remarkable architecture endows people with sensual enjoyment. And the time people appreciate the charm of architecture, a corresponding paean comes into being. Architecture solidifies itself in poems, like the exquisite and elegant Tianyi Pavilion with Jiangnan style. Meanwhile, poems revivify the architecture. For example, “In the morning, the rosy clouds from the southern shore flit across the painted pillars. In the eve, the rain in the western mountains is drawn in by the red curtains” in <A Tribute to King Teng’s Tower> by Wang Bo fully reflects the dynamic beauty of King Teng’s Tower. Among all the numerous and complicated collections of poems can we easily find the unbreakable bond between architecture and poetry. The famous buildings in China, be it the Yellow Crane Tower, Epang Palace, or Yuelu Temple, boast corresponding poems, either magnificent or grunge. Poems pass on the names of architecture while architecture consolidates the poems, complementing each other to be remembered in this world. It is given this linkage between poetics and architecture that the encounter between words and architecture promotes the close connection between people and the space. And after realizing the impact of this moment on the heart, a new kind of thinking on poetics and architecture will be derived. Architecture should not only provide the residence but more exists as a cultural symbol. The construction of modern architecture should conform to the local customs, culture, and humanities, so that people can experience the cultural connotation and poetic feelings during residence.

### **3. THE IMAGE OF “HOME” IN <THE POETICS OF SPACE>**

#### ***(1) Human Homes***

Reading the words describing the architecture, people are prone to enter the space they image and reshape the objectively existing building according to their personal wishes. In the late modernism period when the development of architectural culture stagnated, the feedback to the real world in light of phenomenology and symbolic meaning in <The Poetics of Space > by Gaston

Bachelard promoted the unique study of architecture and humanistic spirit. Different from the theory of traditional architecture that focuses on entities, Bachelard has turned his research direction to the spiritual space of human beings. His main idea was that space is not a container filled with objects, but a residence for human consciousness, and architecture is the poetics of habitat. Home occupies a corner of the world, and the image of which reflects the image of intimacy, loneliness, and enthusiasm. We stay in homes while homes constitute us. We build the homes poetically while homes construct us spiritually.

The word “home”, itself, is quite poetic. As Bachelard said in <The Poetics of Space> that “Home is the root of a person’s heart.” [2] People habitually hide their most true dreams in the homes engraved in their hearts. The homes can be the hometown you haven’t returned to for a long time, the first tent you set up in the wild, or even the luxurious residence in your imagination... The poem “Home is where the heart is.” by Su Shi probably means that only a space where people have a sense of belongings with their souls freed can be called the human “homes”. Everyone has his own home. People add a hazy poetry to their homes according to their own imagination and complex, and return to re-experience the long-awaited tenderness when they are alone. Home is an independent space, which may be ordinary in material but extremely special in spirit. Bachelard, in the 20th century, put forward the “epistemological rupture”, with which the difference between science and poetry was revealed that science requires the separation of subject and object, but in fact the objective attitude has not been realized but brought the spirit of the subject to the land of poetry. “Daydreaming replaced thinking, and poetry concealed theorems.” [3] Bachelard believed in <Water and Dreams-On the Imagination of Matter> that matter does not lack subjectivity, “Through whatever distortions or divisions, matter is still itself. Matter realizes its value in two senses, either in the sense of deepening or leap. While the immeasurability of matter turns it to a mystery from the sense of deepening, matter more seems like an inexhaustible force and a spectacle from the sense of leap. Under both circumstances, thinking towards some matter fosters an open imagination.” In other words, the essence of the physical homes resembles that of the spiritual homes in the phenomenon. People and homes, both the subjects in the process of cognition, endow each other the meaning and proof of existence. The environment is integrated with people’s body and consciousness to form a holographic whole: everything in the house is known to the self, even the dusty broom abandoned in the shadows all the year round; everything about the self is also acknowledged by the home even a special habit hidden from the public. Every period of time that people spend in homes is compressed into a specific space to be cherished permanently. Then what defines homes? The answer is obvious that home is the place where self-

emotions are contained. Wittgenstein once said that “The philosophical self is not a person, nor is it a person’s body or a person’s mind as examined by psychology, but a metaphysical subject, the limit of the world - not a part of it.” If you abandon yourself and only talk about material architecture, you will surely fall into nothingness. Once human beings have feelings trapped in their hearts, they will be unveiled naturally. Since then, home is no longer just an architectural entity but a spiritual sanctuary for everyone, and even a poem that can be imagined at will and chanted aloud.[4]

Imagination plays a decisive role in the process of space formation and architecture construction. The poetic nature of human beings materializes the imagination, brews the inner complex in the solitary space and enjoys it.[5] The two images of the cellar and the attic as the home stretch this emotion vertically, and the more toward the poles, the freer and more abstract. The functions of the two poles of homes generate based on people’s dreams with depth determined according to personal imagination. For example, for children who are innocent, the quiet high attic provides stability, and the dark cellars present fears, while the numb people’s perception towards these emotions experiences a significant decrease. Therefore, a person, if lacks imagination, can only recognize home as a floor plan. As absolute rational thinking outlaws its three-dimensionality and stretchability, the space can only be constructed to be uninteresting. Otherwise in the realm of absolute imagination, the richness and diversification of space turn people into naïve children who create as they like and joyfully live in the dreamy castle. When given an opportunity to mediate in the attic or cellar, the noise of the world gradually disappears to highlight our unique existence, the creative value of which is further manifested in this spiritual space. In addition, this kind of value proves to be interchangeable. As said by Haizi, “Poetry is the kind of thing that returns silence and freedom to the human soul”. Therefore, the time when poets begin to sing, a certain response will be received by their poetic souls.

After discussing the inner connotation of homes from the perspective of imagination, attention has more focused on the connection between the home and the outside world. The home and the people in it, as mentioned above, are integrative. In fact, the home and the universe are no longer two independent spaces in the realm of imagination but connected by human nature to activate each other through self-interpretation of existence. “Silence concretizes itself with a body, a real body, a motionless body. It remains in the dark night and consists of dark nights.” All the literary works considered, the character’s home is depicted by the author to reflect the background and environment of the era. And the “environment” here is actually included in the “universe” above. Here comes a question that if the home changes accordingly with the sole universe, or the opposite? There

are many poems describing the four seasons of the same architecture and also articles narrating the changes of the home given the same environment. It is true that it makes no difference whether it is the universe as the dominant or the home as the dominant.[6] However, from a phenomenological point of view, I think that people will tune the universe to the channel of their homes for their own needs, just like the ancients often said “What you see is what you feel”. Under the poet’s writings, the home exists as a universe, in which the wind whizzes, clouds float and all the furniture breathes. The snow-white tablecloth on the dining table may be the land after a heavy snowfall somewhere. When the imagination in a home reaches its saturation, any adjustment is no longer required. As the universe has its own laws, this home enjoys its own four seasons and an eternal cycle of birth and death. The dynamic confrontation between the home and the universe resembles that between man and nature. For example, “In the strong wind, he lowers his head when necessary, affirming that he will stand up again at the right time, and ignore temporary failure.” The characteristics of dynamic homes connect human beings and the universe appropriately, establishing them a common-mode state with the devouring of nothingness avoided.

## **(2) *Bird’s Nest***

Gaston Bachelard described the bird’s nests in <The Poetics of Space> that “I picked a bird’s nest on the branches of the ivy, a weak bird’s nest covered with moss and dreamlike grass that are unique to the countryside.” Deep down in everyone’s heart lies a dream concerning bird’s nests. Born with it, sometimes it hides deep in the corner, and sometimes it comes unexpectedly. After finishing a day of hard work, people’s bodies are wrapped in warm and tranquil nests, singing joyfully in sweet dreams. It is human instinct to enter our own hidden nest. Since the birth of human beings, we have been looking for our own shelter. Whether it is a cave, a cellar, or a home, they are all equipped with the same function as the bird’s nests—to comfort the residents. Pick a forest at will and stroll through it, the bird’s nests are definitely a common symbol, just like a residential building in a prosperous community. Poets often attach humanity to the bird’s nest, because it is a living home for birds. As it constantly breeds new lives and protects them all the time, the bird’s nest is a high-altitude castle inhabited by dreams, and the origin of life. When we lightly touch the bird’s nest, the life in it will give a wonderful response. In most cases, it will only tremble slightly but not fly away immediately with the great sense of security brought by the bird’s nest. When perched in a bird’s nest, only the wearer knows where the shoes pinches. Even if the bird’s nest is destroyed by the storm, the bird’s heart will not be killed. As the bird’s nest is made with the simplest materials in the most intelligent method, it knows that one day the bird’s nest will recover as before and the

swallows that move will eventually return home. The homes and the bird's nests are never built for anyone. They just stand there, waiting for the return of those who belonged to it. No one would run counter to the home when they longed for rest and safety. It is our instinctive trust in the home that makes us involuntarily embrace it. The phenomenology of the bird's nests realizes us that homes have already upgraded to absolute spiritual sanctuaries in our imaginary world. This comfortable world created by imagination is so quiet that we can even hear its heartbeat full of vitality. Although our bodies live in the steel forest, one thing is beyond doubt that the universe is where human nests and spirits belong.

### **(3) Shell**

"To live is to build a home, but to build a home is not to live." This is the attitude of shell mollusks towards life. We know that their soft bodies are mostly hidden in hard and smooth shells, and occasionally only a small part of them is exposed, so we often treat these shells as inanimate stones or carved works of art. But when we peek into the unmoving body in the dark from the opening of the shell, a chill arises. Animals always have inexplicable fear and awe of unknown things—perhaps this is the way shell mollusks survive. After all, who knows the huge energy contained in a small shell? As they know this well, the shell evolves into a spiral shape, avoiding the linear attack from the outside and greatly enhancing the security. The shells of shellfish are never fixed but grow with the bodies. And each growth represents their own rebirth. In this way, the size of each shell, at the microscopic level, will be accurate to the size of the particle, corresponding to a unique body while preventing even its kind from living properly in its own shell. However, when the phenomenologist focuses on the shell, he will be amazed by the giant hidden in the shell: even if the size of a shell is fixed, there may still be infinite space inside it before people find it out. The claustrophobic space in the shell seems to be a barrier to the time and space of the outside world. If you turn your perspective into it, you will find solid "walls" all around. Time and space extend in a path that subverts common sense, and finally reach the "nucleus" of the shell—a visual spatial pole, which symbolizes the silent suffocation and an eternal closed loop. Perhaps in a space similar to the one above, our consciousness can also be safely hidden in silence at the moment of need. Life is born in a shell, life dwells in a shell, and life is buried in a shell. People are just like shell creatures, who have determined their destiny in so many searches and constant growth.

## **4. THE EPITOME OF MATTER AND THE VASTNESS OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

The appearance and internal structure of the miniature matter are intricately complex. A tiny particle also displays a rich side under the microscope, presenting

itself as a miniature universe. The apple under Cyrano's writing is like this, "This apple symbolizes a small universe for itself. Its kernel part is hotter than other parts, emitting the heat held by its sphere to its surroundings. It looks like this kernel stands as the little sun in this small world, which heats and nourishes this small mass of plant salt." It is from this text that the poetics added to space from imagination is fully embodied, as if we can actually feel the internal composition of the apple and its scorching kernel. Poetic imagination enables us to realize wonderful truths through ordinary things. Poets do not observe tiny things under a microscope like scientists, so their views are different: Scientists name it a particle, while poets regard it as a dust. Under the blessing of imagination, the poets see the inside of things in a different way, a rich world in which no things that you have already understood and been accustomed to exist but all alienated and brand-new ones. It is precisely because we cannot enter those tiny things that they attract us like ancient Greek mythology. Miniatures are often seen in fairy tales with which poets use their writing skills to insinuate the characteristics of human beings to animals like cunning foxes and heroic lions; and even create new species such as villains as small as thumbs and giants as tall as windmills. In this small fairy tale world, you can experience the strange and undistorted world. And in the imagination, sizes prove to be interchangeable. The dialectical relationship between "big" and "small" is thus involved. When a familiar tiny image is enlarged to an unimagined volume, the scale of the space is stretched, and people will break through the stereotypes of traditional space, based on which a new thinking is carried out and a different meaning given to this scene.[7] "Small" images may boast huge meanings, while "big" things may also be born from tiny definitions. "The better I am at miniaturizing the world, the more I can occupy the world. Space lies in nowhere but our hearts." Poets may be incapable of traveling all over the world, but capable of portraying the world through words, how is that possible? In fact, when creating, poets will use the technique of miniatures to fold the curve of the space and continue to place the space in it. As they enter the "core"[8] of the scenery, the distant horizon transforms to a pattern of the bed sheet at home. They know how to use small to create big and turn big into small. When we are at the top of the towering lighthouse, the universe is nothing but a pool of scattered sand in light and shadow. However, we can run out of the house, escape from the earth, and flee from the universe, but still cannot go beyond the "enclosure"[9] set by ourselves. Perhaps everyone lives in their own miniature.

"Big as the world is, it lies deep in our hearts like the sea." Through the discussion of the above images, it can be found that imagination can expand the breadth of inner space without limit. When we examine our dreams outside the souls, we will involuntarily stand in awe of this behemoth. It resembles the calmness of a lake and the

infinite development of the universe, whose supreme sacredness silences the noisy space. The vastness of human inner space has lengthened the distance between people interaction, so poets always remain in solitude, which also allow them more energy to carefully examine the surroundings and create perfect literary works. Because of the uncertainty of the spirit to the material, we often doubt the meaning of our existence, thinking that the world is too large while ourselves too small, like a drop in the ocean unable to overturn the ocean, and even make waves. But people who are good at using imagination never fear nothingness and doubt, because their hearts are big enough to contain heaven and earth, preventing existence from falling into nothingness. Even in a deserted and remote place, a lonely heart has its own fertile soil, and this quiet space provides the necessary conditions for the existence of consciousness, and the awakening of consciousness, in turn, stimulates inspirations. Inspirations burn in loneliness, and the lonely flame brews an explosion of inspiration. The connection between the inner space and the world space is based on a deep sense of loneliness, which is relatively open to deepen each other. When we ignore the evaluations of others, even if we live in a narrow and claustrophobic alley, we can say that "Take the sky as the blanket and the ground as the seat." But at the same time, people should understand the difference between the inner worlds and pure dreams. Although dreams are the basic materials that constitutes the inner world, they differ from inner worlds. Dreams can be beyond the boundaries and detach from reality, but the construction of the inner world necessitates a practical framework. The real space needs the exploration of the inner world, and the inner space calls for the support of the real world. The process of our understanding and learning in this real world resembles the process of continuously enriching and expanding people's inner worlds.

"Space, as you cannot imagine this scary thing that is both interior and exterior, it is the real space." The ambiguity of the definition of the word "space" expedites the following questions, how to prove that a space exists in another larger space? Does an invisible space equal nothingness? If the nothingness dominates the internal space, where should we live? The existence of space itself can be either recessive or explicit. Treating the problem of existence through poetic phenomenology, then the limitations of material existence is ignored, turning the space a plane that can be explored at will. And poets redefine the concept because poetry endows existence an open form of expression, but also the right to self-enclose. In other words, it is impossible to determine a space based on geometric figures. The interior and exterior opposite to each other enable people to appreciate its inner beauty from outside the geometric figure. Poets never skimp on giving those spaces peculiar inversions and reversals, though so seemingly unreasonable from a rigorous and rigid perspective. Imagination vitalizes language, and

poetry visualize space. Once an image is created, space turns to be meaningful in our eyes. This is exactly what Heidegger said, "Existence is the existence of beings." [10] Consciousness stands as the source of human existence. People use consciousness to perceive and use the space endowed with meaning of existence by consciousness, and in turn, these "reformed" spaces testify human existence. [11] In this way, people can experience this richly imagery world, constantly draw inspirations, and then construct homes meaningful to themselves.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on <The Poetics of Space>, the interweaving of space and consciousness is explored layer by layer from three aspects of poetic architecture, the operating mechanism of imagination, and the vastness of consciousness. Invisible in poetry and tangible in architecture, imagination constructs the bridge between with space as the common carrier. Gaston Bachelard made a unique interpretation of the poetics of space and the existence of consciousness through phenomenology, which coincides with Heidegger's existentialism in some respects, that is, the poetic space constructed with imagination involved gain people the confirmation of self-existence, achieving the so-called free state of "authentic existence" in an eternal and definite space. The poetics activated by imagination endows the architecture with the characteristics of humanistic care, allowing people to obtain the belonging of conscious existence while identifying with spirit. According to the space theory by Gaston Bachelard, people living in poetic space resembles a practice that promotes humanity with the form of architecture becoming more diversified with the development of humanity. The changes of the times and the gradual opening of social thoughts have simultaneously improved people's spiritual needs and cultural realms, and economic development and technological progress have also prompted the application of more and more once "supernatural" materials into emerging architectural designs. Therefore, in-depth study should be carried out on architects' research on poetic space and its application in architecture.

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