

'My corner of the world': Bachelard and Bondi Beach

Ann Game and Andrew Metcalfe

School of Social Sciences and International Studies

University of New South Wales

Sydney NSW 2052

Australia

a.metcalfe@unsw.edu.au

a.game@unsw.edu.au

Biographical Details

The authors teach and write together in the School of Social Sciences and International Studies, University of New South Wales, Sydney 2052. They have written four books collaboratively: *Passionate sociology*; *The mystery of everyday life*; *The first year experience*; and *Teachers who change lives*. Additionally, Ann is co-author of *Gender at work* and author of *Undoing the social*, and Andrew is author of *For freedom and dignity*. They are currently working on a study of everyday ritual practice.

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Abstract:

Bachelard's concept of lived space makes a significant contribution to an understanding of the connections between emotion and space. We argue that it provides a relational alternative to the common understanding of space as Euclidean, as an empty, inert distance that gains life only through the projections of human subjects. Bachelard gives primacy to a living space that is simultaneously inside and outside, insisting that the life of this space is in a non-locatable relation. In doing so, Bachelard also gives primacy to deep or archetypal emotions that come not from the subject but from living space. We develop our understanding of lived space through an analysis of people's experiences of Bondi Beach in Sydney. Drawing out the implications of our interviewees' experiences of connectedness, we show that the inhabitation of a corner or particular place opens to the whole.

Keywords:

lived space, Bachelard, depth, elemental, Bondi beach, immemorial

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We should therefore have to say how we inhabit our vital space, ... how we take root, day after day, in a 'corner of the world'. (Bachelard 1969: 4)

The corner is a sort of half-box, part walls, part door. It will serve as an illustration for the dialectics of inside and outside (Bachelard 1969: 137)

In this article we develop an understanding of Gaston Bachelard's concept of lived space, a concept that makes a significant contribution to an understanding of the connections between emotion and space. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard talks of the importance of '*felicitous space*', (1969: xxxi), of lived space that is 'embracing and embraced' (1969: 8), of space that is 'enclosed, protected... all warm', the space of 'earthly paradise' (1969: 7). As these emotional descriptions of space suggest, Bachelard is saying that lived space is a space that lives and feels. This raises two

questions. Where is emotion? What is distinctive about emotional states associated with lived space?

It is commonly assumed that lived space gains emotional qualities through the lives of human subjects: space is felicitous, for example, because it is occupied by happy subjects or because it reminds subjects of their happy experiences. While Bachelard is usually read as human-centred and nostalgic (Lefebvre 1991: 120ff; Mugerauer 1994: 96; Ockman 1998; Ehrmann 1966; Moore 2000), we believe that he has a major contribution to make to social theory precisely because he challenges humanism, by giving logical primacy to relation. The significance of *The Poetics of Space* lies in the phenomenological way that it brings ontological, spatial and temporal issues together: different forms of being imply different forms of space and time. More specifically, the primacy that Bachelard gives to lived space is a primacy of relation rather than the subject: Bachelard's major contribution to social theory is his claim that the life-form that is felicitous cannot be defined or identified as a subject or a human (see eg 1969: xxv-xxvi).

We will argue that Bachelard's understanding of lived space provides a relational alternative to the common understanding of space as Euclidean, as an empty, inert distance that gains life only through the projections of human subjects. While Euclidean space is characterized by boundaries between insides and outsides,

Bachelard gives primacy to a living space that is simultaneously inside and outside.

Thus he says of lived spaces: 'they are in us as much as we are in them' (1969: xxxiii).

In other words, he is insisting on the importance of a form of life that is not finite and therefore cannot be defined. This is what he means by the phrase '[w]ithin the being, in the being of within' (1969: 7). The felicity of '*felicitous space*', then, is not an external projection of internal emotions of a subject, but comes, instead, from a relation where there are no definable insides and outsides. In other words, lived and living space *is* relation.

We will develop our understanding of Bachelard's lived and living space through an analysis of people's experiences of Bondi Beach in Sydney. We have conducted research to find out why, all year round, people engage in routine morning recreational activities, such as soft-sand walking and running, cliff-path running, swimming across the bay, yoga, body and board surfing. Many of our interviewees spoke in Bachelardian terms of how, through their everyday practice, they 'inhabit' Bondi. They spoke of Bondi as their corner of the world, and of their favourite part of the beach as their 'corner of that corner'. When Bachelard speaks of corners being 'part walls, part door', he is referring to the relational logic of being at once inside and outside, simultaneously protected and open: when we are 'at home', in our corner of the world, we are in the world as the world is in us. Perhaps the most common theme

that arose in our interviews, this points to the significance of relational forms of being: the 'we' here does not refer to subjecthood, but, rather, to a relational state.

This article will draw out the implications of our interviewees' experiences of relation and connectedness, showing how the inhabitation of a particular place opens to the whole, 'the cosmos' (Bachelard 1969: 38-73). It is everyday recreation that takes them out of their subjective and human-centred emotional states into the spatial-temporal depths of the relational state of 'well-being' (Bachelard 1969: 12).

Bachelard: lived and living space

Gaston Bachelard was one of the leading philosophers of science of the twentieth century, a major influence on thinkers such as Foucault, Kuhn, Serres, Althusser and Derrida. In the second half of his career, he moved from a rationalist to a phenomenological approach (Bachelard: 1969: xi-xii), writing books on the elements, reverie and space. We find endless stimulation in *The Poetics of Space*, but it is a book that receives little academic attention these days, possibly because abstract argument has come to dominate social theory. Bachelard's phenomenological challenge to abstraction is one of the characteristics that makes his work so important. His focus

on lived and living space provides a theory and methodology for a *participatory* understanding of the world.

In setting out a phenomenological approach to space, Bachelard distinguishes abstract space from lived space, each of which corresponds to different ways of knowing the world. Abstract or Euclidean space is produced by a thinking subject who has been distanced from the world by their desire to know it as an object. In this form of knowing, there is an opposition between the inside of a knowing subject and the outside of the world: '[The obvious geometry of outside and inside] has the sharpness of the dialectics of *yes* and *no*, which decides everything' (Bachelard 1969: 211).

Oppositional thinking understands space as the abstract separation of self and other. As a denial of connection, such space is a void, inert and empty. Whether the measurable distance of this space be great or small, it retains the quality of absolute distance.

Ontologically, abstract space is associated with bounded subjects and objects. In their desire for self-certainty, subjects, according to Bachelard, are not receptive to the world (1969: xi), but, rather, treat it as a mirror of their own selves. As there is no rest in a desire to know, to assimilate the external other, Hegelian philosophers can never be at home:

There is no dearth of abstract, 'world-conscious' philosophers who discover a universe by means of the dialectical game of the I and the non-I. In fact, they know the universe before they know the house, the far horizon before the resting place; whereas the real beginnings of images, if we study them phenomenologically, will give concrete evidence of the values of inhabited space (Bachelard 1969: 4-5)

Bachelard is suggesting that, in their academic sophistication, abstract theorists are alienated from the particularity of otherness, which is present in the everyday world to hand.

As Bachelard says, lived or inhabited space, in contrast to abstract space, is known phenomenologically, through participation in or inhabitation of the world. The site of knowing is not a subject, but a living and embodied relation with the world: knowledge is *of* and not *about* the world (see also Merleau-Ponty 1962: vii-xxi). The ontological state of this form of knowing involves receptivity, loss of self-preoccupation, and a patience or tranquility that comes with the suspension of the desire to know or to get to a point of arrival. In Berger's phrase, Bachelard offers a peasant philosophy (1991: 83).

In the emotional state of 'tranquility', Bachelard says, the being 'opens himself to the world, and the world opens itself to him' (1971: 173). He describes this ontologically open state as eternal childhood, which involves not a nostalgic repetition of the subject's emotional past, not a regression to a childish way of knowing, but a capacity to live the archetypal child, 'under the sign of wonder' (1971: 127). The archetypal child does not refer to the biography of a subject, but rather to a relational form of being lived in the immemorial (see eg 1969: 13-16). In this state of eternal childhood, knowing is accompanied by a non-knowing, which, Bachelard says, is not ignorance but a primal capacity for creativity (1969: xxviii-xxix).

For Bachelard, the phenomenological way of knowing involves creative imagination. The term imagination does not refer to an activity of a thinking subject, but, rather, to an embodied relational state of openness. It is through imagination that we *live* space, a space which, in contrast to the void of abstract space, is a no-thingness full of possibilities. This is why, for example, Bachelard speaks of the 'fullness of the house's being' (1969: 8). As this formulation implies, creative potential is not locatable; it only exists when and because the house's potential is found in the imagination's being, and imagination's potential is found in the house's being. By imagining houses and rooms and drawers, we abide within ourselves: the house image becomes the topography of our intimate being (1969: 8, 15).

A major point of this article is to place the archetypal at the centre of understandings of Bachelard. It is the archetypal that distinguishes Bachelard's phenomenology, and yet this is almost completely overlooked in accounts of his work (Casey 1979; Kaplan 1972; Ehrmann 1966; Ockman 1998; Lefebvre 1991; Mugerauer 1994). These accounts commonly assume that the memories associated with the house are, for Bachelard, the memories of a subject, existing in chronological time. Thus, for example, Kaplan describes Bachelard's work as 'subjective and personal' (1972: 1); Casey (1979: 185) and Moore (2000) describe it as romantic; Lefebvre says that Bachelard posits a 'relationship between Home and Ego [that] ... borders on identity' (1991: 121); and Ockman condescendingly says that Bachelard's 'well-known vision of the oneiric house, with its rather nostalgic and essentialist world view, comes across as historically dated' (1998: 1). Because these writers read Bachelard through a subject-centred ontology, they presume that his house is simply a subject's refuge from the world, filled with memories of the past. Bachelard's theoretical challenge, however, is only apparent when we realize that he is emphasizing *the immemorial*, based on a logic that is neither subjective nor chronological.

Bachelard centres his discussion of lived space on the house because it is the house that allows the receptive non-subjective state that imagination and phenomenology require. The house is any intimate space experienced as 'a corner of the world'. As we have seen, it is an intimate entwining of house-and-human, rather than a container

that holds a person as a box holds a piece of chalk. The intimate, then, is not simply an inside for Bachelard; whereas logicians treat the inside as the exclusion of the outside, for Bachelard, intimate space is both inside *and* outside. Moreover, since inhabitation is a relation, involving the suspension of boundary and location, it is an intimacy that is boundless or infinite. Holding us open, 'the house' - which could be a house or a room or, just as easily, a garden or a beach - is simultaneously containment-and-openness (see also Merleau-Ponty 1968 and Winnicott 1991). The emotions we associate with houses – well-being, felicity, tranquility, love – are qualities of relation, of living space, and not emotions of a subject. As Bachelard says of 'spaces of intimacy', '[t]heir being is well-being' (1969: 12).

Given Bachelard's understanding of intimate space, it is not surprising that he focuses on the door as the embodiment of the principle of containment-and-openness. While walls and doors presuppose one another, the door is logically primary because it embodies connection, the relational logic of 'and' rather than the 'or' of binary opposition. The wall's presumption of absolute separation is secondary, logically derived from the door, which both closes *and* opens, both separates *and* connects. The door, says Bachelard, 'is an entire cosmos of the Half-open' (Bachelard 1969: 222; cf Simmel 1994; Metcalfe and Ferguson 2001: 240-261). The same principle underlies Bachelard's claim that the house is a corner, part wall, part door. Bachelard's argument has important implications for how we understand experiences of

difference. In abstract space and abstract social theory, difference is presumed to be at a distance ('the far horizon'), but in lived space and phenomenology, difference is present in the openness and wonder of here, in the corner. The corner is the door to the world. Here, which cannot be located in abstract space, is everywhere and nowhere. *Here*, we are connected with the cosmos, with the spatial and temporal depth of being.

Bondi, Jon, Katrina and Michael

Bachelard's phenomenological methodology has significant implications for empirical research. His method involves remaining with the vital details of particular experiences or images in order to allow readers to imagine the experiences, that is, to live, embody them (1969: xii-xxxv). It is important to note that this does not involve an identification between writer and reader, as Ehrmann presumes when he says that Bachelard 'supposes a pure adherence or a complete fusion of one subjectivity (the reader's) to another (the poet's)' (1966: 577). Rather than identification between writer and reader, Bachelard's method involves a meeting in the non-finite realm of the archetypal, where there is difference that cannot be located inside or outside.

Empirical material adduced by Bachelard is not used to re-present subjective experience or to provide data from which abstract generalisations can be drawn. Rather, his approach is based on evocation: through bringing to life particular experiences, it is possible to evoke the universal, the archetypal. He says

I may hope that my page will possess a sonority that will ring true – a voice so remote within me, that it will be the voice we all hear when we listen as far back as memory reaches, on the very limits of memory, beyond memory perhaps, in the field of the immemorial. (1969: 13)

Following Bachelard, then, our aim is to evoke lived experience in order to engage archetypal imaginations of readers, including those whose experiences we are imagining-living in our writing. (See **Postscript**, below, for an example of this sonorous reverberation.)

Between April and September in 2009, we interviewed 30 people undertaking daily exercise routines on Bondi Beach. They ranged in age from their 20s to their 80s. In the interviews we asked open ended questions, encouraging people to take their time and speak from lived experience. As word of our project spread, people began approaching us, asking to be interviewed, eager for the opportunity to reflect on the mysterious power of their beach experience. Given our methodological focus on the

particular, we will take three interviews in depth rather than present a survey of all interviews. These three interviewees use examples and languages that we think would reverberate for all the people to whom we spoke. We should point out, however, that our interviewees are only one of the many diverse groups who use the beach, and the analysis that we will give would not necessarily apply to other people on the beach.

Bondi Beach is, at seven kilometers distance, the closest ocean beach to the CBD of Sydney, and has the oldest surf lifesaving club in the world. The surrounding area is one of the most densely populated areas in Sydney, and this population is augmented by a great number of tourists, drawn both to the beach and the social life. Facing south-easterly, toward the Tasman Sea and the immense expanse of the Pacific Ocean, the beach consists of a kilometer long crescent of golden sand between two rocky headlands. This shape and aspect give it consistently good surf. Simultaneously held within its headlands and exposed by them to the fast changing power of the elements, Bondi is renowned for the way in which it combines the domesticated with the wild (see eg Game, 1991: 166ff). Every year hundreds of people have to be saved from drowning at Bondi, because they have misread the dangers of the surf, and, at the time of our interviews, there had recently been a heavily-publicised series of shark alarms and attacks. Every experienced Bondi swimmer and surfer has a story of coming close to death in the waters they love.

The first of our interviewees is Jon, who, in his 50s, works for the fire-brigade. He has been soft sand running for over 35 years, and currently does this every day of the year. He follows his run with a swim, after which he often sits in his corner of the beach and does a crossword or reads a book. Jon is well-known to everyone who frequents the beach, and his running is often punctuated with short stops as he shares greetings with others. Sometimes people run with him for a lap or two, but his favourite part of running is the experience of being 'in [his] own zone'.

Katrina, our second interviewee, is a hospital doctor in her 20s. Since she moved to Bondi two years ago, she has run almost every day along the cliff-face path that connects Bondi to beaches to the south. She also has a swim and does some exercises at the outdoor gym that she jokingly calls the 'muscle park'. She prefers doing her routine in the morning, but, when shift work doesn't allow this, she finds that other times have their own pleasures:

This place has its different moods through the day and in the evening everyone has finished their day at work and they are mellow and it is lovely. Families are out and going for walks, and the quality of the light changes, and those flats there, they all light up, and the moon is up, and it is just beautiful.

Our final interviewee is Michael, a semi-retired landscape gardener in his 50s. Michael grew up around Bondi, and lives there again now, but he visited the beach every day even when living elsewhere. When he worked full-time, he maintained an afternoon routine, but now he has a morning practice which involves stretching exercises, soft sand running or walking, and swimming from the north to the south end of the beach. In the middle of the beach he finds he can also sing at full voice, without inhibition. Sometimes these days his wife and 23 year old daughter come down too, and do their own routines.

The Lived Experience of Bondi

In one sense, people are very clear about why they undertake everyday exercise routines on the beach: they want to be fit and healthy. However, all of them say that there is something more that brings them to the beach, something which they cannot quite name or explain to outsiders. Jon says:

Over the years my approach has become more holistic and that is the word everyone wants to use now. Look, the exercise is still the prime motive that gets me down here to start; I think that I'd better go down and have my run.

Invariably I'll come down at eight and all of a sudden it is twelve or one o'clock

and I think, 'What happened to the day?' It just goes! I'm astounded whenever I pick up my watch and have a look. Time just floats away down here. And you know when the sun's in a certain place, and you just get a feeling that it's time to go. I'm not bound by the clock here and maybe that is part of the attraction.

As Jon suggests, people have projects that motivate them to go to the beach, but what is important about Bondi is what happens to them at the beach that they did not intend. If their practice involved only the attainment of expected outcomes it would have a serial, predictable quality to it. Yet, when Jon says that measurable time 'floats away', he is pointing to something other than seriality. As an attunement to the sun's daily changes, his experience of time becomes more elemental, and this, he suggests, might be 'part of the attraction'. Confirming this intuition, Jon, like many others, insists that his daily experience is always new and surprising: 'I'd just like to say again that I've never got bored with it and that's what's amazing.' Jon is amazed at his experience of amazement: he comes down with certain intentions, and, to his amazement, he finds something else, every day. Jon's practice, then, is paradoxically routine and not routine; it is the way of ensuring that he is open to the newness of each day. Rather than the routine and the exceptional being polar opposites, they are, for Jon, intertwined (cf Buber 2002: 53-5; Metcalfe and Game, 2004, 2010).

Katrina speaks of her practice in similar terms:

I'm not somebody who has to do it like you have to tick a box, like when you start the day brushing your teeth; you go if you want and you just find that nearly every day you want to go.

When we asked her how she felt if she missed a session, her response was:

Um, miss a session, well I don't like to call it a session ... I don't get to the stage where my hands start to shake but I do notice if it has been a few days and then when you do come down, it is like you are discovering it again and it is, 'Oh, oh, oh: that's right!' and you see little things you've missed, and you say, 'Oh, hello you', and you just get totally struck by the beauty of it. I don't know how you can separate the physical exercise and the spiritual aspect, if you want to call it that. It is much more than exercise. I can't imagine getting a similar feeling running on a gym treadmill for 40 minutes. You need to live in the time that you are at, in the place where you are, and let yourself do that, let go a bit. I think that when people come down every day something happens every now and again that breaks through complacency, because we are lucky to live in this great place.

Katrina rejects the word 'session' because it implies that her experience of Bondi is simply a means to her ends; you pay for sessions in a gym to attain your goals, but you go to Bondi to be in Bondi, to 'let go a bit' and allow yourself to be changed in ways

that surprise you, again and again. In other words, something other and more than intentions is involved in getting people to the beach.

Jon and Katrina are pointing to a transformation, an ontological change from being an intentional, project-driven subject, located in abstract space-time, to a relational state of being in lived, 'inhabited', space-time. This is a change to the being of '*felicitious space*'. Many of our interviewees described this state, as Bachelard does, as a state of well-being. This suggests that when they spoke about fitness, they were not just referring to their individual strength, but to a fitness that comes from being in, from relationally *fitting in*, a space that is both within and without (Bachelard 1969: 7). This is what Jon has in mind when he calls his practice holistic and what Katrina implies when she says that the physical and spiritual are inseparable. Likewise, when Michael uses the common expression 'Dr Bondi', and when others say that Bondi has saved their lives, they are referring to health in the full sense of the term, a being whole through being part of a whole (see Bateson 1972).

In order to develop an understanding of this transformation, we will start with the experience that many describe as 'putting things in perspective'. Jon uses this phrase at several points in his interview. He says:

If you sit in your own home you just get so introspective and it is so narrow a vision, 'Geez, I've got to pay those bills' or I have a problem with the family. Coming down here puts it into perspective and you deal with it better when you leave here. ...

It just takes your mind off whatever, you know if your foot's sore or you're wondering what you are doing here on this cold miserable day. I just relax. It is a very good way to put things back into perspective. You realise that this place and these rocks are going to be here a long time after I'm gone and it will still be here a long time after my great grandchildren will be gone and it is a humbling sort of experience. It just makes you realise that things are not so important.

I guess that's it in a nutshell: to put things into perspective, just to get you back to nature a bit. In the city, with all the cars and noise, you're not even sure which way the wind's blowing, so it is just good to come down here.

Jon makes a distinction between 'perspective' and being 'introspective', a self-conscious state in which he identifies with a sore foot or personal problems or things that have to be done. The latter state is often thought of as reality but, as Jon suggests, it involves a failure to see what is actually present. If, for example, Jon is focused on his sore foot while running, he is distanced from where he is: his

identification with this obstacle to his projects makes him a separate subject, located and bounded in abstract space. Such a being can only see their life in terms of obstacles and goals, failure and success. In their 'narrow vision', they are so focused on a projection of who they *should* be that they cannot appreciate the wholeness of their lives as they *are*.

People use the expression 'getting things in perspective' to describe the realisation that they are really *here*, at the beach, that *this* is reality and that the things they may have been worried about were projections. Perspective comes when they have, as Katrina says, 'let go' of their narrowing identifications, and found their whole being in the present. This letting go happens without it being made to happen by a subject; it is not the outcome of a choice to let go. Jon told us that the moment of 'getting things in perspective' happens when he becomes aware of the obsessive aspect of, for example, his anxiety about his foot. As the realization occurs to him, and he sees the obsessiveness for what it is, the anxiety loses the grip it has had on his vision. Letting go is not a rejection or denial of particular subjective emotional states but is an openness to all possibilities; when people have let go, they feel at home, open-and-closed, at home with their whole being. This is the non-subjective emotional state of tranquility or well-being.

The meaning of perspective changes, then, as the experience of space changes. When people think about perspective in Euclidean or abstract terms, they are thinking of a view from a fixed location, but when people on the beach use the term they are referring to a connecting space-time where there are no locatable viewpoints. We can see this when Jon talks about the rocks in his corner of the world that will be here beyond the life of his great grandchildren. Because, as inhabited space, the rocks are both inside and outside, Jon feels simultaneously transient and enduring. Within living space-time, perspective is a vision from all angles, which means also from all times. With perspective then, being is 'humble', no-thing and full, living in a *here* that is nowhere and everywhere, and in a moment of presence that holds within it all time.

The question arises: how do people come into this connected state of inhabiting the beach, if it is not willed and intended? The answer lies in their humble devotion to daily practices. This is implied by Katrina when she says that 'nearly every day' she 'finds' that she 'wants' to go on her run. If Katrina *finds* her wants, they are not willed; they are both inside and outside. They come to her, call to her, and yet she finds them innermost. This is the relational, non-causal logic that Bachelard refers to as reverberation (1969: xix). Like most people engaging in daily practices, Katrina is called anew every day, and the call is not to an anticipated goal but to the practice for itself. All our interviewees highlight this focus on the practice for itself, speaking of

how the disciplines of ritual still their anxieties and loosen their obsessive identifications (see Bachelard 1969: xvii-xviii).

Michael gives a description of his experiences of coming into such a present and focused state:

I think that like meditation it is about being able to lose yourself: the conversation in your head stops for a little while and that can happen either by being quite still or by having some bodily rhythm like swimming that just calms the mind. A connection can take over just about anywhere but there is one particular exercise where I close my eyes or follow my hand around and at some point my tongue goes to the roof of my mouth and everything settles down.

Katrina implies that the discipline of her practice involves attention, at each footfall, to where she is:

At this time of year, it is pitch black at the time I run, completely dark, and I go for a run from Bondi up along the cliff path, which has a whole lot of steps. After a while you know it so well that it doesn't matter if it is dark: you know where you have to duck your head because the cliff hangs over and you know where the water washes over the path.

A lot of it is repetitive and that familiarity is part of the joy of it. You do the same run and you find that your feet are going down in the same place, and you sit for a rest and your hand goes down on the same rock and you say, 'It is only you and me'. After a while you start to develop a sacred site mentality: this is my place. You feel like it owns you more than you own it.

Daily practices transform people, allowing them to inhabit *this* space-time where being is. Thus, the joy of which Katrina speaks, is not an internal subjective state, but emerges through the practice, running 'the same run and finding that your feet are going down in the same place'.

Because daily practice brings about a sense of lived, inhabited space, it makes Jon and Katrina feel that Bondi is theirs. But this experience of belonging is quite distinct, our interviewees told us, from the proprietorial sense of identifying with a place as a possessive subject. Here is Katrina, suggesting how she slips between these different senses of belonging and their different space-times:

You come to think of it as your backyard when you live nearby and you get quite proprietorial about it. It's disconcerting if you come down in the middle of the day during summer and it is completely packed and you can't recognise it. But that is great as well. Anyone who lives in an area gets to know the little

tricks of it and starts to feel like they have more right to it than people who are just passing through, but the visitors and tourists and backpackers contribute so much to the energy of this place and we depend on them.

Proprietorship involves the desire to be left alone with the beach, to fence in what is yours. Belonging in this sense is exclusive, a matter of subjects establishing a location in abstract space-time by excluding others. By contrast, belonging in lived space-time, we have seen, is an open relation, a connection.

From the perspective of the proprietor, it may seem that openness is a crowded experience, but that is to think from Euclidean assumptions. In fact, both Bachelard (see eg 1969: 9-10, 26, 32; 1971: 99-101) and our interviewees describe this state of connected belonging as an experience of solitude. This alerts us to the difference between an exclusive form of aloneness and an open form of solitude. Openness brings solitude rather than crowdedness because there is no external entity to exclude, because it is possible to be with an otherness that is at once inside and outside. We think that this is the experience to which Katrina alludes with her example of the rock. The solitary feeling that there is only the rock and her is part of her expansive 'sacred site mentality': she and the rock are nothing but connections to everything; there are no things to be excluded. Such solitude is healing because it allows people to be whole, to experience imaginative potential rather than to exclude elements of their

being that do not match their identities (see Merton 1972: 80-82; Winnicott 1990). As Bachelard says, the imagination of solitude 'binds' the 'cosmos' (1971: 16, 177).

This analysis has led us to see that people appreciate their beach practices because they feel revitalized by the connectedness and solitude they experience in living space. This combination indicates that the community found in lived space-time has a different emotional basis to the form of community found in abstract space-time. The former is open, the latter jealous. To give a sense of the community of solitude, here is Jon:

Sometimes when I'm in my own zone I'm really unaware of people, but mostly I look up and someone will be there so I will go through three or four stops along the beach. If that bothered me I'd know I'd become obsessional. Saying hello is just a nice thing to do and it is part of being here. After my run I usually sit alone, but there is still a social aspect to that. Occasionally I feel pressured to speak to people but most of the time I don't.

Jon describes a state of solitude in which he is open to his environment and others in it. When he is 'in [his] zone', there is no internal chatter in his mind, and no sense of performing for others, and in this present and focused state he doesn't need to close himself off from others. Accordingly, except for occasions when he has become

'obsessional', he doesn't need to wrench himself from an exclusive place in order to stop and say hello to others. When running, he feels that he is with others; when he sits alone at the beach, he does so openly, without being self-conscious.

When Jon talks about saying hello, he is referring to a practice where people share 'the time of day'. 'Beautiful day!', someone might say, or 'What a great wave!', 'God it's windy', 'Look at that amazing sunrise', 'Water's cold today'. They may have also said 'Beautiful day!' yesterday, but, with each day's difference, their remark comes from the wonder of learning beauty anew (Bachelard 1969: xxv-xxix). All along the beach, people are making the same comments as they greet friends and strangers alike.

Sometimes these comments might be perfunctory, but as people are usually not 'pressured' to speak, the greetings are usually lively, spontaneous and particular to the moment. They are full of significance to the participants because, rather than coming from or being directed to identified individuals, they come from the lived space-time of Bondi; they are of the day and not about it because they come from the here and now. The greeting says 'Yes! This is it; this is where we are; this is life. Praise be!'

Every day is experienced as unique, and the greeting witnesses that miracle. Moments of greeting give people a sense of belonging because their solitude, their particularity and wholeness, has been witnessed (Capra and Steindl-Rast 1992; Winnicott 1990).

These greetings bring us back to the question of why people come to the beach. We said at the beginning of this section that there is something more than physical fitness that brings people here, something that they cannot quite name. They cannot name what is special because they do not have an objectifying distance from it; it is known through participation in the life of the beach, an unnameable experience celebrated and acknowledged in the greetings shared by people who share Bondi as a lived space-time. As Bachelard says, what is communicated is the mystery, that which cannot be defined or located: 'All we communicate to others is an *orientation* towards what is secret without ever being able to tell the secret objectively' (1969: 13).

Depth of being

We have been arguing that people are called to the beach by an experience of particularity-in-connectedness. In this section we will develop an understanding of the quality of this connected particularity that makes it unidentifiable, unnameable. We will argue that inhabitation of lived space-time is a door to a primal or archetypal experience of life, life that is not definably human, much less that of a locatable individual. Thus, for Bachelard, the connections that bring to life the particular have a quality of spatial and temporal depth, and it is the primal nature of this experience of

connectedness that he has in mind when he gives logical primacy to lived space-time.

For Bachelard, the being of lived space-time is at once particular and whole, both here and cosmic, both now and eternal: the cosmos, he says, is intimate (1969: 183ff).

To develop an understanding of depth of being, we need to recall that Bachelard's lived space is based on the principle of the door or the corner, the principle of containment-and-openness. Our interviewees spoke of Bondi in these terms. Here is Jon, talking about his corner:

It is such a beautiful spot here. Sometimes in winter, when there is a howling westerly blowing of a morning, up in the south corner there it is beautiful and sheltered. It is just a real nurturing feeling up there. You have the rocks overhanging and there is a beautiful colour in the rocks; you can lay there and just look at the patterns and the colour in the sandstone, and it is fascinating when you consider how much colour is in them. It is quite a nurturing, safe feeling.

And here is Michael, speaking of the beach as a corner:

The beach faces slightly south and is a little skewed. It's got what for me are encompassing arms of sandstone, so it is an embrace rather than, you know, the extent of Manly [Beach], which doesn't hold you the way that this does. There's

also this sense of amphitheatre which is very comforting to me and my sense of geography.

As we will see, when Michael talks about the skewed angle of the beach, he is referring to its openness to 'southerly busters', gales that can blow up suddenly on any day. Both he and Jon, therefore, are linking the nurturing embrace of Bondi with an experience of openness, of exposure to the elements. The lived space of Bondi in which they participate is both nurturing *and* elemental, and because the elements of lived space are not external forces, Jon and Michael do not shelter from them, but find themselves at home in and through them (see also Bachelard 1968, 1983, 1988).

Let us take Jon's experience of the rocks as an example of this elemental intertwining. When he talks about the colour and patterns of the sandstone, Jon is exemplifying the imaginative process that Bachelard calls reverie or elemental dreaming (see eg 1971; 1969: 190-205; 1983, 1988). Lying under the rocks, looking up at them, Jon has lost his sense of Euclidean space-time and has become part of the rocks. He is not a subject looking at an external object, but has a sense of perspective that allows him to see inside and outside at once. He looks at the surface of the rock as you might look at a fractal image: where his eye is caught by one curve, it is led to see curves in the curve, and curves within that. He sees *into* the stone, and in seeing the unfathomable depths of the sandstone, his own surprising depths unfold (Bachelard 1969: 199-210,

see also Bohm 1985). Fascinated by the rock, Jon is lost, as a human or an individual with purposes, and found, as soulful or imaginative being (see eg Bachelard 1969: xvi-xviii, 17).

Although he is talking about rock, Jon's reference to the swirling patterns acquires sandstone the fluidity of water and flux of air. Looking at the colours and patterns overhead, he is watching the clouds in the sky, and as he follows the rock patterns inward, he too is floating. The shapes are now also what he sees below, on the ocean floor, where the sand of sandstone is being laid in colours and patterns. Jon is immersed in all the elements: this rock, built up over countless years under ocean currents and then reshaped by the sun, wind and water; this rock, the cave where land, water, wind and sun meet; this rock, which connects his and his great grandchildren's transience to the eternity of the elements. When Jon is present to this rock through embodied imagination, he experiences the intertwinement of elemental being, the connectedness across space and time that Bachelard calls depth.

It is worth pausing to highlight the spatio-temporal implications of this Bachelardian analysis of the elemental. These elements are beyond Euclidean and causal logics of space-time, for they are not finite or locatable. The westerly wind howling in Jon's face is also the wind roaring around the Antarctic, as well as being the sun, and ocean

currents and land masses everywhere. Michel Serres, who was Bachelard's student, puts it this way:

One element passes through others, and they, conversely, pass through it. It supports and transports. These reciprocating fluidities create such perfect mixing or kneading that few places lack at least some knowledge of the state of others. ... One breeze bears and announces the whole universe. (1995: 26-9; see also Bachelard 1971: 179-181).

When Jon is in his corner, he is enlivened through his elemental connection, which, as Serres says, connects him with the cosmos: *here* is the dry air of the desert, the biting winds of the Antarctic.

We can now return to Jon's motivations for coming to the beach. When he says that his prime motive is exercise, he implies that there are also other factors involved. Hinted at in his description of a time not governed by the clock, these other factors emerge clearly when he speaks of the elements. At one point he says that the beach calls city people because, otherwise, they don't even know which way the wind is blowing; elsewhere he says that 'the water is the initial element that drags me'. It is elemental being that calls him to the beach.

I love it, love it. I love the connection with the elements. I love running on a stinking hot day; I don't like the cold too much but if there is a lightning storm around, it is fantastic: it just gives you so much energy to run. When I'm running, I look at the water a lot and I watch the waves. I try to listen to it and focus on it. Then when you finish running, and you dive into the water, there is this relief. It is a real release. It is like a cleansing effect on your body and soul. You absorb some of the minerals from the sea because your pores are open from the sweating, and after being in the sea you get that ozone smell. So the swim is an important part. An integral part.

For Jon, this elemental call is not, it should be noticed, a return to a chronological past or to a state of bounded unity: the oceanic feeling that he describes is not the same as Freud's (1962: 11-13; see Game 2001: 238). Moreover, the cleansing water does not separate Jon from the world, by washing anything away. Jon is instead cleansed through openness: his pores are open, his being is open, to difference. He is immersing himself in an ocean that is different every day, and that changes his being in ways he cannot control. When he dives into the water every day, he experiences the wonder of elemental no-thingness. Jon's love of the elemental connection is a love with no identifiable source and no identifiable object: the connection itself is love.

This elemental aspect to morning practices involves re-creation: every day people experience the wonder of genesis. For Jon and Katrina, routine is not a mechanical repetition of the past: through their practice, past, present and future co-exist in the wonder of the unfolding now. Creation, in the eternal now, is not the beginning point in chronology, and re-creation is not a repetition of this chronological past (see Eliade 1954); recreation is instead the particular which holds within it the whole of time. As Bachelard says of the newness of creation,

Time is suspended. Time no longer has any yesterday and no longer any tomorrow. Time is engulfed in the double depth of the dreamer and the world. The World is so majestic that nothing any longer happens there; the World reposes in its tranquility. (1971: 173; see also 1969: xii-xxxv.)

When Jon dives into the water, his experience of renewal is, as Bachelard would say, a primal experience of temporal depth (see eg 1969: 32-3). Re-creation involves the simultaneity of 'this is new' and 'I have always known this'.

Bachelard claims that vital space necessarily has the archetypal or immemorial quality of 'I have always known this', which involves something other and deeper than a subject's memory of a chronological past. This logic of depth is, in fact, the basis of Bachelard's phenomenology: phenomenological communication relies on evocation

rather than representation, and this in turn relies on connecting with the immemorial or universal through the particularity of *this* experience (1969: 13). Thus, when people on the beach cannot name the lived experiences they share in their greetings, it is because these experiences bear the presence of the immemorial.

To conclude this article, then, we will consider the significance of the immemorial to lived space-time. Here is Michael's account of elemental being in Bondi.

I owe quite a bit of my love of Bondi Beach to my late mother, because I would come down here with her when I was a small child. A southerly buster would come in, a proper thunder and lightning afternoon or evening storm. We might borrow a friend's car and drive out to Ben Buckler [the northern Bondi headland] and stand in the full force of the southerly, to experience the big weather. And then we might go home and she would put Wagner on the old gramophone and I would catch the mood and watch the Valkyries going round the room at 78 revs per minute. That gave me the quality of enjoying physically the weather. I'm happy whatever the weather really, but if it's got a bit of an edge to it, it answers to my spirit.

I like to dive off the rocks. We scattered my mum's ashes off that north end there. There are many many people who've done that, and I go out there some

mornings when there are still a few flowers left. So I can pay my respects to mum. But even before she died I liked diving rather than wading into the water, because it is much more exciting. The depth is maybe a little confronting but not enough to stop me. Swimming [across the bay] is also nice as your goggles are clear and just watching the bottom is really lovely. You can see little rays and see the fish and if you swim in close enough on a not-too-big day, you can see the swell of each wave move the sand around and you could be flying over some sandy desert or something. It can take you to all of those places.

When Michael attributes his love of Bondi to his mother, he is remembering his chronological past, his childhood experiences of Bondi with his mother. However, his description of the wildness of those experiences suggests that something deeper than memory is at work here, something more primal that connects Wagner and Bondi and Michael and his mother and all mothers. His experiences on the rocks of North Bondi, now and then, have the quality of the immemorial which, Bachelard says, is essential to the inhabitation of space. In imagining-living space, 'the daydream deepens to the point where an immemorial domain opens up for the dreamer of a home beyond man's earliest memory,' and, in this process, 'we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are' (1969: 5-6; see also 16, 33). Motionless refers to the timeless quality of archetypal or permanent childhood, the open state that allows connection with the cosmos: 'Without

childhood, there is no real cosmicity' (Bachelard 1971: 126; see also Hillman 1975: 8-12). Thus, the childhood that Michael is experiencing now is this permanent childhood, beyond all 'mirages of nostalgia' (1971: 125), the childhood that gave and gives him 'the quality of enjoying physically the weather'.

If Michael is living permanent childhood, what does this suggest about his relation to his mother? Let us recall his description of Bondi, his corner of the world: 'The beach faces slightly south and is a little skewed. It's got what for me are encompassing arms of sandstone, so it is an embrace'. The containment-and-openness of the beach could be that of his mother, which suggests that *here* Michael connects with the intertwining of mother-and-Bondi. His mother is present here, now, embracing yet open, opening him to the southerly busters and to the archetypal childhood that gives him the capacity for elemental being. In experiencing the particularity of his mother now, without nostalgia, Michael experiences not the Freudian but the archetypal mother (Bachelard 1971: 125). Thus, just as Michael respects Bondi for its undefinable depths, its 'edge', so he respects the mystery, the undefinability of his mother who is eternally present in this edge. The love that Michael experiences is not simply a subjective love for the objects of beach and mother; instead, this emotional state has the spatial-temporal logic of depth: it is archetypal.

Michael's respect is apparent in his practice of diving off the rocks into the depths. With every repetition, he dives through his mother's ashes and 'pays his respects' to her. But, in doing this, he is repeating a ritual performed by many others, and is, in a sense, paying his respects to all the others mourned at this site. Through his mother, he connects with generations past and future who mourn, are mourned, throw flowers, dive off these rocks. Like Jon, Michael dives into an ocean that is an other world, different every day; and he sees this world as Jon sees his rock, not as an object, but in its undefinable wonder. Michael glides over the rays as they glide through the sand. In living space, he is ray, and ocean, and desert, and he is amazed, *because*, as Bachelard would insist, he knows them already, in the immemorial. *This* space, Michael says, 'can take you to all of those places'.

It is the inhabitation of this corner of the world 'day after day' that allows Michael, like our other interviewees, to experience this connected or relational form of being, this tranquil and felicitous space. And it is this experience of no-thingness that connects the thousand and one things of Michael's busy day. His morning practice, Michael told us, is 'just part of the continuity of the day... just part of the flow of the day'. As implied by the expression 'getting things in perspective', daily beach practices connect people with the whole of their life.

Postscript

When we had completed the first draft of this article, we sent it to Jon, Katrina and Michael, to check that we had not misinterpreted their accounts. Michael not only reassured us, he responded to Bachelard in kind:

I think you have got the tone right, and to my ear the denizens of the beach do a great job of translating the academic cadences of the Bachelardians into a common tongue. ... Your draft is a worthy attempt at setting out how a routine run along the sand can be a pursuit of the ineffable. Each run is a celebration, a repetition of one of the thousand names of God, who cannot be captured by any collection of phrases; the words chasing after the mystery.

Drop down from the shoulder
slide across the glistening sinews
along the outstretched limb,
steepening across a forearm
gentling into an open palm.
On the other hand,
a wave raised up
with each knuckle closing

into a foaming fist
taking me down, upside down,
held down, dissolving.....
then released, lungs bursting
to gasp in light and air.
Buoyant again, swimming
between breath and death.

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