

## **Gender Equity and the Dialogical *Ethos* of the University: Socrates, Schleiermacher and the Transversal Claim of the *Conversatorium***

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### **Abstract**

Open and unencumbered dialogue is the original position of the modern university-ideal, encompassing both its administrative and educational functions, outstripping even its important reliance upon research in laboratories or solitary writing and contemplative inquiry. This is an idea first intimated in Plato's *Symposium* and later made central to Schleiermacher's draft of a plan for the University of Berlin. Recent inquiries into the many myths of the modern university have lessened the claims on behalf of illustrious figures, such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, for having founded the modern university—a superhuman feat he would himself have disavowed; but the autonomous ideal of Humboldt's colleague, Friedrich Schleiermacher, in which special emphasis is given to “authentic dialogue,” “seminars” and “*conversatoria*” and which he modeled after the unofficial, salon-culture of Berlin, where colloquial spaces were hosted at regular intervals in the houses of leading Jewish women for the sole purpose of sustaining cross-cultural dialogue, appears to have been an underappreciated influence. The paper argues that the notion of the university as a free space of open discussion, devoted to testing truth-claims and hazarding new ideas, is perennially relevant, and potentially transversal for knowledge, inquiry, and reigning systems of social arrangement. It remains the soul of the university, much in the way salon-culture remains the soul of the coffee-house.

### **I. Introduction: Deconstructing the Gendered Myths of the University**

Gendered terminology cuts across every story that we tell ourselves about the nature of the modern university. From the granting of “bachelor” degrees and the singing of hymns to “alma mater,” to the notion that tutors are “midwives” delivering students of their concepts in conversational settings called “seminars” (referencing the ‘scattering of seed’), the long genesis of the university is freighted with allusions to our gendered, and, indeed, mammalian, physiology. Although in some cases the effects of such language are, indeed, troubling (for example, the long standing tradition in German universities for calling dissertation-advisors “Doktorvater”), other similarly gendered allusions add a familiar aspect to what would otherwise be a vague generality, and are less likely to raise doubts as to the aptness of their reference.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some gendered metaphors for higher learning have evolved meanings they appear not to have had long ago. For instance, the “bachelor's degree,” commonly awarded as the lowest qualifying degree at Universities in Europe and America, appears to have been a merging of the Greek tradition for awarding honors at the Pythian games with the presentation of laurel berries (*baccalaureus*) with the medieval hierarchy of knights, in which the knight *bachelor* (O.F.) was the lowest grade. The etymology of our contemporary sense of “bachelor,” however, is disputed. One reading has it that the term derives from “baccalarius,” or farm hand, *whether male or female*, and was probably coined with reference to one attending to a cowherd (from “bacca,” late Latin, for “vacca,” cow). Only much later,

For example, the notion that we are, as Descartes once put it, so dependent as cognitive beings upon literacy that we are “nourished by letters,” serves to link our biological heritage as mammals with what will later become the term for addressing graduates of a college, namely, as “alumni,” i.e., those who have been ‘alimentated.’<sup>2</sup> (If our students have been alimentated by our educational institutions, then our colleges and universities must be analogous to nursing mothers; hence, the gendered phrase “alma mater.”) But, to be sure, we are not really ‘nourished by letters,’ despite whatever value we accrue from mastering them, and college alumni do not really owe the same debt to their ‘alma maters’ that an infant owes to its mother or nurse.

Some of these buried allusions refer to our dependent origins as mammalian nurslings, while others allude to the possibility of generating new lines of thought, considered according to the reference of sowing seed, crossing-pollinating species, etc., whereas other metaphors serve as code for the labor and delivery of bearing conceptual fruit in transitional states analogous to late-term pregnancy. The fact that much of this passes for common sense today reveals the extent to which institutions can become bewitched by language. As the writer and critic, Maurice Blanchot,<sup>3</sup> once put it about similarly freighted language in contemporary theory,

[l]anguage becomes a weird life, without innocence, something lingering and sometimes tremendously quick, like lightning. ...The result is that these free words becomes centers of magical activity, and, more than that, things as impenetrable and opaque, as any human object withdrawn from utilitarian signification. ...Language no longer has anything to do with the subject; it is an object that leads us and can lose us; it has a value beyond our value. ... *It is rhetoric become matter.*

(Blanchot, p. 89) [emphasis added]

If these suspicions about theoretical language are well targeted, the ways in which we speak about our educational institutions harden into attitudes and policies that later take on the appearance of given fact. The obligation of being faithful to tradition that follows along behind any institution of maturity adds still a further burden to the consideration.

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did it take on the additional weight of referring to unmarried adult men, who were marriable, but were not married, perhaps due to difficulties in marrying off large farm families.

Cf. Mitchell’s *Significant Etymology: Roots, Stems, and Branches of the English Language*, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Both “alumnus” and “aliment” derive from “allere,” the Latin root for nourishment.

<sup>3</sup> The context for Blanchot’s diagnosis is the advent of surrealism in Paris, but some of these same fears and concerns dogged the heels of the early German romantics. See his *Work of Fire*, p. 89.

Still, it is curious how such beliefs cluster together in what we might term, *constellations of meaning*, even where there is manifestly no astral source for the illumination we claim to see in them.<sup>4</sup> Other similarly patched together analogies factor into our contemporary conception of the modern university, and the question arises, how has the operative terminology of gendered reference influenced the actual design and implementation of university practice?

While putting forward a comprehensively adequate answer to such a question goes beyond the bounds of the present paper, it is useful to pause and reconsider the role played by the Socratic school of philosophy in advancing many of these notions for the first time, since many of these biologisms were first deployed by the Socrates portrayed in Plato's *Dialogues*. In particular, the *Symposium* had an enormous effect, not only on the founding of the Platonic Academy in Florence during the Renaissance, but also the University of Berlin in 1810. After briefly rehearsing the Socratic legacy in Athens and Florence, I will turn to a brief consideration of the reception of Socrates' approach to higher learning in early nineteenth century Germany, where Socratic philosophy was championed by the early German romantic writers as exemplifying *symphilosophy*,<sup>5</sup> a dialogical and collaborative form of critical thought, that they deployed in journals and salons of the era, and which, later, formed the vital center for Schleiermacher's vision for the University of Berlin.

## **II. The Latent Feminism of Plato's *Symposium* and its Continuing Relevance for Institutions of Higher Learning: Socrates and the Teaching of Diotima**

It is not often remarked by scholars that, in addition to its thematic pursuit of the question—what is love?—the *Symposium* presents a systematic exposé of dialogue in all its forms. Indeed, Plato takes great pains to distance, interrupt and even postpone, the *Symposium*'s promised engagement with the guiding question, almost as though his intention was not to foreground the virtues of his famous teacher, Socrates, but rather to contextualize it as one aspect of a far more

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<sup>4</sup> My use of “constellation” here will be familiar to readers of Benjamin and Adorno. For an excellent overview of their use of the notion, see Martin Jay's *Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 15, where he elucidates it as “a juxtaposed rather than integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a denominator, essential core, or generative first principle.”

<sup>5</sup> The term “symphilosophy” first appears in print in the pivotal, but short-lived journal, *Athenaeum*, the product of Friedrich and August Schlegel. See fragment 112 for an example of how the prefix “sym-” hardly connotes sympathy or agreement for the brothers Schlegel: “Philosophers who aren't opposed to each other are usually joined by sympathy, not symphilosophy.”

complex picture of human inquiry, in which his favored method (the cross examination of assumptions) is situated in a social world, both stimulating and challenging to his chief protagonist.

Unlike the Socrates of the *Apology* or the *Crito*, Socrates is clearly not ‘on trial’ for his strong devotion to a personal research agenda, nor is he presented as being awkwardly out of place –or what the Athenians called, “atopos.” Although he is portrayed as being prone to distraction in the dialogue, he goes along gladly to the banquet, and is even portrayed as having donned ceremonial garb in honor of the occasion. Indeed, the Socrates we see in the *Symposium* acts in ways that are strangely un-Socratic,<sup>6</sup> if, that is, we judge his words and deeds by the pattern set in the early dialogues: Invited to an aristocratic banquet, which, like every academic, he is all-too delighted to attend, Socrates nevertheless delays his entrance into the banquet hall, has to be fetched by a servant after the dinner has already begun, and, insists on bringing along an ally, as he senses the evening’s proceedings will be competitive; lastly, and, perhaps, most surprisingly, when it comes time for the feast of words to begin, Socrates chooses to deliver his speech, not in his own name, but rather those of his female teacher, Diotima, about whom, almost nothing is known, save for this one passage in the *Symposium*.

For our purposes here, the two most important aspects of the *Symposium* are the diverse ways in which dialogue is portrayed as an integral part of the life of the mind, ways including but not limited to, mythical narrative, philosophical argumentation, critical cross-examination, solitary meditation and rhetorical celebration—and this last point, namely, that Plato’s account would be substantially incomplete if it did not include at least one feminine voice (in this case, that of Diotima, as recollected in the speech of Socrates).

As the dialogue unfolds, we are given to believe that, the speech of Diotima, as retold by Socrates, now constitutes Socrates’ mature (and positive) theory regarding the progressive ascent of human understanding from its consideration of physical objects endowed with beautiful form to ideal forms understood as intelligible archetypes of beauty. It follows on the heels of Socrates’ contentious cross-examination of Agathon about the contents of his earlier speech on the nature of love, in which we witness Socrates speaking and acting as we are accustomed to

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<sup>6</sup> For an excellent reconstruction of the many layers of hearsay and allusion that complicate our reading today of the prologue, see Stanley Rosen’s *Plato’s Symposium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968/1987), p. 10-17. For an opposed reading, but highly illuminating, see Martha Nussbaum’s chapter on the speech of Alcibiades in the *Symposium* in her *Fragility of Goodness*, pp. 161-199.

seeing him, i.e., fully engaged in the method of *elenchus* (i.e., methodical analysis of argument-assumptions). That Socrates finds himself ill equipped to answer the question positively is not surprising, as negative dialectics cannot itself indicate what is actually the case, but only rule out what cannot be the case (due to logical inconsistency, self-contradiction, etc.). But there is little to prepare the reader for this sudden and uncharacteristic, handoff:

No, no dear Agathon. It's the truth you find unanswerable, not Socrates. And now I am going to leave you in peace because I want to talk about some lessons I was given, once upon a time, by a *Mantinean woman called Diotima—a woman who was deeply versed in this and many other fields of knowledge. It was she who brought about a ten years' postponement of the great plague of Athens on the occasion of a certain sacrifice, and it was she who taught me the philosophy of Love.* (*Symposium*, 201d) [emphasis added]

It is sometimes suggested that the appearance of Diotima in the *Symposium* is due to this glaring insufficiency in Socrates' own methodology. In other words, in that he is wedded to a relentlessly self-critical position, i.e., a purely negative dialectic, Socrates can only cite another's positive teaching as a quasi-traditional basis<sup>7</sup> for where his own sentiments might feasibly lie, and then, deconstruct this hypothesis as well. But Diotima's teaching is not delivered in the *Symposium* as a canned speech in the same manner that Agathon and the others' earlier speeches are. In fact, during this part of the dialogue, Socrates' customary role as conceptual midwife is refused him, and the tables are turned, with the result that Diotima plays the role of questioner, leading Socrates to a progressively comprehensive vision of his own epistemic commitments. Socrates relates all of this indirectly, as a dialogue within a monologue, and connects his own prior naiveté about love with Agathon's unexamined position (which Socrates has just refuted):

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<sup>7</sup>For a revisionist account of Diotima's historical status, see C. Jan Swearingen's very useful chapter on Diotima in *Classical Rhetorics and Rhetoricians: Critical Studies and Sources* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishing, 2005), p. 142. Swearingen makes an important point about female speakers in ancient Athens: the capacity for women to speak in public was tightly regulated by Athenian law. The only way in which they could speak publically was as a priestess (which, like teaching, was a profession licensed by legal code). "Although it has long been claimed she is a fictional character, her appearance in Plato's *Symposium* is given an historical setting that can be documented: the plague which afflicted Athens during the Peloponnesian War in 440 BCE, and which eventually caused Pericles' death. Athens regulated the public appearance of women more strictly than other cities; priestesses were the only women allowed to speak in public without fear of rebuke or disgrace. It is therefore plausible that a priestess would have to be called from nearby Mantinea. Like the Pythagorean women dispersed during the same period, the priestesses of Mantinea would not have celebrated the Athenian state deity, Athena, but more probably Aphrodite. . . (142-43).

And now I am going to try to connect her teaching—as well as I can without her help—with the conclusions that Agathon and I have just arrived at. Like him, I shall begin by stating who and what Love is, and go on to describe his functions, and I think the easiest way will be to adopt *Diotima's own method of inquiry by question and answer*. I'd been telling her pretty much what Agathon has just been telling me—how love was a great God, and how he was the love of the beautiful, and *she used the same arguments on me that I've just brought to bear on Agathon* to prove that, on my own showing, Love was neither beautiful nor good... (201e) [emphasis added]

In a dialogue that is a nested series of quotations within quotations, starting with Apollodorus, who quotes Aristodemus, who quotes Socrates, who quotes Diotima, it is only this last voice that breaks the cycle of deferral, asking Socrates directly to philosophize about what he sees happening in nature:

Of course, I'm right, she said. And why all this longing for propagation? Because this is the one deathless and immortal element in our mortality...[;] it follows that, we are bound to long for immortality as well as for the good—which is to say that Love is longing for immortality.

—So much I gathered, gentlemen, at one time and another from Diotima's dissertation [?] upon love.

—*And then one day she asked me*, Well, Socrates, and what do you suppose is the cause of all this longing and all this love? Haven't you noticed what an extraordinary effect the breeding instinct has upon both animals and birds, and how obsessed they are with desire, first to mate, and then to rear their litters and their broods. . . . With men, she went on, you might put it down to the power of reason, but how can you account for love's having such remarkable effects upon the brutes? What do you say to that Socrates?

—Again, *I had to confess my ignorance*. (206e – 207a) [emphasis added]

Diotima's teaching reveals itself to be equal parts tutorial and therapy. At the conclusion of the banquet, Socrates will reveal to what extent he has realized the truth of her teaching by surpassing all the others in both sobriety and wakefulness.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps this is Plato's purpose: To reveal the incompleteness of the method of direct cross-examination (or *logos* in the strict sense), if it is not rounded off by a fuller engagement in a symposium-type environment where conviviality reigns supreme, but is also conditioned by competitive rivalry, and where superior arguments receive rounds of critical praise and deficient arguments are subject to critical blame, and even these are subject to further review. Such a

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<sup>8</sup> Socrates' victory is signaled by his sober departure from the drinking-party, a conclusion signifying a curious adaptation: His ability to separate out the intelligible aspect from the physical inducement has given him an almost complete mastery of the circadian rhythms governing his body's need for sleep.

symposium, if made the underlying model for a university, would not only include the task of setting one's account alongside others, but also that of submitting to direct cross-examination, not only regarding one's central argument, but also regarding one's general knowledge, something modern universities call a 'thesis-defense.'<sup>9</sup>

Given its time and place, what is most remarkable about the *Symposium* is not only this last claim – namely, that the soul's conversation with itself is conditioned by the soul's conversation with others, as though at a feast, where all are served, and all serve in return – but that the key role in this epistemology of incompleteness should be attributed to a woman. This last has led many scholars to wonder whether Diotima was a real person, or whether she was a poetic invention. Most modern translations and commentaries are either agnostic about the whole matter (treating every character, including Socrates, as Platonic fictions), or else they view it as obvious that Socrates is adapting his speech to his interlocutors, i.e. telling a tall tale, but with an educational purpose. It is this latter claim that has drawn the ire of feminists scholars for, in this kind of reductive-explanation, they see the handiwork of, what Susan Hardy Aiken has called “woman erasure.”<sup>10</sup> In a recent issue of the *Forum on Public Policy* (Summer, 2007), Lynda George has summarized the scholarly history behind Diotima's reduced influence, presenting an intriguing account of the whole affair that well bears out this suspicion. Noting that ancient artifacts and bas-reliefs indicate that Diotima was frequently portrayed alongside of Socrates, George concludes that she probably did exist, at least to the same extent that Socrates himself did: “One may with some certainty conclude that the fundamental reason Diotima is not accepted to be a real historical person who lived and taught Socrates is due to the fact that she

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<sup>9</sup> Already discernible in Socrates central role as commentator in the *Symposium* is a repeatable pattern not unlike what Richard Dawkins will later call a 'meme': Socrates' comments after each speaker are at pains to highlight the lasting truth of that speaker's contribution, while Socrates' own speech reveals that Diotima had already played the same role as active midwife to on his own self-understanding. This raises the question, however, how much of this meme, if it is a perpetual possibility, is conditioned by gender, and how much is conditioned by the role of critical examiner in a dialogue? Socrates dons shoes and ceremonial dress, not because he is paying court to Agathon, the host of the banquet, nor is he acknowledging the attendance of the other speakers, such as Aristophanes and Phaedrus, etc., but rather because this is how he was garbed when he first received the transmission from Diotima. His comments after each of their speeches is analogous to the role Diotima once played in his own quest for knowledge. Both his wearing of shoes, as well as his capping words, are the *anamnesis* performed by her earlier instigations.

<sup>10</sup> See Susan Hardy Aiken's *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.93. Katherine Welch has appropriated this phrase, now widespread, in her *Electric Rhetoric: Classical Rhetoric, Oralism, and a New Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), where she attempts to rescue the lost voices of Aspasia and Diotima.

happened to be a woman and men have dominated the study of philosophy.”<sup>11</sup> Mary Ellen Waithe, in her preface to the multivolume series, *A History of Women Philosophers*, makes a similar point:

Other disciplines, especially classics and archeology, have considered this issue, and in following sources outside philosophy, I came across two different types of evidence bearing upon it. First, it appears that in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a scholar suggested that it was “silly” to think that a woman would have been a philosopher. And second, there is ancient archeological evidence which classicists and archeologists have interpreted as support for the claim that Diotima was indeed a historical person. The question whether she was the same person as she who had that conversation with Socrates described in the *Symposium* is not conclusively proven. It is important to note, however, that it is not conclusively disproven either.... I have included Diotima in our first volume partly to spur on further investigation by scholars.”<sup>12</sup>

On this reading, the history of Diotima’s erasure begins when the translation of Platonic texts was first undertaken on a large scale, i.e. under the influence of the Neoplatonic revival in renaissance Florence, and was principally due to the misogynistic errors of Marcilio Ficino, the founder of the Platonic Academy in Florence.<sup>13</sup> To be sure, this entire controversy awaits a fuller treatment, and by others more competent in deciding the merits of ancient texts and archeological remains.

While not taking a stand on the question of Diotima’s factual existence, I would like to recommend a subtle shift in focus, away from the ‘great philosophers fixation’ of recent years, to an appraisal that is more sociologically attuned to key structural changes conducive to making

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<sup>11</sup> Lynda George, “Gender Equity: In Search of Diotima's Place With the Ancient Philosophers” in *Forum on Public Policy*, Volume on Women’s Rights, Summer 2007: Available online in pdf form at: <http://forumonpublicpolicy.com/papersum07.html>

<sup>12</sup> See Mary Ellen Waithe, Ed., *A History of Women Philosophers*, Volume I (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1987), pp. xiv-xv. Her own chapter, “Diotima of Mantinea,” is also very useful for laying the groundwork regarding the classical sources, both textual and archeological.

<sup>13</sup> See Prudence Allen’s *The Concept of Woman* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmann’s Publishing, 1997) for a more detailed account of the way in which gender stereotypes shape Ficino’s reading of Plato’s *Symposium*. Especially relevant here are Allen’s observations, drawn from other historical sources, as well as Ficino’s own letters, regarding the admission of female students to the Platonic Academy in Florence, as well as Ficino’s awareness of Plato’s acceptance of female students in the original Academy: “The first question that should be asked is whether or not there were any women in Ficino’s Platonic Academy in Florence. An affirmative answer would be given in the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions. Ficino was aware that Plato had women disciples, for in a letter in which he discusses the disciples of Plato, he mentions ‘several others, among them, two women, Lastheneia of Mantinea and Axiothea of Phlius, who both wore men’s clothes’ . . . . In addition, Ficino left a list of persons who were his close friends. This list identified sixty seven men and no women. Should we conclude then that no women studied philosophy with Ficino? No. There is an alternate source of information that indicates that women were included in both meetings of the Academy and in correspondence with members of the Academy” (890).

real progress in improving human relations across the board. One of these changes, slow to emerge, and also slow to gain critical mass, is apparent already in the model of the symposium discussion-group, the hallmark of Plato's dialogue, in which every speech is shown to have at least one basic truth at stake in its particular perspective. This turn towards syncretism and tolerance appears to be of decisive importance, leading not only to the founding of the Platonic Academy in Florence, which I think surpasses in effect whatever unfortunate remarks Ficino may have made about the capacity of women to be philosophers,<sup>14</sup> but also to the subsequent spread of Diotimas across Europe, both in starting discussion groups and salons, but also circulating and publishing, for the first time, in many cases, women authors, a phenomenon scholars are beginning to chronicle from the mid-fifteenth century to the present day. The proliferation of the Diotima-function in the last two hundred years is more clearly a sign of her reality than the debate about her factual existence in Socrates' autobiography, I would argue.

### **III. The Mythical Genesis of the University of Berlin out of the Spirit of the *Conversatorium*: Schleiermacher and the Salon-Culture of Berlin (ca. 1804)**

There has always been something discordant about the idea of a national university centered in Berlin. This was recognized already in the 1600's by Leibniz, who so detested the dreary and run-of-the-mill lecturers he had encountered that he recommended to Friedrich Wilhelm I to avoid bringing such to Berlin, and to found, instead, a royal society, which might stimulate new and important research without rewarding the tired scholasticism of the university dons by lending them an audience. After Leibniz' death, the King so highly regarded Leibniz' idea that he appointed *three of his court fools as president of the Prussian Academy of the Sciences*.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Regarding Ficino's dubious legacy on this question, Allen adopts the long view: "How should Ficino's legacy for the history of the concept of woman be evaluated? If we considered his effect on women living during his lifetime, it would seem that he had a strong influence on men, especially through the reevaluation of the place of women's beauty in helping to lead men to the contemplation of absolute Beauty. By this measure, his influence on women would be negligible. However, if a longer time frame is selected, it would seem as though Ficino had an important influence on women becoming philosophers. Two of his most famous disciples wrote texts that brought innovations into the history of the concept of woman. Pietro Bembo's *Gli Asolani* recorded the first actual dialogue in which three living women participated with three men in the context of a humanist community of discourse. Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (The Courtier) contains the first direct arguments against Aristotle's foundations for the gender polarity theory. It also describes a woman at a court "where Neoplatonist doctrines of love are much in evidence . . . and justify the presence of women at court, both because of their beauty and because of their virtue" (902).

<sup>15</sup> I am reliant here, in much of what follows, on Daniel Fallon's indispensable study, *The German University: A Heroic Ideal in Conflict with the Modern World* (Boulder, CO: Colorado Associated University Press, 1980), especially pp. 5 – 53 on the founding of the University of Berlin.

Today, suspicion continues about the real worth of universities, and, in Germany, what was once looked on with pride, is now the frequent subject of a considerable amount of “rethinking.” The University of Berlin, founded by Wilhelm von Humboldt, in 1810, and now the bearer of his name (i.e., The Humboldt University of Berlin), is often the target of newspaper editorials, such as the one posted by the philosopher, Hans Lübbe, for the *Hamburger Sonnenblatt*: “The University of Berlin: Myth, or model? [Die Berlinische Universität: Mythos oder Modell?]”

Since Lübbe’s critique, articles and symposia have only increased in number, and to such an extent, it is now difficult to discern what it was about the University of Berlin that made it the archetype for the majority of universities with graduate programs, in both Europe and North America.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the salient features of the Berlin-model were (and remain) these:

(1) Its orientation was primarily directed towards *research*, rather than teaching, training or professional licensure; to the extent that each of these latter were engaged in, they were housed in separate Colleges (medicine, law, theology), but, notably, faculty even in these colleges were not free of the requirement to research and/or defend the results of research. In emphasizing research, the University of Berlin differed manifestly from colleges, which, at that time, were predominantly religious and doctrinal in their orientation, and academies, which were professional, but taken up with licensure and training. (Schleiermacher’s plan, “Occasional Thoughts on Universities,” widely circulated during the years leading up the founding of Berlin, was the principle source of this distinction between schools, colleges, academies and universities, as well as numerous passages about the requirement of all who teach, to be able to research and defend their claims in a forum-like *conversatorium*.)<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Rudiger vom Bruch’s “A Slow Farewell to Humboldt? Stages in the History of German Universities, 1810 – 1945,” Mitchell Ash, editor, in *German Universities Past and Future: Crisis or Renewal?* (Providence/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997). Also useful is Silvia Mergenthal’s “Women at German Universities: A Case of Non-Diversification?” and Konrad Schilly’s “Witten/Herdecke University – Still (?) a Special Case Among German Universities,” both included in *German and American Higher Education*, ed. Helmbrecht Breinig, Juergen Gebhardt, and Berndt Ostendorf, editors (151-57; 59-65). More recently, regarding the founding of University of Berlin, cf. Thomas Albert Howard’s *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> The term appears first in Fichte’s plan (“Deduced Principle”) for the University, but Schleiermacher’s “Occasional Thoughts about Universities” relates more clearly the central role this function shall play in the new model. I have adopted Fichte’s spelling, however, which retains the Latinized ending. Schleiermacher’s “conversatorien” appears to be a Germanized spelling for the same concept.

(2) Although fully state-funded, the principle architects of the university (Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Humboldt) insisted upon *the autonomy of the university*, especially regarding faculty appointments, research agendas, etc. This autonomy was not always tolerated (or acknowledged) by the government, but resembles most clearly the ideal autonomy of the North American private university, of which, until recently, there were none in Germany.

(3) The University of Berlin was also lauded for its orientation toward the pursuit of advanced study and the *awarding of advanced degrees* only (in particular, its designation of the terminal degree in the arts and sciences as the “Doctor of Philosophy” degree,<sup>18</sup> which was widely copied in Europe and North America).

(4) Also influential in the Berlin-plan, was its threefold division of the professoriate into distinct levels (roughly corresponding in status and responsibility to our distinction between lecturers, associates and full professors); to which, Berlin added the requisite minimums of published dissertation, for assistantship, a second, *Habilitationschrift*, or, published inaugural research project, for associate status, plus, a further expectation of an additional book, for full professor. (This model was widely copied in Germany, but has recently been widely criticized for its undesirable effects on faculty-hiring and diversity.)<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> According to Fallon, the American Ph.D. was directly modeled upon the German *Dr. phil.*: “The Ph.D. degree itself was a German import. None was awarded before 1861 when Yale awarded doctoral degrees to three students for high attainments in its Department of Philosophy and the Arts. By 1876, when Johns Hopkins opened, the Yale precedent of awarding a “doctor of philosophy” degree was being followed in 25 American colleges. The “doctor of philosophy” had been assumed directly from the German *Dr.phil.*, which was the principal academic degree awarded by the German “philosophische Fakultät” or faculty of arts and sciences” (52). Over time, Berlin began to offer various sub-doctoral degrees, called *Lizentiat* or *Diplom* degrees, which were awarded upon successful completion of a qualifying examination that was discipline-specific rather than a governmental exam (*Staatsexamen*). Although a staunch defender of the research-focus of Berlin, it was Schleiermacher who first advocated this option, not in order to open up an easier degree-track for students, but because he sought to make the doctorate in a discipline so rare. “By awarding a lesser degree, and reserving the doctorate only for remarkable contributions, the faculty at Berlin hoped to rescue the prestige of the doctorate in arts and sciences. As it turned out, the faculty was of such stellar quality that its first doctorates quickly won renown, and there was never any need to resort to the *Lizentiat*, which, in fact, was never awarded by the faculty of arts and sciences.” (Fallon, p. 39).

<sup>19</sup> See Mergenthal, op. cit., pp. 152-57, who notes the problem of same-sex favoritism, especially for younger, female assistant professors. Mergenthal recommends the adoption of diversity-action committees, or offices on campus, called *Frauenbeauftragte* offices, which administer women-hiring-plans (*Frauenförderpläne*) and oversee progress toward gender equity in faculty recruitment and retention; she also advises “reconsideration of the role of the *Habilitation* as a requirement for a professorship. It must be noted that Germany follows an invitation-only recruitment strategy, whereby search committees prepare a list of the best, most widely respected candidates in an area, and then submit that list to the hiring office, which then handles negotiations with the candidates. This is called *der Ruf*, i.e., receiving the call. It is presumably also a legacy of the ancient Greek notion of vocation, which

(5) Finally, Berlin adopted a university-governance structure in which administration is a shared responsibility between a faculty-appointed president (i.e., Rector) and a Faculty Senate made up of full professors. (Schleiermacher appears to have been a forceful advocate of the Senate-model, and its attendant ideal, whereby administrators were considered “first among equals” and faculty were considered partners in a joint-venture. He served on the Berlin Senate for many years, and appears, also to have been very adept at using its forum to advance policies favorable to his discipline, Theology.)

Although history has shown that several of these commitments are need of some revision, none are without merit as best-practice ideals, and they remain a powerful testament to the intrinsic value of academic freedom. Berlin’s well known mottoes, “Lehrfreiheit, Lernfreiheit!” (Freedom to teach, freedom to learn!) and “Universitas Litterarum,” serve, even today, as a powerful antidote to the corporate-model that we increasingly see asserting itself as the successor to the Humboldt-model.

In fact, the organizational principles for the University of Berlin became the guiding inspiration for a number of graduate programs in North America, including the Johns Hopkins University, the University of Chicago and the University of California, among many others which modeled themselves on Berlin. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, so strong was its attractive force that G. Stanley Hall, founder of the American Psychological Association and president of Clark University (itself molded on the Berlin model) could say:

The German University is today the freest spot on earth....Never was such burning and curiosity....Shallow, bad ideas have died and truth has always attained power....Nowhere has the passion to push on to the frontier of human knowledge been so general. Never have so many men stood so close to nature and history or striven with such reverence to think God’s thoughts after Him exactly.<sup>20</sup>

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it mistranslates literally, into a summons from afar. Needless to say, there are far more candidates waiting to receive the call than there are positions, which makes gender equity efforts even more difficult in Germany than in the United States.

<sup>20</sup> Fallon, pp. 2 – 3. Fallon also records the following testimony, approximately forty years later by Abraham Flexner, the founder and first director of Princeton’s Institute for Advanced Study: “The German university has for almost a century and a half fruitfully engaged in teaching and research. As long as those two tasks combine in fertile union, the German university, whatever its defects of detail, will retain its importance. It has stimulated university development in Great Britain; from it has sprung the graduate school of the new world; to it industry and health and every conceivable practical activity are infinitely indebted.”

At the time of Hall's remarks in 1891, the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, himself the successor to Hegel's chair in philosophy at the University of Berlin, was beginning the first of many attempts to clarify and distinguish the methodologies of the natural from the so-called human sciences by basing the latter on an epistemological instrument he was calling at the time, "descriptive psychology." (Later, he would make clear that "hermeneutics" as previously outlined by Schleiermacher, was a better name for this primary tool of research in the humanities.) Berlin, which was widely venerated during the 1890's for its ground-breaking work in the natural sciences, especially chemistry and physics, would also win renown for its seminal work in the field of cultural history and historiography,<sup>21</sup> but it was not yet known as the birthplace of the humanities, i.e. the *Geisteswissenschaften*, although, due to Dilthey's influence, its name would become, by our time, virtually synonymous with the birth of this other, more contested, legacy as well.

It has often been remarked that Humboldt may not have been the actual person responsible for the successful debut, but no one else could have possibly gotten the task off-the-ground in such a short time.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Humboldt only stayed on the job sixteen months before returning to his research in Rome. But unique circumstances provided him with a governmental mandate and the money to hire the best faculty he could talk into a position. Humboldt's sterling connections and broad academic reputation insured a strong showing of interest by candidates. (Only one case required complex feats of negotiation, namely, the classicist Wolf; after long weeks of diplomacy, success was finally insured when it was revealed that Wolf did not want to be required to have to attend any faculty meetings!) By 1820, Berlin was already known as the premier center of advanced study in all of Europe, with names such as Fichte, Savigny, Schleiermacher, Hegel and prominently on its faculty. By midcentury it would add the names of Galt, Helmholtz, Burckhardt and Dilthey to the growing list.

The myth of the founder, however, overlooks, the extent to which a number of unrepeatable circumstances made Berlin uniquely positioned for success in this regard, not the least of which was its mercantile middle class, its emerging economic prowess and its rapidly

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<sup>21</sup> See Theodore Ziolkowski's *Clio: The Romantic Muse* (Princeton: Cornell University Press, 2004) for a highly readable account of Berlin's rapid rise in stature and reputation during the nineteenth century, especially in the area of history.

<sup>22</sup> So and so asserts that it would be more accurate to call the university the Kant-Schleiermacher University, than the Humboldt University. But so and so also points out that, not unlike Washington's role in the Constitutional Congress, widely respected and acknowledged as a central figure, his accomplishments with regard to the end-product are actually quite modest in comparison to more active voices in the legislative assembly.

growing population. (Berlin doubled its population in just twenty years, between 1800 and 1820, whereas the royal seat, Potsdam, not far removed from Berlin, is still roughly the same size today that it was in 1820.) The myth of the Humboldt University does not have to do with its well structured organization and clear sense of academic purpose; the myth was in Humboldt's singlehanded management of the university's genesis, which he himself would have surely downplayed.

#### **IV. Transversality, Socratic Dialogue and the Emergence of Gender Equity in the Public Sphere**

In his massively influential book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the German sociologist and philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, launched a significant rediscovery of the pivotal roles played in Western democracies by clubs, salons and other micro-societies, when he noted, in 1962, their pivotal importance in what appeared at the time to be a passing remark: “To be sure, before the public sphere explicitly assumed political functions in the tension-charged field of state-society relations, the subjectivity originating in the intimate sphere of the conjugal family created, so to speak, its own public” (29). The critical incubator for these new urban subjectivities was played by the rapidly spreading “table societies” (*Tischgesellschaften*) that were springing up in the late eighteenth century in major metropolitan areas, such as coffee-houses and the newly emergent salons, where people, not directly related to one another, could sit across from one another, in order to discuss issues of the day, both large and small. Habermas characterized the function of these sociological catalysts in shaping popular sentiment as an *ersatz* political realm, far more integrated and diverse than official culture:

Even before the control of the public sphere by public authority was contested and finally wrested away by the critical reasoning of private persons on political issues, *there evolved under its cover a public sphere in apolitical form—the literary precursor of the public sphere operative in the political domain.* It provided the training ground for a critical public reflection still preoccupied with itself—a process of self-clarification of private people focusing on the genuine experiences of their novel privateness. Of course, next to political economy, psychology arose as a specifically bourgeois science during the eighteenth century. *Psychological interests also guided the critical discussion sparked by the products of culture that had become publically accessible: in the reading room, and the theater, in museums and at concerts.* (ST 29)

In Berlin, this function of the apolitical precursor of the public sphere was played by privately hosted salons and tea societies, which met regularly in the homes of leading women in order to provide a focus group for hearing new work by poets, novelists and philosophers, both male and female, as well as discuss the leading issues of the day. One immediate result of many of these salons was the emergence of new publications featuring women writers, such as scholarly journals, anthologies of women poets, and annual compilations.<sup>23</sup>

If the founding of the University of Berlin was predominantly a male affair—and, *to be sure, it was, Berlin not allowing female students to enroll until the end of the nineteenth century*, much later, in fact, than other German universities<sup>24</sup>—it fell to the salons to form the stage upon which intelligent women could first present their ideas and their intellects in the context of a rich, cross-section of learned and established society. And unlike the universities in Germany, the salons were integrated across a much broader social spectrum, including writers and speakers from every social class, and nearly a century earlier than colleges and universities were similarly diversified; moreover, in these settings, women were also involved in every aspect of leadership, spearheading the planning and deployment of what was then an emergent social force. In The Romantic Poetess, Patrick Vincent described the role of the *salonières*, who facilitated the “familiar association” that came to characterize salon-culture, as being analogous to community-organizers:

In the salon, *talk harmonized people into a greater social whole*, the Republic of Letters, itself considered as a microcosm of civil society. Dena Goodman compares the salon to *a potlatch, a disinterested, pure form of reciprocity. Salon culture elevated women in particular because they acted as crucial mediators in this disinterested exchange*, thus becoming touchstones for the ideology of sympathy... Women, in effect, did not practice conversation; they enabled or harmonized it. (RP 128-129) [emphasis added]

Restricting his study to a consideration of the French salons, which were the model for those in Berlin in many ways, Vincent emphasized the “fluid subjectivity” that characterized the

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Diana Maury Robin’s *Publishing Women: Salons, the Presses, and the Counter-Reformation in sixteenth-century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) which details the rise of Salons in Italy and their role in publishing anthologies of women’s poetry, annuals, etc.

<sup>24</sup> For a full account of the slow pace regarding gender equity in the German university, see Patricia M. Mazón’s *Gender and the Modern Research University* (Stanford University Press, 2003), which, despite the more generic title, actually is a history of the University of Berlin and its subsequent effect on the German education system. Especially valuable are Mazón’s observations and statistics concerning the entrance test to college (*Abitur*) and the bars on diversity that still exist in the German model. Also useful in this regard is Silvia Mergenthal’s “Women at German Universities: A Case of Non-Diversification?” in *German and American Higher Education*, ed. Helmbrecht Breinig, Juergen Gebhardt, and Berndt Ostendorf, editors (151-57).

salon-world's "aristocratic ethos" in France (128); in such a fluid world, where verbal reciprocity and critical exchange is paramount, the *salonières* favored a strategy of being, what he calls, 'chameleon like': "[The salons exhibited] what Todd calls the 'social self as chameleon,' a stance that opposed any form of excess, professionalism, or examination of the inner self. This ideal stands at odds with our common notion of the romantic self as individualistic, self-reflexive, and overdramatic" (ibid.)

In Berlin, however, the situation was more removed from the influence of the court and its genteel courtesy (which was more prominent at the court in Potsdam). Consequently, the Berlin *salonières* were not as self-effacing as their French counterparts, and thus far less apt to model themselves on 'chameleon-like' strategies of blending in with others. I agree with Vincent that the overall effect of the salon-world was, in fact, one of fluid subjectivity, but, on my reading, this subjectivity was played out in Berlin as part of a more well rounded *communicative ethos*, which encompassed virtues and strategies that went well beyond universal empathy to include also moments of forceful advocacy, wit, intellectual spark, and gravitas.

According to some reports, many of the Berlin *salonières*<sup>25</sup> were so effective in their presiding role as architect of a new kind of social experience, that some writers could only articulate their experience with the help of religious language. For example, the brilliant writer and humorist, Heinrich Heine, described his attachment to Rahel Varnhagen's salon, as one in which he felt as though he were *owned*, declaring in a famous letter that he might as well "wear a dog collar around town inscribed with the words: 'I belong to Frau Varnhagen.'"<sup>26</sup> Pressed for a reason why he felt so obligated to attend her salons, he stated that it was because she was "the most inspired woman in the universe," and that his acquaintance with her, marked a "a new epoch" of creativity in his life, and that her home was, in fact, his true "*fatherland* ." To another

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<sup>25</sup> In recent years, there have been a growing number of studies, both historical and sociological, about the nature of the salon-world in Berlin, and these have helped shine the light on the significant role played by the *salonières* in shaping the ideas that would later flower into the University of Berlin, the paragon of the modern research university. See in this regard *The Literary Salon in Berlin, 1780-1806: The Social History of an Intellectual Institution*, the doctoral dissertation of Deborah Sadie Hertz. This provides an excellent analysis of the available data concerning numbers, locations, political effect, etc. It is absolutely indispensable for scholars attempting to chart the effects of salon-culture on the University of Berlin, its successor-institution, in many ways. See also Petra Wilhelmy-Dollinger's *Die Berliner Salons* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), which updates her excellent earlier monograph, published under the name Petra Wilhelmy, and the earlier title, *Der Berliner Salon im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989). The revised edition expands her coverage to include maps, lists of principal organizers, as well as attendees, etc., and even appends suggested walks (*Spaziergangen*) for travelers to Berlin wishing to visit some of the still surviving houses.

<sup>26</sup> See Ellen Key's *Rahel Varnhagen: A Portrait* (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1913), p. 235.

correspondent, he likened her to his “patron saint,” and said that his weekly trek to her salon was a kind of pilgrimage. Varnhagen, who was the subject of Hannah Arendt’s *Habilitationschrift*, made a similar effect on the writer, Grillparzer, who claimed that she was the only woman to whom he would have wished to be married. Certainly, on all accounts, Varnhagen appears to have been the most dynamic and intellectual of the Berlin *salonières*, but similar reports were also made by others about Henriette Herz, whose admirers, included Wilhem von Humboldt, who confessed to confidantes that he had loved her passionately, from a close distance, his entire life, as well as Friedrich Schleiermacher, about whom, rumors swirled for years, that he was in an illicit relationship, although no evidence of this has yet been substantiated by scholars of early German romanticism. In the case of two further Berlin salon-hostesses, proposals of marriage were made still more frequently, and, in a couple of cases, famously accepted. Dorothea Mendelssohn, the educated daughter of the famous Enlightenment philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn, who also wrote the novel *Florentin*, led several salons in Berlin and Jena, which rivaled those of Herz in the number of famous names who frequented them. She later married Friedrich Schlegel in 1804, the writer and critic, who coined the term ‘romanticism’ and had first met her at one of her salons; and, lastly, Caroline Michaelis, the educated daughter of a university professor, and herself a writer of considerable merit, married August Schlegel, the classicist brother of Friedrich, and, after their divorce, later remarried Friedrich Schelling, the idealist philosopher at the University of Berlin.

To none of these figures would it be appropriate to characterize them as being chameleon-like or genteel; so strongly stamped were they as individuals that most scholars merely refer to them by their first names. In the context, of Berlin’s salon-culture, or early German romanticism, “Rahel,” “Caroline” and “Dorothea” is sufficient to recollect their creative output, their social power and their strong personalities; whereas, adding “Levin” “Schelling” or “Veit” merely serves to date their life during a certain period of attachment. In fact, Caroline oversaw a group-living arrangement in Jena, which could only be called, today, a commune. Her years in Jena, spent in close proximity to Goethe, Schiller, Fichte, Novalis, the Schlegel brothers and Hegel, can only be called a salon that was in permanent session. So progressive was her vision of a community united around creativity, art and individual expression that her enemies called her “Dame Lucifer”; but her admirers praised her intellect, her warmth, and published her fragments and poems. It is widely believed that Friedrich Schlegel modeled parts of the

protagonist of his novel, *Lucinde*, on Caroline. Henriette Herz had a similar effect on Schleiermacher in Berlin, whose salon he visited weekly, and which he often used as a sounding-board for his emergent views on the university, ethics, the looming Jewish question in Berlin and other philosophical and political matters. About none of these impressive feminine voices would it be accurate to say that they principally directed [their] ‘attention to coordinating the egos of those around her’, or that they were concerned, “not to stand out too much,” as Vincent earlier characterized the role of the salon-leader in France.

Were we to step back here from this brief account of the Berlin-salons and attempt to generalize their effect with regard to the founding of the university of Berlin, we might say that, in many ways, the role of women in shaping the debate about the nature of the university was analogous to the role played previously by Diotima in the *Symposium*: Like her, they were not afforded a place at the table, alongside what should have been their male colleagues, but in the strong leadership and example they provided in their salons, we can discern the live model for the multi-disciplinary *conversatorium* that writers like Schleiermacher used as a basis for the research-symposium that became the University of Berlin.

Moreover, I believe that further research into this question will establish the basis for asserting that, the Diotimas of the salon-world were equally influential on their Enlightenment counterparts, that is, the Humboldt’s, Fichtes, Schleiermachers and Schlegels, who eagerly played the role of Socrates in the salons cum symposia of the early eighteen-hundreds; but, whereas Diotima’s signal influence on Socrates was only made manifest after he had performed the function of public *confession*,<sup>27</sup> few of the German heirs to Socrates similarly confessed their tutelage to the feminine *salonières* whose salons helped them give birth to their ideas.

One exception, to this, was the early German romantic writer (and scene-organizer), Friedrich Schlegel, whose twin treatises on the status of women in ancient Greek literature (“Über die weiblichen Charaktere be den griecheschen Denkern” and “Diotima”) show his clear dissatisfaction with the subordinate position accorded to women in antiquity, and yet also his clear admiration for Diotima: “The beauty of the fairest and loftiest productions of the ancients is marred, in our eyes, by reminding us, even and anon, of a blemish in their social

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<sup>27</sup> Foucault’s late writings on “technologies of the self” has called attention to confession, both as a spiritual exercise, but also a public “act of truth.” See in this regard: *Religion and culture*, selected writings, ed. Jeremy R.Carette (New York: Routledge, 1999), especially “On the government of the living” pp. 154-57 for an account of exomologesis in the ancient Greek world. Also useful is *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), especially the manuscript of Foucault’s lecture, “Technologies of the Self”(pp. 16 – 49).

arrangements so flagrant and so perverse.” (On the Ancients, p. 32) Regarding Diotima, Schlegel wrote in 1795, not only of her “beautiful femininity,” but more importantly, about her “perfected humanity” and her “great understanding.” In so doing, he was the first modern philosopher to have singled her out for praise and sustained attention (his article goes on for some dozen pages):

In the dialogue, Socrates even calls himself her admirer, her student. Her extensive thoughts on desire and the beautiful are as comprehensive as they are as astute, as definite as they are delicate. The gentle greatness with which she speaks reveals a heart that equals her great understanding and presents an image to us not only of beautiful femininity, but of perfected humanity. Her dialogue with the wise man is one of the most excellent relics of antiquity. And it is probable enough that the Platonic Socrates – here as in several other dialogues – does not take the term love, which he confesses to have learned from her, to mean transitory delights, but rather nothing other than the pure goodness of a perfected disposition.

This was written in Jena, where a veritable Diotima cult had sprung up,<sup>28</sup> and after Schlegel had met Caroline, the center of the Jena romantic circle, whom Schlegel called “my independent Diotima” (Letter to Caroline Bohmer, 2 October 1795). After leaving Jena and settling in Berlin, but prior to his meeting Dorothea, Schlegel moved into a flat with Schleiermacher, a domestic arrangement that worked out so well, each referred to the other as his “wife” (*Ehefrau*). And it is here that the two scions of early German romanticism hatched the idea of co-translating the Dialogues of Plato, although this would be the bone of contention that later strained their relationship. Written in the years leading up to the founding of the University of Berlin, Schleiermacher gave a prominent place to the *Symposium* in his re-ordering of the dialogues, so that all of the ‘authentic’ dialogues are seen as leading up to the “guest-meal” (Schleiermacher’s oddly elliptical translation of the title), with the exception of the *Phaedo*, which Schleiermacher regarded as the acme of Platonic artistry and insight. In his “Introduction” to the *Symposium*,<sup>29</sup> Schleiermacher frames the intermedial aspects of Diotima’s conception of love, intermediary between universal and particular, divine and human, man and woman, a transversal force of universal creativity:

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<sup>28</sup> Both Hölderlin and Schlegel referred to significant women in their groups with the moniker, Diotima, and both also attempted to resurrect something of her spirit in their work: Hölderlin, the lyrical voice of the elegy, and Schlegel, the beautiful disposition of perfect humanity. Cf. in this regards, Julia Lukjanova’s “Die Antike Eroskonzeption by F. Hölderlin und F. Schlegel, ausgehend von der Theorie der Diotima in Platons Symposion.” Masters Thesis. 2003. Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Online link: <http://www.grin.com/e-book/15293/die-antike-eroskonzeption-bei-f-hoelderlin-und-f-schlegel-ausgehend?partnerid=googlebooks>

<sup>29</sup> For Schleiermacher’s reading of Diotima’s speech, cf. Schleiermacher’s Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato, trans. William Dobson (New York: Arno Press, 1973), pp. 281, 288-89.

...and therefore Diotima takes especial pains to show that in mortal man, even knowledge herself appears as mortal; not as that which is ever immutable and self-consistent, but only as that which is ever renewing itself; and, therefore, confined between two periods of time, is in each several instance only recollection going back to its eternal and permanent archetype; and she endeavors to show that love cannot in any way generate the eternal nature and immortal essence of knowledge, but can only generate for it its state of mortal appearance, and not only vivifies it in the individual, but by this transference from one to another, makes it immortal in the mortal.... (288-299)

Although falling short of his roommate and co-editor's life-imitates-art remark that the Jena *salonnière*, Caroline Bohmer, was his 'independent Diotima,' these remarks about the intermedial nature of Diotima's teaching in the *Symposium* suggest that Schleiermacher shared Schlegel's high esteem for this legendary figure of antiquity.

## V. Conclusion

In conclusion, rather than seeing the self of the *salonnières* as a social chameleon, I would like to borrow the concept of *transversality* from Félix Guattari, and apply it to the *communicative ethos that I believe was operative in the salon as a whole*. This, I think, is one of the lasting benefits of the symposium-model that was kept alive by the salon-tradition and made into a powerful instrument of social change.

Guattari, who was trained as a psychoanalyst in post-war France, and who co-authored several books with the prominent French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, also spent a good deal of time working in a psychiatric hospital, where he interned after taking his degree. In his experience of working in an institutional environment such as a psychiatric ward, Guattari began to reflect on the inadequacies of traditional Freudian theory, not merely for grasping the plight of his patients, but especially, for grasping the communications within the institution itself. It was in this context of reflecting on the nature of group psychology in an institutional setting governed by vertical hierarchy and systematically distorted communication that Guattari coined the phrase, "transversality." Writing in *Molecular Revolution* (1972), Guattari summarized the thought-process behind his neologism as the third way between two rivals for control of the conversation, one, analogous, to the physicians, the other, analogous to the patients. With appropriate modifications, the situation readily transfers to a university setting.

The subject group, or group with a ‘vocation’ endeavors to control its own behavior and elucidate its object, and in this case, can produce its own elucidation. Schotte could say of this type of group that *it hears and is heard*, and that *it can therefore work out its own system of hierarchizing structures and so become open to a world beyond its own immediate interests*. The dependent group is not capable of getting things into this sort of perspective: *the way it hierarchizes structures is subject to its adaptation to other groups*. One can say of the subject group that it *makes a statement* – whereas *of the dependent group only that ‘its case is heard,’* but no one knows where, or by whom, or when.

(MR 14)

Is there any possibility of real dialogue between such disparate groups? What kind of community unites those who have nothing whatsoever in common (except for their physical location)? Guattari continues his analysis of the communication possible between two such opposed groups, by introducing the hierarchical vectors, vertical, horizontal and transversal. On this reading, all communication that comes from the first group, the independent vocation, which both makes a statement, and is, in turn, heard, when its statements are voiced, are vertical (“leaders, assistants,” etc.): “Here all movement is from the summit to the base” (MR 18). All of the communications that stem from the patients in the hospital are unable to make any kind of difference with regards to “the system of hierarchizing structures,” and are thus only “adaptive,” i.e. they are enunciations evoking a limited accommodation to the given: “Horizontality as it exists in the disturbed wards of a hospital, or, even more, in the senile wards; in other words, a state of affairs in which things and people fit in as best they can with the situation in which they find themselves” (MR 17). To this basic communicative impasse which affects every hierarchical institution that serves a subordinate group, Guattari adds the notion of “adjustable blinkers,” i.e. assumptions that can be modified in order to increase what he calls, “the coefficient of transversality.” In an example as humble as any that Socrates ever deployed, Guattari images a stable within which are kept horses blinkered from seeing one another: “Think of a field with a fence around it in which there are horses with adjustable blinkers: the adjustment of their blinkers is the coefficient of transversality.” (MR 17) On this rather humble analogy, horizontally defined communication would be adjustments the horses would make that allowed them best to accommodate themselves to each other and to the fenced space. Vertically defined communication would, presumably, adjust the blinkers such that neither neighbors nor fence are observable (perhaps, only the ground, or the sky). “If [the blinkers] are adjusted as to make the horses totally blind, then (17) presumably a certain form of traumatic encounter will

take place. Gradually, as the flaps are opened, one can envisage them moving about more easily” (MR 18). It is at this point that Guattari introduces the key concept of dialogue, and in a way that recalls Diotima’s effect on Socrates in the *Symposium*:

Only if there is a certain degree of transversality will it be possible—though only for a time, since all this is subject to continual rethinking—to set going an analytic process giving individuals a real hope of using the group as a mirror. When that happens, the individual will manifest both the group and himself. . . . If, on the other hand, he happens to join a group that is profoundly alienated, caught up in its own distorted imagery, the neurotic will have his narcissism reinforced beyond his wildest hopes, while the psychotic can continue silently devoting himself to his sublime universal passions. The alternative to an intervention of the group-analytic kind is the possibility that an individual would join the group as both listener and speaker, and thus gain access to the group’s inwardness and interpret it. If a certain degree of transversality becomes solidly established in an institution, a new kind of dialogue can begin in the group: the delusions and all the other unconscious manifestations which have hitherto kept the patient in a kind of solitary confinement can achieve a collective mode of expression (MR 20)

It is my belief that the unencumbered dialogue circle as portrayed in the *Symposium*, and which is also operative in the salons, can achieve this kind of collective expression. This is due, not to its revolutionary overturning of the status quo, which merely substitutes one vertical hierarchy for its opposite, but rather because of its transversal readjustment in which every speaker has his or her vertical and horizontal blinkers adjusted by others in a conversational dynamic such that new possibilities are exposed to them, new modes of relation apprehended. Guattari draws the conclusion this way: “Transversality is a dimension that tries to overcome both the impasse of pure verticality and that of mere horizontality: it tends to be achieved when there is maximum communication among different levels and, above all, in different meanings. It is this that an independent group is working towards” (MR 18). For Guattari, this requires structural redefinition of all the roles in a group, plus, authentic dialogue so that the coefficient of transversality is increased by mutual adjustment of the subjective blindspots we all inherit and protect.