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“The world is my provocation” Pathicity in Gaston Bachelard

Abstract

This article explores the role of pathicity in Bachelard’s notion of reverie. Through the concept of provocation, four images from The Poetics of Space are investigated. “House, soul, and the corner” tackles the relationships between spaces and reveries. “The smell of raisins” highlights the active side of pathicity. “The hostility of the city” scrutinises how imagination can smooth urban sounds. “The ménage” is dedicated to engagement and care, where pathicity is embodied in daily tasks.

Keywords

Bachelard, Reverie, Pathicity

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*But the oneiric instance to which we refer differs from magic.
It exists on a plane a bit more vague, a little less determinate.
It is precisely the imagination of matter itself,
the realm of reverie concerned with work.*

Gaston Bachelard

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to propose some considerations that try to outline *pathicity* as it appears in Gaston Bachelard's concept of reverie. To do so, I will start from and base my argumentation on the notion of *provocation*. Following Tonino Griffero's proposal¹ that underscores the theoretical and somehow foundational implications of *being-grasped*, the notion of pathicity is here understood as the involvement of the subject when affected by the intrusiveness, to varying degrees, of the world. Indeed, the idea of pathicity and all its alternatives are key in the aesthetic theories on atmospheres, and have been stressed, though with some important variations, among others by Hermann Schmitz (2019) and Gernot Böhme (2017a, 2017b). However, as we shall see, Bachelard's position seems neither to admit a primary (and potentially exclusive) pathic – in the sense of "passive", "non-resistant" – horizon in affective experiences and phenomena comparable to atmospheres (*à la* Böhme and Griffero), nor (and much less) to embrace a radically externalist view (*à la* Schmitz). Indeed, Bachelard's very conceit of imagination and reverie assumes and actually gives pre-eminence to the existence of the soul, *anima*, which plays a pivotal role in his essays on material imagination and in his poetics.

Even if the notion of pathicity is not directly addressed by Bachelard, it runs through his theory of imagination as the ability to (re-)create images that are innervated by the cosmogonic elements and by the felt, intimate spaces of the house. As the French philosopher strongly emphasised, reverie is neither to be understood as a fantasy, a so-called "castle in the air", nor as a dream dictated by the instances of the unconscious; rather, as the result of the *activity* (the emphasis is not accidental) of day-dreaming which is filtered by the four elements (fire, water, air, earth). These are, in his words, the "hormones of the imagination" (Bachelard 1988a: 11). The reverie creeps into the interstice between affection and response, that is, a form of action. To put it differently, in its kneading of

¹ Among others, see Griffero 2019a, 2019b, 2020.

the matters and responding to their "affordances", to borrow a Gibsonian term particularly apt here, imagination is an active force that industriously works on what it is affected by, that is, on the invitations, opportunities, and *provocations* it receives.

My thesis is that the idea of provocation, as well as its gentler version, "solicitation", evokes very well and is the hallmark of Bachelard's understanding of pathicity². Indeed, as a rephrasing of Arthur Schopenhauer's famous statement "The world is my representation", the sentence "The world is my provocation" is adopted by Bachelard in different variants in a number of his works. Just to mention some occurrences, in *Water and Dreams*³, in the chapter dedicated to violent waters, Bachelard underlines the resistant, opposing feature of the world when faced with a subject endowed with will. Hence, he argues that, from an activist point of view, fire, water, air, and earth – that is, the material elements – correspond to "four different types of provocation, four types of anger" (Bachelard 1983: 160). Whereas in *Earth and Reveries of Repose* Bachelard (2011: 218) claims that the "belligerent world is our provocation" when considering the root and the act of uprooting it, in *Earth and Reveries of Will* (2002) the terrestrial world itself is basically conceived as a continuous friction and obstacle. In fact, here Bachelard extensively addresses the concept of provocation. The solid matter challenges us, and we struggle. In the sign of the earth, imagination turns into imagination *against*; it provokes us, and we respond by acting, reacting, and engaging our energies, as it is the case of the engraver (cf. also Bachelard 1988b: 55). Clearly, in all these cases "provocation" is mostly connected to a degree of aggression. And all aggression, whether it is connected to humans, to minerals, or to the weather, is always of animal origin. This point was already developed by Bachelard in *Lautréamont* (1986), but persists in his later works. In *Air and Dreams*, he emphasises the aesthetic value of weather phenomena, perceived as powers rather than forms. Anger

² On Bachelard and the provocations of matter, cf. Bonicalzi *et al.* 2012.

³ This essay, published in 1942, stands as an explicit breakpoint from the objective pose assumed in his previous (three years earlier) *psychoanalysis* of fire (Bachelard 1964). As a matter of fact, Bachelard is obliged to shift gears because of his failure to approach the images of water by means of a rationalistic and detached attitude (cf. Bachelard 1983: 6-7), which is nevertheless still detectable not only in the identification of water-related complexes, but also in certain passages and approaches in subsequent works on the elements. This acknowledgment, mixed with regret, is also found as a self-denunciation at the opening pages of his last, unfinished work, *Fragments of a Poetics of Fire*, published posthumously and edited by his daughter Suzanne Bachelard (cf. Bachelard 1990: 3-4).

shapes up to be the foundational inauguration of the dynamic being, the driving force without which impressions would be dead letters. Thus, as "if by provocation, the world is created through anger. [...] Anger is the act by which being begins" (Bachelard 1988a: 227). Similarly, in *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard talks about "a bestiary of the wind" (Bachelard 1994: 44) to describe the occasions in which the weather turns into a hostile and aggressive beast that, in the event of violent meteorological conditions like during a hurricane, howls and screams. Addressing the themes of pathicity and provocation in Bachelard might be a hazardous move. The risk lies in overshadowing the active, poietic, and generative nature of both the imagination and reverie, leading to an interpretation that places too much emphasis on external factors. I will try to avoid this, acknowledging that reverie is a dynamic process through which images emerge, intensify, and transform experience, sometimes primarily from within, and that the imagination should be understood as a creative activity capable of reorganising the world and transfiguring it⁴.

Provocation, which differs from solicitation not so much for the quality of its dynamics but for its stronger intensity, is verbatim a "call forth", a "call forward or out", something that causes or brings about the occurrence of an event, a phenomenon, or an action. Certainly, in Bachelard pathicity is a necessary condition for existence. It underlies the faculties of receiving the world's suggestions, performative qualities, and invitations, and of listening to the voices of the poetic images, to their *murmuring* (an aspect I will elaborate later). But, at the same time, such a pathicity is not mere passivity; rather, it is tightly intertwined to a degree of agency, to an active reply and engagement that the world itself requires and asks for. In this sense, pathicity lies at the intersection between the self and the other – the world provokes *me* and *I* exist within and insofar this provocation activates me. Here, the self is composed of the pathic *me* that gives rise to the active *I*. Provocation expresses the complex and non-unidirectional dialectic between subjectivity and the world, indicating "a dual movement: the world is the result of our rational and imaginative tools of provocation, but at the same time it is what provokes us, what provokes our experience of it" (Vinti 2012: 20)⁵. Within this framework, the human being is a surface that separates the self from the other in an ever-dynamic relationship. The human being is – in short – a sensitised surface area. In this in-between, in this auroral state of being still

⁴ I would like to thank Aurosa Alison for her valuable and generous insights.

⁵ Henceforth, the translations from non-English sources are by the author.

merged with its affective surroundings, the reverie unfolds. In a certain sense, to hint once again at J.J. Gibson, reverie resembles the surface. As an interface between medium and substances, the surface "is where most of the action is" (Gibson 1986: 23).

On the plane of the reverie, the world is not littered with solidified objects, but teems with rarefied processes and metamorphic mingling. Bachelard depicts the reverie as the daydreaming of the material world through the imaginative activity of the daydreamer, sometimes (and in his personal case, very often) mediated by the poet's imagination, concretised in and triggered by poetic images and their novelty. In their turn, images arise from the con-fused relationship with a fluid world that is crisscrossed by lines of force, suggestions, provocations, and solicitations caused by the elemental substances it is composed of. Differently put, the "imagination 'reacts' to the matter's 'provocation,' and images are the 'flowers' that bloom from this encounter, from this 'transaction'" (Sertoli 1972: 210-1). In essence, the reverie is penetrated by the materiality of nature while being an expansion of it. The reverie, which is the liminal layer between sleep and wakefulness, is a volatile, pre-dimensional space. Bachelard (1969: 111) coins the evocative phrase "penumbral ontology" to indicate this interstitial crevice, the blossoming of a difference from which the self and the world emerge in the *same mode of being*. Images are then modes of *oneiric* experience of matter, even if the adjective "oneiric" may be misleading. The reverie (*rêverie*, "daydream")⁶ does not coincide with *rêve* (dream) because of its evanescence and peculiar dynamics. Whereas the dream is silent, nocturnal, unconscious, dramatic, dominated by the *I*, reverie, in contrast, is half-light; it is diurnal, more delicate, a never-ending murmuring that flourishes at the juncture where consciousness and the world begin to diverge but are still entangled. The reverie is therefore the intermediate membrane where subjects and objects have blurred boundaries or they can even reverse.

Therefore, the reverie is somehow radial: the subjects focus on the objects and become the objects of their daydreaming; while the agency is transferred to the objects, pathicity to the subjects. A case in point of such an imaginative relationship of continuous elemental-ontological permutation is the human experience of observing fire, "the *first phe-*

⁶ Many translations retain the French term due to the significance of the word itself in the Bachelardian philosophy, and the subtle but crucial differences with its unconscious counterpart.

nomenon, on which the human mind *reflected*" (Bachelard 1964: 55). Differently from the light of a candle or of a lamp:

[the] electric lightbulb will never provoke in us the reveries of this living lamp which made light out of oil. We have entered an age of administered light. Our only role is to flip a switch. We are no longer more than mechanical subject of a mechanical gesture. We cannot take advantage of this act to become, with legitimate pride, the subject of the verb "to light". (Bachelard 1988c: 64)

As Bachelard (1994: xix) puts it, such an ontological disclosure entails that, at "the level of the poetic image, the duality of subject and object is iridescent, shimmering, unceasingly active in its inversions". Specifically, the subjective and objective poles seem to be the results of a relationship that stands as a necessary precondition to their subsequent differentiation. Aligning with a relational idea of atmospheres, the reverie is the point where the world and the state of the subject merge, while e-merging. In other words, we are faced with an affective, material ecology dense with *ecstasies*, as Böhme (2017a: 18-20, 2017b: 37-54) would say: namely, the ways things step out of themselves becoming present in the surrounding space. In Bachelard's vocabulary, however, "atmosphere" clusters diverse semantic and figurative nuances. On the one hand, it seems to indicate the affective *qua* poetic quality of words and images; as an example, this transpires when he claims that "*meaning* is of little importance when it is a question of giving memories their dream (*rêve*) atmosphere" (Bachelard 1969: 140). On the other hand, it consists of the dimension where the very reverie unfolds. Among others, this passage makes such a sense clear: "The image is no longer under the domination of things, nor is it subject to the pressures of the unconscious. It floats and soars, immense, in the free atmosphere of a great poem" (Bachelard 1994: 69). Quite consistently, atmosphere opposes rational meaning. This implies a resistance to an analytical and reductionist attitude to comprehend words and images conceptually, while encouraging – or even *compelling* – a first-hand engagement with their realm. The same is true for spaces, especially the intimate spaces of the house.

In the following pages, my analysis will mainly (but not exclusively) focus on Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1994). The reason is twofold. On the one hand, being his first poetics (published in 1957), it can be seen as the watershed between an interest in the aesthetic experiences provoked by the material world, and a more autobiographical and creative approach towards poetic images and their spatial provocations. On the

other hand, the very subject – that is, the intimate spaces of the house – is particularly disposed to an analysis that attempts to elucidate pathicity through the notion of reverie and its connection to atmospheric spaces and buildings, like many recent architecture-based studies show (cf. Böhme 2017b; Pallasmaa 2012, 2014; Canepa 2022).

In *The Poetics of Space*, reverie is directly addressed through an inquiry into space understood as felt (cf. Alison 2019, 2020), rather than measurable or geometric, which finds its counterpart in the body conceived and lived as *Leib*. Bachelard's purpose is to elaborate a *topophilia* – which, however, does not exclude, as he himself admits, the existence of hostile images and what we might conversely call *mystopia* – by investigating images of happy spaces, images of intimacy as they emerge and articulate; that is, a study of the phenomenon of the poetic image as it arises in consciousness, in its actuality and emergence. In this respect, "poetics" has to be understood in two ways. In its strict sense, as the essay is based on literary and poetic documentation, where not only the image corresponds to the word, but poetry is understood as a pneumatic reality – language, according to Bachelard, is as a matter of fact the root of consciousness. And in its broad sense: imagination as a *poietic* faculty that creates images that go beyond reality, obeying the *function of unreality*. This is an activity that is, in different ways, always intertwined with pathicity. Such an aspect, in my opinion, concurs in making a more systematic study of pathicity in Bachelard's oeuvre interesting, certainly challenging, and perhaps necessary today, in order to open new lines of research and to reread Bachelard's heritage in a contemporary light.

In the wake of his spirit and style, I would like to expand on the topic of pathicity and provocation through four thematic knots or images. They consist of: 1) house, soul, and the corner; 2) the smell of raisins; 3) the hostility of the city; 4) the *ménage*. "House, soul, and the corner", in addition to encapsulating the central theme of the work examined here, will be instrumental in clarifying the pathic relationships between spaces, reveries, and the lived body. Considering the smell of raisins, we will highlight the active, creative side of pathicity, that is, the workings of the imagination that, in the reverie, *murmurs* the world and its provocations, giving rise to the phenomenon of *retentissement*. The theme of reverberation is explored by investigating the hostile nature of the urban environment in its auditory form. Here, what we experience can be actively reworked to create a reverie that positively reconnects us with the environment. The section on the *ménage* is dedicated to the themes of corporeal/im-

agitative engagement and care, where pathicity is embodied in practical activities and daily responsibilities.

2. *House, soul, and the corner*

In disagreement with the Heideggerian idea of "thrownness", for Bachelard being is first and foremost *well-being* – life begins well in the warmth, cosiness, and softness of a protected cradle. This is why the notion of provocation appears somehow violent when applied to the house. In its image, we find ourselves in a realm of gentleness, of a soothing atmosphere. It is, therefore, a *mild* form of provocation that differs from the strong one connected to the dynamics of matter. Indeed, the house is a material-maternal being that should welcome and nourish. The unconscious is then happily housed, and this corresponds to the pathic experience we have of spaces. Actually, when the unconscious is somehow evicted, when it is not housed, it is drifting towards its pathological, instead of pathic, dimension, which is treated by psychoanalysis. In this sense, the house, in its unity and complexity, is the ideal place to grasp the virtues and qualities of the function of dwelling. Since it is our first corner of the universe, the first soil in which our soul sinks its roots, the house becomes the essence of inhabited space, providing both shelter, room, and provocations for reveries. This is why only those who are sheltered can lose themselves in daydreaming.

Even further, our being is housed and, concurrently, we dwell in houses, so a double spatial interpenetration occurs: the images of the house are within us and we are within them. Although Bachelard's perspective ended up taking a position which is equidistant from Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung's principles – that is, against a psychologist reductionism that levels all the qualities of the images to social interpretation – in *The Poetics of Space* he explicitly borrows Jung's intuition according to which our soul is organised and psychically structured in the same manner as a house. Specifically, the house of our soul is imagined as a vertical (and concentrated) being that develops from the cellar up to the garret covered by the roof. Between these two poles, the upward articulation includes a ground floor and, at most, a first floor, because when faced with too many floors "our dreams become blurred. In the oneiric house, topoanalysis only knows how to count to three or four" (Bachelard 1994: 25). Every floor is typified by peculiar qualities. The basement corresponds to irrationality, the dark side of the house, chthonic powers,

fears, shadows, darkness, the dimension where sunlight never enters, which hosts dramas and madness. And while the ground floor is connected to everyday and familiar life, raised floors and the roof embody rationality and clarity. Actually, even words can be imagined, according to Bachelard, as tiny houses, equipped with their cellars, floors, and garrets like actual buildings. Here, the ground floor is the plane where common-sense inhabits. To go up or downstairs are actions endowed with opposite qualities: the former finds its counterpart in conceptualisation and in abstraction – the philosopher's task; the latter, in dreaming and getting lost in obscure etymologies. Only the poet can wander between these two opposite but complementary dimensions, holding sky and earth together. Consequently, the stairs between the floors have oneiric tones, and their orientation is neither neutral nor symmetrical. Indeed, in the realm of values, just as the key closes rather than opens, and the handle opens rather than closes, the staircases to the cellar are always descending, whereas those to the attic are always ascending. In a nutshell, directions are non-uniform in imagination. That is to say, each thing and orientation provoke us in a different way. In atmospheric terms, we find the same phenomenon that ties in with the theme of lived space: although metrically the same, the journey one takes to leave or return is not pathically homogeneous. The direction provokes experiences that do not coincide in affective terms.

By developing a cluster of dialectics – such as large/small; open/closed; within/without – Bachelard's hypothesis is that the house is the archetypal structure of our soul, the topography of our inner being. Moreover, in this framework, the internal/external space is permeable – the inside/outside dialectic is based on a "reinforced geometrism" (Bachelard 1994: 215) while, depending on the case, being can be a condensation that disperses or a dispersion that flows into a centre. The house, especially that of one's childhood, is also inscribed in the somatic memory of its dweller. Bachelard (1994: 11) talks about "muscular consciousness" retained from the beloved spaces – for instance, *that* road that climbed the hill, *that* last higher step to enter the bedroom. These memories graft the imagined house onto the lived one, forming a space where body and soul co-constitute each other. Pathicity is embodied and becomes the flesh through which we dwell in spaces. Not only the different houses and buildings correspond to different imaginative provocations (e.g. tower, hut, manor house, cottage, palace, etc.), but every edifice is composed of various spaces and objects by which we are affected and in which reveries linger, corporeally *and* psychically. In this context, Bachelard gives the

corner a place of honour. The corner is the emblem of a small space where it is pleasant to curl up. It affords us to nestle in its limits. The somatic, corporeal dimension is pivotal, in that it is the primary ground through which the reverie develops. Just like the hut, which consists of the primitive dwelling, is the condensation of the intimacy of shelter, the absolute protection that grants us the experience of unknown and remote spaces, the corner is the seed of a house. The corner is the home of being. The corner ensures and radiates the value of immobility, and precisely thanks to this, imagination takes there the most distant journeys. It provokes such reveries because it affords complete protection and stasis by spatialising, we may say, the whole being in its most compact condensation and contraction, an *enclosed here/me*.

Among other things, in the corners we experience the duplicity of being happy to be sad. The corners – "a refuge for ambivalence" (Bachelard 1994: 140) – invite us, provoke us to feel something which is dual, and we are actively subjected to their antagonist solicitations. Specifically, the corner emanates an atmosphere that involves and reorients the mood of the person who crouches there, even though, in order to crouch there, their emotional and corporeal disposition is already more or less attuned to that specific tone that finds anchorage in an objective space. Just as each temperament suits a certain element, and so we can speak of a tetravalent doctrine of temperaments from which aerial, terrestrial, aquatic, and igneous imaginations derive, so too can the affective topography of the house be read as an inventory of such temperaments. The corner dweller knows well that "nothing is ever empty, the dialectics of full and empty only correspond to two geometrical non-realities. [...] A living creature fills an empty refuge, images inhabit, and all corners are haunted, if not inhabited" (Bachelard 1994: 140). The atmosphere of sadness, sought after and desired and therefore happy, requires a corporeal contraction that antagonistically produces reveries of the opposite spatial sign. The corner embraces this contraction and gives it shelter – an "imaginary room rises up around our bodies, which think that they are well hidden when we take refuge in a corner" (Bachelard 1994: 137). The minimalism, the simple nature of the corner makes it extremely tiring, challenging, and demanding from the perspective of imagination.

3. *The smell of raisins*

Whereas simplicity provokes an industrious activity of the imagination, on the contrary, over-picturesqueness conceals the values of shelter. Neither the most detailed spatial descriptions, nor the most precise planimetric representations do justice to the imagined house. Such a criticism of the over-picturesqueness in the register of reverie appears in another passage of *The Poetics of Space* that takes into account the scent of raisins Bachelard recollects from his childhood. It reads:

What would be the use, for instance, in giving the plan of the room that was really *my* room, in describing the little room at the end of the garret, in saying that from the window, across the indentations of the roofs, one could see the hill. I alone, in my memories of another century, can open the deep cupboard that still retains for me alone that unique odor, the odor of raisins drying on a wicker tray. (Bachelard 1994: 13)

Hubertus Tellenbach (1968) was the first to phenomenologically connect atmospheric and olfactory experiences. The theme of memory obviously plays an essential role, given that in "*fragrance and flavor the enduring element of the past, its atmosphere, is preserved*" (Tellenbach 1981: 224, italics in original). But in Bachelard this relationship is complicated by further issues. The odour preserves the atmosphere of one's own childhood room *only if* unburdened by specifications. Of course, here Bachelard does not oppose memory to imagination. Memory is not understood as an archive of associations from the past; rather, it is conceived as the re-activation of past imaginative acts that infiltrate the present ones. The very memory is based on and sustained by imagination. This twisted logic reflects the reverie's antilogic. To some extent, every imaginative act is the original act of imagination, in an intertwined relationship that, elsewhere, Bachelard (1969: 20) summarises thus: "memory dreams, and reverie remembers". If reason is historical, imagination is unhistorical. And he continues:

The odor of raisins! It is an odor that is beyond description, one that it takes a lot of imagination to smell. But I've already said too much. If I said more, the reader, back in his own room, would not open that unique wardrobe, with its unique smell, which is the signature of intimacy. Paradoxically, in order to suggest the values of intimacy, we have to induce in the reader a state of suspended reading. For it is not until his eyes have left the page that recollections of my room can become a threshold of oneirism for him. And when it is a poet speaking, the

reader's soul reverberates; it experiences the kind of reverberation that, as Minkowski has shown, gives the energy of an origin to being. (Bachelard 1994: 13-4)

Put differently, this scent is like an authoritative (but not authoritarian) atmosphere that does not prevent the reader from readjusting the poet's fragrance and mood. Indeed, if Bachelard had ever written a poetic or architectural manifesto, in all likelihood he would have criticised over-picturesqueness in all its variations, accusing it not only of constituting an anti-imaginative quality that hinders the possibility of inhabiting one's oneiric house, but also of representing an ornamentalist tendency that fills poetry, architecture, and all the arts and crafts with values that are hostile to their intimate experience. Indeed, the saturation of space prevents imagination from working. The overabundance of details obstructs the daydreamer's or the reader's contribution, who should pathically receive the image from the poets, artists, and craftspeople and retrace the path of their imagination backward, while developing it further. If too structured and precise, images and spaces turn into hindrances: the subject's imagination becomes entangled in a crystallisation that cannot be reworked and hence reactivated and lived.

The smell of raisins distils the essence of the childhood home, a house in dialectical relationship with the space in which it nestles. The experience of the house, as Bachelard explores well by investigating the relationship between the house and the universe, takes into account the affective and meteorological qualities that, depending on the situation, embrace or attack it. This mirrors a further, somehow deeper structure in Bachelard's thought: the house and the cosmos are not opposing realms but they dynamically animate each other. The provocations of the elements infiltrate and filter through the boundaries of the refuge into its inner core. Thus, the dweller experiences the house in relation to these forces. For instance, the warmth of a house intensifies as a storm rages outside; a blanket of snow makes the world silent, amplifying the welcoming quality of the interior. In this way, pathicity becomes spatialised: the body sensitises the boundaries of its shelter, turning the hostile world into a transfigured, poetic intimacy. The smell of raisins becomes the essence of the French countryside dear to Bachelard, bathed in sunshine under a clear sky that opens the horizon up. It talks about the relationships between its landscape, tasks, and human activities in a rural dimension.

Bachelard's oeuvre contains interesting considerations on smells; he even acknowledges that some "myths draw their energies from odor

alone" (Bachelard 1990: 40). However, if it makes sense to establish a sensory ranking (and let's pretend it does), perhaps Bachelard would be more of an auditive type, given the centrality of the verbal, linguistic, acoustic aspect of imagination and reveries, their speech and murmuring (cf. Sertoli 1972: 290-303). So much so that, in the quotation above, Bachelard mentions Eugène Minkowski and takes up his concept of *retentissement* (reverberation), developed in 1936 in *Vers une cosmologie* (1999). *Retentissement* is discussed in the chapter devoted to *l'auditif*, where *retentir*, "to reverberate", is the emblem of the dynamics of the auditory dimension⁷. Reverberation differs from resonance precisely because the former implies a pathicity that develops into an agency, an action. Whereas resonance gives rise to a symmetrical echo, reverberation entails a more asymmetrical affective aftermath: a reverberation that transforms subjectivity. As Nevio Del Longo (2021: 170) maintains, the "experience of *retentissement* sets in motion the reader's creative will, awakening all their dormant poetic potentials; it is *retentissement* that makes poetry speak to the reader's soul, turning them into creators themselves and bringing about a true renewal of being". This is central to Bachelard's model of poet-reader communion, a process mediated by reverberating images that reshape the felt world. When we encounter a truly poetic image, we do not simply accept it or listen to it, we are not solely subjected to it, but we *speak*, we *pronounce it* ourselves. And in so doing, even more, we *create* the poetic image. Pathicity, provocation, and creation go hand in hand. To be subject to, we need to be subject of, and the other way round.

Like smells, sounds also generate different provocations depending on the spaces in which they resonate. These tune into a relationship of *retentissement* when the ear and the being that experience and reproduce them have a corresponding temperament. The passage about the smell of raisins is useful not only for the notion of *retentissement*, but also to introduce the hostility of the city which, in Bachelard, manifests itself primarily as an auditory one.

⁷ The following chapter is devoted to smell, *l'olfactif* – whose dynamic is *se répandre*, "to spread, to diffuse". In his view, the olfactory dimension has tight connections with the way atmospheres are present and felt (Minkowski 1999: 111-20). On the diverse relationships between smell and atmosphere, cf. Mancioppi 2023.

4. *The hostility of the city*

Bachelard's relationships with sound ecologies are deeply rooted in and affected by his biography. In particular, they measure themselves against his childhood spent in Bar-sur-Aube, a village in the French rural region of Champagne-Ardenne, rich in streams, fields, valleys, birds, and vegetation, or against the decade spent as an adult in Dijon, both marked by a rhythm far removed from the hustle and bustle of big cities. It is from this clarification that we understand why urban sounds, precisely because they are urban, are hostile and disturbing to his ear, which is attuned to the silences and timbre of nature. Indeed, Bachelard was 73 years old when *The Poetics of Space* was published. After moving permanently to Paris in 1940 to teach History and Philosophy of Science at the Sorbonne and once retired to private life in 1955, Bachelard used to live in a small apartment at 2 Rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Genève. Here, as *The Poetics of Space* shows, he often returned with his memory, imagination, and heart to his native or more tranquil places, an aspect that recurs more and more frequently in his later works, which are interspersed with personal images and memories. Two evocative biographical episodes are emblematic. The first concerns the city of Paris imagined as an ocean; the second is about a neighbour who hammers nails into the wall and is imagined as a woodpecker.

Complaining about traffic noise at Place Maubert that he can hear from his house, and denouncing the fact that the rumble of cars and trucks keep him awake at night, which cause him to curse his city-dweller's fate, Bachelard reveals a strategy which is based on an affective/imaginative naturalisation of hostile auditory stimuli. By actively reworking the annoyance he is subject to, the roar of Parisian traffic is reshaped into the swell of an ocean, and indeed he manages to calm down by living the pelagic metaphors.

We all know that the big city is a clamorous sea, and it has been said countless times that, in the heart of night in Paris, one hears the ceaseless murmur of flood and tide. So I make a sincere image [...], an image that is as much my own as though I myself had invented it, in line with my gentle mania for always believing that *I am the subject of what I am thinking*. (Bachelard 1994: 28, my italics)

Here, we find again the plexus between pathicity and agency, imaginative activity. The modern city, especially in its sonic saturation, threatens the capacity for reverie if it is passively received. But in retuning it, one is still

able to be pathically *and* actively open to the qualities of the world and its provocations. Thus, the bed becomes a small boat. The air filled with the sound of car horns, once its provocations are transmuted into positive reveries, is the same which propels the boat's sails/bed. And hence, the philosopher reassures himself: "Sleep in the storm. Sleep in your own courage, happy to be a man who is assailed by wind and wave. And I fall asleep, lulled by the noise of Paris" (Bachelard 1994: 28). This very activity seems to fall within the realm of the pathic, reinforcing their intertwining: even what we think is, in a certain sense, something that affects us, even if it is often believed that *one is the subject of what one is thinking*.

Something similar occurs with the hammering of a neighbour at night, that Bachelard transforms into the pecking of a woodpecker.

And so the woodpecker enters into my sound world and I make a salutary image of him for my own use. [...] I "naturalize" the noise by imagining that I am in my house in Dijon, where I have a garden. And finding everything I hear quite natural, I say to myself: "That's my woodpecker at work in the acacia tree". This is my method for obtaining calm when things disturb me. (Bachelard 1994: 97)

The woodpecker is not imagined for its singing, but for its working – "Up and down the tree-trunk, his beak pecks the wood with resounding taps, and although he frequently disappears, we still hear him" (Bachelard 1994: 97). If, as Tim Ingold maintains, in "this world, every creature is what it does: the woodpecker pecks wood, the anteater eats ants, the honeysuckle tenders its nectar to the suckling bee" (Ingold 2024: 69-70), humans then *humanise*. In Bachelardian terms, they humanise the provocations received from the environment, that is, they *imagine* – imagination is indeed a faculty of *surhumanité* (cf. Bachelard 1983: 16).

These auditory reveries can be understood as acts of *pathic re-signification*, we might say, reclaiming the poetic being in a dissonant world. So, it is true that "Bachelard invites us to rediscover this sense of listening, even in the urban environment, where we can also ask ourselves: what sounds and silences do we want to be surrounded by in order to live better and act upon our sound environment today?" (Lassus 2023: 9). Reveries also function as a strategy of defence in the face of what is perceived as hostile. In this kind of reverie, the daydreamer does not merely murmur the murmuring of the world, but murmurs the murmuring of a world that is imagined, as a watermark, through its absence. Reverie gives voice to beloved spaces and soothes the sense of detachment from those experienced as inhospitable when living and attuning with their images

prove impossible: we hear their voices, but we don't utter them in turn. This sheds light on an attitude of engagement and even care towards the environment, which is a key aspect of the *ménage*.

5. *The ménage*

Pathicity finds expression in the humble realm of the *ménage* as well, that is, the chores, the daily tasks of cleaning, ordering, and maintaining the domestic space. These gestures, which are often silent and repetitive, form a choreography of care through which the house becomes not merely a container of life, but a living presence, shaped by and shaping our affective experiences of it. Everyday objects hold a cosmic and poetic inspiration that gives rhythm to our own temporality. Far from being excluded from poetic life, functional acts like dusting a shelf, folding linens, scrubbing a floor can become poetic in themselves. Indeed, Bachelard refuses the opposition between utility and imagination. The poetics of an object or space arises from the pathic disposition of the subject who actively takes care of and attends to it: an embodied, performative, and imaginative *engagement*, as Arnold Berleant (2004) would put it. Through the *ménage*, pathicity becomes a practice: the quiet, humble workings of sustaining the world by responding to its provocations. Tidying, in this sense, becomes not a dull, trivial repetition, but a *poietic* act, a kind of somatic reverie that recreates the world by responding to its provocations. The active participation in and with spaces and objects imbues them with qualities to which we are subject to. Indeed, as Elio Franzini (2012: 306) puts it, in Bachelard the image is "both a psychic production and a concrete and poetic (or poietic) experience of our somatic and affective relationship with things".

This has profound ethical and even political implications. First of all, they have to do with the overcoming of the hierarchy between doing for the first time and re-doing, that is, between originality/uniqueness and repetition, hence acknowledging equal dignity to both those who conceived, designed, and built something and those who manage it on a daily basis, in the continuity and repetitiveness of simple practices. Taking Bachelard's words literally and to their extreme conclusion, this implies that housecleaning is not inferior to architectural projects and construction. By elevating repetition, re-doing, and care as equally meaningful, Bachelard's aesthetics implicitly challenges the Western, modern valorisation of originality and of the extra-ordinary, anticipating the main as-

sumptions of everyday aesthetics (cf. e.g. Light-Smith 2005; Saito 2007, 2022).

In Bachelard the *ménage* is coloured by the workings of imagination itself, which unfolds along the axis of the material that it shapes and polishes. Unlike a botanist (not: a scientist) with a magnifying glass, who excludes everyday world by becoming "a fresh eye before a new object" (Bachelard 1994: 155), in a rediscovered youth because it restores the amplified and amplifying gaze of a child, the consciousness of the polisher is rejuvenated because it imbues the object with human dignity, completely renewing it. And even further:

[a] house that shines from the care it receives appears to have been rebuilt from the inside; it is as though it were new inside. In the intimate harmony of walls and furniture, it may be said that we become conscious of a house that is built by women, since men only know how to build a house from the outside, and they know little or nothing of the "wax" civilization. (Bachelard 1994: 68)

Interestingly enough, these pages are reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir's chapter dedicated to the married woman/housewife in *The Second Sex*. Indeed, Bachelard developed most of these points already in his *Earth and the Reverie of Repose*, an essay that de Beauvoir knew and which, among other works by Bachelard, she quotes.

If it is true that every cleaning activity involves a certain amount of malice and aggression aimed at removing dirt, in the figure of the married woman, as de Beauvoir insists, this tension is grafted onto her destiny. Actually, the housewife performs her domestic matters with a malignant gleam in her eyes because she knows that the contemplation of all her efforts will last only a few moments, and the next day everything will have to be done over again, relentlessly, without any stable achievements or a firm grip on the world. The *ménage* becomes the cause and effect of her frustrations. Whereas Bachelard stresses the positive aspect of the domestic engagement with things to be taken care of since, in temporal terms, "housewifely care weaves the ties that unite a very ancient past to the new epoch" (Bachelard 1994: 68), de Beauvoir highlights the drama of female situation. Differently from men, whose project "is not to repeat [themselves] in time: it is to reign over the instant and to forge the future" (de Beauvoir 2009: 77), housewives live in the constant repetition of a time that thwarts all their efforts, inevitably spoiling what has been painstakingly arranged or cleaned. Life itself (family members, the sun, the wind, etc.) is a threat to the order they pursue, busy with an activity

where negativity prevails rather than the ambition to have a positive, tangible, creative impact on the world.

Thus, the provocations that the material world poses to workers are imbued with socio-cultural values, and reveries are formed taking into account the subjective situation in which the daydreamers find themselves. In Bachelard, the *ménage* takes on the nuances of a poetics of care and involvement in itself; in de Beauvoir, the *ménage* is the emblem of a non-poetic existence, levelled to a passive, negatively pathic dimension that does not allow for the active energy of creative self-fulfilment. The house, from an intimate space sparking reveries open to a future full of possibilities and potential, becomes a cage that murmurs a future already set in stone by others.

6. Final remarks and research openings

While brooding over Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, Pier Paolo Pasolini writes:

Calvino does not invent anything just for the sake of inventing: he simply focuses on an impression of reality – one of the many intolerable *shocks* that middays or twilights, mid-seasons or hot spells cause us in the most unexpected or familiar corners of the known or unknown cities in which we live – and, while feeling it in all its poignant dreamlike quality, he analyzes it: the separate, dismantled pieces of this analysis are projected back into the void and cosmic silence in which, precisely, imagination reconstructs dreams. (Pasolini 1999: 1730)

Leaving aside the fact that *Invisible Cities* has what it takes to be an interesting point of reference for a comparative analysis on the theme of reverie and lived spaces between the Italian writer and Bachelard, the idea of *shocks* can be seen as a variation on the theme of provocation. Whereas Calvino, as understood by Pasolini, is a sort of engineer of dreams, a rational lucidity that uses the speculative tools of the scientist to deal with the oneiric and fantastic dimension, Bachelard, a philosopher of science initially interested in scientific rationality and detachment, abandons any analytical pretensions and denies any causal relationship when faced with reverie. The shocks of the world to which he is subjected are transformed into vibrant images that saturate the daydreamer's experience. The Bachelardian daydreamer personifies pathicity, which is reversed into its opposite and transformed into poetic creation.

To come full circle, quite literally, a parallel can be drawn by mentioning one last passage to be found in the last chapter of *The Poetics of Space*, titled "The Phenomenology of Roundness". Here, Bachelard claims that scientific thinking and some philosophical attitudes crystallise us in a state of maturity that prevents us from pathically experiencing the world. Since usually, in his view, the age in which we imagine does not correspond to the age in which we could explain how or why we imagine. And he wonders: "How, then, without 'dephilosophizing' ourselves, may we hope to experience the shocks that being receives from new images, shocks which are always the phenomena of youthful being?" (Bachelard 1994: 236). Openly criticising psychoanalytic reductionism, Bachelard does not acquit the subject of responsibility but conceives pathicity as the ability to receive and to create at the same time. To actively, creatively receive, and respond. This asks for a pathic, aesthetic sensibility that, as Griffero (2020: vii) maintains, gives value to being "subject to" more than to being "subject of".

Bachelard encourages us to cultivate exposure and reveries not so much as means but as ends, because it is only in this way that our *anima* remains young and happy. Therefore, happiness inhabits in the images that are provoked by the world through the poets, and we contemplate these images as they activate us and activate themselves in us. According to Bachelard, images refer to nothing per se; rather, in them something is fulfilled, our *hunger* for images can be satisfied. Indeed, he also proposes the formula "the world is my appetite" (Bachelard 1969: 178). This is an active search, a search for sur-reality which nevertheless has its roots in the living, affective, pulsating materiality impregnating the spaces we experience, which teem with solicitations and opportunities depending on the various imaginative temperaments. At the same time, this search is a creative need that fosters human flourishing. Thus, Bachelard's invitation is to nurture a pathic agency, to listen to the murmuring of the world while creatively murmuring it. In so doing, we turn into that sensitised filter where being is in deep communion with the world's being, namely the reverie.

Although Bachelard's perspective might be guilty of promoting a somewhat naturalistic romanticisation of human dwelling, it can contribute to a renewed, pathic but still responsible and operative, sensitivity towards the environment, whose provocations too often go unheard. Through the therapeutic power inherent in reconnecting us to the idea that all we "communicate to others is an *orientation* towards what is secret" (Bachelard 1994: 13), Bachelard encourages us to practice the skill

"not to leave vagueness (but stay in it in the right way)" (Griffero 2014: 1). In this sense, it should be emphasised that, for Bachelard, the poetic image cannot be fully explained through structured models; rather, it manifests itself as an evenemential emergence that resists and cannot be reduced to conceptual closure. Rather than being a limitation, such a gap can be seen as an opportunity and a wealth of possibilities. This is, I believe, the most precious and still current legacy Bachelard gifted us with.

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