

**The Nottingham Trent University**

**How corners effect the human**

**&**

**The architectural relevance of The  
Poetics Of Space**

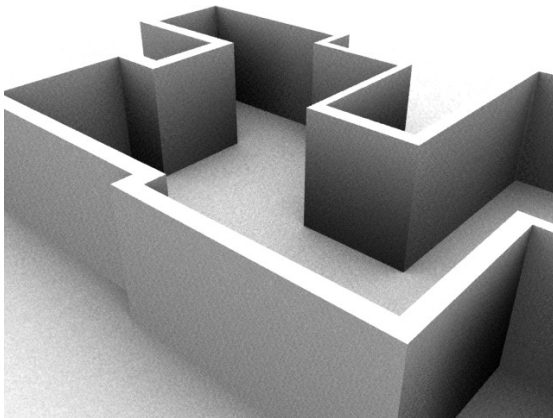
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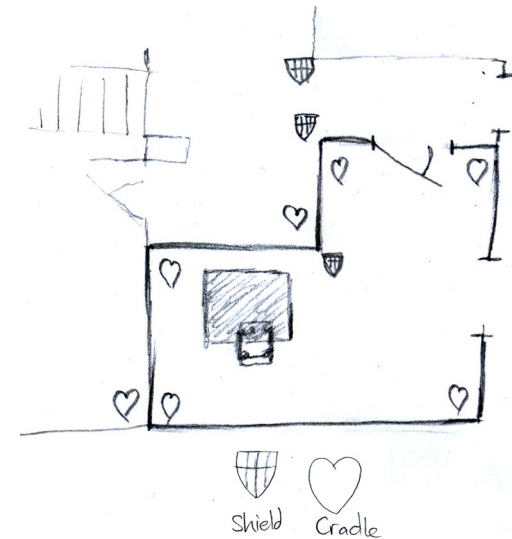
## How corners affect the human

“Every corner in a house, every angle in a room, every inch of secluded space in which we like to hide, or withdraw ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination; that is to say, it is a germ of a room or a house.”  
(Bachelard.G., 1994, Pg136.)

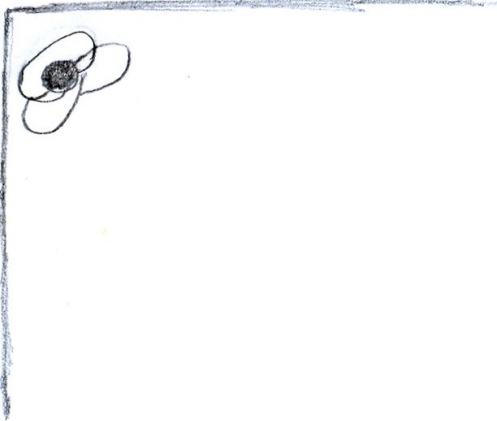
Bachelard says that corners make things happen and feed creative germination whilst at the same time “a corner that is lived in tends to reject and restrain, even hide, life”. The life it hides is the life



happening in the immediate space of the experienter; hidden from the outside world on the other side of the corner. Transversely we also have to consider the life that the outside world is prevented from seeing, the life of the experienter themselves. “The corner becomes a negation of the universe”. This negation means denial of the world, a cold rejection. Corners are a shield that provides protection from the world, provides shelter for our minds so that creative energy can flow and our minds can wander freely without worldly stimulus. The corner fends off the desires and wishes of the world and can appear to stop time as time spent in a corner can seem like an eternity whilst in its arms. These arms are the other side of the shield; the cradle. This provides space in which dreams are able to be realised and considered without prejudice and without the stern judgement of the outside world. Here the corner is no longer strong and defensive, but warm and gentle, protecting our inner thoughts with its stature and strength. Corners could therefore be considered the mother and father of our creative minds.  
(Bachelard.G., 1994, Pg136.)



“When we recall the hours we have spent in our corners, we above all remember the silence, the silence of our thoughts.” I have thought about what this means for several weeks, my difficulty stems from my belief that silence is achieved fully through meditation. I believe that real silence involves mental rest as well as rest from auditory stimulus. I believe also that our minds speak to us, not in an audible way as through speech but in private words and phrases that we consider to be thoughts. Here it could be argued that silence from both sound and the frantic and fragmented daily patterns of thought can be found in corners. This means that cradling corners are a peaceful place. This quote refers to the times when we have been allowed to have time and restful space to think things through, to consider and to recall past events, sort things out for peace of mind and to make plans for the future. These are all very creative processes that are hindered in other spaces – in the world just beyond the cradling corner. This is what I believe Bachelard is referring to when he calls corners the chambers of being.



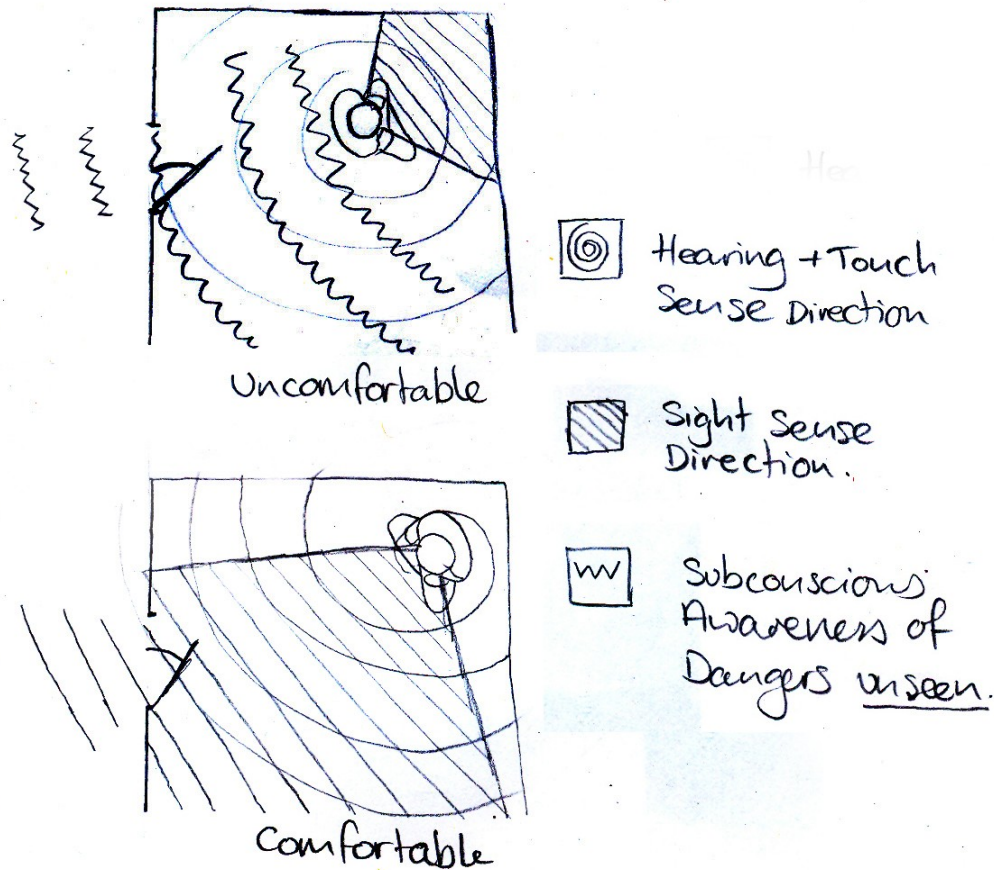
“The corner is the chamber of being.”  
(Bachelard.G., 1994, Pg138.)

Corners can also take on an imaginative ethereal context, a space where we can place our imagination in a scene. This is reflected in many photographs of buildings, rooms and other spaces where the view that shows the most interesting content is the view from the corner. Not only from the corner of an internal room (see fig. 7 & 8 below) for example where two or three wall/ceiling areas meet, but also from a corner of an imaginary box which contains the exterior view of the building being observed (fig.9). On a

further level, the physical photograph of the building is itself housed in four corners cradling the data within, the points of the four corners reminding careless hands to be kind to the image in order to preserve it.

Humans are sensitive to our surroundings. Bachelard's work is a reflection of the thoughts and feelings that we all experience at different times and places in our lives.

The Chinese system of locating auspicious space Feng Shui; can be directly linked to how we experience corners. In the two drawings below (fig.1) the first shows how having your back to an entrance or a window can be an uncomfortable experience, especially if the doorway is a main thoroughfare, or if the window leads directly onto a busy street.



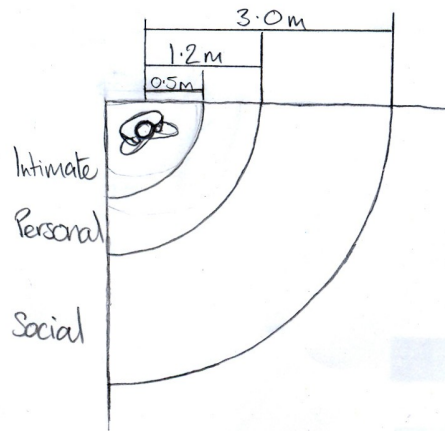
(Fig. 1)

Feng Shui is a system that you can use to balance the space you inhabit by blending the busy outside world with the peaceful space inside the home. If done well, this will enhance the peacefulness of the corners in the home by changing the negative external movements into positive movements as they enter the living space. This is achieved through the use of running water fountains, wind chimes and mirrors that have been chosen and placed so that they are between the external “noise” and the internal peace desired in the living space.

When using corners in architecture it is important to consider the direction the user will face when using the space and the location of windows and doors. As the use of the sense of sight is the most favoured line of defence; this can be used to create comfort in a space. If the user of the space can rest assured that they won't be approached unexpectedly from behind this naturally creates comfort for the individual. If this can be complemented by the ability to see entrances/exits to the space this will enhance the feeling of security and comfort in the space.

Measurements (Sommer.R., 1969, "Personal Space. The behavioural basis of design", Bosko books.

For comfort to be present there must be enough intimate, personal and social space in a room for normal interaction and activities to take place. When sat resting in a corner and letting your mind be creative it could be argued that a persons requirements for personal space increases from the intimate space right to the other-side of the social space. This reflects the

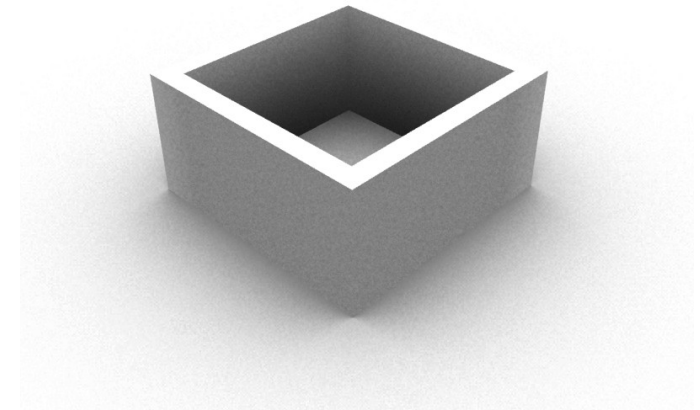


need to protect oneself and also the intimate nature of our thoughts and the

distance that they can help us travel in our minds. It could be argued that the requirement for more space to get the most from a corner is a reflection of the distance that can be travelled in our minds – far from the prison of our physical shell. The space might be used to visualise our thoughts more clearly.

Intrusion into personal space is a threatening experience. Close quarter approach or contact can make you more sharply aware of the personal space you have available, it may also make a room seem smaller than it is as the emotions of security and safety provided by a large room are replaced by a more immediate threat.

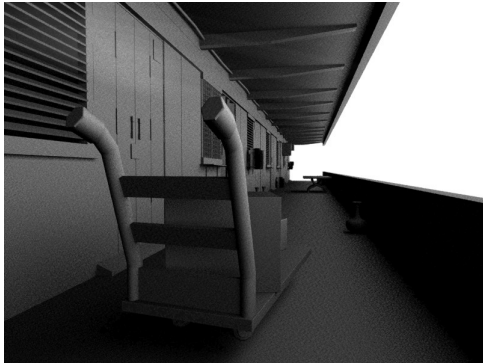
Ironically, rooms like toilets are about the size of "Personal Space". Appropriately the only room I can think of that is the size of Intimate Space is a walk-in-wardrobe, which Bachelard considers to be the centre of order in a home because they are the most organised spaces that we use on a daily basis.



Moving from interior to exterior

The exterior world also has an abundance of corners, both positive and negative in their relationship with their surroundings. The exterior corners of this shape if we are to follow Bachelard's theories are protecting the interior space from the outside world. So corners of this type have a defensive nature. In fig.3 below we can see this type of corner in the front part of the building; each level of the building having its own personal defence protecting the occupants from externalities. If we were to stand on the balcony and examine

the area we would realise that the space has many cradling corners which hold the living spaces in place and it could be argued; provide an extra level of comfort to the occupants.

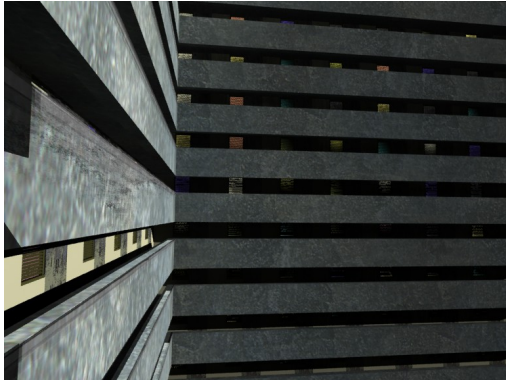


Defensive, protecting, warning corners are found in the exterior world in other places such as the ends of the walls that connect the gates at the entrance of the house in fig. 4. In the same way the pillars in fig.5 and fig.9 provide visual protection in the form of a warning of strength and stature to visitors. The shapes are tall and overbearing and it could be argued have a humbling effect on the visitor in the same way that curtain walled skyscrapers help corporate business to display their stature and overbearing strength to the world.

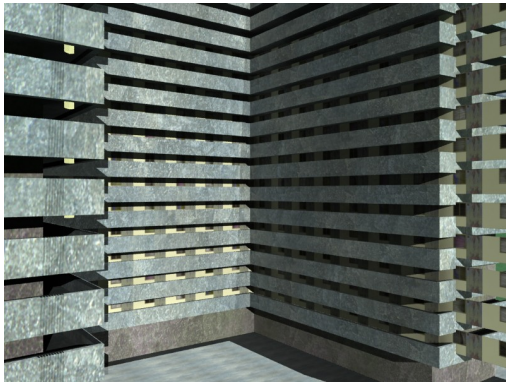
I believe that the role of corners of outside spaces are the same as internal spaces except that they can be used for private communication and sharing of thoughts and ideas rather than the seeding or development of a thought, idea or dream. Bachelard tells us that internal corners are for dreaming. I believe that while the fundamental role of external corners remains the same in terms of protecting and cradling, I think the use of the corners naturally changes as the user is influenced by the presence of the world, people, activity and motion that is absent in the internal descriptions that Bachelard provides.

I understand that this notion is in itself reflective of Bachelard's theory, Bachelard himself points out that inside and outside are dialectic divisions which blind us as soon as we use them, he goes on to warn us not to let this division govern our thoughts of positive and negative. (Bachelard.G., 1994, Pg211). If this is the case, then Bachelard understood that corners play an important role both internally and externally.

Bachelard says the inside is for personal inner communication thought and creativity, the outside is for outer communication of our thoughts and creativity in order to share them with others and with the world.



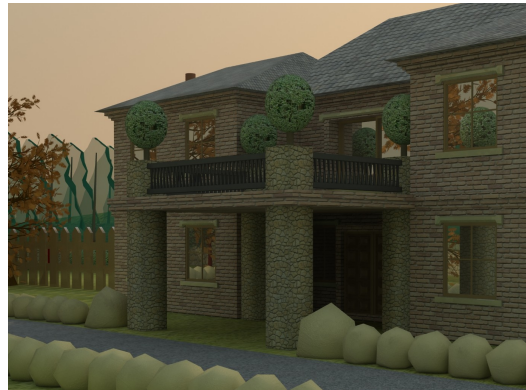
(fig.2)



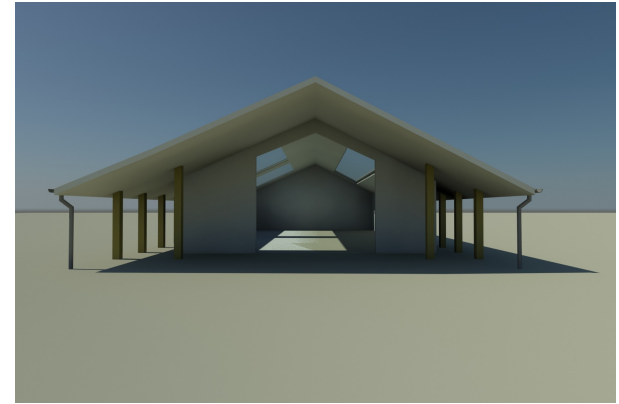
(fig.3)



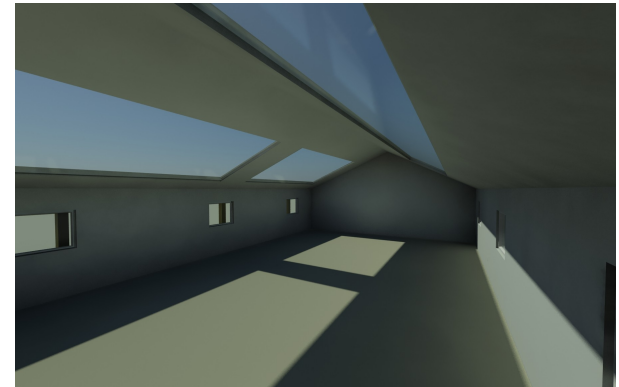
(fig.4)



(fig.5)



(fig.6)



(fig.7)



(fig.8)



(fig.9)

In conclusion, Bachelard's concepts from *Poetics Of Space* are internal perceptions and are involved with the structure of a building. He considers the emotions that are scattered in different places of the home and explains those using examples from poetry and popular stories of the time. Despite his work being about the internals of the home the concepts that Bachelard draws for us in our minds are so easily found in situations across the globe at work and at home and indeed in many cases on the street in one form or another. You can walk down a street and observe the corners that form the structure of a building; very easily you can imagine the inhabitants being cradled by the building and at the same time being protected by the opposite side, the pointed side of the corner.



## **Architectural relevance of Poetics Of Space**

### **The house.**

Bachelard observes that the house is a vertical being. It has distinct layers or floors and within each layer exists different phenomenon. The verticality of the home is created by its two poles the cellar and the attic (or Garret as it is called in the book). (Bachelard.G., 1994, Pg17.) As the house rises out of the ground different states of mind are contained in each floor according to Bachelard. The cellar, the subterranean space is the realm of the subconscious. As we rise up through the house we pass through the earthy everyday mundane ground floor that connects us to the world outside. Upwards again we begin to rise in consciousness as we rise above the everyday world. On the first floor we can rest; assured of our separation from the outside world. Here the “I” is strongly guarded by the “Non-I” which surrounds the occupant. As we rise further upwards into the attic we become closer to the elements and we are reminded of the purpose of the roof as the physical and psychological protector. “In the attic it

is a pleasure to see the bare rafters of the strong framework. Here we participate in the carpenter’s solid geometry” in that it is here that our minds are free to create, free to have higher thoughts away from the mundane everyday of the other floors. Bachelard points out “Even a dreamer dreams rationally. We understand that a pointed roof averts rainfall. The slope of the roof is the surest indicator of climate.” (Bachelard.G., 1994, Pg17.) It could be argued that a garret is the ultimate creative place because whilst there we are elevated above our mundane problems of everyday life, free to be creative yet surrounded by well conceived rational and physically strong engineering.

When we compare the cellar, which is a dark and mysterious place which holds our fears and where our demons run rampant, to the garret where darkness and fear is removed by the light of day and replaced by clarity of mind. It is understandable why being at the top of a building is so desirable.

### **The Hut**

The image painted by Bachelard of the hut begins with a far of flicker of light from a window. “When we are lost in darkness and see a distant glimmer of light, who does not dream of a thatched cottage or, to go more deeply still into the legend, of a hermit’s hut?” (Bachelard.G., 1994, Pg31.)

The legendary hut is the essence of solitude. A single occupancy dwelling removed from villages, towns and cities. Bachelard suggests that this mental image transcends the villages of huts that have been seen and everything that we have seen personally. “The hut can receive none of the riches ‘of this world.’ It possesses the felicity of intense poverty; indeed, it is one of the glories of poverty; as destitution increases it gives us access to absolute refuge.” This extreme solitude places the hermit “alone before God. His hut, therefore, is just the opposite of a monastery. And there radiates about this centralised solitude a universe of meditation and prayer, a universe outside of the universe.” (Bachelard.G., 1994, Pg32.) The hut is not only a refuge in the

sense that it protects from the elements like other structures do but it is a space where our thoughts and dreams can be elevated out of the mundane and into spiritual.