

Rural Housing in Switzerland: Material Culture and Domestic Relations (18th and 19th Centuries)

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This dissertation project investigates housing in Switzerland during the transition period from early modern to modern society. The project sets out from source material on vernacular architecture collected by the long-term programme *Schweizerische Bauernhausforschung* (Swiss Rural Building Research), adds to this evidence with selected items and relates them to the socio-spatial organisation of households and house-dwellers. The main question concerns the *transformation of domestic relations* as reflected in *material culture*.

As mentioned above, material culture studies constitute a rapidly developing interdisciplinary field promoted first in the United Kingdom and the United States. If the aspect of materiality has often been neglected in academic scholarship during the upswing of social sciences from the 1970s onwards, material culture studies have succeeded in bringing it back in and in showing that human actors cannot be understood apart from the things whose use and consumption structure their lives. This research has drawn from a wide range of social theory, including Bourdieu's praxeology, Giddens' structuration, and Latour's actor-network-theory. Research on vernacular architecture, an important part of material culture, has benefitted from that development both on the conceptual and the empirical side. It underwent internationalisation, and the hitherto separate fields of anthropology and folklore studies have been brought in closer contact.

In the case of Switzerland, organised research on rural vernacular architecture started nearly a century ago, and intensified towards the end of World War II as an employment measure for architects and technicians. From 1960 to now, the Swiss National Science Foundation has contributed to the funding of this programme of inventarisation and examination of the important rural buildings of the country. In its first phase, the focus was on questions of typology, building materials and furniture. But from the 1980s onwards, the historical trajectories of single buildings gained more attention and so did the archival sources to document the construction and reconstruction of these buildings sometimes taking place over centuries. Thanks to this programme, the offices of the *Schweizerische Bauernhausforschung* in Zug and of the *Denkmalpflege* (heritage preservation) in the Cantons have collected a huge amount of plan material, photographic records and historical sources that are available to the public. Thus, since 1985, 20 of 26 cantons have published one or more monographs with a more or less historical approach. **However, what was the relation between the material aspects of housing and the history of domestic relations?** The Swiss research programme and other initiatives have not yet given systematic answers to that question – much as family research has paid

relatively little attention to material culture so far. Moreover, so far most of the work is restricted to conventional historical periodisation, which impedes the assessment of trans-epochal developments. In her book on 'Europe at home: family and material culture 1500-1800', Raffaella Sarti describes her project as a "history of the family from the point of view of its material culture and, at the same time, a history of material culture that takes on the viewpoint of the family." By using the Swiss documentation as a starting point, the present project aims at adopting a similar perspective for the 18th and 19th centuries. This will allow housing to be used as one indicator for the metamorphoses of household and family during the *Sattelzeit*. The project will apply a *case-study approach*, organised in three steps: 1) I will screen the available information on rural housing and filter out a considerable number of promising objects that can be used for documenting the structures and changes of housing in the period under study; 2) The information gathered will be completed by further archival work; 3) The findings of this enquiry on Swiss housing will be synthesised and analysed with regard to current family research.

At each step in the research the emphasis will be on the *temporal dimension*, thus not on regionality as in most of the previous and current work of *Schweizerische Bauernhäuser*. From this angle I will be able to focus on processes of differentiation and reallocation of space in the house reflecting historical changes in the domestic sphere. What do the processes and boundary shifts tell us about the importance of age, gender, kinship, privacy, accessibility for outsiders and other aspects – in short about the social tissue and hierarchy of domestic groups in transition to modern society?