

Ideal Sociability

Friedrich Schleiermacher and the Ambivalence of Extrasocial Spaces

William Rasch

The Berlin salons of the 1790s have often been seen as idyllic places, almost as if they had transcended their physical locality and brought their participants to a realm in which normal social constraints and accepted segregations simply ceased to exist. Conducted predominantly by well-educated and intellectually active Jewish women such as Henriette Herz and Rahel Levin, these social gatherings brought together men and women, Jews and Christians, aristocrats and commoners in a setting where normal social conventions could be suspended, at least temporarily.¹ Here, young, cultivated women of the emerging Jewish middle class could converse with their male, Gentile counterparts as well as with more adventurous members of the nobility. Therefore, uncommon friendships could develop, such as those between Herz and brothers Alexander and Wilhem von Humboldt or between Herz and young philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. Moreover, if Cupid and fate happened to converge, the temporary suspensions of class and religious difference could also lead to more intimate unions, such as the affair and eventual marriage between young Friedrich Schlegel and Herz's childhood friend, Dorothea Veit,² for the salon served not only as a momentary respite from the affairs of business, state, and household but also as a site of illicit romance, legitimate courtship, and, perhaps most unlikely of all, lasting friendships between men and women. I will highlight this last category. Though most people at that time considered nonromantic friendships between the sexes to be impossible, Schleiermacher not only testified privately and publicly³ to its possibility, referring to his

“nonpassionate” relationship with Herz, but also used male-female communicative interaction as a basis for theorizing a utopic sociability (*Geselligkeit*) that ironically could be found only outside of society.

Like Schiller, Schleiermacher imagined an extrasocial space in which the fragmented, functionalized citizen could be formed into the well-rounded human being. Schleiermacher wished to fashion a language—both a theoretical discourse about sociability and a form of dialogic communication that would serve as the medium for that ideal form of human intercourse—in which the occupational differences among men and the purportedly essential differences between men and women could be bracketed. He sought a common discursive ground based on nonspecialized knowledge accessible to all educated people who gather together for no other purpose than the self-enrichment that comes from the mutual exercise of the human being’s intellectual and spiritual capacities. Though such a public, salon-based discourse of sociability aimed to heal the perceived wounds of modernity—including the wound that cleaved men from women by confining the latter to the household—the result was the solidification rather than the dismantling of essentialist distinctions. Instead of challenging the differentiation of a male public sphere from a female domestic realm, the discourse of ideal sociability served as a supplemental, not subversive discourse, an alternate but not alternative model of male-female interaction that underpinned more than it undermined the workings of the modern gender system and thus made its continuation possible. This claim does not concern intentions but a variation of Hegel’s “cunning of reason”—a “cunning of discourse.” That Schleiermacher’s dream of unfettered sociability did more to confirm than contest naturalized gender roles remains one of the unfortunate and unintended consequences of a genuine attempt to evade constraints imposed by the late-eighteenth-century public discourse on the proper behavior of both men and women.

I.

From the beginning, Henriette Herz and Friedrich Schleiermacher defended and protested the innocence of their friendship. His family, their friends, and Berlin society at large voiced their concern so often that Herz and Schleiermacher felt compelled to turn their relationship into an object in need of philosophical reflection. “And so we often spoke at length about the fact,” Herz writes in her memoirs, “that we

neither had nor could have any other feeling for one another than friendship, albeit of the most intimate kind; indeed, as strange as it may seem, we set down in writing the reasons that prevented our relationship from being other than it was."⁴ Herz does not reveal the reasons why their relationship never became "passionate," but according to Schleiermacher at least, a lack of sexual attraction, despite Herz's undisputed beauty, apparently was among them. Indeed, both remark on the unconventional and thus comical oddity of their joint physical appearance—that is, "the contrast between me," as Herz puts it, "a statuesque and at that time still well-endowed woman, and the small, thin, not particularly well-built Schleiermacher."⁵ Observers remained suspicious. Both Herz's lifelong friend, Dorothea Veit, and Schleiermacher's newfound friend, Friedrich Schlegel, were frankly jealous, as Schlegel readily admitted. Veit chastises Schleiermacher for depriving Schlegel of attention and support, and Schlegel voices his jealousy by complaining that Schleiermacher gives more of himself, more of his heart and soul (*Gemüt*) and not just his understanding (*Verstand*) and intellect, to Herz than he does to his friend, intellectual companion, and roommate, Schlegel.⁶ While it is deliciously tempting to unravel (or simply make up) the strands of hetero- and homoerotic sexual jealousy and the "protest-too-much" self-deceiving sublimations that seem to be at play here,⁷ I prefer blissful ignorance and would rather pretend that I have not been born and raised in the post-Freudian latter half of the twentieth century so that I might simply take their words at face value.⁸ Indeed, to find only sexual jealousy here would be to lose sight of far more interesting anxieties concerning proper gender roles and the competition over intellectual playmates. So, let us for the moment assume that Herz and Schleiermacher were, as the rather demeaning phrase has it, "just friends." What did that friendship look like?

Schleiermacher's sister was uneasy about her brother's shenanigans, and on at least fifteen occasions he felt compelled to justify himself in writing to her. These letters are filled not only with reassurances and direct responses to criticisms—for example, that true friendship trumps that old prejudice, anti-Semitism⁹—but also with concrete depictions of what the two companions did together in their daily round. In this regard, the most interesting passage occurs in a 30 May 1798 letter. "For the most part," he writes, "I live with Herz," who was spending the summer in a small house in the Tiergarten, a wooded district on the outskirts of Berlin. Since she has no children and is

extremely efficient with regard to domestic affairs, she can devote nearly all her time to study and conversation. Thus, Schleiermacher makes it a habit to spend the entire day with her at least once a week. He learns Italian from her and teaches her Greek.¹⁰ They share their knowledge of physics and nature and read Shakespeare or “this and that from a good German book.” For relaxation, they take long walks together, and he can talk to her “right out of the depths of my soul . . . on the most important things,” undisturbed by anyone. Though their “inner” differences match their outer ones, they understand each other perfectly—or, as Schleiermacher rather one-sidedly writes, “Herz treasures and loves me, as different as we are.”¹¹

The physical setting, as Schleiermacher presents it, is idyllic in its near-sylvan solitude. Though the encounter takes place in Herz’s summer home, the scene and the sphere are far from domestic. Not only are there no children, there is no husband, no other man portrayed. Yet the male figure (Schleiermacher) enters the scene neither as a suitor nor as a sexual rival but as a friend and intellectual companion, a man who has more in common with women than with other men¹² and thus is capable of nonerotic friendship, to the chagrin and consternation of his contemporaries. Accordingly, the central female figure, Herz, appears as a full equal with the male, not only interacting symmetrically on a wide variety of intellectual topics but also teaching him as well as learning from him. We are in a realm of mutual complementarity, where differences are harmonized.¹³ When we look at the topics of interest, however, we notice that they are restricted to literature (Shakespeare, German books), language, and the natural sciences. Schleiermacher gives no indication that “the most important things” in any way include topics such as law, economics, politics, or surprisingly even religion. The Tiergarten summer house, located in Berlin yet isolated from it, a place where the two conversationalists can remain wholly undisturbed,¹⁴ does not constitute either the limited realm of hearth and home or the public sphere. No affairs from either domain penetrate their friendship or the sociability of their well-matched personalities, which, Schleiermacher feels, is the way it should be.

I have taken the time to rehearse these aspects of their friendship—and, to repeat, to take them at face value—because both what is included and what is excluded from this ideal depiction help us understand the limits of the notion of sociability that Schleiermacher develops in his 1799 essay, “Versuch einer Theorie des geselligen Betragens” (Attempt at a Theory of Sociable Conduct), especially with regard to

the generally accepted gendered division of the world into domestic and public spheres. The autonomous domain of sociability, where rank, religion, and gender play no role in determining a candidate's acceptability, is meant to be neither domestic nor public. Therein lies its charm as well as its problem, for just as Schleiermacher and Herz could ignore but not escape social reality, so the attempt to construct an idealized extrasocial space to compensate for what are seen as debilitating divisions of the modern world neither overcomes nor reconciles itself to those divisions but merely confirms and replicates them. In the end, the ideal realm of sociability does not represent an escape from the divisions of the modern world but a mechanism by which the limits placed on women's participation in it can be—intentionally or unintentionally—justified.

II.

I used the term *extrasocial* in the preceding paragraph to avoid the term *autonomy*, but the notion—or, rather, notions—of autonomy are central to this investigation and therefore need some preliminary explanation. The modern understanding of autonomy, arising out of the Protestant Reformation and the political-philosophical reactions to the European religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, comes to full fruition in eighteenth century Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant.¹⁵ Kantian moral law is neither laid down by a higher authority, whether divine or natural, nor derived from empirical knowledge of history or human nature. Rather, it first comes into being as the result of the free choice of an unencumbered subject. The individual conscience, no longer subject to an external authority (for example, the Mosaic law proclaimed by God), must assume both the roles of lawgiver and follower of the law and must therefore void itself of particular interests. Whatever physical, psychological, or social constraints may plague the individual as a moral agent, as an agent of a self-determined moral law his or her actions must make a claim to universal validity. The individual, in other words, must assume that for his or her action to be judged morally appropriate, it cannot be psychologically or historically situated but could be replicated at all times and by all persons without losing its claim to moral validity. If I lie to prevent what I consider to be negative consequences, then I must assume that lying is universally appropriate. If I cannot make that assumption, then I must refrain from lying, no matter the outcome. On this basis,

then, not out of a sense of personal inclination, one acts out of a sense of duty to a subjectively determined yet universally applicable law. I am not moral because I obey a predetermined moral law; I am moral because I am able, rationally and disinterestedly, to determine what that law is. This ability to recognize and perform one's duty in opposition to one's "natural" drives or desire for personal happiness presupposes the autonomous faculty of uncontaminated reason. Rational self-legislation, therefore, is the sign of a morally and politically *mündig* (mature) individual.

What remains interesting in Kant is not the notion of the autonomous, unencumbered subject, which has repeatedly come under attack by political philosophers of all stripes since Hegel, but rather what happens to the notion of the autonomy of reason. To save reason from the rationalist dogmatists, the skeptical empiricists, and the religious enthusiasts, Kant neatly divided it into two "autonomous" faculties, theoretical and practical. The faculty of theoretical reason is the realm of knowledge, the description of what *is*. The faculty of practical reason, conversely, is the realm of moral action and invokes the prescriptive language of what *ought* to be. By radically separating the *ought* from the *is*, Kant emancipates, so to speak, the freely posited (yet universal) moral law from the physically necessary laws of nature, for neither by empirical induction nor logical deduction can one move from the sensible, cognitive sphere of theoretical reason (by which we understand the natural realm of cause and effect) to the supersensible realm of freedom that is practical (moral) reason. In this way, Kant hopes to save a domain of human freedom from the determinate reductionism of science. Indeed, by insistently locating the causal law within the realm of theoretical reason alone, Kant necessarily denies a causal relation between the two spheres. That Kant posits a third faculty of reason, the faculty of indeterminate (aesthetic) judgment that is meant to mediate between theory and practice, does not ultimately solve the problem of their radical incommensurability, because the divisions of reason that Kant implements are soon seen to be not only independent faculties of mind but also accurate reflections of the divisions or differentiations of modern society as such. What results is not the autonomy of a unified reason but rather the autonomy of a series of system rationalities, each guiding the activities of the various "value spheres" (to use Max Weber's term)¹⁶ of modern society. The autonomy of differing mental faculties becomes the autonomy of various forms of social com-

munication. In Jürgen Habermas's somewhat cautious rendering, the differentiated Kantian faculties of reason become institutionalized as cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive forms of communicative rationalities, marked respectively by truth, normative rightness, and beauty.¹⁷ Other, perhaps less inhibited, heirs to this particular aspect of the Kantian tradition chronicle the transformation of the once unified autonomy of reason into an unlimited number of autonomous and incommensurable rationalities located in correspondingly differentiated and self-replicating social systems.¹⁸

The autonomy of reason—or, as we have seen, the autonomy of an increasing number of system rationalities—takes on a dual aspect. On the one hand, there is what one might call a liberal or negative notion of autonomy characterized by an individual's freedom from social and governmental constraint; on the other hand, social constraint itself is said to result from an increasing differentiation of functionally autonomous spheres of social activity. The autonomy of the unencumbered subject, in other words, is posited as a response to and pitted against the developing autonomy of functionalized social systems. These two opposed realms—the liberal domain of *Bildung* (self-cultivation) and the functionalized domain of professional specialization—find their expression in the polemical *Mensch/Bürger* (human/citizen) distinction that played such a dominant role in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century neohumanist pedagogical discourse, with the harmonious *Mensch* remaining an extrasocial entity (despite having been molded to perfection in the newly reformed university), while the *Bürger*, invariably thought of as male, sacrifices his humanity in the daily grind of bourgeois economic, bureaucratic, and political life. Thus, the late-eighteenth-century response to the onset of modernity combines both aspects of autonomy in a way that has had lasting consequences. As a result of the religious civil wars and the European global expansion into the New World, Africa, and Asia, the political sphere (represented by the bureaucratized state) and the economic sphere (represented by the marketplace and incipient money economy) loose themselves from ecclesiastic and absolutist control. If one follows the evolutionary scheme advanced by Niklas Luhmann, the increasing independence and self-regulation of political and economic operations provide evidence for the transformation of European society from a stratified, hierarchical unity to a horizontal proliferation of functionally differentiated, self-organizing social systems, including politics,

the economy, the legal system, and many others.¹⁹ This functional differentiation of incommensurable “value spheres” (Weber) or operationally closed social systems (Luhmann) is, in fact, the principle by which modernity has come to organize itself. Since the unity of this differentiation cannot be found in the partial and contingent perspectives of individual systems, modern society cannot see itself as a harmonious totality—cannot, as Luhmann says, see itself as if from the outside—because it lacks a position or normative standard from which the whole can be morally, politically, or otherwise judged.²⁰ Consequently, as Habermas acknowledges, “the fact that a modernity without models had to stabilize itself on the basis of the very diremptions [or divisions: *Entzweiungen*] it had wrought” is felt as a persistent “anxiety” that begs for compensation.²¹ Ironically, functionally differentiated modernity, emancipated from moral and religious supervision, makes the enlightened critique of the rationally autonomous subject possible, yet this structure of differentiation becomes the impossible object of the critique that it makes possible.

The late eighteenth century massages this anxiety by creating anthropological solutions. The centrifugal “fragmentation” of society is said to jeopardize the “wholeness” and “harmony” of an essential human subjectivity. Within the realms of the state and the marketplace, the individual is stripped of his or her unity and reduced to the instrumentalized status of citizen and consumer. Friedrich Schiller’s famous chronicle of the ills of fragmented modernity, taken from his sixth letter on aesthetic education, initiates a two-hundred-year German tradition:

That polypoid character of the Greek States, in which every individual enjoyed an independent existence but could, when need arose, grow into the whole organism, now made way for an ingenious clock-work, in which, out of the piecing together of innumerable but lifeless parts, a mechanical kind of collective life ensued. State and Church, laws and customs, were now torn asunder; enjoyment was divorced from labour, the means from the end, the effort from the reward. Everlastingly chained to a single little fragment of the Whole, man himself develops into nothing but a fragment; everlastingly in his ear the monotonous sound of the wheel that he turns, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of putting the stamp of humanity upon his own nature, he becomes nothing more than the imprint of his occupation or of his specialized knowledge.²²

To protest and protect against this perceived devolution of the fully human to the merely functional *Bürger*, the German (but not just German) liberal, humanist tradition champions the notion of autonomy. Here we speak not of the autonomy of self-regulating social systems but rather of autonomy from the limitations imposed by such mechanistic institutions. Faced with the threat of social fragmentation, the human subject preserves its integrity in realms that are not considered to be marked by social functionalism. Because human autonomy (as the harmonious development of all human powers—that is, *Bildung*) cannot be nurtured in the specialized spheres of social systems, extrasocial spaces must be posited as the site of activities that engage the totality of the truly human.

Again, Schiller provides us with an exemplary model. The chicken-or-egg aporia that confronts him takes the form of a question: To establish a free, democratic, and just society, populated by a fully mature humanity, what comes first, a political or an anthropological revolution? In other words, what comes first, the perfection of society or the perfection of humanity? Schiller clearly places his trust in the latter. But the problem then becomes how such a desired change in human nature is to come about in a decidedly imperfect environment. A political revolution will propose democratically reformed social institutions suitable for the free and equal exercise of human potentialities, but if the human has not achieved a certain level of maturity and responsibility, then democracy, as the French Revolution demonstrated, transforms itself instantaneously into tyranny and terror. Thus, if humans learn the ways of servitude in an absolutist state, and if a political revolution alone will not elevate them above their baser instincts, where is such a maturing process to take place? Or, in Kantian terms that Schiller historicizes, if, in the modern world, reason, which dictates adherence to the moral law strictly out of a sense of duty, stands in conflict with inclination, how is harmony—that is, the unity of duty and sensual inclination—to be reestablished? The alienated structure of the modern world clearly is not a necessary structure, for the perfect harmony of society and nature is known to have existed in ancient Greece (or so Schiller and his compatriots thought); but to effect a new synthesis that could stand as a functional equivalent (not a re-creation) of the ancient example, a modern model of harmony must be achieved, at least in idealized form.

Schiller believes that such a paradigm of harmonious totality lies within the aesthetic sphere. But if such is the case, the aesthetic domain

must exist outside of the ever-expanding realms of society. It must be autonomous from rather than within society if it is to serve as the institution in which an aesthetic education is to take place. Only after the human has achieved maturity within this protected sphere can permanent and lasting political change be effected, which is to say that the self-determination or purposeless purposivity of the work of art becomes both the model for the self-legislating autonomous subject and the space in which this autonomous subjectivity can be realized. This liberal notion of autonomy, derived from the idealist tradition, pits specific realms—ideally, art—against society. The emancipated self-determination of art and the artist is read as if the entire endeavor were somehow divorced from society and its petty day-to-day concerns. While others work within the fragmented spheres of the bourgeois world, serving an externally determined purpose, the artist—and let us go by the true name, the genius—creates (*ex nihilo*, as it were). What is true for art is also true for scholarship (and the domain of knowledge for its own sake, the university), morality (determined exclusively by the self-referential interiority of one's conscience), the household (a domestic sphere watched over by idealized femininity), and, as we shall see, the sociability of the salons. According to this view, autonomy means escape from the daily workings of the social world, escape from alienation, fragmentation, reification, modernization, functionalization, efficiency, performativity—in short, escape from the rationalized, administered society. We now return to one of these escape attempts and its attendant consequences: Schleiermacher's "Attempt at a Theory of Sociable Conduct" can be seen as an effort to raise the type of experiences he enjoyed with Herz and in the salon scene of the late 1790s to the level of theory—that is, a theory of utopic sociability designed to take place in an extrasocial space beyond both the public and private spheres.

III.

The first sentence of Schleiermacher's essay makes the claim that all educated (*gebildet*) people demand "free sociability, neither bound nor determined by any external purpose."²³ Later in the essay, he defines this free and purposeless sociability as a situation in which "several people should have an effect on one another, and . . . this effect should in no way be one-sided."²⁴ The emphasis is on the simultaneity of a plurality of perspectives, a *Vielseitigkeit* (many-sidedness), as a way of

correcting for the limited and limiting nature of the daily round. Tossed back and forth between the cares of the household and the business of bourgeois (*bürgerlichen*) society, we are diverted from our higher aspirations by the *Einseitigkeit* (uniformity) and *Beschränkung* (restriction) that result from the tasks of our occupations as well as by the limited horizons (boredom) afforded by the daily contact with the same few people doing the same few things in the domestic sphere. There must, therefore, be a condition (*Zustand*) that complements both spheres by allowing individuals to come into contact with others in their full diversity, allowing a glimpse “into a different and foreign world” that suspends all domestic and bourgeois constraints.²⁵ Whereas talk of an “other condition” that is only momentarily realized may seem to evoke a quasi-mystical indeterminacy, Schleiermacher locates this condition in a concrete physical space, even if that space can be defined only as the interaction between people. Sociability is a condition, a potentiality, a “moral tendency” that can be actualized wherever and whenever people are gathered, provided the gathering has only itself as its purpose.²⁶ Sociability—free interaction between people for its own sake—does not occur at the theater, in the lecture hall, or even at a ball.²⁷ “No particular activity should be collectively undertaken, no work collectively brought into existence, no insight methodically gained. . . . [T]here should, in other words, be no other purpose than the free play of ideas and impressions, through which all members stimulate and animate one another.”²⁸ Sociability, in fact, does not happen in society at all but, like the activity in Herz’s summer house, presupposes society as a means of hovering above, safely away yet immanently accessible.

What Schleiermacher describes as sociability in particular and *Bildung* in general is the absence of function. Paradoxically phrased, sociability’s function is to create a functionless system within society so that the individual may remove him- or herself from both the functionalized public and domestic spheres. Thus, any activity that takes place in a function system—including art (unlike Schiller), science, and even entertainment (dancing)—cannot be the site of sociability, for in these areas one’s attention is immediately directed and focused on a particular purpose or methodologically determined task. We see this purposeful avoidance of purpose in the rules that Schleiermacher sets up for acceptable conversation, rules that restrict what can be discussed. To be excluded are topics that exclude, topics that require specialized knowledge based on occupation, whether that occupation be

of the workaday world or in the home. We are advised that true sociability requires “that no topic should be broached that is not a part of the common sphere of interest.”²⁹ If I touch on a subject about which another person knows nothing or if two of us discuss such a specialized theme, “the society ceases to be an integrated whole.”³⁰ Here Schleiermacher wishes to avoid precisely what Schiller described—that is, the “ingenious clock-work” of modern society that makes of the individual “nothing more than the imprint of his occupation or of his specialized knowledge.” With specialized discourse, the fragmentation of the outside world invades the space of sociability, separating women from men, doctors from scholars, and theologians from lawyers but also separating each individual from his or her truer and higher self.³¹ Sociability is threatened, in other words, when “the members once again involuntarily crystalize, as if by chemical affinity, into small circles according to their social station, to the great detriment of sociability, which cannot, therefore, reach its ultimate goal of temporarily displacing people from their occupational perspectives.”³² In acceding to the demands of sociability, then, we are released from the functionalized depths of our specialized knowledge so that we may experience the full breadth of a harmonized individuality that need not eliminate but certainly must sublimate its contingent specificity to achieve the formal grace that marks total participation. “One characterizes a person not according to the substance of what he thinks or does but rather according to the way he treats that substance, how he establishes connections and develops and communicates his subject.”³³ The “how” of an action replaces the “what” as defining human trait, because a unity of manner—the way in which one’s originality is expressed in any situation—can compensate for the fragmentation of matter. *Versatility* is the term Schleiermacher uses for the ability “to adapt to every situation and yet maintain one’s own identity no matter where one is, to stand and move about as one’s innate self.” Thus,

the most versatile is one who is at the same time the most polymath and original, one who is prepared to engage in any subject matter, even the most trivial and unfamiliar, and still know how to express his own uniqueness in a variety of ways.³⁴

If a differentiated society leads to a differentiated or “self-alienated” personality, then the ideal of a free and purposeless sociability becomes one of de-differentiation not of society, which can never return to any

purported premodern unity, but of the individual in his or her dealings with the functionalized world.

Here, then, Schleiermacher turns to women for help. Writing in 1799, while living in the Berlin of the Jewish salons, he cannot help but note that true sociability occurs “under the eyes of women.” A certain necessity drives educated women to organize these ideal gatherings, for if their soirees were directed only to domestic concerns, they would be even narrower and deadlier than the male, professional-based salons. When men talk of their professions, Schleiermacher reminds us, they can at least be free of the domestic side of their personality. However, women’s professional and domestic lives coincide; thus, women feel all the more fettered in a gathering in which only the domestic sphere of society is experienced.³⁵ And because they are excluded from the public sphere and the world of professions, they cannot partake of exclusive male discourse. Consequently, to escape their everyday world and still include men, they are forced to organize a type of sociable intercourse that presupposes only general culture (*Bildung*). Their desire to escape their domestic imprisonment, then,

drives them into the company of men, among whom they can be the founders of a better society, because they have nothing to do with bourgeois life and are not interested in the affairs of state . . . and precisely because they have no point in common with [men] except that they are educated people.³⁶

Schleiermacher could not be more direct. Unlike men, women cannot escape the domestic sphere by entering bourgeois society. They are excluded from formal education at the university and thus from professional occupations. As a consequence, women supposedly know and care little of the political world outside their direct orbit. To facilitate their escape from hearth and home, therefore, they must create a space that is neither domestic nor public, a space of formal *Bildung* and sociability. Accordingly, for Schleiermacher, “the point of origin for *freie Geselligkeit*” is not the family, as Ruth Drucilla Richardson claims,³⁷ but rather his “Platonic,” passionless, nondomestic friendship with Henriette Herz.

How we evaluate Schleiermacher’s construction of sociability and its implied solution to the anxiety caused by modernity depends, in part at least, on what consequences follow—not only for the men but also for the women involved. We might ask, Where does Schleier-

macher go on the days he does not visit Herz, and where does Herz go? We can only answer by saying that Schleiermacher ventures out into the “fragmented” world of bourgeois society, plying his trade as author, preacher, and theologian, while Herz remains quietly at home. The purportedly utopic and momentary release from the emerging divisions of modernity does nothing to alter the status of that modernity and thus does nothing to alter the concrete position of women in modernity. They are invited to initiate and choreograph an intricate and well-regulated interaction between cultivated minds for the sake of self-actualization in an imagined realm that disassociates itself from the intellectually limited and limiting duties of both men and women, but this invitation only marginally increases women’s participation in society as a whole.

Again, a letter from Schleiermacher can help us visualize in concrete if anecdotal detail the dual fates of our two protagonists. Once again trying to reassure his sister that there are no improprieties in his relationship with his female friend, Schleiermacher begins by noting his natural shyness, remarking that Herz often chides him for being too introverted. By inclination, then, he is not the ideal candidate for the type of sociability that he theorizes. This admission serves as the preamble to a remarkable passage from a letter Herz wrote to Schleiermacher that recalls a particularly stirring evening in which friends gathered at her sister’s home. In this letter (as cited by Schleiermacher in his letter to his sister), Herz places herself fully in the observer position, not only observing Schleiermacher and friends but also observing herself observing them. With great satisfaction, she watches but does not participate in the free exchange between Schleiermacher and a friend named Willich, observing the *Leichtigkeit* (ease) and *Offenheit* (openness) with which the former engages the latter. The sight of this uncharacteristic openness so fills her with emotion that she is rendered ecstatically mute even as the friends gathered to sing Schiller’s “Ode to Joy”:

My heart was very full when you left; I watched with inner joy and emotion as you and Willich drew nearer during the singing; and if I did not join in the chorus, it was because of the impossibility of uttering a sound, since the movement of my heart stifled all words and sounds.³⁸

Schleiermacher finally must leave to catch a late evening coach. All but Herz accompany him to the station, and when the others return,

Willich sits next to her. “[S]ilently and solemnly we celebrated your memory,” she reports. “He told me in a quiet voice that he had never felt as religious as at that moment: I savored the harmony and remained silent.”³⁹ He talks, he walks; she stays behind and remains silent. Schleiermacher carries his experiences and his facilities with him, while Herz—emotionally invigorated, to be sure—stays behind and sinks back into a warm and fulfilling but passive silence.

A mere anecdote? Yes, but also an emblem. Schleiermacher’s “free sociability, neither bound nor determined by any external purpose,” a form of endless and ends-less communication that can perpetually reproduce itself because it is not linked to a specific purpose, was purportedly developed to compensate for the effects of functional differentiation. The moment of achieved sociability, the moment observed between Schleiermacher and Willich, becomes a momentary act of de-differentiation and reharmonization (in song as well as being). Yet, as Jürgen Fohrmann notes, the form of sociable discourse also serves simultaneously as the motor for the temporalization of functionalized social systems. “A remarkable symbiosis takes place,” Fohrmann writes,

between formal and thematic de-differentiation on the one hand and social differentiation on the other. The circle of sociable people understands itself as the microcosm of humanity (society) and reunites in its structure of communication what in the framework of functional differentiation has already divided itself into the various individual logics of systems communication. At the same time, this communicative imperative is kept at such a formal level that it is reintegrated in the individual systems and used as program formulations (education of the individual in pedagogy, the seminar in the university, dialog of experts in science, sociable literary criticism in art, etc.).⁴⁰

Thus, what starts out as the other of function in an autonomous, functionless realm finds itself firmly embedded as the motivating force for the evolutionary development of nineteenth-century social systems—indeed, as the formal mechanism of historical perfectibility (hermeneutical dialog with tradition) and scientific progress (indefinite conversation with nature that transforms untenable theories into stages on the way to truth).⁴¹ The self-fashioning of a harmonious personality in the company of educated women becomes the honing of a

skill to be used in exclusively male occupational and professional domains. If women learn to refine these same skills, they must nonetheless reconcile themselves to the fact of a restricted application. When the sociable evening is over, women have nowhere to go except home.

IV.

This analysis is not meant to minimize the existential importance of the salons and the possibility of sociable discourse for educated women at the end of the eighteenth century. The ability to meet with one another and to meet, as intellectual equals, with educated men could be a many-faceted event leading to lasting intellectual and emotional friendships. As historian Deborah Hertz emphasizes, the Jewish salons in Berlin played an important role as a marriage market, bringing together cultivated, wealthy Jewish women with both ambitious middle-class men and the sons of the impoverished lesser aristocracy.⁴² The salons also served as the site for developing long-standing female-female friendships and quite possibly homosexual liaisons.⁴³ This confluence of relative tolerance and social change certainly created possibilities of which some women (Herz, Rahel Varnhagen, and Dorothea Schlegel are among the most famous examples) were poised to take advantage. It is not that their education (conducted by tutors at home) made them eligible for a variety of careers but rather that their sociability (as well as that of their future husbands) allowed for a different quality in the one type of career for which they were preordained—that is, marriage, household management, and child rearing. However, the notion of sociability that could be located between the spheres of domesticity and society was a fiction, for the society in which this sociability took hold was more complex than such a scheme allows. The representation of modern society as divided into two spheres—one public, the other private, with the possibility of a utopic no-man’s-land in between—was misleading, because what occurred at the end of the eighteenth century as functional differentiation affected the domestic sphere as much as it did the public, transformed the domestic sphere too into a function system. The differentiation of society into a plurality of subsystems, in other words, left no room for extrasocial spaces within society, no domestic sphere and no utopic projects of *Bildung*, *aesthetische Erziehung* (aesthetic education), or *Geselligkeit*. One can, with Habermas, call it “colonization of the life-world” if one likes,⁴⁴ but if one wishes to understand the often contra-

dictory attempts of men and women to refigure sexual and gender relations at this time, one will need to recognize the fundamental and paradoxical limitations inherent in any utopic project that operates only with one and not the other notion of autonomy. The terms *family*, *children*, *child rearing*, *intimacy*, and *sexuality* all mark the emerging objects of specialized and professional (clinical, medical, therapeutic, pedagogical) discourses during the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, not realms of pre- or extrasocial life. The private, domestic sphere did not remain outside of society but was integrated into it by becoming functionalized as a subsystem. Thus, the banishment of women from the public sphere and their exclusive relegation to the domestic sphere might better be understood not as the result of a rigid distinction between the public and the private but as the restriction of women to just one realm or social subsystem of the all-encompassing public sphere called society. Contrary to the prevailing rhetoric of the time, women were not banished from functionally differentiated bourgeois society; they were just kept stratified, assigned one “natural” occupation, while their partners became agile and functionally flexible.

After phrasing them in this way, one can recognize that both the idealist and the Marxist critiques of bourgeois society as the locus of alienated and self-alienating labor have consistently worked against the interests of women, who have been historically excluded on the basis of purportedly natural distinctions. Consequently, the various projections of utopic spaces intended to compensate for the debilitating effects of a thoroughly administered society served in fact as mechanisms of this exclusion, not as blueprints for a better future in a sublated modernity. Eschatological hopes for radical transformation became thereby just another vehicle for an invisible continuity. When, as has traditionally been the case, the differentiation of modern society is looked on negatively as both the cause and manifestation of fragmentation and alienation, the urge to construct “nonsocial” spaces to serve as objects of utopic longing remains an ever-present temptation. Historically, such temptations have manifested themselves in depictions of women charged with overseeing these idealized domestic or sociable spaces and thereby credited with preserving some of the natural harmony and totality of personality that were said to be lacking in their professionalized male counterparts. Such representations seldom announced themselves as explicitly misogynist. After all, it is one thing to be explicitly restricted to only a highly limited number of social spheres—the home, the salon, perhaps a school for young girls—

because of one's natural inferiority and quite another to be praised for the undisturbed harmony of one's nature and therefore "spared" the trials and tribulations of a fragmented and unfulfilling social reality. Against the former thesis—one's natural inferiority—cogent liberal, enlightened arguments could be and were made at the time by Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel, Mary Wollstonecraft, Olympe de Gouges, and others. But to argue against the latter claim—the one that purported to shield women from the psychic damage that men, of necessity, must endure as part of their anthropologically determined role in earthly affairs—was a good deal more difficult, especially if one shared the prevailing negative evaluation of modern society. Faced with the alternative of self-alienation in functionalized society and self-actualization at sociable evening gatherings, one would have been hard-pressed to choose the former. Or, put another way, alleviating the monotony of domesticity with the type of intense experience that Herz apparently enjoyed, however fleetingly and silently, in the company of her intellectual peers seemed preferable to escaping the prison of domesticity altogether for the sweatshop of bourgeois society. Perhaps this helps explain one of the more intriguing puzzles that surrounds the intense discussion of gender in Germany around 1800. For all the collaboration between men such as the Schlegel brothers and women such as Dorothea Schlegel and Caroline Schlegel-Schelling, and for all their derision of Goethe's and Schiller's idealization of passive femininity; for all of Schleiermacher's efforts to argue for and realize the possibility of equal, nonsexual, male-female friendship; for all the activism of women pedagogical reformers such as Betty Gleim and Amalia Holst; and for all the anger of a woman such as Rahel Varnhagen directed against the various social hierarchies that excluded women in general and Jewish women in particular from full participation in all aspects of the social life of her day—no one, it seems, could articulate his or her frustration and desire for change in a language that did not reinforce the prevailing anthropological discourse and thus the essentialized distinctions that that discourse established. Even the most utopian of projections only replicated the exclusions that these men and women sought to escape. One could desire emancipation around 1800, it seems, but one could not imagine it happening within society.

Notes

1. For an excellent account of the Jewish salons, see Deborah Sadie Hertz, *Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin* (New Haven, 1988). For a more com-

prehensive account of Berlin's nineteenth-century salon scene, see Petra Wilhelmy, *Der Berliner Salon im 19. Jahrhundert (1780–1914)* (Berlin, 1989). See also Hartwig Schultz, ed., *Salons der Romantik: Beiträge eines Wiepersdorfer Kolloquiums zu Theorie und Geschichte des Salons* (Berlin, 1997), vol. 2, in which two essays are of particular interest here: Andreas Arndt, "Geselligkeit und Gesellschaft: Die Geburt der Dialektik aus dem Geist der Konversation in Schleiermachers 'Versuch einer Theorie des geselligen Betragens,'" 45–61; Konrad Feilchenfeldt, "Rahel Varnhagens 'Geselligkeit' aus der Sicht Varnhagens: Mit einem Seitenblick auf Schleiermacher," esp. 160–69.

2. Dorothea Veit, born Brendel Mendelssohn, was the daughter of the Enlightenment Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn and is better known as Dorothea Schlegel. Unhappily married to Simon Veit, a prominent Jewish banker, she met Friedrich Schlegel in Herz's salon in August 1797. See Henriette Herz, *Henriette Herz in Erinnerungen, Briefen, und Zeugnissen*, ed. Rainer Schmitz (Frankfurt, 1984), 53–61, for a description of an account of Dorothea Schlegel's divorce from Veit, her affair with Schlegel, and their eventual marriage. Herz also relates her husband's wish that she break off her friendship with Dorothea and refusal to do so. Friedrich Schlegel's philosophical novel, *Lucinde*, not only reflects their affair (to the embarrassment of their friends) but also gives a possible impression of the type of intellectual discourse that may have occurred in the salons. See Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis, 1971).

3. Privately in the letters cited later in this chapter and publicly in his *Vertraute Briefe über Friedrich Schlegel's "Lucinde,"* written in 1800 and currently most readily accessible in Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde: Ein Roman: Mit Friedrich Schleiermacher's "Vertrauten Briefen über Friedrich Schlegel's 'Lucinde'"* (n.p., 1985). For Wilhelm Dilthey's still interesting evaluation of the significance of Schlegel's *Lucinde* and Schleiermacher's *Briefe*, see *Leben Schleiermachers*, vol. 1, ed. Martin Redeker (Berlin, 1970), 13:496–546.

4. Herz, *Henriette Herz*, 92. All translations of Herz and Schleiermacher are my own.

5. *Ibid.*, 90. For both the lack of sexual attraction and the disparity in their physical appearance, see also Schleiermacher to sister, 12 February 1801: "Whoever understands anything about internal expression will recognize in her a passionless being, and even if I were inclined to succumb to the influence of external features, I find nothing appealing in her—though her face is undeniably very beautiful—and her colossal, majestic figure is so very much the opposite of mine that if I were to imagine that we were both free, and loved and married one another, I would always find something ridiculous and absurd in the situation that would only be outweighed by the most extraordinary of circumstances" (Herz, *Henriette Herz*, 330–31). The pertinent letters by Schleiermacher are reproduced in Herz, *Henriette Herz*; for the sake of convenience, all citations are from this volume.

6. Schleiermacher to sister, 30 May 1798, in *ibid.*, 263.

7. Both Schleiermacher and his friends were aware of the possibility of sincere self-deception. See two remarks by Schleiermacher: “Both Schlegel and Veit were worried that I was deceiving myself, that passion was at the bottom of my friendship with Herz, that I would sooner or later discover this fact and it would make me unhappy” (ibid., 263–64); “Nothing passionate will ever develop between us; our relationship has already been thoroughly tested in that regard. Do not take the fact that I speak of this with such certainty as arrogance” (284).

8. For evidence to the contrary, see Schleiermacher to sister, 8 November 1798, in which he fantasizes about a marriage to Herz (ibid., 277).

9. Schleiermacher to sister, 26 October 1798, 23 March 1799, in ibid., 277, 285.

10. The reference to teaching Herz Greek comes from Schleiermacher to sister, 20 December 1800, in ibid., 325.

11. Ibid., 262–63.

12. See the often-cited line from Schleiermacher to sister, 23 March 1799: “It is deeply ingrained in my nature, dear Lotte, that I will always relate to women more closely than to men, because there is so very much in my heart that the latter seldom understand” (ibid., 284).

13. See Schleiermacher to sister, 23 March 1799: “I can complement her insights, her outlook, her soul, and she does the same for me” (ibid.).

14. “We have done so since the beginning of spring, and no one has disturbed us” (ibid., 263).

15. For a thorough account of this process, see J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1997).

16. See, for example, Max Weber, “Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions,” in Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York, 1946), 323–59.

17. Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity versus Postmodernity,” *New German Critique* 22 (1981): 8.

18. I have in mind Niklas Luhmann, whose work informs the following discussion. For the most thorough discussion of the functional differentiation of modern society, see Niklas Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt, 1997), 595–865. In English, see Niklas Luhmann, “Differentiation of Society,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 2 (1977): 29–53.

19. Luhmann, *Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, 678–776.

20. Ibid., 86–91.

21. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, 1987), 16. The alternate translations of the German *Entzweiungen* are provided in the original.

22. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (London, 1967), 324–25.

23. Friedrich Schleiermacher, "Versuch einer Theorie des geselligen Betragens," in *Schriften*, ed. Andreas Arndt (Frankfurt, 1996), 65.
24. *Ibid.*, 70.
25. *Ibid.*, 65, 66.
26. *Ibid.*, 69.
27. *Ibid.*, 70–71.
28. *Ibid.*, 71.
29. *Ibid.*, 74.
30. *Ibid.*, 73.
31. "If I know that one person is a businessman, another a financier, and a third a landowner, then, of course, that which is common to all three occupations is easily found, but what I know of the talents, knowledge, and education of a person based on his bourgeois station is simply the bare minimum of what he can be—namely, what he is forced to be by his occupation. How much more additional knowledge and ideas might not these three people possess and exchange that have nothing to do with their profession?" (*Ibid.*, 81–82).
32. *Ibid.*, 82.
33. *Ibid.*, 77.
34. *Ibid.*, 80.
35. *Ibid.*, 83.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Ruth Drucilla Richardson, *The Role of Women in the Life and Thought of the Early Schleiermacher (1768–1806): An Historical Overview* (Lewiston, 1991), 132. See esp. her brief discussion of the "Versuch" essay (129–32) and of *Die Weihnachtsfeier* (133–64).
38. Schleiermacher to sister, 1 July 1801, in Herz, *Henriette Herz*, 335.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Jürgen Fohrmann, "Gesellige Kommunikation um 1800: Skizze einer Form," *Soziale Systeme* 3.2 (1997): 358.
41. On Schleiermacher's hermeneutics as a translation of *Geselligkeit* from an oral to a written medium, see *ibid.*, 359.
42. Hertz, *Jewish High Society*.
43. See, for example, Deborah Hertz's introduction to Rahel Varnhagen, *Briefe an eine Freundin: Rahel Varnhagen an Rebecca Friedländer*, ed. Hertz (Cologne, 1988), esp. 45–47.
44. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, 1987), 2:303–403.