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Call for Participation: Reading Group “Informal Cultures of Knowledge in Non-Institutional Spaces in the Long Nineteenth-Century”

We are seeking collaborators for the establishment of an international, interdisciplinary virtual reading group on “Informal Cultures of Knowledge in Non-Institutional Spaces in the Long Nineteenth-Century”

Working from the assumption that spatial environments shape social behaviors and thus enable specific interactions, and conversations, this reading group will explore transient, (semi)private, or disreputable spaces (the private home in general, the boudoir, the salon, the waiting room, the ship, the artist studio, the club, the fair, or circus ...) and their specific ties to knowledge creation and transmission not available elsewhere (insider knowledge, gossip, rumor, embodied knowledge – for instance, how to play an instrument, or how to act or dance –, the pseudoscientific ...). What characterizes these in-between spaces? Does knowledge transmission in these non-institutional spaces differ from that in institutional ones, and if so, in what ways? For some of these liminal spaces (for instance, salons), the concept of heterotopia developed by Michel Foucault is suitable as a thought model. It describes places that have only partially implemented the norms given at a given time, or function according to their own rules, thus reflecting social relations by representing or negating them. But what does this in turn say about the character and quality of the knowledge that circulates in these places? And how could we go about determining what knowledge is gained where and how? What are the methods to study informal knowledge? On which sources can we draw? To address these questions (and to develop new ones), we will discuss selected current scholarship as well as primary texts (texts broadly defined) from the long nineteenth century.

The reading group is designed to connect researchers across disciplines, institutions, and career stages with a shared interest in the intersections of spaces and knowledge beyond and outside of established institutions and codified expertise. Our focus will be on the long nineteenth century in a global perspective. We are particularly interested in exploring the role of gender, race, and class on the spatial experience of historical agents and their epistemic agency.

The **reading group** will meet **biannually in May and November via Zoom** over the course of **three years**. Beginning in the second year, the meetings may also include project presentations by interested members of the reading group (public, if preferred). We also envision **one in-person workshop in our second year**. In between live sessions, we want to keep the conversation alive via chat and the exchange of reading recommendations, CfPs, and updates on interesting events. The number of participants will be limited to **8-10 persons**, so that an intensive exchange can take place even in the digital space.

This group is co-organized by Dr. Carola Bebermeier (musicology, University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna) and Dr. Katrin Horn (American Studies, University of Bayreuth). Dr. Bebermeier works on music-making and salon culture in the US-American parlor (<https://www.mdw.ac.at/imi/laufende-projekte/a-world-within-a-room/>). Dr. Horn is developing a project on the role of receptions and studio visits in the transatlantic exchange between Italy and the US. For more information on her current work on gossip, please see ArchivalGossip.com.

To join, please send your **name and contact information** along with a **brief (300-500 words) statement** explaining your interest in the topic, its connection to your own research (projects or interests), and – optional – a text you would like to see discussed in this group to bebermeier@mdw.ac.at and katrin.horn@uni-bayreuth.de. We will accept statements from interested participants **up to 27 November 2022**. Participants will be notified by 15 December 2022. For further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.