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16th to 19th Century

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# INTRODUCTION

## Continuities and transformations in the history of the domestic sphere

*Joachim Eibach and Margareth Lanzinger*

The domestic sphere may appear to be something given, something non-historical. Most readers will share several assumptions, particularly specific daily experiences in domestic space. This applies to certain furnishing standards and living circumstances, regardless of the quality of the household, be it a suburban family home or a downtown tenement, a luxurious bourgeois villa or a scanty flat in a socialist satellite city, a nobleman's mansion or a peasant's farmstead. In terms of terminology, even a meagre shack of the early modern period, shared as a dwelling space by journeymen, may be regarded as a domestic sphere. In most cases, it encompasses facilities for sleep, personal hygiene, food preparation, consumption and leisure time. Beyond that, we may identify aspirations of privacy and personal freedom. At second glance, however, both living conditions and activities in the domestic sphere differ enormously. Often, the dwelling space is also a place of paid or unpaid work. There are huge differences in the number of people living in one place and the way they relate to each other, in the spatial layout and the material culture and, above all, in cultural norms of closing and opening the domestic realm to outsiders. This list of criteria could easily be continued. Of course, domestic spheres are of basic importance for daily lives and society, and at the same time the outcome of choices actors may or may not take. Underlying norms, social circumstances and individual preferences differ from context to context. This becomes evident not only when comparing societies and regional cultures of living but even more so when a historical perspective is applied.

By pure chance, this introduction is being written at a time during which its topic is gaining new and unforeseeable relevance on a global scale. Currently, due to the coronavirus crisis we are confined to our homes and must limit contact with other people. Yet, many aspects of the domestic sphere which the lockdowns in various countries have brought about are by no means entirely new. Rather, they shed new light on historical changes. Working from home, home schooling and, generally speaking, spending much more time with one's spouse or partner, with children or other intimates are anything but new phenomena. For some observers, the setting in spring and summer 2020 offers new and forward-looking options. Strikingly, however, and unlike the nineteenth-century cult of domestic life, domesticity is now largely perceived as a seedbed of problems. It comes with hardships such as stress, unstructured days, social isolation, depression and the danger of domestic violence. Accordingly, the repercussions of the coronavirus crisis shed light on

general shifts in the history of the domestic. Before COVID-19 hit, nurseries and other pre-school institutions had taken over tasks, formerly assigned to families. By and by, practices, previously mostly home-based such as cooking and commensality, but in a broad sense also work and leisure activities, had been outsourced. At least, the amount of time and effort spent on these activities in the domestic sphere had been reduced. As a spin-off effect, the coronavirus crisis challenges the proposition of both family history and family sociology that an important function of the modern family is recreation from the stress and hardships of professional life.<sup>1</sup> Does the current situation make us realize the loss of importance of the domestic sphere that has shaped our everyday life during ‘normal times’ before corona? More likely, the domestic sphere underwent specific transformations over the past decades. Even more so, in a long-term perspective, the domestic sphere has a history. Its trajectory includes continuities and changes that correspond with macro shifts in society.

As a part of everyday life, the domestic appears self-evident only at first glance. The objective of this volume is to present a comprehensive survey of it from a historical perspective. A wide range of aspects must be covered. The domestic sphere – as practice, as social space with its corresponding notions, as a network of interactions and interrelations or as assemblage that includes material goods, knowledge, animals and plants<sup>2</sup> – has been shaped by long-term processes. These started in the early modern period and continued throughout the nineteenth century. Significant changes as well as the entwinement of back-and-forth processes only become visible if the perspective transcends the usual division between the early modern era and the nineteenth century. Relevant phenomena – in terms of gender relations, legal status, the public–private divide, separate spheres etc. – can only be adequately captured using an approach that spans the time periods.<sup>3</sup> Another aim is to contribute to ongoing interdisciplinary debates that bridge history, gender studies, historical kinship studies, family sociology, legal history, art history and literary studies.

As an analytical term, the domestic sphere encompasses manifold aspects, hitherto addressed under the headings of ‘the family’, ‘household’, ‘home’ or *das Haus*. It may serve as an umbrella concept that allows us to integrate various fields of study, to connect current tendencies of innovative research and to interrelate perspectives, often discussed separately. This includes (among others) the history of social space, material culture, emotions, sexuality, food, medicine and animal studies. Taken as a category of research, the domestic sphere is not to be confused with domestic culture or with domesticity, cherished as a cultural value. Albeit, this is part of the story. As mentioned above, we find domestic spheres by no means only in the case of seemingly fully equipped family households. The concept shall serve to observe very different kinds of dwellings.<sup>4</sup>

What is and what configures the domestic sphere? Building on established sub-disciplines in historiography, particularly the history of the family and/or the household, the leading category of this book emphasizes the intertwined aspects of social space, practice and interaction. It suggests the study of daily practices of actors within the interior or dwelling space and their communication in the domestic sphere and its social environments. With regard to ongoing debates in law and the social sciences, we may also note that it does not seem easy to find a clear-cut definition of ‘the family’. This applies to both today’s family and to the family in history. And upon closer observation, it is also true for the ‘household’ or ‘kinship’. One way of getting around this problem is to focus strictly on the perceptions of the actors involved: who was or is regarded a member of the family or kin?<sup>5</sup> However, this approach would exclude persons who were also present and relevant in the domestic sphere, though not necessarily regarded as family members, including servants, lodgers, roommates, tutors and governesses,

neighbours, friends and visitors. We also have to bear in mind that certain spaces in homes were more or less accessible for people from outside the household and more or less reserved for certain activities, ranging from collective work to sociability to undisturbed privacy. In his seminal book *Household and Family in Past Time*, published in 1972, Peter Laslett linked the term 'household' to 'co-residence'.<sup>6</sup> In the age of social history this proved a very productive undertaking. However, it has become clear that 'co-residence' in early modern households as well as in numerous nineteenth-century families was quite a volatile matter. The number and composition of co-residing people depended, among other things, on the season, labour situation and financial needs.<sup>7</sup> Already in the 1970s, the household concept has been criticized, particularly from a microhistorical perspective. The principal problem was the narrow focus on persons living within the household and the neglect of relations with neighbours, friends, workmates and especially with relatives who did not live beneath the same roof.<sup>8</sup> "Nor were relations among members of the nuclear family given much thought (where were the studies of siblings, for example?)" as David Sabean stated in 2006.<sup>9</sup> It seems more realistic and more fruitful to focus on the changing 'co-presence' of actors and their relations in the domestic sphere. Who is present in house and home, either permanently or every now and then? Who does what with whom in which space?

While this volume gives a certain preference to social action and interaction, we must also take into consideration that since the sixteenth century the domestic sphere has been the subject of intense discourse, the topic of numerous images, stories and collective identity constructs. Of course, the manifold topics highlight the importance of the domestic. Its relevance to contemporary observers is also mirrored by the fact that multiple genres of sources are available. With regard to the chapters of this volume, particularly important are different types of court records and self-narratives, but also inventories and wills, normative texts, ranging from laws and pamphlets to domestic advice literature, novel literature and paintings.

### **Social space: practice, interaction, communication**

The history of the domestic sphere can be approached from very different theoretical perspectives. Social space was to a great extent determined by the actors' ordinary and extraordinary activities, by relations, shaped through interaction and communication.<sup>10</sup> How did the actors perceive and stage the domestic in their daily lives? Can we distinguish specific routines, rituals and special events, moreover family- or otherwise related uses of justice and other exterior institutions? In order to answer these questions, a focus on social practices seems promising. We observe different ways of 'doing house and family'.<sup>11</sup> Following this line, it appears that domestic activities encompass more than what the term 'household' is able to cover. A number of activities, typically situated in the domestic sphere, do not quite fit under the conceptual roof of the household, as seen by historians, for example intimate contacts with or without consent, reading and writing, domestic forms of devotion, domestic music and debating clubs, cultures of visit and conviviality etc. It must also be added that in social terms the micro-space of domestic relations is structured by hierarchies, status, gender and power. Permission to enter a house or a room, the positioning at the dining table and even more so to be welcomed as a temporary resident are issues of social status and power.<sup>12</sup> Over the whole time period covered in this volume actors from the lower reaches of the populace encountered great difficulties in defining and securing a domestic sphere of their own.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, at the other end of the social scale, at princely courts, spatial arrangements very clearly relate to the power aspect of social space.<sup>14</sup>

Although the term ‘the home’ in particular carries connotations of comfort, privacy and protection, mirrored in numerous paintings and novels, domestic spheres have never been sealed off, self-contained, fully self-sufficient extra-legal spheres, isolated from society. Quite the contrary, it is important to acknowledge the inter-connectedness and social openness of domestic spheres. This double aspect firstly points to economic and other forms of cooperation between different households or families.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, it emphasizes the spatial complexity, in particular the permeability, of the domestic sphere with regard to professional life, sociability and conflict.<sup>16</sup> Thirdly, it highlights different modes of visibility and social control. Of course, these matters were subject to change. During the early modern period, specific observations and interventions came from the social environment, for instance kin, guild and neighbourhood, but also from law-based institutions.<sup>17</sup> Neighbours and other actors of the immediate environment had relevancy in different roles: as supporters, creditors, opponents, observers, witnesses and mediators in case of conflict (see the chapter by Inken Schmidt-Voges and Katharina Simon).<sup>18</sup> At the same time, ecclesiastical and other types of courts gave spouses and, albeit to a lesser degree, servants the opportunity to make claims and bargain over gender roles in the domestic sphere.<sup>19</sup> Inter-connectedness can be detected with regard to economic activities, related to local markets (Jane Whittle), but also in a more symbolic sense, for instance homes functioning as places of lived religion across confessions (Suzanna Ivanič and Irene Galandra Cooper).

In theoretical terms, the entwining of interaction, or rather communication, and space is conceptualized in highly divergent ways. But this is not the place to go into details. It should only be noted that, while Anthony Giddens in his *Theory of Structuration* stresses the structuring force of human agency and social interaction,<sup>20</sup> Niklas Luhmann and the followers of his theory of social systems in their cultural history of communication try to eschew actors’ agency and instead focus on changing ways of communication.<sup>21</sup> Yet from both points of view, the stratified societies of the early modern period primarily worked on the basis of face-to-face-interaction, typical for the domestic sphere. There seems to be a certain consensus about the constitutive nature of direct interaction, that is, rituals and other forms of structured communication among present actors, in early modern society compared to modern society, where law, distant media and state-like institutions prevails. However, the shifts and overlaps between the two need to be debated. We thus find an increase in the importance of legal codes, statutes and courts concerned with marital matters already in the wake of the Reformation. At the same time, the actors’ direct interaction in the domestic sphere and, often intertwined, in its immediate environment during the early modern period was, and perhaps still is, not a minor matter of society. Inter-epochal studies with a focus on interaction and social practice in the domestic sphere can be very productive in questioning, rather than repeating, theoretical aspirations. In line with this, the question remains open: what are the (chief) differences between the socially heterogeneous early modern household family<sup>22</sup> or ‘open house’ and its equivalents during the nineteenth century and beyond?

In terms of the domestic sphere as a social space, we find another interesting strand of theory in the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, well known for his concept of the ‘habitus’ and social distinction. The relevance of Bourdieu’s approaches for studies of the domestic sphere is twofold. The ‘habitus’, as a set of the actor’s dispositions, is, to a certain degree, albeit not irrevocably, shaped by the ‘habitat’. The ‘habitat’ includes the manifold arrangements of the domestic sphere, certainly family relations, as well as the immediate sociocultural environment and milieu in which one was brought up. At the same time, for Bourdieu the domestic sphere is an indicator of class and social distinction. It is the result of a class-

specific investment in taste and cultural capital. Taking the French society of the 1970s as his example, this aspect is spelled out in *La Distinction*, in which Bourdieu points to a number of facts and traits, inter-connected with the domestic: the layout of the house or apartment, material artefacts such as books, works of art and furniture aesthetics, standards of cleanliness, eating habits, general style of living etc.<sup>23</sup> According to Bourdieu's postulates, the domestic sphere may be seen as a structuring structure, a shaper as well as shaped by 'habitus'. However, the French sociologist does not really follow a historical line of argument. His observations of French society in *La Distinction* do acknowledge changing life styles of successive generations, albeit without duly taking into consideration historical changes in the domestic sphere.

Overall, what is the added value of research on the domestic sphere, understood as a field of social practice and interaction? We argue that it provides the chance to reassess key paradigms and concepts of historical change. Thus, neither the evidence of the *Haus*-model for the early modern period nor of the 'nuclear family'-model for the nineteenth century is taken as a self-evident truth. Changes in domestic terminology do not necessarily reflect shifts in social practices (Jon Mathieu). Moreover, instead of relying on constructs such as 'the public' versus 'the private', which primarily derive from nineteenth-century legal thought, it appears more promising to start from scratch, so to speak. This involves observing concrete ways of 'doing the domestic'. Close reading of the sources reveals 'the messy realities' (Suzanna Ivanič and Irene Galandra Cooper).<sup>24</sup> Who was co-present and interacted in what ways in the domestic sphere? Can we distinguish between routine everyday usage of things and deliberate ostentatious display? Who worked, in the wider sense, to make a living<sup>25</sup> and who did the cooking (Raffaella Sarti)? Where were children taught and by whom (Sylvie Moret Petri, Mary Clare Martin)? Where did the elderly and servants have their sleeping places? Who was invited or dropped in occasionally? Was the door to the street open or closed? Can we observe a fading relevance of immediate environments, mixed zones and hence a retreat of the family behind walls and curtains (*Rückzugswohnen*)? As crucial constituents of spheres, both social relations and materiality come into play. Rather than taking macro processes such as the overall functional differentiation at the turn from stratified to bourgeois society in the years around 1800 as self-explanatory, a fresh view on everyday life in the domestic sphere is likely to yield surprising results. For instance, was the emergence of the modern family really triggered by a loss of functions or a relief from tasks, typical of the early modern household family? Did, as a result of this transformation, intimate and emotionalized 'private' relations emerge accompanied with new gender roles and 'separate spheres' of men and women? Giddens as well as Luhmann highlight the importance of the invention of the home for the breakthrough of the idea of 'romantic love' in the years around 1800.<sup>26</sup>

Many such questions have already been addressed over the past decades, particularly in research inspired by gender issues. With the cultural, the spatial and the material turn, the study of house, home and family developed *de nouveau* into a very attractive field of scholarship. The editors and authors of this volume do not claim to open an entirely new page of historiography. Rather, we want to advocate an integrative perspective that considers recent innovative trends. Study of the domestic sphere can provide new insights into modes and traits, continuities and transformations in the history of household, home and family, and into general social processes.

### **The emergence of privacy and separate spheres?**

According to Jürgen Habermas, private and public spheres were the result of a process of differentiation that took place only over the course of the eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Can we

witness a transformation from an early modern ‘open house’ to a modern ‘private life’ (Joachim Eibach)? In line with the latter, the French editors of *A History of Private Life* argued that more individualistic lifestyles developed. The nineteenth century has typically been seen as “the golden age of private life”,<sup>28</sup> an attribution considered next to commonplace. However, one underlying assumption of our volume is that the history of the domestic sphere is multifaceted and more complex than the idea of linear or even teleological development suggests. Transformation should not be mistaken for a normative construct, but rather seen as an open, overarching question. It remains a principal challenge to highlight shifts, for instance the changing ways of inter-connectedness and social control, and at the same time avoid the dichotomous pitfalls of modernization theory. Hence, it is only a first step to define the domestic sphere as an open, porous and permeable space. In a more general and very concrete sense, it is necessary to analyse the domestic sphere by taking into account its mutual inside/outside relations, and furthermore include changing linguistic, legal, social and cultural environments.

Following the pioneering work of Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, first published in 1987,<sup>29</sup> research on the time periods from the eighteenth century onwards has been guided by two inter-related hypotheses: the privatization of family life and the emergence of ‘separate spheres’. Both assumptions proved fruitful, but have also been increasingly contested. In particular, it was research on middle-class families, based on self-narratives, in England and in the German-speaking countries, that has yielded new results. In 2002, Mary Jo Maynes summarized the state of research in *The History of the European Family*, edited by David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli, rather conventionally:

The private home, the center of domestic life, was among the most innovative cultural sites of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the modern Western dichotomy between private and public is less a natural one than a by-product of the creation of a middle-class family and gender roles. The domestic sphere was initially at least the bourgeois realm *par excellence*. It provided the necessary foil to public life and was equally crucial for the establishment of bourgeois political and cultural hegemony.<sup>30</sup>

In the same volume Martine Segalen concludes “For bourgeois families, the separation between home and work was completed in the middle of the century, thus leading to a clear division of gender roles, with women managing the domestic chores and men going out to earn a living.”<sup>31</sup>

However, upon a closer examination of the sources, in particular diaries and letters, the domestic realm becomes more ambiguous. In terms of work, sociability and representation, the domestic sphere of nineteenth-century families was anything but effectively demarcated from exterior life. Considering the division of gender roles and separate spheres, as early as 1993, in an often-quoted article, Amanda Vickery expressed serious doubts that the eighteenth century saw the introduction of new kinds of separation in the daily lives of women and men.<sup>32</sup> Based on the personal papers of genteel women, she did not find domesticates, but rather women who spent much of the day in respectable society outside their homes.<sup>33</sup> There is, indeed, little doubt about the fact that nineteenth-century bourgeois culture invented new styles of domesticity as “a profound attachment: a state of mind as well as a physical orientation”.<sup>34</sup> However, the gendered perspective also yielded surprising outcomes. According to John Tosh, in England the period between 1830 and the 1860s must be seen as “the heyday of masculine domesticity”.<sup>35</sup> The home served as



a refuge from taxing working life. Men were asked to spend more time with their families rather than engaging in traditional sociability with other men in public houses, and in fact often did so. As a result of these approaches, men are reintroduced, if not readmitted, to the domestic realm while women in their daily activities inside and outside their homes are attributed with more agency.

Research on the *Bürgertum* – the rising bourgeoisie in the German-speaking countries – has been largely compatible with studies on its English counterpart. Despite the cult of domesticity, which throughout Europe became a flagstaff of bourgeois identity construction, the distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ has, over the past years, lost much of its former persuasiveness. German-speaking research on the history of the family started with classic assumptions about a retreat into privacy. The loss, or rather the transformation, of functions that had been inherent to the preceding household-family at the turn of the eighteenth century was seen as the defining moment of the modern family.<sup>36</sup> In the German case, prior to the ‘separate spheres’-hypothesis, the pioneering study of Karin Hausen about the nineteenth-century polarization of the so-called *Geschlechtscharaktere* – the dichotomous construction and naturalization of gender roles – published as early as 1976, had become a chief reference of research.<sup>37</sup> Following Hausen, the polarization of naturalized gender roles was seen as a decisive difference between the early modern period and the nineteenth century. From the mid-1980s onwards, gender issues were increasingly regarded as a key topic. Again, the examination of letters and diaries, but also court records, had significant results. In line with international research, the books of Anne-Charlott Trepp on the Hamburg *Bürgertum* and of Rebekka Habermas on *Bürgertum* in South Germany criticized the ‘separate spheres’ approach as a far too schematic representation of domestic relations. Both authors highlighted the importance of domestic sociability for both sexes in the first half of the nineteenth century and provided insights into how spousal relations were lived in novel ways. As a basic shift, they argued, the early modern ‘working couple’ (Wunder) was replaced by the loving couple (*Liebespaar*) (Trepp), tied together by mutual affections, or rather by the so-called *Bildungspaar* (Habermas), referring to a couple which identified the pursuit of refined education through joint reading and conversation as their *raison d’être*.<sup>38</sup>

The above-mentioned publications revealed several surprising aspects of the domestic sphere: emotional men who appreciated sharing time with their wives ‘in private’, and active women who pursued their own agency; time-consuming conviviality with friends and guests; and, moreover, the home as a location of education and work. State servants, advocates, priests and aldermen worked from home and met their clients at home (Maria Ågren, Joachim Eibach). Women, excluded from universities and other public institutions, used their homes as places to practice homeopathy and workplaces for their pedagogical studies.<sup>39</sup> As a matter of fact, peasants and craftsmen also traditionally worked in the house and home. The boundaries between private and professional use of the domestic space were blurred in several ways. The gendered division of work is still being discussed. Already, Davidoff and Hall pointed to the “contribution which married women made, and still make, to the family enterprise through their labour, their contacts and their capital.”<sup>40</sup> At stake is not least the definition of work as either paid work or, in a broader sense, of sustenance activities. Following this line, a central question of the ‘Gender and Work’ research group, led by Maria Ågren, is whether the ‘two-supporter model’, typical of the early modern period, persisted into the nineteenth century or was superseded by a ‘male-breadwinner model’.<sup>41</sup> Economic activities of women during the early modern period were certainly not confined to the domestic sphere (Jane Whittle, Beatrice Zucca Micheletto).

There is growing evidence that the engagement of women in work and with production did not come to an end with the turn to bourgeois society (Elisabeth Joris, Beatrice Zucca Micheletto).

### More than ‘the genteel’ and *Bürgertum*

In primarily focusing on women and men from the urban middle classes, the research based on self-narratives is strongly biased. Much less is known about the attempts to demarcate a domestic sphere in the daily lives of the poor, of peasants and the emerging working class. In the lower echelons of society, sociability included courtyards, the street and other public spaces; working-class boys and girls were “at home in the streets”.<sup>42</sup> The lack of privacy implied that intimate contacts among the lower populace often took place not in a house, but rather in nature or elsewhere (Sandro Guzzi-Heeb). Yet, the domestic realm was not only the daily space of genteel women or middle-class *Bürger* but also of numerous servants with different functions and in general of people with low income. In fact, all strata had access to or at least attempted to demarcate domestic space.

Well into the nineteenth century, the right to marry and to set up one’s own domestic realm was strictly controlled by the authorities. Economically defined marriage hindrances particularly existed in South Germany, in several Swiss cantons and in the Habsburg Monarchy.<sup>43</sup> In the Austrian territories, a so-called ‘political marriage consent’, issued by local municipalities, was required. In several regions this policy was applied in a rather rigorous manner, in the sense that land ownership was the major path to obtain marriage consent while other sources of income were less accepted. Underprivileged couples, driven by their wish to keep house together or by mutual affection, but not allowed to marry by local courts, often took their cases to higher courts to fight for their right to wed.<sup>44</sup> From thousands of court records of the early modern period and the nineteenth century we know that the domestic sphere was not a refuge or a space of relaxation, but rather a battlefield for spouses.<sup>45</sup> In the majority of cases, it was women from the middling sort or the lower populace who brought marital conflicts to court.<sup>46</sup> Their complaints point to violence-prone relations, the often fragile domestic economy and instability.

Even though “food comprised the greater part of a labouring family’s expenditure over the course of a year” and, in addition, the family had to pay for various other things such as “clothing, rent and fuel for heat” as well as for medicines and medical care, agricultural labourers in England, for example, possessed various types of material goods.<sup>47</sup> As Craig Muldrew in his study of early modern agrarian England shows, on the basis of labourers’ probate inventories there were clear differences between the poorest labourers and those in a better position. A man by the name of Christopher Gyll who died in 1593 lived in two rooms “which were almost devoid of goods, and what he possessed was described as rotten or old”, while John Hutson was a wealthy labourer. Hutson owned a farm with a buttery and a washhouse when he died in 1721. His inventory contains “a significant number of household goods” and, among other items, a standing clock and two looking glasses.<sup>48</sup> Clocks as well as looking glasses form part of the “key consumer goods” at the end of the seventeenth and at the beginning of the eighteenth centuries.<sup>49</sup> Thus, distinct differences of household and domestic economy occurred not only between social milieus but also within the same occupational group and not least over time.

Through comparison of different types of court records and legal documents, we encounter complex settings of gender and power in domestic contexts, related to wealth. In more general terms, wealth – including real estate and money, but also material objects and legal entitlements, moreover the distribution of wealth, wealth transfers and administration

had social, economic, generational and gender-specific implications throughout history. Access to wealth and competition about it were fundamentally dependent on inheritance patterns and the respective marital property regimes. Inheritance practices exhibit a great variety from a European perspective.<sup>50</sup> Property rights and rights of disposal of unmarried women, wives and widows varied accordingly. Intergenerational transfers of wealth constitute a mainstay of the endurance of social inequality. Inheritance laws and practices had an impact on families, familial relations, marriages and gender roles, and with them to a large degree on whole societies. Thus, legal patterns as well as contracts and wills shaped hierarchies and gender relations within the domestic sphere. At the same time, they were closely linked to concepts of kinship and marriage – and vice versa. In many European countries, a discernible trend towards better property rights of wives and widows compared to relatives did not occur before the last decades of the nineteenth or even the beginning of the twentieth century.

### **The domestic sphere from a relational perspective**

The domestic sphere is a matter of manifold social hierarchies that were accepted or undermined, instrumentalized or contested, a matter of inclusion and exclusion and, not least, of inequalities. It was inhabited by an ensemble of people who engaged in various relationships. Bruno Latour's concept of assemblages, mentioned above, expands the notion of social space and agency even more by integrating non-human actants and thus reconfigures the socio-material relation.<sup>51</sup> This approach is valuable because in the domestic sphere the relationships between people within and beyond the walls of the home are connected with things and material furnishings, as well as with animals and plants that were included in the relational network via interactions and everyday practices. People, things, animals and plants have always stood in spatial relation to one another, particularly in the interior of the domestic sphere, but also in exterior spaces and institutions via multiple connections and entanglements. These could be situated locally, regionally or nationally, and also be connected globally: through translations and receptions, missions and colonialism. All these spaces were shaped by various ways "of arranging the social world"<sup>52</sup> such as law, culture, economy and politics. They were translated not only into practices and ideas of government but also into categories of difference such as age, generation, gender, marital status, social status, social milieu, position in the family and social fabric, kinship, wealth, confession and religion, race and ethnicity, as well as belonging. These categories influenced both interpersonal relationships and scopes of action as well as references to material culture and to plants and animals.

Focusing on the domestic sphere allows us to counteract binary attributions and dichotomous points of view: against a schematic separation of interior and exterior, consumer and producer, paid and unpaid work, economy and emotions, nuclear family and kinship, or independence and dependencies. By doing so, the authors of this volume question conventional paradigms and challenge widespread stereotypes: the public–private divide, the private sphere, the domestication of women. They argue for the necessity to differentiate and consistently suggest a thought process of relational structures and connections, breaching diverse dichotomies with their contextual and situational oriented approaches.

The relationship between house and family can be interpreted as a foundational relationship. At the same time, we must ask ourselves in what contexts house and family were conceived of together, and in what contexts they were set against one another? What is the significance of the domestic sphere as a relational space when 'house' was the

dominant umbrella term and not ‘family’, or vice versa (Jon Mathieu)?<sup>53</sup> With all the differentiation that takes place in the interior, it seems at least according to the trend, and consistent with various chronologies, that there had existed various perceptions of the house and/or family in aristocratic, peasant, bourgeois and working-class milieus. The German name for the domestic advice literature that was widespread in Europe was *Hausväterliteratur* (Philip Hahn). This notion of the genre alone reveals the close connection between the home (*Haus*) and the family. However, it simultaneously represents the hierarchical nature of relationships contained within the home. When and why did the home, family or domestic sphere, domesticity, become socially and emotionally charged? In the emerging bourgeois milieu of the nineteenth century, houses increasingly became family seats or ancestral homes of branched out and often spatially dispersed relatives, representing both status and belonging.<sup>54</sup> Houses served as symbols for ideas of stability and continuity, but could also carry national connotations – for example in becoming symbols for the Bulgarian national awakening or for the non-existent Polish fatherland (Kristina Popova, Monika Szczepaniak). Despite the increasing conceptual focus on the family, the home did not disappear as an important reference space in the nineteenth century, nor as a physical or symbolic unit. The weight between physical and symbolical significance may have shifted. Moreover, the spatial and material turn brings new aspects into play that also consider the domestic sphere. Do architectural-spatial arrangements and structures have an effect on the interactions and communications that take place within them, and if so, what is it?<sup>55</sup> This question addresses spatial perceptions.

With this perspective on the domestic sphere, various configurations of people come into view that one must separate analytically, but keep reimagining how they fit together. The volume mentions marital and familial relationships (parent–child relationships, sibling relationships), kinship relationships as well as working relationships within the household. All these relationships were involved in tiered hierarchies, particularly gender and social hierarchies, which is addressed by many of the volume’s authors. The legal figure of the *paterfamilias*, whose position and power reached into various parts of the nineteenth century, stood above all inner-domestic relationships. However, also in normative contexts, we must always question to what extent gender hierarchies were legitimized, formalized and consolidated or thought of as being more permeable.

A number of different relationships (for instance relatives, friends, neighbours, servants) have emerged as counter models for the coupling of the modern and ‘isolated’ nuclear family,<sup>56</sup> which was a symbol of individuality, love marriage and the independence from parents.<sup>57</sup> Over the past years, the interconnection between marital and kinship relations has emerged to become a central perspective of research. In this context, it is particularly relevant to study how transfers of and access to wealth were organized and distributed. This simultaneously opens up the perspective on relationship arrangements (Margareth Lanzinger), but in doing so we must also conversely ask ourselves: in what way did wealth influence the relationships between people with close social ties?<sup>58</sup> By an expanded perspective, the question of the relationship of vertical – generally the father–son centric configuration – and horizontal configurations between siblings and marriage ties plays into the domestic sphere.<sup>59</sup> In light of this, sibling relationships began intensifying during the years surrounding 1800 – on various occasions even to the extent that they took on an eroticized character (Claudia Opitz-Belakhal).<sup>60</sup> Romantic love that breached conventions also constituted a part of the horizontal paradigm: the desire for a free choice of partners.<sup>61</sup> This, along with the freedom of movement, was feasible in specific contexts, so that we can speak of “sexual cultures” and “sexual milieus” (Sandro Guzzi-Heeb). The potential of the

analytical separation between vertical and horizontal relationships lies in the fact that it makes these competing logics visible. This also applies to visible relatedness<sup>62</sup> and the scopes of action that have significantly influenced the shape of the domestic sphere.

Hierarchies and relationships between masters and servants were also very different. On the one hand, it was expected of servants to be obedient, but, on the other, they would challenge the authority of their masters. In this vein, practices of negotiation, alliances and conflicts breached the too simplistic 'above'–'below' scheme (Raffaella Sarti). Maidservants in particular are pragmatic examples of the ambivalence of relationships between distance and proximity in the interior of the domestic sphere. They performed wage labour, but at the same time were occasionally viewed as part of the family. They could become the object of their masters' desire, midwives and keepers of secrets, but also enter situations where they could compete with the lady of the house over the favour of the children (Elisabeth Joris). In the long run, as a consequence of increasing wage labour and monetized economy, master–servant relations experienced fundamental changes.

One central aspect of the theorization of the private sphere was a stronger emotionalization of relationships between mothers, fathers and children following new concepts of childhood, motherhood and fatherhood, as well as of gender relations according to new concepts of love and marriage, which were adopted by the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. However, chronologies of changes in perception of motherhood and fatherhood, of motherly and fatherly love, are often controversial. What mothers and fathers had in common was that the relationships to their children experienced a naturalization in the nineteenth century. Contraception also had an impact on the parent–child relationship. Even though contraception became more reliable only in the early twentieth century, more or less secret knowledge of contraceptive methods existed for centuries. Appropriate devices were marketed commercially from the second half of the nineteenth century,<sup>63</sup> but they had been available and used to rather different extents. Not least, the increasing interest in educational issues was also related to changing conceptions of parenthood and family and to a differentiation of responsibilities. For some, specialists or institutions were most suitable for the education of children. At the same time, parents were increasingly seen as 'educational partners', and the intimacy between fathers, mothers and children was revalued (Sylvie Moret Petrini). Along with the emergence of public schooling, home schooling also remained a common practice in the nineteenth century, and the home viewed as an 'educational environment' (Mary Clare Martin). Images and positions of fathers were, and remained, particularly ambivalent (Claudia Opitz-Belkhal).

In many ways, the domestic sphere was always a place of competing interests and conflict. While conflicts stressed relationships, they were also capable of negotiating or even stabilizing them. Disputes very quickly leaked outside the house when relatives, neighbours and both secular and ecclesiastical institutions were involved in restoring and securing peace as mediators, protectors, supporters or witnesses (Inken Schmidt-Voges and Katharina Simon). Violence, abuse and force in various social configurations and forms were also aspects of the domestic sphere, which was characterized by dependencies, asymmetrical power relations and ambivalences when sexual violence also occurred in consensual relationships (Julie Hardwick). This transition was marked in spatial terms by the transformation of dwelling spheres into closed-off spaces only accessible for brief amounts of time. This highlights the vulnerability of the domestic sphere.

As has already been established in various contexts, working relations are key for the analysis of the domestic sphere in its everyday practice and, above all, in its interior and exterior relationships. Domestic work has long been contrasted with wage labour, valued

differently and associated with femininity.<sup>64</sup> In her “critique of approaches to ‘domestic work’” Jane Whittle suggests a clear definition of “types of work” in order to avoid confusion and be able to categorize and evaluate women’s work adequately. We should differentiate between “housework”, “care work”, “production for own use or subsistence” and “paid work”.<sup>65</sup> At any rate, it must be emphasized that women contributed significantly to household incomes, and played active roles in various areas in marital, familial and non-domestic labour relations (Beatrice Zucca Micheletto). Women interacted with a large number of people beyond the circle of the family and the home: with their husbands’ clients and work colleagues, friends, close and distant relatives and visitors. As we can learn from diaries that were written in the decades around 1800, the domestic sphere proved to be much less a place of ‘refuge’ or ‘privacy’ in the bourgeois milieu, but rather a space for the pronounced and multifaceted co-presence of various people (Joachim Eibach). At the same time, we have uncovered a multitude of overlaps and interactions between the professional and the domestic sphere: when bailiffs, pastors or lawyers worked from their homes, state servants worked with them in their home offices (Maria Ågren); astronomical work was performed in the house (Sebastian Kühn); and herbs were processed, knowledge was applied and remedies were produced and sold from the home (Sandra Cavallo). Women – along with pupils, servants, friends and guests – were deeply involved in these endeavours. During the nineteenth century, the work of midwives, women who practised medicine and the founders of schools often took place in spatial settings that were connected with the household and living spaces. Women were predominantly responsible for cooking – particularly in the lower and middle classes. By writing and publishing cookbooks, women also created external references, however in gender-specific geographies (Raffaella Sarti). Business activities were sometimes closely connected with the everyday life of the domestic sphere from both a social and spatial perspective (Elisabeth Joris). Caretakers, doormen and concierges were situated on the border between interior and exterior realms, and at the same time were balanced in an ambivalent position between authority and submissiveness with regard to their social relationships (Jens Wietschorke).

Relationships – to various spectra of guests as well as to specific objects – became visible not only through work but also leisure activities. Interiors as well as certain forms and spaces of sociability were coded according to accessibility and gender (Catherine Richardson, Frank Hatje). This was also the case for spaces as places of refuge – such as flower gardens as personal spaces (Kristina Popova). Religiously charged spaces, times and objects (books, crucifixes, icons) also constituted integrative parts of the domestic sphere. Various levels of relationships were contained in religious practice: domestic-hierarchical and consumer relationships as well as national references (Suzanna Ivanič and Irene Galandra Cooper, Tine Van Osselaer and Alexander Maurits). This expanded and amplified the symbolic connections between the domestic sphere and socio-cultural environment.

### **Material culture: entangled domestic things**

As witnessed particularly by household inventories, over the course of the centuries the domestic sphere tended to become equipped with an increasing number of things<sup>66</sup> that were either homemade or further processed, bought or inherited, sold, bequeathed, brought along, traded or gifted – but above all used. Things were therefore involved in an array of economic and social processes, interactions and practices. In their practical use, working equipment, tools and kitchen utensils provided a significant economic basis.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, things were a part of social – marital, familial, kinship, inner-domestic, neighbourly etc. – relationships.<sup>68</sup>

Social relationships were established, maintained and strengthened through things. Things were furthermore legally structured in marital and inheritance-related transfers. Renata Ago suggests that “objects thus serve to decode the social world”.<sup>69</sup> They occupied an in-between space; in-between a fluctuating and stable affiliation to a household or to specific people. Things were inventoried, entered into account books and negotiated before courts when they were named in testaments, marriage and retirement contracts or bankruptcy records.<sup>70</sup> Some things were visible in the domestic sphere, others stowed and tucked into chests, drawers and cabinets. Things indicated and represented social status; they stood in relation to spaces and the furnishings of interiors. The difficulty for historians lies in the circumstance that objects, especially when they were part of the everyday domestic sphere, are generally only accessible to us in text form, recorded according to specific criteria, and, in less affluent households, only described sparingly.<sup>71</sup> Objects were at least listed together when house inventories were created according to rooms. If details on make, colours and materials of the items were provided in inventories, it is easier to flesh them out in the imagination.<sup>72</sup>

The transition from the house or household to the home, and the perception of home were inseparably linked to the things it was furnished with. Rising consumerism, the gradually emerging material culture and a specific refinement of domestic arrangements constituted marked phenomena in the long transition from the early modern period to the nineteenth century. There are various explanations for the changing consumer culture and ‘consumer society’. The early study by Joan Thirsk suggests that new proto-industries produced goods for a broader social spectrum of consumers in England already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus, she assumes the existence of a consumer society at that time as “by the end of the sixteenth century goods that had been deemed rich man’s luxuries in 1540 were being made in so many different qualities and at such varied prices that they came within the reach of every man”.<sup>73</sup> Particularly inspiring are concepts that base their argument on an increasing demand, and closely relate production and consumption, such as by Neil McKendrick<sup>74</sup> and Jan de Vries with his thesis of the ‘industrious revolution’.<sup>75</sup> This was conceived from a household perspective and linked with market-oriented work able to fulfil consumers’ wishes. It is natural to assume that gender-specific consumer patterns are at play,<sup>76</sup> however, it remains a challenge to establish the extent to which women – particularly married and middle-class women – were involved in the ‘industrious revolution’. Beyond that, it is significant to note that the economic opportunities and thus the quantity and quality of things, the interior and furnishing of the living space as well as the construction and floor plan of houses varied greatly. These distinctions apply not only across time but also across class and geography, to the north and the south, the east and the west and even “apparently uniform areas were teeming with a thousand differences”.<sup>77</sup>

The roles and areas of expertise assigned to men and women in early modern advice literature aligned with gender roles similar to the nineteenth-century breadwinner and homemaker models. Husbands were portrayed as producers and wives as consumers. Some differences, however, did exist. Husbands often did not bring home a salary in the form of cash, but rather in the form of raw materials that needed to be processed (Jane Whittle). Women were responsible for their own economic areas, selling their own products such as eggs, cheese and yarn.<sup>78</sup> One important differentiation in this context of consumption is to be made between the supply of essential goods on the one hand and leisure shopping on the other, where the latter was initially only available to the upper classes. However, a closer look reveals that trading of goods made up a significant part of the spectrum of everyday activity. Shopping at markets and from craftspeople was part of the quotidian life of many

women. From the frequency of specific bequests drawn up in wills, we can surmise that women seemed to have had a closer relationship to things.<sup>79</sup> To include a specific object in a will expressed the existence of a special relationship to the person who it was bequeathed to. It could have been an expression of gratitude or love or the wish to remain in constant memory through an object.

Women were generally credited with the task of furnishing the house. However, even this categorization must be questioned. In the mid-eighteenth century, the Winn couple jointly designed the interior of their Yorkshire country house over many years, and commissioned bespoke furniture such as an apothecary's cabinet (Serena Dyer). To furnish a house or an apartment could thus be associated with a series of interactions. Trans-regional and wide-ranging trade relations were at the heart of planning, designing, producing and purchasing furniture and home textiles. Knowledge of materials and processing methods were indispensable. The interpretation of interior paintings furthermore reveals that gender coding of interior spaces is a complex task. Interior paintings were not just portraits of rooms, they staged and idealized spaces as to become constitutive for the bourgeois self-image of the time (Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat). They displayed the private, negotiated social order and hierarchies and also suggested in-between spaces. In a 'narration of loss' typical for the modern period, which idealized rural life in a situation of political unfreedom – symbolized by the country manor, architecture, interior design, religious and patriotic objects, portraits, stories, furniture, celebrations, rituals, became atmospheric assemblages of the unfulfilled. The endangered country estate was a real, but above all, imagined place that was longed after (Monika Szczepaniak).

Pets ultimately also became part of the domestic sphere. Dogs, who through their close relationship to people advanced to quasi-family members, occupied a special significance in this transformation. That said, dogs were also mediums for self-representation and fashion accessories. Keeping dogs was therefore accompanied by the self-image and self-construction of the bourgeois milieu, and helped design the living spaces and forms of family life (Aline Steinbrecher). The introduction of plants from the garden into the interior of the house and home also took place at the end of the eighteenth century. This phenomenon was part of a certain refinement and enhancement of domesticity. Displaying plants became part of the bourgeois lifestyle. Indoor gardening was connected to various strands of knowledge production and transfer that found entry into the domestic sphere (Sophie Ruppel). Plants also occupied specific spaces: windowsills and winter gardens. Thus, they were also an element that fitted into the network of relationships within the domestic sphere between the interior and exterior, between people, objects and spaces.

### **Transitions and continuities**

*Prima facie* history is about change, but what change? Our suggestion to start with social basics, in particular practices and interaction in and around the domestic sphere, rather than relying on legal constructs or somewhat utopian ideas of *Haus*, home and family, offers the chance to challenge conventional transitions of family history. Privileging such a focus must not necessarily exclude issues of changing discourse. In fact, shifts in discourse on the domestic sphere are evident and presumably not without effect on everyday life. While the early modern period featured domestic advice literature (Philip Hahn), the eighteenth century saw a real hype in the production of pedagogical literature which instructed mothers and fathers how to raise and educate their children (Sylvie Moret Petri).



Discourses on house and home served well as means of changing identity construction. As mentioned above, this applies to the formation of bourgeois identity, following the Reformation (Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat), moreover to the specifically modern 'narration of loss' which constructed a metonymic relation between the fate of one's nation and the home (Monika Szczepaniak).

Turning points in accounts of European family history largely coincide with general history, for instance the turn from the Middle Ages to the early modern period or the age of the French Revolution. Although, as Jon Mathieu recently commented, problems of periodization are rarely discussed explicitly in family history.<sup>80</sup> Under observation here is primarily the turn from the stratified society of the Ancien Régime to class society or rather bourgeois society, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, accelerated in the decades around 1800. Referring to this era of enormous social, political and conceptual changes Reinhart Koselleck coined the term *Sattelzeit* (literally: saddle period).<sup>81</sup> With certain delays, varying from country to country, this time period is widely conceived as the cradle of the modern family.

Without doubt, the assumption of substantial change in that period of European history is well-founded. A closer look at the history of the domestic sphere using an inter-epochal approach, however, sheds light on developments of diverse kind and different direction. In fact, one of the most challenging aspects for research is the back-and-forth of processes, the coincidence of continuities and transformations that lead to modernity. For instance, domestic violence, sexual as well as otherwise, shows a disturbing continuity (Julie Hardwick), albeit the management of conflict changed over time (Inken Schmidt-Voges and Katharina Simon). These long-term developments began before the eighteenth century and continued throughout the nineteenth. The related question of whether and how major political shifts such as the Reformation and major social processes such as the industrialization affected the daily lives of the actors in the domestic sphere should also be considered. Conversely, long-term developments may have emerged from changing needs and practices in the domestic sphere. Until at least the eighteenth century, science<sup>82</sup> (Sebastian Kühn) as well as medicine (Sandra Cavallo, Sophie Ruppel) were practised in the house and home. Jürgen Habermas has already argued that one scenario of the critically reasoning audience, so typical for the Enlightenment, was the quasi-public *salon*, temporarily separated from more private spaces within a private home.<sup>83</sup> Leisure activities were, and still are, *in nuce* political (Catherine Richardson), particularly in societies which strive to standardize the moral conduct and behaviour of their subjects. Along this vein, nineteenth-century bourgeois society was initiated perhaps not so much by the ideas of liberal master-thinkers. Instead, it was shaped by practices of domestic sociability that no longer paid attention to differences of class (*Stand*) between nobility and bourgeoisie, but, at the same time, excluded men and women of the lower populace (Frank Hatje, Joachim Eibach).<sup>84</sup> The assertion that family and the domestic were solely private matters ignores their public functions. Certainly, not only the strengthening of family ties, as expressed in the increase of cousin marriages and intensified relations among siblings, but also the manifold interactions in homes were interrelated with class formation. Far from being a counterworld to the sphere of work and society at large, the domestic sphere was a field of learning rules, shaping one's habitus and constructing networks.

It has, meanwhile, become commonplace in introductions to family sociological works to argue that from the eighteenth century onwards macro shifts of functional differentiation in society relieved the family from production and other tasks which then sparked the emergence of the emotionalized, intimate modern family life.<sup>85</sup> However, numerous sources

from the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries provide insight into the fact that the early modern 'open house' was not simply replaced by an entirely privatized venue of spouses and children. Social necessities of elaborate visiting cultures drastically limited the amount of time available for oneself and one's family (Frank Hatje, Joachim Eibach). Domesticity was an ideal, propagated in novels and paintings, cherished in letters and diaries, but in reality, the domestic realm was rarely a place of refuge, reflection and relaxation. In this respect it is fair to question the common periodization of the emergence of the modern family. In its beginnings (bourgeois) family life was very different than at its later stages. This also applies to the position of women. Due to increasing demands in child-rearing, health care, education and the command of good manners in the nineteenth century, wives and mothers did not experience relief, but perhaps the contrary: more work and more pressure. Furthermore, the new emphasis on emotionalized relations (Claudia Opitz-Belakhal, Sandro Guzzi-Heeb) might also have been another stress factor rather than a mere relief. The idea of romantic love certainly raised expectations of the daily interaction of spouses, parents and children, siblings and friends, making them more ambitious and, at the same time, more time-consuming and fragile.

The years around 1800 were not just a time period during which the formerly all-encompassing household family, which combined production and consumption, lost some of its inherent functions. In the 1970s, Michael Mitterauer suggested that the reduction of functions paved the way for the modern family and led to women's emancipation.<sup>86</sup> Subsequent studies argued more cautiously.<sup>87</sup> The reduction of household production as an effect of the increase of wage labour did not sever all links between the spheres of economy and the family. Can we assume a loss, or rather a transformation, of economic functions? In what ways did sustenance activities – either paid or unpaid work, sometimes concealed, remain relevant within the domestic sphere? These questions need further discussion. The nineteenth century saw the introduction or reintroduction of a number of activities in the domestic sphere (*Verhäuslichung*). Technical innovations such as running water and gas lighting, followed by electricity, allowed for an increasing degree of domesticity in terms of housekeeping, including doing the laundry and daily hygiene.<sup>88</sup> Home schooling remained an important aspect (Mary Clare Martin). The nineteenth century was a heyday of domestic devotion (Tine Van Osselaer and Alexander Maurits), which was newly inspired by the ideal of domesticity. At the same time, domestic devotion stood in direct succession of the Reformation, which had already promulgated homes as cornerstones of the future Christian society.<sup>89</sup>

In contrast to axiomatic assumptions of communication history and Luhmann's theory of social systems, examinations of the domestic sphere illustrate that the nineteenth century was preoccupied with ritual. Domestic rituals in a broad sense ranged between routines, such as joint meals or "the 'tyranny of five-o'clock tea'",<sup>90</sup> structuring the daytime, and the display of style and good manners during formal invitations. Get-togethers of any kind, seemingly free of intention and further purpose, staged aspects of status and power in relationships. This also applies to the question of whether servants who were from the eighteenth century onwards increasingly female (Rafaella Sarti) were allowed to sit at the table, and to the people who were invited. Practices of staging the domestic easily transcended the perimeter of house and home when the family, occasionally including servants and long-term visitors, dressed up for church or the Sunday afternoon walk. Rituals were adopted and abandoned. However, the exposure of the home as such was not specific to any century under observation. Already in the Dutch *Gouden Eeuw* and in Georgian England, real as well as imagined insight into the domestic realm served as a mirror and display of wealth and high-standing morals. We thus find a clear programme of domesticity with distinct gender roles in

seventeenth-century Dutch paintings (Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat).<sup>91</sup> The reconstruction of the city of London after the Great Fire of 1666 served the purpose of rigorously separating the spheres of street and homes with walls, fences and massive doors, thus limiting visibility and access for outsiders. Combined with improved heating facilities, separated rooms created space that could now be used for leisure (Catherine Richardson).<sup>92</sup> Yet, whether and when new gender roles *en suite* with separate spheres developed seems less clear. Research on gender in English society highlights continuities rather than change. Robert Shoemaker concluded: “Whether in courtship, family life, work, or in many aspects of public life, gender differences evident in the nineteenth century were already present two centuries earlier.”<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, the wish to limit access and create one’s own space was not new. However, in line with new ideas of domesticity, the nineteenth century saw a new desire for privacy, even among young women who lived far away from the metropolises of western Europe (Kristina Popova).

The material culture of homes and domestic relations has never been fixed in stone. Of course, it was pure chance that the Great Fire of London happened in 1666. However, living in the city of London with one’s family and servants after the reconstruction differed in many aspects from the still-medieval London before the disaster.<sup>94</sup> Setting up homes offered chances of individual arrangements, made by wives or husbands. Domestic spheres were sites of innovative activities such as reading and writing alone or indoor gardening for the sake of aesthetic refinement (Sophie Ruppel). While some actors such as neighbours lost importance, others entered or re-entered the domestic stage in novel ways: carefully selected friends, animals as pets (Aline Steinbrecher), concierges and caretakers (Jens Wietschorke).

The domestic sphere has a multifaceted history. *The Routledge History of the Domestic Sphere* gives an up-to-date overview of central issues and research results in the history of home, household, family and their social surroundings. It claims that the category of ‘the domestic sphere’ is fundamental and indispensable to understanding early modern and modern societies, and pertinent regarding recent trends in historiography. The book thus encompasses contributions from innovative current research fields in social and cultural history. Its chapters focus on various regions of Europe – from England to Poland and Bulgaria, from Italy to Germany and Sweden – covering rural and urban areas in the period between the age of Reformation and the nineteenth century.

## Notes

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- 11 See the programme of the research project *Doing House and Family: Material Culture, Social Space, and Knowledge in Transition (1700–1850)*, led by Joachim Eibach, Sandro Guzzi-Heeb, Jon Mathieu and Claudia Opitz-Belakhal: [www.hist.unibe.ch/forschung/forschungsprojekte/doing\\_house\\_and\\_family/index\\_ger.html](http://www.hist.unibe.ch/forschung/forschungsprojekte/doing_house_and_family/index_ger.html), last accessed 2 June 2020.
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