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Enlightenment Salons: The Convergence of Female and Philosophic Ambitions

DENA GOODMAN

1. *The Enlightenment Republic of Letters*

A republic of letters in any age is a community of discourse and in discourse. The Republic of Letters of the French Enlightenment was a highly developed community of discourse based on a network of intellectual exchanges centered in the salons of Paris. In the 1760s, the cosmopolitan Republic of Letters that went back as far as the *Respublica Litterarum* of Erasmus and his contemporaries was taking shape in Paris as a community of discourse that took itself seriously in new ways. For the philosophes of the French Enlightenment, both the political and the literary dimensions of their citizenship in this republic were crucial to their self-conception. This new sense of community and of collective purpose was shaped by the collective experience of making an *Encyclopedia* whose purpose, according to its editor, was "to change the common way of thinking."¹ The success of the Enlightenment as a project to change the common way of thinking depended upon the expansion of the Republic of Letters beyond a small elite. It required a more permanent institutional base than the *Encyclopedia*, as a single project, could afford, one that would continue to promote and sup-

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¹ Denis Diderot, "Encyclopédie," in *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 17 vols. (Paris 1751-65), 5: 642A.

port an expanding Republic of Letters. This meant a social base and network of communications that was broader, deeper, and more institutionalized than the *Encyclopedia*; one that was regular and which could expand as the Republic of Letters itself expanded with the spread of Enlightenment. The philosophes found their institutional base in the Parisian salon.²

The Enlightenment salon was the very heart of the philosophic community of discourse that reinvigorated and gave new meaning to the old Republic of Letters. And just as that Republic of Letters was no longer the same polity as it had been in the seventeenth century, when it was peopled and defined by scholars with protestant, emigré and academic identities,³ the salons the philosophes frequented were different, too. Mme Geoffrin, Mlle de Lespinasse, and Mme Necker, the salonnières of the Enlightenment, were not *précieuses*, and their salons were not schools of *civilité*. They challenged the leisure ideal upon which those salons as noble institutions were based.⁴ Like seventeenth-century salons, those of the Enlightenment served purposes of social mobility, but the world into which men now sought entry was not that of the old aristocracy, but the new Republic of Letters. Entry into and education in one of these salons did not integrate one into the nobility, but into a Republic of Letters that was asserting itself as a public space from which the monarchy could be criticized as a partner in dialogue.⁵ In this sense, the philosophes who were the citizens

² The term "salon" was not used to refer to anything but a room in a house or apartment until the nineteenth century. The Goncourts clearly used the term to refer to a social gathering in *La Femme au XVIIIe siècle* (1862), but there is no eighteenth-century precedent for their usage. Jaucourt's *Encyclopédie* entry, "Sallon," discusses the room, remarking only at the end that "It is in *Sallons* that one reposes when one returns from the hunt, or from a walk, where one gambles (*joue*) and where one gives dinners of consequence."

Larousse gives a clue as to why people of the eighteenth century focused on the architectural space more than on what happened in it. From *Larousse* we learn that the salon was only introduced into France from Italy in the seventeenth century, and then only into palaces such as Versailles and the hôtel de Soubise. In the eighteenth century, scaled-down versions began to appear in private homes: "salons de compagnie" designed for "the reception of friends, the pleasures of conversation, of games (*jeu*), of music," where the gatherings that I am here calling "salons" eventually took place as well. It was no doubt because the space itself was novel that the term used to describe it held on to its literal meaning throughout the period discussed here.

³ On the Latin Republic of Letters in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the origins of a French-language one around 1680, see Maarten Ultee, "Letters and the Republic of Letters, 1680-1720," *The Seventeenth Century* 2 (January, 1987):95-112; and Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1979), 1:137, n. 287.

⁴ Carolyn C. Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France* (Princeton, 1976), pp. 11-110.

⁵ See Reinhart Koselleck, *Le Règne de la critique*, trans. Hans Hildenbrand (Paris, 1979), p. 96; and Dena Goodman, "Story-Telling in the Republic of Letters: The Rhetorical Context of Diderot's *La Religieuse*," *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* (1986), no. 1, pp. 54-58.

of this redefined Republic of Letters were attempting to take over the role of the *frondeur* nobility in the contestation with the monarchy over French society, and the Parisian salons became the institutional base from which such an independent position could be asserted and established.⁶

The cosmopolitan basis and higher ideals of the old Republic of Letters gave this new, French one, the independent ground from which to criticize the monarchy; a republic in name, it was already a formal challenge to both the monarchy and the aristocracy that supported it socially. What it needed was a continuing, regular, institutional base in order to establish itself in the real, social, and political world. For the Republic of Letters to become the place from which France would be transformed socially and politically, it had to be more than an ideal republic, more than the conceptual space in which to live the life of the mind. It also had to be independent in a way that the old Republic of Letters, based in royal academies, could not be.

By the 1760s, the Parisian salons, already at the center of Parisian social and intellectual life, had become centers of Enlightenment. Seventeenth-century women had created the salon as an undifferentiated social space that valued ideas and fostered discussion of them.⁷ The seventeenth-century salon was the very symbol of urbanity that challenged the closed court and courtly ideals as they were being glorified and exploited by Louis XIV at Versailles.⁸ The challenge was not to nobility itself or even to the monarchy's cooptation of it, but to birth as the basis of nobility. These salons and the women who led them actively asserted the idea that nobility could be acquired, and that the salonnières were instrumental in helping the initiate to do so.⁹

In the eighteenth century, under the guidance of Mme Geoffrin, Mlle de Lespinasse, and Mme Necker, the salon was transformed from a noble, leisure institution into an institution of Enlightenment. In the salons, nobles and non-nobles were brought together on a footing of equality. "The *politesse* of an equality founded on the value of the person was imposed little by little against the ritual of hierarchies," writes Jürgen Habermas.¹⁰ The salon became an institution of

⁶ On the role of salons in shaping a public space in the eighteenth century see Jürgen Habermas, *L'Espace public: Archéologie de la publicité comme dimension constitutive de la société bourgeoise*, trans. Marc B. de Launay (Paris, 1986), pp. 38–56.

On the "politics of contestation" as they developed in the eighteenth century, see Keith Michael Baker, "Politics and Public Opinion Under the Old Regime: Some Reflections," in Jack R. Censer and Jeremy D. Popkin, eds., *Press and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary France* (Berkeley, 1987), pp. 208–14.

⁷ Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes*, pp. 11–55.

⁸ Habermas, *L'Espace public*, p. 41.

⁹ Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes*, pp. 41–55.

¹⁰ Habermas, *L'Espace public*, p. 46. Norbert Elias views the salons as a mere extension of the court, but in this I think he is wrong. He both ignores the opposition between *cour* and *ville* and makes no distinction between seventeenth- and eighteenth-century salons. Elias, of course, is analyzing and describing a static court society, rather than a dynamics of change. Habermas, who is interested precisely in accounting for change, makes both distinctions and thus sees Enlightenment salons as different from both the court and seventeenth-century salons. See Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1983), p. 52; and Habermas, *L'Espace public*, pp. 41–43.

Enlightenment not only by embodying a new set of values, but by using those values to shape a serious working space for the women who led them and for the men who frequented them, engaged together in the project of Enlightenment.

The women who led the major Enlightenment salons did not see themselves and their world in the same ways as the *précieuses* had. They saw their needs as women coinciding with those of the expanding group of intellectuals who were now calling themselves "philosophes," rather than with those seeking entry into the nobility and the court. Thus, while men of letters had always been part of the social matrix of the salon, by the 1760s the salon itself, as the extension of individual salonnières, had changed to make their position central. It was thus a newly redefined social and intellectual space that was exploited by the men of the Enlightenment who saw themselves as engaged in a collective endeavor on the model of their *Encyclopædia*: a collective endeavor that needed a regular, institutional, social base. To understand their project of Enlightenment requires an understanding of how eighteenth-century salon women transformed a noble, leisure form of social gathering into a serious working space, and in so doing created the ground on which such a collective project could be carried out.

2. *The Salon in the Eighteenth Century*

Why did women form salons? Not, I think, because they sought fame and power through their association with brilliant and powerful men. This is the sort of explanation that assumes the centrality of men in understanding the actions of women. It is what the men who frequented the salons thought and what historians of the salon have continued to write. It is embedded in all the books on the salons that are little more than collections of anecdotes and *bon mots* of these same brilliant and powerful men. Abbé Morellet, for example, in his praise of Mme Geoffrin, wrote that her purpose in forming a salon was to achieve celebrity by "procuring the means to serve men of letters and artists, to whom her ambition was to be useful in bringing them together with men of power and position."¹¹ While Mme Geoffrin did aim to be useful, just as it is clear that she did achieve celebrity through doing so, the noble "service ideal," so often attributed to women, does not provide a satisfactory explanation of her actions. Fame and glory were dubious goals for a woman such as Mme Geoffrin, who would have had a hard time aspiring to these virtues of the old male nobility. Fame and glory were the by-products of more complex and individual ambitions at a time when, according to Elisabeth Badinter, ambition itself was a dubious quality in a woman.¹² Rather than social climbers, the salonnières of the Enlightenment must be viewed as intelligent, self-educated, and educating women who reshaped the social forms of their day to their own social, intellec-

¹¹ André Morellet, *Eloges de Madame Geoffrin, contemporaine de Madame du Deffand* (Paris, 1812), pp. v-vi.

¹² Elisabeth Badinter, *Emilie, Emilie: L'ambition féminine au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris, 1983).

tual, and educational needs. The initial and primary purpose behind salons was to satisfy the self-determined educational needs of the women who started them.

In an age when women did not have or aspire to careers, the salon was just that: a career based on a long apprenticeship and careful study, resulting in the independence of a mastership. It was a career open to talents, but also one which required significant capital both to launch and support it. Unlike the men who shaped themselves and made their mark in the world through careers, the salonnière reaped no material rewards from her labor. Hers was a career, but it provided no income and its economic side was pure outlay.

The women who led the Parisian salons always apprenticed in an established salon before breaking out on their own. The primary relationship that underlay the salon as a continuing social institution was thus between female mentors and students, rather than between a single woman and a group of men. Such is the case of Mme du Deffand who, in her youth, according to one observer, practically lived at the private court of Sceaux dominated by the Duchesse de Maine. Mme Geoffrin, the most important of eighteenth-century salonnières, frequented the salon of Mme de Tencin for almost twenty years. Only at the older woman's death in 1749 did she formalize her own salon. Mme Necker, in turn, "studied" under Mme Geoffrin, and Julie de Lespinasse, who served as Mme du Deffand's companion for twelve years, also dined regularly at Mme Geoffrin's.¹³

I can only suggest here the variety and complexity of motivations that might explain why particular women in the eighteenth century established salons. Mme de Lambert, for example, sought to provide for herself a social space and time free from gambling, which had taken on epidemic proportions by the early years of the century. As an alternative to this form of social life, she regularly invited a wide assortment of men and women to her home, where they were enjoined to "speak to one another reasonably and even wittily, when the occasion merited."¹⁴

A different sort of motivation must be ascribed to Mme Geoffrin, who was moving in the opposite direction when she attended Mme de Tencin's salon and eventually established her own. Whereas Mme de Lambert was trying to upgrade a social life characterized by dissipation, Mme Geoffrin made a daring step for a devout girl when, at the age of eighteen, but already a wife and mother, she began to frequent the afternoon gatherings at the home of Mme de Tencin.¹⁵ For Mme de Tencin's reputation featured a youthful escape from a convent and forced vows, and the production of an illegitimate child who grew up to be the

¹³ See any of the general studies of the eighteenth-century Parisian salons. The best are: Marguerite Glotz and Madeleine Maire, *Salons du XVIIIème siècle* (Paris, 1949); Marie Gougy-François, *Les Grands Salons féminins* (Paris, 1965); and Roger Picard, *Les Salons littéraires et la société française, 1610-1789* (New York, 1943).

¹⁴ Suzanne Delorme, "Le Salon de la Marquise de Lambert, berceau de l'*Encyclopédie*," in Suzanne Delorme and René Taton, ed., *L'Encyclopédie et le progrès des sciences et des techniques* (Paris, 1952), p. 20.

¹⁵ [Pierre] de Ségur, *Le Royaume de la rue Saint-Honoré: Madame Geoffrin et sa fille* (Paris, 1897), pp. 23-24.

philosophe, d'Alembert. By the time she moved into Mme Geoffrin's neighborhood in 1730, Mme de Tencin was considerably more sober, but still dazzling to a young girl who had been raised by her grandmother and married off at fourteen to a man literally five times her age. However, the enticement of Mme de Tencin's salon for this girl was not the titillation of the older woman's past, but the stimulation of her present intellectual company: men such as Fontenelle, Marivaux, and Montesquieu. For Mme Geoffrin was not only young and devout, she was also ignorant. As she wrote later to Catherine the Great of the grandmother who had raised her: "She was so happy with her lot that she regarded knowledge as superfluous for a woman. She said: 'I've gotten along so well that I've never felt the need for it.'"¹⁶ Following these principles, Mme Chemineau taught her granddaughter to read but not to write, trusted her to neither a convent nor a tutor, and personally gave her an education that was for the most part religious.

Two years after her grandmother's death, Mme Geoffrin began her own course of studies with the men who gathered at the home of Mme de Tencin, a course which she continued for the rest of her life. For Mme Geoffrin, the salon was a socially acceptable substitute for a formal education denied her not just by her grandmother, but more generally by a society that agreed with Mme Chemineau's position. Years later, Mme de Genlis wrote that as a child she had had the opportunity to attend regularly her brother's Latin lessons for seven months, but when he went back to school and she asked to continue the lessons herself, her mother said no.¹⁷ The problem was not simply that parents did not want to educate their female children, but that there were not even institutions available in which to do so. The convents to which young girls were often sent performed primarily a social and moral function, and only secondarily a pedagogical one.¹⁸ Mme du Châtelet's father had had to provide her with a battery of tutors in the early years of the century, and fifty years later Diderot was struggling to do the same on a much more limited budget for his daughter, Angélique.¹⁹

Mme de Genlis educated herself haphazardly, reading whatever books she could find, learning from anyone who would teach her. After her marriage she devoured her husband's library. "I had a great desire to educate myself," she writes in her memoirs;

the library at Genlis was quite considerable. The late marquis de Genlis, a very serious and pious man, had made one half of it, and my brother-in-law had made the other,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁷ Madame [Stéphanie Félicité Ducrest de Saint-Aubin, Comtesse] de Genlis, *Mémoires inédits ... sur le dix-huitième siècle et la Révolution Française depuis 1756 jusqu'à nos jours*, 10 vols. (Paris, 1825), 1: 77-78.

¹⁸ Samia I. Spencer, "Women and Education," in Spencer, ed., *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment* (Bloomington, In., 1984), p. 86; François Furet and Jacques Ozouf, *Reading and Writing: Literacy in France from Calvin to Jules Ferry* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 72-73; and Martine Sonnet, *L'éducation des filles au temps des Lumières* (Paris, 1987).

¹⁹ On Mme du Châtelet see Gougy-François, *Les Grands salons féminins*, pp. 80-81. Diderot refers to his problems in educating his daughter in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. See also Arthur Wilson, *Diderot* (New York, 1972), p. 455.

entirely composed of novels. . . . As to history, I was so ignorant that I did not know where to begin. . . . I should have started with ancient history, but lacking a guide, I gave no order to my readings which, at the beginning of a course of studies, lost me a lot of time.²⁰

Mme de Genlis did not grow up to be a salonnière. The disorderliness with which she attacked the problem of her education perhaps explains why. It was a talent for and dedication to organization that not only made salonnières successful at what they did, but made of their joint creation a structured institution of Enlightenment. Abbé Morellet wrote of Mme Geoffrin that the regularity of her life contributed significantly to her ability to attract guests.²¹ Like Mme du Deffand and Julie de Lespinasse, she was always at home at the hours set aside for regular social gatherings and she travelled rarely, in contrast to the almost frenetic movement that characterized her contemporaries, of whom Mme de Genlis was more typical. But this regularity was part of a greater sense of organization that defined all aspects of Mme Geoffrin's life and every hour of her day, from a 5 a.m. rising, through a morning of domestic duties, letter-writing, and errands, to the afternoons she devoted twice a week to her salon.²² For twelve years, Julie de Lespinasse was home every evening from five until nine o'clock to receive.²³

Mme Necker has left evidence of her preparations for the gatherings she planned. The Chevalier de Chastellux is said to have once leafed through a notebook in which she had written: "Preparation for today's dinner: I will speak to the Chevalier de Chastellux about [his books] *Félicité publique* and *Agathe*, to Mme d'Angiviller about love." She had also noted her intention to start a literary discussion between Marmontel and the Comte de Guibert.²⁴ The development of such an agenda is not surprising in a woman who wrote in her journal: "One must take care of one's cleaning, one's toilette, and above all the maintenance of order in one's domestic interior before going into society; but once one is in the world, one must not think about all these little things, nor let them penetrate that which occupies one."²⁵ And in contrast to Mme Geoffrin's grandmother, who believed that conversation could be a substitute for learning in a world where women could and should get along on wit rather than knowledge,²⁶ Mme Necker prepared herself thoroughly for her weekly performances. "One is most ready for conversation when one has written and thought about things before going into society," she wrote in her journal.²⁷

In case there can be any doubt as to the seriousness with which these women took themselves, here again is Mme Necker: "[Catherine the Great] never had

²⁰ Genlis, *Mémoires*, 1: 201-02.

²¹ Morellet, *Eloges*, pp. 56-57.

²² Ségur, *Le Royaume*, pp. 102-03.

²³ Picard, *Les Salons littéraires*, p. 263.

²⁴ Glotz and Maire, *Salons*, pp. 300-01.

²⁵ Madame [Suzanne Curchod] Necker, *Mélanges extraits des manuscrits*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1798), 1: 223.

²⁶ Ségur, *Le Royaume*, p. 6.

²⁷ Necker, *Mélanges*, 1: 300.

a taste for pleasure, and this characteristic was one of the causes of her greatness; it is the taste for pleasure which undermines the consideration of all women."²⁸ In one way or another, all these women, from Mme de Lambert to Mme Necker, were trying to establish centers of seriousness in a society and an age generally characterized, then and now, as frivolous and licentious. Furthermore, it was a society characterized in this way because of the perceived dominance of salon women. Jacques-Joseph Duguet wrote of women in the seventeenth century:

Gradually, the court, where they have power, as serious as it may have been originally, degenerates into a court full of amusements, pleasures, frivolous occupations. Luxury, revelry, gambling, love, and all the consequences of these passions reign there. The city soon imitates the court; and the province soon follows these pernicious examples. Thus, the entire nation, formerly full of courage, grows soft and becomes effeminate, and the love of pleasure and money succeeds that of virtue.²⁹

And in the eighteenth century Jean-Jacques Rousseau expressed the same fears in his *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theatre*. Again, it is pleasure and its identification with salon women that Rousseau sees as the basis of corruption in society. In the salons, men try to please women, and in so doing they become womanish, effeminate. "Unable to make themselves into men, the women make us into women," Rousseau complained.³⁰ The result was a corrupt society that contrasted with the serious, virtuous, male societies of Sparta and Geneva.

But Rousseau, whose views were echoed by his admirers, was wrong. Seventeenth-century salonnières, according to Carolyn Lougee, did promote a leisure ideal (although it was not contrasted with utility and was meant as the basis of a regeneration, not a degeneration of society).³¹ The women who formed Enlightenment salons, the women about whom Rousseau claimed to be speaking, did not. Whereas Duguet's anti-feminism may have had some basis in fact, Rousseau's was based on mere prejudice. Salons were changing, and philosophes were spending more and more time in them to their advantage. Far from promoting leisure at the expense of work or pleasure at the expense of greatness, the salons were still trying to regenerate society, but this time as the basis of the philosophes' Republic of Letters, rather than in the service of a declining nobility and those who sought entry into it. Rousseau, who was increasingly alienated from the philosophes, remained out of step here as well. It is not coincidental that his most violent attack on salons and salonnières ap-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1: 298. On the seriousness with which Mme Necker took herself and her job as a salonnière, see my "Seriousness of Purpose: Salonnières, Philosophes, and the Shaping of the Eighteenth-Century Salon," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History* 15 (1988), 111-18.

²⁹ Quoted in Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes*, p. 84.

³⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à M. d'Alembert*, in *Du contrat social* (Paris, 1962), p. 204. See also pp. 161, 171, 180, and 205-06.

³¹ Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes*, pp. 41-55.

pears in a public letter to d'Alembert, editor of the *Encyclopedia* and leading citizen of the Republic of Letters that was developing in the salons.

Each for her own reasons, Mme Geoffrin, Mlle de Lespinasse, and Mme Necker gathered around them people willing and eager to socialize in a serious fashion, and set up regular, structured occasions for doing so. It was the seriousness and regularity of these salons that distinguished them from seventeenth-century salons and other social gatherings of their own time, not their lightness. Abbé Galiani thought often about the difference between these Parisian salons and the gatherings available to him in Naples. In 1771 he wrote to Mme d'Épinay, thanking her for a manuscript she had sent him and noting that he would present it on one of the "Fridays" when he met with friends who were trying to recreate their Parisian experience. "But our Fridays are becoming Neopolitan Fridays," he wrote, "and are getting farther away from the character and tone of those of France, despite all [our] efforts. . . . There is no way to make Naples resemble Paris unless we find a woman to guide us, organize us, *Geoffrinise* us."³²

3. *From Education to Enlightenment: Enter the Philosophes*

In using the social gathering and transforming it to meet their own needs, Mme Geoffrin and salonnières like her created a certain kind of social and intellectual space that could be exploited by the expanding group of intellectuals who were beginning to call themselves "philosophes." As Raymond Picard has written:

There was forming, little by little in France, a 'Republic of Letters,' which had its own laws and unwritten customs, its loyal citizens and its international alliances . . . It was in the salons, the circles, and also the cafés where the vogue began, that this Republic held its sessions, where its members met in order to unite or at times to oppose one another, but to create, above their quarrels or their differences, passing or durable, a true *esprit de corps* and to assure the dominance of thought in society.³³

The salon offered the philosophes a social space that valued ideas and fostered discussion of them. Whereas other social gatherings were organized around the goal of passing time, Enlightenment salons were never conceived of as a means simply to while away the hours. They were to be useful to those who directed and attended them, and, eventually, to the society at large beyond them. Like the philosophes they gathered around them, the salonnières were practical people

³² Abbé Galiani to Madame d'Épinay: 13 April 1771, in Galiani, *Correspondance*, ed. Lucien Perey and Gaston Maugras, 2 vols. (Paris, 1890).

³³ Picard, *Les Salons littéraires*, pp. 139–40. Picard seems simply to be resituating Voltaire's analysis of the seventeenth-century European Republic of Letters: "A republic of letters was being gradually established in Europe, in spite of different religions. Every science, every art, was mutually assisted in this way, and it was the academies which formed this republic:" *The Age of Louis XIV*, trans. Martyn P. Pollack (New York, 1926), p. 380. Note that Picard not only changes Europe to France, but academies to salons, circles, and cafés.

who kept busy at tasks they considered productive and useful. Pleasant as salon gatherings certainly were, they were not mere leisure activities created to while away the hours or as relaxation from serious work or business. The relationship between work and leisure which marks our twentieth-century existence cannot be written back into this eighteenth-century world without misrepresenting it. Under the Old Regime, work and leisure were dominant activities of distinct social groups.³⁴

What the eighteenth-century salonnières did was to transform a noble and thus leisure form of social gathering into a serious working space. They did this by regularizing such gatherings, and by encouraging and organizing the intellectual activity that took place in them. Most importantly, they redefined such activity from pastime to work. They no longer conceived of intellectual activity as games to amuse them, but as work to instruct them.

In addition to sponsoring serious and productive intellectual activity, the salons were also crucial in establishing an undifferentiated social space in which such activity could take place. What distinguished salons from courts and the dominant society they represented was not only their conception of intellectual activity as useful work, but also the mixing of ranks and orders, the absence of hierarchy and marks of social distinction that took place in them.³⁵ The kind of conversation fostered in the salons depended upon a recognized equality among the speakers which allowed for the very activity of criticism and judgment that characterized their speech. This breaking down of social barriers for the facilitation of discourse was conducive both to the expansion of Parisian intellectual life and to the development of an ideology reflecting it. As Habermas writes of the new institutions of the café in England and the salon in France between the Regency and the Revolution: "They were centers where criticism developed, first of a literary order, then of a political order later on, and which started to promote a sort of equality among cultivated people, putting on the same footing aristocratic society and certain bourgeois intellectuals."³⁶

The philosophes' understanding both of intellectual activity and of progress as the collective action of equals, evident in their adoption of a Baconian scientific method and in their creation of the *Encyclopedia* based on it, found a social base in these salons. For they provided a regular meeting place and center of intellectual exchanges upon which such collective activity could grow. A significant development in epistemology and in intellectual history more generally here intersects the social and institutional development of the salon. Each strengthened the other as they became two complementary aspects of the project of Enlightenment that gained strength through this union in the 1760s and '70s.

The philosophes captured the salons from the aristocracy, "liberating themselves from the authority of their noble hosts," according to Habermas, "and

³⁴ Michael R. Marrus, Introduction to *The Emergence of Leisure* (New York, 1974), p. 7.

³⁵ Picard, *Les Salons littéraires*, p. 148; Glotz and Maire, *Salons*, pp. 71-72.

³⁶ Habermas, *L'Espace public*, p. 43.

reaching that autonomy which would transform conversation into criticism and *bon mots* into arguments."³⁷

With this capture of the salons in a period of growing collaboration, the philosophes created for themselves a social base which facilitated their work and made possible its expansion. This development was in no way extrinsic to the intellectual activity of the Enlightenment when it is understood as a collective project, rather than as a collection of texts. For a collective project of Enlightenment, the salons were not simply diversions; nor were the women who ran them simply an audience whose social demands undermined the seriousness of male work. What the salons provided the philosophes was a serious social environment that established a structure for their discourse: a structure that, although it did have limits, was highly elastic and allowed for the growth of speakers and of speech. And because intrinsic to the project of Enlightenment was the expansion of the audience, the creation of an enlightened public, the composition of salon society, and especially the inclusion of women in it, made it a model for that general public that was to be enlightened even as it was created. As Habermas argues, the public constituted itself in the eighteenth century from these circles of interlocutors, considering itself simply as an extension of that core which set the tone for the public at large.³⁸

By the 1760s, the philosophes not only dominated the guest lists of the major salons, but had even begun their own. In 1764, d'Alembert and his friends took advantage of a break between Mme de Duffand and Julie de Lespinasse to start their own salon.³⁹ Here it was not the philosophes who served the ends of the salonnière, but the salonnière who was selected to fulfill a necessary function for the philosophes. Viewed in this way, Julie de Lespinasse's salon was a parody of a Parisian salon, and she a parody of a salonnière, a woman formed by men. As she herself wrote: "Look at what an education I've received;" and as she named the regular guests of Mme du Deffand she added: "Voilà the men who have taught me to speak, to think, and who have deigned to think of me as somebody."⁴⁰ Formed entirely in the salon, Julie de Lespinasse was a philosophic by-product of other women's aspirations, perfectly suited to serve the men who now realized the need for female direction, as a previous generation of women had realized an equally important need for male learning. The salon of Julie de Lespinasse met all the formal requirements of that new institution, but it did so with the even newer collective aims and purposes of the philosophes, rather than with the older individual ones of the salonnières. Perhaps this is why Julie de Lespinasse, whose life had never been happy, did not find happiness or fulfillment even in her own salon. As her letters to the Comte de Guibert reveal, she led a double life: a public life in the salon that was empty, and a

³⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

³⁹ Glotz and Maire, *Salons*, pp. 209-10.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Glotz and Maire, *Salons*, p. 224.

private one in her love letters that was meant to but could not fill this emotional void.⁴¹

In setting up Julie de Lespinasse's salon, the philosophes were both acknowledging the salon itself as an important institution of Enlightenment and identifying the functions of the salon that could be put into the service of Enlightenment. Even as new salons were opened by women to serve their own needs, they became additional centers of the growing Enlightenment Republic of Letters. The activities carried out in salons merged with the social and intellectual activity of Enlightenment. The ambitions of female salonnières and male philosophes came together in the daily life of the Parisian salons. To complete our understanding of Enlightenment salons, I would now like to turn from the aims of the salonnières to the functions the salon came to serve for the Republic of Letters and the project of Enlightenment in which its members were engaged.

First, the salon served as a central clearing house for news, information, ideas, discourse broadly understood; as a communications center, into and out of which discourse (and thus Enlightenment, as a function of discourse) flowed. Secondly, it was a space for people to make contact, to meet each other, to come to know one another; where they could join together for common purposes, conceive and collaborate on common projects; a space where new people could be introduced, brought in; an expanding space for an expanding Republic. Third, it provided a model for French society as a whole, a model on the basis of which that greater society could be transformed. The common thread which runs through all these functions, which weaves together salonnières, philosophes, and the public they sought to shape and serve, is the epistolary exchange. If salons were the heart of the Enlightenment, letters circulated through them like its life blood.

4. *Letters and the Republic of Letters*

While conversation has always been the primary activity of salons, it was another form of discourse which made the Parisian salons of the eighteenth century centers of Enlightenment. If conversation shaped the discursive space within the salon, the letter moved the Enlightenment out of the private world of the salon into the public world beyond it. Letters, which were the dominant form of writing in the eighteenth century, were increasingly and creatively used by the philosophes to bridge the gap between the private circles in which they gathered and the public arena that they sought to shape and conquer.⁴² From Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* to Diderot's *Letter on the Blind* and Rousseau's *Letter to D'Alembert on the Theatre*, the letter form was already prevalent by 1760 as the form of writing that brought writers and readers together to interact on a footing of equality. By the end of the century, the copied and circulated

⁴¹ See Dena Goodman, "Julie de Lespinasse: A Mirror for the Enlightenment," in Frederick M. Keener and Susan E. Lorsch, eds., *Eighteenth-Century Women and the Arts* (New York, 1988), pp. 3-10.

⁴² Habermas, *L'Espace public*, pp. 40-41.

letter, the open letter, the published letter, and the letter to the editor, were uniting a vast web of readers into a network of intellectual exchanges that began often in the salons of Paris, but spread outward from them to the four corners of Europe and the New World. This vibrant epistolary network was a two-way street, as readers responded to writers, becoming writers themselves in pamphlets and in the columns of an emerging periodical press that was itself an institutional extension of the epistolary network. Thus was established a reciprocity of exchange that was crucial to the definition and expansion of this Republic of Letters.⁴³

Correspondence and conversation were complementary aspects of the salon and were equally important to it. Horace Walpole was a corresponding member of Mme du Deffand's salon, and Abbé Galiani, who had been a major figure in all the Parisian salons during his ten years as secretary to the Neapolitan ambassador, kept up a weekly correspondence with Mme d'Epinay for fifteen years after his departure. Catherine the Great and Frederick the Great also maintained lines of communication with important salonnières.

Letter writing was a responsibility and necessity for the successful salonnière; it was not simply an outlet for a frustrated writer. Eighteenth-century women who had literary talents and aspirations wrote much besides letters, even though they did not always publish their works under their own names. And maintaining a correspondence was not a casual activity. "We have established a correspondence, the Prince of Gotha and I," wrote Abbé Galiani to Mme d'Epinay in 1772, in a letter that forms part of their regular, weekly, numbered, correspondence.⁴⁴ After some hesitation, resulting from the too-wide circulation and eventual publication of her first letter, Catherine the Great entered into what one historian has aptly called "epistolary commerce" with Mme Geoffrin.⁴⁵ The entering into correspondence was a formal engagement implying reciprocal responsibilities, the breaking of which generally ended, as in the contemporary epistolary novel, with either the returning or the burning of the letters already exchanged.

Neither were letters simply a substitute for conversation, an absence made present, as theorists of the epistolary genre often argue.⁴⁶ For the salonnières, who were constantly engaged in conversation, who never lacked the presence for which letters are supposed to compensate, put as much care and effort into their correspondences as they did into their conversation. Correspondence both maintained a broader membership in the salon than conversation allowed, and supplied substance for the conversation that did go on. Incoming mail was quarried for news, gossip, information, ideas; letters were also shared, read aloud,

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 52-53.

⁴⁴ Galiani to Mme. d'Epinay, 14 march 1772.

⁴⁵ Glotz and Maire, *Salons*, p. 137. (Catherine's letters to Mme Geoffrin are published as an appendix in Ségur, *Le Royaume*, pp. 431-462.) Mme de Gentis employs the same terms when she writes of the Comte de Rochefort that he was "en commerce de lettres avec Voltaire." *Mémoires*, 1:344.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus, Oh. 1982), p. 14.

passed around, and generally inserted in the discourse of the salon. From examples too numerous to cite, here is one, a letter from Mme Geoffrin to Marmontel: "Your letter will be, today, Wednesday, a very agreeable reading at dinner and at supper." And here is another, from Galiani to Suard: "My letters are like those of Saint Paul, *Ecclesiae quoe est Parisiis*. Read them, then, to my friends."⁴⁷

Outgoing mail, too, was central to salon life. It spread manuscripts, news, gossip, information, and ideas beyond the Parisian center; it also reported on happenings in the salon itself. The *Correspondance littéraire*, edited by Grimm and then by Meister, was the product of fruitful salon collaborations that formalized these functions of outgoing mail, as it connected Paris with European subscribers for almost forty years.

A literary correspondence is, in a sense, a redundancy, for both words derive from the letter. From the *Correspondance littéraire* we can learn the dual purpose of the letter in the salon-based Republic of Letters.⁴⁸ First, as part of a correspondence, the letter was a form of communication, a link between people, a means of exchanging representations and interpretations of the world. Secondly, however, it was also "literary," what we in the twentieth century would call a piece of writing. Since the letter was a formal genre of writing, to write a letter was not simply to communicate, but to create as well. A good letter both communicated and was a work of art. It was also part of the larger whole that was the correspondence. What distinguished the literary correspondences such as Grimm's from true correspondences such as that between Mme Geoffrin and Catherine the Great, was not their formality, but their lack of reciprocity: literary correspondents only sent letters, they did not receive them. The two-way correspondence provided a model of discourse for the Republic of Letters, which, as a Republic was based on the reciprocal communication that defined it as a community; and as a Republic of Letters took the higher aims of literary or artistic creativity as its own.⁴⁹ The extension of the private correspondence into the public forms of pamphlet and periodical was the hallmark of the Enlightenment Republic of Letters which reached out beyond itself to become the center of a growing public.

Newsletters such as Grimm's were as closely tied to the salons as the more private correspondences of the salonnières and their guests. As a phenomenon, the newsletter originated in the salons of the early part of the eighteenth century, as one kind of project in which salon members participated. There were

⁴⁷ Mme Geoffrin to Marmontel: 29 July 1767, in Jean-François Marmontel, *Correspondance*, 2 vols., ed. John Renwick (Clermont-Ferrand, 1974); and Galiani to Suard: 30 June 1770, in Galiani, *Correspondance*.

⁴⁸ On the equally important but different role that correspondence played in the academy-based Republic of Letters of the seventeenth century, see Ultee, "Letters and the Republic of Letters" and Paul Dibon, "Communication in the Respublica literaria of the 17th Century," *Res Publica Litterarum* 1 (1978): 42-55.

⁴⁹ Much good work has been done on epistolarity, especially Altman's *Epistolarity*. A good introduction is the special issue of *Yale French Studies* called *Men/Women of Letters* (1986), no. 71, edited by Charles A. Porter, and especially his excellent brief introduction to the volume.

certain salons that were known as newsbureaus.⁵⁰ By the latter half of the eighteenth century, newsletters had become autonomous, but those who wrote them still could not be distinguished from salon participants: these were not outsiders who were admitted in as reporters, but insiders who sent news out. Indeed, it was because they were insiders in the salons that men such as La Harpe and Suard were sought as reporters on the intellectual scene.⁵¹ And newsletters such as Grimm's still betrayed their salon origins in that they were collective rather than individual productions. They were projects carried out by salon members, and like the project of Enlightenment itself, they were directed by male guests, rather than female salonnières. Women both provided and structured the space—social and discursive—that was the salon, but men filled that space with their projects of Enlightenment that would change the world through changing the common way of thinking. Mme d'Épinay's many anonymous contributions to the *Correspondance littéraire* show this joint endeavor of salon women and philosophes to have been in the form of nested boxes.⁵²

Besides letters and newsletters, manuscripts of other sorts went in and out of the salons in a number of ways. Some, such as poems, were enclosed with letters, or were letters themselves: *épîtres* or epistles in verse. Other works, such as Abbé Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*, were composed collectively in the salon, generated by it.⁵³ And it may have emerged from an earlier, uncompleted project, conceived by Raynal, Suard, and two or three other young men newly arrived in Paris in the 1750s, of writing collectively a general history of voyages.⁵⁴ Helvétius is said to have composed all his works in company.⁵⁵ His wife's salon provided the social base for his writing and, incidentally, supported and generated that of others. Her importance to the Republic of Letters in general is indicated by the fact that her salon continued even after the death of her husband in 1772. It was her salon, not his.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ The most important was that of Mme Doublet de Persan. See Lionel Gossman, *Medievalism and the Ideologies of the Enlightenment: The World and Work of La Curie de Sainte-Palaye* (Baltimore, 1968), pp. 60–61; and Robert S. Tate, Jr., "Petit de Bachaumont: His Circle and the *Mémoires Secrets*," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 65 (1968).

⁵¹ Charles Nisard, *Mémoires et correspondances historiques et littéraires inédits—1726 à 1816* (Paris, 1858), pp. 86–87.

⁵² See Ruth Plaut Weinreb, "Madame d'Épinay's Contributions to the *Correspondance littéraire*," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 18 (1988): 389–403.

⁵³ Glotz and Maire, *Salons*, p. 329.

⁵⁴ Dominique Joseph Garat, *Mémoires historiques sur la vie de M. Suard*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1820), 2:63–64.

⁵⁵ André Morellet, *Mémoires sur le dix-huitième siècle et sur la Révolution*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1821), 1: 136 and 214–15; and Garat, *Mémoires historiques*, 1:229–30.

⁵⁶ Historians uncomfortable with the idea that salonnières really led their own salons have identified particular salons with individual men who frequented them. Thus, Mme de Tencin's and Mme Geoffrin's were "really" dominated by Fontenelle; Mme du Deffand's by the Président Hénault and d'Alembert (before he went on to Julie de Lespinasse's). Picard describes the role of the "principal guest" as follows: "Counsellor and even literary educator of the mistress of the house he was, certainly, but he was also for them a valu-

The salon also provided a place for manuscripts to be read. Here a young author could find an audience of established and influential writers and sympathetic amateurs who, if they were impressed with his work, might back him and it. With this aim in mind, young writers would go to more than one salon with poem or play in hand. The poet, Delille, for example, read parts of his translation of the *Georgics* in salons for nine years before publishing it.⁵⁷ Such activity not only could advance the career of the writer and the hopes for publication or production of his work, but could also serve as an introduction into the Republic of Letters. And the philosophes already established there, who saw virtue in numbers, could only encourage the entry of new people who were not only talented, but sympathetic to their aims. The opportunity to read manuscripts aloud in the salons served the second function of the salon, that of meeting ground, of the expanding space for the expanding Republic.

There were also manuscripts that were read in salons and never published, such as Gentil-Bernard's *Art d'Aimer*, which went the rounds for years, and Guibert's *Eloge du Chancelier de l'Hospital*.⁵⁸ The reading aloud of manuscripts in salons could be either an alternative to publication or as a stepping-stone to it. Habermas sees such readings rightly as a crucial forum for the philosophes. "The distinction made by Diderot between *les écrits* and *les discours* shows clearly the role played by these new meeting grounds," he writes. "Scarcely any of the great writers of the eighteenth century would have submitted to discussion his essential reflections without having first presented them in the form of such *discours*, that is, in the form of lectures given before the academies, and above all, before the Salons. The Salon held in a way the monopoly of first 'publication': a new work, even a musical one, had first to receive the assent of this forum."⁵⁹

Salon readings were not merely a second-best alternative mandated by strict censorship, nor do these private readings simply reflect the elitism of intellectual life in the eighteenth century. Although publication could certainly get one into trouble, and it was more dangerous than these "private" readings or the "private" circulation of manuscripts, there was nothing clandestine about the salons, and one could get into trouble even with unpublished work. Even speech could be dangerous. In fact, one historian has found that the police in this period benefitted from the services of a woman who, according to Lieutenant of Police Lenoir, "was received into the best homes in Paris," and who, in turn,

entertained at her own home, several times a week, courtiers, men of letters, socialites, and these idle persons one sees everywhere and who meddle in everything. She served,

able technician, we would say today, of social events, amusements, and of conversation," (*Les Salons littéraires*, p. 157).

See also Glotz and Maire, who discuss the salons of the Duchesse de Maine, Mme de Lambert, and Mme de Tencin in a chapter called, "Autour de Fontenelle," (*Salons*, pp. 59-109; also p. 19).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 27 and 313; Picard, *Les Salons littéraires*, p. 334.

⁵⁹ Habermas, pp. 44-45.

on days she entertained, a tea the cost of which the police paid. Her house, where gathered persons of all conditions and of good and bad company, was not regarded as completely open; only a few women attended; there were no games; people spoke there with complete freedom.⁶⁰

Through the establishment of this phony salon, Lenoir claimed to have learned more of importance than he did through his inspectors and other contacts. One therefore cannot make a simple distinction between "safe" salon activity and "unsafe" publication.

However, even granting a distinction between the elite world of the salon and what was permitted there, and the non-elite world of general publication, there is still the public itself to be considered. This public could learn about what went on in the salons through newsletters and periodicals; they could acquire or borrow illegally printed books. And they were meant to do so. They were not the masses, but they were also not the small (if growing) group of people who met frequently in the salons. They were enlightenable.

A manuscript given to one person in a salon or through a contact made in a salon would then go farther, as it entered complex and extensive networks of intellectual exchange. And it was these networks, through which manuscript materials circulated beyond the Parisian salons in which they were centered, that the philosophes developed in order to carry out their work of Enlightenment. Without them, "Enlightenment," as the process of enlightening articulated by Kant in 1784, would be a meaningless term.⁶¹

One way these networks were formalized, strengthened, and expanded was through periodicals. The editors of the major French journals were well established in the Parisian salons.⁶² And the periodicals they edited devoted much of their space to the publication of letters and of pieces in the form of letters. Indeed, subscription in the eighteenth century implied much more than mere passive consumption of periodical works. Readers were expected and encouraged to contribute to the journals to which they subscribed. In 1766, for example, Marmontel wrote to Voltaire: "In regards to Montauban, M. Ribote has written you a report on the disasters of that city; he has sent me a copy of his letter and has asked me to have it inserted in the public papers."⁶³ Marmontel, who was editor of the *Mercur de France* at the time, was in a good position to oblige. Voltaire often took advantage of the practice of printing letters in journals

⁶⁰ Alan Williams, *The Police of Paris, 1718-1789* (Baton Rouge, La., 1979), p. 108.

⁶¹ Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, In, 1983), p. 44.

⁶² The distinction between the journals I am discussing here, which were privileged and protected, and the "frondeur" press studied by Nina Gelbart must be acknowledged. However, unlike Gelbart, I am not ready to write off the privileged press entirely, just as I am not ready to write off the philosophes and the salons—the Enlightenment itself—as significant centers of criticism in the eighteenth century. Nina Rattner Gelbart, *Feminine and Opposition Journalism in Old Regime France: "Le Journal des Dames"* (Berkeley, 1987), especially pp. 30-36.

⁶³ Marmontel to Voltaire, 7 December 1766, #98 in Marmontel, *Correspondance*.

to further his numerous political campaigns, of which the Calas Affair is the most famous. Editors obliged because they were grateful for contributions from one whose celebrity could help boost circulation.

But it was not only famous writers whose contributions were encouraged. As early as 1731, Samuel Johnson of Connecticut achieved the distinction of making the first American contribution to one of these journals.⁶⁴ And in her memoirs, Mme de Genlis recalls her pleasure in reading in the *Mercure de France* a poem addressed to her by her husband. He and a couple of friends had written verses in honor of her birthday. Her husband had sent his to friends in Paris who had liked it enough that they in turn sent it along to the *Mercure*.⁶⁵ Periodicals, which reached a much broader public than did the private newsletters, and which could turn personal correspondence into public writing, opened up the Parisian salon world, making it the center of a Republic of Letters that stretched from Edinburgh to Naples, and from Petersburg to Philadelphia. As readers became contributors, they established themselves as active citizens of the Republic.⁶⁶

Periodicals also served to spread the news of works by authors considerably less known than Voltaire. A major feature of all the journals was the book review or extract. A favorable review would be helpful especially for diffusion beyond Paris and beyond France, where people depended on periodicals to let them know what had been published and if it was worth ordering. Norman Fiering has written of the dependence of eighteenth-century Americans on the learned European journals to which they subscribed. One James Logan of Philadelphia, for example, subscribed to two of these periodicals, the *New Memoirs of Literature* and the *Republic of Letters*. Fiering writes of Logan:

[He] was determined to be a full citizen of the international republic of letters even though an ocean separated him from its capitals. His impatience with [the] editing [of the *New Memoirs*] was surely an indication of his desperate sense of dependency upon [it]. The man of letters in eighteenth-century America had to struggle hard to overcome mere provincial status.⁶⁷

Americans, however, were not alone in needing to overcome provincial status in a world of slow communication, unsure and expensive postal service, and difficult transportation. Daniel Roche has reminded us that travel was still very much an elite phenomenon in eighteenth-century Europe.⁶⁸ Arthur Young's account of his travels through France in the 1780s is on one level a detailed account of these difficulties. In his letters to Mme d'Épinay, too, Abbé Galiani

⁶⁴ Norman S. Fiering, "The Transatlantic Republic of Letters: A Note on the Circulation of Learned Periodicals to Early Eighteenth-Century America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 33 (1976): 656.

⁶⁵ Genlis, *Mémoires*, 1:249.

⁶⁶ Gelbart makes a similar point in *Feminine and Opposition Journalism*, pp. 34 and 66.

⁶⁷ Fiering, "The Transatlantic Republic of Letters," p. 659.

⁶⁸ Daniel Roche, *Le Siècle des lumières en province: Académies et académiciens provinciaux, 1680-1789*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1978), 1: 321.

is forever complaining about the post and trying to figure out ways to avoid the high cost that keeping in touch entailed. He also never managed even one trip back to Paris after his hasty departure in 1769. Indeed, he never again managed to get farther from Naples than Rome.

Subscriptions to periodicals or memberships in reading clubs that subscribed to them performed an essential function for the Republic of Letters in keeping its members connected with each other and the intellectual activity that united them. Indeed, because subscription to periodicals meant actively participating in the Republic of Letters, it implied membership or citizenry in that Republic as well. In the eighteenth century, periodical reading, subscription, and membership came together in various ways, such as the "Project for a Society for all the Literary Papers," proposed in Lyon in 1759, but whose author thought it could be profitably imitated throughout the provinces. The idea was for fifteen people to pay a certain sum each and jointly subscribe to about a dozen periodicals. By a round robin system, all the members would be able to read all the papers. "The advantages of these societies are based on two maxims," the author writes: "(1) I give so that you may give to me, *Do ut des* . . . 2) In leaving the first hand, pass along to the next, *Da sequenti*."⁶⁹ Subscribing, like reading itself in the eighteenth century, was no solitary activity.⁷⁰ Just as writers saw themselves as engaged in a collective project of Enlightenment, so did readers read and subscribe collectively, and thus engage actively with the philosophes, joining through their subscriptions and reading clubs the Republic of Letters whose center was in the distant Parisian salons.

Even Abbé Galiani, who could count on personal correspondence to keep him in touch with Paris, read the gazettes and journals and enjoined Mme d'Épinay to fill her letters only with news that he would not already have found in these public sources.⁷¹ And the journal editors were no mere servants of the

⁶⁹ Quoted and discussed in Claude Labrosse, "Fonctions du périodique littéraire," in *L'instrument périodique: La fonction de la presse au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Claude Labrosse and Pierre Retat (Lyon, 1985), p. 47.

There were many other similar projects of association proposed from about mid-century on, and all drew upon the salon, the correspondence, and the periodical as the models for their component parts. They bear titles such as: "Projet pour l'établissement d'un bureau général de la République des lettres," (1747); "Correspondance générale sur les sciences et les arts" (1779); "Journal du Lycée de Londres, ou Tableau de l'État présent des sciences et des arts en Angleterre" (1784); "Vues patriotiques sur l'établissement en Bretagne et dans toute la France d'une académie encyclopédique et populaire" (1785); and, even after 1789, a "Plan d'Association générale entre les savants, gens de lettres et artistes, pour accélérer les progrès des bonnes moeurs et des lumières," by Abbé Grégoire.

As far as I know, no work has been done to analyze and determine the success of these numerous and related projects.

⁷⁰ See Roger Chartier, *Lectures et Lecteurs dans la France d'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1987).

⁷¹ Galiani to Mme. d'Épinay: 25 September [1770], in Galiani, *Correspondance*.

On the *chambres de lecture* in provincial France see Arthur Young, *Travels in France During the Years 1787, 1788, 1789*, ed. M. Betham-Edwards (London, 1924), pp. 134, 199, and 207; J. Quéniart, *Culture et sociétés urbaines dans la France de l'Ouest au*

citizenry; they were actively trying to shape the Republic of Letters to which they too belonged.⁷² Garat writes of two such editors, Suard and Arnaud, that they

conceived and executed under two successive titles, the *Journal étranger* and the *Gazette littéraire*, the project of making known to France, either by analytical extracts or by complete translations, all that would appear in Europe in the arts, in the sciences, in letters, no matter what their success, their *éclat*, or simply the noise they made . . .

Everyone with an enlightened spirit in Europe was called to the execution of this project and entered into it; what the foreigners did for France, they did also for their own country: never had there been a correspondence so widespread, so varied, and so well maintained solely by the interests, everywhere [else] neglected, in reason, taste, and the enlightenment of peoples.⁷³

Garat goes on to compare this French effort with its Italian counterpart. "Two periodical works," he writes,

contributed powerfully to the opening of new literary and philosophical communications between these two . . . countries: the *Journal étranger* . . . and *le Café*, edited in Milan with no less success by the marquis de Beccaria, the marquis de Véry, and . . . their collaborators. Articles from the *Journal étranger* often went into *le Café*, those of *le Café* into the *Journal étranger*. Never have new ideas had such rapid circulation at long distance.⁷⁴

The network of communications that kept the Republic of Letters going, however, depended upon the communications apparatus of the state, just as editors of controlled journals and other men of letters were themselves dependent upon sinecures paid them by the state. Letters and journals only circulated by means of the postal system. This became increasingly true over the course of the eighteenth century, not only as the Republic of Letters expanded beyond the Parisian center, but as the French government's control over correspondence was extended as well with the elimination of competing courier services throughout France and the implementation of local postal service in Paris.⁷⁵

In July of 1789, at the height of the Revolution in Paris, Arthur Young, traveling in the provinces, vented his frustration with the inadequacy of the network of communications in France, especially as compared to England. "The backwardness of France," he writes

XVIIIe siècle (Paris, 1978); and Roger Chartier and Daniel Roche, "Les Pratiques urbaines de l'imprimé," in *Histoire de l'Édition Française: Le Livre triomphant, 1660-1830*, ed. Henri-Jean Martin and Roger Chartier (Paris, 1984), 2:414-15.

⁷² See Labrosse, "Fonctions du périodique littéraire," pp. 11-127.

⁷³ Garat, *Mémoires sur Suard*, 1: 151-52.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 2: 193-94.

⁷⁵ See Eugène Vaillé, *Histoire des Postes françaises jusqu'à la Révolution* (Paris, 1946); "La Poste et la presse sous l'Ancien Régime," *Bulletin d'informations, de documentation, et de statistique [BIDS]* (May 1936): 33-68; "Les Petites Postes (1759-1792)," *BIDS* (July-August 1934): 39-87; and "Les Petites Postes (deuxième article)," *BIDS* (September 1938): 31-48.

is beyond credibility in everything that pertains to intelligence. From Strasbourg hither [Besançon], I have not been able to see a newspaper . . . The whole town of Besançon has not been able to afford me a sight of the *Journal de Paris*, nor of any paper that gives a detail of the transactions of the states; yet it is the capital of a province, large as half a dozen English counties, and containing 25,000 souls, —with strange to say! the post coming in but three times a week. . . . For what the country knows to the contrary, their deputies are in the Bastile, instead of the Bastile being razed; so the mob plunder, burn, and destroy in complete ignorance: and yet, with all these shades of darkness, these clouds of tenebrity, this universal mass of ignorance, there are men every day in the states, who are puffing themselves off for the FIRST NATION IN EUROPE! the GREATEST PEOPLE IN THE UNIVERSE! as if the political jontos, or literary circles of a capital constitute a people; instead of the universal illumination of knowledge, acting by rapid intelligence on minds prepared by habitual energy of reasoning to receive, combine, and comprehend it.⁷⁶

Despite their grand schemes and infinite projects, the Republic of Letters that the philosophes had been constructing for forty years was limited and fragile, too much so to support a revolution of the magnitude of 1789. Nor, it turned out, were they able to control even the networks of communication they had contributed so much to shape. Just as the women who started salons found themselves mistresses of an institution that could be exploited by the philosophes for their own purposes; so too did the philosophes, who had taken over the salons, find themselves the creators of networks of intellectual exchange which they could not control. Feeble and inadequate as they were from Arthur Young's point of view, potentially powerful social structures and structures of communication were in place and growing, but they were also growing autonomous, to be used by anyone who could tap into them. The institutions developed for purposes of Enlightenment could be and were used by others who were opposed to those who had developed them. The philosophes had never controlled the periodical press, both because of competition from the *frondeur* and French-language foreign presses, and because of the monarchy's control over the post and the official press.⁷⁷ They did not control the salons permanently, either, even if they established themselves and their Republic of Letters in them, for the salon continued into the nineteenth century as a social institution that was the extension and expression of women's needs and interests.

To the degree that these structures became institutionalized they became autonomous, which is of the nature of institutions. And although this certainly caused the philosophes grief and frustration, because these institutions were structured around and for the purpose of debate and critical judgment, they were fundamentally institutions of Enlightenment. In the end, what made the salons and the epistolary networks that passed through them institutions of Enlightenment was not the people who sought to control them, but the principles that underlay and structured them: the social and intellectual principles of reciprocity,

⁷⁶ Young, *Travels in France*, pp. 214–15.

⁷⁷ Censer and Popkin, *Press and Politics* and Gelbart, *Feminine and Opposition Journalism*.

equality, debate, and exchange. And these were the principles of the Republic of Letters, the salon, the epistolary exchange, and the periodical that developed from them.

In closing, I would like to suggest that the Parisian salons, the Republic of Letters based in them, and the epistolary networks that ran through them, served also as an implicit model on the basis of which both salonnières and philosophes hoped to transform society. Although the Enlightenment Republic of Letters based in the Parisian salons was drawn from the elite of the Old Regime, it was neither hierarchical in its internal operations nor closed or self-perpetuating as an elite. Rather, it was egalitarian in form and democratic in aspiration. The Parisian salon was the seed from which an enlightened public could develop, its character becoming progressively less elite as it grew. This Republic of Letters, centered in the salons of Paris, and reaching beyond all borders political, geographical, and temporal, through its networks of correspondence and personal intellectual exchanges, provided both a model of a new kind of polity and the means that were to achieve it. The project of Enlightenment, which brought together the ambitions and aspirations of salonnières and philosophes, was to transform society in the image of that Republic. Only further study of the Enlightenment as this collaborative effort will reveal the impact of their work in the shape that history since then has taken.

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