

EARLY MODERN GENDER AND SPACE: A METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

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SPACE and gender were intimately linked in Early Modern theoretical constructions of patriarchal order. The classical doctrine that order in families and by extension, within the wider commonwealth required adherence to a spatial system that assigned a public role to men, and confined women within the domestic sphere, was repeatedly restated in sermons, conduct literature and educational tracts throughout the period. It was a principle simply summarised by William Whately in his wedding sermon, *A Bride-Bush*, when he said that the husband should be «without door, she within; he abroad, she at home», and by the puritan preacher, Henry Smith, in 1591, when he declared that husbands and wives should see themselves as like the cock and the dam: «the cock flies abroad to bring in and the dam sitteth upon the nest to keep all at home»¹. Writers of treatises on marriage and conduct books, agreed on the necessity for all families in Early Modern Europe, to be governed according to these principles of gender and spatial order. The husband and master, should have absolute dominion over the house and household, and take charge of «public» affairs. The wife had to be subject and obedient to him, focussing her attention solely upon the ordering of the house. This system was deemed to be of essential importance for the maintenance of a godly, ordered family, and by extension, a stable commonwealth. If it were not adhered to, according to Dod and Cleaver, then chaos would ensue. Where the wife «be not subject to her husband, to let him rule all the household, especially outward affaires; if she will make against him, and

¹ Smith, Henry, *A Preparative to Marriage*, London, 1591, p. 43; Whately, William, *A Bride bush or a wedding sermon: compendiously describing the duties of married persons: by performing whereof, marriage shall be to them a great helpe, which now finde it a little hell*, London, 1617, p. 14.

seek to have her own ways, there will be doing and undoing. Things will go backward, the house will come to ruin»².

The relationship between gender and space has also been a consistent theme in histories of women and of gender over many years, even if not always explicitly stated. One of the most influential master narratives about the status of women is a story of decline from the Early Modern to the Victorian age. Historians who support this theory argue that, with the advent of capitalism and the rise of a class society, female marginalisation was reflected in, and reinforced by, progressive loss of access to public space by women. The earliest articulations of this approach came in the field of economic history. Alice Clark's classic *Working Lives of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919), and Ivy Pinchbeck's *Women Workers in the Industrial Revolution* (1930), both argue that the decline in women's economic status came about as a result of the separation of work from home, even if they differed as to when they thought these changes in the spatial organisation of labour took place³. Other historians have argued that, as the division between domestic space and workspace became more distinct, the household became more sharply identified as private, domestic and feminine, in opposition to the public and masculine spaces of work and politics, from which women were progressively excluded. The most important and influential of these arguments about the emergence of «separate spheres» has been made by Davidoff and Hall in their book, *Family Fortunes; Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (1987). They argue for, and trace, an evolution of separate spheres during the period and they link this separation of male and female worlds to the formation of middle-class identity. The outcome of this sharpening of spatial and social distinctions was to produce a more rigidly hierarchical and patriarchal society.

The «separate spheres» model continues to have a very powerful influence on women's and gender History although there is now a mounting body of literature which challenges many of its assumptions. Work on masculinity has

² Dod, John and Cleaver, Robert, *A godly forme of household government: for the ordering of private families, according to the direction of God's word*, London 1612, sig. F4.; Gataker, Thomas, *Marriage duties briefly couched together*, London 1620, p. 10; Whately, William, *A Bride-bush...*, *op. cit.*, p. 36

³ Clark saw the allegedly rapid advance in capitalism at the end of the seventeenth century as the pivotal period of change, while Pinchbeck argued that fundamental changes in the spatial and social organisation of labour did not occur until the «Industrial Revolution» in the nineteenth century.

drawn attention to the «private» and domestic aspects of the lives of men as well as women⁴. The «public» aspects of the family have been addressed in terms of its relationship to the community, to political institutions, public policy, and in terms of its economic role⁵. Studies have also begun to stress continuity in the spheres and status of women. Historians, in particular of women's work, have argued that during the pre-industrial era of domestic production, women's economic status was already low and opportunities for work were constrained. Amanda Vickery takes arguments for continuity still further by stressing that normative notions of a basic separation of spheres in which women were associated with home and children, while men controlled «public institutions», was not a creation of the nineteenth century, but could be «applied to almost any century and any culture»; it was an idea «at least as old as Aristotle». She argues for detailed studies to find out «how women accepted, negotiated, contested or simply ignored the much quoted precepts of proper female behaviour» in different times and in different places⁶. Vickery's work points to the need to extend study of the ways in which ideologies about gender and space and practices of gender roles intersect back into the seventeenth century, but to date most research has focused on the period after 1750. While it has been acknowledged that the gender order of Early Modern Europe was often defined in spatial terms, for the most part historians of the Early Modern period have implicitly or explicitly rejected the applicability of the «separate spheres» paradigm for the pre-modern past⁷. Research has concentrated on recovering

⁴ For studies that emphasise the «private» and «domestic» aspects of men's lives, see Tosh, John, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, Yale, Yale University Press, 1999; Shoemaker, Robert B., *Gender in English Society 1650-1850. The Emergence of Separate Spheres?*, London, Longman, 1998; Vickery, Amanda, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England*, Yale, Yale University Press, 2009; Harvey, Karen, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012. For a discussion of the relationship between men's «private» behaviour and their «public» reputation, see Foyster, Elizabeth A., *Manhood in Early Modern England. Honour, Sex and Marriage*, London, Longman, 1999.

⁵ Lynch, Karen, «The family and the history of public life», *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 24 (1994), pp. 665-684.

⁶ Vickery, Amanda, «Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history», *The Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), pp. 413-414; *ibid.*, *The Gentleman's Daughter. Women's Lives in Georgian England*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1998, p. 6.

⁷ For studies that outline the patriarchal model of gendered space, see Amussen, Susan D., *An Ordered Society. Gender and Class in Early Modern England*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell,

the «public» aspects of women's lives and the ways in which the worlds of men and women were integrated rather than separated, especially in arenas of work and worship. Studies of the Early Modern family, have argued that pre-modern households were not «areas of privacy» but «public political institutions»⁸; that Early Modern marriage was an economic if unequal, partnership, and the tasks and spaces of men and women overlapped in a society in which there was not the sharp division between work and home that later generations experienced⁹.

Influenced by the insights and accomplishments of the Social History of the 1970s, this work has been keen to make distinctions between prescription and practice and to recover the material circumstances of the lives of men and women in Early Modern society. Yet while this research enormously enriches our knowledge of female and male experience and emphasises that prescription and practice should not be confused with one another, in other ways it shrinks the scope of analysis of gender and space. Its focus on social mixing tends to present a picture of an unproblematised heterosocial world, and conceals the extent of segregation that obtained in Early Modern society. Universities, arenas of formal local and national, political and administrative institutions were exclusively male arenas: the parish church in many parts of Europe was segregated by gender¹⁰.

1988, pp. 68-69; Fletcher, Anthony, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press 1995, pp. 120-1; Gowing, Laura, *Domestic Dangers. Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 86-7. Studies that explicitly reject the 'separate spheres' paradigm include, Hunt, Margaret, *The Middling Sort, Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996; Smail, John, *The Origins of Middle-Class Culture: Halifax, Yorkshire, 1660-1780*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1994.

⁸ Collinson, Patrick, «The Protestant Family», in his *The Birthpangs of Protestant England. Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, London, Macmillan 1988, pp. 60-61.

⁹ Wrightson, Keith, *English Society 1580-1680*, London, Hutchinson 1982, p.93. For studies that stress patterns of gender-mixing within early modern society, see Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, *op. cit.*; Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, *op. cit.*; Ingram, Martin, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 241-2.

¹⁰ For studies that highlight more segregated aspects of the early modern social world, see Capp, Bernard, «Separate Domains? Women and Authority in Early Modern England», in Griffiths, P.; Fox, A. & Hindle, S. (Eds.), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1996, pp. 117-145. Mendelson, Sara and Crawford, Patricia, *Women in Early Modern England*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 202-255.

More importantly, perhaps, implicit reliance on a generalised model of «spheres» manages to be too schematic and abstract in terms of both gender and space¹¹. Recent developments in Gender History, influenced in part by the linguistic turn, have complicated our understanding of how prescription and practice relate to one another. It is now recognised that while prescription tells us how people were supposed or told to act, it does not provide evidence of how people actually behaved, but «ideal» prescription and «real» practice were not wholly distinct. The content of conduct literature was a product of the interests and concerns of its readership, just as «real» lives were shaped by the texts that formed part of the culture. People might revise or reject normative notions, but the two are not wholly separable. Laura Gowing, for example, in her study of Early Modern gender relations, has stressed that relationships within «real» households were shaped by prescriptive and popular literature, just as imaginative and informative descriptions of marriage drew on stories of «real» lives. The language of insult and the examinations and information of witnesses in marital disputes were informed by familiar printed fictions and prescriptions. At the same time, women manipulated normative notions and texts telling tales of female weakness and dependence, to pursue their own interests, in particular if they wished to extricate themselves from an unattractive marriage agreement¹². Experiences and discourses are not the same thing, but they intersect and overlap. Gender roles as actually lived were a product of complex interactions of ideas and material circumstances.

These developments suggest that analysis of the social effect of gender on the use of space in the Early Modern period should examine normative notions and practice in relation to one another rather than viewing them as prescription on the one hand and practice on the other. The analytical framework of study should not be based around a male/public and female/private or domestic dichotomy, which runs the risk of an unhistorical, contextually insensitive application of those terms. The focus should not be on «spheres» but spaces themselves, how historical actors defined and described them and how normative ideas and practice intersected to shape gendered use and experience of those spaces. Such a shift would allow discussion of gender relations to move away from arid arguments about «prescription versus practice» or «representational versus real» to attend to the complex ways men and women accepted, negotiated, manipulated, or even

¹¹ Vickery, 'Golden age to separate spheres?', *op. cit.*, p. 412.

¹² Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 54-5, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-39.

ignored normative boundaries, just as they do today (though the distribution of power meant that some were more able to do so than others)¹³.

THEORIES AND APPROACHES

Over the past thirty years research in a wide variety of fields has demonstrated the close interrelation of gender, space and identity. The strength of this strand of scholarship lies in the way that it understands space in social and performative terms. A space is conceptualised as more than, and different from, a physical location or place. According to the French historian Michel de Certeau, «space is a practiced place»¹⁴. Natt Alcock explains that «a place is transformed into a space by the social actors who constitute it through everyday use». Thus «the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers»¹⁵. Similarly, the feminist anthropologist Hannah More has argued that, «meanings are not inherent in the organisation of [...] space, but must be invoked through the activities of social actors»¹⁶.

Such insights encourage close consideration of the links between gender, space and power. The geographer Doreen Massey has explained that, «the spatial organisation of society [...] is integral to the production of the social and not merely its result. It is fully implicated in both history and politics»¹⁷. In similar vein the anthropologist Shirley Ardener also states that «space reflects social organisation, but of course, once space has been bounded and shaped, it is no longer a neutral background; it exerts its own influence»¹⁸. The organisation of space is not then just a reflection of society and its values, it is a

¹³ For studies that explore the interaction between ideologies and practices of gender roles, see Hufton, Olwen, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe Volume 1. 1500-1800*, London, Harper Collins, 1995; Shoemaker, *Gender in English society, op cit.*; Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ Certeau, Michel de, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984, p. 117.

¹⁵ Alcock, Nicholas «Physical space and social space», in Locock, M. (ed), *Meaningful architecture: social interpretations of buildings*, Aldershot, Avebury, 1994, pp. 207-30.

¹⁶ Moore, Hannah, *Space, text and gender, An Anthropological Study of the Marakwet of Kenya*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 8.

¹⁷ Massey, Doreen, *Space, Place and Gender*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1994, p. 186.

¹⁸ Ardener, Shirley, «Ground Rules and Social Maps for Women: An Introduction», in Ardener, S. (ed.), *Women and Space*, London, Croom Helm, 1981, p. 12.

medium through which society is reproduced, since it provides the context in which social and power relations are negotiated. As Doreen Massey has argued, space «both reflects and has effects back on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live»¹⁹.

Recognition of the role of the subjects who give meaning to space through everyday use is important for historians in several respects. First of all it counters the charge that the study of space is «unhistorical» in the sense that it studies static structures at the expense of change over time. Space conceptualised in terms of social relations has temporal dimensions. It is «inherently dynamic», since social actors attribute different meanings to space at different times²⁰. Such a conceptualisation of space moreover, acknowledges differential and temporal experience and use of space by distinct individuals or groups, whether the distinction is based on gender, age, social status or some other factor²¹. These insights mean that historians can move beyond debates about an apparent opposition between structure and agency to explore the relationship between them. Various theorists have argued that subjects are simultaneously subject and active in what Anthony Giddens has termed the process of «structuration» of institutions that characterise society²². Structures, in our case spaces, set boundaries, both to the conceptual and practical options available to a person, but they do not wholly determine them.

The link between mental and physical space is important here. Influenced by the French philosopher, Henri Lefebvre, who studied how space is produced conceptually as well as materially and suggested this occurs through three different yet connected processes: «spatial practice» (material or functional space), «representations of space» (space as codified language), and «representational space» (the lived everyday experience of space); writers in a variety of fields have shown ways in which spaces can be gendered, even when they are shared by men or women, through perception, experience and use²³. Individual

¹⁹ Massey, *Space, Place, op. cit.*, p. 186.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3; More, *Space, text and gender*, p. 7; Kent, Susan, *Domestic architecture and the use of space. An inter-disciplinary cross-cultural study*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 3.

²² Giddens, Anthony, *Central Problems in Social Theory*, London: Macmillan, 1979; Giddens, Anthony, *The Constitution of Society*, Cambridge, Polity, 1984; Burke, Peter, *History and Social Theory*, Cambridge: Polity, 1992, p. 113, p. 161.

²³ Lefebvre, Henri, *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

sense of space, and behaviour within it, is influenced by a host of cultural clues that enable people to create «mental maps» to help them to use spaces and to let them know when spaces might be difficult or dangerous to enter. These different perceptions and experiences are determined in large measure by the different degrees of power wielded by individuals or groups over how the space is accessed, used and given social and cultural meanings²⁴.

The physical body is also an important consideration. According to Linda McDowell, research on the body has changed the meaning of space, «as it has become clear that spatial divisions –whether in the home or in the workplace, at the level of the city or the nation-state– are also affected by and reflected in embodied practices and lived social relations». The German sociologist Martina Löw is also interested in the «genderization of spaces» and the relation of «mutual interdependence between spaces and bodies»²⁵. The work of the French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu has inspired much of this work. His concept of *habitus* helps explain how individual agents ascribe cultural meanings –in our case to spaces–. The *habitus* is a set of deeply internalised dispositions that limit, without determining, the possibilities of individual agency. The *habitus* is learned through a slow process of inculcation. Patterns and norms of behaviour and ways of thinking about the world gradually become internalised and naturalised through training in mind and body. Mechanisms of inculcation include factors which arrange the physical disposition of subjects, such as the learning of table manners and ways of walking, the use of material objects, the time and location of practices, the ease and constraint of access to architectural settings. They also include factors such as reading and hearing, which shape the mind. All these form media by which an individual becomes socialised into the performance of a social role within the culture of the group. Bourdieu emphasises that the *habitus* is flexible and, in a limited way, enabling: it is defined as «a set of schemes enabling agents to generate an infinity of practices adapted to endlessly changing situations». Constructing the parameters set by the *habitus* therefore does not preclude the possibility of agency or change. The *habitus* sets boundaries, both to the conceptual and practical options available to a person but it does not wholly determine them.

²⁴ Gould, Peter and White, Rodney, *Mental Maps*, London, Routledge, 1986, p. 108; Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-6; Moore, *Space, Text and Gender*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

²⁵ McDowell, Linda, *Gender, Identity and Place*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 34; Löw, Martina, «The Social Construction of Space and Gender», *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13 (2006), p. 121.

The *habitus* operates in relation to what Bourdieu has described as a «social field» –in our case a space–. A social field is inhabited by several different *habitus*s placed in differential power relations. This helps explain why and how different social actors can ascribe different meanings to the same space or field. Those meanings are shaped and limited by a person's *habitus*²⁶.

Thus a focus on space encourages attention to concepts of agency. One of the key points to emerge in feminist spatial study has been the multiple and dynamic ways in which spaces can be conceived, used, experienced and understood by different users at different times. Such analysis brings important insights to bear on gendered use of space because it exposes ways in which context and the intersection of gender with other social factors such as age, social and marital status complicate social and spatial codes²⁷.

These conceptual approaches suggest that a historian of gender has much to gain from a study structured in this way. Gender is recognised by historians as not a natural given but as an inculcated social construction²⁸. It is not used to describe the sexual differences ascribed to bodies. It refers to a complex process of social construction and reassertion through continual performance, a process that changes over time²⁹. Since space is not simply the product of social relations, but also a ground of social construction, space lies at the heart of our concerns. As Doreen Massey has argued, space «both reflects and has effects back on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live»³⁰.

Spatial analysis is also very useful for gender history because it is highly contextual. It requires consideration of links between people and spaces as well as between different types of spaces and so allows for extremely nuanced and

²⁶ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a theory of practice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977, pp. 16, 78-87; Bourdieu, Pierre «Social space and the genesis of classes», in his, *Language and symbolic power*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991, p. 230. For an accessible discussion of theoretical debates about the relationship between structure and agency, see Burke, *History and Social Theory*, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-114, pp. 118-126.

²⁷ Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, *op. cit.*, p. 3; Moore, *Space, Text and Gender*, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Kent, Susan, *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space. An Inter-Disciplinary Cross-Cultural Study*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 3.

²⁸ Scott, Joan W, «Gender: a useful category for historical analysis», *American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), pp. 1053-76.

²⁹ Butler, Judith, *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, London, Routledge, 1991, pp. 139-41.

³⁰ Massey, *Space, place and gender*, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

dynamic analysis of gender and power. Early Modern historical scholarship has moved a long way from the assumption that all men were autonomous patriarchs and all women simply victims. Scholarly attention is now paid to the complex, varied, uneven and changing articulation of patriarchal authority. Contradictions and tensions between the ideal model of gender relations disseminated through the pulpit and prescriptive literature and the practices of everyday life, as well as the intersection of gender with other social factors such as age, social and marital status, created arenas for female agency. It has been emphasised that this agency can be seen not only in occasional acts of resistance, but also in the continual negotiation of everyday interactions. Michael Braddick and John Walter have recently called for a search for «sources and spaces» in which the historian can see these informal, often opaque and complex aspects of the everyday politics of gender in process³¹. In similar vein, Alex Shepard has forcefully argued that «to understand the social practice of patriarchy in early modern England, we need to be far more aware of precisely which men stood to gain, which women stood to lose, and in which *contexts*»³². Since space is the context in which these power relations were played out, and the organisation of space influenced how and when interactions occurred, the usefulness of spatial analysis becomes apparent. It provides us with a highly contextualised, dynamic picture of how gender relations were constructed, maintained, manipulated, negotiated, contested or changed by daily human encounters and through the medium of space.

Yet although the field influenced by what has been termed the «spatial turn» is wide, the number of full-scale monographic treatments that focus on the gendered social construction of space is relatively modest, indicating perhaps that the transfer of conceptual advances into empirical application still poses considerable challenges.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

We already know and continue to learn a great deal about the layout, appearance, form and content of –the houses, streets, churches, markets and even

³¹ Braddick, Michael J. and Walter, John, «Grids of Power; Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Early Modern Society», in Braddick, Michael J. and Walter (eds), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society. Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 39.

³² Shepard, *Meanings of manhood, op. cit.*, p. 4.

alehouses– the «microsites» or small scale spaces of early modern life from the extensive and rich research conducted by archaeologists and historians of material culture. The ongoing digital revolution has also provided extraordinarily useful tools to create, store, and disseminate findings of space-related research. Geographical information systems allow sophisticated processing of landscape-related data, and 3-D modelling programmes have equipped scholars with unprecedented multimedia opportunities to reconstruct and to facilitate the visualization of spatial structures³³.

Some of these scholars have used material evidence to explore how the material world was given social and cultural meaning. Raffaella Sarti's masterful study of the material culture of the Early Modern European home takes an anthropological and gender approach to the subject³⁴. There have also been some very interesting studies of the links between gender and the built environment by architectural historians³⁵. Graves has used plans of parish churches, «with the aim to develop an understanding of the architectural space of the later medieval parish church in England, based on social practice»³⁶. Gilchrist's study of archaeological and architectural evidence provided a nuanced and complex account of the gendering of space in medieval monasteries³⁷. Boddington has analysed the material remains of Anglo-Saxon churchyards to trace links between burial sites and social status³⁸, while Brown has used house plans to determine changes in layout and use of houses in seventeenth century London. There have been a large number of excellent studies of household inventories in different regions of early modern Europe that map room use and look at the way objects take on cultural meanings in different contexts. Garrard's work on household inventories. For example, has focused on the

³³ See, for example, websites such as «Virtual Heritage»: <http://www.virtualheritage.net/home.htm> or «The Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture»: <http://www.christianityandculture.org.uk/> (both accessed March 12th , 2014).

³⁴ Sarti, Raffaella, *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture 1500-1800*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2002.

³⁵ Hills, Helen (ed.), *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2003.

³⁶ Graves, C. P. , «Social space in the medieval parish church», *Economy and Society*, 18 (1989), pp. 297-322.

³⁷ Gilchrist, Roberta *Gender and material culture. An archaeology of religious women*, Oxford, Routledge, 1994.

³⁸ Boddington, Andrew, «Raunds, Northamptonshire:an analysis of a country churchyard», *World Archaeology*, 18 (1987), pp. 411-425.

significance of the varying quality of objects such as beds or chairs assigned to individuals within the household as symbols of power and status³⁹.

The archaeologist Matthew Johnson, has used evidence from house plans and inventories to argue that the architectural improvements that were made to many homes in England during the seventeenth century led to significant changes in the ways that they were controlled and relations between the people who lived in them. He suggests that new concepts of privacy developed during this period, middling sort families retreated behind glass windows into more comfortable homes, household life was lived less publicly and neighbourly and parochial interventions diminished. He also argues that domestic spaces became increasingly segregated with respect to gender and status. As specialised service areas within middling sort homes proliferated, women and servants were ousted from the «front», «public» living spaces of the hall and parlour and relegated, marginalised and «privatised» to the «back» spaces of the kitchen and service areas around the yard. More generally, Johnson has used a variety of forms of material and documentary evidence to argue that changes in the spatial organisation of fields, churches and houses, associated with the «rise of rural capitalism» between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, reflected and reinforced a growing social and spatial segregation of society, along class and gender lines⁴⁰.

These studies have added considerably to our understanding of how space was organised. Yet several scholars have raised questions about the attempt to reconstruct of social practice from documents such as floor plans and inventories, suggesting that such studies are sometimes afflicted by what has been termed «the problem of meaning». They may show us how space was organised

³⁹ Brown, Frank, «Continuity and change in the urban house: developments in domestic space organisation in seventeenth century London», *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 28 (1986), pp. 558-590; Weatherill, Lorna, *Consumer behaviour and material culture 1660-1715*, London, Routledge, 1988; Garrard, Rachel, «English probate inventories and their use in studying the significance of the domestic interior, 1500-1700», *AAG Bijdragen*, 23 (1980), pp. 53-77; Johnson, *An Archaeology of Capitalism*. See also Yentsch, Anne «The symbolic division of pottery: sex related attributes of English and Anglo-American household pots», in McGuire, R. M. and Paynter, R (eds.), *The Archaeology of Inequality*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991; Glassie, Henry, *Folk housing in middle America; a Structural Analysis of Historic Artefacts*, Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1975; Deetz, James, *In small things forgotten: the archaeology of early American life*, New York, Random House, 1977; Overton, Mark, Whittle, Jane, Dean, David and Hann, Andrew, *Production and consumption in English households, 1600-1750*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁴⁰ Johnson, Matthew, *An Archaeology of Capitalism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, pp. 174 -7.

and even how different kinds of men and women behaved in space but they are less successful in explaining why, or what spatial behaviour actually meant⁴¹. In the first place, even when augmented by the material record, written documents such as plans and inventories can only tell us about prescriptive patterns of use: they do not allow us to see space as actually lived and what it meant. In the second place, plans and inventories are static documents. They do not allow us to develop an analysis sensitive to short or long-term shifts in the social use and social meaning of space.

To determine how spaces were gendered we require sources that present people describing their own behaviour and that of others that provide a dynamic picture of the activities of men and women within space, in which it is possible to see how prescriptive ideas interacted with social practice to shape experience. If, as is argued by many, the constitution of gendered space in early modern society was a process, a complex interaction of ideas and material circumstances, then perhaps we need to look beyond conventional sources to recognise that it is available to us in a variety of kinds of evidence –material, visual, and written–, whether in plans, inventories, pamphlets, conduct books, sermons, letters, diaries, ballads, and plays or manuscript materials such as court records.

The problem of meaning is not entirely eliminated, of course, because in our search for evidence we depend on written sources often constructed by elite individuals and institutions. Even when written sources attempt to record oral culture, as in the examinations and information of witnesses, the information is partly filtered and potentially deformed by its being written down by men whose ideas and values may not necessarily be the same as the speaker. Several scholars have also pointed out that litigants and lawyers shaped testimony to suit their circumstances. Yet these problems of distortion can be exaggerated. For Natalie Zemon Davis, in her pioneering work on witness testimonies, what she meant when she argued that she had found fiction in the archives was that she had found evidence that «authors shape the events of a crime into a story» and that the purpose of this shaping was to provide a testimony that would be believable to their readers, because the activities and patterns of behaviour were unremarkable and conventional⁴². For this reason court records can pro-

⁴¹ Anderson, Michael, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family, 1500-1914*, London, Macmillan, 1980, p. 34.

⁴² Davis, Natalie Zemon, *Fiction in the archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, p. 2.

vide us with a very useful source for the study of social and spatial behaviour. Moreover, the wealth of detail about space found within court records was often (though not always) incidental, rather than central, to the crux of the matter before court and so less liable to distortion.

Some of the most interesting recent work on gender and space has been distinguished by inventive and historically grounded analysis of printed texts such as ballads and drama in relation to court records. Lena Cowen Orlin's latest research focuses around a Tudor merchant-class woman and her experience of domestic space through a close study of material, architectural, cultural and legal sources⁴³. Paul Griffiths has examined the interface between the symbolic and the material using evidence of prosecutions at the London courts as well as stories and ballads to explore the meaning of night walking and the different experiences and conflicting meanings of street space for different people at different times of the day⁴⁴. Laura Gowing's study of London uses ballads and conduct books alongside archival sources such as dispute evidence to examine the contradictory ways in which women experienced space in sixteenth century London. She argues that the traditional ideology which prescribed that women should remain enclosed within domestic space could not be sustained when women moved about for their work, when houses were often shared with lodgers, and when neighbours could hear and sometimes see much of what went on inside the house. But this did not mean that women experienced space in the same way as men. Because femininity was *imagined* in a restricted range of locations, women were liable to be labelled and condemned as disorderly when out on the streets, and this disorder was articulated through languages of sexual promiscuity. Gender, she argues, was literally grounded in social, spatial practice⁴⁵.

In my own work I have found that a micro-historical approach to the study of space that draws on material evidence, augmented by prescriptive material alongside personal accounts such as diaries and memoirs together with court

⁴³ Orlin, Lena Cowen, *Locating Privacy in Tudor London*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.

⁴⁴ Griffiths, Paul, «Meanings of nightwalking in early modern England», *Seventeenth Century*, 8 (1998), pp. 212-38.

⁴⁵ «The freedom of the streets: women and social space, 1560-1640», in Griffiths, P. and Jenner, M. S. R. (eds.), *Londinopolis: essays in the cultural and social history of early modern London*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000, pp. 130-153. See also Sarti, R., *Europe at home, op. cit.*

records has complicated my understanding of gendered meanings and patterns of use of social spaces in fruitful ways. My starting point was of course the vivid picture that archaeologists have provided of the material conditions of Early Modern middling sort domestic life. Without such work my study would not have been possible. I also built on the knowledge that we have of the structure of the early modern family that has been established by demographers that have shown that many households in early modern England contained not only mothers, fathers, and children but often also servants and apprentices. It has long been recognised that seventeenth century houses were used for a wide range of activities including, living, working and entertaining. But I had noticed that, to date, little investigation had been conducted into the impact that these practices had on the character of domestic space and how experience varied between different household members. My interest was in examining some of the ways that different members of the household used and experienced the houses in which they lived and worked in Early Modern England and the manner in which space was organised and controlled.

I found that, unsurprisingly, an early modern middling sort house was not one where rigid and static social patterns were mapped upon its spaces and rooms were not strictly segregated according to gender, or any other social factor, unlike those of the elite. Spaces were multifunctional, dynamic and so their use and meaning constantly shifted. Moreover, lack of space in most households meant that separation or segregation according to rank or gender was not possible or practical. Nonetheless, the organisation of space for everyday activities played an important role in the expression of the social, age and gender hierarchies that ordered the early modern domestic world and the implications of such use and organisation carry important messages about the nature of the household itself.

In the final part of the paper, and by way of example, I thought it would be useful to share my findings about the ways that early modern middling families in England prepared, served and ate their food and what this evidence tells us about relations in particular between masters, mistresses and servants. Several studies, based on material and architectural evidence, have provided insights into the importance of the organisation of mealtimes for the marking out of social difference⁴⁶. Social and cultural historians have also shown that

⁴⁶ Studies of the historical, social and cultural significance of food include: Mennell, S., *All manner of foods: eating and taste in England and France from the middle ages to the present*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985; Goody, Jack, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study*

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eating together was very important for marking out the boundaries of belonging to the early modern household and as an arena in which family unity was expressed⁴⁷. A husband was expected to provide adequate provision for his wife and children⁴⁸. Bed and board formed part of the contractual arrangement between apprentices and masters; and servants lived and ate in the homes where they worked⁴⁹. Yet eating also had an undoubted importance in early modern society for the marking out of social difference⁵⁰. Building on this work and drawing on documents such as diaries and court depositions that record details given by middling sort people and their servants about their own domestic spaces and how they used them I was able to recover a highly contextualised, dynamic and complex picture of the links between status and authority with regard to dining practices that adds to our understanding of gender and space in valuable ways. Use and experience of space for eating was shaped by a complex combination of factors that competed to determine the ordering of the Early Modern domestic world –gender, age, status, «place» and context–.

In Early Modern England food preparation was regarded as a female task. Young male apprentices were assigned peripheral tasks such as heating the oven for baking and fetching water for cooking, showing that age and place could blur distinctions between male and female work in interesting respects. In some wealthy homes food preparation was delegated almost entirely to female servants, suggesting that work in the kitchen was beginning to be considered a menial activity⁵¹. We find, for example, that evidence provided to undermine Elizabeth Vickar's claim to be the wife of the late Thomas Atwood included a claim that she had been observed performing «the meanest and most servile offices for Edward Atwood, such as dressing his victuals and wash the dishes, wait on him at table and weed the garden, and to behave herself in all respects

in *Comparative Sociology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982; Heal, Felicity, *Hospitality in early modern England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; Sabeau, David, *Power in the blood: popular culture and village discourse in early modern Germany*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984; Hammer, C. I, «A hearty meal? The prison diets of Cranmer and Latimer», *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, III (1999), pp. 653-680.

⁴⁷ Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class*, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

⁴⁸ Wrightson, *English Society*, *op. cit.*, pp. 90, 108.

⁴⁹ Kussmaul, Ann, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 40.

⁵⁰ Mennell, *All Manner of Food*, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ Overton et al., *Production and Consumption*, p. 80.

as a common servant»⁵². Yet the popularity of handbooks such as the *Queen-Like Closet* by Hannah Wolley which appeared in 1670, designed for the mistress of a country house, indicate that competence in cooking was required even of affluent women. On the whole women in middling and lower level households prepared meals for their families, where possible assisted by one or two female servants.

Although cooking was a female activity, and so the rooms in which food were prepared were gendered in terms of use, they remained highly permeable and firmly multifunctional through the period. By the end of the sixteenth century in most middling households in England, cooking had moved out of the hall into a separate kitchen⁵³. But a variety of evidence confirms that this spatial specialisation did not automatically encourage a parallel move towards social or gender segregation, as some commentators have suggested⁵⁴. A study of probate inventories from the north-west and southern regions of Restoration England notes that the contents of kitchens included items of «comfort and colour» varying from books to weaponry, birdcages, time-pieces, looking glasses and prints⁵⁵. Prosecutions for poison record male servants, apprentices, women and men using the kitchen for a variety of purposes at different times of the day⁵⁶. In these circumstances any attempt to define working spaces according to gender or status was clearly impractical. The kitchen continued to be a highly integrated social space in which different household members co-existed and went about their respective tasks within a gendered division of labour with very little apparent segregation according to status or strict patterns of control.

By contrast, the organisation of space for eating household meals provided an arena for the overt expression of hierarchical distinctions between servants and their masters and mistresses. There were, of course, many variations in day-to-day arrangements for eating that were shaped, amongst other factors, by different working practices, the size and wealth of the household and the

⁵² Earle, Peter, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London, 1650-1750*, London, Methuen, 1994, p. 240.

⁵³ Weatherill, *Probate Inventories*, p. 150.

⁵⁴ Johnson, *Archaeology of Capitalism*, pp. 171-4.

⁵⁵ Pennell, Sarah, 'The material culture of food in early modern England, circa 1650-1750'. *Unpubl. DPhil. diss. Oxford, 1997*, pp. 236-8.

⁵⁶ ERO, Q/SBa 2/ 85; Q/SR 390/32; ERO, D/B5 Sb2/4 not foliated; D/B5 Sb2/7, fos 255v-258;

time of day or season of the year. Family members did not always eat together. Men who worked in the fields ate outside. Masters and mistresses often ate supper alone in the evening. In the cloth towns of north and central Essex early modern «fast food» was available for people to buy and to eat on the street and masters, mistresses, male and female servants frequently went out to taverns to eat and to drink ale in the evening⁵⁷.

Midday dinner was the main meal of the day in which members of the household generally ate together and its organisation carried considerable symbolic weight for marking out the hierarchy that informed relations between them. A range of arrangements are revealed in the records, depending to a large extent on the size and wealth of the household. In affluent homes, with several servants, rank was displayed by different tables. Parents and children ate at an «upper» table, sometimes joined by senior employees, while servants and apprentices lower down the pecking order ate separately at a lower table⁵⁸. The status conscious Elizabethan tutor, Thomas Wythorne, was well aware of the importance of these spatial distinctions when he stipulated to his employers that he should be «used as a friend and not a servant». He noted, with some relief, in his autobiography that, «upon this, they not only allowed me to sit at their table but also at their own mess, so long as there were not any to occupy the place ... that was a great deal my better»⁵⁹. Samuel Pepys adopted a different approach towards his sister Paulina when he agreed to let her come and live with him and his wife in November 1660. He symbolically defined her place in the pecking order of his London house downwards, stating that she would take her place «not as a sister but as a servant», and declared, «I do not let her sit at table with me»⁶⁰. A marital case that came before the bishop of London's consistory court in 1574 provides another vivid illustration of the significance of these spatial distinctions for the marking out of the household hierarchy of place. Witnesses declared that

⁵⁷ Johnson, *Archaeology of Capitalism*, pp. 46-48; ERO, Q/5Ba 2/58; Sachse, W (ed), *The Diary of Roger Lowe of Ashton-in-Makefield, Lancashire 1663-74*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1938, pp. 13-14, 20, 22, 23, 26, 34, 41, 43, 44, 58, 68, 79.

⁵⁸ Overton et. al., *Production and Consumption*, op. cit., p. 130; Melville, Jennifer, 'The use and organisation of domestic space in late seventeenth-century London'. Unpubl. PhD diss. Cambridge, p. 216; Earle, *City Full of People*, pp. 240-1; Meldrum, Tim, *Domestic Service and Gender 1660-1750*, Harlow, Longman, 2000, p. 146.

⁵⁹ Osborn, V. (ed.), *The Autobiography of Thomas Wythorne*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 94.

⁶⁰ Latham, R.C. and Matthews, W. (eds.), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, London, G. Bell and Sons, 1970, p. 188.

Elizabeth, the adulterous wife of the printer Henry Denham, disrupted domestic order in a scandalous manner by moving her lover, the apprentice Isaac Binge, from the lower table to the upper table to sit beside her to eat⁶¹.

In households of more modest means, with fewer rooms and less furniture, servants and apprentices ate at the same table as the master and mistress. But gender, generational and status hierarchies were still reflected and reinforced by systems of seating. Subordinate members of the household of both sexes were expected to sit lower down the table, on less comfortable forms, stools and benches, or, if chairs were in short supply, children probably had to stand⁶². A pilot count of seating furniture made from 160 probate inventories from just over the county border in eastern Suffolk in 1584 found an average ratio of 1 chair to every 4.3 other seat places. Over time chairs became more common and also more comfortable but seating continued to reflect rank. Inventory lists invariably distinguished between «great», «little», «small» or «ordinary» chairs⁶³. The overlapping influences of gender and status are apparent in these contexts. The master sat at the head of the table, often in the only single chair. The distinct position of the wife, as deputy governor, was also marked out by her superior place at the table, where she sat in a chair, above servants and children of both sexes⁶⁴. An extract from a chap-book of the period highlights the disadvantages of age with regard to the allocation of place at table. In 1685 an unknown commentator on courting couples wrote:

«above all let them [young maids and men] be respectful to their parents and when they come to the Table, seat themselves last in a place suitable for their degree, not contending therein, nor seeming dissatisfied, though they sit below their inferiors»⁶⁵.

Legal cases also show how the spatial organisation of mealtimes was used to mark out the hierarchy of place. We find that in evidence given in support of Jane Lillington, whose status as wife or servant was at issue, witnesses emphasised that she «sat at the upper end of the table and carved as mistress of the family»⁶⁶. Customs of social and spatial separation became more complete by the eighteenth century, as the number of rooms in houses increased, tables

⁶¹ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

⁶² Sarti, *Europe at Home*, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

⁶³ Garrard, *English probate inventories and their use*, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁶⁴ Johnson, *Archaeology of Capitalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 175; Sarti, *Europe at Home*, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

⁶⁵ Pennell, 'Material Culture of Food', *op. cit.*, p. 228.

⁶⁶ Meldrum, *Domestic Service*, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

reduced in size and increased in number. By this stage employees were more often required to eat in the kitchen or in the hall, while the master and his family ate in the parlour⁶⁷.

The household pecking order was also demonstrated by «the order and manner of servants» access to food. An amusing account given by the Lancashire apprentice, Roger Lowe, of «his first meal at the servants» table of a local cleric, implies an absence of even the rudiments of order at the lower table:

«Every servant [had] a bowlful of *podige* [pottage] anon a great trencher like a pott lid I and all the others had, with a great quantity of *podige*. The dishes else were but small and few. I put bread into my *podige* thinking to have a spoon, but none came. While I was thus in expectation of that I could not obtaine, every man having a horn spoon in their pockets, having done their *podige* fell to the other dishes. Thought I, these hungry Amallkites that I am gotten amongst will devour all if I do not set upon a resolution. ... Thought I what must I do with all these, wished in my heart many times that those hungry Rogues had them [dishes of food] in their guts, but that would not do, for still they were there before me, and I durst not set them away, though it was manners so to have done».

Lowe decided to eat his pottage as quickly as possible, but burnt his tongue, preventing him from finishing his meal. He left his food, «with a hungry belly but a lamenting heart, and ere since I have been cautious how to supp pottage»⁶⁸. Yet Lowe's obvious horror at what he experienced, suggests that mealtimes in middling households may often have followed more orderly rules.

A case of poison in a London house provides some illuminating insights into the ordering of mealtimes at middling social levels and so is worth recounting in some depth. It involved the attempt by Edward Frances, a «blackmore servant» (probably a slave), to murder his master Thomas Dymock, over a nine-month period in 1692, in an effort to gain his liberty. On one occasion Frances managed to put rat poison into some water gruel in preparation on the kitchen fire. Thomas Dymock's wife Rebekah told the court that she tried to tempt her husband into eating some supper after he had fallen ill from drinking ale poisoned by Frances a few days before. After her husband refused the gruel Rebekah decided to eat a portion her self and ordered her maid to bring some to her. The maid, Joanne Lichfield, duly brought the gruel to her mistress and then asked her «if she may eat the rest of the water grewell». Rebekah agreed. However it is interesting to note that before Joanne actually

⁶⁷ Overton et al., *Production and Consumption*, op. cit., pp. 94, 119, 130-4.

⁶⁸ Sachse, *Diary of Roger Lowe*, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

sat down to eat the food she felt obliged first to ask her master's daughter and then Edward Frances if they would eat it. Only when they both refused did Joanne feel able to take «the water grewell» and eat it herself.

Gender, age and «place» thus intersected in complex ways to regulate the pecking order of serving the meal: the master was offered food first, followed by the mistress, the children of the nuclear family, the male servant and then the female servant. Sadly, the family cat who came lowest of all on the social ladder, ate the «grewell» that was left over and died soon afterwards⁶⁹.

The early modern house was an arena that resonated with power and symbolism throughout the early modern period even in more modest middling sort homes. Its organisation was vitally important for the marking out and maintaining of hierarchy that sustained order in the early modern domestic world. It was not simply a passive backdrop to a social system that had structural origins elsewhere. The way people used space reflected and, in turn had effects back upon, the way social relations between masters and mistresses and their employees were expressed, reaffirmed, challenged or changed. Yet this short investigation is able to show that space in the Early Modern house was not static but fluid, highly dynamic and variable according to a number of factors including the personality of individuals, time of day, size and wealth of the household, the local economy and occupation. It also varied according to time and use and was determined in the different contexts addressed by different social factors (status, gender, age and place). The subordinate status of servants was mapped out spatially by the seating arrangements at the dinner table. On the other hand food preparation, although gendered, was an activity in which interdependence more than hierarchy between household members was expressed⁷⁰. I would argue that recognition of these complexities requires a revision of interpretations of the significance of changes in the organisation of domestic space *over* time. Specialised spaces for different functions were created but seventeenth century houses were busy places and room use was not set in stone. Almost all spaces remained accessible to everyone and continued to be multifunctional throughout the period. In these circumstances changes in the physical structure of houses seem less clearly related to sharper spatial and social distinctions between servants and their employers than has sometimes been assumed.

⁶⁹ Melville, 'Use and Organisation of Space', *op. cit.*, p. 221.

⁷⁰ Flather, Amanda, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England*, Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society, 2007, pp. 75-93.

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In conclusion I hope that I have shown by my own work that I am not recommending here that we «throw the baby out with the bath water». By that I mean that I recognise that of course physical evidence and documents such as plans, maps and inventories remain vital tools. Without them a study of gender and space would not be possible. More traditional aspects of historical research must also be combined with spatial analysis –social, economic, political– to construct appropriate contextual explanations and interpretations. But to consider the more complex historical questions of gendered spatial identity, power, perception and representation, more refined methods and a variety of sources need to be deployed. Gender studies and spatial studies have always been interdisciplinary, theoretically as well as historically informed. It is important that this continues to be the case and to work against unhelpful divisions such as the ones this symposium aims to bridge. If we do so then new insights will become available in part because of a turn to new kinds of evidence or to new strategies for reading evidence that we've already got. Since in studies of Early Modern gender and space we have a relative scarcity of evidence, it is very important that we make the most of what we have and that we invest energy and expertise in interpretation so that work in the field can develop yet other ways of thinking about questions of gender, space and identity through further research into the spaces where we see men and women of different age and status using their domestic spaces for different purposes that is sensitive to the negotiations required to organise the multiple realms of activity created by life and work.