

## THE HOME FROM ATTIC TO CELLAR

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### Abstract

This study is based on 96 in-depth interviews with the inhabitants of rural and urban environments in France. It aims at ascertaining the importance of attics and cellars as hidden spaces of the home and to describe the uses and experiences they elicit. The thematic analysis shows that hidden spaces are never disconnected from the daily lived-in interior spaces of the home, which is thus experienced as a whole. Beyond the negatively connoted emotions associated with these places, attics and cellars are shelters allowing appropriation, accumulation and security, and signify time. They provide space for the experience of secrecy, considered as the basis for the assertion of self identity.

### Introduction

This article examines the notion of dwelling and elucidates the uses which characterize and convey the concept of home through the identification of the psychological functions of two specific areas in the home, namely the attic and the cellar.

The choice of only two of the sub-territories in the house is based on the hypothesis that the dwelling experience is a total one. The home is experienced as a whole to be made one's own, over and beyond the fact that it is divided into more or less specialized sub-territories such as the living-room, kitchen and hallway. Not that this division is unimportant. Quite to the contrary it is crucial, reflecting the role of the home as a territory at once intimate and private, but which also serves as a 'place for and sign of sociability' (Raulin and Ravis-Giordani, 1978).

Indeed, our hypothesis takes into account the division of the house into sub-territories by stressing the idea that they are connected through dialectical relationships. In other words, when we say that dwelling is a total experience, we mean that a dynamism is at work everywhere in the home through different modalities without ever viewing any space as in itself negligible, less significant than any other.

From its Greek origins up to this day, the word 'dialectics' has been imbued with diverse meanings. Its most recent and general use refers to 'any sequence of thoughts or even of facts which logically depend one on another. This idea of dialectical *forward movement* has been extended in Neo-Hegelian thought and especially in Marxism and has acquired the connotation of mobile, progressive, evolving' (Lalande, 1980, p. 228).

As it is used here, its meaning arises from Altman and Gauvain (1981, p. 286) for whom dialectics refer to a conception of the workings of the physical and psychological world in which three main aspects may be distinguished. On the one hand, the world and human activities imply tensions between opposite poles. On the other hand, these processes of opposition function as unified systems. Finally, the relationships between opposite poles are dynamic.



In the case we are dealing with, this amounts to saying that (a) the home encompasses *polar tensions* on a *spatial level* (upstairs/downstairs; front/back; left/right); a *psychological level* (clean/dirty); a *level of uses* (tidy/untidy); and on a *social level* (private/public): (b) on the other hand, the specific character or the status of each place refers us to the other subterritories in the home. Thus the seemingly constant tidiness and stage-setting in the living-room, seen as a 'front region' of the home (Goffman, 1973), reflects the ceaseless fight that the dweller wages against dirt and disorder, e.g. in the kitchen or the bathroom. Lastly, (c) this inter-linkage implies that any new qualification of a sub-territory reverberates on the total experience and on all the uses of the home.

By qualification it is meant the appropriation processes through which a new role and meaning are assigned to a space (Korosec-Serfaty, 1973, 1975; Graumann, 1978). Though it is true that no space may be seen as either affectively neutral or devoid of social meaning, it is nevertheless the dialectics of uses and representations which determine the successive meanings of places. These processes are what separates a 'given space' from a 'produced space', i.e. what separates 'the shapes, sites and buildings existing prior to a definite psychological and social process from the shapes, sites and buildings resulting from the arrangements and the interpretations made by the users' (Bromberger and Ravis-Giordani, 1976, p. 16).

This approach legitimizes the study of the home from any of its sub-territories. However, we have chosen to be interested in the attic and cellar, i.e. hidden territories in the house, for several reasons.

One of the reasons for this choice is that the home is considered as having a public dimension and a private one, i.e. a hidden face and a visible one (Goffmann, 1973; Zonabend, 1980; Altman and Chemers, 1980; Pratt, 1982; Kron, 1983). If we refer to our hypothesis, according to which the distinct experiences of these two dimensions are lived in dialectical terms, it means that the visible spaces of dwelling draw their qualities, status, and meaning from their relationships with the cupboards, closets, drawers, balconies, garages, attics and cellars which comprise the hidden spaces of dwelling. If it is true that the living-room, for instance, the most visible and most consistently shown of all private spaces, bespeaks the dweller, it does so in terms which certainly reveal the person's mode of being and dwelling, but it does so above all in socially acceptable terms. What is visible expresses the dweller, but it also conceals him. Being both a visage and a mask, its function is to keep the outsider at a distance. The image set forth by what is shown should at the same time satisfy the outsider's 'scrutiny and keep him there; prevent him from going further, divert his attention from the heart of the matter by limiting him to a complacent reading of the shape of things' (Médam, 1977, p. 73).

Therefore, any study of the being's modes of anchoring in space has to include a series of perspectives. It is obviously necessary to take into account and to view as the indispensable basis of the analysis what is observable and pertains to the manifest. Yet it is also necessary to attempt to define the links between what is manifest and the latent contents of the arrangements of objects, the design of space, the sequence of uses; i.e. between what is hidden and what is shown, what is conceded or proffered for others to see and what is reserved for our own sight, i.e. our privacy.

On the other hand, the studies which have focused on the 'backstage' of the home (Kira, 1976; Clavel, 1983) generally have not taken into account at the same time



the dimensions of uses and of experience. We propose such an approach in order to suggest a broader definition of the psychological functions of hidden spaces and to define the critical dimension which integrates the uses of these spaces and the experiences associated with them.

In addition the interest in the attic and the cellar stems also from the fact that modern housing contains an even smaller number of secondary sub-territories. What is the psychological importance of their disappearance? The relevance of these questions appears as soon as one examines the impact in the literature focusing on the study of the experience of dwelling of Bachelard's much quoted book *The Poetics of Space* (Bachelard, 1981). Bachelard, when proposing a psychology of the home, asserts that there is no authentic, deep and complete experience of the home without the significance of the hut, of going down the cellar and going up to the attic. Bachelard tells us of houses snuggling in the heart of medieval villages, of farmhouses rising in the middle of ample fields. He has inspired authors who see in the single-family home the supreme type of ideal housing, the only one which at the same time allows one to experience 'dwelling' and to create a 'universe' which is protective and self-reflecting. This view is represented at its most eloquent by Olivier Marc (1972, p. 137) who writes:

'There still is nowadays an architecture which satisfies me if I leave its small size aside: that of suburban detached homes. They are ugly and all too often pretentious, certainly, but each one creates there a clearly evidenced universe, in the dimension nowadays given by the collective psyche. And it is only in this spontaneous architecture, in this architecture without architects, despised by aesthetics, that a few signs of authentic living may be gleaned.'

But today most people live in low and high rise multifamily buildings or in urban and suburban homes. Does this mean that all have only an incomplete experience of dwelling? In other words, what counts more: the location and therefore the verticality and depth of the house or the separate and hidden character of these subterritories?

Because, on the one hand, there has been considerable influence from Bachelard's book in particular through Cooper's exploratory essay *The House as a Symbol of Self* (1976) which some authors have taken literally, and, on the other hand, because this kind of analysis contains many more or less explicit value judgments regarding some of the most widely spread kinds of dwellings in contemporary western urban societies, we propose first to confront Bachelard's contribution to the understanding of the psychological functions of the attic and cellar in the home with what the inhabitants actually say about these places. Then, we propose to define more generally the psychological role of hidden spaces in the dwelling experience. To do so, we shall put ourselves in Bachelard's phenomenological perspective, assume that the 'speaking subject is all the subject' (Pontalis, 1955, p. 931) and that every phenomenology is an attempt to grasp images through the speech which convey them.

### The Dwelling and Reverie

Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* is scattered with brief references to Jung which seemingly provide sufficient grounds to support, for example Marc's statement that the detached house is the only one to indicate evidence of 'authentic living'. But the value and the originality of Bachelard's contribution rests in another area. For him, the root of our conscious being is an image-making activity which is displayed



in science and poetry. The poetic image possesses its own intrinsic dynamism, whose origin can only be grasped by means of phenomenology, defined as an intuitive, contemplative and relational attitude. The *Poetics of Space*, then, explicitly seeks to achieve a 'happy phenomenology of the home', which derives from topophilia because it examines the images of felicitous and eulogized spaces. This eulogy primarily consists of language. Topo-analysis, defined as the psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives, takes for its subject—matter the spaces of language formed by words, sentences, stanzas or verses. Therefore Bachelard's first and foremost contribution is to initiate a phenomenology of expression.

In this perspective, what might have, from the outset, created a difficulty, i.e. the considerable gap between a happy phenomenology of the home and the negative experiences of space, is explained by Bachelard's theory of the human relationship to space, in which the memory of places is the experience of being and of being in oneself. Being in oneself means that the unconscious is not only housed, but happily housed, housed in the space of its happiness, before any trauma, any tearing away, any struggle. The space of happiness is that of pre-human restfulness, which here verges on the immemorial. We see here some hints of a reference to Jung's psychoanalysis. Another one is made when the levels of human consciousness are compared to those of a house. Thus the cellar would correspond to the obscure area in the consciousness of the individual, that area which participates in the collective unconscious, while the attic would correspond to the world of the conscious and the rational. Bachelard rapidly criticizes this comparison, but proposes nevertheless to accept it temporarily 'because it develops so easily' (Bachelard, 1981, p. 19).

Another of Bachelard's contributions to the phenomenology of the home is his conception of dreaming, which for him is radically different from the conception proposed by Jung, for whom dreaming fulfils a predictive function. Bachelard, on the other hand, wants to show that the house is one of the strongest powers of integration for the thoughts, the memories and the dreams of men. In this perspective the binding principle is reverie. Reverie presents the memory of previous reveries, thus giving access to the initial shell which shelters the being. Reverie is the subject-matter and the way of access to dwelling which for Bachelard is the territory of the person, being well, as shown by his analyses of the hidden spaces in the home: attic, cellar, corners, drawers, wardrobes. In all these humble places, the dwelling experience is one of intimacy, concentration, happy closeness, which integrates the immensity of the universe. It would be a mistake to infer from this that dwelling is an experience of enclosure and sedentariness—reverie is dynamic, it is not enclosed anywhere. The reverie of the dwelling is open to the outside world.

### Design and Conduct of the Study

This study uses the phenomenological perspective, i.e. is animated by the intention to grasp the dimensions of concrete phenomena which are part of the experiences of the subject. 'Doing phenomenology' is generally considered as a personal venture into the world of phenomena experienced by the phenomenologist himself. However this study is based on information gathered during interviews, and thus is not only theoretical but empirical too. It focuses on what the dwelling subjects actually say. The aim was to gather neither the dreams put into words nor poems (Bachelard,



1981) but ordinary words which describe at once experience and daily practice of places.

We interviewed 96 out of 120 persons contacted. Because of our intention to compare at a later stage of our on-going study of the various aspects of the home experience rural versus urban and man versus woman experiences, we chose to contact 60 urban and 60 rural dwellers (30 men and 30 women in each case). For the same reason we also tried to ensure the relative homogeneity of the two samples at least from the socio-economic point of view.

The rural environments were taken at random from a list of small villages in Alsace, Eastern France. But the interviewer had to check that the potential respondent met three criteria. The dweller's main activity should be agriculture, his house should have an attic and a cellar and he should own his land. Of the 60 persons contacted, 36 (18 men, 18 women) met the conditions and accepted to be interviewed.

The 57 respondents of the urban sample were contacted in the same way, after working hours. The urban neighborhoods were also chosen at random from a list of residential neighborhoods in Strasbourg and its periphery. The list, called SIROCO (Note 1), like the one for rural places, was provided by the Department of Economic and Statistical Surveys of the Regional Delegation of the French Ministry of Housing (1977). The respondents (25 men, 32 women) lived in detached housing neighborhoods, and the exterior house appearance showed the presence of attics and cellars. Their economic level was known from the outset, since detached housing in Alsace has been extensively surveyed from this perspective (Renaud, 1978; Korosec-Serfaty, 1979).

The interviews were semi-directed, focusing on the attic and the cellar. They lasted from one hour and thirty minutes to three hours. The role of the interviewers was mainly to induce free speech on the experience and usage of these two places in the home. They underwent training before doing actual interviews. The first interview was considered as practice interview and used for completion and cross-checking of the interview guideline which was designed in the following way. All interviewers took part beforehand working sessions where they were asked to make clear their own ordinary perception and experiences of attics and cellars as well as to look for information in ethnological and sociological literature. A few poems and novels were used as source texts too, leading to an outline of the main practical and psychological 'functions' of attics and cellars, e.g. storage, discarding, hiding, etc.

The use of this outline was twofold. First it provided potential directions for the interviews. It was not supposed to be used as an open-ended questionnaire, but as a source list when needed during the interview, e.g. to clarify some points or to encourage speech. Second, it was to be used as a provisional 'thematic reading grid' of the interviews, during the first stage of the analysis, although we knew it would have to be given up once the themes mentioned in the interviews were defined according to what people actually said.

All interviews were conducted in the respondent's home, tape recorded, then fully transcribed. In several instances, the respondents, unasked, felt either the need to show their attic or cellar (or both) to the interviewer when the interview was over or to refuse from the outset to consider such a possibility. Some respondents took paper and pencil to draw their attic and cellar and pointed out different storage places. In some instances, we suggested or were invited to take pictures of the places, which we did for illustrative purposes. This particular set of reactions shows that



the respondents were clearly and eagerly involved in the interviews.

The following thematic analysis stems from the entirety of the respondents' words. The first step in analysing the data consisted in grouping the dwellers' statements into a limited number of categories, called here themes or meaning categories, drawn out of what seemed to be similar descriptions of various aspects of one phenomenon. Thematic analysis is by definition context-bound, therefore this part of the analysis is certainly critical.

We tried to capture through the themes the various dimensions of the experience of attic and cellar without trying to evaluate the respective 'psychological weight' of each of them. This analysis has no statistical aim. It is essentially a semantic approach which assumes that all individual variations in the expression of experience contribute to the comprehension of the phenomenon under consideration. However in this paper and in our present perspective of 'phenomenology through vicarious experience' (Spiegelberg, 1975, p. 35) the number of interviews provides us with a richer amount of descriptions centered on the same topic, thus allowing us to achieve at once a wider and more acute phenomenological description. This description seeks to discern the various modalities of appearances of attic and cellar, i.e. to grasp the various affective states or significant orientations which, in different situations, represent the experience of hidden territories in the home.

We then sought to describe the relationships and articulation of these dimensions in order to suggest an eidetic approach of the experience of the 'hidden' in the home. The eidetic method derives from the intention to find out what is essential to a phenomenon (Spiegelberg, 1975). Therefore it raises the question of its meaning and is often closely associated with an exploration of the sense of words, i.e. with hermeneutics. We make such a brief incursion in the world of hermeneutics by suggesting an interpretive reading of some key words used by the respondents, then turn to the first questions to see how they can be answered.

Lastly, because experience is multifaceted, the phenomenological activity is underlaid by the quest for unity of meaning in the subject. We shall therefore try to define, through all the descriptions of the multiple aspects of the experiences of hidden places the central dimension which integrates them and upon which the unity of experience is based.

### **Place Characteristics of Attic and Cellar: Up and Down**

'Here's the cellar, we're going down. Careful, don't get your clothes dirty ... Now we're coming to the attic, we'll be going up. Mind your step, the staircase is steep' (70-year-old rural woman). Going up, going down, these obvious movements denote the specific nature of the attic and cellar and explain the environmental features characterizing them. The respondents accurately describe the impact the location of the attic and the cellar has on the emotions these places elicit.

The attic is the least sheltered part of the house, the place in which the temperature and weather changes are the most strongly felt. All respondents pointed out that the attic is cold in winter and hot in summer, that one cannot but be aware of the weather outside when one is in the attic. Still being in the attic is being within the house, sheltered by a roof and four walls. Consequently, the opposition between shelter and exposure is more subtly experienced in the attic.

The rhythms of weather and climate are not perceptible in a deep and dark cellar. Its temperature is constant, it does not freeze in winter. It is 'a full-fledged part of



the house' (46-year old urban woman), i.e. it possesses the characteristics of the inside, by contrast with the attic which has the characteristics of the outdoors.

Thus the verticality of the house is ensured by the polarity of the cellar and of the attic. This polarity is also present in the many statements in which the attic and the cellar are viewed as *similar* because both are hidden territories and therefore play the same role in their relationship to the spaces of daily uses. In opposition to Bachelard, both the attic and the cellar appear as similarly cursed or forbidden places: 'If for instance you see a movie, or you read a book ... there's always murders in the attics and the cellars' (31-year-old urban man).

Lastly this polarity is evidenced by the fact that the attic and the cellar generally serve as *references* to each other, as terms of comparison. This dialectical process underlies the different emotions and practices belonging to each place, in particular when sleep and night, on the one hand and on the other hand the mastery of these spaces are evoked. 'I could sleep in the attic but I'd never sleep in the cellar' (48-year-old rural woman). Sleep requires a region of privacy, not one of closure 'I don't like going down to the cellar, it's dark in there. I'm not afraid of the dark, but ... the place is such a shambles. This feeling of being shut in ... It's an earthen floor, really like a dungeon: a trap door, a steep staircase. You feel like you'll never go up again' (46-year-old urban woman).

The disorder, associated to the proliferation of an unwanted life (rats, spider's webs) expresses the dimension of neglect in the cellar. It is at the same time stable and pullulating with repulsive creatures which betray the lesser control that the dweller has over this territory which is supposed to be his.

Everything seems easier to master in the attic. 'In the attic, I'd kill the spiders, they're more accessible there and let's say it's more in the open, it's not the same thing' (46-year-old rural woman). This mastery is only apparent. According to Bachelard, it is due to the fact that man refuses to face the cellar (the unconscious). We shall see to what an extent this assertion exhausts the meaning of the respondents' statements.

### Phenomenological Dimensions of the Attic and the Cellar

#### *Appropriation*

Attic and cellar are also identified with accumulation, stockpiling and reserve supplies. Through a kind of sedimentation process, a variety of useful or seemingly useless objects are gradually accumulated, all of them closely interlocked with the dweller's identity, with his economic activities as producer and consumer of goods. In rural environments, food is stocked in the cellar which thus has a special character. '(The cellar) is mainly used to keep wine in. As soon as you go in, there's the smell of wine, it's rather pleasant, it's a very special place' (22-year-old rural woman).

The positivity of the attic as well as of the cellar is asserted as soon as appropriation processes come into play. The attic, associated with hard work done in hot weather (gathering the hay in), or in bitter cold (taking out the fodder for the cattle), and always in the all-pervading dust, remains a place used for vitally important activities like the cellar. It is appropriated through *work*, through the most crucial tasks.

Attic and cellar may become play-related spaces for both children and adults. 'When it rains, the attic becomes the children's domain. They can jump, play, make tunnels and even sleep there' (50-year-old rural woman). This play-related dimension of a



work-space is, of course, made possible by the seasonal uses of the attic, but it is nevertheless remarkable if we remember that the association of work and play in a single place is very unusual nowadays. A great deal of work is done in the attic, we are told in rural environments, 'but there are compensations, you stay there a lot. You can have fun, you can sleep there or at least take a nap, and when I was young I even took girls there' (40-year-old rural man). The appropriation occurs through *play* and combines with private uses which turn the attic into an intimate, still vividly remembered place: 'For us children, the attic was our realm. We used to remain there for whole days, it was wonderful' (50-year-old rural woman).

The cellar, about which Bachelard, because of his focus on topophilia and not giving himself leave, in a way, to say much about it, asserts that it is all too natural to feel fear there, the cellar too is appropriated through play, in a happy mode. Its specific environmental characteristics, its nocturnal dimension, its stillness may form the basis for this appropriation. The frightening cellar gives the opportunity of playing with fear: 'The kids used to play at frightening each other there... When they were little, it was easy for them to play there' (47-year-old urban woman).

The appropriation here consists in playing with the 'given', in experiencing up to a point the inescapable character of the associations between darkness and fear, being underground and vulnerability, etc. Being afraid for fun, playing at being locked in mean actually experiencing fear, but with the certainty of a happy ending. Play, in this case, is an endeavor to de-dramatize the cellar, to free oneself from its spells so as to make it more familiar and hence ordinary. Using the cellar to play in helps to prepare future experiences of a less conflicting nature, less dependent of the vagaries of imagination, and also provides a more positive experience of a home sub-territory.

The positive connotations attached to the cellar in rural environments are also to be found in urban environments, provided the cellar no longer is only a space to discard things in, but an appropriate place for various activities. It then becomes in the respondents' statements more familiar and sheds its 'cellar' designation to become a 'basement'. When transformed into a basement, it sheds both its original name and the connotations of dirt, darkness, fear and confinement attached to it. Once made into a garage and/or into a complex territory, part pantry and part recreation room, it gains the status of a clear, clean and familiar space. 'I like it in my basement. I like to tidy it up. There's a sink near the boiler and the washing machine's also there, I can do my laundry there. The kids have set up a darkroom to develop their negatives in' (40-year-old urban woman). The cellar becomes a sub-space of the home which accordingly acquires a totally different territorial foundation. The very nature of the daily uses elicited by these spaces creates this status change. The dweller brings into play a certain amount of dynamism, a will to exert a psychological mastery over space which incites him to extend his influence to the most remote areas of his home and to refuse giving up the foundations of his territory to darkness and cold.

Similarly, the will to appropriate space extends to the urban attic when, for instance, it is remodeled to be lived in, as was frequently reported.

Being in the attic or the cellar still means being a little apart, a little outside the house, in a space traditionally considered secondary, a place used to discard things in, but it also means being outside the boundaries of the 'high status' space, i.e. the rooms the family uses daily. The dynamics of spatial extension, the urge to approp-



riate these secondary spaces precisely aim at qualifying these sub-territories in a new way, by giving them the symbolically loaded attributes of the home, those which express the 'lived-in' character of a place. This is why the assertion of the person's identity is encouraged, particularly through the setting up of territory markers (Hansen and Altman, 1976) and reminders of home and of family links are frequent: 'My husband hung the walls with pictures of mountain landscapes, because he likes mountains, and a picture of the girls. We put a carpet on the floor, like this he feels more at home in that room. He gave it a personal touch' (47-year-old woman).

Thus, two important dimensions are outlined. The attic and the cellar, because they afford the possibility of better mastering the intrusions of dirt within the dwelling, contribute in confirming the latter in its character of order and cleanliness and in ridding the house of the more humble signs of daily life.

Further, the attic and the cellar constitute spatial resources that each family manages in its own way. They allow room, for instance, for getting away from the tensions due to living constantly together in the same house. 'I do everything in the cellar. I made myself a workbench. Now, I've got my own corner ... nobody bothers me' (48-year-old urban man). 'That's where my husband unwinds. When he's really fed up with everything, it's the attic' (47-year-old urban woman).

#### *Affluence and security*

The shelter, according to Bachelard, is fortifying. The dwellers tell us that the attic and the cellar are shelters because they protect from physical aggression as well as from want. The two dimensions of affluence and security are thus closely intertwined. In rural as well as in urban environments, the attic and the cellar are used to store food supplies. 'It's important, a cellar, especially for storage... There are all kinds of preserves, carrots, onions, potatoes... It's also used to put away the things we don't use' (40-year-old urban woman). A full cellar is reassuring: it eases the anxiety and fear of the future. Similarly, depending on whether the attic is full or empty, it reflects seasonal rhythms (full of fodder in the winter, empty in summer), but it also reflects affluence or want: 'When the attic is full, we feel good' (56-year-old rural man).

In this sense, the attic and the cellar complete each other; they are constantly locked in a *dynamic relationship interspersed with moments of intensity and excitement and moments of peace and plenitude*. This dynamic relationship is created by the alternation of emptiness and fullness. For instance, 'the full jars are kept in the cellar, the empty ones in the attic. They are fetched (from the cellar), used (at home), they are put back (in the attic), then brought (home) to be filled up again, then stored once more (in the cellar)' (40-year-old urban woman).

The shelter and survival aspects of home uses are integrated to behavior, movements, cyclical comings and goings from the house to the attic and the cellar. The house is the place goods are produced, processed and consumed in. They acquire at each stage a new status which sends them up to the attic or down to the cellar. In this sense, we may speak of a *dialectical* relationship between the *behavior in and the uses of* 'the home, from attic to cellar'.

The moments of plenitude, when the production of goods may temporarily cease, occur when the attic and the cellar are full: 'In winter, with the attic and the cellar, we didn't have to worry; we had all we needed at home, fodder for the cattle in the attic and food for us in the cellar, and we didn't even need to go out of the



house, because we could reach the attic by climbing up the barn ladder' (60-year-old rural man). The self-sufficiency, the closure of the home around its reserves are linked to ancient practices which evolve only slowly. Thus the frequently mentioned freezer is often located, whether in the city or in rural environments, in the cellar, where more products are thus stored.

The other dimension of the shelter is experienced in as much as both the attic and the cellar are intimate places that only the dweller is thoroughly familiar with. They are habitable, but only insofar as the dweller wants to extend his mastery of space, and they nonetheless always remain safe and secret places, affording opportunities of withdrawal and protection, more particularly in exceptional situations. 'During the war (1939–1945), I hid people in my attic' (72-year-old rural man). Urban cellars were also used as shelters against air raids, like the Paris Underground during the war. Some respondents pointed out that a great many cellar windows in Strasbourg are still marked with the yellow arrow which designated collective shelters to passers-by and residents: 'We actually lived in the cellar during the war, we felt safer there, because it's sturdily built' (60-year-old rural man).

### *Secrecy*

The following lines aim at bringing to light the psychological meaning of the objects hidden in the attic and the cellar. We intend to show that because people talk, at first reluctantly and later on with a wealth of detail, about their things, they are in fact talking about secrecy. Furthermore, by underscoring the importance of the time dimensions in the statements about the attic and the cellar, we also intend to show that the time-continuum has closely knit relationships with secrecy, which make the experience of the hidden the integrative dimension for the uses and the experience of the attic and cellar and, through this very fact, of home. In other words, the home experience is the experience of the shown/hidden dialectics and its approach presupposes the understanding of the meaning of secrecy.

*Remembering and Forgetting.* The attic and the cellar are, to repeat the dwellers' own words, where 'there's all kinds of old junk', where 'it's a shambles'. They are not only places denoting affluence, they are *full* places. Between emptiness and fullness, complex dynamics are established which always refer, as we shall see, to the dynamics established between the dirty and the clean. These full places are referred to in the mode of denial: 'I don't even know exactly what's in my attic' (45-year-old rural man).

Thus, although people willingly acknowledge the 'fullness' of hidden places, an effort is necessary to tell what this 'fullness' is made of. In other words, the attic and the cellar provide the share of secrecy that each house requires, so that it cannot be said to be open to all and sundry, i.e. so that the whole being cannot be said to be exposed to the sight and to the questioning of others (Margolis, 1974). The dwellers' denials and hesitations reveal an attempt at backing off, at refusing to break the implicit law of silence about what is hidden. For secrecy to fulfil its psychological function, which is to assert individuality and identity, both interlocutors have to abide by this law. Secrecy implies reciprocity (Simmel, 1964). The interviewer breaks it, in an attempt at establishing a new relationship, that of the shared secret, a relationship which is found, albeit in a different form in each case, in confession, when telling someone a secret or in the therapeutic relation.



The lists of what fills attics and cellars are always detailed, sometimes very lengthy. Through these long lists of things the dweller sizes up the effects of time: 'I think there's a small cupboard from the great-grandmother. Oh well, it's already rotten, I'll have to throw it away'. The remembrance is often matched with astonishment: 'Whatever did we keep all that for?' (50-year-old urban man). These allusions to the seeming irrationality of their behavior constitute as many signs of reluctance to acknowledge from the outset the existence of any 'need for secrecy', as well as of reluctance to admit the spontaneous association generally made between the hidden and the immoral (Simmel, 1964). The cellar and the attic allow dwellers to forget things temporarily. Things are there yet they are not visible. They can be retrieved at any moment but also forgotten at will, without any regrets or remorse as long as they are not thrown away. Relegating something to the attic means giving oneself time *to grow* indifferent to it, but also the *possibility of re-discovering it*, of re-appropriating it at any time: 'There's boxes... Some of them, we haven't even unpacked them since we moved in fifteen years ago' (40-year-old urban woman).

This failure of memory may be well accepted and even perceived as a privilege, an off-handedness, a freedom with things. To say that one's attic holds piles of forgotten objects amounts to asserting one's independence from things which, as everyone knows, own us as much as we own them (Rheims, 1964; Baudrillard, 1968, 1969; Douglas, 1979). It is also a way of indicating that one has a reserve of things at one's disposal, things which may one day become another privilege, that of the mastered memory, through the rediscovery, the selection, the identification of things and therefore of events linked to them (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

Finally, forgetting may be the obvious sign of giving up, of letting go, of losing interest in the life expressed by this or that thing: 'My husband, he used to pile up things... He kept everything. Before (his death) I used to know where everything was, but now it's five years since he passed away...' (69-year-old urban woman).

*Keeping-throwing away.* In the attic and in the cellar there are all these useless objects which find their way to the cellar, and which constitute the leftovers from daily life. They are the things that get in the way, that must not be seen by visitors. Throwing away demands an effort and implies preliminary operations to sort things out and choose among them to partly destroy them so that they do not reveal too much about the person who discarded them.

On the other hand, keeping totally useless possessions is justified by 'you never know, it might come in handy' while it reveals in fact our relationships with objects, some slovenliness and carelessness perhaps, but also the refusal to leave everything behind, to be left without baggage, without the tangible signs of one's experience. Therefore, people discard objects when they are ready to, when their inner psychological evolution lets them do it. Throwing away any possession, however useless, means tearing it off the fabric of one's experience, giving it up, and if this is to be done without conflict, it must be motivated by the individual's own evolution. In this sense, clearing a place up and emptying it is also a way of appropriating it.

*Value.* Throwing away nevertheless causes some fear, the fear of losing something valuable: 'I throw away when I sort things out, once a year, and that's when one makes mistakes. We threw away antiques' (23-year-old rural man). In the attic and in the cellar, things acquire value in the course of time, and thus useless things, kept contrary to all reason, are side by side with treasures. One goes to the attic and to the cellar to get rid, or so one says, of all that is consciously acknowledged to



be useless, but also to hide what is consciously known to be precious, thereby turning these territories into places identified with private and secret uses: 'Before there were any banks and because they didn't trust anyone all that much, the farmers used to have a hiding place, a hole or some place in the cellar where they stashed their money... The cellar was the safest place, even if there was a fire it didn't burn down. They used to keep title deeds and papers there too' (56-year-old rural man).

*Order and cleanliness.* The attic and the cellar do not need to be exceedingly clean and orderly in view of the fact that social norms as well as popular imagination and poetic tradition associate them with disorder: 'It's a tidy attic, therefore it isn't an attic' (30-year-old urban man). It is in relation to the 'hidden place' dimension that each person's attitude is expressed through the acceptance or the refusal that the attic or the cellar be tidy.

As a direct consequence, cleaning gives rise to conflicts between the members of the family for whom disorder does not hold the same meaning: 'The place ought to be swept. It's him (the husband) who should do it' (45-year-old urban woman). It also gives an opportunity of asserting more forcefully the ethical qualities deemed to be part of one's personality. Cleaning 'even' the attic and the cellar means showing that there's nothing to hide, attempting to prove that one upholds the moral virtue of cleanliness right through (Médam, 1977; Heller, 1979) but also that one rejects irrational attachments: 'But it's so tidy that when you want something... When you notice that something isn't worth a dime, out it goes...' (27-year-old rural man).

Through these processes, attic and cellar become out of bounds for others: 'When we were kids, the cellar was almost a forbidden place. Now I understand my grandfather better and the value this cellar has for him' (22-year-old rural man). We again find value on both the psychological and material levels, and the two frequently overlap: 'We've got valuable things in the cellar and my husband looks especially after his wine; nobody is allowed to touch it... But he never shows his wine cellar' (47-year-old urban woman).

### **Some Suggestions for the Hermeneutics of the Experience of Hidden Spaces**

These last developments show that the attic and the cellar provide room for the action of secrecy. As with secrets, which must not be revealed, whatever they may be about, one only reveals the contents of the attic and of the cellar after having attempted to tell nothing about them. Like secrecy, which is basically independent of the contents it protects, the attic and the cellar hide 'the useless', whose presence 'cannot be justified', but they also hide precious objects and articles which turn them into 'forbidden' places that one does not show spontaneously. The uses elicited by these places are always private.

As this juncture, it is useful to point out that the word *secretary*, designating an occupation originates in the need for kings in the medieval times to have clerks in charge of the writing of their private letters, and who were called in French '*clercs du secret*' and later secretaries. This word is also used in French to designate a piece of furniture—a desk with drawers and keys, allowing secrecy, i.e. control over information. Thus, Levy (1976) writes 'any secret is knowledge and nothing but knowledge. But this knowledge is not ordinary; it holds a position of its own in the totality of the person's knowledge... This special position—apart from the



rest of the knowledge—results from a sorting out process' (p. 120). We saw the importance of this sorting out process when analysing the dynamics between 'keeping/throwing away'. Furthermore a common etymology for the words 'secret' and 'excrement' has been established as well as that their semantic opposition is expressed by the opposition between rejecting and keeping: 'The substantive "secret" derives from the Latin *secretum*; the adjective derives from *secretus*, which is the past participle of the verb *secerno*, meaning to separate, to put apart. *Cerno* means to sift, to riddle . . . *Excrementum*, which refers to siftings but which also means dung, excrement, has given the French word excrement. By contrast, in *se-cerno*, the prefix *se* stresses the separation with an idea of preservation. *Secerno* which means to separate, to put apart, has given two French terms: secretion and secret' (Levy, 1976, p. 118). The etymological research therefore gives an insight about the underlying anal thematics implicitly contained in the word and hence, constitutes a metaphorical representation of the anal function.

Keeping in mind, on the one hand, the idea that the modes of actualization of secrecy are open to variations (from culture to culture and across the historical development of a culture) and, on the other hand, the Simmelian idea that the amount of secrecy needed by a society remains constant (Simmel, 1964; Nora, 1976), one must stress that, in our culture, things, any material possessions are viewed as extensions of personality, as symbols of the self (Rochberg-Halton, 1984), as supports for the expression and external actualization of the self. In this sense, hidden objects and places help to situate the boundaries of the self, to delimit the special being whose 'psychological and psychosocial significance . . . implies that a person has secret thoughts and feelings' (Margolis, 1976, p. 136).

### The Search for the Unity of Meaning: the Time Dimensions

Attics and cellars induce action, i.e. changes in their environments and hence changes in the dweller. This dynamic process gains heightened meaning at particular times of the seasons cycle, during the production and consumption of goods, or during exceptional periods of time, like war time. They allow secrecy, which is a particular experience of time, because it is basically an experience of retention (of knowledge) and a call for disclosure (Zempleni, 1976) allowing the beginning of a new way of relating to oneself and to the others. Thus time is the thread which sums through the experience of attics and cellars. This is more evidenced by the respondents' own statements about past and future.

#### *Continuity of generations*

'(Our attic) isn't a real attic yet, we still haven't had the time to pile up enough stuff, things' (43-year-old urban woman). The attic achieves its deepest meaning when it is old. It does not hold valuable possessions only but a whole array of things which, regardless of their aesthetic or market value, are imbued with symbolic meanings. These things attest to the person's filiation and to his relationships with his ancestors on the one hand, and with his offspring on the other hand. They suggest the person's pride on being able to identify his origins and his roots, as well as his determination to ensure this continuity. 'For me, this attic is a little like the family's memories box. I go there and look at the glass-covered portraits of my forebears in their gilded frames. That's where my mother had kept the diary of one of my uncles' (40-year-old urban woman).



This is often accomplished in a founding spirit, with the purpose of setting up bearings for their heirs, but also of establishing a status for themselves in the family history: 'You know in my home, when I was a kid, my parents never kept anything, so now I just dream of rummaging once in an attic... You've got something from your grandmother, it reminds you of family memories... If there isn't anything, there's no past' (46-year-old woman). Empty space is thus to correspond to empty time. There has to be something (things) 'which denote that the past is filled with what came to pass'.

In this perspective, the emptiness of the attic or of the cellar should always be viewed within the framework of the dweller's relationship with time. An empty attic is, like a disordered cellar, a sign of neglect. It shows that a turning-point has been reached in the course of a person's life. Similarly, emptying other people's attics amounts to wielding some degree of power over their past and in a way appropriating part of their life. Seeing one's attic emptied by others, cleared of its 'old stuff' amounts to realizing from up close the meaning of the word 'plunder', understanding that the relay of life has passed to others' hands: 'But you see in this attic, there's not much left. Everybody came and took the old things... There's nothing left. Once it was the life of the home' (70-year-old rural woman).

### Conclusion

At the end of the study we must return to our initial questions.

We made the hypothesis that the dwelling experience is a total one. The quotation of the respondents' statements has shown that attics and cellars serve as references to one another and they are spontaneously compared with one another. Furthermore our examination of appropriation processes, affluence, security, secrecy and cleanliness has shown the dependency of each home sub-territory upon the other. For example, refurbishing the attic or the cellar results in a new perception of the home as a whole. The house is not only perceived then as more spacious, more apt to provide independence and privacy to some of its dwellers. The new uses of attic (play, or inhabiting in general) or cellar (play, performing activities connected with dirt and disorder) reinforce the connotations of orderliness and cleanliness associated with the frontstage of the home, i.e. they contribute to the emergence of a new image of the other lived-in spaces, where the dimension of 'appearance' is even more clearly underlined, and therefore the separation between the 'private self' and the 'social self' made even more visible.

Another example can be found in our description of the dynamics of the production, storage and consumption of goods as well as in the dynamics of keeping and throwing away things. The experiences all these activities mean are performed in the home, i.e. in 'primary' or daily lived-in spaces as well as in 'secondary' or hidden places of the house. Thus, these places make possible the experiences of a special kind of wealth known only by the dweller, whose specific characteristic is that it is liable to grow or diminish, depending upon the dweller's own perception, i.e. the evolution of his system of values.

We had moreover made the hypothesis of dialectical processes between the experience and the uses of the home. The analysis of the home uses which result in appropriation (through work, play, display of objects, maintenance, refurbishing, remodelling, etc.) has shown that the psychological reverberation of uses on experience



is crucial. It has also highlighted the importance of personal dynamisms in the relation with inhabited space.

Another one of our purposes was to attempt to define the dimensions which integrated the uses and the experiences of the attic and of the cellar. The time dimensions constitute this link, this ever-present reference all along the interviews, the attic and the cellar signify time not only because they shelter old objects which themselves signify time (Baudrillard, 1968) but also because they allow forgetting and remembering, delay and temporary oblivion of events and actions associated with stored objects. The latter contribute to the development and assertion of self identity through periods of change (Proshansky *et al.*, 1983) stabilize the ephemeral character of lived experiences (Boesch, 1980) and because their reality is a reality of action (Piaget, 1972), they will also serve as support for future-oriented actions. The accumulation of so-called useless objects for example corresponds to an anticipation of possible actions and their order is not only spatial and temporal. It is first a personal configuration, i.e. an attempt at ordering the different facets of one's identity.

We must also return to the hypothesis of the dialectics between the hidden and the visible spaces in the home. Our examination of the psychological functions of secrecy and of its place in self theory is of particular importance here.

The assumption that the house is at once a private and social environment is shared by most authors (Ekambi-Schmitt, 1972; Goffman, 1973; Verret, 1974; Hayward, 1977; Altman and Chemers, 1980; Pratt, 1982; Adorno, 1983; Kron, 1983). Some of them (Palmade, 1970) stress the idea that it allows narcissistic withdrawal in opposition to the experience of outside (of the house) as experience of being with others. They see in the dialectics of the house and its environment the fundamental support for the assertion of identity. Such an assumption deserves to be elaborated, since 'withdrawal' and 'being with others' may be facets of the same experience of dwelling at the ontological level (Lévinas, 1961). On the other hand it contains its own risk of alienation, e.g. when the need to hide or to have secrets is not balanced by the ability to be with others. Thus privacy is experienced at once in the closure from and opening to others (Kruse, 1980).

Because self-identity is the temporal dimension of self-knowledge (Tap, 1980) it emerges in actions and decisions about what aspects of the self can be made visible and appear to others as coherent and stable, and leads at once the person to maintain a private 'territory' of possessions and thoughts whose order, limits and openings vary over time according to the person's own development. Secrecy is more the awareness of the existence of such a territory than knowledge about its contents.

Thus, rather than a symbol of self, the house is the place where the self, defined as the set of integrated, lived and subjective meanings experienced by the person as a separate and original individual (Fedida, 1974) and self-identity, defined as self-knowledge, find room to be actualized through action and appropriation (Korosec-Serfaty, 1984). Some of its sub-territories can indeed be considered as means to communicate information to others about one's social self (Lauman and House, 1972; Pratt, 1982). But its hidden ones provide space for invisibility as the necessary basis for the assertion of this social self.

We intended to verify the existence and the relevance of the analyses carried out in Jungian terms by Bachelard and by the often quoted authors who rely on Bachelardian approaches. We have seen that environmental features had a bearing on place perception, that the location, the light, the temperature were as many elements



influencing the relationship to space. A good many expressions used by the dwellers have a Bachelardian ring to them. Yet there emerges from the interviews something much deeper, whose full implications reach much farther than the conventionally termed descriptions. In any case, in cultural contexts which locate God (and therefore spirituality) 'up there' in heaven, and terrestrial values 'down there' or in the 'bowels' of the earth, it is only too natural that the attic and the cellar should be represented as the 'head' and the 'roots' of the house. In opposition to Bachelard's assertion, however, this narrow symbolism is not explanatory. In the best of cases, it is a description, and we might even say a superficial one at that, because it does not tell us anything about uses and their reverberation on the experience of the shelter. It does not explain the reluctance to talk about hidden places, nor the statements about the dirty and the clean, nor even Bachelard's refusal to develop his analysis about the negative images of the attic and of the cellar. In other words, if, in accordance with Jung, we were to reject the concept of repression (Freud, 1952), we ought to view as vain and insignificant the bulk (from both the quantitative and qualitative points of view) of the dwellers' statements, all the utterances about the accumulation of the useless and the precious, all their accounts of forgetting, of knowledge, of the dirty and of the clean, which we have seen constituted the richest harvest yielded by this study.

Lastly, we intended to examine the possible consequence of the absence of attics and cellars in modern houses and apartment buildings. Haumont and Raymond (1973) state the dissatisfaction of dwellers in recent low and middle income high-rise apartment buildings or in houses with very small or unsafe cellars. The inhabitants are lead to use, against their will, the balconies (which are transitional spaces) or the garages (which are secondary spaces) in lieu of attic or cellar. This dissatisfaction is said to be due to the 'functional sliding' thus occurring between spaces with different statuses.

On the other hand according to Bachelard (1981), all houses, even the most modest ones, 'have to be differentiated in height' (p. 25). It might thus be said that the dwellers of the long, low and narrow farmhouses, which are traditional in certain French regions, had only an incomplete and restricted experience of dwelling and therefore of well-being. But, again according to Bachelard, 'in Paris there are no houses, and the inhabitants of the big city live in superimposed boxes. ... The houses have no roots and, what is quite unthinkable for the dreamer of houses, skyscrapers have no cellar. ... The height of city buildings is a purely exterior one. ... Home has become mere horizontality' (p. 27).

Apparently, we are in the midst of contradiction, which would only be explained by the initial bias in favour of 'the hermit's hut'. But 'at the simplest mention of it', 'phenomenological reverberation' obliterates all mediocre resonances. The hermit's hut is an engraving that would suffer from any exaggeration of picturesqueness. Its truth must derive from the intensity of its essence, which is the essence of the verb 'to inhabit', the hut immediately becomes centralized solitude' (p. 29). And, on the other hand, 'the discussion of our theses takes place on ground that is unfavorable to us. For, in point of fact, a house is first and foremost a geometrical object, one which we are tempted to analyze rationally. ... But transposition to the human plane takes place immediately whenever a house is considered as space for cheer and intimacy, space that is supposed to defend and condense intimacy' (p. 47-8).

These contradictions can therefore be resolved and transcended only by returning



to Bachelard's genuinely original contribution, that is to say, his conception of reverie and dream interpretation. Reverie gives access to the dwelling experience, *wherever one is*, for, according to Bachelard, imagining will always be greater than experiencing. If, through reverie, 'the architect of the oneiric house' erects 'three-storey houses' or at the most 'four-storey houses', it nevertheless remains true that it is eminently reductionist to conclude from this (Cooper, 1976; Marc, 1972) that only the free-standing house, whatever its number of floors may be, enables the dwelling experience, i.e. the being. Bachelard's three-storey house is an oneiric house, that is to say the house of his reverie, a house which has complex relationships with his native culture, as well as with his philosophical conception of the being and of the 'happily housed' unconscious.

Thus, any literal translation of psychological analyses into architectural choices is dangerous. Translation is so notoriously difficult that it is hardly ever evoked without simultaneously evoking betrayal. In this particular case, translation can only apply to the spirit, not to the letter. It becomes all the more difficult, but this difficulty is unavoidable. In order to be more faithful to Bachelardian analyses about intimacy and centered solitude, in order to take into account the dwellers' statements, one must stress that this dissatisfaction derives from the impossibility to confer upon certain things and places the status of hidden things and places. The house must provide space for secrecy as well as for visibility. In other words, rather than the verticality of the house, the crucial element is the variety in the qualities of the different sub-territories in the home. Not that verticality is of no account. Skyscrapers differ from single-storey houses and different emotions are linked to depth and height. But this study demonstrates that in the 'deep-hidden' combination as well as in the 'high-hidden' combination, it is the hidden which confers its importance upon the 'deep' and the 'high', as well as it confers its significance to the 'shown' and 'visible'.

What may vary across history, class and cultures is the nature of what is hidden—for example women (Boughali, 1974; Bayazit *et al.*, 1978; Duncan, 1982), servants and their hall (Martin-Fugier, 1982) or the body (Flandrin, 1976)—and the status of the people these things are hidden from. But 'the action of the secret passes continually from the hider of things to the hider of self' (Bachelard, 1981, p. 88).

### Note

- (1) SIROCO is a filing system of information on buildings constructed in France every year, updated by the French Ministry of the Environment.

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