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The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex

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The second half of the 1990s witnessed a conversational turn in curating. Ranging from small discussion circles to blockbuster-like marathons, conversations abounded in museums, art galleries and exhibitions. The very same period witnessed an increasing number of publications dedicated to museum studies, including the history and theory of curating. Whereas the questions raised by museum scholarship were very much concerned with exhibitions, the same cannot be said about conversations. That conversations are neglected subjects in museum histories betrays a long history of the feminisation of conversation as an intellectual, artistic and political practice, whose significance my essay attempts to understand and restore while keeping in mind the gendered and other politics that pervade contemporary curatorial practice

The contemporary conversational turn in curating *could* have motivated a historiographical search for an earlier curatorial model based upon conversations – but, so far, such a search has never happened. The importance of the exhibition has been firmly joined with the logic of the museum by museum studies. In his influential study *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (1995) Tony Bennett introduces the exhibitionary complex, a concept central to museology and critical museum studies.¹ I would like to suggest that there was in fact a historical conversational complex analogous to the exhibitionary complex, which has never

been fully investigated. While the exhibitionary complex was produced in the museum, the conversational complex was produced in the salon, particularly in the salon cultures of Berlin and Vienna around 1800. Like the museum, 'salons were among the first institutions of modern culture'.² Both museum and salon spaces assume an important historical position in the production of modernity, modern culture and modern subjects. In what follows I seek to work out the implications of the salon model and its conversational complex with respect to political thought, curating and art making. I am particularly interested in understanding the salon model and its conversational complex with respect to introducing a different historiography of curating.

Let me now turn to the writings of the British philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), whose description of the penal system of confinement has been central to Bennett's proposal of the exhibitionary complex. I will show that Bentham's political thought on conversing is equally important to formulating the concept of the conversational complex. Via Leela Gandhi's work I will highlight how Bentham joins the prepolitical with conversing and, based upon this, develop further the concept of a conversational complex connected to the salon model.

Michel Foucault drew upon Bentham's two-volume treatise on the panopticon when writing an analysis of 'power/knowledge relations during the formation of the modern period', published as *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* in 1975.³ Bennett's study, *The Birth of the Museum*, echoes Foucault's title, and it is via the philosopher's work on 'institutions of confinement' that Bennett develops his analysis of institutions of 'exhibition'.⁴ '[...]Bentham had envisaged, by making the penitentiaries open to public inspection – that children, and their parents, were invited to attend their lessons in civics'.⁵ Much rather, as Bennett argues, such lessons were organised through the exhibitionary complex which involved 'the transfer of objects and bodies from the enclosed and private domains in which they had previously been displayed (but to a restricted public) into progressively more open and public arenas where, through the representation to which they were subjected, they formed vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting messages of power (but of a different type) throughout society'.⁶ Not only did the visitors to the museum see, and inspect, the objects representing histories of the past and the present, they also saw, and inspected, each other. 'It was in thus democratizing the eye of power that the exhibitions

realised Bentham's aspirations for a system of looks within which the central position would be available to the public at all times, a model lesson in civics in which a society regulated itself through self-observation.⁷ The exhibitionary complex transformed the museum from a cabinet of curiosity into an institution of governance. The visitors to the museum were understood to both embody and represent the logics of a regulated, governed and obedient public.

I will now turn to *A Fragment on Government*, the first book by Jeremy Bentham, to work out the underpinnings for the conversational complex and tease out its key differences from the exhibitionary complex. It was the year of 1776 when this book was published, and Bentham wrote:

When a number of persons (whom we may style *subjects*) are supposed to be in the habit of paying obedience to a person, or an assemblage of persons ... (whom we may call governor or governors) such persons altogether (subjects and governors) are said to be in a state of *political society* ... When a number of persons are supposed to be in the habit of *conversing* with each other, at the same time that they are not in any such habit as mentioned above, they are said to be in a state of *natural society*.⁸

What provokes my interest here is the dichotomy between *governing* and *conversing*. In the context of Bentham's political thought, governing and conversing represent two different states of society, the political versus the natural, respectively. Leela Gandhi writes:

The work of the early Bentham, especially, conveys the clear sense that unmediated relationality, the horizontal arrangement of the 'face-to-face' relation, or what he calls 'conversation', is constitutively antithetical to the vertical axis of power along which are arranged the motions of obedience, the disciplinary rotations of governmentality. [...] That is to say, the condition of horizontal, direct, or immediate relationality – relationality *sans* obedience – equals a state of prepolitical, nongovernmental, and anarchic sociality. Governmentality becomes shorthand for the improved culture of mediated relationality.⁹

Via Gandhi's description of governance and conversation we come to see that there is an analogous dichotomy between the museum and the salon. While

the exhibitionary complex relies on a vertical axis of power between display and viewer, the conversational complex is based upon horizontality and relationality. I am specifically referring here to the conversational complex as it was cultivated in salon culture in its Berlin and Vienna versions around 1800. In these salons, subjects did not transform into a regulated, governed and obedient public; rather, they conversed in 'prepolitical' sociality.

The Jewish women who hosted salons, to which they themselves referred as circles or societies, used the economic and spatial resources of their bourgeois homes to offer the supporting infrastructures for conversing subjects. It is of importance to situate the Berlin and Vienna Jewesses and their practice of aesthetic, social, and intellectual conviviality in the specific political and economic context of the time.¹⁰ In the early nineteenth century Jews could not live in Vienna unless they purchased the right of toleration for a very large sum of money. In 1829 there were 135 "tolerated" Jews in Vienna, mostly wealthy bankers and merchants, along with their families, employees, servants and assorted hangers-on.¹¹ Marsha L. Rozenblit writes the following with regard to the specific situation of Jewish women in the Habsburg Empire:

They certainly shared legal status with all Jews: suffering traditional anti-Jewish economic and residential restrictions until Joseph II lifted some of them in his famous Edict of Toleration in 1781 and enjoying civil, legal and political equality after the Austrian and Hungarian governments extended full emancipation in 1867. Yet as women they did not have access to higher education until the turn of the century, nor did they have the right to vote and participate in the political process until after World War I. They could not even join political organizations until 1908.¹²

The domestic sphere became central to female subjects since the formation of the public sphere that precluded their full political participation in the mechanisms of state. Historical female subjects cared for and provided the support necessary for conversation, which was produced in the domestic sphere of the private home. Not only did these salonnières open their private homes as the spatial infrastructures supporting the salon culture, they also actively participated in the conversations. At once hostess and conversationalist amongst other conversationalists, the salonnière performed a dual role. This is crucial to the excavation of a different historiography of curating. The salonnière is at once providing the material as well as immaterial resources

and conversing with others. Here is a position that we might identify in hindsight, as a curator. She curates conversations, which from the twenty-first century we may regard as ephemeral artworks realised in the domestic realm.

The fine arts are a public, professional activity, the results of this activity became part of the epistemic power of the exhibitionary complex. 'What women make, which is usually defined as "craft", could in fact be defined as "domestic art"'.¹³ A Western ideology of separate, *gendered* spheres effectively produced the dichotomy public/domestic art, or, in other words, fine art/craft.¹⁴ Both women and men were involved in this domestic art of the 'conversation as an art work'.¹⁵ The salonnière is at once behind and with/in the making of the artwork of conversation. The spatial preposition 'behind' places emphasis on the fact that the salonnière acts as hostess providing the material and immaterial support structures and resources, the space of the private home, the food, the skills to make this known as 'salons or at-homes on a *jour fixe*' so local and international visitors could plan their participation.¹⁶ As hostess, the salonnière developed the knowledge of how to create 'a specific social constellation'.¹⁷ I activate the figurative meaning of being behind someone, to mean fully supporting someone.

The salonnière provided other women with intellectual sustenance and access, even as men outranked them as guests in number and renown. [...] The company of professionals, moreover, afforded female writers, critics, musicians, and artists a platform for their own creativity and subject matter for their work. [...] Composers and artists, men and women, had a place to perform and exhibit when suitable public venues were non-existent or inaccessible.¹⁸

The salonnière provided the space necessary to have conversations and also participated in these conversations together with her invited guests. The salonnière was with/in the conversation and was therefore actively involved in making 'conversation as an art work'.¹⁹ What we see here are not subjects in isolation, but subjects in conversation.

Hanna Lotte Lund stresses that the position of Berlin Jewesses, as subjects without rights, was very different from positions held by French aristocratic gentlewomen and their salons or the Blue Stockings Society in England, led by aristocratic, wealthy and upper-middle-class women.²⁰ Barbara Hahn emphasises that Rahel Levin Varnhagen and other Jewish 'salonnières' in

Berlin around 1800 never referred to the gatherings they hosted as salons. 'Rahel Levin, for instance, called the gatherings staged by the high aristocracy "salons" – for her a distant and inaccessible world. To speak of "salons" inevitably implies a prior history, in particular in the salon culture of the French aristocracy.²¹ There is a metonymical operation to be analysed here: society can be understood as society at large as well as a social gathering in the domestic space. The metonymical operation relating the salon or conversation-based gathering to society at large is called *pars-pro-toto*. The part can stand in for the whole, the social gathering for society at large. In 1799 Rahel Varnhagen wrote: "There need be no hierarchy in society. [...] The elementary relation within the word society [*Gesellschaft*] ought to alert us already to this: it is an associate-ness [*Gesellenschaft*] for joy or the like. There is no master among it, but entirely equal associates [*Gesellen*]; and it is not appropriate there for anyone to be master."²² The art of conversation embodies a politics (or utopia) of horizontality and a non-hierarchical society. In the small gatherings no one is a master. There is no hierarchy. Etymology is of importance here. Being without master is etymologically derived in German from the word *Gesell/en/schaft*: associate-ness. Everybody can become an associate. Everybody can be associated with everybody else. This horizontality and relationality is practised in the domestic sphere, from where it could impact on society at large. This passage from society practised in the domestic sphere to society at large was politically radical. It would have led to a society without hierarchy and without masters. Such a society was put into practice in conversation. The separate spheres model takes on a very different concept of horizontal power in its social potentiality here. We will see how this potentiality was carefully silenced and negated.

Jürgen Habermas' 1962 treatise *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has informed the majority of political and social history on the social spheres model. What is of interest here, is that Habermas uses the salon as his model to introduce Immanuel Kant's concept of 'knowledge of the world (Weltkenntnis)' and the 'man of the world (Mann von Welt)'.²³ Following Kant, Habermas draws a line from the public sphere via the knowledge of the world and the man of the world to the salon conversations. The gendering and the racialisation of this line is evident. The Jewish women, who initiated and supported salon culture, as well as Jewish men, were effectively excluded from full participation in the public sphere. Jewish men were prevented full access to the public sphere on grounds of

their Jewishness. Jewish women faced a dual oppression that led to their double exclusion from the public sphere as women and as Jews.²⁴ A critical analysis of this constellation evidences that there is no reciprocal line to be drawn from the salon conversations to the public sphere. This was a broken line, interrupted by the absence of those who were excluded from it.

Habermas uses the following quotation from Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) to underline the significance of salon conversations: 'If we attend to the course of conversation in mixed companies consisting not merely of scholars and subtle reasoners but also of business people or women, we notice that besides storytelling and jesting they have another entertainment, namely arguing.'²⁵ The women-led salon model was written into a public sphere history governed by men of world – at the expense of the women who supported and organised salon culture. Let me turn to the German original in order to draw out the specific gendered operations at work in Immanuel Kant's choice of words and language. The quote from Kant's *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* reads as follows in German:

*Wenn man auf den Gang der Gespräche in gemischten Gesellschaften, die nicht bloß aus Gelehrten und Vernünftlern, sondern auch aus Leuten von Geschäften oder Frauenzimmern bestehen, acht hat, so bemerkt man, daß außer dem Erzählen und Scherzen noch eine Unterhaltung, nämlich das Räsionieren darin Platz findet.*²⁶

I want to draw attention to the difference we can discern between the term women and the term *Frauenzimmer*. Even though one can translate *Frauenzimmer* into women, much of the nuance that the term *Frauenzimmer* registers is definitely lost. The word conventionally used for women is *Frauen*, the word used to refer to female members of the aristocracy or the upper class bourgeoisie is *Dame*. The word *Frauenzimmer* is curiously ambiguous and complex in and of itself: *Frauen* means women and *Zimmer* means rooms. Therefore, the literal translation of *Frauenzimmer* is women's rooms. Following Duden's *Etymological Dictionary of the German Language* the word *Frauenzimmer* developed as follows: The word originated as a spatial term. It first described the rooms designated to be used by the lady or mistress of the house, it later described all the rooms used by all the female servants of the court and even later all the bowers, the women's private chambers in a medieval castle; eventually the term came

to describe collectively all the women who actually lived in these rooms; at the beginning of the seventeenth century the term came to be used for an individual woman as well and was particularly used to describe women of noble descent or ladies; then a devaluation process began and since the nineteenth century the word is used to speak of frivolous women and can also be understood to refer to prostitutes.²⁷ The decline of the word *Frauenzimmer* was already well underway by the time Kant used it in 1788. Therefore, his use of the word is at best ambiguous.

Habermas states that ‘It was the world of the men of letters but also that of the Salon, in which “mixed companies” engaged in critical discussions; here in the bourgeois salon, the public sphere was established.’²⁸ Following Kant and Habermas here, the man of world and the public sphere emerge from the salon and its conversations. Yet, the salon as a woman-led space and its complex culture of conversation that effectively bridges between the domestic sphere and the public sphere is not taken into account. On one hand we witness the process of salon culture’s devaluation and feminisation. On the other hand we witness the process of the making of the man of world and his public sphere via salon culture without acknowledging the specific significance of the mixed companies that produced the art of conversation. Taken together, these two lines of thought support each other to arrive at public sphere without equal involvement or participation of women or Jews. The salon is a *Frauenzimmer*, and I deliberately misread the term now and place my emphasis on its constituent element *Zimmer*, room. The salon was a *Frauenzimmer*, a room opened up and created by women as a support structure for the art of conversation. Whilst the salon is acknowledged in its importance within public sphere discourse, it is precisely via this discourse that the salon is rendered a space supporting masculine subject formation, resulting in a man of world.

While men of world, artists, thinkers, writers of the Romantic period, enjoyed the fertile and inspiring ground of salon conversations that fuelled their aesthetic and intellectual energy, the very same men put forward a discursive formation that effectively devalued and feminised salon culture. This feminisation had at once political and aesthetic reasons. The practice of a society beyond hierarchy, beyond strict social role models for men and women as well as for Jews and Jewesses, was too dangerous were it to become a political reality and not merely domestic art taking place in the privacy of homes. The practice of conversation as art work,²⁹ at once

co-emergent with and co-dependent upon others, profoundly challenges the artist-as-genius position distinguished by the production of art conceived of in isolation and based upon the subject model of the independent individual.³⁰ Therefore, it proved to be necessary to devalue and feminise the subject formation produced in the art of conversation. “The most vehement and influential attack on the art of conversation as shallow, vain and deceptive came from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who also denounced the excessive power of the “gentle sex” in the salons, where the “natural” inferiority of woman to man was subverted and men were feminized.³¹ And this is entirely in line with Kant’s use of the term *Frauenzimmer* I discussed before. Ultimately, this salon culture has to be understood as a threat to modernity’s project of the individual, independent, masculinist subject formation. The aesthetic and political stakes were high: in the salons, a different society and a different art making appeared possible.

Let me now continue to find the man of world in the museum. ‘[...] [T]he displacement, in the art gallery, of the king by the citizen as the arch-actor and metanarrator of a self-referring narrative formed part of a new and broader narrative, one with a wider epistemic reach in which it is “Man” who functions as the arch-actor and metanarrator of the story of his (for it was a *gendered narrative*) own development.³² This story produced gendered, classed, racialised exclusions in order to constitute what was considered historically relevant. The curators who provided the material basis, the objects with which to structure these narratives, did not appear to communicate with the public. Rather, the museum accordingly introduced a division of labour. Bennett emphasises the ‘[...] hidden spaces of the museum where knowledge was produced and organized *in camera* [...]’³³ From this follows a binary between production and reception with a hidden curator as public knowledge producer and a public museum audience that consisted of both women and men. Paul O’Neill describes the historical role of the museum curator as ‘curator-as-carer working with collections out of sight of the public.’³⁴ This curator-as-carer did not provide much in terms of a historical subject formation that was a precedence for the curator-as-author introduced in the second half of the twentieth century. However, the salonnière might have offered a historical subject formation of interest to the contemporary curator positionality. The salonnière’s work was at once curatorial practice and art practice and might therefore have been well suited to be understood as the subject formation

after which contemporary curatorship was modelled. Yet, the domestic sphere, the feminisation, and the genderedness of her positionality precluded that. Therefore, ultimately the masculinist artist-as-genius concept was activated for the curator-as-author concept.

However, the mid-1990s witnessed the passage from museum-curator to curator-as-author, and the arrival of the conversational turn in curating. In their 1996 essay, 'From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur: Inventing a Singular Position', Nathalie Heinrich and Michael Pollak analyse the passage from 'curator to creator', which they link to the individualist, masculinist subject position of 'the auteur'.³⁵ They state:

Therefore, it is in the name of the privilege accorded invention and creation – of the singularity of the individual creator of an artwork and his or her capacity for innovation when faced with the solidified traditions in the institutions – that the original work, the combination of works and documents, which constitutes an exhibition, can be judged. In other words, in extremis, it is as auteur that an exhibition curator will eventually be regarded. This is certainly an extreme position, but it is the passage to this extreme, which is of interest to us here.³⁶

We have seen that the curator-as-carer was hidden *in camera* and did not appear publicly in the role of curator-as-author. The salonnière who conversed with other subjects in the process of making art as conversation might have offered a complicated and interesting subject position combining the curator-as-carer with the curator-as-author, but she had never been considered a curator in the first place. The literal meanings of the Latin root of the words to 'curate' and 'curator' did not lend themselves to the construction of the curator-as-author at all. The meanings found in translation have to do with care, service, maintenance, management, healing, provision and distribution of resources. The Austrian school Latin school dictionary Stowasser offers the following definitions which I have translated into English:

care

I. look after, to take care of something or to take an interest in something, to take something to heart or to worry, to provide or to manage, to affect

II. to take care of; 2. to service or to maintain, to foster or to care for somebody; 3. a (sacrifice) to provide; b. to manage, to

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command; c. (sick people) to treat, to cure; d. (money) to provide, to obtain or to get, to pay.³⁷

The historical role model for the curator-as-author was found in an earlier model of a fully male-identified subject position: the artist-as-genius. Catherine M. Soussloff dates the formation of the artist-as-genius to the Early Modern Period. ‘The situation of the artist whose origins can be identified as textual and located specifically in the early biographies of artists but whose genius is universal is one that we have come to accept as the norm in our culture.’³⁸ According to Catherine M. Soussloff the passage in art history was that from craftsman to artist. We see here that the passage from curator-as-carer to curator-as-author echoes this earlier passage.

Conversations have been just as central as exhibitions to art curating since the mid-1990s. In 1995 Hans Ulrich Obrist curated *Mind Revolution*, which he described as ‘Curating (Non)-Conferences.’³⁹ The event used ‘Ernst Pöppel’s research centre near Cologne in Jülich, where there were hundreds of scientists and laboratories. [...] And so the “conference” we organized at the research centre, “Art and Brain”, had all the constituents of a colloquium except the colloquium. There were coffee breaks, a bus trip, meals, tours of the facilities, but no colloquium.’⁴⁰ What we see here is the production of conditions enabling relationality, horizontality and the avoidance of a vertical axis of power. We also see that existing infrastructure, in this case a research centre, was used as a support structure for ‘private conversations’ between artists and scientists. Again, such private conversations have the potential to impact on art, science, society, economy, politics and so on. In short, such conversations impact on public life. As Obrist elaborates: ‘In my practice, the curator has to bridge gaps and build bridges between artists, the public, institutions and other types of communities. The crux of this work is to build temporary communities, by connecting different people and practices, and creating the conditions for triggering sparks between them.’⁴¹ We see here that contemporary curating does in fact encompass curating-as-caring as I have analysed it via the salon model. Such curating provides the support necessary for having conversations. It bridges private and public, conversing and governing, art and science. It creates new constellations for conversations, of which the curator becomes part. There is a gendered dimension to be investigated with regard to curating conversations. While female curators have to tread

carefully in order to escape the gendered dimension of conversations as a both feminised and fleetingly ephemeral activity, male curators inscribe the curator-as-artist position into the conversation practice by turning it into an identifiable oeuvre. The conversation as oeuvre is no longer fleeting and circulates via publication.⁴²

In 1997, documenta X also witnessed a turn to conversation. The curator, Catherine David, had 'already extended the spatiotemporal nature of the exhibition format' by inviting and interacting with 100 guests over 100 days.⁴³ The series of discussions, debates and events featured speakers including Ackbar Abbas, Giorgio Agamben, Edward Said, Etienne Balibar, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Geeta Kapu. Issues of state and nation prevailed and clearly emphasise the post-colonial perspective of the programming and the outreach beyond Western, European-centric thought. The title of the programme, '100 Days – 100 Guests', refers to hospitality. However, the guest is an ambivalent figure. The Latin root of the word 'guest' bears witness to that: *hostis* means at once guest and enemy. In a globalised world with ever more borders, not everyone is a welcome guest. Many critical debates followed the public lectures and discussions. These exchanges were a catalyst for the founding of the international antiracist network *No Person Is Illegal* at documenta X. This network assists immigrants regardless of their immigration status. The salon acted as a bridge between the domestic and the public. Documenta X bridged between the art world context and the larger context of globalisation, society, politics, and migration regimes. Therefore, conversations can, in fact, connect exhibitions 'like biennials "now understood as vehicles for the production of knowledge and intellectual debate"⁴⁴ with public life.⁴⁵ Five years later, in conjunction with documenta XI, we see again a strong emphasis on curating conversations of global dimension. Curator Okwui Enwezor conceived of five different platforms. They took place in Vienna, New Delhi, Berlin, St. Lucia, Lagos and Kassel.

Enwezor describes the term 'Platform' as 'an open encyclopedia for the analysis of late modernity; a network of relationships; in an open form for organizing knowledge; a nonhierarchical model of representation; a compendium of voices, cultural, artistic, and knowledge circuits.' [...] On [...] a final level, perhaps the legacy of Enwezor's contribution was the *consciousness-raising* [emphasis added] move that momentarily

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shifted the emphasis away from the exhibition, both symbolically and in actuality, by extending the parameters beyond its exhibition framework.⁴⁶

Again, we see the rejection of a vertical axis of power, and the desire for horizontal exchange and knowledge production as well as its nonhierarchical representation. ‘One of the Documenta curators under Enwezor, Ute Meta Bauer, called this a temporarily “adopted country” for intellectual diasporas from diverse origins and disciplines where art functioned as “a space of refuge – an in-between space of transition and of diasporic passage.”’⁴⁷ This description resonates strongly with the spaces created by Jewish women and their salons:

For a biblical nation ‘wandering in exile’ and deemed ‘rootless’ by host countries, the salon granted a secure domicile and a sense of belonging – a home of one’s own. Yet it was simultaneously a worldly place – a center for cosmopolitans, who, like the hostess, came from other lands and identified with the international comportment of *le monde*.⁴⁸

Hidden in plain sight in curating’s contemporary turn to conversation is the historical subject of the salonnière. ‘Overall, the eighteenth century salonnière emerges as muse and patron, and only secondarily as *femme savante* or *femme auteur*.⁴⁹ The salonnière merges the conflict of providing care and support, muse and patron, with intellectual and artistic achievement, *femme savante* or *femme auteur*. The salonnière’s subject formation united what modern ideology constructed as mutually exclusive. The salonnière appears at once as carer and as author. She brings together these functions as a woman. The salonnière never occupied the genius-as-artist position. The subject formation we can discern here is based upon conversing with others. The woman-led salons and their conversational complex clearly demonstrate that modernity could have taken a very different turn with regard to the politics of subject formation, society, politics, and art making. The salonnière’s authorship or subject position is marked by work considered reproductive work (care), domestic art (taking place in her private home), and ephemeral art (conversation). In today’s institutional frameworks and languages of the art market under capitalist globalisation, the historical subject position occupied by the salonnière becomes legible as the curator of conversations. Yet, so far, she has not been included in the

historiography of curating. This may have to do with the fact the domestic art of conversations curated by a hostess bore both too much risk of feminisation and the legacy of the salon as a classed space.⁵⁰ More radical lessons to be gained from the exclusion of the salonnière from the historiography of curating might be the following: first, the woman-led culture of the salon embodied art making with others based upon conversations as opposed to the artist-as-genius in isolation; second, the politics practised in the salon was a society with no masters and no hierarchy; the domestic art of conversation was based upon care as co-emergence, co-dependence, and co-authorship. Therefore, the risk of feminisation as the reason why the salonnière has not been taken into account as a role model for the curator successfully masks the much larger threats the society practised in the salon posed. Modernity, modern culture and modern subjects might well have taken a different turn: the salonnière demonstrates that horizontality and relationality in making art and making politics is possible.

Notes

1. Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London; New York, 1995).
2. Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun, *Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation* (New Haven, CT; London, 2005), p. 1.
3. Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 61.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–1.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
8. Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC, 2006), p. 98.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 98–9.
10. In 1781, Christian Wilhelm von Dohm published two volumes *Concerning the Amelioration of the Civil Status of the Jews* which were of importance to the process of Jewish emancipation in Germany. Marsha L. Rozenblit, 'Habsburg Monarchy: Nineteenth to Twentieth Centuries', in *Jewish Women's Archive*. Available at <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/habsburg-monarchy-nineteenth-to-twentieth-centuries> (accessed 30 October 2016). In 1812, Frederick William III, King of *Prussia*, passed the *Edict Concerning the Civil Status of the Jews in the Prussian State*. '[...] almost 70,000 Jews in Prussia became residents of the state.' Yet, Deborah Sadie Hertz emphasises that

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- [...] the ethos of the 1812 edict was a partial and conditional emancipation. Deborah Sadie Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans: The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin* (New Haven, CT, 2007), p. 108.
11. Rozenblit, *Ibid.*
 12. *Ibid.*
 13. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York, 2013), p. 70.
 14. *Ibid.* The distinction made here is between fine art and craft. Yet I want to deliberately use the term domestic art in a wider sense than suggested here. I propose to understand the art of conversation as a specific domestic art.
 15. Lucia Re, 'The Salon and Literary Modernism: Proust, Wilde, Stein', in *Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation* (2005), p. 171.
 16. Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun, 'The Power of Conversation: Jewish Women and Their Salons', in *Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation* (New Haven, CT; London, 2005), p. 1.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
 18. *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.
 19. Lucia Re, 'The Salon and Literary Modernism: Proust, Wilde, Stein', in *Jewish Women and Their Salons*, p. 171.
 20. Hanna Lotte Lund, *Der Berliner jüdische Salon um 1800: Emanzipation in der Debatte* (Berlin; Boston, MA, 2011), p. 3.
 21. Barbara Hahn, 'The Myth of the Salon', in *The Jewess Pallas Athena: This Too a Theory of Modernity*, trans. James McFarland (Princeton, NJ; Oxford, 2002), p. 42.
 22. Barbara Hahn, 'A Dream of Living Together: Jewish Women in Berlin around 1800', in E.D. Bilski and E. Braun (eds), *Jewish Women and Their Salons*, p. 156.
 23. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA, 1991), p. 106.
 24. The trauma of the Holocaust and the oppression of Jewish cultural history may have contributed significantly to the forgetting and silencing of salon culture with regard to the histories of what is today understood as curating. History writing repeated the dual exclusion of gender and of Jewishness.
 25. *Ibid.*
 26. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
 27. Duden, *Etymologie: Herkunftswörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (Mannheim, Wien, Zürich: Dudenverlag 1989), p. 203.
 28. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 183.
 29. I refer here to the conversation culture of Jewish salons in Vienna and Berlin and not to the aristocratic conventions and etiquettes of French Salon culture. Jewish salon culture was victim to politicisation and anti-Semitism. Hannah Arendt writes: 'The salon which had brought together people of all classes, in which a person could participate without having any social status at all, which

had offered a haven for those who fitted in nowhere socially, had fallen victim to the disaster of 1806.' Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York; London, 1974), p. 121. 'From 1809 onwards a younger generation of Romanticists [...] determined the intellectual tone of Berlin society. [...] These groups bore all the earmarks of patriotic secret societies.' *Ibid.*, p. 123. The open-mindedness of the Jewish salon posed a political threat. The indiscriminateness, relationality, and horizontality of salon culture was rendered precarious. The new societies, called 'Liedertafel' or 'Christlich-Deutsche Tischgesellschaft' were no longer led by Jewish women, but by nobles and Romanticists. And, they were decisively nationalistic. 'The bylaws banned admittance of women, Frenchmen, philistines, and Jews. [...] The nobles had been the first to admit the Jews to a degree of social equality, and it was among the nobles that systematic anti-Semitism first broke out.' *Ibid.*, p. 123.

30. Catherine Soussloff has developed a historical analysis of the subject position of the artist since the Early Modern Age in Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept* (Minneapolis, MN; London, 1997).
31. Lucia Re, 'The Salon and Literary Modernism: Proust, Wilde, Stein,' in *Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation* (2005), p. 173.
32. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 38.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
34. Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), p. 9.
35. Nathalie Heinrich and Michael Pollak, 'From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur. Inventing a Singular Position,' in R. Greenberg, B. Ferguson, and S. Nairne (eds), *Thinking about Exhibitions* (London; New York, 1996), pp. 237–8.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Josef M. Stowasser, *Lateinisch-deutsches Schulwörterbuch* (München, 1994), p. 135.
38. Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Absolute Artist*, p. 74.
39. Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'Curating (Non)-Conferences,' in *Ways of Curating* (London, 2015), pp. 52–6.
40. *Ibid.*, pp.153–4.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
42. An example for this strategy of counteracting the ephemeral status of the conversation and turning it into an authored oeuvre is offered by Hans Ulrich Obrist's ongoing publication project *The Conversation Series*.
43. Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating*, p. 81.
44. *Ibid.*
45. I do by no means want to downplay the risk of capture, commodification, and pacification of conversation as an art world format. Yet, I do strongly believe

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that conversations can navigate the power/knowledge relations differently, and that conversations can, in fact, support agency, and create new knowledge, forms of solidarity, or living community.

46. Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating*, pp. 154 and 83.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
48. Bilski and Braun, *Jewish Women and Their Salons*, pp. 4–5.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
50. Lara Perry's *History's Beauties: Women and the National Portrait Gallery, 1856–1900* (Hants and Burlington, 2006) points to the fact that classed dichotomies based upon the bourgeoisie (moral) and aristocracy (immoral) binary fall short of historical realities. This is of interest to understand the dynamics when and if historical subject role models are activated. There are not only gender biases to be taken into account but also other intersectional biases. The artist-as-genius model was based upon the passage from craftsman to artist and evidences upward social mobility as well as the ideal of the independent creator as *homo oeconomicus*. Catherine M. Soussloff, as I have pointed out earlier, has worked out this passage from craftsman to artist in *The Absolute Artist*. The salon is tainted with its aristocratic past. And, the Jewish salonnières remained tainted as outsiders on the inside. Hannah Arendt states: 'Rahel had remained a Jew and a pariah.' Arendt, *Rahel Varnagan*, p. 203.