

Protected Intimacy

Safe Spaces to Dream, Explore, and Discover

By Mel Latimer



Fig. 1 *Trade Winds #2* (1958)

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"We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images. Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost" (Bachelard, 1994:6).

"A diary journal repository laboratory, picture gallery, museum, sanctuary, observatory, key... the core of a labyrinth, a clearinghouse for dreams and visions... childhood regained -*Joseph Cornell's Dossier's*. " (Simic, 1992:37)



Fig. 2 *Medici Slot Machine* (1942)

As Gaston Bachelard worked with poetry, Joseph Cornell worked with found objects; but were the intimate spaces they imagined with these mediums much different from one another? Bachelard (1994) writes poetically about phenomenological images of the house that retain our dreams (Bachelard, 1994), while Cornell was making boxes to contain his own dreams (Solomon, 2015). This text will explore the uses of these protected spaces and ways that their intimacy, perhaps, makes them similar through a variety of sections as follows: to start, *A Poetic Lens* will lay out the terms by which this text will explore, and next I will define the *Phenomenological Means* by which this will be done. Bachelard's

Protected Intimacy will be interpreted and compared to the spaces within boxes created by Joseph Cornell, who I will then submit that we join as a fellow *Voyager & Voyeur*. Looking closer I will question what makes Cornell's objects *Ideal Objects* for the dreamer, and then look at the *Intimate Immensity* his boxes both contain and provide refuge from. The deeper appeal of Cornell's work will be explored by means of Bachelard's *Ancestral Forest* (1994), and then we will visit Bachelard and Cornell's time in the early 20th Century that so desperately called for *The Miniature* and containment in an era of such expansion. Lastly, the relevance of this need for containment and *protected intimacy* will be discussed in *The Present and Onwards*, and whether we will find a balance between protection and connection going forward.

A Poetic Lens

"To specify exactly what a phenomenology of the image can be, to specify that the image comes before thought, we should have to say that poetry, rather than being a phenomenology of the mind, is a phenomenology of the soul" (Bachelard, 1994:XX).

"something no
words can hold

-[Cornell's] Diary, January 18, 1958" (Caws, 1993:163).

There was no evidence that Bachelard and Cornell were aware of each other, but the times in which they existed did overlap, leaving the possibility of indirect connections through the *Zeitgeist* of the time; this will be creatively explored later in *The Miniature*. Separated by an ocean and two decades, Bachelard was born in 1884 in Bar-sur-Aube, France, and Joseph Cornell in 1903 in Nyack, New York. Though there are a great deal of biographical texts on Cornell, there isn't much, if any, information available about Bachelard's childhood or personal life apart from his interests that he pursued professionally. This makes a linear side by side exploration of the two quite difficult. Bachelard's career changed often throughout his life as he moved from teaching physics and chemistry to practising mathematics, and later to finally becoming interested in philosophy and phenomenology. Four years before his death in 1962, he published his final piece, "The Poetics of Space" (New Encyclopedia 2023). This seems to be where he and Cornell's interests met in an indirect way. Phenomenology led Bachelard to explore that when one daydreams, the dreamer's mind does so experientially within the intimate spaces in which they first dreamt - the spaces of their childhood home. During this same time, Joseph Cornell was in a basement of his mother's home on Utopia Parkway in Queens creating small assemblage boxes through which he could safely dream (Solomon, 2015). I want to entertain the idea that these spaces can intersect in a shared phenomenological sense; by one of imagination, soul, and poetry. In this way it is not impossible to feel this connection, but is impossible to *make* one feel it - and nor would I want to, as emotion, to Bachelard, is "perhaps nothing but an expression of a

poetry that was lost", and much like this lost poetry, I believe what is evoked by these spaces will either feel as though the reader has stumbled upon something familiar or not. It should be noted that the primary text being used here, "The Poetics of Space", is as suggested by the title - a poetic interpretation of these phenomenological thoughts based on Bachelard's own experience. By its own nature it is not a science, but rather a philosophy of his own ideas. So in the writing ahead it will be used as a poetic lens, and Cornell's work will be explored through it, seeing what, if anything, lines up or comes into focus for the viewer.

Phenomenological Means: A Note to the Reader

"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. 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" (Bachelard, 1958:13).

There are two branches in phenomenology. The first was developed by the father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, which was later classed as transcendental phenomenology. Husserl believed that a firsthand description of an experience is where the true experience of being occurs. Any second hand description is classed as a new experience in and of itself, leaving no room for second hand interpretation in this branch. He didn't feel it was necessary in terms of research as the subject could bracket their own bias, thereby separating it from their experience of a situation, whilst simultaneously experiencing it at the same time. This is referred to as transcendental reduction, and was something that fellow phenomenologist and philosopher Martin Heidegger rejected (Giorgi, 2012:3-12). This is where the second branch of phenomenology originated; hermeneutic phenomenology. Heidegger did not feel that one could hold awareness of bias and experience the world simultaneously, and transcendental reduction was replaced by interpretation and meaning, which he believed was integral in understanding an experience (Giorgi, 2012:3- 12). In terms of research, this would allow the researcher to "interpret the descriptions and to co-construct meaning" (Mollenthal, 2018) beyond the subject's first hand experience.

It was difficult to find anything definitive on which school of thought Bachelard subscribed to, but based on excerpts such as the

above it seemed he might be a purist who felt a secondhand interpretation to be more along the lines of psychoanalysing, which we do know that he felt to be less effective; "... a phenomenologist, a psychoanalyst, or a psychologist (these three points of view being named in the order of decreasing efficacy)..." (Bachelard, 1994:3). In this sense, my act of interpreting parts of Cornell's life and work using Bachelard's writing may not fall within his ideology.

This writing will instead have a hermeneutic tone, which I feel is necessary. If I were to bracket my own bias and separate it as transcendental phenomenology requires, the entirety of this piece would no longer exist. This writing is inseparable from what it is that I myself, the viewer of Cornell and reader of Bachelard, am arguably identifying through my own directedness towards their work. In this sense there is a twofoldness, as I will become both one of the subjects and the researcher at the same time.

Protected Intimacy

"Transcending our memories of all the houses in which we have found shelter, above and beyond all the houses we have dreamed we lived in, can we isolate an intimate, concrete essence that would be a justification of the uncommon value of all of our images of **protected intimacy**?" (Bachelard, 1994:3).

Bachelard only mentions "protected intimacy" using this exact term once, but the combination of these two words sets the tone for each time he describes his concept of intimacy thereafter; each mention is buffered with notions of protection. He asserts that this protected intimate space is situated within our mind, and experientially sheltered within the safe confines of our memories of the childhood home. Not in specific individual memories, but the collective experience of inhabiting those spaces. In this, among other ways, it shares similarity with the spaces created by Cornell in his boxes, but this will be touched on shortly. First we must further define the terms of *protected intimacy*. Before exacting this term, Bachelard writes:

"Space that has been seized upon by the imagination... nearly always exercises an attraction. For it concentrates being within limits **that protect**. In the realm of images, the play **between the exterior and intimacy** is not a balanced one"
(Bachelard, 1994:XXXVI).

Bachelard emphasises here that this kind of intimacy is interior, or contained, by speaking of the exterior as intimacy's opposite. He carries on to say it is not only a protected space, but one that requires attraction to be present. This is furthermore stressed by Bachelard that all intimate spaces are designated as such by an attraction to begin with:

"My research is devoted to the domain of intimacy, to the domain in which psychic weight is dominant. I shall therefore put my trust in the **power of attraction of all the domains of intimacy**. There does not exist a real intimacy that is repellent. **All the spaces of intimacy are designated by an attraction**" (Bachelard, 1994:12).

It seems so far that Bachelard's intimacy, like most types of intimacy, originates in an attraction, but differs in that this intimacy is contained or hidden within something in a protective manner; reflecting once more back to the opening quote to this writing, "We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories." In later chapters of "The Poetics of Space" he speaks of secretive drawers, chests, and cupboards, that bear within themselves "a kind of esthetics of hidden things" (Bachelard, 1994:XXXVII). He writes, "There will always be more things in a closed, than in an open, box... All intimacy hides from view" (Bachelard, 1994:88).



Fig. 3 *Roses-des Vents*

There are mentions of the term intimate or intimacy one hundred and sixty eight times throughout the text; protect, protected, protection, protective thirty two times, so I will not be exhibiting every example here, but I will say that a great deal of these examples involve the discussion of an interior space, or protecting what is intimate within this interior space from the exterior. There are a great number of definitions of intimacy, but in order to understand why this intimacy is different it is helpful to look at some common notions about intimacy.

In the book "Intimacy" (2014) by Ziyad Marar, which is an examination of various types of intimacy, they write, "While the academic literature is not clear-cut in its conclusions about

intimacy, there does seem to be some convergence, some key lenses at least through which to look at the experience. In their contribution to the Handbook of Personal Relationships, Harry Reis and Philip Shaver (1988)... claim that intimacy requires something more than reciprocity and disclosure, but an interaction that is validating and accepting of the one who discloses" (Marar 2014:43-44). This definition of intimacy is presumably one that involves some kind of interaction, and therefore vulnerability with another person, and this is where Bachelard's intimacy seems to diverge from the above agreed traits of this word. The intimacy that Bachelard describes very much takes place within oneself, within the act of being or perceiving the world, and does not require a connection with a person apart from oneself. Again, "between the exterior and intimacy", Bachelard's idea of intimacy is something that happens within; imagination "concentrates being within limits that protect", and this was also very true for Cornell's imagination (Caws, 1993).

To see how Reis and Shaver's definition of intimacy might also not suffice in describing the spaces Cornell was creating, we must first look at his life.

As Bachelard's "The Poetics of Space" was being published in 1958, Joseph Cornell was by then a well-known assemblage artist displaying with other prestigious artists of the time such as Marcel Duchamp. Though Cornell also made films and collages, a great deal of his most notable works involved carefully placing

objects and images of his liking into boxes that appeared to be physical manifestations of his dreams (Solomon, 1997).

In 1972, when Cornell died at the age of sixty eight, he was still a virgin. By then he had only had but one relationship towards the end of his life that was remotely close to Reis and Shaver's intimacy, and it was not deemed a sexual one. It was with his friend Leila Hadley, who described it as "Dyonysian, as opposed to Apollonian" (Caws, 1993:42). It primarily consisted of phone conversations and exchanging ideas, which was likely the closest Cornell came to this kind of validation or acceptance from a woman, the prime markers of Reis and Shaver's intimacy. Though he made attempts at connecting with women often, the amount of attention he would give them often made them uncomfortable. His assistant that he hired in 1960 only lasted one month before leaving because, "There was something disturbing about the attention he lavished on her" after which he continued to write to her (Solomon, 1997:357).

An earlier diary entry of Cornell's from the spring of 1944 reads:

"... saw Marlene Deitrich in polo coat & black beanie cap on back of hair waiting at curb of Jay Thorpe's for a taxi. First time I'd seen her off screen and brought an unexpectedly elated feeling. Working in cellar that night on Soap Bubble Set the green glass locket portrait of her on the floor evoked very special feelings. Relationship, extension, etc." (Caws, 1993:105).

Creating boxes was clearly where Cornell expressed his intimacy, however it was anything but vulnerable; much like the intimacy that Bachelard describes in "The Poetics of Space" it was protected within the bounds of his imagination. In his biography *The Theatre of the Mind*, Mary Ann Caws wrote, "There was no risk in collecting; no risk in looking, or in pursuing, with a maniacal bent... Cornell treated things as if they had appeared for the first time, reassembling them and preserving them and their 'glint'" (Caws, 1993:43).



Fig. 4 *Untitled (Penny Arcade Portrait of Lauren Bacall)* (1946)

Even though the boxes he made were at times designated by his attraction to another person, this intimacy was only expressed to

be contained safely inside a structure within which he could safely explore, and discover them without the vulnerability of actually getting to know them. This is why Bachelard's intimacy might be much more suited to describe Cornell's boxes. It requires no reciprocation, no vulnerability; it only requires a safe space to dream. Each of the elements of Bachelard's *protected intimacy* that are evident in Cornell's work will be visited throughout this text in various orders of mention: attraction, protection, containment, and dreams.

Voyager and Voyeur

"... a room that grew buoyant and, little by little, expanded into the vast stretches of travel" (Bachelard, 1994:54).

"Dreams ever different

 ' ' varied

Endless voyages

Endless realms

Ever strange

Ever wonderful

-(Cornell's) Diary, October 31st 1961" (Caws, 1993:44)

In 1917 when Cornell was only thirteen years old, he found himself in an impossible situation. "With his father's death, Joseph lost the "magician" who made his childhood a relatively comfortable and protected one... he was suddenly the male head of his family." He felt especially responsible for his mother and his brother Robert,

who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at birth. This would mean that Cornell would never travel far from home (Solomon, 1997:23). "Cornell's childhood did not teach him how to meet the challenges of life but how to avoid them; early on, he came to understand that if he was going to have a life at all, it would have to be through a profound act of imagination" (Solomon, 1997:1-2).

Bachelard reflects on this fragment by writer Hermann Hesse that seemed quite relevant to Cornell's life:

"A prisoner paints a landscape on the wall of his cell showing a miniature train entering a tunnel. When his jailers come to get him, he asks them "politely to wait a moment, to allow me to verify something in the little train in my picture. As usual, they started to laugh, because they considered me to be weak-minded.. I made myself very tiny, entered into my picture and climbed into the little train, which started moving, then disappeared into the darkness of the tunnel..." How many times poets, painters, in their prisons, have broken through walls, by way of a tunnel! How many times, as they painted their dreams, they have escaped through a crack in the wall! And to get out of prison all means are good ones. If need be, mere absurdity can be a source of freedom" (Bachelard, 1994:150).

Cornell might have never travelled in life, but he was certainly a voyager by the way of escapism. His boxes became safe ports of travel to explore the things he was disconnected from in life;

distances he could only imagine traversing, people he would only wish to be with or meet, and a life that he would later regret he was so reserved in living. In this sense, his boxes were safe places to voyage and explore these things by way of escapism.



Fig. 5 *Untitled* (Tilly Losch) (1935)

But voyaging and escapism weren't the only things that allowed his dreaming. He seemingly made an art of voyeurism. One could call him more of an observationist, but the term voyeur feels more suitable. It puts him truly on the outside of watching people living moments of their lives that weren't quite private, but not likely for the consumption of a stranger either. He often wandered the streets of the city in search of inspiration and objects for his work. It was on these journeys he wrote observations of people he saw along the way. He often referred to "figures he devoted

sometimes temporary homage" as fairies or *fée* (Caws, 1993:22).

Here he wrote in a journal entry from March 18th, 1958:

"grey morning suddenly the apricot *fée*
let down
coarser on close view
coming from direction of library with 2 young men as on the
Thursday or Friday morning brought back with its heart-break
- now the anti-climax - still the inspiration should remain -
young people - reaching strangers and on different levels -
the promise remains" (Caws, 1993:39)

Whether Cornell intended this or not, we, as viewers of these boxes, become both fellow voyeurs and voyagers. We are voyeurs in the sense that we are looking in on some of Cornell's most intimate longings from the outside, and at the same time these dreamscapes are vague enough that we are able to step inside of them as voyagers; to dream safely within their four walls. It wouldn't be entirely unreasonable to believe this was an intentional invitation by Cornell. Much to the chagrin of galleries, he regularly would give his boxes to neighbourhood children for them to bring home and play with. He felt that children understood how to properly use them, to daydream with them (Caws, 1997:26). But what is closer to the essence of Cornell's intimacy than inviting a viewer to share his experience without having to ever get to know them? And on the other side of that, we as viewers get to do the same without ever having to interact with Cornell. Everything is protected and without risk,

and this interaction that takes place entirely within ourselves is *protected intimacy* at its core.

Ideal Objects

“Great images have both a **history and a prehistory**; they are always a **blend of memory and legend**, with the result that we never experience an image directly. Indeed, every great image has an **unfathomable oneiric depth** to which the **personal past** adds special color. Consequently it is not until late in life that we really revere an image, when we discover that its **roots plunge well beyond** the history that is fixed in our **memories**. In the realm of absolute imagination, we remain young late in life. But we must lose our earthly Paradise in order actually to live in it, to experience it in the reality of its images, in the absolute sublimation that transcends all passion” (Bachelard, 1994:33).

Here Bachelard outlines what constitutes a useful phenomenological *image* for the dreamer, but Cornell also uses *objects* that one could argue are equally effective, and might have some additional elements of usefulness. They not only have the element of a personal past, and a prehistory beyond one’s own experience, like Bachelard requires, but they have a physical element to explore as well, which we will soon touch on. Not too different from

Bachelard's definition of an ideal image is this journal article *Intimate Objects*, which I would like to explore briefly:

"An Intimate Object has the following characteristics:

- (1) It is small enough to be easily manipulated by the hands.
- (2) It consists of two parts - an object and a box specially designed to contain it.
- (3) Both the object and its box have geometrical forms.
- (4) Tactile qualities are of prime importance.
- (5) Interpretation of the signification or message of the two parts is to be provided by the possessor."

(Sebastian, 1980:13)

This section, *Ideal Objects*, will continue to primarily focus on Bachelard's notions of what makes an ideal image, but it would be difficult to ignore the similarities between Sebastian's above list of requirements, Bachelard's requirements, and Cornell's objects. Cornell's objects are indeed small, easily manipulated by the hands, contained within a box, some have geometrical forms, tactile qualities, and allow signification or message for the viewer; that being said, containment, tactile qualities, and interpretation will be visited naturally in the writing ahead by simply exploring Bachelard's markers for what constitutes an ideal image, and will later touch on the aspect of scale in *The Miniature*. I therefore ask you to simply hold these characteristics in the back of your mind as you read on, and they may lend to the sense of intimacy in Cornell's boxes.

Now, returning to Bachelard's ideal images, and notions of a lost earthly paradise, Cornell himself was living in his own childhood through his boxes, a lost paradise that he truly came to appreciate as an adult (Solomon, 1997). Though Cornell's boxes themselves may have been odes to things he longed for, the objects that he chose to compose the interior were often related to attractions lingering from Cornell's own history. They harkened back to a time of innocence that Cornell wished to return; a time of magic acts, penny arcades, and travelling by means of daydreaming (Solomon, 1997).

"Something unreal seeps into the reality of the recollections that are on the borderline between our own personal history and an indefinite pre-history, in the exact place where, after us, the childhood home comes to life in us" (Bachelard, 1994:58).

Cornell often chose objects that were, and still are, timeless. Looking at an example of one of Cornell's boxes *Untitled (Celestial Navigation)* below, we can see constellations, marbles, longitudinal lines, and drinking glasses, all recognisable and familiar even seven decades later. These items sit on the border of our history and a prehistory, starting at a place of familiarity.

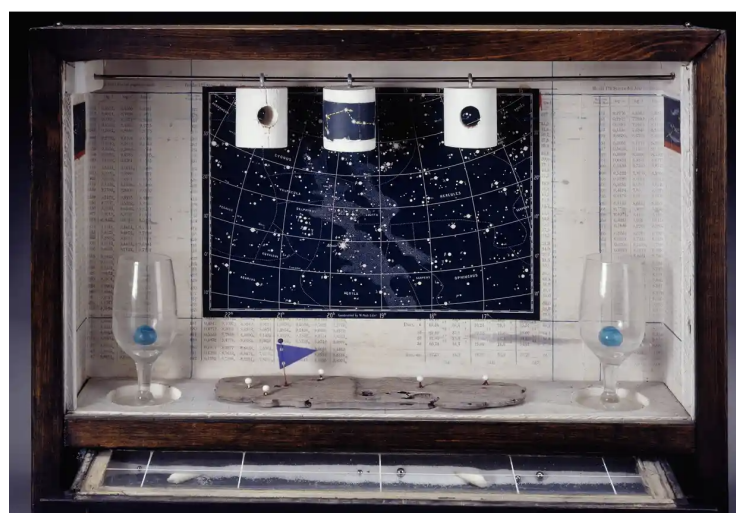


Fig. 6 *Untitled (Celestial Navigation)* (1956)

For Cornell, the initial attraction to these objects is familiarity from his past, but this can also be the case for the viewer due to these items' commonality. For example, a marble is so common that we would all likely know its tactility, materiality, and the experience of a marble; how it would feel to hold, to touch, to roll across the table, to knock it against another marble; there is a safety in this predictability. Within this familiarity, a collective experience of memories involving this intimate object, lies our own history.

"Poets will help us to discover within ourselves such joy in looking that sometimes, in the presence of a perfectly familiar object, we experience an extension of our intimate space" (Bachelard, 1994:199).

Then, objects, not entirely unlike images, have an added element of physical history. We can see this in the patina, the worn edges, the places it's been held or rubbed, or chipped and marked. It is a history beyond us we may never be able to know fully, but we can still feel intimately familiar with how these things came to be this way by filling in the gaps with our own experiences to imagine it. This can then further deepen our sense of our own history and prehistory in these objects; our "personal past adds a special colour" (Bachelard, 1994:33) to these objects, but at the same time this imagined prehistory. Sebastian might also argue that this is a personal interpretation, therefore adding to the object's likelihood of being an intimate one (Sebastian, 1980:13).

There is another element that can lend something extra to what makes these objects ideal, and that is in Cornell's choices in combining and arranging them:

"And what is more, the imagination, by virtue of its freshness and its own peculiar activity, can make what is familiar into what is strange. With a single poetic detail, the imagination confronts us with a new world. From then on, the detail takes precedence over the panorama, and a simple image, if it is new, will open up an entire world"
(Bachelard, 1994:134).

I'd like to suggest there is a sense of kismet in the arrangement of these objects curated by Cornell; objects we never knew were meant to be together, like a marble in a glass in front of a map of the stars, but here Cornell places them thoughtfully together. As a result, we have a new arrangement of objects and images that we've never seen before. This combination elicits curiosity.

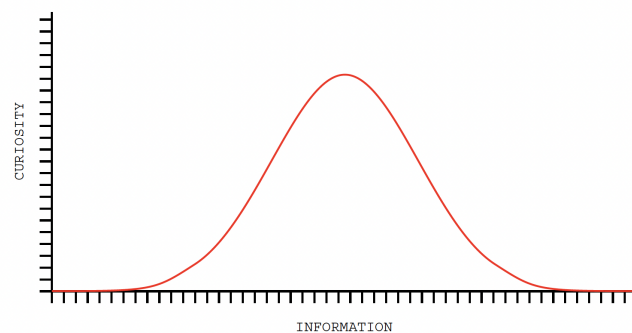


Fig. 7 Naive Set Theory (2007)

In an essay by Anthony Huberman, "Naive Set Theory", he argues the following: an entire absence of information elicits no curiosity, but when we realise the existence of something we attempt to accumulate more information, coming across more questions and hypotheses, all the while fueling our curiosity even more. Eventually this information leads to consensus; at this point it sinks into the understood and our curiosity becomes less and less. Huberman suggests that art thrives at the top of this bell curve (Huberman, 2007:1). Cornell achieved this through these unique arrangements, and this curiosity is exhibited best in this excerpt from *Dime-store Alchemy*:

"Where Chance Meets Necessity

Somewhere in the city of New York there are four or five still-unknown objects that belong together. Once together they'll make a work of art. That's Cornell's premise, his metaphysics, and his religion, which I wish to understand" (Simic, 1992:14).

If we, for a moment, look at curiosity's role in human interactions, it is often the precursor to attraction, in that if we discover something we like about someone as a result of curiosity, we then purposefully develop meaningful connections with that person because of it (Kashdan, 2004:23). If one developed some kind of attraction before knowing anything about another person, it might be classed as superficial. It wouldn't be considered meaningful until one first got to know that person

beyond their own initial perception of them. But with art, we are allowed to have all of these attractions and connections to objects safely within ourselves before learning anything about what we're connecting with, and in Bachelard's terms it would still be classed as intimacy; one that is internal, and for Cornell, without the vulnerability of interaction. These internal interactions further paint the picture of the *protected intimacy* in Cornell's work, and how the elements of these objects' usefulness in dreaming lends to this; both through various elements of familiarity and the socially acceptable attraction elicited by the curiousness of his arrangements.

Intimate Immensity

"Immensity 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. As soon as we become motionless, we are elsewhere; we are **dreaming in a world that is immense...** It is one of the dynamic characteristics of quiet daydreaming" (Bachelard, 1994:184).

Here Bachelard introduces the idea of intimate immensity, and how this immensity, an endless realm of possibility, is internal. This is an interesting concept, as Bachelard's idea of intimacy is often contained and protected within the confines of something, but here the container is the self that paradoxically contains an internal vastness of its own. Here we will visit how *intimate*

immensity and *protected intimacy* are inextricably connected to one another.

In relation to art, Bachelard writes:

“It then becomes clear that works of art are the by-products of this existentialism of the imagining being. In this direction of **daydreams of immensity**, the real product is consciousness of enlargement” (Bachelard, 1994:184).

In December of 1920, when Cornell was seventeen years old on a visit home from school, his sister recalled a night, “when she awoke to find her brother in her bedroom, trembling violently and asking if he could talk to her. He walked to the window, gazed into the darkness, and explained that he had been studying the concept of infinity in his astronomy class. To this diffident youngster who was given to restrained inhibited behaviour, the idea of a universe without limits or boundaries was intensely vivid, and he quivered before visions of it” (Solomon, 1997:36).

Bachelard argues that upon experiencing this vastness outside of ourselves, the “immensity is within ourselves”. But then, we return to the state of being that again magnifies our sense of self in our perceived place in existence, returning to a liveable state where our intentionality is not directed towards this vastness at all times:

"And even if we are aware of our own paltry selves-through the effects of harsh dialectics-we become aware of grandeur. We then return to the natural activity of our magnifying being" (Bachelard, 1994:184).

I would argue that this moment of existential crisis for Cornell may have pushed him to not only face inwards but remain orientated that way for the remainder of his life, all while attempting to create manifestations of refuge from this immensity. His art, as Bachelard wrote of art before, might have been a byproduct of this existentialism. He created a world inside of himself and, "It was as though all this material represented an underground network in which the only visible landmarks were the boxes and collages, and the difficulty of communicating their meaning was a source of both regret and satisfaction" (Ades cited in Kynaston, 1980:15).

When Cornell first began creating art in 1930, he started off with collages (Solomon, 1997). Collage might seem less contained as a medium, but even some of his collages were held within a frame or inside of a book. These sorts of contained boundaries from the infinite were thematic in his work. There are borders of some sort in all art, but the edge of a piece of paper or canvas did not seem to suffice for Cornell; the wooden walls and borders, not dissimilar to those of an old Victorian house such as the one he grew up in in Nyack, seemed to do well in sheltering his dreamscapes from the vastness outside of them, only increasing the intimacy within these spaces.



Fig. 8 *Fountain of Youth* (1959)



Fig. 9 *Cornell's childhood home in Nyack, NY* (no date)

It is possible that Cornell's boxes are made more intimate simply by their nature of having walls that separate them from the vastness outside of them. Bachelard discussed in an earlier chapter how, "Baudelaire sensed the increased intimacy of a house when it is besieged by winter... Isn't it true that a pleasant house makes winter more poetic, and doesn't winter add to the poetry of a house?" (Baudelaire cited in Bachelard 1994:38)

He went on to say, "... we feel warm because it is cold out-of-doors... Indeed, everything comes alive when contradictions accumulate" (Bachelard, 1994: 39). These juxtapositions of refuge and vastness are another means by which the works themselves become intimate and protected. In this way, the shelter he creates by making his boxes worn and almost house-like only draws attention to the vastness he may have been trying to both at once shelter his dreams from and contain.

As is apparent in Bachelard's examples, in most of our perceptions of the world we define things by what they are not, and what they are not lends to what they are; exterior to intimacy, warm to cold... The *protected intimacy* of these boxes is in the same way defined by the vastness Cornell was hiding from, making *intimate immensity* and *protected intimacy* inextricably connected.

Ancestral Forest

In the section *Ideal Objects* found earlier in this text, we discussed what makes an ideal object to dream with. We looked at Bachelard's precursors for this, which included a personal history and a prehistory. One prehistory we explored was timeless, and the other imaginary. Here I would like to explore another kind of prehistory that may lend to the appeal of Cornell's boxes in a different way; through a prehistory that may make the *protected intimacy* of these boxes appealing.



Fig.10 *Setting for a Fairytale* (1942)

"When the dialectics of the I and the non-I grow more flexible, I feel that fields and meadows are with me, in the with-me, with-us. But forests reign in the past. I know, for instance, that my grandfather got lost in a certain wood. I was told this, and I have not forgotten it. It happened in a past before I was born. My oldest memories, therefore, are a hundred years old, or perhaps a bit more. This, then, is my **ancestral forest.**" (Bachelard, 1994:188).

Here, I would like to briefly explore the ancestral aspect of Cornell's boxes. Bachelard discusses a shared experience in the writing above; one that stretches before our existence and is passed to us generationally. The stories of our grandparents and those before them become our stories, and in this way we form

generalised images and memories of things we have never experienced firsthand. Though Cornell never travelled himself, an integral part of his identity was that he had descended from a line of voyagers (Solomon, 1997:12). In this way, memories of travel stretched beyond his own, and into the stories of his great grandfather, Commodore Voorhis, who was a venture capitalist that designed and raced clipper ships. The Commodore had been dead thirteen years when Cornell was born in 1903, but left him some prized possessions, including an award from one of his races and five paintings of his clipper ships. Cornell cherished these deeply (Solomon, 1997:12).

This kind of prehistory Bachelard speaks of is the result of an oral tradition of storytelling, but are all generational memories passed down to us in such an obvious way? Kerry Ressler and Brian Dias studied epigenetic memory in mice, memory passed down genetically, so to speak, by training a generation of mice to associate a particular scent to pain. The next generation retained that association despite never being taught or experiencing it themselves. In terms of humans, there was a generation of people in the Netherlands who experienced famine in the 1940s. This not only impacted them, but their children were not well equipped to manage lives of plenty in the years after the famine ended. Because of having bodies that were prepared for famine like their parents, they were at increased risk of various health issues due to having regular access to food (Callaway, 2013) .

Trauma is a common thread through the majority of these experiments. As humans we have a history of seeking shelter and protection from risk of attack, famine, and environment among many other threats that dates back to pre-nomadic times. Would it not be unreasonable to question whether our collective ancestral forest might have created in us all a visceral recognition of the protection that Cornell's boxes offer? This isn't the only presence of this kind of prehistory in these boxes. Is it possible that our recognition of the timeless objects mentioned earlier in this text also comes from a memory beyond our own? This prehistory evokes a kind of knowing, and in this distant familiarity we can find another source of attraction to these spaces of shelter and refuge from the world that exists outside of ourselves.

The Miniature

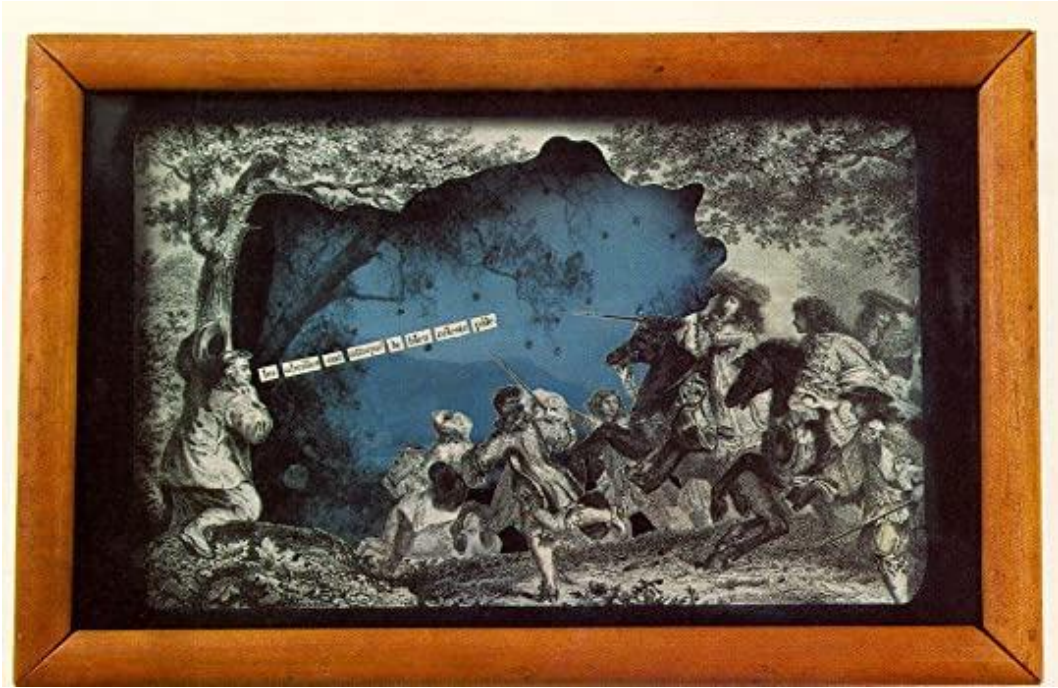


Fig. 11 *Les abeilles ont attaqué le bleu céleste pâle*

"The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it. But in doing this, it must be understood that values become condensed and enriched in miniature"
(Bachelard, 1994:150).

Bachelard wrote an entire chapter on the miniature, and for a brief moment, I would like to not use Bachelard as the lens by which Cornell is being examined, but to place him as a subject of observation side by side with Cornell. Over their shared years alive between 1903 and 1962, there was a great deal happening in the world. There were two great wars; technology was developing at

an alarming rate with inventions such as the radio, television, the Model T, and better access to public transportation (Oxford Reference 2012); Einstein discovered The General Theory of Relativity, and Edward Hubble established the literal Expansion of the Universe (Garwin, 2003). An accurate depiction of the struggles of this time, though fictional, is the penultimate book of "Anne of Green Gables, Rilla of Ingleside" by Lucy Maude Montgomery (2010). This book took place in 1914 during the beginning of World War I, a time when the world was on one hand, becoming increasingly smaller; the characters were being impacted by a war happening across the ocean, "What does it matter if there's going to be a war over there in Europe? I'm sure it doesn't concern us" (Mongomery, 2010:45), while on the other hand, technology was advancing at an alarming rate allowing a great deal more of immediate communication, with which came a faster flow of information than they had ever experienced. "She wanted to be alone—to think things out—to adjust herself, if it were possible, to the new world into which she seemed to have been transplanted with a suddenness and completeness that left her half bewildered as to her own identity (Montgomery, 2010:53)." Even more confusingly the preceding generation, maybe more so than other times in history, was unable to offer any guidance on how to manage this overwhelm since it was not just new, but almost entirely foreign to them. I would question whether the overall tone of this time would create an overwhelming urge to shrink things back down to a manageable size, to contain them within realms that they could control and better understand. Making the world smaller or more containable would have likely been an

appealing thought to this generation. Returning to the lens of Bachelard, he writes:

"... the minuscule, a narrow gate, opens up an entire world. The details of a thing can be the sign of a new world which, like all worlds, contains the attributes of Greatness. Miniature is one of the refuges of greatness" (Bachelard, 1994:155).

Though Bachelard was describing an aspect of the miniature, it makes an ideal metaphor for what happened in *Rilla of Engleside* ; first a shrinking of the world, which then opened up into a larger one. This experience of Cornell and Bachelard's era wasn't the only origin for their interest in the miniature though. Bachelard suggests a universal natural desire for this at all ages:

"But the imagination deserves better than that. In point of fact, imagination in miniature is natural imagination which appears at all ages in the daydreams of born dreamers" (Bachelard, 1994:240).



Fig. 12 *Untitled (Pink Palace)* (1946)

Between Cornell's first experience of *intimate immensity* and the rapid changes being experienced in the early 20th Century, it's no wonder at all that the idea of shrinking things to a manageable state would appeal to him. As we have seen in his boxes, the miniature made a regular appearance. What they both experienced isn't largely different from the rate at which technology is advancing in the modern day, and isn't entirely surprising that both Bachelard's writing and Cornell's boxes still have appeal. In modern times we often seek refuge in technology (Wu, 2017), but I will later discuss how these forms of refuge do not meet the criteria for Bachelard's *protected intimacy*. Once made small, things can become manageable, containable, and even create a means to imaginatively escape. The world may always need to shrink things down to a manageable size, as this becomes a safe place to explore and understand. These boxes and their miniatures might timelessly serve as small safe havens of *protected intimacy*.

In Summary

I have used Bachelard as a *Poetic Lens* to propose that the spaces Cornell has created within his boxes are not much different from the phenomenological spaces Bachelard writes of in "The Poetics of Space". Bachelard writes of *Protected Intimacy*, which by his markers has been interpreted in this text as an intimacy designated by an attraction, but contains and protects spaces in which we can dream (Bachelard, 1994). We then join Cornell in this space of *protected intimacy* as both the *Voyager & Voyeur* when we look into boxes that depict dreams of his deepest yearnings, but at the same time we step inside of them to voyage within the safe expanses of our imaginations. Here we find the *Ideal Objects* Cornell chooses that harken back to his own childhood, but they are common enough that they may also be familiar to us through our own history and prehistory. When arranged in ways we have never seen, they may elicit a curiosity. The combination of this familiarity and curiosity perhaps can then lead to an attraction to these spaces without knowing much about them, which would be deemed entirely acceptable within the bounds of *protected intimacy* that have been outlined (Bachelard, 1994:33). In addition, these objects are small, easily manipulated by the hands, contained within a box, have tactile qualities, and allow signification or message for the viewer, as outlined by Sebastian's article *Intimate Objects* (1980). The scale of these objects were also visited in *The Miniature*, which explored the thought that there may have been a great need for scaling down during the time in which Bachelard and

Cornell both lived (Bachelard, 1994) (Solomon, 2015). *The Miniature* offered the ability to shrink things back down to a manageable size in an era where the world was rapidly expanding, in many ways not so different from modern times. This will now bring us to the final section of this text where I would like to look at the relevance of *protected intimacy* in *The Present & Onwards*.

The Present & Onwards

“December 29th, 1972 was a Friday. Early that morning, Cornell spoke to his sister Betty by telephone... before they hung up, Cornell confided ruefully, “You know, I was thinking, I wish I hadn’t been so reserved” (Solomon, 1997:490).

Cornell passed away suddenly later that morning (Solomon, 1997:490).

It’s hard to imagine what it would be like for Cornell or Bachelard to be alive in our times; how strong the need to seek refuge would have been. We too are living in a time of rapidly advancing technology and overwhelming choice where we can now customise everything in our lives from the music playlists we create, to the television shows we watch, and what our newsfeed shows us. These are all things that were once curated for us by radio hosts, television stations, and local newspapers. This is now our vastness that leads us to our feelings of *intimate*

immensity, and our need for refuge from it is stronger than ever. This shows in our binge-watching of television programmes, our endless scrolling of social media, and our general disconnect from human interaction; but these forms of escape provide us even more things to consume, not space (Wu 2017) (Carr, 2010). This kind of space that is missing is essential for dreaming in Bachelard's terms. Much in the way discussed in *Ideal Objects* that curiosity can be the precursor to attraction, this dreaming might be a precursor for the imagination, which is an element of Bachelard's writing:

"If we give their function of shelter for dreams to all of these places of retreat, we may say, as I pointed out in an earlier work, that there exists for each one of us an oneiric house, a house of dream-memory..." (Bachelard, 1994:15).

I would like to propose that spaces like these, to dream are something that is collectively needed in modern day society going forward. These spaces to dream, such as the ones that Cornell provided us, are extremely important, and although maybe not all of them are as perfect a combination of elements as Cornell's, they do exist in other forms, much like Bachelard's timeless "The Poetics of Space" that is still in print today (Penguin Randomhouse, n.d.). As we can see from Cornell's life, *protected intimacy* is not a space made for living in. We as humans have needs that cannot be fulfilled whilst we hide there, first and foremost, the need for human connection. In the age of social media and text messaging, we are in dire need of direct face-to-face connection

(Hari, 2019). Existentialist Rollo May writes, "Human freedom involves our capacity to pause between stimulus and response and, in that pause, to choose the one response toward which we wish to throw our weight. The capacity to create ourselves, based upon this freedom, is inseparable from consciousness or self-awareness" (May, 1994:100). Maybe these spaces that Cornell has left us are to be used less like a home, as he used them, but more like temporary shelter from the modern day barrage of information; places that may give us room to dream.

In the modern day, phenomenologically speaking, these boxes may still take place in our own memories of protection of the childhood home, but much like that home it is one we are not meant to remain in forever. But this can be the beauty of these spaces within ourselves; we're able to return to them when we like.

"... we are very surprised, when we return to the old house, after an odyssey of many years, to find that the most delicate gestures, the earliest gestures suddenly come alive, are still faultless" (Bachelard, 1958:15).

These spaces, like Bachelard's ideas of the miniature, may allow us to shrink things down to manageable sizes so that we can explore and understand them, but maybe it's important to remember to return them to their true size so that we can return to the world of the external. Remember what Bachelard wrote before:

"But we must lose our earthly Paradise in order actually to live in it, to experience it in the reality of its images, in the absolute sublimation that transcends all passion"
(Bachelard, 1994:33).

It is a pleasant final thought to consider that maybe, the protective spaces that Bachelard and Cornell created may someday be the space used by a present day dreamer to find respite from the immensity of modern times. Maybe this will give someone the space to dream of things that they too can alchemise into new spaces, possibly even ones of connection.



Fig. 13 *Paolo and Francesca* (1943)

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