



2009 CONFERENCE

IDENTIFYING THE PERSON: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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Abstract

The House Number: A History of Order and Disorder

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Based on my doctoral thesis about the history of the census and house-numbering in the Habsburg Monarchy published in 2007, as well as on my booklet about the house number and my current research – see the corresponding postings in my weblog: <http://adressescomptoir.twoday.net/topics/Hausnummerierung/> – I want to deal in my presentation with a technology of address that was characteristic for the classifying spirit of the eighteenth century: House numbering. This technology was not introduced to facilitate orientation for the cities' inhabitants or to be helpful to foreigners; its origin can be located in the border areas of early modern police, military and tax administration. It should make possible the state's access to the houses' riches and resources, in order to control, tax and recruit inhabitants, or to lodge soldiers.

In my paper I want to treat the different systems of house numbering being used (numbering consecutively the houses of the whole city or districts of it, block numbering, 'clockwise scheme' of street numbering, system pair/impair), arguing that it was difficult to gain acceptance of the idea that there is a difference between the data (the house) and its address. The first methods used did not take into account that it could be possible – analogous to the indish-arabic place value system based on the using of the Zero – to mark an empty space. Only the system of numbering the houses of one side of the street with odd, on the other with even numbers started to make a difference between *counting* houses and *addressing* them, given the fact that the highest house number of a street numbered in this manner did not need to equal the number of houses of this street. Presumably this system was first introduced in Philadelphia in 1790, before it was first introduced to Europe in Paris 1805, after a comparison of the different types of numbering.

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