

Julia Nikiel, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland

Kamil Rusiłowicz, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

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Hit Pause and to Shell with It – Daydreaming Academic Poetics of the Ideal Domicile Amidst the OverEXposuRE of Contemporaneity

*Be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels,
not of trade, but of thought.*

Henry David Thoreau

In her short story “Roseveine”, an American author Rikki Ducornet tells the story of Gabriel Temporal-Lux-Blason, a child genius whose life has been traumatized by Their sadistic father (both the pronoun and the royal capitalization of the protagonist’s own choosing). A traveler and a drunk, Gabriel’s father, nicknamed the Meat Grinder, torments his son with macabre tales of animals mercilessly tortured and killed in the pursuit of *haute cuisine*. Constantly afraid of becoming Their father’s next prey Gabriel withdraws into the safety of Their own mind and starts (day)dreaming up places where They would feel secure. In Their search for an ideal abode, Gabriel conjures a vision of so-called Dreamful Architecture, i.e. a collection of three worldly domiciles – summer, spherical, and airborne – each designed to provide their prospective inhabitant with a safe and peaceful dwelling. The domiciles mark the beginning of Gabriel’s search for ideal spaces of rest and healing, and initiate Their inquiry into “[t]he Brain as the Blueprint of a Transcendent Architecture” (Ducornet, 1997, p. 35).

As Gabriel becomes fascinated with seashells, Their interest shifts away from tangible and towards more abstract domiciles. Solid, their beauty matched only by the imperviousness of their “stalwart bodies”, the shells Gabriel admires in Their mother’s friend’s cabinet “cannot be torn from the rocks, not even by the strongest

Julia Nikiel, Katedra Anglistyki i Amerykanistyki, Instytut Językoznawstwa i Literaturoznawstwa, Wydział Neofilologiczny, Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Pl. Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 4a, 20-031 Lublin, Phone: 0048815372654, julia.nikiel@mail.umcs.pl, <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5893-4477>
Kamil Rusiłowicz, Katedra Literatury i Kultury Amerykańskiej, Instytut Literaturoznawstwa, Wydział Nauk Humanistycznych, Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II, Al. Racławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, kamil.rusilowicz@kul.pl, <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8324-5115>

hands, nor in the roughest weather” (p. 41). Allegedly, the shells withstand everything they are exposed too. It comes as no surprise then that at a certain point Gabriel starts dreaming about hiding in and inhabiting a shell. Retreating further and further into Themselves, They come to believe that Their mind is “composed of one nacreous coil, [Their] thoughts sweeping upward under the influence of a lucent tide, the whole protected by a layering of scales” (p. 34). Drifting to sleep in Their scallop-shaped bed, Gabriel finally arrives at a theory about the existence of abstract spaces which house and mirror people’s utmost desires. They call these spaces the Dreamful Architecture of Unfulfilled Desire. In order to find one’s space, one has to (day)dream it. Once found, the space becomes a form of Ideal Architecture of Fulfilled Desire, the dreamer’s Ideal Domicile, a mental sanctuary for the unconscious which promotes further (day)dreaming and prompts its inhabitant to float away from the real world and into reverie.

While, from the very beginning, “Roseveine” reads like a Ducornetesque – surreal, erotic, carnal – rendition of Gaston Bachelard’s poetics and theories, it is Gabriel’s choice of a shell as Their Ideal Domicile that ultimately positions Ducornet’s story within Bachelard’s “phenomenology of the imagination”, i.e. his exploration of poetic images as lived experiences which resonate in one’s consciousness (2014, p. 3), as well as his cognate ruminations on the reciprocity of influence between space and the human self. External and familiar to its inhabitant, adaptive, and aimed at providing atemporal therapeutic seclusion, in Ducornet’s story the Ideal Domicile acts as shel(l)ter, a space of reverie, or “creative daydream” (Picart, 1997, p. 60), wherein the dreamer is “struck with wonder” (Bachelard, 1969, p. 1) and “charm[ed]”, “disturb[ed]”, and “awaken[ed]” (Bachelard, 2014, p. 19) to new realities of being and becoming.

“[A]n empty shell”, to quote from Bachelard (2014), “like an empty nest, invites daydreams of refuge” (p. 127). Gabriel’s choice to mentally inhabit a Trochus stems not only from Their fascination with Roseveine and her collection of seashells – the conceptual dwelling of the Ideal Domicile, Gabriel argues, is always anchored in a real space known to the inhabitant – but, most importantly, from Their desire for sheltered repose. Small and inconspicuous yet sturdy and beautiful, the Trochus is furnished with a thick layer of mother of pearl and edged “with a handsome series of protective spines, its walls so thick as to be nearly impenetrable” (Ducornet, 1997, p. 49). The shell’s impenetrability responds to Gabriel’s need for what They call “impervious integument” (p. 37). Apart from being a recognizable and familiar space, the Ideal Domicile is also idiosyncratically mutable. Perfectly attuned to its dweller – “a house that grows in proportion to the growth of the body that inhabits it” (Bachelard, 2014, p. 137) – the Domicile feels like home; it “reveals a known pattern” and, “[a]s in nature, contains a secret and subtle variation known only to the inhabitant and dependent upon [their] own corporeal dimensions and aesthetic or spiritual sensitivities” (Ducornet, 1997,

p. 49). The Domicile's singularity has a soothing and distancing effect on the inhabitant; what is more, the sense of unparalleled comfort it instills ruptures the usual horizontality and continuity of time (Helin et al., 2022, pp. 67–68), thereby freeing the dreamer's mind to delve deeper and reach higher than it normally w/ could. Inside the Domicile, Bachelard (1969) avows, "[t]ime is suspended. Time no longer has any yesterday and no longer any tomorrow" (p. 173); the outside "universe", Ducornet (1997) contends, "silenced, diminishes progressively until it vanishes altogether" (p. 49). As a result, the inhabitant finds themselves aware of yet both immune to and dismissive of external circumstances and influence. The consequent tranquility, or, in Bachelard's (1996) terms, "the peace of repose" (p. 18) the inhabitant experiences inside the Domicile, allows them to immerse in dreamful self-reflection, or reverie, opening them up to their own potentialities.

The Ideal Domicile acts as a space of becoming; but not just that, for the fact that it is a shell that functions as the Domicile's exemplar suggests that the space is liminal and the processes it precipitates are replete with contradictions. "The shell", Bachelard (2014) argues, "is a witch's cauldron in which bestiality is brewing", it epitomizes the constant interplay between opposites and especially between "what is hidden and what is manifest. A creature that hides and 'withdraws into its shell' is preparing a 'way out'"; even though seemingly static "in the motionlessness of its shell", the inhabitant is in the process of mustering "temporal explosions, not to say whirlwinds, of being" (pp. 128, 131). Inside the Domicile, inhibitions disappear and imagination takes over. Giving in to the reverie, the inhabitant explores their unconscious, "housed" (p. 21), to use Bachelard's term, within the confines of the Domicile, and willingly confronts and reconciles the dialectics of their self, e.g. forgetting yet remembering, (not) knowing yet feeling, wanting yet fearing, being yet becoming anew and other. As the inhabitant prepares to leave their hiding, they come to realize that "[t]he[ir] shell is no longer exterior to the[ir] self, [but has] become[...] the[ir] self" (Ducornet, 1997, p. 50): having domesticated the space of their own mind, the (day)dreamer has become the dream. Bestialized into "a mollusk" (Ducornet, 1997, p. 50), the inhabitant can simultaneously stay inside and come out of the shell – "the part that comes out [forever] contradict[ing] the part that remains inside" (Bachelard, 2014, p. 128) – being both of and not of the world, inside reverie yet awake.

Reverie is the catalyst of change: far from rousing *from* it, the dreamer awakens *through* it. Within the Domicile, the daydreamer reroutes their attention inward, heightening their consciousness and preparing themselves to espouse both the outer and the(ir) inner worlds. "To be awake", Henry David Thoreau (2012) famously argues, "is to be alive" (p. 146). Upon emerging from the Domicile, the dreamer is ready to be-in-the-world and to not just deliberately face but, possibly, also transcend whatever has drawn them into hiding. The shift of attitude towards the outside stems from the change reverie occasions *within* the

dreamer, awakening them to the boundlessness and unfamiliarity of their self, or, in Bachelard's words (2014), their "inner immensity" (p. 203). "Immensity", Bachelard writes, "is within ourselves. It is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs and caution arrests, but which starts again when we are alone ... dreaming" (p. 203). "[N]atural[ly] inclin[ed]" to "contemplate[...] grandeur" (p. 201), reverie unveils the entirety of being the dreamer holds within. "A world takes form in our reverie", Bachelard maintains, "and this world is ours. This dreamed world", he argues, "teaches us the possibilities for expanding our being within our universe" (Bachelard, 1969, p. 8).

A Dreamer, a kosmos (Whitman, 2023, p. 32). Reverie is empowering. Inviting the dreamer to take a step back and prioritize their inner being, it assists the dreamer in (re)discovering their sense of agency and, as a result, helps them acknowledge themselves not as an object of influence but rather as an active and imaginative co-creator of both their own becoming and the world. Still, can the universe within – even one infinite in its immensity – actually challenge the one without? Especially, as is the case with our contemporary world, if the latter is overwhelming in its totality and marked by, among others, instantaneity, simultaneity, overstimulation, progressing dataism, and the twilight of privacy? Put differently, can a musing shell withstand the (shell-)shock of contemporaneity?

Hit pause. It is exactly the ability to take time out, process, and plug oneself back in only once ready that might well function as the greatest act of sabotage and defiance in the post-millennial 24/7 world of overexposure. Whilst no easy task, in a world that never stops nor sleeps, settling down inside the intimacy of a chosen space, be it tangible or intangible, and indulging in reverie not only celebrates individuality and meaningful relationality, so unlike contemporary anonymizing and mostly utilitarian hyperconnectedness, but also holds a promise of (self-)expansion outside the networked and all-consuming system of the now.

Inside the now, mediation replaces meditation, and space – valued only inasmuch as it serves a purpose – is stripped of character and ousted by hubs and non-places. Most "of our experience today", to quote from Richard Kearney (2014), "is processed by digital communication networks and social media", reducing "our culture" to "broadcast and bigness", with "our most private thoughts [exposed] to public view, and ... so many places of work and habitation ... featureless, climate-controlled and quarantined against surprise" (p. xviii). Acting against these processes requires imagining alternatives and thus opening for oneself (and possibly others) new channels for thinking about and existing in the world. "[P]ursu[ing] that private and very personal becoming no matter how strange and unfamiliar the outcome may prove" takes courage (Danielewski, 2014, p. xv); what is more, it can only be accomplished if one's mind can switch off (the network), rest, and reboot. It is for that very reason, Kearney asserts, that "[n]ow more than ever, we have need for intimacy, secrets, sites of interiority and

contemplation Without such nooks and crannies to muse and mope, to linger and loiter, there is nowhere to begin anew. No place for rapt attention” (2014, p. xviii). Chosen as domiciles, the “nooks and crannies” Kearney mentions act as spaces of opposition, fostering qualities antithetical to the now, such as, among others, privacy, detachment, stillness, situatedness, and uniqueness. The greater their versatility, the more diverse the reveries they occasion and, hence, the greater a challenge they pose to the exploitive and homogenizing impulse behind the forces of contemporaneity.

A space of one’s choosing, the present-day Ideal Domicile might just as easily be a shell as it might take the form of a blank page or document. Perceived primarily as spurs of poetic imagination, reveries are usually associated with various forms of artistic expression they inspire. Hence, an inhabited page, be it paper or screen, builds expectations of producing not simply written but specifically fictional or lyric reveries. Still, imagination is inextricably bound to the reality that stimulates it, and it is on that account that today the nature of so-called flights of fancy is progressively evolving, leading to their incorporation by none other than academic imagination, as tools for speculative yet critical analysis of contemporary reality, which increasingly eludes and even defies comprehension.

By definition, academia is concerned with advancement and transmission of knowledge; academic endeavors rely on logic and precision and are evidence- and fact-based. Today, however, both knowledge and facts are quickly becoming the stuff of legend. While in theory contemporary reality prioritizes facilitating and universalizing access to information, this same reality systematically hinders people’s attempts at the pursuit of knowledge. “We’ve never been smarter We’ve never felt stupider”, reads one of Douglas Coupland’s *Slogans for the 21st Century* (2011–2014). Continuously exposed to ever-accelerating and ever-changing inflow of unprocessable amounts of data, contemporary people, academics included, find it ever more impossible to know anything beyond a shadow of a doubt. While this is not to say that scientific research is ending – and far from that, as every day brings new technological advancements and ground-breaking discoveries – it is a fact [sic!] that more and more scholars, especially in the field of humanities, forsake certainty and come to increasingly appreciate speculation as a means of interpreting what refuses to be known. The trend is discernible not only in the growing academic recognition of genre art forms, i.e. literature, video games, movies, and increased regard for storytelling – whatever the medium – as a viable tool for the unpacking of the now, but also in greater willingness on the part of scholars to give rein to their imagination, crossing, or beastializing disciplines and approaches, balancing rigorous analysis with creative inferences, and opening themselves to the whirlwinds of surprising conclusions.

Whenever a scholar approaches a blank page (or document), they dream of going beyond themselves (and, hopefully, others in the field), exceeding expectations,

and reaching where no one has reached before. While sometimes spiced with a pinch of vanity, the dream is one not of glory but of originality and revelation, using one's quiet musings within the microspace of a page to draw well-versed macroscale conclusions. As the essays collected in this volume demonstrate, it is by listening beyond the everyday buzz, welcoming contradictions, and finding the courage to peek underneath the new normal that scholars can attempt to at least partially expose post-millennial immensity for the meat grinder it is and, in so doing, awaken people *to*, or – by suggesting new ways of conceptualizing and being in the world – maybe even *from* the nightmare of contemporaneity.

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