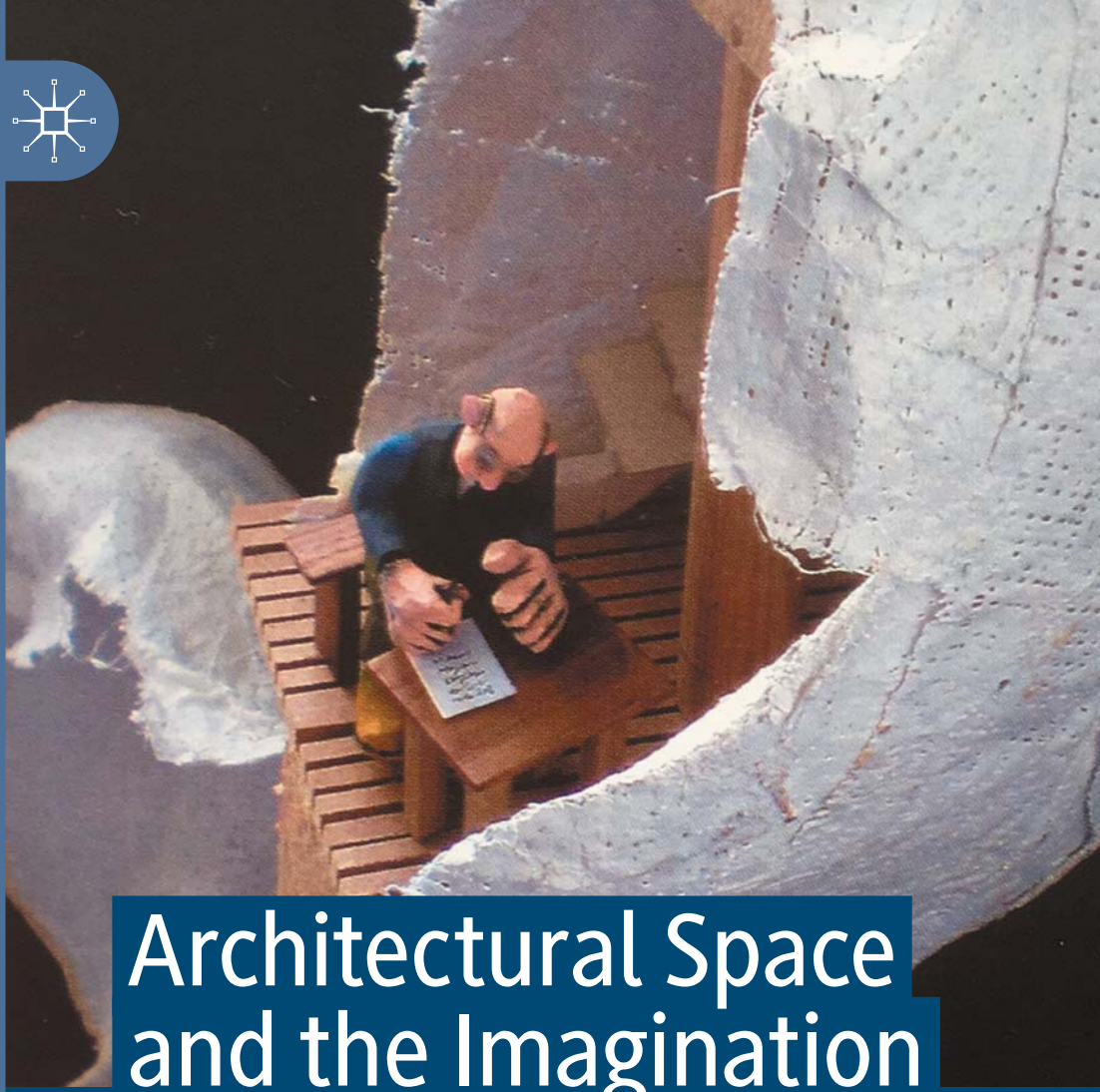

Architectural Space and the Imagination

Houses in Literature and Art from Classical to Contemporary

Edited by
Jane Griffiths · Adam Hanna

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Contents

Christina's World
(*after Andrew Wyeth*)

If I paint the light, the way it catches each blade
of grass that points to the house, and sharpens it,

they will say I am evading the issue.

If I render the faded clapboard, tease out its fibrous
softness in paint, they will say it wants context.

If I allow house and shed to stand for what happened
they will say these are empty forms.

If I paint what happened, who'd look at the grass
again, or trace the shape of what can't be spoken

in the grey-skied space between the house and the barn?

First published in Jane Griffiths, *Terrestrial Variations* (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books, 2012), p. 11. The editors are grateful to Bloodaxe Books for permission to reproduce the poem here.

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Andrew Lanyon is an artist and writer from Cornwall. He graduated from the London School of Film Technique in 1968 and spent several years as a photographer, presenting a major touring show, *The Rooks of Trelawne*, at The Photographer's Gallery in 1976. He has self-published over thirty limited edition letterpress books since 1987, beginning with *Deadpan*, the first of the Rowley series that still continues. He has also written highly acclaimed books on his father the painter Peter Lanyon as well as other artists and poets. During the 1990s, alongside painting, collage, and writing, Lanyon returned to filmmaking. His work is in private and public collections including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Stephanie Norgate is a poet and playwright. Her plays have been broadcast on BBC R4. Her two books of poetry from Bloodaxe Books are: *Hidden River* (2008) and *The Blue Den* (2012). Stephanie is a former Reader in Creative Writing at the University of Chichester and is currently a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at the University of Southampton. Her third poetry collection from Bloodaxe will be published in 2021.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Jane Griffiths and Adam Hanna

In the artist Andrew Lanyon's playful textual exploration of the creative process, *The Only Non-Slip Dodo Mat in the World* (2013), his protagonist Ambrose Fortescue takes up residence in the heads of a series of public statues. He treats them like themed hotel rooms, literally looking out through their eyes, and choosing his hosts according to the direction he wants his writing to take:

> His progress from one character to another was colouring his thinking as well as initiating new trains of thought […] A week spent inside Peter Pan was different from what it might have been had he not first spent a week in Sigmund Freud.[1]

[1] Andrew Lanyon, *The Only Non-Slip Dodo Mat in the World* (privately published, 2013), p. 16.

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Lanyon's collaborator Carlos Zapata created a richly suggestive model of Fortescue at work, a photograph of which is on the front cover of this book. It shows Fortescue writing at a desk in an attic that is located in a cut-away sculpture of a head. This is not the head of a recognisable figure such as Freud or Peter Pan. Rather, it is anonymously generic, and the way its white expanse is mirrored by the bald dome of Fortescue's head as he bends over his paper implies a close correlation between the two: that the head in which he is at work is his own. This collapses the distinction between house and mind; they are equated as both the space where creation occurs and the space that informs and directs such creation.

The representation of Fortescue at work neatly encapsulates the interests of the essays collected in this volume, which explore the interplay between architectural space and the literary imagination. Bringing together research into a range of periods, and with contributions from architectural and art historians, poets, and artists as well as from literary scholars, it aims not simply to complement existing research into the house in literature and art, but also to suggest how this field of enquiry might be developed. In recent years, both representations of architectural space and individual writers' and artists' houses (as well as the relationship between them) have been the focus of a great deal of critical attention. In particular, they have been linked to questions of nationhood and political identity, as well as to questions of gender—as witnessed, for example, in Gill Perry's discussion of home and identity in *Playing at Home: The House in Contemporary Art* (2013), and in Imogen Racz's *Art and the Home: Comfort, Alienation and the Everyday* (2015). The national and gendered politics that inhere in domestic spaces are at the forefront in such academic studies as Karen Lipsedge's *Domestic Space in Eighteenth-Century British Novels* (2012), as well as Monika Shafi's *Housebound: Selfhood and Domestic Space in Contemporary German Fiction* (2012). Further, they have been the subjects of the essays in Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft's *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture* (2006) and, more recently, Terri Mullholland and Nicole Sierra's edited collection *Spatial Perspectives: Essays on Literature and Architecture* (2015). More recently still, the essays in Rhona Richman Kenneally and Lucy McDiarmid's edited volume, *The Vibrant House: Irish Writing and Domestic Space* (2017), have combined contemporary theories on the agential qualities of material with more traditional preoccupations with gender, nationality, and identity. Such critical and scholarly

attention has extended to the actual houses inhabited by writers and artists, as seen in studies including Phyllis Richardson's *The House of Fiction: From Pemberley to Brideshead, Great British Houses in Literature and Life* (2017)—which examines actual houses such as Walpole's Strawberry Hill and Sterne's Shandy Hall as well as fictional structures such as Pemberley and Brideshead—and Kirsty Bell's *The Artist's House: From Workplace to Artwork* (2013), which is concerned both with work that is shaped by the house an artist lives in, and with houses that are shaped by the resident artists' work.

While this volume reflects many of these areas of interest, its primary focus is on direct relationships between the house and the creative imagination, specifically on architectural space as the object of the imagination, the house as shelter for the work of the imagination, and (significantly) architectural space as a means of envisaging the shape and the workings of the imagination itself. Its contributors acknowledge the importance of current scholarship on house and nation, house and politics, house and the uncanny, house and gender identity, but its main interest is in the various ways in which the house may be 'in the mind'. Like Lanyon's and Zapata's work, it explores the points where the boundary between house and mind becomes indistinct: houses that are coterminous with the writer's mind, and minds that are imagined in architectural terms.

It is not surprising, then, that Heidegger's 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' (1951) and, especially, Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958, first English translation 1964) are recurrent points of reference.[2] Heidegger's cornerstone essay inverts the traditional view that humans are dwellers because they have built spaces in which to dwell. Rather, according to Heidegger, building arises from the impulsion to dwell. 'To be a human being', he wrote, 'means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell'.[3] The primordial dwelling place, a built space that symbolised urges that could perhaps be better described as expressive than literary, is famously exemplified by Heidegger's own simple, slope-roofed hut in the Black Forest—a place that contained almost no books, but copious supplies of writing paper.[4] In the work of both Heidegger and Bachelard,

[2] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994); Martin Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971), pp. 141–60.

[3] Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking', p. 147.

[4] J. H. Prynne, 'Huts', *Textual Practice*, 22 (2008), 613–33 (p. 628).

ideas of the built dwelling place as a fundamental element of human experience loom large. For Bachelard, as for Heidegger, the idea of the house is one that is embedded deeply in the collective unconscious as an image of shelter and protection.[5] He argues that this image is informed by memories of a childhood house as an entirely safe and private space for daydreaming. As the locus of remembered daydreaming—the lost great good place—the house becomes embedded in the adult imagination as 'one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind'.[6] For Bachelard, the house as object of the imagination is inseparable from the idea of the house as shelter for the work of the imagination, and it is the fusion of these two roles that gives the image its universal appeal. Indeed, when he writes that it is 'thanks to the house [that] a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated', he comes close to representing thought itself in explicitly architectural terms; when he states that 'our soul is an abode […] by remembering "houses" and "rooms", we learn to "abide" within ourselves', he seems to imply that Heideggerian dwelling takes place not in the world, but in the imagination.[7]

Through their emphasis on the embodied nature of dwelling, both Bachelard and Heidegger are closely associated with phenomenology. Although debate as to what phenomenology constitutes is almost as old as the word itself, the term most frequently connotes a preoccupation with what has been described as 'space, time, and the world "as lived"'.[8] Its focus, therefore, is neither on causality nor on the nature of being, but rather on the granular, irreducible nature of experience itself. According to David R. Cerbone, its central concerns with experience and consciousness make the practice of phenomenology inextricable from

[5] Although Bachelard's work has recently attracted criticism on the grounds that it is based purely on his own essentially middle class experience (see Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft, *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture* [Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006], pp. 14–15), his work seeks specifically to discover the complex relationship between the personal and the universal.

[6] Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 6.

[7] Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 8, p. xxxvii.

[8] Maurice Merleau-Ponty and John F. Bannan, 'What Is Phenomenology?' *CrossCurrents* (1956), 59–70.

'introspection'.[9] This turn inwards can readily be imagined in spatial terms; conversely, the house, where space is first known and experienced, becomes a basis for how 'the world "as lived"' is understood. Such phenomenological theorisations of the house in the mind are as central to this volume as they are to Bachelard's and Heidegger's work. Yet with contributions drawn from a range of periods and disciplines, it also extends and challenges their positions, setting contrasting views of the interrelationship between architectural space and the imagination in dialogue. Prefaced by the poem 'Christina's World', which speaks to the possible ways in which an artist might imagine a house, the first three chapters, grouped under the heading 'Foundations', establish a number of ideas and approaches that recur throughout the volume. The first of these, an extract from Andrew Lanyon's privately printed *Bifurcated Thought* (2013), does so with remarkable flair.[10] As a piece of imaginative writing, a cross between essay and short story, it is, perhaps, an unusual opening for a book of academic essays. Its presence is vital, however. An extended exploration of the house as image of the thinking mind, it does not just illustrate the possibility of imagining the mind in architectural terms, forming the equivalent of the 'pertinent literary documents' that Bachelard quoted in support of his reading of the symbolism of the house.[11] It also displays an almost uncanny consonance with classical and medieval traditions that discuss the mind as architectural structure, playfully introducing connections that will be the subject of more traditional forms of investigation later in the volume. Lanyon's piece suggests how closely theory and artistic practice may be related, and how new perspectives may be gained from their juxtaposition. He dramatically riffs on the idea that the house may serve as image of the thinking mind, seeming to stumble upon it almost by accident. Setting out to write about thought, he claims that the metaphor he had originally intended to use for it was

[9] David R. Cerbone, 'Phenomenological Method: Reflection, Introspection, and Skepticism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology*, ed. by Dan Zahavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 7–25 (p. 7).

[10] *The Only Non-Slip Dodo Mat in the World* and *Bifurcated Thought* are the third and fourth of a series of privately published books in which Lanyon explores the nature of creativity through imaginative fictions; the two previous volumes are *Von Ribbentrop in St Ives* (2010) and *The Daughters of Radon* (2011).

[11] Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 37.

the wind, but that, as he followed the wind on its course, he unexpectedly discovered a dovecote in its path. In consequence of this encounter:

> Wind moves in a new direction. Within moments the dovecote has become a small cottage, to which rooms, stairs and wings are rapidly added. While wind is pouring down the chimney, this building is already changing from a substantial house into a mansion and by the time wind bursts into an attic, the place is teetering on the brink of being opened to the public.[12]

This series of transformations continues as the wind that pours down the chimney turns into a maid who is leaving her room and in doing so creates the stairs which she descends to encounter a piano tuner who later composes a tune for her and, in the process, calls into being a further addition to the house: 'an uncurtained glass conservatory' that completes the imaginary structure with a flourish.

Lanyon's *jeu d'esprit* thus brings together a number of possible relationships between house and mind. His house is, explicitly, a 'thought-house': a house that is the direct expression of mental activity. It also creates a space in which further creation occurs, in the form of the piano tuner's composition, and that creation in turn feeds back into the shape of the house, making it not the result of a single thought process, but a collaborative effort. In addition to representing the creative process, the house is the visible form in which that process results; indeed, the great glass conservatory that is the culmination of the edifice is explicitly said to realise 'the link between inside and out'—that is, it symbolises the way in which a private, internal thought is made publicly manifest.[13] As Lanyon describes it, there is no distinction between form and content: the mind imagines a house that gives shape and direction to the mind's own subsequent imaginings and simultaneously results in a physical presence in the outside world. Moreover, Lanyon not only *writes* that this is what happens, but also lays out his text so as to allow the reader to share in the experience. The dovecote that so unexpectedly interrupts the passage of the wind of thought and provides the foundations for the elaborate manor house is given physical representation on the page by the insertion of a small black and white photograph of a foursquare stone dovecote. This quite literally interrupts the text, to the extent that the sentence 'This

[12] Lanyon, *Bifurcated Thought*, p. 8.

[13] Lanyon, *Bifurcated Thought*, p. 14.

obstacle, at first a formless mass, grew rapidly into a substantial structure, something as sturdy and unadorned as this dovecote' is forced into the position of caption. The reader's eye thus encounters a physical obstruction in the text at precisely the moment that the 'obstacle' is written of, while the building it represents forms a counterpart on the page to the image that is called to mind by the word 'dovecote'. In this way, readers are given their own experience of the phenomenon that Lanyon goes on to explore in more detail—that the process of thought both forms and is informed by its contents. They are furnished with their own house in the mind.

Lanyon's work thus recalls Bachelard's idea of the 'housed' memory, but it also recalls two much earlier models of the mind and its movement: from antiquity onwards, wind was frequently used to figure inspiration, whose etymological root is the Latin *inspirare*, to breathe into. Such inspiration was frequently linked with precisely the kind of excited and inventive improvisation that appears in Lanyon's own writing. For example, the classical rhetorician Quintilian asserted that:

> If a speaker is swept away by warmth of feeling and genuine inspiration, it frequently happens that he attains a success from improvisation which would have been beyond the reach of the most careful preparation. When this occurred, the old orators used to say that some god had inspired the speaker. But the reason is obvious. For profound emotion and vivid imagination sweep on with unbroken force.[14]

For Lanyon, however, such inspired free-association cannot work in a vacuum. It requires a local habitation, which it finds in the dovecote—an image that also recalls some much earlier ways of thinking about the house in the mind. In classical memory arts, which remained influential well into the medieval and early modern periods, public speakers were encouraged to visualise an architectural space, and to associate each of the various topics of their speech with a particular location in the building. The idea was that, when giving their speech, this spatialisation would enable them to retrieve the topics in any order they desired, as one might locate items in the familiar cupboards of one's own home. The imagined

[14] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. by H. E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 10.7.13-14. For this connection, see further Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 125–56.

architectural space could be either real or invented; it could be 'a house, an inter-columnar space, a recess, an arch, or the like'.[15] The crucial point was that it would enable the retrieval of material, and its re-use in a new form. This, in turn, encouraged the visualisation of the memory itself in spatial terms; common metaphors that recur throughout both classical and medieval writing include 'thesaurus' ('storage room', 'treasury', or 'strong-box'), 'cella' ('storeroom'), 'arca' ('chest'), library, hive—and dovecote.[16] In one of the earliest occurrences of this image Plato writes in the *Theaetetus* of the contents of an orderly memory as resembling pigeons in a pigeon-coop, while Cassiodorus deploys the metaphor at greater length in his *Institutiones*; as Mary Carruthers puts it:

> He describes the structured memory […] as a kind of inventoried set of coops or animal-pens. […] Whatever experiences one has will be channeled by this previously laid-out inventory, and will find their appropriate place, each contributing its matter to the general store. Without the sorting structure, there is no invention, no inventory, no experience, and therefore no knowledge – there is only a useless heap, what is sometimes called *silva*, a pathless forest of chaotic material.[17]

While we might now associate the orderliness implied by architectural metaphors for the memory with stasis, or a want of creativity, for those who used them, the images implied the opposite: the material stored in the mind's orderly apertures was there to be taken up and shaped into some new form. It was the spatial, architectural structure of the memory that enabled thought.

Lanyon's dovecote, of course, first appears as an image *in* the mind rather than one *of* it. Moreover, it is possible that the way in which his work echoes memory arts is accidental: reinvention rather than allusion. Nevertheless, exploring the subject of thought and creativity, the material he discovers is a classical image of the mind, and this interacts

[15] The quotation is from one of the most popular rhetorical treatises, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. by Harry Caplan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), III.xvi.29. Cf. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, XI.2.1; and Thomas Bradwardine, 'On Acquiring a Trained Memory', trans. by Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 361–68.

[16] See further Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, pp. 37–55.

[17] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, pp. 38–39.

with thought to create new structures which themselves take architectural form, as he not only shows the transformative processes of thought, but also the spaces in which that transformation occurs. His allusive, elusive, manically extended riffs on the idea of 'chambers of the mind' reanimate ways of thinking about the creative process that have been dormant for centuries, and this suggests the persistence of house not only as a memory place, but as image of the mind itself: as both literal and metaphorical starting point for creativity.

The second and third chapters in the 'Foundations' section take a more traditional academic form, but are equally radical in the approaches they propose to the house in the mind. Whereas Lanyon represents creative thought in explicitly architectural terms, Christian Illies focuses on architecture as a stimulus to further forms of creativity. At the outset, he explores the auras and atmospheres that are inspired by built spaces and, consequently, are projected onto them. He does this by writing about the strange mix of fear and allure that attaches itself to buildings with grisly pasts, raising the idea that haunted places have such a hold on the imagination because, by virtue of their limits, they are able to make the fearful and uncanny knowable and contained. Illies suggests that magical, mythical approaches to built space, which make it a locus for story-telling, enable a discourse he terms 'narrative beauty'. Such beauty, Illies argues (in ideas that take a distinctly Heideggerian bent), can help human beings find a meaningful place in the world.

The narration of architecture is also central to Martin Düchs and Sabine Vogt's chapter, which is concerned with the sensory experience of architecture, and how this is reflected in both literary and architectural texts. Their piece begins with an outline of the different ways in which a house may be held in the mind—as a two-dimensional picture, as a three-dimensional vision of space, as an imagined experience of space in time, and finally as an imagined experience of space in time that also engages the senses. The authors then examine how architecture's appeal to the senses finds expression both in one of the earliest literary discussions of an architectural structure, Pliny the Younger's epistle about his villa at Laurentum, and in the work and writing of the present-day architect Peter Zumthor. Tracing a shared interest in architecture as an immersive experience in such diverse figures, and bringing together architectural and literary analysis, this chapter suggests that a phenomenological experience of architecture is fundamental not only to the experience of buildings themselves, but also to the ways in which they are re-imagined in writing.

By directly investigating relationships between built space and the imagination, the first three chapters raise questions that are explored further in the rest of the book. These subsequent chapters are divided into two sections, 'Reading Literary Architectures' and 'Architectures of the Literary Imagination'. Those in the former section focus on ways in which imaginary architectures have been deployed in a variety of texts to envisage and articulate the experience of being in the world; those in the latter turn to the various relationships between architectural space and writers' own imaginations, whether that space takes the form of the houses they lived in, the structure of their work, or the source of their images of making.

The first literary architecture to be examined is that of the eighth-century *Codex Amiatinus*, a manuscript whose text of the Bible is accompanied by a series of complex miniatures. Focusing in particular on its elaborate representation of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, Meg Boulton radically extends and develops the argument that the image is a composite of several ecclesiastical structures and Old Testament spaces, representing a layered amalgam of Tabernacle, Temple, Church, and the Heavenly City yet to come. Drawing on Bachelard's consideration of architecture as understood through lived experience, Boulton argues that to view the book's miniatures may constitute an equivalent experiential encounter. By depicting a variety of architectures that were considered to house God, its pages themselves come to function as a representation of the earthly and structural guises of the Church that also prefigure Jerusalem; its representation of built space contains within it a representation of all Christian time. Like Düchs and Vogt, Boulton presents built space as something that is most fully experienced through the reader's imagination in the act of engaging with the words and images on a printed or manuscript page.

Helen Swift's chapter, too, is concerned with the relationship between texts and the imagined architectures they contain. Whereas Boulton's interest is in the way the physical book comes to serve as a substitute for the architecture it represents, Swift discusses how a book's contents—its poetic fictions—may take on the function of memorial architecture. Focusing on the profusion of fictional spatial structures—tombs, cemeteries, palaces and temples—which are described as housing the dead in late medieval French writings, she explores the possibility of constructing a meaningful place in the world for those who have departed from it. While tombs have traditionally been conceptualised as frameworks intended