

THE CENTRE FOR PRIVACY STUDIES WORK METHOD

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Prologue

The Danish National Research Foundation Centre for Privacy Studies (PRIVACY) is dedicated to interdisciplinary and collaborative research into notions of privacy and the private in the early modern period (1500–1800).¹ The PRIVACY research team includes social and cultural historians, church historians as well as historians of architecture, of law and of political ideas. When we gather scholars from so many different disciplines each with its distinct scholarly profile and approaches, joint points of orientation are key. We need a shared analytical approach and a set of common landmarks that guide our scholarly efforts. At PRIVACY, we have three such sets of landmarks that serve as investigatory tools in our joint work with the early modern sources – be they, for instance, texts, groundplans or assemblages of archival documents. The first concerns terminology; the second concerns the areas in which notions of privacy and the private are negotiated; the third concerns the semantic realms related to privacy and the private.²

Terminology³

Searches for words with the root *priv* generate insight into historical notions of 'private' and 'privacy'.⁴

¹ The Centre for Privacy Studies is funded by the Danish National Research Foundation (DNRF 138) and housed at the Theological Faculty of the University of Copenhagen in collaboration with the Royal Danish Academy: Architecture, Design, Conservation in Copenhagen. The Centre was founded in 2017 and is directed by Mette Birkedal Bruun; in April 2021 it houses some 23 postdoctoral scholars and PhD-students. The principal research focus is directed to notions of privacy and the private in Western Europe (1500–1800), but we reach out to a geographically and chronologically wider span of research interests through seminars and collaborations. The Centre is driven by a vision of collaborative and interdisciplinary research (www.teol.ku.dk/privacy).

² This text includes a revised version of sections of Mette Birkedal Bruun, 'Privacy in Early Modern Christianity and Beyond: Traces and Approaches', *Annali Istituto storico italo-germanico/Jahrbuch des italienisch-deutschen historischen Instituts in Trient*, 44 (2018/2), 33–54 (pp. 33, 46–49). It is the product of the daily joint research at Centre for Privacy Studies and owes a lot to the scholarly efforts of the entire PRIVACY research team. For an introduction to the Centre work method viewed against a more extensive scholarly foil, see Bruun, 'Towards an Approach to early modern Privacy: The retirement of the great Condé' in *Early Modern Privacy: Sources and Approaches*, ed. M. Green, L.C. Nørgaard and M.B. Bruun (Leiden: Brill, 2021, forthcoming).

³ This approach owes something to the semasiological aspect identified in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*; cf. Reinhart Koselleck, 'Einleitung', in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexicon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. by O. Brunner, W. Conze and R. Koselleck, 8 vols (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972-1997), I (1972), pp. XIII–XXV (pp. XX–XXI). At PRIVACY, the first aim is to study how *priv** words are deployed in particular idioms, texts, and genres at a given location. This means that our first interest rests with particular appearances of such words in particular sources and their linguistic impetus within that source.

⁴ Attempts at a research bibliography are futile; suffice it here to mention a few landmarks. Classical legal

The terminological approach stays close to the sources, and it is well suited to grasp the broad array of historical meanings of *priv** words, ranging from the corporeal and run-of-the-mill connotations associated with terms such as *privy* and *private parts* to loftier matters of state associated with the vocabulary related to the *Privy Council* or the *conseil privé*. Strictly speaking, the *Geheimrat* eludes this focus, which gives us a first hint as to the blind angles of the terminological approach.

A terminological focus may help us sidestep commonplace presumptions and attune our scholarly attention to unexpected variants. We may work on different scales. Perhaps we simply keep an eye on *priv** words when we work with early modern sources. Perhaps we do a more systematic search, targetting a particular genre of sources or doing word searches with a more or less refined technological mediation, thus entering into research areas such as corpus linguistics. In other cases, a concern with *priv** words may not be sufficient, and we are well advised to broaden the terminological search to include cognate terms such as, for the French material, *particulier* or *intime*. The relationship

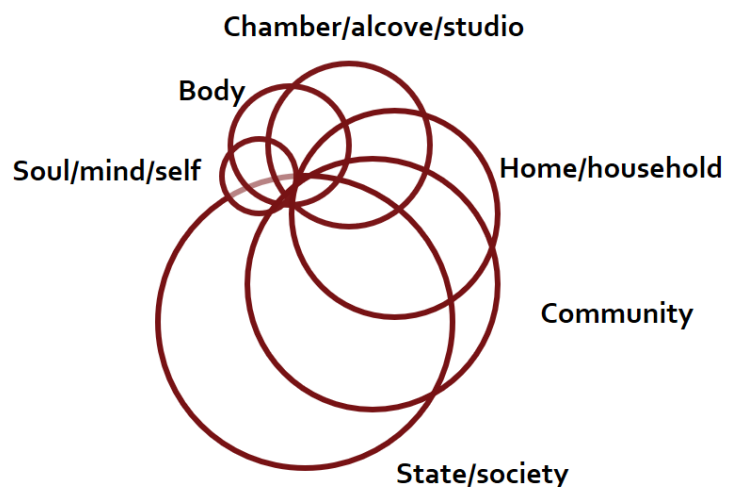
definitions of what is private, be it status, property or civic rights, lay the foundation, and legal understandings permeate historical and current conceptions, the latter generally rooted in the definition of privacy as ‘the right to be let alone’ presented in S.D. Warren and L.D. Brandeis, ‘The Right to Privacy’, *Harvard Law Review*, 4 (1890), no. 5, 193–220, with the analysis of surveillance and society in A.F. Westin, *Privacy and Freedom* (New York: Atheneum, 1968) as another milestone. Sociologists have studied the private as a negation of the public. For example, Richard Sennett’s classic *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) examines the progress of private values in an urban setting over and against what is public and common and Barrington Moore Jr. applies a broad sociological horizon in *Privacy: Studies in Social and Cultural History* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1984). For a general historical presentation, see above all David Vincent, *Privacy: A Short History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016). Bart van der Sloot and Aviva de Groot (eds), *The Handbook of Privacy Studies: An interdisciplinary Introduction* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018) focuses on contemporary perspectives, but includes a sideglance to history in Sjoerd Keulen and Ronald Kroeze’s chapter ‘Privacy from a Historical Perspective’, pp. 21–56. Several works with a contemporary focus includes a historical perspective, see, e.e.g, Joseph Cannataci (eds), *The Individual and Privacy I* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); Marie-Theres Tinnefeld and Wolfgang Schmale, *Privatheit im digitalen Zeitalter* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2014). Regarding early modern notions of the private Dena Goodman keenly pinpoints 1989 as a watershed. This year saw English translations of both Jürgen Habermas’s *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Neuwied – Berlin: Luchterhand, 1962) (by T. Burger) and the third volume, *De la Renaissance aux Lumières* (1986), of Philippe Ariès, Georges Duby and Roger Chartier, *Histoire de la vie privée* (Paris: Seuil, 1985–87) (by A. Goldhammer); D. Goodman, ‘Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime’, *History and Theory*, 31 (1992), no. 1, 1–20 (p. 20). The latter remains of interest, but should be supplemented with more recent specialized analyses of early modern privacy in particular contexts, be they religious culture (Alexandra Walsham, Charlotte Methuen and John Doran (eds), *Religion and the Household*, Studies in Church History 50. Boydell and Brewer and The Ecclesiastical History Society (2014); Jessica Martin and Alec Ryrie (eds), *Private and Domestic Devotion in Early Modern Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012)), literature (Ronald Huebert, *Privacy in the Age of Shakespeare* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2016); Mary Trull, *Performing Privacy and Gender in Early Modern Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), spatial dimensions (Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994)) or social history and material culture (Annik Pardaillhé-Galabrun, *La naissance de l’intime: 3000 foyers parisiens XVII^e-XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988)). Historical interest in privacy often comes with a gender perspective: see, e.g., Jean B. Elshtain, *Public man, private woman: women in social and political thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) and Corinne S. Abate, *Privacy, Domesticity, and Women in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2003); see also Anna Becker, ‘Gender in the History of Early Modern Political Thought’, *The Historical Journal*, 60 (2017), no. 4, 843–63.

between *priv** words and its cognates outlines local networks of meaning that are context sensitive and demand careful interpretation. This approach also leaves us with the question of how to study the non-verbal terms of, for example, visual programmes which draw on layers of aggregated symbolic meaning.

This strong focus on the context of specific kinds of language-use warns against too general conclusions as to the *priv** terminology. With its proximity to the sources, the terminological approach risks leading to a form of atomization, bringing to the fore a multitude of occurrences of *priv** words, each of which comes with its own context in a particular historical situation. To borrow an expression from von Moos, this approach risks winding up in 'reiner Quellensprache' – that is, parroting the idiom of the sources themselves and leaving us with a host of historical *priv** words in an unhandy 1:1 scale.⁵ Moreover, the terminological focus does not necessarily capture all the aspects that we associate with privacy, and trawling the sources with a terminological net yields but a section of the broader picture.

Heuristic zones

Often early modern sources have no *priv** words, but are nonetheless relevant for an investigation of perceptions or experiences pertaining to privacy. The PRIVACY scholars' second approach is not dependent on terms. We deploy a heuristic set of zones that represent early modern areas of theorizing, regulation and practice related to privacy and the private. These zones are neither exhaustive nor absolute, but they do offer a common structure that enables us to correlate widely different sources and disciplinary approaches.⁶ The zones serve as a catalyst for historical analysis.



⁵ Peter von Moos, 'Die Begriffe "öffentlich" und "privat"', *Saeculum*, 49 (1998), 161–92 (p. 163). See also von Moos, 'Das Öffentliche und das Private im Mittelalter. Für einen kontrollierten Anachronismus', in *Das Öffentliche und Private in der Vormoderne*, ed. by G. Melville and P. von Moos (Vienna – Cologne – Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1998), pp. 3–83; von Moos, "Öffentlich" und "privat" im Mittelalter. Zu einem Problem historischer Begriffsbildung (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2004) (lectures given in 1996), especially the *Methodenkritische Schlußüberlegungen*, pp. 92–99.

⁶ This approach owes something to the onomasiological aspect identified in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*; cf. Koselleck, *Einleitung*, p. XXI. It differs by its deployment of heuristic zones as a means to secure a shared focus for the interdisciplinary research team.

They point to spatial registers that are relevant not least, but not only, in relation to architecture, and they delineate particular practices and ideal entities as well as their intersections. Each zone thus gives rise to historical debates regarding privacy, and the thresholds between zones potentially involve a negotiation where the contours of an individual or a group of individuals come to the fore.⁷ We take special interest in the thresholds: how and where is the boundary between, say, the street and the house demarcated and described; is the retreat into an alchove perceived as an escalation of privacy; how are the difference of activities and characteristics pertaining to respectively the body and the mind classified – and are such classifications related to privacy or the private?

Just as interesting, however, are the overlaps between zones. When we consider such overlaps, our attention is directed to questions such as: to what extent and by which means do rulers and societies access and regulate the minds of the subjects; which societal circumstances provoke a change in this regard; when and how do members of, for example, a civic community gain access to private homes; how do the collective norms of a community or a household determine the bodily practices of an individual? Such questions spring from the zone structure and aid our joint focus on, for example, legislative boundaries between household and community, decrees regarding individual

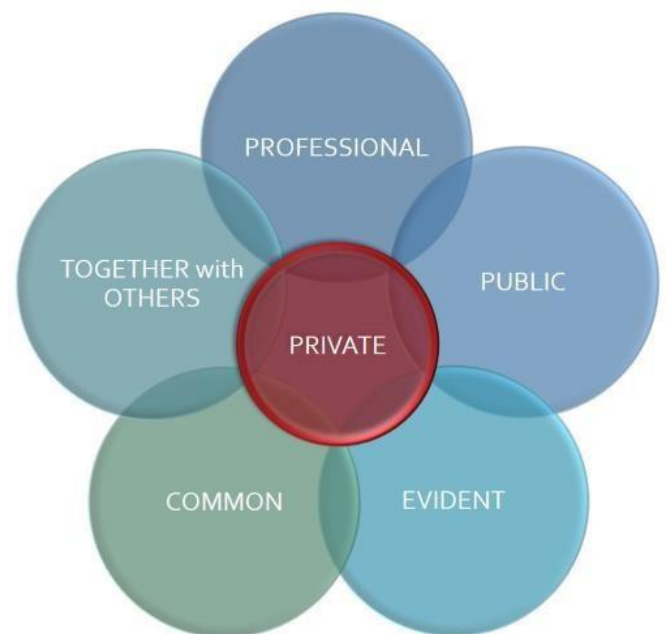
⁷ As Becker shows, some of these zones have historical parallels in early modern political theory; Anna Becker, 'Der Haushalt in der politischen Theorie der Frühen Neuzeit', in *Das Haus in der Geschichte Europas: Ein Handbuch*, ed. by J. Eibach and I. Schmidt-Voges (Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter, 2005), pp. 667–84. Social theory inspire, but do not control the identification of the heuristic zones; e.g., Erving Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places. Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings* (New York: Glencoe, 1963) and *Relations in Public. Microstudies of the Public Order* (New York: Basic Books, 1971); Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique. Folie et déraison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); and *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 3: *Le souci de soi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). Further theoretical stimulus has come from works such as Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*; and Roland Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble. Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1976-1977)* (Paris: Seuil, 2002). While such works inspire, their distance from the historical sources is often too wide for immediate bridging, as is apparent in historians' criticism of Habermas's *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*; see, e.g., for feminist evaluations, Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Marilyn Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Ideology of Domesticity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); for warnings against deploying Habermas' philosophical approach as a paradigm for historical studies, see, e.g., D. Goodman, 'Public Sphere and Private Life', pp. 1–20; Alastair Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England: News Culture and the Overbury Affair, 1603–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Brian Cowan, 'Rethinking Habermas, Gender and Sociability in Early Modern French and British Historiography', in *Making Space Public in Early Modern Europe: Geography, Performance, Privacy*, ed. by A. Vanhaelen and J.P. Ward (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 41–53; for a criticism of his privileging of print as an agent of social change, see Steven Mullaney, 'What's Hamlet to Habermas? Spatial Literacy, Theatrical Publication and the Publics of the Early Modern Public Stage', in *Making Space Public*, pp. 17–40; see also the chapters in Bronwen Wilson and Paul Yachnin (eds), *Making Publics in Early Modern Europe: People, Things, Forms of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2011); for an overturning of his observations regarding salons and coffeehouses, see Antoine Lilti, *Le Monde des Salons: Sociabilité et Mondanité à Paris au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2005) and Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); for a modification of his social and chronological focus, see Joan DeJean, *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). See further the observations regarding the impact of Arendt's definition of public/private on historical research in Becker, 'Gender in the History', p. 848; and the remarks on the traps involved in applying concepts such as public and private in scholarly discussions across languages in von Moos, *Die Begriffe*, pp. 166–74.

bodies or the theoretizing of the household (*oeconomia*) vis-à-vis the societal order (*politia*) as well as the regulations of practices that come out of it.

The heuristic zones help us to put such questions to the sources and to establish common ground between disciplines. Since the work with the zones takes as its point of departure conceptions of privacy that are to some extent modern, this approach comes with the risk of anachronism.⁸ We pay heed to possible projections of our own more or less conscious assumption that certain phenomena are particularly private, be they artefacts (particular pieces of clothes, mementos, containers for personal belongings), activities (sleep, sex, hygiene, contemplation), spaces (home, bed, bedroom, latrine, confessional), forms of communication (letters, one on one conversations, coded communication, sharing of secrets) and so forth.

Semantic mapping

There is no stable definition of privacy, and it is not the aim of PRIVACY to provide one. We do, however, aspire to outline a semantic taxonomy that helps us to approach systematically the meanings and valences connoted by terms and notions of privacy and the private. In its Latin root and historical development, the adjective *privatus* is a negation, and notions of privacy or the private, whether they are *priv** words or the fruit of a zone analysis, are often characterized by being the opposite of, or at least in tension with, concepts such as the public, official, professional, communal, evident and so forth.⁹



The semantic map is a basic template for a taxonomy of the meanings and connotations of privacy and the private. As an organic tool, it may be adjusted and proliferated as we extend and

⁸ Von Moos, for one, warns against taking modern conceptions as the point of departure for *Begriffsgeschichte*; particularly with notions such as private and public the definition of which are blurry; *Die Begriffe*, p. 163 in a discussion of Lucian Hölscher, 'Öffentlichkeit', in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. by Brunner, Conze and Koselleck, vol. 4 (1978), pp. 413–67.

⁹ Lewis and Short inform us that *privatus* comes from the verb *privo*, meaning 'to bereave, deprive, rob, strip of anything' or 'to free, release, deliver from anything' and that its primary meanings concern being 'apart from the State, peculiar to one's self, of or belonging to an individual, private (opp. *publicus* or *communis*; cf. *domesticus*)' and that it further denotes persons who are not in office and things, such as houses, that are isolated from State affairs; C.T. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891 [1879]), p. 1447. According to Amy Russell, Plautus (c. 254–184 BC) offers the earliest datable opposition of *publicus* and *privatus*; A. Russell, *The Politics of Public Space in Republican Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 30.

deepen our analyses. Particular contexts, sources, genres or societal circumstances may lead to a privileging of one of the circles; other circles may evolve as we extend and deepen our research; and finally developments over time may be charted on the map.

Concluding remarks

The three approaches supplement each another. The zones give us a form of birds eye view on each source and direct correlations between sources, while the terminological approach is instrumental for a Fine-tuning of our historical perception; it helps us to see nuances of the private that we might otherwise miss and to weed out anachronisms. The semantic mapping offers a template for overall classifications of meaning and valence. The three approaches do not pretend to exhaust all aspects related to privacy; nor are they to be mistaken for research results. They offer a starting point and a set of analytical tools that serve research on early modern notions of privacy, be it interdisciplinary or monodisciplinary, be it individual or collaborative. It is our hypothesis that adjusted versions of the three approaches might even prove useful for analyses of current notions of privacy and the private.

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