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Constructing Middle-Class Milieus in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Labor of *Geselligkeit*

The restructuring of kinship relations in Europe during the late eighteenth century was characterized by the fundamental importance of endogamy.[1] Through marriage and friendship alliances, people became active in constructing milieus that brought together those with the same cultural attitudes and styles.

Endogamy occurred through repeated marriages into the same families or into circles of families that constituted complex alliances among each other. The Delius family from Bielefeld and Bremen, for example, married into the same families over many generations.[2] Marriages between cousins were structurally prominent in nineteenth-century familial endogamy, but there were other ways for families to link themselves repeatedly over time without a particular couple being related by blood. The Göttingen historian Reinhold Pauli, for instance, described how Karl Richard Lepsius's son Bernard had studied in Göttingen and frequented their house, falling in love with one of his daughters. Because the boy's mother was the only daughter of the long-deceased sister of his old friend Parthey and the closest friend of Reinhold's mother, "old connections were renewed again through this marriage."[3]

But the endogamy that was characteristic of nineteenth-century kinship also (and perhaps primarily) referred to marriage within the same cultural and social circles. Marriage was oriented toward finding someone 'familiar.' There are many examples of young men developing a close relationship with a particular family before seeking out one of the daughters for a spouse. Christopher Johnson has characterized this new kinship structure in terms of 'horizontalization.'[4] It is one where the intense sibling, cousin, and in-law relations proliferated along horizontal axes, enveloping wide nets of interacting kin, who reinforced particular cultural styles, guided social reproduction, supported entrepreneurial and political activity, and provided aid and counsel during periods of celebration and crisis. Intense family life was decisive in the creation of cultural understanding and practice, and the social intercourse between groups of families was crucial for the formation of social (*Schichten*) consciousness.

I have previously offered an account of the structural aspects of European nineteenth-century kinship systems and how these systems worked to preserve social boundaries, form and maintain alliances, and inculcate implicit understandings:

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1 For discussions about nineteenth-century endogamy, see David Warren Sabean, *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher, and Jon Mathieu, eds., *Kinship in Europe: Approaches to Long-Term Development (1300–1900)* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2007); Christopher H. Johnson, "Die Geschwister Archipel: Bruder-Schwester-Liebe und Klassenformation in Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts," *L'Homme: Zeitschrift für feministische Gesschichtswissenschaft* 13 (2002): 50–67; David Warren Sabean and Christopher H. Johnson, eds., *Sibling Relations and the Transformations of European Kinship, 1300–1900* (New York: Berghahn, 2011).

2 *Deutsches Geschlechterbuch*, vol. 193 (Limburg an der Lahn, 1987), edited by Uta von Delius.

3 Elisabeth Pauli, *Reinhold Pauli: Lebenserinnerungen nach Briefen und Tagebüchern zusammengestellt* (Halle a. S., 1895): 335.

4 Christopher H. Johnson, "Die Geschwister Archipel": 50–67.

> Kinship and the alliance system of the nineteenth century were crucial for concentrating and distributing capital, providing strategic support over the life course of individuals, structuring dynasties and recognizable patrilineal groupings, maintaining access points, entrances, and exits to social milieus through marriage, godparentage, and guardianship, creating cultural and social boundaries by extensive festive, ludic, competitive, and charitative transactions, configuring and reconfiguring possible alliances between subpopulations, developing a training ground for character formation, shaping desire and offering practice in code and symbol recognition ("something in the way she moves"), training rules and practices into bodies, and integrating networks of culturally similar people.[5]

Life Trajectories through Houses: Male Autobiographies

Karl Ewald Hasse, professor of medicine and teacher of Robert Koch and Wilhelm Wundt, came from an academic family, and both he and his brother became academics.[6] His father arranged for him to live with one of his friends when he went off to university, primarily because this 'house' was the center of a constant stream of local and foreign guests, not unlike the house he grew up in. Such a house was a meeting point for cultural figures of all kinds: artists, literati, scientists. He makes it clear that his sense of taste and his own style of life was deeply rooted in the kinds of houses that he lived in and had access too. There was an easy flow from houses where he encountered family and kin to houses where he was introduced into the intellectual life of the university and the towns and cities he passed through. Everywhere he went he found the same familiar milieus. In the Leipzig he grew up in, he was surrounded by relatives, something he thought of as crucial for his socialization. He mentions a series of houses that were key to the construction of the kind of milieus in which he and the rest of his family felt at home. He talks about close relations with several houses into which his relatives eventually married. He himself was surrounded by cousins, and his uncles and aunts configured the life in which he, his siblings, his cousins, and his friends took part. As he grew up, there were groups of young people around the core group of relatives busy with music, dancing, living pictures (*tableaux vivants*), and intellectual games. Throughout his time as a student and when he was developing himself professionally, he spent a great deal of time in the various houses of his brothers-in-law. And every week, his father gathered together all of the wider family.

Not all families or houses were alike. One house Hasse visited had medical professionals in constant attendance, and it was here that Hasse developed the contacts and found the support for his later career as a doctor. In another house, that of the Brockhaus family, he found a meeting point for writers, and like many other middle-class young men of the period, he cultivated relationships over an extended period with the house into which he eventually married. Heinrich Brockhaus's ward was an intimate friend of his sister and Brockhaus was anxious to be allied with the Hasse family. After completing his education, Hasse found employment in Zurich. He remarks about the difficulty of leaving an environment of friends and relatives for a city where he was a stranger. But then he was immediately taken up by a series of 'houses.' The whole time he was there, a constant stream of relatives passed through, and he and his wife did the rounds of kin-visiting throughout the year. He later took up a position in Heidelberg, where once again *Geselligkeit* (sociality)

5 David Warren Sabean, *Kinship in Neckarhausen*: 451.

6 Karl Ewald Hasse, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1902).

structured the rich and varied life he describes. Finally, in Göttingen, kinship and *Geselligkeit* provided constant subjects for consideration. Indeed, his autobiography is devoted less to his work or scientific breakthroughs than to the contacts he cultivated in the many houses he spent his time and how these connections played a role in his career. He has little to say about his teaching, preferring to list students who were professionally successful – one of whom married his daughter. Kin even show up in his circle of clients. His nephew studied with him and, through his patronage, ended up as a professor.

Hasse's autobiography is fascinating for the transitions it demonstrates in his reflections on professional milieus and family networks. The key intersection for him seems to lie in *Geselligkeit*. When he lived in Switzerland, people from all over Europe liked to visit. Medical professionals from abroad used their contact with him to show up for vacations and collegial interaction. While he frequently lists some of his famous contacts, his recollections center on the houses where he was welcomed and on the openness of his own house to visitors. More important than narrow contacts with others in his own discipline were houses providing a variety of cultural entertainment, particularly music. 'House-sociality' offers the possibility of networks extending well beyond his own profession. Many of his closest friends were colleagues, and they entered his family life in many ways, including by becoming godparents to his children. As soon as his sisters or daughters married, Hasse immediately talks about the brother- or son-in-law and his house, pointing out how long-term relationships even among kin are structured through the idiom of the house.

Cultivating the House, Cultivating Relationships: Women's Work

There are significant silences in men's autobiographies. Hasse, for example, wrote very little about his wife and much more about his father-in-law and brother-in-law. He lists this or that person whom he met, but seldom locates them in a particular space – in the particular house where he encountered them. A house might be given a name, that of the man who headed it, but the most important figure for him, often unnamed, is the wife or 'mother' of the house. It is precisely she who was responsible for the house's style.

For such women, we also see a seamless transition between kin, friends, and neighbors, with kin offering the structural center around which other networks were constructed. Characteristic of women's activities were 'cousin circles' or groups of sisters and sisters-in-law who coordinated family news and information and configured larger kin networks. Of course, much of the family-visiting involved men, even if most of the planning and organization was carried out by women. All of the cooking, cleaning, washing up, directing the household servants, nursing, and the like was done by women.

Quite central to the dynamics of kinship cultivation was the hospitality provided by wives, sisters, and daughters. Hospitality provided by women, as well as their planning activities, was at the heart of integrating extensive kinship networks and the sociability of professional and entrepreneurial men. Lorenz von Stein considered the role of wives to be critical in the ability of men to create social networks, referring abstractly to male "social thought" and female "social feeling."[7]

7 Lorenz von Stein, *Die Frau auf dem socialen Gebiete* (Stuttgart: Kessinger, 1880); Lorenz von Stein, *Die Frau; ihre Bildung und Lebensaufgabe* (Berlin: Diedmann, 1890).

Ernst Brandes made the same distinction as von Stein between public and private spheres and observed the fundamental importance of wives and mothers in bridging them. Mediating between the public and the private was a sphere where men and women met on an equal basis, an area he called *Geselligkeit*.[8] In such mixed society, he argued, everything orbited around women. Women framed the spaces in which such gatherings took place, as well as the forms of interaction.

There are not many accounts of the actual work that women carried out, but the autobiographies and collections of correspondence from the nineteenth century provide hints to allow us to piece together a sense of what was involved. It is important to distinguish three aspects of women's labor in terms of the presentation of the house: the physical work, the development and cultivation of networks, and the development and maintenance of the particular culture, manners, and style of the family. The rich house-sociality that Hasse and others participated in was the subject of extensive planning, networking, and physical labor on the part of the women of the house.

Louise Otto provides an authoritative description of the associated household labor.[9] During the 1830s and 1840s, she explains, the household economy involved far more complex labor than when she was writing, in the late 1870s. Taking on more servants later in the century did not reduce the labor, but rather changed the nature of household management. First of all, she pointed out that most households were larger at the start of the nineteenth century, so that even a craftsman had journeymen, helpers, and apprentices living and boarding in the house. She describes the complex labor requirements, from baking, cooking, and preserving and drying fruit, to making and mending clothing and doing the laundry, all of which could involve weeks of labor. The list of actual tasks should be fairly clear, but what Otto stresses is the *Geselligkeit* of the work among all the women of the household, and that the many activities were tied up with the openness of the house to the larger network of kin, friends, and acquaintances. The point here is that women's labor should not be taken for granted. What is interesting is that all of the autobiographies by men that I have read take it for granted. And they reduce it to the symbolic figure of the mother of the house – her graciousness and style – mentioned only in passing. What matters to men for the most part is the tone of the houses that they frequented.

The creation of a *Bildungsbürger* lifestyle in the nineteenth century had a great deal to do with the familial dynamics and house-sociality created by women. Emil Fischer, the Berlin professor of chemistry and Nobel Prize laureate, spent his long bachelorhood on professional development in the presence of male friends and colleagues. The lecture hall, laboratory, meals, walking tours, and visits played a core role in developing his network. But all of his lasting relationships seem to have been filtered through house-based *Geselligkeit*. Once he was married, he could not conceive of his professional life outside of maintaining a "great" house, though here his wife unfortunately failed him; he quickly found a more suitable female companion to take her place after her premature death. There seems to have been two parallel networks for a man like Fischer, though patronage and academic political discourse could not be separated from the social life of the home. Throughout his academic career, from his time as a student to his retirement, women controlled access to the kinds of venues where he was anxious to spend his time. Women were busy weaving professional and marital networks. His autobiography reveals a dense network of academic marriages. Fischer was the patron of at least four of his closest kin for chemistry professorships and he was

8 Ernst Brandes, *Betrachtungen über das weibliche Geschlecht und dessen Ausbildung in dem geselligen Leben*, 3 vols. (Hannover, 1802): vol. 1, 76–83, 91; vol. 2, 27–8; vol. 3, 172ff.

9 Louise Otto, *Frauenleben im deutschen Reich: Erinnerungen aus der Vergangenheit mit Hinweis auf Gegenwart und Zukunft* (Leipzig, 1876).

likely instrumental for many other contacts through the rich and varied networks in the houses he frequented.

It was commonplace for people in the nineteenth century to talk about friendships opening up the door to a whole family and extending to a family's larger circle of friends and relatives. At crucial points in his autobiography, the Hamburg patrician Emil Lehmann describes the way new acquaintances introduced him to the social life and friendship of their whole families.[10] *Freundschaft mit unserer ganzen Familie* ("friendship with our whole family") repeats itself throughout his account. The Swiss anatomist Wilhelm His develops the theme of visiting houses at each stage in his career – as a student in Basel, Berlin, and Vienna, as a young academic in Basel, and as a professor in Leipzig.[11] He relates how he entered Berlin society through two particular families. Especially attractive for him was the Friedländer house, the center of literati, intellectuals, and artists. By the time he got to Vienna, the mother of one house had decided to invest in his self-presentation, although given his upper-bourgeois background and his seamless transition from circle to circle, he must have already been quite presentable in the first place. Everywhere he lived and throughout his career, families and houses were of central importance and enabled him to enter society. Each of them was dominated by a 'house mother' and each had its own style. The Göttingen historian Georg Gottfried Gervinus provides a contrasting account.[12] His youth had been spent preparing to be a merchant and reading Romantic novels. By the time he was about to set off to study in Heidelberg in his early twenties, he clearly had not developed the requisite manners for the academic circles he now aspired to. At that point, two women who had married into *Beamtenfamilien* decided to take on the task of making him socially respectable. They worked on overcoming his bashfulness and ridding him of his ill manners. As he put it, visiting their houses on a regular basis and learning to act properly around women was crucial to his cultural and social development. Indeed, for a year, he joined them in their house every single evening. Marriage was just as much a door to a larger family as friendship was. Socially, culturally, and economically, friendship and marriage provided bonds not just between individuals but between houses, families, lineages, dynasties, and networks.

People of the nineteenth century had to learn to manage quite different kinds of networks, and this delicately choreographed system involved the presentation of each family and its members according to the rules of the particular stratum and cultural sphere in which they wished to operate. The private house and its activities were intricately articulated with a larger network of social connections and aesthetic assumptions. The education of both men and women in open and fluid systems where couples had to cooperate in tasks of social representation required protracted drilling in taste, morality, sentiment, and style.

Houses, Families, and *Geselligkeit*

Male autobiographies from the nineteenth century describe the many aspects of work that relate to the construction of the nineteenth-century bourgeois house. These accounts include a constant refrain about houses, families, and *Geselligkeit*. The aspect that I want to underline here is the dual

10 Emil Lehmann, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 3 vols. (Kissingen, [1885]–1895), vol. 1: 29, 61.
11 Wilhelm His der Ältere, *Lebenserinnerungen und ausgewählte Schriften* (Bern: Verlag Hans Huber, 1965).
12 Georg Gottfried Gervinus, *G. G. Gervinus' Leben: von ihm selbst 1860* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1893).

role of the house – a stage for *Geselligkeit*, on the one hand, and to create and sustain networks of family and friends, on the other. Both of these tasks involved complex forms of labor that were largely in the hands of women. They acted as the doorkeepers, controlling who had access to the space in which the social interaction of like-minded people took place. In this way, women's work was fundamental to patrolling the boundaries of class. They determined access and exclusion, and were crucial to the formation of political, familial, and cultural alliances. Studying this kind of work tells us about the formation of class *habitus*.

The house was central to the configuration of milieus. It was here that a sense of taste and style was established. Mediating the public and the domestic sphere, the house was a place for women to impose form and configure networks. Hospitality was a result of considerable effort, integrating kin, friends, colleagues, and strangers. This laid the foundation for like to find like, which supported nineteenth-century kinship construction and class formation.