NECESSARY LUXURIES

Books, Literature, and the Culture of Consumption in Germany, 1770-1815

Matt **Erlin**

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For Ebba

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There are excuses for spending money on luxury, and then there are reasons.

—Acura Spring Sales Campaign 2010

Necessary Luxuries

Introduction: Guilty Pleasures

The current crisis of the humanities is only the most recent incarnation of a controversy that has been ongoing since Plato denied the poets admission to his ideal state. The debate, simply put, concerns the value of literature and the arts; more specifically, it centers on the question of whether artistic pursuits have any demonstrable value for society at all. This book argues that we can better understand what is at stake in attempts to answer this question, as well as why the question itself will not go away, by turning to a moment in German history when it first emerges in modern form. My central claim is that culture is conceived in the period as a form of *luxury,* and that arguments about the validity of cultural pursuits are inseparable from wide-ranging controversies in the period regarding the legitimacy of luxury itself.

Eighteenth-century Western Europe, we now know, was the site of a consumer revolution, an era during which a growing group of individuals began to emerge for the first time from what Daniel Roche has called "the stranglehold of scarcity."[1] Due in large part to the expansion of overseas trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, new consumer goods began to shape the everyday lives of increasing numbers of people to a previously unheard-of degree. In the words of the historian Michael Kwass, "Everything from kitchenware to underwear, tables

1. Daniel Roche, *A History of Everyday Things: The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 72.

to tea sets, and wigs to watches began to circulate as never before."[2] Hopes and fears regarding the impact of all of these artifacts and experiences converged in contemporary reflections on the idea of luxury, reflections that found expression in literally hundreds of treatises and journal articles on the topic, written by the major intellectuals of the day.[3]

Some of these commentators were deeply troubled by the spread of what they considered to be excessive consumption. For them, luxury was a cancer on the national body, the destroyer of families, and a source of immorality and physical enervation for the individual. A smaller group proved more sanguine, claiming for the first time in the long history of reflections on the topic that at least some degree of luxury was ultimately beneficial for both the individual and society. Beginning with the scandalizing claims of Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* in 1714 and continuing with the more moderate arguments of thinkers like Voltaire, Hume, Saint-Lambert, and, most famously, Adam Smith, the advocates of luxury emphasized its role in stimulating industry, reforming manners, and increasing human happiness. For the first time since antiquity, in other words, some began to distinguish between "bad" and "good" luxury, between mere "excess" and "refinement"—and they began to advocate for the latter.[4]

One would be hard pressed to find anyone in the period who expended more energy trying to untangle these two categories than the authors and publishers of literary works. On the one hand, works of literature, and the commercially successful genre of the novel in particular, provided writers with a medium for the representation of consumption and of new consumer goods, of the positive and negative consequences of self-interest, and of the ongoing efforts in the period to rethink traditional conceptions of the relationship between people and things. But literature itself, as an object and as a set of cultural practices, was also understood as a form of luxury, in either the positive or the negative sense, as frequent references to *Bücherluxus* (book luxury) and *Leseluxus* (reading luxury) make clear. It should thus come as no surprise that the romantic author Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) rather ambiguously equates Goethe's literary achievements with those of the English potter Josiah Wedgwood, or when Goethe's own autobiography relates his frustration with an impudent publisher who offered him a supply

2. Michael Kwass, "Ordering the World of Goods: Consumer Revolution and the Classification of Objects in Eighteenth-Century France," *Representations* 82 (Spring 2003): 87.

3. Regarding the English-language discussion, John Sekora notes that the British Museum and the London School of Economics together possess over 450 books and pamphlets on luxury from the period between 1721 and 1771. John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 66.

4. See Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, "The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates," in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires, and Delectable Goods*, ed. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 9.

of Berlin porcelain as compensation for publishing an unauthorized edition of his works.[5]

Indeed, while many of the new artifacts that featured in discussions of luxury were exotic commodities from abroad—coffee, tea, spices, chocolate, sugar, and new textiles, for example—one of the most widely distributed luxury commodities in the period, one characterized by an extraordinary degree of product differentiation as well as highly sophisticated techniques of marketing and brand management, was not new at all, and was produced locally. That commodity was the book.[6] Particularly in Germany, where the production of other consumer goods lagged behind that of England and France, books were in the vanguard, so to speak, of the movement toward modern forms of production, marketing, and distribution.[7] These books were luxuries in the familiar sense of being objects of discretionary consumption too expensive for most readers to purchase for themselves. Books and reading, however, were also closely associated with aspects of the eighteenth-century concept of luxury that are more alien to our contemporary sensibilities and can thus help us to grasp the historical specificity of the category: the association of luxury not just with the expensive or the rare or the ornamental, but especially with the excessive and the superfluous, with overstimulated senses and a runaway imagination. These characteristics of the book as artifact, together with the unique capacity of literary texts to take up a position vis-à-vis their own commodity status, made the literary sphere a privileged site for grasping the emergence and working through the impact of what eighteenth-century observers perceived as modern luxury.[8]

My broader argument is that the field of literary production and consumption in Germany as it takes shape between 1770 and 1815 can be adequately understood only in terms of this discursive interpenetration of luxury and literature or, more

5. Novalis writes: "Goethe has done in the sphere of German literature what Wedgwood did in the English art world." Novalis, *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs,* ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), 2:412; Goethe's remark appears in part 4, book 16 of *Dichtung und Wahrheit.* Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Goethes Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden*, ed. Erich Trunz (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1976), 10:81. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the German in this and subsequent chapters are my own.

6. Books are the most significant representative of a whole range of cultural consumer goods and commodified entertainments that appeared in the period, including paintings, sculpture, music scores, muscial instruments, concerts, and plays. For a comprehensive catalog, see Michael North, *"Material Delight and the Joy of Living": Cultural Consumption in the Age of Enlightenment in Germany*, trans. Pamela Selwyn (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008).

7. The statistics documenting the dramatic expansion in the book market have been cited many times before, but they bear repeating here. According to the catalogues of the Leipzig Book Fair, 978 titles were published in 1700, 1,296 new titles in 1750, and 4,012 in 1800—a threefold increase in fifty years. See North, *"Material Delight,"* 8–10.

8. I would like to thank Richard Gray for drawing my attention to this feature of the literary commodity

generally, of luxury and the fine arts. Moving beyond the still prevalent one-dimensional models that cast "serious" art as a repudiation of commerce, the analysis that follows intends to demonstrate just how deeply preoccupied artists and especially authors are with their status as luxury producers, and how the discursive strategies used to justify their activities emerge in dialogue with more general discussions regarding the legitimacy of those new objects of discretionary consumption understood as luxuries. As we will see, this dialogue shapes controversies over the legitimacy of prestige editions in the period (chapter 2) and over the value of reading (chapter 3). It also helps determine the structural and rhetorical features of literary works themselves, as an analysis of novels by Campe, Wieland, Moritz, Novalis, and Goethe will demonstrate (chapters 4–7).

These justificatory strategies, moreover, invoke the entire range of positions in the luxury debates. That is to say, literature and the arts are not merely attacked using arguments found in the treatises condemning luxury more generally; they are also defended using the arguments of both the critics *and* the advocates of luxury. Approaching the literary production of the period from the perspective of luxury thus helps to cast its contested status into particularly sharp relief. Those who refused to accept Jean-Jacques Rousseau's association of the arts and sciences with corruption had to find ways to legitimate artifacts and practices that were often seen as decorative and ornamental at best, to embed them within stable frameworks of meaning, once they had begun to become detached from those contexts (the church, the state, and the traditional status hierarchy) that had previously rendered them intelligible and expressive. By the same token, however, because so many authors and artists take up this challenge, literature and the arts also provide a particularly rich resource for understanding the emergence of the category of positive luxury, a process whereby that which might be considered excessive was discursively tamed and drawn into the orbit of utility.

To put it provocatively: the idea of Culture with a capital *C* takes shape in the period as the luxury that is not a luxury. The much-discussed and highly influential notions of self-cultivation and aesthetic autonomy do not emerge, as one influential line of interpretation that runs from Marcuse to Terry Eagleton and beyond would have it, by way of a dialectical repudiation of the alleged inhumanity of commercial society. They represent instead a partial but enthusiastic endorsement of that very society, one that attempts to unleash the emancipatory energies of commerce and the free market and simultaneously to attenuate their disintegrative impact. Recognizing the ambivalence with which commentators reacted to new opportunities for consumption enables us to acquire a more differentiated and historically adequate perspective on the period, but also a more sympathetic one, as we witness them engaging in often very sophisticated attempts to come to terms with dramatic transformations in the sphere of material culture, adopting and adapting existing conceptual models in order to make sense of new phenomena and justify their own activities.

On one level, then, this book is conceived as an interdisciplinary study of literature as both a cultural practice and a social institution. As such, it aims to deepen our understanding of the discursive as well as the material contexts that shape the novel in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The analysis builds on recent work done in German and British studies on both consumer culture in a narrower sense and the interface between literature and political economy more generally. With regard to the former, Daniel Purdy and Karin Wurst have provided insightful and theoretically sophisticated treatments of fashion and consumer culture in late eighteenth-century Germany.[9] And the interpenetration of literary and political-economic discourse has figured prominently in examples of what has loosely been termed the "New Economic Criticism," whose most astute practitioners include such scholars as Martha Woodmansee, Richard T. Gray, and Fritz Breithaupt in the United States as well as Jochen Hörisch and Joseph Vogl in Germany.[10] What has been missing from these valuable studies, however, and what the following chapters explore in some detail, is a more historically specific elucidation of luxury as *the* central analytical category of eighteenth-century political economy as well as a consideration of the institutional and especially the textual ramifications of the perceived status of literature itself as luxury good.

Acknowledging this status—acknowledging, that is to say, that German authors approached both their own artistic endeavors and questions about the nature of fine art through the lens of luxury—can also help us to acquire a new perspective on the broader trajectory of German literature in the period. Scholars have tended to cast the decades "around 1800" as a moment when both the arts and the artist in Germany underwent a dramatic elevation in status. Such a view can be easily supported by phenomena like the cult of genius that begins with Klopstock or the apotheosis of art in the aesthetic theory of romantics like Schelling. Different scholars have emphasized different facets of this elevation, but it has often been cast in terms of a sacralization, whereby the arts take on a quasi-religious function.[11]

9. Daniel Purdy, *The Tyranny of Elegance: Consumer Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Goethe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Karin Wurst, *Fabricating Pleasure: Fashion, Entertainment, and Cultural Consumption in Germany, 1780–1830* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005).

10. Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Richard T. Gray, *Money Matters: Economics and the German Cutlural Imagination, 1770–1850* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2008); Fritz Breithaupt, *Der Ich-Effekt des Geldes: Zur Geschichte einer Legitimationsfigur* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008); Jochen Hörisch, *Kopf oder Zahl: Die Poesie des Geldes* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1996); Joseph Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft: Poetik des ökonomischen Menschen* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2004).

11. Martha Woodmansee, for example, has described the theological framework that undergirds the aesthetic writings of Karl Philipp Moritz, whom we will encounter in chapter 5, and who first expressed the influential notion that artworks constitute harmonious, self-sufficient totalities to be enjoyed solely for their own sake. As Woodmansee explains it, Moritz simply transports "the highest stage and ultimate goal of human piety and felicity" as it is understood in Pietist theology into his theory of art. Woodmansee, *Author, Art, and the Market*, 19. Jochen Schmidt, in his definitive history of the concept of genius in German culture, identifies a similar sacralization of literature in the period. Whereas Horace's "aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae" was still the final word at the beginning

I want to tell a story that is less familiar but equally central to the self-understanding of authors and artists in the period. Rather than concentrating on the exaltation of literature and the author, my starting point is what the poet Durs Grünbein has referred to as "the thoroughly dubious character of poetic creativity" (*das durch und durch Fragwürdige des dichterischen Schaffens*).[12] I am interested in texts and passages that testify to the precarious status of the arts in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, to the doubts expressed—both among artists themselves and those evaluating the arts from the outside—about whether artistic endeavors, and the production and consumption of works of literature in particular, really have any value for society at all. In fact, when one surveys the territory of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature with such doubts in mind, it is hard not to be struck by how many works can be construed as warnings against the misguided or undisciplined pursuit of a career as an artist or against a naive belief in the power of art or beauty to change the world. Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (The Sorrows of Young Werther) and *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship) as well as Moritz's *Anton Reiser* spring to mind, as do a surprising number of novels and novellas from the romantic period, such as Jean Paul's *Titan,* E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* (The Sandman) or even his *Der goldene Topf* (The Golden Pot), which, notwithstanding its sanctification of poetry, ends by relegating it to the status of a temporary refuge. Even Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (Henry von Ofterdingen), often seen as the paradigmatic endorsement of an aesthetic religion and of the artist as prophet, includes its share of uneasiness.

If one expands the framework to include those works that depict the dangers of an overactive imagination or the confusion of fantasy with reality, both phenomena closely associated with luxury in the eighteenth century, then the list of relevant titles expands accordingly: Wieland's *Don Sylvio* (The Adventures of Don Sylvio de Rosalva), Musäus's *Grandison der Zweite* (Grandison the Second), and a number of other novels inspired by *Don Quixote*, not to mention the many works (e.g., Lenz's *Die Soldaten* [The Soldiers]) in which the exposure to literature and the arts has pernicious or at least ambivalent consequences. And attacks from outside the field of literary production are legion. One of the more striking examples is a text

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of the eighteenth century, by midcentury poetry had acquired "the pathos and the uniquely binding force of a revelation—a revelation of truths that could only be accessed through poetry and thus could only be conveyed by a poet." Jochen Schmidt, *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens in der deutschen Literature, Philosophie und Politik 1750–1945* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), 1:1.The new status of the author in the period has also been elucidated by Siegfried J. Schmidt, who describes the emergence of a new concept of authorship as vocation, one that arises from an "inner vocation" and that demands "total commitment." As Schmidt puts it, a professional ethos emerges, which, for the first time, "makes the production of literature in theory the sole occupation in the life of the independent author." Siegfried J. Schmidt, *Die Selbstorganisation des Sozialsystems Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 291, 290.

12. Durs Grünbein, *Warum schriftlos leben: Aufsätze* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 16.

by Johann August Schlettwein, one of those prolific early political economists in Germany who tend to be grouped under the rubric of cameralism, and who is best known for his role in the failed attempt to reform the duchy of Baden according to physiocratic principles. As Schlettwein explains in a series of extended reflections on luxury and its consequences in his treatise of 1779, *Grundfeste der Staaten oder die politische Oekonomie* (Foundations of the State or Political Economy), artists are essentially parasites. A rise in the number of painters increases the number of individuals who require sustenance but whose own activities make no demonstrable contribution to the general welfare. As Schlettwein puts it, "Should this activity, which serves the pleasures of the eyes and the imagination, take possession of the souls of all human beings, then the entire human race will go to rack and ruin."[13]

Readers of Rousseau will recognize that Schlettwein's view was far from uncommon in late eighteenth-century Europe. Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* of 1750 offers the most notorious but by no means the only example of a widespread suspicion of artists and intellectuals as unproductive, status-seeking freeloaders, and of the arts as a source of nothing so much as self-indulgent sensualism and dissatisfaction with one's place in the social hierarchy. Rousseau's impact, of course, has long been acknowledged. Examining Schlettwein's arguments, however, can help us to grasp the broader political-economic stakes of his claims about culture.

In fact, one can identify a similar political-economic perspective even among defenders of the arts. In a treatise on the circulation of money first published in 1780, the pioneering economist and head of the Hamburg Commercial Academy Johann Georg Büsch offers a fairly typical view. True to his liberal inclinations, Büsch claims that artists are essential to the prosperity of the state. Their value, however, has nothing to do with any pedagogical or cultivating function. Rather, because their creations feed the desires of the affluent, they thereby help to redistribute wealth. Without such refined pleasures, he argues, expressions of affluence would be reduced to "gluttony, drunkenness, and fornication," which, in addition to being morally suspect, also fail to generate an adequate intensity of monetary circulation.[14]

For all of their differences, both Büsch and Schlettwein view the arts first and foremost as a form of luxury production, a status that renders them highly problematic for the one even as it suggests to the other their utility in an emerging market society that demands the stimulation of desire together with the capacity for self-restraint. And they are not alone. Commentators ranging from orthodox theologians to public officials to the artists themselves approach the arts from

13. Johann August Schlettwein, *Grundfeste der Staaten oder die politische Ökonomie*, (1779; repr., Frankfurt/Main: Athenaeum, 1971), 403.

14. Johann Georg Büsch, *Abhandlung von dem Geldumlauf in anhaltender Rücksicht auf die Staatswirtschaft und Handlung*, 2nd ed. (Hamburg and Kiel: Carl Ernst Bohn, 1800), pt. 2, 82.

the perspective of luxury, often with a similar sense of ambivalence. The fact that more vociferous critics of the arts such as Schlettwein were often breezily dismissed by artists as benighted philistines does not mean that their criticisms had no bite. I think that we can acquire a valuable perspective on the new conceptions of literature and culture that emerge in the period if we take as our starting point this profound suspicion regarding their legitimacy, rather than the perhaps more conspicuous assertion that artistic pursuits represent the highest form of human endeavor.

Approaching the literature of the period from this perspective thus allows us to appreciate more fully just how precarious its status was, even among enthusiasts. As with any form of luxury, reading or writing works of literature could be easily characterized as superfluous at best and at worst as a dangerous distraction from more important tasks. Those who would defend it had to find ways to link it to socially productive outcomes, a challenge whose resolution entails a careful positioning of books vis-à-vis other forms of material culture and which proves just as relevant to the didactic literature of the Enlightenment as to the supposedly autonomous art of romanticism. If recent projects in German literary history can be taken as representative, one still finds a strong tendency among scholars to classify works on the basis of traditional designations of periods and movements: Enlightenment, Sensibility, Storm and Stress, Late Enlightenment, Weimar classicism, and romanticism.[15] Luxury, however, provides a conceptual backdrop against which the entire period may be seen in terms of a dynamic unity, rather than simply as a series of literary trends and countertrends. The point is not to deny that one can draw distinctions among the authors and works associated with these trends, but to demonstrate that they are frequently responding to the same questions, even if their answers to those questions turn out to be quite different.

Defining Luxury

So what *was* luxury in an eighteenth-century context? If virtually all of the major European intellectuals of the period agreed that luxury was an important topic, they hardly agreed on how to define it. For Johann Peter Süßmilch, writing in 1741, luxury is "that magnificence, opulence, and expenditure, which eliminates all order, which confuses everything, and mixes the noble with the lowest class of citizen."[16] David Hume writes in 1752 that, generally speaking, luxury means "great

15. Claire Baldwin has written: "There has been a striking tendency in German Studies to construct elaborate typologies of the eighteenth-century novel that have served to create distinctions rather than to establish commonalities." Claire Baldwin, *The Emergence of the Modern German Novel: Christoph Martin Wieland, Sophie von La Roche, and Maria Anna Sagar* (New York: Camden House, 2002), 7.

16. Johann Peter Süßmilch, *Die Göttliche Ordnung in den Veränderungen des menschlichen Geschlechts, aus der Geburt, dem Tode und der Fortpflanzung desselben erwiese*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Im Verlag der Buchhandlung der Realschule, 1765), pt. 2, 72.

refinement in the gratification of the senses."[17] In his article on the topic from the *Encyclopédie*, published in 1764, Saint-Lambert explains that it is the "use one makes of wealth and industry to procure a pleasant existence."[18] Virtually every text written on the topic, moreover, begins with a reference to the ambiguity of the category; as the article from D. Johann Georg Krünitz's monumental *Oekonomische Encyklopädie* (Economic Encyclopedia, 1773–1858) explains, "The definitions of luxury are as varied as the opinions as to whether it is harmful or harmless."[19]

Such assertions of definitional diversity notwithstanding, one can identify some broad areas of agreement in the countless treatises written on the topic. In the simplest terms, luxury in the period is defined as anything deemed unnecessary or superfluous. To be sure, this definition does not take us very far, as Bernhard Mandeville already made clear in 1714 when he explained, "Once we depart from calling everything luxury that is not absolutely necessary to keep a man alive, . . . then there is no luxury at all."[20] Such a characterization becomes more productive, however, if we approach it from the opposite direction and say that the myriad assertions about luxury represent so many attempts to define, or redefine, the scope of the necessary, of human needs.

While substantive definitions of human needs have fallen out of favor in recent social theory, they exert an extraordinarily powerful influence in the eighteenth century.[21] Thinking about luxury in terms of the category of needs, moreover, can help us to appreciate the full implications of the point made by John Sekora in his pioneering study of the topic—namely, that luxury functions in the early modern period as a system of discourse in the Foucauldian sense. It expresses a set of wide-ranging and largely unreflected mental structures through which humans interpret their world. As both the ambiguity and the scope of the definitions above suggest, the concept of luxury as that which transcends our basic or "natural" needs extends over a broad semantic field. It is nonetheless one that can be delimited in terms of the constellation of associated notions, both negative and positive, either intimated or explicitly mentioned in the texts just cited: ornament, excess, and status seeking on the one hand; refinement, moderate pleasure, and economic productivity on the other. A closer reading of these texts would also reveal the connection of luxury to

17. David Hume, "Of Refinement in the Arts," in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary,* ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987); available at Library of Economics and Liberty, http://www.econlib.org/library/LFBooks/Hume/hmMPL25.html.

18. Jean-François, Marquis de Saint-Lambert, "Luxury," in *Commerce, Culture, and Liberty: Readings on Capitalism before Adam Smith*, ed. Henry C. Clark (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003), 478.

19. Heinrich Gustav Flörke, "Luxus," *Oekonomische Encyklopädie oder allgemeines System der Staats-Stadt-Haus- und Landwirthschaft*, ed. D. Johann Georg Krünitz, http://www.kruenitz1.uni-trier.de/. According to the website, Flörke took over the encyclopedia beginning in 1800; see http://www.kruenitz1.uni-trier.de/background/author.html.

20. Bernhard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees and Other Writings,* ed. E. J. Hundert, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 66.

21. Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 129–30.

questions of morality, government, and political economy, as well as its alleged role as a founding principle of modern European civilization, which may be understood as either a fall from grace or the emergence from barbarism.

Mapping out this intellectual territory in some detail will be the task of chapter 1. The task is complicated somewhat by the fact that this territory is the site of ongoing border disputes in the period. In Sekora's words, luxury represented "one of the oldest, most important, and most pervasive negative principles for organizing society Western history has ever known."[22] But, as he goes on to note, it was this very status of luxury as a "negative principle" that some intellectuals began to call into question in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—a reevaluation that proves inseparable from the dramatic expansion in the world of goods as previously described. Hume, for example, expresses a new, more contextual understanding of the category when he follows up his definition with the claim that "any degree of it may be innocent or blamable, according to the age, or country, or condition of the person."[23]

Precisely this dynamism, however, as well as the acknowledged relativity of the category, makes luxury a particularly powerful lens for casting certain aspects of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German culture into relief. The recognition that the meanings of the term are relative to time and place means that commentators expend a great deal of energy attempting to draw clear distinctions among various forms of luxury: modern versus ancient, productive versus unproductive, tasteful versus opulent.[24] Such distinctions figure prominently in efforts to characterize the fine arts either in parallel or in opposition to other consumer goods. And they are crucial for thinking about the impact of these commodities and commodified entertainments on the individuals who consume them. One key line of argumentation in the efforts of advocates to demarcate a sphere of "good" luxury is to claim that, by subjecting the desirous subject to a kind of controlled stimulation, certain types of luxury can help to fashion them into productive, civilized, and self-regulating members of society. In this manner, the allegedly superfluous is brought into the realm of necessity. Debates about luxury, in other words, always entail reflections on subjectivity, and this brings us to a secondary claim of this study: that a consideration of luxury and the arts can shed new light on the evolution of ideas about the self in the modern era.

The Well-Tempered Self

The emergence of "the modern self" has been the focus of great interest in recent decades, so much so that one would be more justified in speaking of modern

22. Sekora, *Luxury,* 2.
23. Hume, "Of Refinement in the Arts."
24. Berg and Eger, "Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates," 9.

selves.[25] My own reflections on the topic have been most strongly influenced by recent work done in consumer culture studies. The central analytical category in this context is that of a posttraditional self, operating in an environment in which social identity is no longer firmly anchored in institutions like religion or the family, or in the idea of a society of orders. The weakening of these institutions—which is itself largely a consequence of the rise of commerce and spread of market-based forms of exchange and consumption—creates a situation in which identity becomes a choice, and the self becomes a project.[26] Within this framework, discretionary consumption (including cultural consumption) becomes a key resource for establishing a sense of who one is; in the words of Don Slater, "Consumer culture is the privileged medium for negotiating identity and status within a post-traditional society."[27]

In a sense, Slater is simply reiterating an observation made popular by Mandeville in his own early eighteenth-century reflections on luxury. Particularly in large cities, Mandeville remarks, the fact that reputation is based on external appearance "encourages everybody who is conscious of his little merit . . . to wear clothes above his rank . . . and consequently have the pleasure of being esteemed by a vast majority."[28] Mandeville, moreover, also recognized that fashionable commodities represent more than a mere means for the display of new identities; he also understood that commerce and the affluence to which it gave rise created new mechanisms for the exercise of social power, mechanisms that were inherently destabilizing. As Edward Hundert explains, Mandeville sought to show that in modern commercial societies "persons are obliged to orient their public performances in a world of mobile property, in which relations with others are rarely elemental, but are instead mediated by the unstable values embodied in possessions themselves."[29]

For Mandeville and a number of other eighteenth-century commentators, this destabilization of traditional social relationships through commerce had had a decidedly positive impact, and a variety of recent studies of eighteenth-century Europe have sought to concretize the emancipatory aspect of this relationship between consumption and identity with regard to a group of increasingly confident

25. The basic idea of the "rise of the individual" continues to exercise a powerful hold, and has recently been persuasively reaffirmed in Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006). But one can in fact identify a myriad of different selves or subjects in the scholarship on the topic: the Cartesian subject, the autonomous, bourgeois subject, the divided self of romanticism, Kant's transcendental subject, the possessive individual described by Macpherson, and the disciplined subject of Foucault. For a recent overview of the topic, see Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

26. See Slater, *Consumer Culture*, 22, 83–88. For a fascinating account of the limitations of this approach to the posttraditional self, see Breithaupt, *Der Ich-Effekt*, esp. 37–38.

27. Slater, *Consumer Culture,* 29.

28. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees,* 75–76.

29. E. J. Hundert, "Mandeville, Rousseau, and the Political Economy of Fantasy," in Berg and Eger, *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, 29.

and upwardly mobile middle-class consumers.[30] My interest, however, is in more abstract anthropological models of psychic equilibrium and in fears of self-loss rather than in techniques of modern bourgeois self-fashioning. While such models might seem more characteristic of early twentieth-century psychoanalysis than of Enlightenment anthropology, we will see that they exercise a powerful sway over eighteenth-century commentators. Indeed, one of the advantages of adopting the perspective of luxury is that it enables us to look both backward and forward, to see how new conceptual frameworks are built up on the ruins of those that seem to have lost their relevance, as well as how they are in turn incorporated into and help to shape subsequent theoretical edifices.

New opportunities for self-definition through consumption are experienced both as a path to progress and as a source of tremendous concern, and not merely among conservatives who lament the disintegration of the social status quo. When identities are increasingly mediated through market mechanisms and thus become ever more fluid and fungible, the consequences extend beyond a weakening of the traditional status hierarchy. The very legitimacy of notions of a coherent, authentic, or essential self is called into question. Rousseau taps into this deeper level of concern when he writes of modern society: "Everything being reduced to appearances, everything becomes factitious and play-acting: honour, friendship, virtue, and often even vices in which one at length discovers the secret of glorying."[31] An expanding culture of consumption, understood by eighteenth-century observers in terms of the category of luxury, thus not only enables new social elites to establish communitites of identity in approximation of or in distinction to other social groups. It likewise triggers fundamental anxieties about the durability of the individual.[32]

The unease regarding real versus simulated selves that suffuses the luxury debates constitutes their most salient point of contact with literature and the sphere of the fine arts more generally. Literary texts, and especially novels, are thoroughly implicated in the alleged reduction of identity to mere appearance. Like other forms of discretionary consumption, reading also generates fantasies of alternative realities and alternative selves, fantasies that feed into and are in turn sustained by the enjoyment of other luxury commodities. The complex of consumer objects that became popular following the publication of Goethe's *Werther* in 1774, not

30. These studies have sometimes focused on middle-class emulation of the nobility, sometimes described the efforts of a rising middle class to distinguish itself from the nobility, and sometimes addressed consumption-driven mechanisms of distinction within the middle class itself. The classic assertion of social emulation as the motivation for consumption is to be found in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Europa Publications, 1982). For a more recent analysis that focuses on differentiation among the members of the middle class, see Wurst, *Fabricating Pleasure*.

31. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 187.

32. Hundert, "Political Economy of Fantasy," 28–40.

merely blue jackets and yellow vests but also Werther porcelain and collectible illustrations, offers the most conspicuous example of this feedback loop.[33] Against this backdrop, eighteenth-century laments about escapist or identificatory reading practices take on a new resonance as a particularly powerful example of more general fears about the fictionalization of identity. As we will see, categories like verisimilitude, plausibility, and even irony have a significance that far transcends their use in more narrowly literary discussions. At the same time, however, by focusing on the literary context, we will be better able to grasp how a critical vocabulary that comes to define much later debates about consumer culture already takes shape in the context of eighteenth-century discussions of luxury and the fine arts.

This concern with real or authentic selves, moreover, also returns us to the categories of psychic equilibrium and self-regulation as described previously. To the extent that the sensuous and imaginative pleasures of luxury consumption—whether of books or of other goods—give rise to fantasies of modest improvement, these pleasures can be seen to drive socially desirable behaviors. Too much stimulation of the senses and the imagination, however, and the system threatens to spin out of control. Members of the nobility turn to bizarre foreign spices to satisfy their corrupt palates, or young men adopt the habit of dressing up like Goethe's Werther, even if it means inverting their financial priorities and having to forgo some of life's basic necessities.

Eighteenth-century commentators tend to respond to this dilemma by positing an ideal of the balanced or well-tempered self as a solution, an ideal that reflects the general anthropological orientation of the age and especially the notion, elucidated in recent work by scholars such as Hans-Jürgen Schings, Alexander Košenina, and Jutta Heinz, of the human being as a psycho-physical entity, an "indivisible unity of feeling and thinking, body and soul, sensuality and reason, nature and culture, determination and freedom."[34] Honing in on the category of luxury thus enables us to recognize that responses to the expanding world of goods are fundamentally anthropological in their orientation, casting both the threat and the opportunities presented by this expansion in terms of a specific, psycho-physical model of selfhood. The absence of fixed, preestablished criteria for determining the exact constitution of this balanced self, however, gives rise to disagreements about what, in fact, constitutes excessive behavior and whether human beings can periodically engage in such behavior without completely losing their grip on reality. At stake in the debates about luxury and the arts, in other words, is the question of how much

33. See Purdy, *Tyranny of Elegance,* 147–79.

34. Hans-Jürgen Schings, *Melancholie und Aufklärung: Melancholiker und ihre Kritiker in Erfahrungsseelenkunde u. Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977); Jutta Heinz, *Wissen vom Menschen und Erzählen vom Einzelfall: Untersuchungen zum anthropologischen Roman der Spätaufklärung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996); Alexander Košenina, *Literarische Anthropologie: Die Neuentdeckung des Menschen* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008); quotation from Košenina, 10.

pleasure and stimulation can be tolerated by the individual without a complete loss of self-control. And this issue of self-control is linked in turn to concerns about social stability.

Joseph Vogl has described the parallel between these two levels of control in terms of the idea of a "somatic economy" (*haushälterischer Körper*), which, he argues, operates as a closed system seen to exist in a state of dynamic equilibrium. Whether the body in question is that of the mercantilist state or the individual, the goal is unhindered circulation and an optimization of the balance of forces through effective regulation. Vogl also asserts that a crucial transformation occurs around 1800, at which point both the state and the individual come to be understood on the basis of a new conceptual framework, one that posits both as types of *self*-regulating systems that operate according to a logic of imbalance or limitless demand. This new paradigm can be seen in the model of infinite deferral entailed by new theories of credit as well as in the insatiable desire and ceaseless activity of Faust in the second part of Goethe's drama.[35] To these examples one can also add any number of models of self-regulating and self-correcting social systems, such as those based on Adam Smith's "invisible hand" or Kant's notion of "asocial sociability."

Like Vogl, I also believe one can discern a shift in ways of conceiving the self in the epoch under consideration. As my previous comments about the dynamic unity of the period suggest, however, I want to emphasize continuity rather than discontinuity or rupture. Instead of a wholesale transformation from an equilibrium-based model of the self to one based on a constitutive imbalance—the model embodied for Vogl in Faust's infinite striving—I see the discourse of luxury as indicating a shift entailing optimization within an existing framework. The idea of the somatic economy remains in force at the level of both self and society, but this economy is recalibrated to operate at a higher level of intensity. Beginning around 1800, one finds an increasing tendency to view self-regulating systems, including that of the individual subject understood as a balance of psychic forces, as capable of tolerating more sensuality, more imagination, more desire, more egotism—in short, more luxury—than had previously been the case, without a loss in overall stability. This intensification becomes especially apparent in the romantic period, where it has implications not only for representations of the artist but also for the narrative structure of the text.

My thinking in this regard owes a debt to recent appropriations of the work of Norbert Elias, who is best known for his model of the "civilizing process," whereby, over the course of several centuries, external mechanisms of social control become internalized in the form of what, using Freud's more familiar terminology, we would call the superego. The thrust of this development is toward increasing levels of self-restraint in a whole range of behaviors, from eating habits to speech to

35. Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*.

courtship rituals. Elias's theory, however, also contains references to a process that runs in the opposite direction, a process that he and a number of other sociologists have elucidated under the rubric of "informalization." The basic idea behind informalization is that as the capacity for individual self-control increases in a general sense, this can open up possibilities for the relaxation of controls in certain limited arenas.[36] For our purposes, the most productive use of this idea has been made by the sociologist Mike Featherstone. In his discussion of consumption practices in postmodernism, Featherstone makes the important point that an increase in instances of apparent lack of self-restraint (in the form of excessive consumerism, for example) does not necessarily mean that controls have been abandoned. It can also mean that they have been embedded at a deeper level, such that punctuated excesses of this sort lose their threatening character. Previously transgressive behaviors that would have constituted a threat to the maintenance of a stable identity are no longer perceived as menacing, at least not by all concerned parties. As Featherstone puts it, "There may be 'rules of disorder' which act to permit more easily controlled swings."[37]

Featherstone's notion of "controlled de-control" offers a useful framework for thinking about the shifting boundaries of luxury in the period as well as about the ambivalent attitudes expressed by contemporaries toward what I have termed the posttraditional self. It allows us to grasp the appeal of new opportunities for cultural consumption as sources of pleasure and self-affirmation, but also to see why, even among commentators critical of the traditional society of orders, these new opportunities simultaneously give rise to trepidation. In addition, as we will see, the idea of "controlled de-control" can help us to link this trepidation to authorial decisions regarding the narrative organization of literary works, and not merely in the case of the "aesthetics of containment" seen as characteristic of Weimar classicism.[38] Even in that case, I think that the idea of containment, as crucial as it is, fails to capture fully the stakes of the project. In the end, all of the novels addressed in this study—whether they have conventionally been characterized as belonging to the Enlightenment, romanticism, classicism, or something in between—are

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36. As Cas Wouters explains, "The loosening of external compulsions and codes of behavior—the process of informalization—[is] 'closely associated' with a tighter regulation of drives . . . and simultaneously harbors such regulation in itself." Cas Wouters, "Informalisierung und der Prozess der Zivilisation," in *Materialien zu Norbert Elias' Zivilisationstheorie*, ed. P. Gleichmann, J. Gouldsblom, and H. Korte (Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 1977), 286. See also Wouters, "Formalization and Informalization: Changing Tension Balances in Civilizing Processes," *Theory, Culture & Society* 3.2 (1986): 1–18.

37. Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 21.

38. See Simon Richter, introduction to *The Literature of Weimar Classicism,* ed. Simon Richter, vol. 7 of *Camden House History of German Literature* (New York: Camden House, 2005), 9–16. For a different perspective on the possibility of moving beyond such a view, see Elliott Schreiber, *The Topography of Modernity: Karl Philipp Moritz and the Space of Autonomy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 36–59.

concerned with the simultaneous stimulation *and* containment of self-interested desire; where they differ is in terms of their claims regarding the level of desire that can be maintained without succumbing to complete disorder, and in the literary and rhetorical strategies that define their efforts.

On Method

It should be clear by this point that this book owes a debt to the methods of the New Historicism and discourse analysis—as Sekora argues, luxury in the eighteenth century is without a doubt a "system of discourse." In light of the studies that have appeared on the topic in the past two decades or so, however, one can no longer follow Sekora in asserting that it is a lost system of discourse. On the other hand, it does seem that many recent works on luxury give its discursive character short shrift, being too quick to limit their focus to the sphere of commodities narrowly defined and thereby failing to convey a sense of just how resonant the concept remained in the eighteenth century in a wide range of contexts. My argument, to reiterate it in the simplest possible form, is that a more complete understanding of this resonance can shed valuable light on how the idea of literature comes to be understood in the period, and more specifically, how literature comes to be defined as a form of, or even as the paradigmatic embodiment of, positive luxury.

Such a claim perforce raises questions as to the relative priority attributed to different levels of analysis. As formulated, it would seem to suggest that there exists a stable, preestablished discourse of luxury that can serve as the background for an analysis of literary production and consumption as well as of the form and content of literary works. It is true that condemnations of luxury remain remarkably stable in their basic argumentative structure from antiquity up through the eighteenth century. The problem arises when one recognizes that, beginning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the validity of that argumentative structure is no longer self-evident. At the risk of sounding overly Hegelian, one can say that we are dealing with a discourse that is becoming conscious of itself, becoming an object of conscious exposition rather than an unreflected set of intellectual assumptions. The fact that luxury is in a process of redefinition in the decades under consideration in this study calls into question the viability of a background/foreground model.

The difficulties are increased by the fact that the fine arts and luxury are mutually constitutive spheres in this period. Justifications of the former employ elements from both traditional condemnations of luxury and newer endorsements of it. And justifications of luxury will sometimes make use of elements typical of arguments in favor of the arts, or literature more specifically, with recourse to notions of taste or self-cultivation. If luxury can tell us something about the literature of the period, in other words, then the reverse is also true: conceptions of literature can help us to grasp the transformation in the meaning of luxury. For this reason, the introductory exposition on luxury provided here and in chapter 1, based as it is primarily on the essays and treatises that explicitly address the topic, is slightly misleading. It reinforces, even if only implicitly, the idea that these texts have a clear discursive priority, that they constitute a stable conceptual framework against which the literary texts must be evaluated. There may be times when my analysis grants primacy to these texts, simply because, as works of expository prose, they present certain elements of the luxury discourse with greater precision than works of fiction. The position that will unfold over the course of the analysis, however, is that the discourse as a whole is constituted by both sets of texts and thus is not fully captured by either set in isolation.

To the extent that one can speak of a stable conceptual framework for luxury, it is only with regard to the traditional view, pithily captured in the tautological assertion attributed to Christian Wolff: "Luxury is arrogance."[39] For the period under consideration in the chapters that follow, however, this framework can serve only as a rough starting point for an effort to trace the contested and shifting boundaries between what comes to be understood as "good" and "bad" luxury, and between each of these categories and that of the fine arts. What this means is that the full definitions of the key concepts that drive the framework argument of my analysis will become clear only in the course of the analysis, and only in terms of their relationship to each other. To attempt to define concepts completely at the outset would be to imply that these categories have an existence wholly independent of and prior to the texts in which they are instantiated. If there is a certain circularity entailed by my approach, I believe that it is of the hermeneutic variety, such that one will have the impression of a deepening grasp of the relationship between part and whole, text and discourse, rather than the impression that the argument has simply assumed what it set out to prove.

In fact, I believe that this approach allows me to avoid the latter type of circularity as it pertains to other categories of analysis. One way to describe this book is as a study of the relationship between literature and economics, or of the interpenetration of literary and economic discourse in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Germany. As such, it can be seen as a contribution to the growing body of scholarship that has been classified under the rubric of the New Economic Criticism. My only objection to such a description is that it presumes that the terms "literature" and "the economy" refer to clearly defined, autonomous spheres in the period under consideration; this is decidedly not the case. One of the advantages of taking luxury as our starting point is that it allows us to sidestep the dangers of an anachronistic application of concepts that fully inhabit their modern definitions only well after the period under consideration. Of course, no attempt to understand the past can completely avoid anachronism, inasmuch as the very idea of historical understanding implies a process of translation from one conceptual framework to

39. Qtd. in Anton Koch, *Wesen und Wertung des Luxus* (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1914), 8.

another, a process that can never be perfect. But I do think that taking luxury as a starting point better enables us to treat the period on its own terms and to recognize the haziness of boundaries that we tend to think of as clear and distinct. The many texts that include explicit condemnations or endorsements of luxury never limit themselves to consideration of issues that we would define as economic; rather, in keeping with the previously mentioned anthropological orientation of the period, they address such diverse topics as universal history, the sciences of state, moral philosophy, and, of course, aesthetics.

Of particular significance in this regard is a specific, recognizably modern conception of literature whose beginnings I hope to elucidate and which thus cannot itself be used as a basis for explanation. Rather than presenting the novels of Campe, Wieland, Moritz, Novalis, or Goethe as examples of a literary modernity to the extent that they meet certain criteria imposed on them from the outside, I want to trace how the novels themselves seek to construct an idea of modern literature through a complex negotiation of various discursive fields. My emphasis, in other words, is on the literary as an effect, rather than as an inherent property of certain kinds of texts. Paraphrasing Bruno Latour's position on the nature of "the social," one could say that "the literary" becomes visible only as the end result of an interaction or association of elements that are themselves non- or perhaps pre-literary.[40] This is why, even though this study as a whole aims to illuminate a larger set of concerns, the close reading of individual works will play such a central role in the analysis, since it is only on the basis of the rhetorical operations of the texts themselves that one can grasp the dynamic process through which the literary takes shape. These readings are of course intended to foreground particular elements in the novels and thus make no pretension of being exhaustive. Most of the novels under consideration here have repeatedly demonstrated their openness to a wide range of intrepretations. In fact, one advantage of framing these novels in terms of luxury is that it enables one to harness the insights of previous scholarship in order to illuminate new facets of these works, and I have striven in each case to show how my own analyses complement and enrich rather than simply refute previous readings.

I am also eager to avoid using a modern understanding of "capitalism" as the basis for explaining developments in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century thought, when the idea of capitalism itself—that is to say, capitalism as an intellectual (rather than a structural) phenomenon—is also something that needs to be explained. Until recently, scholars of the period tended to focus on literature and philosophy as sources for understanding critical reactions to the spread of a capitalist worldview. Frequent references to "romantic anticapitalism" offer a case in point. But the majority of those arguments from the period that have been

40. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1–9.

presented as anticapitalist have a long history in condemnations of luxury; that is to say, they are not "anti*capitalist*" in any unique sense. Criticisms of insatiable greed, of exploiting others for one's own advantage (treating human beings as means rather than ends), or even of a universal commensurability of objects can—*pace* Adorno—be found in a variety of texts from precapitalist periods. What is new, and what proves most interesting, are not so much these criticisms but the manner in which they become entangled with the advocacy of phenomena previously condemned: if not insatiable greed, for example, then insatiable needs. Some of the best recent work in the aforementioned New Economic Criticism has focused on the complicity between "literature" and "economics," and I hope to contribute to our understanding of this complicity, while at the same time refocusing the discussion by insisting on luxury as the key analytical framework for grasping its full range and complexity.[41]

To call for caution in the application of the idea of capitalism as an explanatory framework, however, is not to claim that capitalism (as a structural phenomenon) has no relevance to this study. On the contrary, as mentioned previously, shifts in the discursive fields of luxury and the fine arts are incomprehensible unless one takes into account the impact of an expanding commercial society. But here one again has to be careful of mischaracterizing the nature of this society. To describe the period in terms of the division of labor, technical rationality, or reification, for example, as has sometimes been done, is to apply to it conceptual categories derivative of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism.[42] One can certainly find in eighteenth-century Germany expressions of concern about the impact of the division of labor. Schiller's letters *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (On the Aesthetic Education of Man) offer the best-known example. But most of these writers, including Schiller himself, are actually referring to very basic divisions, such as that between commerce and agriculture, rather than to the kind of specialization reflected in Adam Smith's famous example of the pin factory. Most writers who occupy themselves with what we would consider to be economic matters show less interest in dehumanizing forms of production than in self-interest and the desire to consume, both of which, as the historian Isabel Hull has demonstrated, were viewed as necessary *and* highly threatening to the integrity of civil society.[43] Among the cast of characters that populate the texts of the period, one would be hard pressed to find a cold, calculating factory owner. Instead, the main roles are played by irrational

41. For a comprehensive and nuanced discussion of this complicity, see Gray, *Money Matters*. The seminal anthology of essays representing the New Economic Criticism appeared in 1999: Mark Osteen and Martha Woodmansee, eds., *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Interface of Literature and Economics* (London: Routledge, 1999).

42. The paradigmatic interpretation in this regard is Marcuse's. See Herbert Marcuse, "Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 6 (1937): 54–94.

43. Isabel Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), esp. 155–97.

speculators with crackpot schemes and misguided members of the middle class, described in the *Oekonomische Encyklopädie* as "slaves of sensuality . . . who strive after each new object with a disorderly fervor."[44]

There has long been a debate among economic historians regarding the extent to which the eighteenth century was capitalist at all, particularly in the case of Germany, where industrialization occurred late. One can certainly argue about whether it really makes sense to speak of a "consumer revolution" in the period, especially in Germany, or whether one should go as far as Werner Sombart and claim that luxury consumption was the primary cause of industrial capitalism, but the basic transformation in the world of goods has been well documented and is noncontroversial.[45] For the purposes of my own analysis, I assume that this transformation provides the material foundation for the discursive effects that I intend to investigate; that is to say, although my focus will be on representations, I do believe that there is a prediscursive social reality to which eighteenth-century commentators are responding. This study is thus shaped by my belief in the enduring value of a model that distinguishes in some manner base from superstructure. It also goes without saying that I see the relationship between base and superstructure as dialectical, with the production and consumption of new commodities and the commentary associated with them existing in a mutually determining relationship. Nonetheless, I grant the things themselves a certain primacy of place in the relationship. In this regard, I view this study as offering one possibility for a materialist approach to literary history, a model that takes as its point of departure the transformation of material culture in a broad sense, rather than focusing on social class (as in traditional literary sociology) or transformations in media (as in some determinist variants of contemporary media theory). My own analysis is certainly indebted to these approaches, especially those that emphasize the material features of the book and the role of literary institutions in the construction of meaning, but my approach to questions of materiality casts a wider net.[46]

44. Flörke, "Luxus."

45. The idea of a consumer revolution has been challenged by Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold, "Consumer Culture and the Industrial Revolution," *Social History* 15.2 (1990): 151–79. As Woodruff Smith writes, however, although some "have questioned whether the term [consumer revolution] can be applied accurately to the period (not enough consumption, not rapid enough change for a revolution), there can be no doubt that major alterations occurred in the quantity and type of consumer goods demanded in western Europe, and that these alterations helped to lay the foundations for industrialization, the consumer society, and much more." Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600–1800* (London: Routledge, 2002), 5–6. Sombart advances and defends his claim in *Luxus und Kapitalismus* (Munich and Leipzig: Duncker & Humboldt, 1922).

46. My focus on the conception of books as a form of positive luxury, for example, dovetails well with Andrew Piper's interest in the ways in which "changes to the material conditions of writing and communication that defined the nineteenth century could be rehearsed, interrogated, and ultimately normalized." Normalization is also a key category in my study, but the frame of reference is consumer culture more generally. See Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 13.

This book begins with a conceptual overview of the idea of luxury in Germany, followed by six interpretive chapters, each of which offers a case study in the relationship between literature and luxury. The first two of these interpretive chapters address the topic from a broader, intellectual-historical and institutional perspective, whereas the final four provide fine-grained analyses of individual novels (in one case, a pair of novels). While each chapter is self-contained in its argumentation and can be read independently of the others, each also emphasizes different facets of the relationship between literature and luxury. Thus, when read together, the chapters reinforce and complement each other in productive ways, and only by reading them together can one acquire an adequate sense of how these seemingly disparate works stake out a range of distinct but related positions within a shared force field of intellectual concerns.

Chapter 1 provides a conceptual map of luxury as it is understood in the period, one that acknowledges the long tradition of reflections on the topic while also drawing attention to the transformation of the category. The synopsis aims to build on the insights of recent studies of eighteenth-century consumption while at the same time emphasizing the particularities of the German discourse of luxury through a careful consideration of its entwinement with questions of historical development, the society of orders, Enlightenment anthropology, and, of course, the legitimacy of the fine arts. This exposition provides a broad, intellectual-historical foundation for the subsequent analyses. Chapter 2 addresses the book itself as luxury object; more specifically, it considers the rhetorical strategies used to justify the production of exquisite luxury editions during an era in which the ideal of utility tended to reign supreme. Discussions of these editions offer perhaps the most conspicuous point of interface between luxury and literature, one that illuminates in a striking manner just how closely entwined the spheres of culture and commerce were in the period, and just how much intellectual energy had to be expended to create the sense of separation that held sway during most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In considering luxury editions as a paradigmatic example of the contested boundaries of acceptable extravagance, chapter 2 also provides something of a taxonomy of the arguments used to justify the production and consumption of nonessential goods in the period. Chapter 3 turns from the book to the practice of reading, and from objects to subjects, taking as its point of departure the widespread concerns that emerge in the last quarter of the eighteenth century about an alleged reading mania (*Lesewut*). While these concerns have generally been viewed against the backdrop of political instability or anxieties about gender, I argue that they are best understood as one strand of a much broader confrontation with an emerging commercial society. Recognizing the shared conceptual framework in this instance helps us to grasp why the reading mania was a source of such distress. It also enables us to link concerns about surplus consumption to fears about a loss of subjective authenticity, and thereby to recognize how much even the most conservative commentators on the topic share with more recent critics of consumption as a source of identity.

The remaining four chapters investigate the impact of ideas about luxury on the evolution of the German novel. They are organized in chronological order, and this order is intended to *suggest*—I choose this word deliberately—a possible reframing of conventional models of periodization, one that takes as its point of departure a shift in attitudes toward the sensuous and imaginative pleasures of luxury. These five novels can be seen to describe a historical trajectory of decreasing anxiety with regard to such pleasures, a decrease that finds reflection in a relaxation of control. This relaxation is manifest in conceptions both of the ideal self as depicted in the plot and of the ideal form of narrative organization as intimated by the structure of the work itself. More precisely, the novels raise the possibility that the perceived intensity of desire that can be tolerated without leading to a complete loss of control increases in the period under consideration. From this perspective, the transition from Enlightenment to romanticism appears not as a conceptual reversal but rather as the optimization of a single model of both the self and the narrative totality.

Chapter 4 focuses on two novels that are representative of the anthropological orientation of the German Enlightenment: J.H. Campe's *Robinson der Jüngere* (Robinson the Younger) of 1779 and C.M. Wieland's *Der goldne Spiegel* (The Golden Mirror) of 1772. Each is characterized by a peculiar refusal to accept its own status as "literature" in the sense of a wholly self-justifying mode of entertainment. Whereas scholars have typically explained such refusals in terms of the rather vague category of Enlightenment didacticism, I argue that they result from the suspicion that this type of writing is an unnecessary extravagance. This suspicion leads each author, by way of a series of plot features, formal conventions, and metafictional reflections, to position his own work—and literature in general—within a broader constellation of artifacts ranging from basic tools to opulent luxury goods.

Building on the anthropological implications of these reflections on extravagance, chapter 5 approaches the status of literature and the arts from the perspective of human needs. In his efforts to establish a conceptual context for the legitimate production and enjoyment of works of art, Karl Philipp Moritz provides the period's most comprehensive and radical treatment of the tangled relationship between luxury, commerce, the fine arts, and human needs. A careful reading of the novel *Anton Reiser* (1785–86/90), together with his pioneering aesthetic writings, reveals that Moritz both confirms and complicates the hierarchical conception of needs so widespread in the period. On the one hand, virtually all of the artistic pursuits in *Anton Reiser* can be read in terms of an inversion of this "natural" hierarchy; Reiser mistakes the ornamental for the fundamental, thereby committing the primary sin of the misguided luxury consumer. At the same time, however, the novel makes it clear that his behavior is a consequence of a profound lack rather than a function of affluence. Luxury, in Moritz's paradoxical representation, is revealed as a product of poverty rather than of wealth. Chapter 6 reads Novalis's Bildungsroman *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (Henry of Ofterdingen, 1802) as an extended meditation on the artist as luxury producer. The chapter argues that the much-discussed figure of the miner is intended to serve as a model for the romantic artist, not so much because of his ability to fuse science and art, but because he operates in an environment marked by sensuous temptation but nonetheless manages to maintain his independence and remain productive.

The literary analysis concludes with chapter 7, an analysis of Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (Elective Affinities, 1809) that recasts the novel's engagement with the disintegrative forces of modernity as a meditation on the emancipation of the ornamental and its consequences for the integrity of self and society. In its representation of a decadent nobility, Goethe's novel might seem to confirm the still-widespread notion that condemnations of luxury around 1800 are directed by members of the middle class toward members of the aristocracy. In terms of both its highly nuanced representation of consumer culture and its narrative structure, however, the novel has rather surprising implications for thinking about how one might reembed the decorative within the essential, and the role that literature can play in this effort. The conclusion brings the insights of this study to bear on a series of canonical late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century definitions of the artistic masterpiece, enabling us to view these definitions as so many attempts to posit the work of art as a particular kind of material object.

In closing, it should be noted that this book, despite its length, is essentially essayistic in character. It had as its point of origin the recognition that literature and the arts are conceived as a form of luxury in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and that for this reason, a large number of commentators, even those engaged in artistic endeavors, struggle to define the limits of their legitimacy. This book attempts to construct a coherent and meaningful story on the basis of this recognition. Given the limited scope of the analysis, the conclusions drawn here should be understood as hypothetical in character. They are meant to be suggestive rather than definitive, providing a foundation for further inquiry rather than constituting the final word on the topic.

1

The Conceptual Landscape of Luxury in Germany

Long neglected by scholars, luxury is now recognized as one of the central intellectual preoccupations of eighteenth-century Western Europe, inseparable from the development of the historiography, philosophy, social theory, and aesthetics of the period. Whether or not one agrees with Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger's characterization of luxury as "the keynote debate of the Enlightenment," it has become clear that virtually every major intellectual figure of the Enlightenment weighed in on the subject, including, to name just a few, Mandeville, Gibbon, Hume, Smith, Swift, and Pope in England, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Mirabeau in France, and Galiani in Italy.[1] Germany was no exception: Herder, Kant, Hegel, and Fichte all voiced their opinions on luxury, although they tended to incorporate their statements into works on other topics, rather than composing separate treatises on the subject. Impassioned articles on luxury by lesser-known intellectuals, however, did fill German periodicals, especially in the latter third of the eighteenth-century, and considerations of luxury (whether as *Luxus* [luxury], *Pracht* [splendor], or *Üppigkeit* [opulence]) figured especially prominently in the writings of the cameralists, those

1. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, introduction to part 1, in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires, and Delectable Goods*, ed. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 5; and Berg and Eger, "The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates," ibid., 7–27. A valuable collection of some of the best-known primary texts can be found in Henry C. Clark, ed., *Commerce, Culture, and Liberty: Readings on Capitalism before Adam Smith* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2003).

quintessentially German theorists of administrative economics who rose to prominence in conjunction with the consolidation of the territorial states in Germany following the Thirty Years' War.[2] All of the major representatives of the "cameralistic sciences" in eighteenth-century Germany, from Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi and Joseph Sonnenfels to Isaak Iselin, Johann August Schlettwein, and Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, wrote extensively on the topic of luxury.[3]

Thanks to the efforts of authors such as John Sekora, Christopher Berry, Maxine Berg, and Istvan Hont we now have a good sense of both the salience and some of the general contours of the European debate.[4] We know, for example, that the prominence of discussions of luxury in the eighteenth century is inseparable from the increased circulation of commodities—especially new commodities from abroad—and increased access to these goods on the part of new social groups. The luxury debate was, in other words, a debate about the rise of a commercial society and the values seen to be associated with it.[5] One reason that the category of luxury becomes the central lens through which individuals attempt to come to terms with this rise is that it had a history that made it readily available for use. As Christopher Berry puts it, "'Luxury' had for so long provided an account of how wealth and private interest damaged both self and society that it achieved a salience in a society where these factors were coming increasingly to the fore."[6] Under these circumstances, luxury became a catchall explanatory framework for the entire range of consequences perceived to result from the changes taking place.

Recent scholarship has also given us a detailed account of the opposing camps in the luxury debates as well as the conceptual fault lines that defined their positions. As Istvan Hont has pointed out, one can in fact distinguish between two

2. For a discussion of cameralism in the context of a history of German economic thought, see Keith Tribe, *Governing Economy: The Reformation of German Economic Discourse 1750–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

3. For a partial bibliography, see the list of works cited.

4. Key contributions to the scholarship on luxury include John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Joseph Vogl, "Luxus," in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, ed. Karlheinz Barck et al. (Stuttgart: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2000), 694–708; Berg and Eger, *Luxury*; Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600–1800* (London: Routledge, 2003), esp. 63–104; Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Istvan Hont, "The Early Enlightenment Debate on Commerce and Luxury," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 379–418; Christiane Weder and Maximilian Bergengruen, eds., *Luxus: Die Ambivalenz des Überflüssigen in der Moderne* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011). This partial list does not include any of the numerous analyses of eighteenth-century consumption that tangentially address the topic of luxury.

5. Michal Kwass writes that "from the late seventeenth century [the debate over luxury] served as the main literary vehicle for the dissemination of ideas on consumption." Michael Kwass, "Consumption and the World of Ideas: Consumer Revolution and the Moral Economy of the Marquis De Mirabeau," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37.2 (2004): 189.

6. Berry, *Idea of Luxury*, 142.

luxury debates in Enlightenment Europe. The first is between the "ancients" and the "moderns," between the unequivocal critics of luxury arguing out of a Christian or civic republican tradition and those who, often by way of a demoralization of the topic, defended luxury as a source of modern industry, cultivation, and progress in general.[7] The second is between those moderns who felt that luxury should be left unregulated and those whose ideal consisted in some form of managed luxury. The Austrian cameralist, publisher, author, critic, and all-around *Aufklärer* Joseph Sonnenfels, for example, has the latter in mind when he endorses the idea of "a well-ordered splendor."[8] Regardless of which debate one considers, it quickly becomes clear that the arguments tend to center on the societal impact of luxury. Critics drew from an arsenal that included the claims that luxury ruined the countryside by attracting men to the cities, that it led to depopulation by discouraging marriage, that it destroyed patriotism and sapped the martial spirit, and that it caused, or at least was accompanied by, unsustainable extremes of wealth and poverty. Advocates of luxury, on the other hand, insisted that it rendered individuals more productive and thus contributed to the prosperity—as well as the power—of states, that it increased population by providing a livelihood for greater numbers of people, that it led to more refined manners, that it resulted in improvements in the arts and sciences, and that it generally fostered human happiness and social progress.[9] These alleged consequences of luxury, both pro and con, had taken on something of a formulaic quality by the middle of the century, a development that did not prevent members of either camp from impassioned assertions of their validity.

Finally, it has become clear that the emergence of a split between critics and proponents marks a new phase in the history of the idea of luxury, demonstrating that a paradigm shift was under way in the period. To be sure, the concept had undergone a series of semantic shifts since its introduction in antiquity.[10] In the Hebrew Bible, the emphasis falls on transgressions of the divine law, whereas the philosophers of Greek and Roman antiquity cast luxury in more secular terms, as a crime against the universal, rational norms of nature, including human nature. In medieval Christianity, concerns about temptation and carnality come to the fore. Nonetheless, throughout antiquity as well as the Middle Ages, luxury was unanimously decried as a cause of individual dissipation and social disintegration; to put it simply, any perceived transgression of what was understood as divine or natural law, or any subversion of the social hierarchy, was by definition luxury.

Only in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, beginning with English writings on trade and especially with Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714),

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7. Istvan Hont, "Early Enlightenment Debate," 380.

8. Joseph Sonnenfels, "Versuch über das Verhältnis der Stände," in *Politische Abhandlungen* (1777; repr., Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1964), 103.

9. In his article for the *Encyclopédie,* Saint-Lambert provides a very similar list. Jean-François, Marquis de Saint-Lambert, "Luxury," in Clark, *Commerce, Culture, and Liberty,* 478–80.

10. The following summary is indebted to Sekora, *Luxury*, 23–62.

were the social changes linked to increased luxury assimilated by some writers to an emerging theory of progress.[11] Hume's essays "Of Luxury" (1752; retitled "Of Refinement in the Arts" in 1760) and "Of Interest" (1752) can now be seen as paradigmatic for the new attitude toward luxury, although such views were rare at the time of publication. Hume, as we have seen, defines luxury not simply as excess, but as "great refinement in the gratification of the senses."[12] One came to distinguish, as the English political economist Sir James Steuart put it in 1767, "*luxury*, as it affects our different interest, by producing hurtful consequences; from *luxury*, as it regards the moderate gratification of our natural or rational desires."[13] Despite the gradual emergence of a group of eloquent defenders of commercial society and its benefits in this period, however, the association of luxury with immorality and social disintegration remained strong. Even for the advocates of luxury, the aim was not a defense of excessive consumption, which all commentators continued to view with disapprobation. It was instead the incorporation of a certain limited range of what might seem to be superfluous goods and experiences into a framework of legitimate pleasure. The human desires driving luxury consumption—the desire for material comforts, for improvement in one's social situation, or even simply to enjoy the pleasures of the senses and the imagination—were no longer condemned *in toto* as a source of social instability and individual corruption. As Steuart's remark indicates, however, in order to be legitimate, such desires were subjected to more or less strict controls based on perceptions of what was "natural" and "rational" as well as what constituted "moderation." By the end of the century, the controversies were taking place along two semantic axes, which often crisscrossed in complicated ways. For some, the key distinction was between "luxury" and "not-luxury," whereas for others it was between "good" and "bad" luxury.

With some notable exceptions, much of the scholarship on luxury in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe has focused on the French and British contexts.[14] Building on this work, as well as on a few more recent contributions by German scholars, the overview that follows intends to provide a synopsis of some key features of the German-speaking debate on the topic. Although very much in dialogue with their French and English counterparts, German commentators, to the extent that one can generalize, tended to frame their reflections in more abstract, anthropological or philosophical terms, viewing luxury against the backdrop of the

11. Berry, *Idea of Luxury*, 126–27.

12. David Hume, "Of Refinement in the Arts," in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary,* ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1987); available at Library of Economics and Liberty, http://www.econlib.org/library/LFBooks/Hume/hmMPL25.html.

13. James Steuart, *Inquiry into the Principles of Political Oeconomy: Being an Essay on the Science of Domestic Policy in Free Nations* (London: A. Millar and T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1767), 1:307.

14. The two primary exceptions are Joseph Vogl, both his entry on *Luxus* for the *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe* as well as his monograph *Kalkül und Leidenschaft: Poetik des ökonomischen Menschen* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2004), and the recent anthology edited by Christiane Weder and Maximilian Bergengruen (see note 4).

history of humanity, of the *Bestimmung des Menschen* (vocation of man), or of the capacities of the human mind. A review of these specificities will provide a crucial framework for the interpretations contained in the subsequent chapters.

A careful reading of the German discursive tradition, moreover, can also help shed light on some underilluminated facets of the broader European discussion of luxury. As valuable as the focus on the pro- and con-camps, on the paradigmatic statements of renowned philosophers, and on the alleged societal impact of luxury has been, it has drawn attention away from the shared intellectual assumptions that inform the claims of all the participants, regardless of position. In addition, the many insightful elucidations of reactions to new and exotic commodities, although certainly justified in light of the historical circumstances, have often come at the expense of a consideration of the shifts in the broader networks of artifacts and activities in which these commodities constitute particular nodes. Because of the more theoretical orientation of many of the German reflections on luxury, they bring some of these underlying intellectual and structural elements into the foreground and thereby enable us to develop a deeper understanding of just why luxury was such a source of controversy in the period. What follows is a consideration of four facets of the discourse that prove particularly relevant in this regard.

Luxury as the Consequence of Social Evolution

Reflections on luxury in Germany are closely entwined with ideas about the evolution of human societies. The capacity to generate a social surplus—that which enables a society to move beyond what Hazel Kyrk has termed "survival values"—is understood in the period as a consequence of the increasing complexity and sophistication of social organization, especially of an increasingly complex division of labor.[15] Luxury, to put it succinctly, is a category based on a set of historical-philosophical assumptions. One of the most common is the assumption that human beings evolve out of an animalistic state of nature to form societies, and that luxury appears only at a certain point in this development. As Ferdinand Friedrich Pfeiffer writes in 1779 in his *Probschrift von dem Luxus* (Essay on Luxury), "How hard it would be, in the absence of society, for human beings to develop inclinations; where, then, could even the slightest impetus toward luxury be found? Luxury, like virtue and vice, is born of society."[16] Pfeiffer goes on to link the emergence of luxury to a transition from a hunter-gatherer or pastoral model of social organization to one based on farming: "The first consequence of the refinement and growth of the society was agriculture."[17] A somewhat different tack is taken by Sonnenfels,

15. Hazel Kyrk, *A Theory of Consumption* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1923), 213.

16. Ferdinand Friedrich Pfeiffer, *Probschrift von dem Luxus der heutigen Europäischen Staaten* (Stuttgart: Gedruckt mit Mäntlerischen Schriften, 1779), 3.

17. Ibid., 4.

who, in one of his many essays on political economy, emphasizes the importance of a complex social division of labor for the existence of what he calls *Üppigkeit* (opulence), a term that in his work serves as a synonym for luxury, but which will later become the preferred designation for its negative incarnation. Sonnenfels explains that the comforts of life in society can be acquired only through reliance on the work of others, and goes on to assert: "Opulence can thus be explained through the exercise of man's capacity to increase his comforts through the work of others and thereby to make life pleasant."[18]

Neither Pfeiffer nor Sonnenfels offers anything approaching a comprehensive stadial theory of human history, but their contributions make clear that to reflect on luxury is to reflect on the value of civilization, which is in turn conceived as the culmination of a temporal development. For some the framework of this development remains local, meaning that it remains linked to the developmental trajectory of a particular people, as in arguments about the luxury of the Romans or in Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Humanity), where he blames the allegedly sorry state of the Hebrews at the time of the Babylonian captivity on the misguided introduction of "commerce and opulence" into a country of shepherds and farmers.[19] In other texts, however, the evaluation of civilization converges with attempts to flesh out the contours of a modernity grasped in more universalistic terms. What proves most interesting in these texts is the tendency to universalize luxury itself and then insert it into a framework of positive progress. As Saint-Lambert explains in his contribution to the *Encyclopédie* on the topic, "The first cause of luxury is our dissatisfaction with our situation, our desire to be better off, which is and must be in all men."[20] Luxury, for Saint-Lambert, is an anthropological universal, manifest in phenomena ranging from the hammock of the "savage" to the sofa and the bed of the European. "Our women put on red and diamonds," he writes. "The women of Florida put on blue and glass beads."[21] Such radical assertions of equivalence, however, prove rather rare among the advocates of luxury. More common is the claim that pleasures and ornaments themselves evolve toward greater degrees of refinement, and that such refinement serves as a mark of modern cultivation and is worthy of admiration. In his introductory essay for the *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*, editor Friedrich Justin Bertuch echoes Saint-Lambert in the assertion that the desire for beauty is universal, but Bertuch also claims that "the richer and more refined an enlightened nation is, the more comfortable, beautiful, tasteful, and diverse are its fashions."[22]

18. Joseph Sonnenfels, "Anfangsgründe der Handlung," in Sonnenfels, *Politische Abhandlungen,* 63.
19. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit,* in *Werke in zehn Bänden*, ed Martin Bollacher (Frankfurt/Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989), 6:486.
20. Saint-Lambert, "Luxury," 478.
21. Ibid.
22. Friedrich Justin Bertuch and Georg Melchior Kraus, "Einleitung," *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* 1 (1786): 11.

This refinement, moreover, can help to reduce the level of luxury understood as pernicious excess. We have seen how Johann Georg Büsch, who is likely channeling David Hume, claims that without the fine arts wealth would simply be squandered on gluttony and fornication.[23]

The most extended discussion of this topic, however, and an explicit link to European modernity, can be found in a work of 1793 by the Göttingen historian Christoph Meiners with the rather lengthy title *Historische Vergleichung der Sitten, und Verfassungen, der Gesetze, und Gewerbe, Handels, und der Religion, der Wissenschaften, und Lehranstalten des Mittelalters mit denen unsers Jahrhunderts in Rücksicht auf die Vortheile, und Nachtheile der Aufklärung* (A Historical Comparison of the Customs, Constitutions, Laws, and Trade, Commerce, and the Religion, Sciences, and Schools of the Middle Ages with That of Our Century in Terms of the Advantages and Disadvantages with Regard to Enlightenment).[24] Today Meiners is probably best remembered for his polygenist theory of human origins and his dubious role in the development of a discourse of "scientific" racism. In this book, however, he adopts the role of an advocate of Enlightenment, considering the pros and cons of modern society by way of a comparison between the European Middle Ages and the present day. Meiner's central point is that recent assertions of both modern decadence and the idyllic quality of previous epochs have been grossly exaggerated. And luxury serves as a key framework for unmasking the absurdity of such claims. As he explains it to his readers, their forefathers lived far less simple and innocent lives than they might think; instead, one finds "the most extreme debauchery and extravagance" combined with "the filthiest wretchedness."[25] The meals, for example, were anything but simpler and healthier than those of Meiner's contemporaries: "Just as the foods themselves in France and the rest of Europe were more crude and more difficult to digest, and the preparation thereof was more deleterious than in the present century, so the dishes served at the tables of the great and the rich men were at least as plentiful, and the expenditure they occasioned was far more considerable."[26] The average subject suffered privation while the princes tried to make up for the lack of quality in basic ingredients by oversalting their meats, bathing every dish in a broth of exotic spices, and overindulging in sugary desserts. Improvements in the quality of wine and liqueurs, as well as a reduction in their abuse, constitute an even stronger piece of evidence in favor of modernity. "The so-often derided drinking of coffee" may be an indulgence, but, according to Meiners,

23. Hume writes: "The more men refine upon pleasure, the less will they indulge in excesses of any kind; because nothing is more destructive to true pleasure than such excesses." Hume, "Of Refinement in the Arts."

24. Christoph Meiners, *Historische Vergleichung der Sitten, und Verfassungen, der Gesetze, und Gewerbe, Handels, und der Religion, der Wissenschaften, und Lehranstalten des Mittelalters mit denen unsers Jahrhunderts in Rücksicht auf die Vortheile, und Nachtheile der Aufklärung,* 3 vols. (Hannover: Im Verlag der Helwingschen Buchhandlung, 1793).

25. Meiners, *Historische Vergleichung,* 2:88.

26. Ibid., 100.

it has led to a dramatic reduction in the consumption of spirits.[27] And the list of excesses from the past goes on, from the massive expenditures on tournaments and festivals to princely robes overloaded with "ridiculous ornamentations."[28]

In these cases, then, specific practices of luxury constitute a key criterion for evaluating the developmental level of a given society or of humanity as a whole. Another variant of this approach can be seen in efforts to distinguish "modern" luxury from that of antiquity and assert the superiority of the former based on its origins. A case in point is the essay published by one F.K. Schulze in Hamburg, "Bemerkungen über den Begriff, die Natur und die Schädlichkeit des Luxus" (Remarks on the Concept, Nature, and Harmfulness of Luxury), which appeared in the *Braunschweigisches Journal* in 1790. Toward the end of the essay, Schulze, who defends luxury as "a thing beneficial to humanity and one entwined with the path of cultivation to which man has been predestined by nature," turns to the troubling claim that the greatest empires of the past all seem to have been destroyed by it.[29] While he accepts the claim, he declares any comparison with the contemporary situation invalid. The luxury of the past, he writes, derived from conquest. It appeared suddenly, was concentrated in the hands of a few, and thus overwhelmed societies—he has Rome in particular in mind—whose social and political order was unprepared to manage this newfound wealth. Modern luxury, in contrast, is "the fruit of trade—of industry and the general productivity of the nations."[30] Here we see a link between a uniquely modern luxury and a uniquely modern commercial order. Such luxury, according to Schulze, rests on a firm foundation, serving to increase productivity and limit inequality through the lively circulation of goods.

As all of these examples illustrate, regardless of where one comes down in the debate, thinking about luxury means thinking about history. More precisely, it means evaluating the achievements of modern Germany or Europe vis-à-vis those of some past (ancient or medieval) as well as those of other presents ("savages" in America, for example). In this context, one final aspect of the discussion needs to be addressed, one intimated in the comments by Herder and Schulze. Herder's assertion that the depravity of the ancient Hebrews stems from the introduction of "commerce and opulence" does not equate to an unqualified condemnation of luxury; rather, it reflects the widespread assumption that luxury, in order to be harmless or even beneficial, may appear on the scene only once more basic needs have been addressed.

This virtually universal belief in a natural hierarchy of needs is of particular import for theories of individual development, a topic to which I will turn in a

27. Ibid., 108.

28. Ibid., 119.

29. F. K. Schulze, "Bemerkungen über den Begriff, die Natur und die Schädlichkeit des Luxus, von Herrn F. K. Schulze in Hamburg," *Braunschweigisches Journal* 5 (1790): 101.

30. Ibid., 102–3.

moment. But it also proves relevant from a historical-philosophical perspective, since it implies a particular trajectory of natural societal development, the culmination of which is a turn toward ornament and decoration, understood in the broadest sense. Friedrich Schlegel employs a variation of this theme in his *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie* (On the Study of Greek Poetry) of 1797, when he asserts that "the modern spirit" was initially so occupied with the "necessities of religion and politics . . . that it was only much later able to start thinking about the luxury of the beautiful."[31] Another succinct statement of this idea appears in Joachim Heinrich Campe's popular children's novel of 1779, *Robinson der Jüngere* (Robinson the Younger), which will serve as one of the focal points of chapter 4. After Robinson and his companion Freitag have taken care of their more immediate needs, the narrator explains, they turn to the beautification of their residence. And he continues: "And this, children, is how it has happened everywhere in the world. As long as men still had to direct all their thoughts to the acquisition of their sustenance and the security of their life, it never occurred to them to dedicate themselves to those arts that serve only to beautify the objects around us, and to provide our soul with more refined pleasures than the merely animalistic pleasures of the senses."[32] Problems arise, however, as both Herder's and Schulze's remarks indicate, when wealth comes too quickly, creating the danger that the ornamental will obscure or even be mistaken for the foundational.

Luxury as a Challenge to the Society of Orders

To address the topic of luxury in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is thus to reflect on the evolution of human societies. Any such effort, however, also entails reflection on the existing mode of social organization in contemporary Europe, more specifically, on the viability and the validity of a traditional, estate-based society. In fact, in European treatises from the premodern and early modern period, luxury is by definition a transgression against the hierarchical relations that structure this society. As Torsten Meyer has written, "Until the middle of the eighteenth century, to the extent that one spoke of any form of consumption that was not intended to satisfy 'survival values' (Kyrk), this took place exclusively in reference to a lifestyle appropriate to one's estate."[33] Consumption was seen as a direct expression of social identity; any form of consumption that failed to correspond to this identity constituted luxury; and sumptuary laws, however ineffective

31. Friedrich Schlegel, "Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie," in *Kritische Schriften und Fragmente: Studienausgabe in sechs Bänden,* ed. Ernst Behler (1794–97) (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1988), 1:77.

32. Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Robinson der Jüngere* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), 251.

33. Torsten Meyer, "Zwischen sozialer Restriktion und ökonomischer Notwendigkeit: 'Konsum' in ökonomischen Texten der frühen Neuzeit," in *"Luxus und Konsum"—Eine historische Annäherung*, ed. Torsten Meyer and Reinhold Reith (Münster: Waxmann, 2003), 73.

they may have been, were intended to ensure that this link between consumption and identity remained stable.[34] This stability had all but disappeared by the late eighteenth century—as had the sumptuary laws. Nonetheless, the notion of an estate-appropriate lifestyle continued to exert a powerful hold on commentators.

This is not to say that such a notion was incompatible with an endorsement of "well-ordered" luxury. Far from it. For more sympathetic commentators, the desire for wealth, increased material comfort, even personal advantage, if maintained within the proper bounds, served to intensify interdependency among various social groups. It could thereby both ameliorate the conditions of the lower social strata *and* strengthen the interpersonal ties that held society together. As the author of the entry "Luxus" in the *Damen-Conversations-Lexikon* (Ladies' Encyclopedia) of 1834 writes, "It is only through luxury that the rich and powerful learn the value of their poor brothers."[35] Already in 1780, Johann Georg Büsch, in his *Abhandlung vom Geldumlauf* (Treatise on the Circulation of Money), had offered a representative set of arguments along these lines. Substituting for *Luxus* (luxury) the term *Wolleben* (living well), which he defines as encompassing everything beyond our physical needs, Büsch explains that only the desire to improve one's condition can create lasting social bonds. Such desire causes us to take an interest in our fellow human beings; we realize that we need them to achieve our goals of increased comfort and pleasure. In the absence of this desire, he writes, "there will be no bond between men except the one forced on them by extreme necessity or sovereign decree."[36] Like animals, which cease their activity as soon as they have enough to survive, human beings concerned with mere existence will "attend only to themselves," with the one exception of the pairings undertaken to satisfy the need to procreate.[37]

Within an eighteenth-century context, Büsch clearly occupies the liberal end of the spectrum. He laments the plight of the oppressed peasant, and he encourages all classes of society to strive for material improvement; in other words, he strongly endorses the pursuit of self-interest, or *Eigennutz*, that "so powerful mainspring of human action."[38] He even endorses a gradual mixing of the middle class and the nobility, although he claims that he is only pointing out what already happens and

34. According to Werner Sombart, the last restriction on clothing in France was issued in 1708. Werner Sombart, *Luxus und Kapitalismus* (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1922), 134. See also Daniel Purdy, *The Tyranny of Elegance: Consumer Cosmopolitanism in the Era of Goethe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 99–118. Rousseau, not surprisingly, takes a favorable view of sumptuary laws in the *Discourse on Political Economy*, though he seems to prefer taxation as a means of control. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "A Discourse on Political Economy," in *The Social Contract and the Discourses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 166–67.

35. Carl Herloßsohn, ed., *Damen-Conversations-Lexikon* (1834–36; repr., Berlin: Union Verlag, 1987), 152.

36. Johann Georg Büsch, *Abhandlung vom Geldumlauf in anhaltender Rücksicht auf Staatswirthschaft und Handlung*, 2nd expanded and corrected ed. (Hamburg and Kiel: Carl Ernst Bohn, 1800), pt. 1, 341.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., 341–42.

must happen in a situation where the nobility is so ill prepared to meet its responsibilities. One should recognize, however, that his general position is in no way intended to challenge what he also perceives as the fundamental legitimacy of a corporatist social order. On the contrary, the whole point of encouraging improvements among the various social strata is to intensify interdependency and thus stabilize society. By enhancing the lives of the peasants, the state can render them more productive as well as more content with their position. Moreover, as Büsch repeatedly asserts, the affluence of the peasant must remain at estate-appropriate levels. He advocates for "the stimulation of desire for a certain modest well-being, one that corresponds to their way of life and their occupations."[39] Better clothing and a more comfortable residence should constitute the focus of the peasant's expenditures.

Those who occupy the higher ranks of society, however, must adhere to a different set of standards. While Büsch agrees that one can find examples of states in which a modest affluence is the norm—Holland being Exhibit A in this regard—the organization of civil society generally entails a hierarchy of ranks, and those with higher rank and greater wealth must spend it to maintain a lively circulation of money. As he puts it, the nobleman "must not only live well, he must live extravagantly, so that the money that flows to him in such abundance is returned into circulation."[40] Each stratum of society thus has a mode of luxury consumption appropriate to it, one that helps to integrate it with the rest of society even as it serves as a mark of distinction.

Büsch too, then, insists on the need for careful monitoring and control. He describes various subcategories of luxury (*Wolleben* [living well], *Hochleben* [living extravagantly]); he provides guidelines with regard to those *Volksclassen* (social strata) that are particularly vulnerable to excess; he warns against the particular dangers of sudden wealth, of a predilection for rare and exotic goods, and so on.[41] His advocacy of luxury is shot through with equivocation, but it is an advocacy nonetheless. In terms of the two luxury debates described by Hont, Büsch clearly belongs to the "managed luxury" faction of the modern camp, as do virtually all of the other defenders of luxury in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Germany. But they must confront the uncompromising arguments of a number of "ancients," particularly of the Christian persuasion. For these commentators, the threat posed by luxury to a society of orders constitutes the central concern, and they view the desire for improvement as the first step down a slippery slope toward complete societal disintegration—the loss of meaningful distinctions and of a clear division of responsibilities among the estates. An early expression of the position of

39. Ibid., pt. 2, 22.
40. Ibid., 84.
41. Büsch devotes an entire essay to the question of luxury among members of the merchant class. Johann Georg Büsch, "Von dem Wolleben des handelnden Bürgers, nebst drey Anhängen," in *Vermischte Abhandlungen* (Hamburg: In der heroldschen Buchhandlung, 1777), pt. 2, 271–362.

such thinkers is captured in a maxim attributed to Christian Wolff, who, as we saw in the introduction, defines luxury simply as *Übermut* (arrogance), and who, not surprisingly, also defends the estate-based sumptuary laws that came to be phased out across Europe over the course of the eighteenth century.[42]

A more frequently cited interlocutor is the pioneering statistician, demographer, and Prussian pastor Johann Peter Süßmilch, whose arguments are cited at length, for example, in the work of Sonnenfels. In his highly influential book of 1741, *Die Göttliche Ordnung in den Veränderungen des menschlichen Geschlechts* (The Divine Order in the Transformations of the Human Race), Süßmilch provides a characterization of luxury that demonstrates how powerfully the category is linked among more conservative opponents to disintegration: "With the word luxury I designate that magnificence, opulence, and expenditure, which eliminates all order, which confuses everything, and mixes the noble with the lowest class of citizen, which is born of a vain pride, characterized in particular by a ceaseless forward motion, without ever resting, since by dint of arrogance each wants to appear to be more than he is, until finally everything is identical to everything else, such that one can no longer distinguish one from the other."[43] Here we see what is perhaps the best eighteenth-century example of the idea of luxury as what Sekora calls "a theory of entropy," one that "describes how men, singly or collectively, lose vitality and fall from grace."[44] Few in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century would cast the threat in such stark terms, but the belief that luxury leads to a decline in the legibility of rank and to social disorder remains common, even among its cautious defenders. Heinrich Gustav Flörke, likely author of the lengthy, ambivalent entry on the topic included in the influential *Oekonomische Encyklopädie* (Economic Encyclopedia), founded by D. Johann Georg Krünitz, worries about the "enervation" of the peasants and the artisans who become excessively dependent on foreign products like coffee and spices.[45] At the other end of the spectrum, he also worries about the loss of empathy that stems from an obsession with consumer objects among the affluent, lamenting that "it is not uncommon for a lady to be more deeply moved by a broken imported porcelain cup etc. than by the broken foot of one of her domestics."[46]

42. Qtd. in Anton Koch, *Wesen und Wertung des Luxus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1914), 8.

43. Johann Peter Süßmilch, *Die Göttliche Ordnung in den Veränderungen des menschlichen Geschlechts, aus der Geburt, dem Tode und der Fortpflanzung desselben erwiese*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Im Verlag der Buchhandlung der Realschule, 1765), pt. 2, 72. Süßmilch's description here bears a notable similarity to that offered by Fénelon in his *Telemachus*, where Mentor explains that with luxury the "whole nation goes to wreck; all ranks are confounded . . . all live above their rank and income, some from vanity and ostentation, and to display their wealth; others from false shame, and to hide their poverty." François de Fénelon, *Telemachus*, *Son of Ulysses,* ed. and trans. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 297–98.

44. Sekora, *Luxury,* 26.

45. Heinrich Gustav Flörke, "Luxus," *Oekonomische Encyklopädie oder allgemeines System der Staats-Stadt-Haus- und Landwirthschaft*, ed. D. Johann Georg Krünitz, http://www.kruenitz1.uni-trier.de/.

46. Ibid.

These examples should make abundantly clear that the criticism of luxury is in no way limited to a middle-class assault on aristocratic excess, even if some of the canonical literary works of the period foreground this aspect of the discourse.[47] Such an assault is certainly under way in the latter part of the century, but it fails to capture the full range of the debates. If anything, the more vociferous condemnations target the lower and middle social strata, "young middle-class men [*Bürger*] and their wives and daughters," for example, who, according to an article of 1787 entitled "Über den Luxus in Berlin" (On Luxury in Berlin), have married into titled families and "appear next to those men clothed like people of high birth and are ashamed of their true estate."[48] Ultimately, however, neither the criticism of luxury nor its advocacy can be understood as estate-specific, even if individual commentators, depending on their personal preoccupations or their politics, may zero in on the peasants, the middle class, or the aristocracy. This is because luxury is framed in terms of universalistic moral, historical-philosophical, and psycho-physical categories. The Berlin article just described engages all of these frameworks: it praises the voluntary austerity of the current Prussian court (moral); remarks how natural it is, among a people whose spirit has become more enlightened, "that they dress according to a more refined taste" (historical-philosophical); and laments the negative consequences of an overdeveloped taste for things "that provide only sensual pleasures" (psycho-physical).[49] It also points to another structural framework through its implicit claim—made explicit in other essays on the topic—that the metropolis is the seat of luxury.[50]

The fact, however, that all of the estates come to feature at one time or another in the debates over luxury serves only to underscore the imbrication of such debates with reflection on the society of orders as a whole. In the Berlin article, for example, the author's commitment to the societal status quo finds expression in the organization of the essay: he evaluates the degree of luxury to be found at each rank of the social hierarchy, beginning with the court and concluding with the peasants, who, to his chagrin, have learned to dance "English dances and French Pas."[51] Even though his rhetoric lacks the apocalyptic flavor one finds in Süßmilch, he clearly shares Süßmilch's concern regarding a loss of social legibility, as do many others in the period. Such fears regarding a collapse of distinction and differentiation remind us of the historical specificity of the luxury discourse in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, its association with the end of the ancien régime.

47. In Lessing's *Emilia Galotti*, for example, or Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*.

48. "Über den Luxus in Berlin," *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* 2 (1787): 402. I am fully aware of the complexities of translating the terms *Bürger* and *bürgerlich*. I find "middle class" (and its variants) to be the most appropriate option, both because it does not imply wealth and power in the same way that the term "bourgeoisie" does, and because its use is widespread in Britain in the eighteenth century.

49. "Luxus in Berlin," 403, 404.

50. This topic is also addressed in Friedrich Gedike, *Über Berlin: Briefe "von einem Fremden" in der Berlinischen Monatsschrift,* ed. Harald Scholtz (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1987), 146.

51. "Luxus in Berlin," 414.

Curiously enough, however, precisely this fear can also be seen to anticipate much more recent critiques of consumer culture. The debates about luxury addressed in this study are firmly rooted in the transformations of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European society, but some of the key categories of analysis that emerge from the context of these debates continue to shape discussions of commodities in later periods, even as the term "luxury" ceases to serve as the focal point of these discussions. Anxieties with regard to a universal commensurability among persons and things are, after all, a central feature of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century critique of commodification. The invocation of a divinely ordained society of orders disappears, to be sure, from all but the most conservative reflections, but general fears regarding the loss of meaningful distinctions remain prevalent. As the anthropologist Igor Kopytoff has written, to be salable for money means to "partake of a single universe of comparable values," and this homogenization of value proves to be a source of uneasiness in all societies in which it occurs.[52] As we will see in a number of the literary works under consideration in this study, and particularly in the case of Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* (Elective Affinities), the interface between these two variants of anxiety about commensurability—that is to say, about the loss of distinctions among levels in a fixed social hierarchy, on the one hand, and a more diffuse unease regarding the loss of distinction as such, on the other—provides a crucial locus for understanding the complex relationship between luxury and the fine arts.

Luxury as a Threat to the Psychic Stability of the Individual

If considerations of luxury always appeal to the specific character of individual estates, they simultaneously employ the broad categories of eighteenth-century faculty psychology, addressing the relationship between mind and body in more universalizing terms. Many of the treatises on luxury, to be sure, foreground what we would today refer to as macroeconomic considerations, but others demonstrate an equal concern with the individual psyche. In the language of the period, in other words, luxury intersects at numerous points with the field of anthropology, understood in the eighteenth century as the study of what Jutta Heinz has termed "the human being . . . as psycho-physical creature."[53] The definition of luxury in Krünitz's *Encyklopädie* as "the overrefinement of sensuous taste" reflects one of these points of intersection, and it can serve as representative of a nearly universal association of luxury with excessive sensuality.[54] This association has led a

52. Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective,* ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 69.

53. Jutta Heinz, *Wissen vom Menschen und Erzählen vom Einzelfall: Untersuchungen zum anthropologischen Roman der Spätaufklärung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 21.

54. Flörke, "Luxus."

number of scholars simply to equate eighteenth-century conceptions of luxury with sensuous pleasure. As early as 1922, Werner Sombart argued that all personal luxury "originates at first out of a purely sensuous pleasure in consumption."[55] More recently, in *Consumption and the Making of Respectability*, Woodruff Smith has adopted Sombart's emphasis on sensuality to define luxury as "a set of customs and practices according to which sensual pleasures were identified, understood, sought, obtained, and legitimated, in terms of both actual experience and of imagination."[56] An approach to the topic that focuses on sensuality has certain advantages, not the least of which is that it delimits the parameters of the discussion in a manageable way. But it also runs the risk of ignoring the degree to which references to sensuous pleasures are interwoven with other conceptual frameworks from eighteenth-century anthropology, frameworks that are no less significant if we want to understand why luxury is such a contested topic in the period.

Authors who point to the positive or negative consequences of luxury, for example, also rely on ideas about the link between stimulation (*Reiz*) and enervation (*Verweichlichung*). Ernst Brandes, a conservative university official in Göttingen who will return in chapter 3, sums up the threat in an essay that appeared in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in 1790, claiming: "He who rests on soft cushions day in and day out, his nerves will slacken in the end."[57] Krünitz's *Encyklopädie* adopts a similar line, claiming "from the overrefinement of sensibility [*Empfindung*] comes an inclination to surfeit."[58] In fact, assertions that overstimulated nerves lead to physical and moral weakness are a staple in the writings on luxury, and these assertions—which represent an eighteenth-century variant of an argument about effeminacy that dates back to antiquity—help us to grasp the basis of derivative concerns about sensuous pleasures.[59]

In an eighteenth-century context, moreover, sensuality as a human capacity or faculty is inseparable from the faculty of the imagination. Smith himself points to the importance of the "fantasy element" in conceptions of luxury, linking it to the categories of sexuality, status, and the exotic.[60] And in Colin Campbell's pioneering study of 1987, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism,* it is the imagination, rather than sensuality, that plays the lead role in the emergence of modern consumer culture. According to Campbell, the dynamic of modern consumerism has its origins in "autonomous imaginative hedonism," a new mode of hedonism in which the individual derives pleasure from imagined states rather than from the actual consumption of any real commodity. Because this gratification takes place in a virtual realm, once mastered, it can be directed toward almost any

55. Sombart, *Luxus und Kapitalismus,* 73.
56. Smith, *Consumption,* 66.
57. Ernst Brandes, "Über den verminderten Sinn des Vergnügens," *Berlinische Monatsschrift,* 1790, 421–75.
58. Flörke, "Luxus."
59. Berry, *Idea of Luxury,* 137–38.
60. Smith, *Consumption*, 72–76.

object. Moreover, because this imaginative realm appears superior to but can never actually replace reality, it also gives rise to an endless chain of desires (or needs), and this insatiability constitutes for Campbell the singularity of modern consumption.[61]

I will return to the ideas of both Smith and Campbell at various points in the analysis; for now, it is enough to point out that their claims regarding the centrality of fantasy to discussions of luxury and consumption find abundant support in essays and treatises from the period. Martin Ehlers, for example, a pedagogue and professor of philosophy in Kiel who is best known for his efforts at school reform in the 1760s and 1770s, refers in a book on the morality of pleasure to those forms of expenditure "that satisfy the demands of no natural need, but which instead merely supply the imagination with delightful images, or through which we offer up a sacrifice to sensuality or the passions."[62] For Ehlers, in other words, both the senses *and* the imagination are characteristic of luxury, not least because the imagination is what enables the individual, in a kind of distorted mirror-image of the sympathy so central to eighteenth-century aesthetics and philosophy, to fantasize about the impact his or her indulgences will have on others: "And finally, how easily pride and vanity form in the soul when one indulges in a life of splendor that is not connected to the performance of a duty, nor is a consequence of meritorious acts, and yet still provides occasion for expressions of admiration on the part of the mindless crowd."[63] Not all commentators share Ehler's sense of urgency, but virtually all of them express some concern about the dangers of a hyperactive imagination, concerns that find expression in frequent condemnations of "imaginary needs" or "imaginary goods," as well as in the typical association of luxury consumption with the "needs of vanity."[64] Another, particularly interesting example is to be found in the novelist Jean Paul's *Friedens-Predigt an Deutschland* (Sermon to Germany on the Peace), which appeared in 1808. Revealing his sympathies for the artisanal classes, the author distinguishes between popular luxury, based on the limited and self-regulating pursuit of sensual pleasures, and the luxury of the higher ranks (*Hochstands-Luxus*), which is allegedly driven by the "insatiability and limitlessness of fantasy."[65] Arguments like those of Ehlers, Jean Paul, and others make it clear that the discourse of luxury is also a discourse of fictionality, the fictional being understood here as that which is a mere product of the imagination, lacking any

61. Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, 3rd ed. (London: Alcuin Academics, 2005), 77–95.

62. Martin Ehlers, *Betrachtungen über die Sittlichkeit der Vergnügungen in zween Theilen,* 2nd rev. ed. (Flensburg and Leipzig: In der Kortenschen Buchhandlung, 1790), 1:193. The first edition appeared in 1778.

63. Ehlers, *Betrachtungen,* 1:196.

64. These precise phrases (*eingebildete Bedürfnisse, eingebildete Güter,* and *Bedürfnisse der Eitelkeit*) appear in a wide range of eighteenth-century texts. For example, both the first and third appear in Johann Georg Schlosser, "Politische Fragmente," *Deutsches Museum* 2 (February 1777): 112. The second appears under the entry "Aufwand" in the *Deutsche Encyclopädie oder Allgemeines Real-Wörterbuch aller Künste und Wissenschaften,* ed. Heinrich Martin Gottfried Köster (Frankfurt/Main: Varrentrapp Sohn and Wenner, 1779), 2:279.

65. Jean Paul, *Friedens-Predigt an Deutschland* (Heidelberg: Bei Mohr und Zimmer, 1808), 34.

anchor in a natural order conceived in normative terms. Reflections on the impact of luxury lead commentators to make assertions about natural or "real" versus fictional human needs, or, in the case of some reflections on the social hierarchy, "real" versus fictional identities. As mentioned in the introduction, this entwinement with questions of verisimilitude and plausibility represents one key point of intersection between the luxury debates and conceptions of literature and the arts, a topic to which we will return in chapter 3.

Ultimately, however, when one digs past the surface-level arguments, the status of any single faculty proves less decisive in the debates about luxury than the ideal of a harmonious balance of all the faculties. The most vociferous critics of sensuous pleasures and a runaway imagination would concede that both sensuality and the imagination have a role to play in human life, even that they constitute the necessary foundation for the development of the so-called higher faculties. The aforementioned F. K. Schulze makes the case for the importance of sensuous knowledge as the foundation for all improvement. He characterizes the human being as a creature "who remains unfamiliar with all of his mental powers until the stimulation of the senses sets them in motion."[66] Sensory impressions serve as the foundation on which we build an edifice of higher-order mental operations, honing our skills of comparison and differentiation by evaluating the degree to which these impressions give us pleasure or displeasure. In fact, Schulze (rather idiosyncratically) defines luxury as the entirely natural attempt to occupy our ceaselessly active spirit (*Geist*) in a pleasurable fashion, by establishing the greatest possible number of sensuous relationships with the external world.

A reflection on the value of the imagination in the context of luxury can be found in Swiss *Aufklärer* Isaak Iselin's influential work of 1764, *Über die Geschichte der Menschheit* (On the History of Humanity), a work that also helps to confirm the historical-philosophical moment of the luxury debates. According to Iselin, the "rise" of the imagination leads to all sorts of undesirable behaviors, including a "proclivity for ornament," the desire for "anything that shimmers, jingles, is colorful," which is typical of "primitive" peoples.[67] But the imagination also grounds the development of the higher faculties and the refinement of sensuality and thus plays a crucial role in the process of human improvement. As Iselin writes, "However much the imagination [*die Phantasie*] confuses man in his use of concepts, it is nonetheless the most powerful means by which to increase the strength of our inclinations and their duration, to imbue them with a more powerful allure and to grant them an infectious vividness."[68] The imagination, in other words, expands the

66. Schulze, "Bemerkungen," 85.

67. Isaak Iselin, *Über die Geschichte der Menschheit* (Carlsruhe: Bey Christian Gottlieb Schieder, 1784), 1:214.

68. Ibid., 221. Iselin does not distinguish in any systematic way in his usage of *Einbildung* and *Phantasie*.

sources of human pleasure and thus the scope of desire, thereby pushing humanity beyond its original, animalistic state.

Joseph Vogl has insightfully elucidated how the phenomenon of luxury becomes in this period the point of convergence for a disparate but coherent body of anthropological knowledge, which, as he puts it, "constitutes itself around the figure of a desiring subject."[69] The central question for commentators is how this desiring subject can be both encouraged and restrained. Convinced of the necessity of the senses and the imagination as motors of human progress, but equally convinced of the potentially pernicious consequences of an overdevelopment of either, authors generally have recourse to an equilibrium-based model in which the senses and the imagination must be subordinated to the dictates of reason and the will. Arguing along these lines, Schulze insists that sensory stimulation, however important, must ultimately be subordinated to our higher vocation. Thus we must nurture our "nobler senses," particularly that of sight, and generally bring the activities of the senses "into as close a relationship as possible with our spiritual being."[70] Iselin sums up his ideal as follows: "Sensuality lays the groundwork for the welfare of the individual; the imagination intensifies his pleasant sensations, but it confounds and embitters them to an equal degree. Reason, by contrast, subjects the first as much as the second of these forces to the appropriate restraints. . . . It invigorates and orders the entirety of human feelings."[71] For Iselin, Schulze, and many others, the psyche is conceived as a bundle of forces that must be maintained in a state of dynamic equilibrium, one based on a hierarchical model of the faculties according to which the ideal is a combination of maximum intensity within a framework of maximum control. Even among authors and commentators who would dismiss Iselin's tripartite framework as overly simplistic, one nonetheless finds a powerful preoccupation with questions of balance, both at the level of the individual subject and at that of the social order. As described in the introduction, one also finds an acute interest in the potential as well as the limits of psychic and social systems that prove capable of regulating themselves.[72]

The fact that Iselin's reflections appear in a general history of humanity reminds us that although the discourse of luxury would be unthinkable without the categories of eighteenth-century anthropology (here in the form of the psychology of the faculties), these categories have an applicability in the period that transcends the scope of the luxury debates. There is, however, one final anthropological category that proves inseparable from those debates: that of human need. As I mentioned

69. Vogl, "Luxus," 701.
70. Schulze, "Bemerkungen," 99.
71. Iselin, *Geschichte der Menschheit,* XXI.
72. Models of self-regulation figure prominently in the arguments advanced in Joseph Vogl's *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*. The centrality of self-regulation as a concept in eighteenth-century German thought is also demonstrated in Albrecht Koschorke, "Physiological Self-Regulation: The Eighteenth-Century Modernization of the Human Body," *MLN* 123 (2008): 469–84.

previously, the invocation of substantive conceptions of human needs might seem quaint or even dangerous in a contemporary theoretical context. On the basis of what authority does one establish for others which needs are "real" and which are "false"? The effort smacks of paternalism at best, and authoritarianism at worst. Even a thinker as heavily invested in a need-based anthropology as Herbert Marcuse has his reservations, claiming in *One-Dimensional Man* that "no tribunal can justly arrogate to itself the right to decide which needs should be developed and satisfied."[73] Subsequent chapters will take up the question of how notions of authentic human needs continue to haunt debates about consumption right up into the twenty-first century, despite widespread insistence on the untenability of such notions.[74] For now it will suffice to point out that the language of needs is everywhere in the writings on luxury, and to make the bolder claim that neither the theory nor the practice of literature in the period can be adequately grasped without taking this language into account. Forced to come up with a one-sentence definition of luxury, commentators often resort to the declaration that luxury includes all forms of consumption that are not intended to satisfy our "natural needs."[75] The idea of natural or genuine needs has a powerful resonance among authors representing a wide range of positions, but most of these same authors also acknowledge that needs are relative to time and place. It is doubtful that any late eighteenth-century writer on luxury, notwithstanding the popularity of Rousseau in Germany, would disagree with Sonnenfels's claim about natural needs: "It is no misfortune for civil society that we have moved away from the primary needs of nature."[76] As the qualifier "primary" (*die ersten*) suggests, however, the dismissal of the state of nature as an ideal by no means entails the abandonment of nature as a normative category. The challenge lies in differentiating between those needs or desires that presume some level of cultivation but are nonetheless "natural," and those that are simply false.

The preferred solution is to turn, in a manner that parallels the strategies employed in the case of the faculties, to ideas of hierarchy and development. The notion of a hierarchy of human needs, in other words, entered the scene long before the publication of Maslow's *A Theory of Human Motivation*; it was well established by the late eighteenth century. Sonnenfels, for his part, distinguishes among *Notwendigkeit* (necessity), *Bequemlichkeit* (comfort), and *Üppigkeit* (opulence), arguing that all three are necessary for prosperity. In his encyclopedia entry on the topic of needs, J.F. Pfeiffer employs a slightly different set of concepts (*erste Notwendigkeit* [primary need], *zweite Nothwendigkeit* [secondary need], and *Luxus* [luxury]), but his point is the same. All three levels of consumption are necessary for the development of a fully human society—"a ceaselessly progressing cultivation of

73. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 6.

74. For a discussion, see Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press), 127–30.

75. Schulze, "Bemerkungen," 74.

76. Sonnenfels, "Anfangsgründe," 64.

humanity."[77] The achievement of this goal, however, depends on a stadial progression from one category of needs to the other, which depends in turn on maintaining the appropriate relationship among the various faculties.

If these two forms of hierarchy are closely related to one another, they are also inseparable from considerations of the evolution of the social order, as the many parallels with the previous sections illuminate. Society and the psyche are conceived in analogous fashion, and the challenge of establishing a well-functioning social order tends to be conceived in a way that prioritizes the production of well-tempered—that is to say, self-regulating—subjects rather than robust institutional frameworks.[78] This task is delineated with particular clarity in the literature of the German Enlightenment, as we will see in our discussion of Campe and Wieland in chapter 4. As alluded to in the introduction, however, the ideal of the well-tempered subject constitutes a focus of all of the works under consideration in this study, and thus can help draw attention to their shared intellectual terrain.

Luxury, the "Consumer Revolution," and the Ambiguous Status of the Fine Arts

Reflections on the psyche and on needs remind us that, in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Germany, luxury is as much about the subject as it is about objects. Perhaps the most striking example of this emphasis is Schulze, whose essay fails to mention a single luxury good. To call attention to this fact, however, which has been downplayed in some of the recent scholarship on the topic, is in no way to deny the centrality of an expanding world of goods to the discourse.[79] Michael Kwass is certainly correct when he claims that "in the eighteenth century, the key word around which debate on consumption turned was 'luxury.' "[80] Essays and treatises on luxury often check off the new or newly available commodities that are a source of concern in rapid succession. The entry from Krünitz's *Encyklopädie* is typical in its adamant condemnation of foreign products, not simply the porcelain cup mentioned previously but also coffee, sugar, spices and other "treats."[81] The author of the article "Über den Luxus in Berlin" (On Luxury in Berlin) offers a veritable catalog of popular luxury commodities: "English riding horses and furniture," "diamond jewelry and pearls," "Hamburg delicacies," "foreign wines and liquors,"

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77. J. F. Pfeiffer, "Bedürfnisse," in *Deutsche Encylopädie, oder Allgemeines Real-Wörterbuch aller Künste und Wissenschaften* (Frankfurt/Main: Varrentrapp Sohn und Wenner, 1778), 3:158–59.

78. On the moral individual as the basis of the ideal society, see Jürgen Fohrmann, "Utopie, Reflexion, Erzählung," in *Utopieforschung: Interdisziplinäre Studien zur neuzeitlichen Utopie*, ed. Wilhelm Voßkamp (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1982), 3:27. As he points out, the alternative would be a focus on laws and institutions. The source of much recent reflection on self-regulation in the eighteenth-century is, of course, Foucault.

79. In Berg and Eger's anthology, for example.

80. Michael Kwass, "Ordering the World of Goods: Consumer Revolution and the Classification of Objects in Eighteenth-Century France," *Representations* 82 (Spring 2003): 88.

81. Flörke, "Luxus."

"Indian spices," "headdresses from Paris," serving ware made of "plated silver," "lacquered and gilded chairs and ottomans covered with atlas silk," "trumeau mirrors and marble tables," "mahogany furniture," and "porcelain table services."[82]

Still, it is important to recognize that there is no perfect correspondence between the conceptual fields of luxury and the emerging culture of consumption: in their traditional form, condemnations of luxury predate the consumer revolution by well over two millenia. This ancient pedigree means that responses to new opportunities for consumption are prestructured by the parameters of an earlier luxury discourse, but the inadequacies of those parameters also give rise in turn to transformations of the discourse, most notably, to the previously mentioned split between a positive and a negative conception of surplus. In addition, the appellation "luxury" is frequently applied to activities and entertainments, from dinner parties to weddings to funerals, as well as to objects.[83] As with many of the artifacts mentioned in the debates, these entertainments are not necessarily new, but they are perceived as occurring more frequently, or as being more elaborate, or as being newly accessible to a wider range of social groups as a result of processes of commodification and the spread of new mechanisms of exchange. The result of this confrontation of old and new is a remarkably complex and contested semantic field.

For commentators in the period, it would seem that no position on this field proves more difficult to fix than the one occupied by the fine arts. As one of the most significant spheres of discretionary consumption, the fine arts were held up by defenders as the quintessence of human cultivation and attacked by others as a source of decadent self-indulgence. In fact, as we will see, even the most adamant advocates found it necessary to delimit the appropriate scope of the fine arts, to differentiate them from other forms of productive activity, or to make the case that they should be considered socially productive at all.

At the risk of oversimplification, one can explain this problematic status of the arts on the basis of a threefold ambiguity as regards their relationship to luxury more broadly conceived. In one sense, the fine arts simply *are* a type of luxury. Particularly in those arguments that invoke stadial theories of societal progression, the fine arts appear, together with other forms of luxury, as the natural product of a particular stage of historical development. As we saw in the previous quotations from Campe and Schlegel, they are incorporated into the broader category of the superfluous or the ornamental. Within the context of this general association of luxury, human cultivation, and the fine arts, however, the latter also become implicated in the conceptual split between good and bad luxury, between ways of consuming societal surplus that encourage productive activity and those that either are

82. "Luxus in Berlin," passim.

83. An example is the discussion of funereal luxury in G. H. Sieveking, "Fragmente, über Luxus, Bürgertugend und Bürgerwohl," *Verhandlungen und Schriften der hamburgischen Gesellschaft zur Beförderung der Künste und nützlichen Gewerbe* 4 (1797): 171.

neutral forms of entertainment or lead to indolence. Authors pursuing this line of inquiry, particularly prevalent in the final quarter of the eighteenth century, often establish direct parallels between the impact of art objects and that of other luxury commodities.

Finally, one can identify, especially around the turn of the century, attempts to work out a new framework for valorizing superfluity, attempts that detach the fine arts entirely from the question of productive luxury in a traditional sense and seek to establish their qualitative distinction from other kinds of commodities or forms of discretionary consumption. In this model, the fine arts derive their legitimacy from the socially sanctioned aim of constructing a particular kind of self; they are underwritten by the idea of self-cultivation or *Bildung*. As described in the introduction, culture—or Culture—emerges as the alternative to luxury, as the luxury that is not luxury. And the self-interested desire called Culture is justified in turn through recourse to a variety of different claims: that humans have an inalienable right to be happy, for example, or that they have a divinely ordained obligation to develop their capacities. None of these claims is irrefutable, however, and the dividing line between legitimate self-improvement and egotistical self-indulgence is an ongoing source of controversy in the period.

One of the aims of this study is to demonstrate that this third way of thinking about the fine arts and luxury—for which the idea of aesthetic autonomy can serve as a kind of shorthand—is less clearly differentiated from earlier models than it might appear. Conceptions of an ideal subject, after all, informed reflections on luxury in ancient Greece, as both Plato's and Aristotle's concerns about the softness and effeminacy of those who have given themselves over to a luxurious life make clear.[84] And the emphatic rejections by some of utility as a basis for evaluating the fine arts do not equate to an endorsement of refined pleasure for its own sake or even a denial of their "use value." One needs to distinguish in such cases between different modalities of utility. When Schiller, for example, laments in the *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man) that "utility is the great idol of our age," he is certainly not issuing a call for hedonistic sensualism.[85] He is, rather, rejecting one narrowly conceived model of utility (closely linked to *Eigennutz*, or self-interest narrowly defined) in favor of another, more comprehensive one. Art may not be useful in the sense of yielding immediate material benefits or making individuals more industrious, but both its production and its reception are forms of self-interested behavior that prove eminently useful in the creation of an enlightened humanity, which can, in turn, foster a greater degree of social harmony. In this regard, Schiller's arguments ultimately reproduce the logic of advocates of luxury like Büsch or Sonnenfels, despite the fact

84. Berry, *Idea of Luxury,* 58.
85. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters,* ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 89.

that such an instrumental approach to art would seem to contradict Schiller's basic aesthetic principles.

In order to gain a sense of how such ambiguities are manifested discursively, I would like to conclude with a consideration of two short texts. The first is one of the most prominent investigations of luxury written in the period: Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* of 1750. An early occasional piece, the *Discourse* is by no means the author's most philosophically substantial work, but it can be seen as one of the opening salvos of the second phase of the eighteenth-century debate on luxury, which had begun with Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* in 1748.[86] Rousseau's essay was also hugely influential, especially in Germany, where it was first reviewed by Lessing in 1751 and translated by Johann Daniel Tietz in 1752. By 1753 it had already led to the publication of at least three works that contained collections of responses to Rousseau's assertions.[87] Rousseau serves as an intellectual touchstone for all of the authors under consideration in this study, though perhaps it would be better to refer to "Rousseauism," since the authors in this study tend to concentrate less on the complexities of Rousseau's arguments than on what they perceive as his central claim: that civilization is always and everywhere a form of decline.

Both at the time of its appearance and in more recent scholarship, Rousseau's essay has often been viewed as constituting a radical departure from the optimism of mainstream Enlightenment thought. In fact it offers a variant of the classical republican position that was quite prominent in the period, emphasizing the centrality of virtue and the dangers of corruption that stem from the pursuit of self-interest.[88] The significance of the essay for my purposes resides less in the specific elements of its ostensible attack on luxury—which were old news by 1750—than in (1) its status as a point of reference for German authors, and (2) the equivocations to which Rousseau resorts as he tries to untangle the intersecting categories of luxury, consumer culture, and the fine arts. If German commentators were almost universally hostile to what they took, rightly or wrongly, to be Rousseau's basic thesis, they often reproduced the conceptual uncertainty that characterized his representation

86. Hont, "Early Enlightenment Debate," 417.

87. A collection of speeches and poems composed by the students of the Alton Gymansium was published in 1752 by the rector of the school under the title *Beweis, daß der Grund der Glückseligkeit der alten Celten mit nichten in dem Mangel der Wissenschaften zu suchen sey*. In the same year, Johann Christoph Gottsched collected and published a series of lectures given at the University of Leipzig by four scholars. The book was entitled *Vertheidigung der Gelehrsamkeit, und sonderlich der schönen Wissenschaften gegen den Herrn Rousseau aus Genf.* Finally, a two-volume collection of responses to and reviews of Rousseau was published in French in Gotha in 1753. See Herbert Jaumann, *Rousseau in Deutschland: Neue Beiträge zur Erforschung seiner Rezeption* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 4–5.

88. See Frank Lovett, "Republicanism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2010 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/republicanism/; as well as J. G. A. Pocock, "The Mobility of Property and the Rise of Eighteenth-Century Sociology," in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 103–24.

of the fine arts. It is this uncertainty and equivocation, rather than the more conspicuous attack on civilization, that make Rousseau's essay paradigmatic for the German context.

The discourse is divided into two sections. In the first, Rousseau states his thesis—"that our souls have become more corrupted in proportion as our Sciences and our Arts have advanced toward perfection"—and then goes on to offer a series of historical examples of societies whose decline correlates with the spread of cultivation.[89] In the second, he offers a set of causal arguments as to why cultivation leads to depravity, adducing additional historical case studies along the way. The general thrust of Rousseau's argumentation is to equate luxury and the fine arts; he more or less defines the arts and sciences *in their entirety* as luxury, in the sense that they are characteristic of societies that have progressed beyond the fulfillment of "natural" needs. Though he does not explicitly make the connection, this wholesale association of refinement with degeneration clearly evokes the republican tradition of antiquity, and especially Socrates' description of the luxurious (*truphōsan*) polis in Plato's *Republic*.[90] On this level, Rousseau's reflections bespeak an effort to untangle opposing models for managing social surplus; the central question is whether virtue can be reconciled with affluence. For Rousseau's Greek interlocutors, the answer was clear. In the case of Aristotle, for example, basic needs are met in the household (*oiḳos*) and the village (*ḳōmē*), with the aim of freeing the individual for participation in the good life of the polis. To devote oneself to producing more than is necessary, in order to acquire wealth and live opulently, was to live a life unworthy of a human being.[91] One finds an echo of this position in Rousseau's valorization of the martial life, especially in his celebration of the ascetic virtues of Sparta, and there is much in the essay to suggest that the best way to accommodate the excess productive capacity of society is to channel it into military exploits.[92] According to this strand of the argument, one can have either patriotism and military prowess or luxury (in the form of the arts and sciences) and corruption.

At the same time, however, Rousseau's diction at various points indicates a desire to make distinctions within the category of the arts and sciences, and especially within the category of the arts, suggesting that luxury and the arts are not, in fact, the same thing. At one point, for example, he explains that "all of Demosthenes's eloquence never succeeded in revivifying a body which luxury and the Arts had enervated." This statement implies that "luxury" and "the Arts" are separate—if equally pernicious—phenomena. Other passages only heighten the ambiguity of

89. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Sciences and Arts," in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9; subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

90. Berry, *Idea of Luxury*, 48.

91. Ibid., 54.

92. Sparta figures prominently as a counterpoint to European decadence in many of the texts on luxury. See Berry, *Idea of Luxury*, esp. 143–52.

Rousseau's position. As James Swenson has written, "In a single paragraph Rousseau will present several possible constructions of the position of luxury in relation to the arts and moral corruption."[93] Rousseau claims, for example: "Other, worse evils follow in the wake of the Letters and Arts. One of these is luxury, born, like they of men's idleness and vanity" (18). While the first sentence would seem to suggest that "the Letters and Arts" are a cause of luxury, the second indicates that the two categories are distinct but have a common origin in human idleness and vanity. Rousseau then goes on to conclude that "luxury is seldom found without the sciences and the arts, and they are never found without it" (18). This final remark seems to point to luxury as the causal agent.[94] A slight variation of this argument can be found in a previous paragraph when he writes that the Arts are "sustained" by luxury (16). The situation is rendered all the more confusing by the slippage between "arts" (which may or may be limited to the fine arts), "the Letters and Arts," and "the sciences and the arts."

In addition to the fact that they underscore a profound uncertainty in the period as regards the definition of both luxury and the fine arts, what makes these equivocations particularly interesting is the conceptual space they open up for a type of fine art that does not lead to enervation, for fine art as good luxury, or as the surplus that is not luxury. Rousseau does present this possibility in the essay, if only fleetingly. According to this view, the fine arts actually serve as a source of higher values and the basis of social cohesion rather than as a positional commodity that generates competition and conflict. Rousseau indicates at various points that there are alternatives to the depraved art of the day, most strikingly in the following passage:

> Carle, Pierre; the time has come when the brush intended to enhance the majesty of our Temples with sublime and holy images will either fall from your hands, or be prostituted to decorate the panels of a carriage with lascivious pictures. And you, the rival of the likes of Praxiteles and of Phidias; you whose chisel the ancients would have employed to make them such Gods as would have excused their idolatry in our eyes; inimitable Pigal, either your hand will consent to burnish the belly of some grotesque figurine, or it will have to remain idle. (20)

Here one sees a juxtaposition of two models of the visual arts. The first is associated with public spaces and arguably with public patronage, as well as with religion as a source of community ("Temples"). The second is linked to the private realm ("carriage"), sensuous and sensationalist pleasures ("a grotesque figurine"), and the individual consumer ("*our* Temples" vs. "*a* carriage").

If, however, Rousseau insists in this passage on a distinction between true art and the art of luxury, his earlier remarks demonstrate an inability or an unwillingness

93. James Swenson, *On Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 66.
94. Ibid.

to maintain this distinction over the course of his argument. One of the reasons that delimiting the parameters of the fine arts and their relation to luxury proves so difficult is of course the consumer revolution itself. As an increasing number and variety of goods become available for purchase, and as new production technologies allow for an increased emphasis on the aesthetic appeal of everyday objects, the lines between the fine and the mechanical arts, as well as between art and commerce, become increasingly blurred. In a sense, Rousseau is grappling with precisely these divisions, and his unease is palpable. Where does a "grotesque figurine" fit into the order of objects? Is the problem its lack of aesthetic merit or the fact that it exists merely to enhance the status of its owner? And what, exactly, is wrong with painting the panels of one's carriage? Is the problem that the paintings are "lascivious," or is it the fact that they are purely decorative, having no identifiable functional relationship to the primary goal of transportation? Or is the problem really that some people get to have carriages with painted panels, and others do not? Even Rousseau, then, despite the apparent radicality and resoluteness of his position, struggles to make sense of the fine arts within the context of modern affluence.

To see how this equivocation carries over into the German context, we can consider a second example of both the drive to differentiate and the conceptual difficulties to which it leads. In a short essay, "Kunst und Handwerk" (Art and Handicraft), written around 1800, Goethe intervenes directly in the luxury debates, defining the central term as follows: "According to my definition, luxury does not consist in a wealthy man's possession of many precious objects, but rather in the fact that he possesses objects of a sort whose form he must first transform in order to provide himself with a momentary pleasure and to enjoy a certain prestige in the eyes of others."[95] This definition contains all of the elements typical of the period: the reference to luxury's ephemerality, its sensuous appeal, and its role as a marker of social distinction. Goethe goes on to distinguish luxury from true art, which is enjoyed for its own sake—rather than as a means to enhance reputation—and never loses its ability to stimulate. In contrast to the "inclination to surfeit" that Krünitz's *Encyklopädie* associates with luxury, for Goethe true art objects are those "that one enjoys throughout life, and in the enjoyment of which one can take an ever-greater pleasure as a result of one's ever-increasing knowledge" (120). Here we find in condensed form the attempt to incorporate fine art into a lifelong ("throughout life") project of *Bildung* and thereby explicitly detach it from the category of luxury. Both art objects and other luxury commodities arise under conditions of affluence, but the former attach sensuous and imaginative pleasure

95. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens.* vol. 4, pt. 2, ed. Klaus H. Kiefer et al. (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1986), 119; subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text. While all of the critical editions of Goethe's works include the word *erst,* a version of the essay that appeared in the *Goethe Jahrbuch* in 1896 substitutes the word *oft,* which, within the context of the luxury debates, makes far more sense. See "Über Kunst und Handwerk," *Goethe Jahrbuch* 17 (1896): 14.

to knowledge ("ever-increasing knowledge") and to the fulfillment of our unique vocation as human beings.

And yet, while the distinction appears clear enough in principle, and is no doubt familiar to the twenty-first-century reader, Goethe's essay reveals a striking complexity in terms of its practical application. His examples actually seem to challenge the straightforward split between art and handicraft indicated in the title of the essay. The artifacts of antiquity, he writes, show us that artistic peoples left their mark on even the most quotidian objects: "Everything possessed by those peoples in whom the spirit of art flourished, even mere tools, was a work of art and was adorned as such" (119). Goethe then goes on to adduce a belt described by Homer as an example of the kind of lifelong enjoyment he means—hardly the object that one would expect to find in an explication of what is meant by a masterpiece.

The really crucial question for Goethe, as he soon makes clear, is not so much how to define the essence of the work of art as how to resist the transformation of aesthetic experience brought about by the commodification of the beautiful. He describes at some length the threat to true art posed by the reproduction for the masses of singular works from the past. As Goethe explains, "To this must now be added the fact that in recent times machines and manufacturing have been developed to the highest possible degree and, thanks to commerce, the entire world is thus awash in pretty, delicate, and pleasing things" (120). For Goethe, the spread of such decorative objects, or, even worse, the mechanical reproduction of paintings by way of a "great painting manufactory" (121), means the end of art. In his comments we find in the most explicit terms the concern that, in a world characterized by a widespread availability of cultural commodities, luxury will be mistaken for art, even that it will replace art altogether.

One can certainly see, as some scholars have, an anticipation of Walter Benjamin in these lines, but more relevant for my analysis is the echo of Süßmilch.[96] Goethe's comments speak to the convergence of luxury, commodification, and a general anxiety about a loss of meaningful distinctions. In Süßmilch that loss pertains directly to a divinely ordained society of orders; in Goethe's essay we find a secularized version of the same causal model, brought to bear in this case on a more general framework of concern about the quality of human life.

In the case of Goethe in particular, however, we can also find ample evidence to suggest that the distinction between art and luxury may have been overdrawn in the first place, at the level of both the object and the subject. In the essay, for example, his claim that the "modern-antique pottery and glassware" (121) of the English cannot generate the same kind of response as an original Greek vase is by no means self-evidently true, particularly when one considers that much of the serious aesthetic reflection on ancient art in eighteenth-century Germany, including

96. See Daniel Purdy, "Weimar Classicism and the Origins of Consumer Culture," in *Unwrapping Goethe's Weimar: Essays in Cultural Studies and Local Knowledge*¸ ed. Burkhard Henke, Susanne Kord, and Simon Richter (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 2000), 43.

Goethe's own, was based on reproductions. And on a more general level, as scholars like Daniel Purdy and Karin Wurst have demonstrated, the aesthetic program of Weimar classicism actually bore some notable similarities to the pedagogically oriented consumerism advocated by figures like Friedrich Justin Bertuch in his *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*.[97] From this perspective, the stark dividing line Goethe insists on drawing between art and luxury might be seen as evidence of a nagging suspicion that they are not so different after all.

In Rousseau, then, we find a vigorous condemnation of the fine arts as luxury, accompanied by just the hint of a possibility that this need not be the case; in Goethe, we find a resolute insistence on their distinction, haunted by the notion that they are actually inseparable. One can view these two positions as two poles demarcating a conceptual force field that is highly dialectical even at its extremes. We owe to Purdy and Wurst a compelling demonstration of how this dialectic of art and luxury shapes Weimar classicism and its aesthetics of autonomy, which clearly emerged in dialogue with an expanding consumer culture and especially Friedrich Justin Bertuch's efforts to promote it out of his Weimar headquarters.[98] Purdy in particular makes a key methodological claim that is relevant to my own analysis. Rather than simply seeking to uncover and interpret previously neglected texts, he explains, cultural studies would do well to consider the interrelations among the entire range of objects and artifacts circulating at a given historical moment, in order to "understand the discursive operations which separate art from material culture."[99] Despite the work that has been done along these lines in the intervening decade, this exhortation has lost none of its resonance. What I intend to provide in the pages that follow is a series of case studies that investigates precisely these discursive operations in all their complexity and that also expands the scope of previous analyses to include a range of periods and works that have generally been considered separately. We will see that it was not just the definitions of art of Goethe and Schiller that evolved in dialogue with an expanding sphere of material culture, but also those of Enlightenment authors like Campe and Wieland as well as romantics like Novalis and liminal figures like Karl Philipp Moritz. And we will see that this dialogue did not rely entirely on assertions of difference but also of similarity—that is to say, on efforts to establish the legitimacy of art by creating discursive affinities with other modes of consumption and forms of material culture. One can see such an attempt in Goethe's essay, which, even as it insists on a distinction between genuine art and "refined handicraft," simultaneously aligns that art with other kinds of objects—in particular the ornamental "tools" of antiquity.

97. Purdy, "Weimar Classicism," 44; Karin Wurst, *Fabricating Pleasure: Fashion, Entertainment, and Cultural Consumption in Germany, 1780–1830* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 24–25.

98. Purdy, "Weimar Classicism," 43.

99. Ibid, 45.

What links all of these authors and their works is an engagement with the idea of luxury, a desire to define their own creations in such a way as to protect them from the kinds of attack that Rousseau levels against the artists of his day: accusations of self-indulgent egotism, of providing empty sensual pleasures, of prostituting their talents for the sake of fame or financial gain. And these authors also use the idea of luxury, in its negative incarnation, as a way to invalidate those types of art and literature that fail to measure up to their own ideals. The central aim of all of these authors, in other words, these advocates of "good" luxury, is to establish the necessity of the superfluous; to put it provocatively, it is to establish the utility of the fine arts. This claim, as I suggested previously, is no less defensible for the numerous assertions that begin to appear around 1800 regarding the lack of utility as the essence of artwork. Recent scholarly interpretations have often sought to read this renunciation of utility in terms of a dialectical response to the spread of exploitative economic practices or the abuses of absolutism; art becomes a substitute, a refuge, or perhaps a training ground for those modes of human experience that cannot be accommodated by the existing social order.[100] There is much to admire in these interpretations, but they tend to assume that debates about art are really displaced debates about something else, whereas I would argue that the preoccupation with the validity of the arts is the primary concern, and that any ingenious claims about the arts' political or economic relevance are derivative.

Indeed, for all of its dialectical sophistication, what this interpretive tradition fails to appreciate is just how closely the sphere of the fine arts is *identified* by contemporaries with the new and potentially threatening models of self-interested economic activity in the period. In the works of many of these eighteenth-century commentators, in other words, culture is seen as less of a refuge from the emerging economic order than as its most powerful manifestation. If anything, the split between self-interest and disinterestedness is one that runs down the middle of both political-economic and aesthetic discourse, rather than one that can be used to distinguish the two spheres.

From this perspective, the renunciation of utility bespeaks a desire to reinstate the utility of art on a higher level, and thus to make clear that artists are in fact valuable members of society whose products, while they may seem purely ornamental, nonetheless contribute to the greater good. In the next chapter, we will consider how this desire is fleshed out, so to speak, in an arena of material culture where the intersections of fine art and fears of excess appear with particular saliency: the production and purchase of luxury editions.

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100. See, for example, Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (London: Blackwell, 1990); and Jonathan Hess, *Reconstituting the Body Politic: Enlightenment, Public Culture, and the Invention of Aesthetic Autonomy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999). Broadly speaking, this thesis can be said to originate with Marcuse's essay "Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 6 (1937): 54–94. In citing these three works together, I in no way intend to suggest that their arguments are identical; what they share is a basic orientation toward the view that the emergence of the category of the aesthetic is best understood through the lens of politics or economics.

2

Thinking about Luxury Editions in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Germany

The funeral of Christoph Martin Wieland in 1813 offered a fitting tribute to one of Germany's best-loved poets. According to a detailed report published in Friedrich Schlegel's *Deutsches Museum*, the casket was put on display on January 24, and large numbers of Weimar residents, representatives "of all classes," came to pay their final respects. Upon arrival, they encountered what must have been an impressive and moving scene:

> The casket was placed on a low platform. Inside the deceased rested quietly, wrapped in a white muslin burial gown and crowned by a laurel wreath woven by his youngest daughter. His features were completely unchanged, his characteristic kindliness seemingly rendered even more gentle by the gravity of the hour of his death. The blue silk drapery that covered the lower half of his body also flowed out over the cover that lay in the extension of the casket. Resting there on a pillow of red satin were, first of all, copies of his *Oberon* and his *Musarion*, the former in the most beautiful edition published by Göschen, the latter poem in the truly faultless luxury edition that appeared with Herr von Degen in Vienna in 1808. . . . An arrangement of laurel branches surrounded these products of his immortal spirit. Beneath them, on a pillow of white satin were French badges of honor from the Legion and the Order of St. Anne; twelve candelabras cast their glow upon this fitting burial scene.[1]

1. "Wielands Begräbniß," *Deutsches Museum* 3 (1813): 174.

The atmosphere suggested by this description is one of tasteful opulence, an opulence befitting both the gravity of the occasion and the reputation of the deceased. The anonymous author of the report makes a point of noting the rare colors and fabrics of the goods on display—the white muslin burial gown, the blue silk drapery, and the red and white decorative satin pillows. Each of these items represents a socially sanctioned instance of extravagance meant to honor the artist and attest to his stature. The same can be said of the literary works included to memorialize his artistic achievements. Given the occasion, it seems only fitting that each of these works would be in the form of an exquisite luxury edition rather than any ordinary pocketbook version. Together with the other items, these editions helped to create the atmosphere of solemn celebration that characterized the event.

This description of Wieland's funeral ceremony offers more than mere testimony to the popularity of one of Germany's first canonical authors. With its conspicuous inclusion of two literary works among a series of exquisite objects, it reminds us that one of the most widely circulated luxury commodities in the period was the book. As in the case of other premium goods in the period, the increased circulation of luxury editions provided a source of celebration for some and a source of consternation for others. Each of these positions, moreover, can be viewed as part of the more general process through which surplus consumption was reframed in the period, a process that entailed, among other things, an effort to recontextualize the pursuit of sensual and imaginative pleasure.

In the wake of a breakdown of previously valid criteria for establishing the legitimacy of certain forms of conspicuous expenditure, whether on the basis of social rank (elaborate fashions and forms of material culture) or religion (feasts and festivals), individuals were forced to come up with new frameworks for understanding, limiting, and morally sanctioning such pleasure.[2] Wieland's funeral provides evidence of the emergent conception of "good" luxury in the period, even as the emphasis on tastefulness, simplicity, and restraint in the description demonstrates the fragility of such legitimacy. As a number of articles from the period make clear, funerals in particular were sometimes singled out as occasions of unnecessary extravagance, and it is probably no coincidence that the author of the article uses the term *angemessen* (appropriate) to describe the character of Wieland's ceremony.[3]

2. See Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600–1800* (London: Routledge, 2003), 63–81.

3. See, for example, Georg Sieveking, "Fragmente über Luxus, Bürgertugend und Bürgerwohl," *Verhandlungen und Schriften der Hamburgischen Gesellschaft zur Beförderung der Künste und nützlichen Gewerbe* 4 (1797): 171.

In the analysis that follows, I will focus on the ways in which luxury editions in particular figured in these efforts to demarcate the boundaries of acceptable extravagance, whether as instances of an allegedly dangerous excess or as laudable examples of cultivated affluence. This project also entails two subsidiary aims. The first is to demonstrate that new insights into the history of the book in Germany can be gained by viewing developments in publishing against the backdrop of the history of consumer culture. Whereas scholarship on luxury editions in Germany in this period has tended to situate them exclusively within the context of developments in printing and publishing, the funeral description above encourages us to place them within the broader framework of an emerging consumer society—more specifically, within the framework of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century debates regarding the consequences of what was perceived as a rapid expansion in luxury. The second aim is to refocus some of the recent scholarship on that history, which has tended to emphasize individual self-fashioning and class identity to the neglect of the national contexts of consumption. Before turning to these topics, however, it will be necessary to explain in greater detail just what, precisely, constituted a luxury edition in the decades around 1800.

The Look of Luxury

When Wieland received the edition of *Musarion* that eventually ended up in his casket, he was duly impressed (fig. 1). In a letter to Karl August Böttiger of September 14, 1809, he offers the following description: " No doubt the publisher Degen in Vienna has also sent you a copy of his incomparably magnificent and exquisite luxury edition of my *Musarion*. What do you say to this miracle of typography in times like these?"[4]

His expression of admiration might have surprised some contemporaries. Joseph Vinzenz Degen, publisher of the edition and director of what was eventually to become the state printing press (the k. k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei) in Vienna, was viewed by many as a somewhat shady character. One might think this was a result of his activities as a spy for the Austrian government in the 1790s.[5] But German authors and intellectuals most likely knew nothing of these activities; rather, they took issue with his role in the long-running controversy over pirated editions (*Nachdruck*) between Protestant Germany and the Habsburg Empire. Like many of his fellow Austrian publishers, Degen was accused of distorting the

4. Christoph Martin Wieland, *Wielands Briefwechsel*, ed. Siegfried Scheibe, vol. 17, pt. 1 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), 669.

5. Werner M. Bauer, "Der Verleger und Drucker Joseph Vinzenz Degen und Johann Baptist Wallishausser und ihre Stellung in der österreichischen Literatur ihrer Zeit," in *Die Österreichische Literatur: Ihr Profil an der Wende vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert (1750–1830)*, ed. Herbert Zeman (Graz: Akademische Druck & Verlagsanstalt, 1979), 179–203.

MUSARION.

VON

CHRIST. MART. WIELAND.

EIN

GEDICHT IN DREY BUCHERN.

WIEN.

IN DER DEGENSCHEN BUCHDRUCKEREY.

1808.

Figure 1. Cover page from Degen's 1808 edition of Wieland's *Musarion.* Christoph Martin Wieland, *Musarion: Ein Gedicht in 3 Bänden* (Vienna: Degen, 1808). Reproduced courtesy of Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel: Töpfer 2° 4.

market and robbing honest authors of their due through the publication of unauthorized editions.[6] In the case of Degen, moreover, his alleged transgressions were inextricably linked to his luxury productions, since he and his supporters claimed that the quality of these editions precluded them from charges of piracy. In a brief advertisement in the *Intelligenzblatt* of the *Annalen der Literatur und Kunst in den Österreichischen Staaten*, dated January 1804, he makes his case, claiming that those who have made such accusations need only look in the catalog of the Leipzig book fair, "in which, as is well known, reprints are not advertised."[7] A review of three of Degen's editions that appeared a year earlier in the same journal repeats the argument. As the author puts it, "These luxury editions are not reprints, but rather a monument of admiration for the German nation, which Herr Degen has erected to some of the leading poets of Germany."[8]

Not all interested parties found such claims convincing, as can be gleaned from a letter sent to Goethe by Christian August Vulpius. In the letter, dated September 19, 1803, he warns his brother-in-law of a group in southern Germany that is publishing a complete edition of Herder's works, and he goes on to explain that "a certain Herr Degen, renowned Viennese bookseller," plans to publish luxury editions of all the great German authors. He advises Goethe to announce his own authorized edition of his collected works so as to avoid losing his well-deserved honorarium to this "thieving rabble."[9]

By 1809, however, Degen's reputation appears to have improved, due in no small part to the undeniable quality of precisely that series of editions that had provoked the ire of Vulpius. What was it that made Degen's work so exemplary? Scholarship on the history of publishing in Germany has made it clear that, with regard to the material aspects of the book, publishers, authors, and readers in the period focused their attention primarily on three elements: paper, typeface, and illustrations. Each of these elements also proves significant for understanding the ways in which defenses mounted in favor of luxury editions mirror broader trends in an emergent consumer culture.

Good paper was hard to come by in late eighteenth-century Germany. Until the mid-nineteenth century, when the use of wood-based paper became widespread, virtually all paper was made from rags in a production process that was extremely

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6. The details of the *Nachdruck* controversy have been well documented. For a discussion that includes detailed bibliographical information on both primary and secondary sources, see Heinrich Bosse, *Autorschaft ist Werkherrschaft: Über die Entstehung des Urheberrechts aus dem Geist der Goethezeit* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1981).

7. Joseph Vinzenz Degen, "Berichtigungen," *Intelligenzblatt der Annalen der Literatur und Kunst in den Österreichischen Staaten* 1 (January 1804): 6.

8. "Zimmermann von der Einsamkeit," *Annalen der Literatur und Kunst in den Österreichischen Staaten* 5 (January 1803): 8.

9. "Vulpius to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 19 September 1803," in *Christian August Vulpius: Eine Korrespondenz zur Kulturgeschichte der Goethezeit,* ed. Andreas Meier (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 1:88.

labor-intensive (fig. 2). The rags had to be collected, sorted, cleaned, and transformed into the pulp that would eventually be turned into the individual sheets of paper. The scarcity of the raw material meant that publishers and printers had a difficult time maintaining adequate supplies. Some states even instituted export restrictions for rags in an effort to address the problem.[10] In the short term, publishers generally found it most expedient to print editions in a variety of paper qualities and in a range of sizes, from duodecimo to royal folio. The majority of copies appeared on simple *Druckpapier* (printing paper), while a smaller number, generally including those given to the author or his friends, were printed on more costly *Schreibpapier* (writing paper), which had undergone an additional process of strengthening and smoothing in order to reduce absorbency.[11] Imported papers from Switzerland and especially Holland were considered particularly rare and desirable, to such a degree that Wieland, in the preface to an earlier, second edition of *Musarion* (1769) published by Ph. E. Reich, drew attention to the fact that Reich had secured a supply of several bales of Dutch paper for the project.[12] The Degen edition of *Musarion*, however, raised the bar yet another notch. Not only did this edition appear in folio format; it was also printed on what was known as *Velinpapier* (vellum paper), an especially strong and smooth white drawing paper, so called because of its similarity to parchment.[13]

Paper size and quality were not merely significant for the general durability of a book; they were also closely linked to typographical aesthetics. The whitest papers permitted maximum contrast between lettering and background, thereby increasing clarity. Larger sheets allowed for larger characters and a wider letter spacing, and lower degrees of absorbency made it less likely that the letters would bleed into one another or to the other side of the page. But the most urgent typographical dilemma for luxury producers in late eighteenth-century Germany came from a different direction and introduced a number of complicating variables into the decision-making process. The burning question of the day was which typeface to use: the traditional German *Fraktur* (black letter) or the Roman-inspired *antiqua*. As Wolfgang von Ungern-Sternberg has written, this question proved to be a frequent source of controversy after 1750.[14] While Latin type had become the standard

10. Irmgard Kräupel, "Buchausstattung," in *Lesewuth, Raubdruck und Bücherluxus: Das Buch in der Goethezeit,* ed. Jörn Görres (Düsseldorf: Goethe-Museum Düsseldorf, 1977), 152.

11. Ibid., 149.

12. Qtd. in Wolfgang von Ungern-Sternberg, "Schriftstelleremanzipation und Buchkultur im 18. Jahrhundert," *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik* 8.1 (1976): 82.

13. Heinrich Gustav Flörke, "Papier," *Oekonomische Encyklopädie oder allgemeines System der Staats-Stadt-Haus- und Landwirthschaft*, ed. D. Johann Georg Krünitz, http://www.kruenitz1.uni-trier.de/. It should be mentioned that Degen was also famous for having renewed the art of printing on actual parchment in the period and that two copies of his *Musarion* were printed on that material. See W. u. B., "Musarion von Wieland: Pracht-Ausgabe von Degen in Wien 1808," *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* 24 (1809): 790–93.

14. Ungern-Sternberg, "Schriftstelleremanzipation," 83.

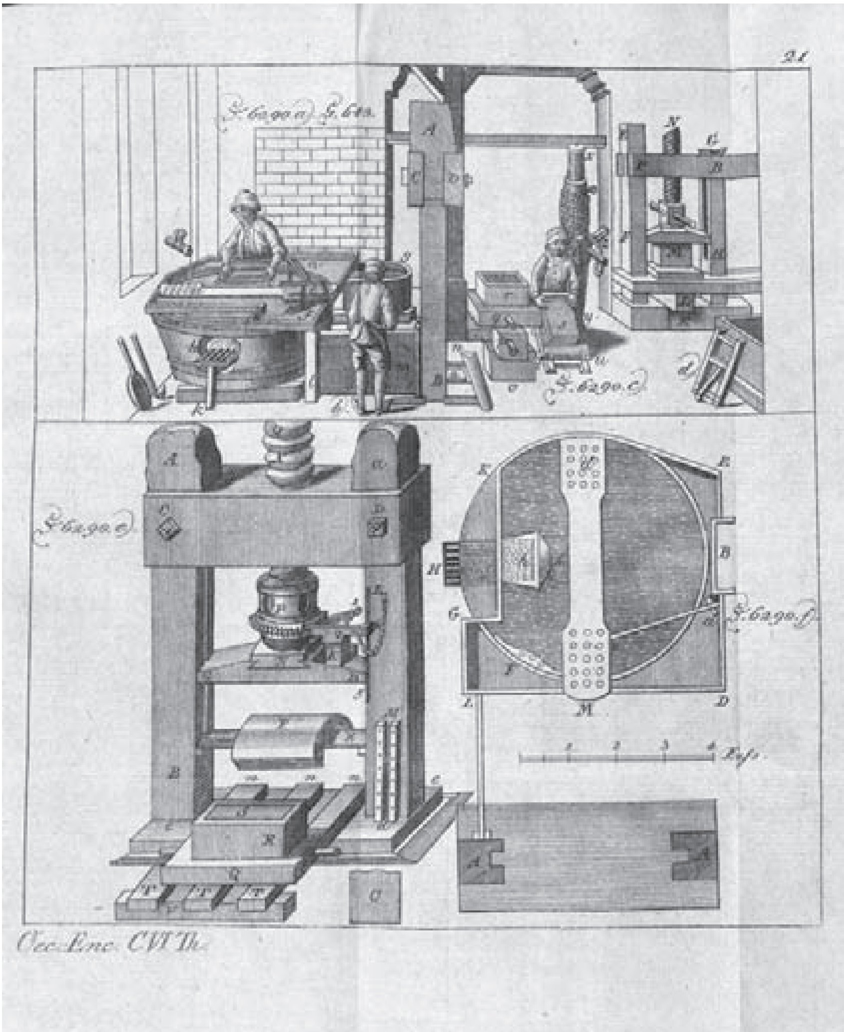

Figure 2. Making paper. D. Johann Georg Krünitz, *Ökonomisch-technologische Encyklopädie*, vol. 107 (Berlin: Joachim Pauli, 1807). Reproduced courtesy of Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel: Ae 30.

in other European countries, in Germany, German letters continued to be used for the overwhelming majority of texts appearing in the vernacular.[15]

This widespread use of *Fraktur* did become a target for criticism in the period, however, at least for those authors and publishers concerned with the reputation of

15. Ibid.

German literature abroad and among readers in Germany, especially those at court, who took their cue from France and Italy.[16] An example of the standard line of attack appears in a review of Degen's *Musarion* edition—which had been printed in *antiqua*. The author begins with a remark on the long inferior state of the printer's art in Germany. He attributes the achievement gap between Germany and other European countries in part to the fact that the latter had readopted "the noble, simple form of the roman letters . . . as opposed to the monkish-Gothic curlicues of the so-called German."[17] The implied contrast here between classical antiquity and the allegedly grotesque monasticism of the Middle Ages indicates that, at least among its supporters, the use of *antiqua* was viewed as part of a more general, antibaroque endorsement of neoclassical aesthetics. Decisions about which typeface to use, however, could not be based solely on such aesthetic considerations, because these decisions had practical economic consequences as well. Friedrich Schiller makes this clear in a letter he sent to his publisher Crusius in November 1799. Schiller insists here on the use of "German script" for the upcoming edition of his poems, because, he claims to know "from experience . . . that in this way a book ends up in many more hands."[18] As surprising as it may sound to a twenty-first-century reader, the general public simply found the German type much easier to read. In the words of H. M. Marcard, "The main reason that I am in favor of the continued use of the German script is the following: it is more pleasant to the eyes than the Latin . . . not the eye as a judge of beauty, but rather as the organ of sight."[19]

The typeface controversy is interesting for a number of reasons, not least because it provides a less familiar perspective from which to consider the interpenetration of class and aesthetics in the period and because it speaks to the topic of cultural nationalism. These facets of the debate, however, together with its various phases, have been fairly well documented.[20] For our purposes, it is enough to note that around 1800, *antiqua* was the typeface of choice for the most exquisite luxury editions. Schiller himself says as much in response to Crusius's suggestion

16. Ibid.

17. "Prachtausgabe der *Musarion* in Wien," *Neue Berlinische Monatsschrift,* October 1810, 235.

18. Friedrich Schiller, *Schillers Werke: Nationalausgabe*, ed. Lieselotte Blumenthal and Benno von Wiese, vol. 30, ed. Lieselotte Blumenthal (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1961), 120.

19. H. M. Marcard and C[hristoph] M[artin] Wieland, "Apologie der teutschen Lettern, mit einer Antwort des Herausgebers," *Der neue Teutsche Merkur* 3 (September 1793): 100–101. Wieland's own position is a bit hard to determine. In his editorial response to the article he argues that the author has been too hasty in his conclusions. In a letter to Göschen dated July 15, 1799, however, he claims that the sale of his collected works has been hindered by the "accursed Latin letters," and he goes on to claim that the German type is easier to read. Qtd. in J. G. Gruber, *C. M. Wielands Leben* (1827; repr., Hamburg: Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur, 1984), bk. 8, 287.

20. See, e.g., Wulf D. v. Lucius, "Anmut und Würde: Zur Typographie des Klassizismus in Deutschland," in *Von Göschen bis Rowohlt: Beiträge zur Geschichte des deutschen Verlagswesens,* ed. Monika Estermann and Michael Knoche (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1990), 33–61; Fritjof Luhmann, "Wandlungen der Buchgestaltung am Ende des 18. Jahrhundert," in *Buchgestaltung in Deutschland 1740–1890,* ed. Paul Raabe (Hamburg: Dr. Ernst Hauswedell, 1980), 89–104. The topic is also discussed in Ungern-Sternberg, "Schriftstelleremanzipation," 83–86.

that he publish a luxury edition of his poems to accompany the regular edition. Agreeing with Crusius's own position, he writes: "Latin script is probably necessary for a luxury edition, but of course one must avoid choosing a typeface that is too small."[21] In the case of the Degen edition of *Musarion*, the *antiqua* characters are described by the previously mentioned reviewer as exemplary, not only in terms of "cut, purity, evenness," but also with regard to color: "the blackness of the script." He does take issue with the occasionally uneven appearance of the umlauts and with the presence of "irritating little white dots" in the thick lines of some characters. He also expresses some reservations about the illustrations; these reservations bring us to the third major focus of attention in discussions of luxury editions in the period.

Illustrations constituted an important means of making a book more attractive to potential buyers, but one that had a significant impact on the price of the work. In addition, the inclusion of high-quality images, by heightening both the appeal of the work and its cost, also increased potential profit margins for the producers of cheaper, unauthorized reprints.[22] Publishers thus had to weigh carefully their decisions about how many and what kinds of illustrations to use. Some books were made available with and without illustrations, and occasionally images were offered for purchase separately.[23] The presence of any kind of visual material was noted in book reviews and advertisements, whether this material was in the form of portraits (Johannes Pezzl's *Charakteristik Joseph II* [The Character of Joseph II, 1803]), landscapes (I. A. Schulte's *Ausflüge nach dem Schneeberge in Unterösterreich* [Excursions to the Schneeberg in Lower Austria, 1802]), or diagrams and tables (J. Schemerl's *Ausführliche Anweisung zur Entwerfung, Erbauung und Erhaltung dauerhafter und bequemer Strassen* [Detailed Instructions for the Design, Construction, and Maintenance of Durable and Comfortable Roads, 1807]). With regard to works of literature, the most common illustrations at the end of the century were renderings of particular scenes from the plot.[24] In virtually all cases the images were in the form of copperplate engravings—woodcuts were scorned by readers by this point in time—and both the artist of the original image and the engraver were frequently mentioned by name in advertisements and reviews, indicating that certain artists could increase the appeal of a book.[25]

21. Schiller, *Schillers Werke: Nationalausgabe*, ed. Norbert Oellers and Siegfried Seidel, vol. 40, pt. 1, ed. Georg Kurscheidt and Norbert Oellers, 21.

22. Rosemary Hoffmann-Scholl, "Die Buchillustration im 18. Jahrhundert," in Raabe, *Buchgestaltung in Deutschland,* 40, 47.

23. The *Intelligenzblatt der Annalen der Literatur und Kunst*, for example, advertises two portraits of Freiherr von der Lühe for 6 fl. if purchased separately from the edition of his poems "An Flora" and "Ceres," and at a discount (3 fl.) if purchased together with the work. Degen, book advertisement in *Intelligenzblatt der Annalen der Literatur und Kunst in den Österreichischen Staaten* 2 (January 1803): 20.

24. Hoffmann-Scholl, "Die Buchillustration," 46.

25. Ibid., 47.

MUSARION.

ZWEYTES BUCH.

Was, beym Anubis! konnte das
Für eine Stellung seyn, in welcher Fanias
Die beiden Weisen angetroffen?
„Sie lagen doch – wir wollen bessers hoffen! –
Nicht süſsen Weines voll im Gras?“ –
Dieſs nicht. – „So ritten sie vielleicht auf Steckenpferden?“
Das könnte noch entschuldigt werden;
Plutarchus rühmt sogar es an Agesilas.

Figure 3. Illustration from Degen's 1808 edition of Wieland's *Musarion*. Christoph Martin Wieland, *Musarion: Ein Gedicht in 3 Bänden* (Vienna: Degen, 1808). Reproduced courtesy of Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel: Töpfer 2° 4.

The images in Degen's *Musarion* edition, for example, were originally drawn by the artist Karl Josef Aloys Agricola and engraved by Friedrich John. John was among the most respected engravers of his day, and he had already provided engravings for the publisher G. J. Göschen's luxury editions of the collected works of both Wieland and Klopstock.[26] In keeping with the generally restrained, neoclassical style of the *Musarion* edition, the illustrations were in this case modest in size and limited to three in number. Each appears as a headpiece at the beginning of each of the three sections of the poem, illustrating a scene from the work (fig. 3).

Two examples will help to convey a sense of how these three factors were combined in order to achieve the remarkable degree of product differentiation that characterized the book market in this period. The milestone edition of Wieland's collected works, for example, published by Göschen in Leipzig between 1794 and 1811, appeared in four separate formats as described below:[27]

Gr. 4 m. Kupfern auf geglättetem Velinpapier erster Sorte (Quarto with copperplate engravings on premium quality, smooth vellum paper)	250 Rtlr.
Gr. 8 m. Kupfern auf geglättetem Velinpapier erster Sorte (Octavo with copperplate engravings on premium quality, smooth vellum paper)	125 Rtlr.
Taschenformat (Kl. 8) m. Kupfern auf geglättetem Velinpapier (Pocketbook format [small octavo] with copperplate engravings on premium quality, smooth vellum paper)	112 Rtlr. 12 Gr.
"Wohlfeile Ausgabe" in gewöhnlichem Format auf Druckpapier ohne Kupfer ("Budget edition" in standard format on printing paper without copperplate engravings)	27 Rtlr.

A similar variety often characterized the publication of individual works, as advertisements from the *Annalen der Literatur und Kunst in den Österreichischen Staaten* make clear. A copy of an edition of Freiherr von der Lühe's two poems "An Flora" and "Ceres" ("To Flora" and "Ceres"), published by Degen, was available in the following formats:[28]

In 4to, auf Velinpapier mit zwey Porträten des Verfassers, gezeich. von Kininger, und gestochen von John (In quarto on vellum paper with two portraits of the author, drawn by Kininger and engraved by John)	10 fl[orins]

26. Dr. Constant von Wurzbach, ed., *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich* (Vienna: Die kaiserlich-königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1863), 10:238.

27. Qtd. in Ungern-Sternberg, "Schriftstelleremanzipation," 79 n. 16. The formatting of the information suggests that it comes directly from an advertisement for the edition, but the citation does not provide any details in this regard.

28. Degen, book advertisement in *Intelligenzblatt der Annalen der Literatur und Kunst in den Österreichischen Staaten* 2 (January 1803): 20. One florin = sixty kreuzer.

Dasselbe Werk, auf großem Velinpapier in 4to (The same work, on large vellum paper in quarto)	15 fl.
Auf Velinpapier in 8vo, ohne Kupfer (On vellum paper in octavo, without copperplate engravings)	3 fl.
Auf Druckpapier in 8vo (On printing paper in octavo)	30 kr[euzers]

The use of different currencies in Northern Germany, Southern Germany, and Austria renders comparisons between the two examples difficult, but it is possible to get an idea of the dramatic differences in price that characterized different editions of a given work. In the Wieland example given above, the luxury edition (known as the *Fürstenausgabe* [prince's edition]) is almost ten times as expensive as the bargain edition, and in the case of Freiherr von der Lühe, the most costly edition is thirty times as expensive as the cheapest. Shortly after deciding to publish Wieland's collected works, Göschen wrote to the author: "Every merchant's servant, every impecunious student, every country pastor, every officer with a modest salary shall be able to buy your works."[29] Whether or not this was the case is extremely difficult to judge in the absence of detailed information on eighteenth-century budgets. Given that twenty-seven reichsthaler corresponded roughly to the price of two new pairs of boots in Dresden in 1764 and was slightly more than the annual rent for a simple flat in Berlin in 1793 (between eighteen and twenty-four reichsthaler), it seems that even the inexpensive edition would have constituted a major purchase for those of modest means.[30] And it is certainly clear that the *Fürstenausgabe* would have been marketed to a very select audience.

One final aspect of the book as material commodity needs to be mentioned in this context—that of binding. In the majority of cases, questions related to bookbinding do not figure into the discussions that take place between authors and publishers about the formal aspects of editions of their works. This is because individual purchasers generally made separate arrangements with either the publisher or a bookbinder to have manuscripts bound according to their wishes and their budget. There were exceptions. Degen, for example, sometimes made his books available prebound, both in paper (*broschiert*) and in boards (*cartonniert*), in either case "covered in colored paper."[31] In the case of the *Wiener Taschenbuch für das Jahr*, an almanac that Degen published between 1803 and 1809, the type of binding was a key element in product differentiation. Almanacs in general relied heavily on extratextual factors in order to increase their marketability. The 1806 edition of the *Wiener Taschenbuch*, which contained twenty-one copperplate engravings and twenty tables "for marking the celebration days of domestic bliss and social life,"

29. Qtd. in Ungern-Sternberg, "Schriftstelleremanzipation," 79 n.16.

30. Bern Sprenger, *Das Geld der Deutschen: Geldgeschichte Deutschlands von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1991), 149.

31. Degen, book advertisement in *Intelligenzblatt der Annalen der Literatur und Kunst in den Österreichischen Staaten* 21 (June 1804): 168.

was available in a gilt-edged, paper-bound version with a slipcase for seven florins, in English morocco leather for twelve florins, in the same morocco leather with a lock for thirteen florins, and in yet another version of the same with silver edging and an additional, free-standing set of illustrations for twenty florins.[32]

Geldautoren and *Bücherluxus*

The emphasis on concrete particulars in the foregoing discussion may give the impression that the production and consumption of luxury editions was a foregone conclusion in the period and that the editions themselves were accepted by all as the natural realization of the inherent potential of the printer's art. Indeed, commentators around 1800 often speak in terms that give this impression. In addition, much of the scholarship has approached the topic from this perspective, as if the exquisite works that appeared in the period embodied some sort of objective ideal that printing had been prevented from achieving until then.[33] Rather than a true explanation for the production of these editions, however, the adoption of such a perspective by late eighteenth-century advocates must be understood as a subtle means of asserting their legitimacy. Claims about the realization of aesthetic ideals constitute one of several strategies—I will turn to some of the others shortly—that were employed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in order to justify the existence of what must be seen as a potentially problematic luxury good. There was, after all, no shortage of commentators who viewed these editions with great suspicion. One of the more vociferous was the Swiss bookseller Johann Georg Heinzmann, whose *Über die Pest der deutschen Literatur* (On the Plague of German Literature) of 1795 decried a wide range of phenomena linked to the expansion of the literary market in the latter part of the century. A sense of his line of attack and its multifarious resonances can be gained from arguments such as the following: "Previously, a primary concern of the author was to ensure that his work was printed correctly, without exaggerated luxury but nonetheless respectably, and offered at an honest price that was appropriate to the content. Now our authors and booksellers have forgotten this German honesty to such a degree that no books appear on better paper or are printed more splendidly than those of the greedy hacks who cloak their emptiness with chintz and glitter."[34] This alleged detachment of interior and exterior, essence and appearance, is a recurring theme in discussions of luxury editions and luxury more generally in the period.[35]

32. Degen, book advertisement in *Intelligenzblatt der Annalen der Literatur und Kunst in den Österreichischen Staaten,* November 1805, 240. No issue number is visible on the first page.

33. See, for example, v. Lucius, "Anmut und Würde," esp. 41–45.

34. Johann Georg Heinzmann, *Appell an meine Nation, über die Pest der deutschen Literatur* (1795; repr., Hildesheim, Gerstenberg, 1977), 167.

35. Examples from the more general discussion can be found in Johann Heinrich Zedler, "Mode," in *Grosses vollständiges Universallexikon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, ed. Johann Heinrich Zedler, vol. 21 (1739), 707, http://www.zedler-lexikon.de/; and in "Über den Luxus in Berlin," *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* 2 (1787): 411.

Johann Adam Bergk, Kantian popular philosopher and author of the widely read treatise of 1799 *Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen* (The Art of Reading Books), offers a variant of this concern when he argues: "Books are meant to be read, not to be used to decorate the room. Brilliant bindings are like padlocks that we do not dare to tear off, for how easily we might sully the beautiful cover! Whoever thus intends that his books be read must never clothe them in magnificent robes."[36] In contrast to Heinzmann, whose primary target is the alleged greed of publishers and authors and the unscrupulous marketing of worthless books, Bergk views the problem with regard to utility: extravagant ornamentation reduces the functionality of the book and is thus to be avoided. As with Heinzmann, however, the central question is whether the exterior exists in a harmonious relationship with the interior. While Bergk is generally a much more liberal thinker than Heinzmann, the implication of his utilitarian position is actually more radical, since there appears to be no possible justification for elaborate ornamentation, whatever the content of the work or the merit of the author. For Bergk, a luxury edition is a kind of category error, something along the lines of a nonalcoholic schnapps.

Concerns about the relationship between interior and exterior reappear even in the writings of those industry pioneers who did the most to encourage the production of upmarket editions. An example is Göschen, whose commitment to the fine arts of printing and typography earned him the moniker "the German Didot."[37] In an advertisement for his opulent printing of the New Testament of 1803, Göschen legitimates the enterprise in terms that echo those of Heinzmann: "If typographical magnificence and elegance have at times been wasted on insignificant or even immoral works, then admirers of the Christian religion must acknowledge with all the more pleasure and acclaim the fact that the founding documents of the Christian religion have been honored with a typographically magnificent edition."[38] What contents, in other words, could be more deserving of an elegant exterior than those profound and eternal truths contained in the Bible? In this instance Göschen was also participating in a long and established tradition of producing high-end Bibles for wealthy customers. The very fact that he finds it necessary to justify the undertaking, however, testifies to the existence of some unease about the matter.

One of the most telling examples of this unease comes from Wieland himself, whose initial reaction to Göschen's idea of publishing the *Fürstenausgabe* of his works reveals serious reservations about the project: "Do not laugh at me, my dear Göschen,

36. Johann Adam Bergk, *Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen, nebst Bemerkungen über Schriften und Schriftsteller* (1799; n.p.: Zentral Antiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, n.d.), 33.

37. *Deutsche Biographie Online*, s.v. "Göschen, Georg Joachim," http://bsbndb.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/sfz21450.html.

38. Georg Joachim Göschen, "Ankündigung einer Prachtausgabe des griechischen Neuen Testamentes nach Griesbachs Recension," *Beylage zum Intelligenzblatt der Annalen der Literatur und Kunst in den Österreichischen Staaten*, January 1803, VIII.

but I must confess to you my weakness, if that is indeed what it is: an inner feeling, which appears to me to be more than mere modesty, is repulsed at the thought of seeing all of my writings introduced to the world in such a magnificent edition as your quarto-edition will be. I feel as if I should be raised to the rank of baron or count. An author would have to be at least a king to allow himself to be paid such an extraordinary honor without embarrassment."[39] Nothing about the context of these remarks suggests that Wieland is indulging in false modesty; rather, his comments demonstrate the extent to which estate-based categories for understanding the meaning of material possessions still exercise a powerful influence in the period. Despite the increasing proliferation of new and exotic consumer goods, in other words, there remained a strong sense of a substantive and natural link between certain forms of material culture and social rank. Even writers who advocated luxury as a means to spur individual industry and propel society toward prosperity often insisted that such luxury found its natural limit in the restraints imposed by a traditional society of orders. As we have seen, J.G. Büsch asserts that we must encourage the peasant to enjoy "the fruits of his industry." He goes on to make clear, however, that the affluence to which this industry gives rise must be in harmony with "his general circumstances and vocation."[40] In the example from Wieland, we can see the writer's conviction that the magnificent artifact proposed by Göschen is simply inappropriate for a middle-class author. It is worth noting in this context that Wieland does not condemn extraordinary luxury per se—as a squandering of valuable resources, for example. Rather, he reveals for us the degree to which, even late in the eighteenth century, certain levels of pomp were thought to be appropriate only for the upper echelons of society.[41]

Such residual perceptions notwithstanding, it is also clear that a renegotiation of precisely this link was well under way in late eighteenth-century Europe. The challenge, as several recent studies have shown, was to rethink traditional conceptions of the relationship between people and things, to develop classifications and taxonomies that would legitimate the new intensity of surplus consumption and production. Taking our cue from the anthropologist Mary Douglas, who was one of the first to emphasize how goods are "needed for making visible and stable the categories of culture," we can understand this task in semiotic terms.[42] To the extent that the preexisting connection between sign (forms of material culture) and referent (social rank) had become unstable or was deemed inadequate, it became necessary to reestablish some kind of semiotic order through a process of resignification.

39. Qtd. in Gruber, *C. M. Wielands Leben*, bk. 7, 37.

40. Johann Georg Büsch, *Abhandlung von dem Geldumlauf in anhaltender Rücksicht auf die Staatswirtschaft und Handlung,* 2nd ed. (Hamburg and Kiel: Carl Ernst Bohn, 1800), pt. 1, 350.

41. Another assertion by Büsch demonstrates how notions of estate-based consumption were combined with emerging economic models that emphasized utility. Of the nobleman, he writes: "[He] must not only live well, he must live extravagantly, so that the money that flows to him in such abundance is returned into circulation." Büsch, *Abhandlung,* pt. 2, 84.

42. Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption,* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), 38.

In the terms used by Heinzmann in his attack, the task is to take what had long been viewed as "exaggerated luxury" and make it "respectable."

Legitimation Strategies

Woodruff Smith has provided a useful conceptual framework for thinking about this process. In *Consumption and the Making of Respectability*, he introduces the idea of a "cultural context," which can be understood as a web of institutions, behaviors, discourses, locations, and material objects that are meaningfully linked to one another and that "make 'sense' as an ensemble to people living in a particular time and area."[43] Smith offers the contemporary example of the context of sports, which includes a whole range of equipment, games, and designated locations, to which one could also add various ritualistic behaviors such as tailgating as well as concepts like "soccer moms" and the purchase of certain types of folding chairs. Smith's overarching argument has to do with the way in which a selection of independent but overlapping contexts come to be subsumed as aspects of a single new context that becomes global in scope in the nineteenth century—that of respectability. There is much that is of interest in his analysis, but for our purposes the most significant aspect is his treatment of luxury. For Smith, the new, positive conceptions of luxury that emerge in the period represent so many attempts to reconcile morality with various forms of sensual pleasure. In his words, "The context of luxury is best understood as including both a set of morally problematical behaviors and the cognitive and linguistic frameworks within which people attempted to deal with the problems posed by those behaviors—but excluding solutions that called for doing without pleasant sensual experiences altogether."[44]

Smith focuses on three cognitive categories that play a key role in this effort to render sensual pleasure derived through consumption socially acceptable. The first is that of "taste," which provided a set of allegedly universal rules for organizing new forms of entertainment and shaping the consumption of nonessential goods. Notions of good taste, which in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries generally emphasized balance, order, and restraint, were of course set by social elites. Because of this and because the development of good taste allegedly required years of training and guidance, this category also had the advantage of helping to stabilize existing and emerging social hierarchies without invoking the arbitrary privilege of birth.[45]

The other two categories, "comfort" and "convenience," had a less immediate connection to social hierarchy, though they functioned nonetheless as crucial elements in the evolving self-understanding of the middle class. The key point is that

43. Smith, *Consumption*, 13.
44. Ibid., 67.
45. Ibid., 81–83.

the idea of comfort, which appears in German writings from the period as *Bequemlichkeit* or *Gemächlichkeit,* does not simply provide a neutral, descriptive label for certain kinds of pleasure, but that it functions normatively. That is to say, "comfort" becomes a designation that simultaneously categorizes and legitimates such pleasures by placing them within a cognitive context that links them to other, positively connoted activities and institutions. An evening spent smoking expensive tobacco in front of a roaring fire might be linked to such ideas as the value of friendship or the centrality of home and family.[46] The category of convenience functioned in a very similar manner; only in this case the emphasis was placed on an increase in efficiency or effectiveness and the elimination of unnecessary discomfort. In a late eighteenth-century context, one might point to the new paraphernalia (lamps, desks, chairs) designed to assist the burgeoning numbers of recreational readers.

Other scholars have approached the topic from a perspective similar to that of Smith. Both John Crowley, writing about the British context, and Torsten Meyer, who discusses German cameralism, have addressed how the idea of comfort serves to validate the consumption of certain nonessential goods.[47] Focusing on the French context, Michael Kwass has shown how eighteenth-century thinkers like George Marie Butel-Dumont used Enlightenment arguments to disassociate forms of discretionary consumption from the traditional status hierarchy. By explicating the desire to consume in terms of a universal human right to the pursuit of happiness and pleasure, Dumont worked to neutralize the argument that luxury among the middle and lower classes was simply an expression of vanity and the quest for status.[48]

Though these scholars differ in a number respects, they all demonstrate the means through which, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, advocates of luxury developed new cognitive categories to sanction what might have been perceived as extravagance. In the words of Smith, these categories "afforded a framework within which sensual experiences provided or suggested by commodities of bewildering variety and unprecedented availability could be enjoyed without appearing to threaten anything of significance."[49] None of these authors addresses books in any detail, but this framework of taste, comfort, and convenience nonetheless provides a good starting point for an analysis of German luxury editions in the period. At the same time, however, a consideration of these editions also reveals the need for a more nuanced approach to such luxury goods.

46. Ibid., 84.

47. John Crowley, "The Sensibility of Comfort," *American Historical Review* 104.3 (1999): 749–82; Thorsten Meyer, "Zwischen sozialer Restriktion und ökonomischer Notwendigkeit: Konsum in ökonomischen Texten der Frühen Neuzeit," in *"Luxus und Konsum"—Eine historische Annäherung*, ed. Reinhold Reith and Torsten Meyer (Münster: Waxmann, 2003), 62–81.

48. Michael Kwass, "Ordering the World of Goods: Consumer Revolution and the Classification of Objects in Eighteenth-Century France," *Representations* 82 (Spring 2003): 87–114.

49. Smith, *Consumption*, 85.

This is because the categories postulated by Smith and others are inadequate to capture the full range of strategies used to legitimate the production and purchase of such editions.

With good reason, much recent work on luxury has emphasized individual self-fashioning and the eighteenth-century shift away from the representative social function of consumption, which had been most powerfully embodied in early modern sumptuary laws. In many cases, this emphasis stems from dissatisfaction with earlier scholarship on the topic, and especially the pioneering studies of Neil McKendrick, whose analyses posit competitive display and the emulation of the upper classes as the main wellspring of luxury consumption in the eighteenth century.[50] The desire for a more differentiated approach to the topic is certainly justified. The case of the German luxury editions, however, suggests that we might want to revisit the categories of competition and emulation from a somewhat different direction. Discussions of these editions indicate that imitation of one's superiors is indeed a crucial aspect of consumer behavior in the period, but in the advertisements and book reviews under consideration here the imitative impulse appears to have been redirected away from the field of social competition to that of national rivalry.

Before turning to the patriotic context of the production of luxury editions, however, we should note that Smith's categories do provide insight into many of the legitimation strategies used by producers and consumers of German luxury editions. To assert the need for additional nuance is not to claim that these categories lack validity in a general sense. The strategies in question are anything but monolithic, and in many instances the notions of taste and convenience figure prominently in the discussion (the notion of comfort less so). Declarations of the tastefulness of a particular edition appear frequently, particularly in reflections on the superiority of *antiqua* lettering over the allegedly baroque and grotesque *Fraktur*. Even a seemingly offhand reference, for example, to those "men of artistic sensibility and good taste" who undertake to produce quality luxury editions gives a sense of the way in which this notion helps to construct an imagined—and rather exclusive—community of individuals with a unique capacity for aesthetic appreciation.[51]

Perhaps the most interesting facet of the discourse on taste is the frequent recourse to the closely related notion of connoisseurship as a way to justify the creation and purchase of these works. To be seen as a connoisseur is to be seen as someone for whom the purchase of a particular object is determined by a larger framework of intellectual interests and refined pleasures that enjoys wide acceptance among contemporaries. In reviews and advertisements, the target audience

50. A brief discussion of McKendrick and some of the objections can be found in Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 19–20, 148–73.

51. G[eorg] von Reinbeck, "Teutsche Typographie als Luxus betrachtet," *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* 23 (1808): 521.

for these exquisite works is constructed in explicit opposition to those who are seduced by baubles and trinkets, those for whom the purchase of a luxury item represents an impulsive indulgence of purely sensual pleasures. Often the connoisseurship of the legitimate buyer is framed in terms of collecting; a review of Göschen's 1802 edition of Schiller's *Don Carlos*, for example, refers to those who will want to add the work to their "discriminating collection of books."[52] A discussion of editions of Ramler and Virgil makes reference to "bibliophiles from all the cultivated nations of Europe."[53] Many of Degen's most famous editions were actually marketed as part of such series as the *Collectio auctorum latinorum* (Collection of Latin Authors) or the *Sammlung deutscher Dichter* (Collection of German Poets). The idea of a collection, particularly a collection of Latin or German "classics," implies substantive knowledge and expertise on the part of its owner. It speaks to his ability to synthesize, to integrate individual elements into a coherent and meaningful whole. In this respect, it is thus seen to reflect a motivation far more respectable than the one presumably driving the (presumably female) purchaser of gilded trivialities like the "pretty little volumes of little calendars, little pocket books, little poems," which, according to one commentator, "unfortunately! have become all the rage."[54]

In other cases this expertise is couched not in terms of the content of the work but in terms of print culture itself, as knowledge of the inherent potential of the art (or science) of typography.[55] Indeed, the entire constellation of elements described in reviews of these works has as its organizing spirit a notion of technical expertise. It is this expertise that allows one to appreciate such details as the "the beauty of the type, precise monitoring of the spacing, straightness of the lines, blackness of the ink, and whiteness of the paper" and gives rise to "the applause of all connoisseurs."[56] Such comments also point to the convergence of the idea of taste and the category of convenience, fusing the invocation of progress toward the perfection of typography with the ideas of efficiency and utility, in the sense of ease of reading. The reviews by Karl August Böttiger, author, archaeologist, and editor of the *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* in Weimar, offer some of the most conspicuous examples of this tendency. He repeatedly couples the decorative and the purposive, employing phrases like the "judicious efficacy of the ornamentation" or applauding the relatively narrow margins of a Virgil edition, despite the fact that those "spoiled fanciers of the senseless waste of paper" would no doubt rather have it otherwise.[57]

52. "Prachtausgabe von Schillers *Don Carlos* mit Kupfern," *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* 18 (1803): 42.

53. K[arl] A[ugust] Böttiger, "Zweckmäßige Prachtausgaben von Virgil und Ramler," *Der neue teutsche Merkur* 3 (1800): 303.

54. "Thomas Abbt, *Vom Verdienste*," *Neue allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* 104.1 (1805): 221.

55. The same can be said of the discussions of copper engravings, the production of which is referred to in the period as *Chalkographie*.

56. Böttiger, "Zweckmäßige Prachtausgaben," 310, 309, respectively.

57. Ibid., 309.

Böttiger's model for the ideal luxury edition seems to take its cue from idealist theories of the work of art, which he combines with a healthy dose of Enlightenment utilitarianism. He describes a new edition of Valerius Wilhelm Neubeck's poetic work *Die Gesundbrunnen* (The Fountain of Health) as "a splendid edition on a grand scale . . . which, as a result of the incomparably harmonious combination of all parts into a beautiful whole and the extraordinary precision of the execution, begins to satisfy those demands whose fulfillment has seemed impossible for the Germans up until now."[58] Taken as a whole, his comments offer a uniquely comprehensive collection of the arguments on the basis of which what had been a single, negatively charged category of luxury becomes differentiated into "good" and "bad" variants. Pointless excess ("the senseless waste of paper") is opposed to taste and expert knowledge ("the applause of all connoisseurs"), technological achievement ("extraordinary precision"), and utility or convenience ("straightness of the lines," "blackness of the ink").

Gilding the Nation

A closer look at the rhetorical staging of these arguments, however, reveals that they also appear as part of a larger framework, a framework that presumes German inferiority in the field of publishing and celebrates each luxury edition as a step toward the achievement of parity. The previous quotation from Böttiger, for example, refers to the demands of high-quality publishing that Germans have been unable to meet "up until now." The review of Degen's *Musarion* edition in the *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* begins by pointing out that Germany has recently delivered "several works of typography . . . that can justifiably be placed side by side with the most exquisite productions of foreign presses."[59] Similar comments appear in virtually all of the positive reviews of these works, often with specific references to such printing houses as those of François Didot in France and Giambattista Bodoni in Italy, whose productions were considered exemplary. The publishers who undertake such editions are praised as patriots, who spare no expense, "to strive, also in this respect, to save German literature from humiliation in the face of its neighbors and to prove that works of elegance can also arise from German hands."[60]

Of course, in a general sense, it is hardly surprising to find narratives of cultural competition in texts from this period. German-speaking elites from Friedrich Nicolai to Goethe had been lamenting their nation's alleged lack of cultural accomplishment since at least the 1750s, and the widespread upsurge in patriotic sentiment in the wake of the French Revolution has been well documented.

58. Böttiger, "Neubecks *Gesundbrunnen,* eine typographische Merkwürdigkeit," *Der neue teutsche Merkur* 3 (1798): 297.
59. W. u. B., "*Musarion* von Wieland," 790.
60. Von Reinbeck, "Teutsche Typographie," 521.

Apparent in these reviews, however, is an aspect of this competition that has not been recognized—namely, the interpenetration of such patriotic sentiment and the discourse on luxury production and consumption. Scholars have noted the often nationalistic undertone of the debate over Gothic type, but the function of patriotism in the reviews is of a somewhat different character. Whereas in the typeface controversy national pride appears as an end unto itself, in the case of the luxury editions this pride is instrumentalized in order to justify the existence of what might otherwise be seen as wholly superfluous. In other words, the use of national comparisons figures critically in the legitimation of luxury by allowing these editions to be recast as national treasures rather than personal indulgences. The legitimacy of such treasures, moreover, is all the greater in light of the fact that they represent so many attempts to measure up to a standard already established by other nations. In this instance, then, one does indeed find that the principle of emulation generates motivations for consumption. Unlike other examples of imitative "conspicuous consumption," however, such emulation poses no threat to social stability. On the contrary, it helps to stabilize relations among different social classes by providing an object of identification at the national level, one that can be admired and approved by everyone, even if it can be owned by only a select few.

One way to gain a better sense of this community building (and canon-forming) function of luxury consumption is to take commentators at their word when they refer to these editions as "a monument to German good taste and artistic productivity" or "a beautiful monument."[61] Such comments suggest that rather than serving solely as a means of individual or class identity formation or an expression of individual status-seeking, these consumer objects also provided a mechanism through which surplus expenditure was linked to a sense of national pride. The object memorialized or celebrated is sometimes the art of printing as such and sometimes the author and his work. In the best-case scenario, the two are combined into a seamless unity, an ideal that returns us to the connection between interior and exterior discussed previously. One reviewer expresses particular satisfaction with Degen's *Musarion,* because, in his words, "beauty of execution and beauty of content converge here so serendipitously."[62] Though the author does not go into any detail with regard to the content of Wieland's poem, the fact that it advocates a life of modest pleasures and opposes both asceticism and mindless excess does make it a particularly felicitous choice for such an edition.

Occasionally, the logic of the patriotism argument is reversed, as when J. W. von Archenholz, in his discussion of Wieland's collected works, worries that an

61. F. Schöll and K[arl] A[ugust] Böttiger, "Über den Abbé Delille und die Prachtausgabe seiner Georgika in Basel," *Der neue teutsche Merkur* 2 (1797): 339; W. u. B., "*Musarion* von Wieland," 790.

62. "Prachtausgabe der *Musarion* in Wien," 236.

insignificant list of subscribers might reflect a lack of appreciation for a poet who is the "pride of his nation."[63] And occasionally the importance of national identification is explicitly cast in opposition to more local patriotism, as when Böttiger points out that "every German who does not measure the classical works of a nation according to the little clump of earth from which he emerged will be eager to possess [Ramler's] poems in this exemplary edition."[64] In all cases, however, the categories of taste, comfort, and convenience are situated within the larger context of national improvement, and this larger context appears to provide one of the key frameworks through which the superfluous sensual pleasures provided by these products are accommodated to popular conceptions of morality.

Keeping such comments in mind, one can perhaps draw a parallel between these editions and the actual national monuments that proliferated in the nineteenth century, from the Cologne cathedral to the Kyffhäuser complex. Testimonials from the period demonstrate that at least some of these volumes, in particular those produced by Degen, did take on a monument-like function in serving as sites of pilgrimage, and not only when they appeared as part of a famous author's funeral. Carl Bertuch, journalist and son of the editor of the *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*, for example, made sure to view Degen's editions while attending the Vienna Congress as a representative of the Association of German Booksellers. In his *Tagebuch vom Wiener Kongress* (Journal from the Vienna Congress) he writes: "Before the meal, Degen showed us the luxury editions 1. of Lucan, 2. of *Musarion*, 3. *Epithalma* by Bondi. Printing and binding both magisterial.—the reparation of the parchment as vellum truly exquisite."[65] In a similar manner, the ill-fated August von Kotzebue takes note of Degen's work in his *Erinnerungen von einer Reise aus Liefland nach Rom und Neapel* (Reminiscences of a Journey from Livonia to Rome and Naples), first published in 1805. While in Vienna, he writes, he makes a point of visiting "the industrious bookseller Degen." He then goes on to invoke the motif of foreign superiority, claiming that Degen's editions of the poet Johann Peter Uz and the author-physician Johann Georg Zimmermann (*Musarion* had not yet appeared at this point) "compete with those of the wealthy Brits; even the costly bindings keep pace in all respects with their English counterparts."[66] In addition, some of the subscription offerings for these books operate in a manner very similar to those calls for contributions to the construction of monuments, appealing to patriotic sentiment and a sense of competition with other nations.

There are of course key differences as well. Subscribers to the luxury edition of Wieland's collected works actually took individual possession of the product.

63. J[ohann] W[ilhelm] von Archenholz, "*Sämtliche Werke*, by Christoph Martin Wieland," *Minerva* 2 (1795): 185.

64. Böttiger, "Zweckmäßige Prachtausgaben," 312.

65. Carl Bertuch, *Bertuchs Tagebuch vom Wiener Kongreß*, ed. Hermann Freiherrn v. Egloffstein (Berlin: Gebrüder Paetel, 1915), 44.

66. August von Kotzebue, *Ausgewählte prosaische Schriften* (Vienna: Ignaz Klang, 1843), 43:306.

In addition, in the case of publications like this one, appeals to national pride are linked much more directly to commercial interests. Publishers generally included a page listing presubscribers to a work, just as public monuments often have a plaque commemorating donors, but in the case of the luxury edition this commemoration served as an additional form of advertising for the product. A prestigious list of presubscribers could generate additional postpublication interest in the volume.

Another context in which commentators stress the patriotic implications of consumption may help to cast the specificity of the luxury editions into greater relief. Karin Wurst has shown how the late eighteenth-century German debate about the pros and cons of a national costume reveals shifting frameworks of identity construction in the period, as elites began to develop models of social solidarity that transcended the traditional corporatist social structure of the German states. In terms of the models of community around which it was organized, then, this cultural debate points forward to the more explicit political nationalism of the nineteenth century. In terms of the history of consumer culture, however, the debate is essentially backward looking, since most advocates of such costumes cast their arguments in explicit opposition to luxury, to what was seen as an unhealthy appetite for new, extravagant, and often foreign goods.[67] The perceived value of the national uniform was seen to stem from its functionality and restraint as well as from its ability to render the wearers equal. In contrast, the arguments in support of the luxury editions attempt to justify extraordinary levels of individual expenditure on highly ornate products that simultaneously establish or reinforce social hierarchies, even as they appeal to broader, patriotic sentiments. In this sense, the advocates of luxury editions anticipate the strategies used by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American advertisers, who stressed consumption as a means to unify the people even as they carefully cultivated the role of goods as symbols of social distinction.[68]

Degen's editions in particular also enable us to see the entanglement of self-interest and public spirit on the production side of the equation. While his celebrated luxury editions of Uz and Zimmermann were sold on the open market to anyone who could afford them, his *Musarion* edition was never marketed at all. Instead, he offered copies as gifts to the author and a few other distinguished personalities. While Wieland's own copy was printed "on pressed vellum paper," two additional copies were printed on parchment and presented to Emperor Napoleon and Tsar Alexander. There is no reason to doubt that the publisher had a genuine interest in the development of typography in Germany or in celebrating Wieland's literary achievements. His contemporaries, however, while they acknowledged his

67. Karin Wurst, "Fashioning a Nation: Fashion and National Costume in Bertuch's *Journal des Luxus und der Moden,*" *German Studies Review* 28.2 (May 2005): 367–86.

68. See Charles F. McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 97–106.

contributions, also recognized that his apparent self-sacrifice and generosity could be seen as the continuation of self-aggrandizement by other means. As Carl Bertuch explains in his previously cited *Tagebuch*, Degen demonstrated extraordinary self-sacrifice in undertaking the luxury editions, "which, however, in the end paid off by winning him the admiration of the court and the state printing company, as a result of which he became a rich man."[69]

Ultimately, whether one is considering the desire to produce or purchase these works, it proves impossible to disentangle more cold-blooded commercial calculations from patriotic sentiment or any of the other motivations that might have influenced individual decision making. This very confusion of motives, however, provides the key to understanding how such extravagant objects acquired legitimacy in the period. The turn of the nineteenth century marks the final dissolution of what can be termed a correspondence model of consumption, which, though never all-encompassing or unassailable, posited a fixed and allegedly natural link between specific forms of expenditure and one's position in a stable social hierarchy. This model is replaced by one based on immanent coherence, where there is no absolute standard according to which "excessive" consumption can be determined.[70] As long as one can construct a meaningful and coherent narrative that attaches individual expenditure to an aim perceived as socially beneficial, any level of luxury can be made to appear justifiable. In this respect, the story of German luxury editions is part of the larger eighteenth-century story—the most memorable chapter of which was written by Adam Smith—of how individual self-interest and the interests of society ultimately come to be conceived as identical.

In many respects, this identification would seem to be firmly established in our own day, and there is much about contemporary consumer culture that suggests a world very different from the one in which Degen was operating. When, for example, J. K. Rowling produced seven handwritten copies of her story collection *Tales of Beedle the Bard*, bound in brown morocco leather and decorated with hand-chased silver ornaments and semiprecious stones, there was certainly no public expression of concern over whether such objects constituted an unnecessary luxury. Neither, it should be pointed out, was there any attempt to pitch these editions as technical or artistic achievements. On the contrary, as her decision for a handwritten manuscript over a printed book makes clear, these copies were self-consciously anachronistic, intended to provide access to some semblance of authenticity in a

69. Bertuch, *Tagebuch*, 44.

70. The publication of Bernhard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1723) marks a crucial moment in the emergence of this idea of relative luxury. As the author explains, "If once we depart from calling everything luxury that is not absolutely necessary to keep a man alive, then there is no luxury at all." Bernhard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees and Other Writings*, ed. E. J. Hundert (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 66.

thoroughly commodified society. It is true that both Degen and Rowling can be seen as tapping into the consumer's desire for singularity and uniqueness, but the former achieves this by gesturing toward the future, whereas the latter does so by gesturing toward a less commodity-saturated past or perhaps toward a fantasy world in which such objects would seem at home.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Rowling, like Degen, decided to give six of these copies away, albeit to friends rather than potential patrons. She also donated the proceeds ($3.98 million) from the auction of the seventh copy to the Children's Voice charity campaign. Her actions indicate that the need to establish the legitimacy of luxury has by no means disappeared, be it for producers or consumers. In the case of the latter, the context of fandom constitutes a contemporary variant of the more traditional idea of the collector, which continues to exist alongside it. In other spheres as well, narrative frameworks organized around notions of cultivation, comfort, convenience, and even—occasionally—national interest continue to be invoked as a way to justify discretionary expenditure that might otherwise be deemed excessive. To these one can also add narrative frameworks organized around health and environmental sustainability—the legitimacy of extravagant spending on organic foods, for example, would seem to be beyond question among certain groups of consumers.

The only alternative to these contingent justificatory narratives would be a model of consumption that applies some sort of absolute standard to individual expenditure. The correspondence model discussed above offers one example of such a standard, but there are others. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the German philosopher J. G. Fichte addressed the question of luxury in his treatise of 1800 on trade policy *Der geschloßne Handelsstaat* (The Closed Commercial State). Fichte does not advocate the traditional estate-based, hierarchical approach to consumption, but neither does he celebrate the desire for luxury as a spur to industry, self-improvement, and technological advancement. Instead, he argues for the equitable distribution of resources. As he puts it, "Everyone should first have enough to eat and a place to live before anyone adorns his home; everyone should have warm and comfortable clothing before anyone begins to dress magnificently."[71] From our current perspective, his position seems just as irrefutable as it does antiquated and impractical. Even in 1800, as Degen's own success indicates, it is not clear that anyone was listening.

71. J. G. Fichte, "Der geschloßne Handelsstaat," in *Ausgewählte politische Schriften*, ed. Zwi Batscha and Richard Saage (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 79.

3

The Appetite for Reading around 1800

Reading has always been considered dangerous by some, but rarely as dangerous as it was perceived to be in late eighteenth-century Germany. The meteoric growth of the market for books and periodicals in this period not only gave rise to a new literary public sphere; it also triggered wide-ranging and often hysterical fears among German intellectuals and other educated elites of a "reading epidemic." These fears have attracted a fair amount of interest over the years, with more recent studies generally addressing the topic from the perspective of the history of genre, class conflict, or gender politics. Commentators like Eric Schön have made it clear how significant the discussions of *Lesesucht* (reading addiction) and *Lesewut* (reading mania) are for our understanding of the history of reading, and how our own notions of what it means to be a reader, especially a reader of novels, take shape in this period.[1] Others have emphasized eighteenth-century concerns about the politicization of readers from the lower social strata following the French Revolution or about women readers who allegedly neglect the duties of motherhood.[2]

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1. Eric Schön, *Verlust der Sinnlichkeit, oder, die Verwandlungen des Lesers: Mentalitätswandel um 1800* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987).

2. For political and gender aspects of the reading debates, see Claire Baldwin, *The Emergence of the Modern German Novel: Christopher Martin Wieland, Sophie von La Roche, and Maria Anna Sagar* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 2002); Robert Bledsoe, "Harnessing Autonomous Art: Enlightenment and Aesthetic Education in Johann Adam Bergk's *Die Kunst, Bücher zu Lesen*," *German Life and Letters*

The discussion of these facets of the controversy has certainly been illuminating, but the emphasis on drawing distinctions among text genres or social groups has tended to narrow scholarly focus, whereas the scope of the controversy itself seems to demand a more comprehensive approach. Notwithstanding the frequent singling out of certain groups or genres for condemnation, one cannot help but be struck by how widespread concerns about reading and excessive textuality were throughout late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Germany: how many commentators expressed them (from Wieland to Friedrich Schlegel, from Mendelssohn to Fichte), how many different text genres came under suspicion (from novels to plays to newspapers and political journalism), and how many different groups were seen to be at risk (not just young people, peasants, and women, but also adult middle-class readers of both sexes).

In light of the ubiquity of these concerns, I propose that we take a step back from the approaches mentioned above in order to adopt a more holistic view, one that expands on recent scholarship emphasizing the status of books as commodities and reading as a form of consumption.[3] As with the attempts to justify luxury editions discussed in the previous chapter, anxieties about reading are best understood against the backdrop of an emerging commercial society, in which, as we have seen, the expansion of print culture constitutes a particularly salient moment. Like the commentary on luxury editions, late eighteenth-century reflections on reading are inseparable from a more general intellectual engagement with new modes of discretionary consumption, and recognizing this shared conceptual framework can help us to grasp why *Lesewut* (reading mania) was a source of such distress in the period. If, however, our emphasis in the previous chapter was on the qualities of the objects themselves, as well as on their contested status in an increasingly unstable society of orders, a focus on reading returns the issue of individual subjectivity to the forefront of our inquiry—especially the equilibrium-based model of the self discussed in the introduction. To be sure, concerns about the nature of subjectivity also played a key role in the justification of luxury editions. Under consideration

53.4 (2000): 470–86; Dominik von König, "Lesesucht und Lesewut," *Buch und Leser: Vorträge des ersten Jahrestreffens des wolfenbüttler Arbeitskreises für Geschichte des Buchwesens,* ed. Herbert G. Göpfert (Hamburg: Dr. Ernst Hauswedell, 1975) 89–113; Helmut Kreuzer, "Gefährliche Lesesucht? Bemerkungen zu politischer Lektürekritik im ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert," in *Leser und Lesen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977) 62–75; Stephan Schindler, "The Critic as Pornographer: Male Fantasies of Female Reading in Eighteenth-Century Germany," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 20.3 (1996): 66–80; Rudolf Schenda, *Volk ohne Buch: Studien zur Sozialgeschichte der populären Lesestoffe 1770 bis 1910* (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1970). Two studies with a greater focus on aesthetics (and, especially in the case of Woodmansee, economics) are Jochen Schulte-Sasse, *Die Kritik an der Trivialliteratur seit der Aufklärung* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1971) and Martha Woodmansee, "Toward a Genealogy of the Aesthetic: The German Reading Debate of the 1790s," *Cultural Critique* 11 (1988): 203–21.

3. Of particular significance are Daniel Purdy, *The Tyranny of Elegance: Consumer Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Goethe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Woodmansee, "Genealogy of the Aesthetic"; and Karin Wurst, *Fabricating Pleasure: Fashion, Entertainment, and Cultural Consumption in Germany, 1780–1830* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005).

in that discussion, however, was a fairly broad array of cultural contexts (comfort, hygiene, connoisseurship, scientific knowledge, and patriotism) and how these contexts helped to harmonize new opportunities for discretionary consumption with existing behavioral ideals. In this chapter, I want to move to a more abstract level of reflection on the self, one that foregrounds ideas of coherence and self-regulation in a more general sense.

What proves particularly significant about the reading controversy in this regard is how it reveals a complex intertwining of old and new notions of a normative subjectivity. A number of the attacks on excessive reading echo those fears about a decline of the traditional estate-based conception of individual identity that are still so widespread around 1800. But many of these texts also contain the germ of a more recognizably modern concern about the disintegration of a coherent sense of self. Thus, like the controversy over luxury editions, the reading debates remind us that there is more at stake in early condemnations of consumerism than the issues of social hierarchy and social differentiation that have often constituted the focus of studies on the topic.[4]

Moreover, because these attacks address the relation between consumption and psychology in such detail, they also demonstrate with particular clarity that such anxieties are inseparable from the spread of capitalism, albeit a variant of capitalism that needs to be grasped, along the lines described in the introduction, in its historical specificity. To be more precise, these reflections on reading show how the expansion of commodification as a result of new mechanisms of exchange posed a challenge not only to an estate-based hierarchy, but also to a conception of subjective authenticity, one based on the principle of a harmonious balance among the various actions, behaviors, and attitudes seen to constitute the exemplary individual.

Finally, and perhaps most unexpectedly, recognizing the crucial status of subjective authenticity in this context opens up a new perspective from which to consider the romantic model of textual hermeneutics that emerges around the end of the century. From this perspective, ideas about active readers or readers as authors that become so prevalent in this period appear not as the consequence of rarefied philosophical and aesthetic reflections, but as anxious attempts to come to terms with a rapidly expanding commodity culture.

As the structure of the previous paragraph suggests, my argument will proceed in three stages. The analysis begins with an elucidation of the conceptual overlap between discussions of excessive reading and those that address luxury consumption more generally. With this general framework in place, I then turn to a series of treatises on reading that illuminate the significance of an expanding market for

4. See, for example, Don Slater's *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 68–70; Woodruff D. Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability* (London: Routledge, 2002), 8–9; Torsten Meyer, "Zwischen sozialer Restriktion und ökonomischer Notwendigkeit: 'Konsum' in ökonomischen Texten der frühen Neuzeit," in *"Luxus und Konsum"—Eine historische Annäherung,* ed. Torsten Meyer and Reinhold Reith (Münster: Waxmann, 2003), 73–74.

understanding concerns about surplus consumption and its alleged destabilization of the individual subject. This fear of destabilization then serves, in the final section of the chapter, as the basis for a reconsideration of the late eighteenth-century ideal of the creative reader, an ideal that can be grasped as an effort to reestablish subjective agency in the face of a potentially overwhelming expansion of the sphere of material culture.

Reading as Consumption

The easiest way to link reading to consumption in late eighteenth-century Germany is on the basis of semantic overlap. References to the "ravenous devouring" of bad books are repeated in endless variations in essays on excessive reading, and they are complemented by descriptions of readers as "book gobblers" (*Bücherfresser*) and of books as "useful, healthy, and strengthening nourishment for the mind" or "fashionable sweets."[5] But a more substantive connection between the two discourses is to be found in the shared concern regarding marginalized groups, especially the lower social strata, young men, and women of all ages. In all three cases, unregulated access to new commodities is seen to pose a threat to social stability. So, for example, just as the author of the entry on luxury in D. Johann Georg Krünitz's *Oekonomische Encyklopädie* (Economic Encyclopedia) speaks of peasants whose overconsumption of coffee and foreign spices leads to "enervation," commentators on young male readers express their fears that self-indulgence will lead to a "reluctance toward all forms of real work."[6]

In the case of women as well, one finds an exact parallel between the two discursive fields, as can be seen through a juxtaposition of criticisms of women whose novel reading has made them indifferent toward their domestic duties and those rendered equally indifferent through what an author from *Der neue deutsche Zuschauer* (1789) terms "finery and splendor."[7] In Vienna, he writes, the desire for luxury, especially among women, has reached such proportions that "every day, many respected families are forced into bankruptcy as a result of it."[8] Vienna serves as the target for this attack, but in fact the article repeats a standard motif from what was by then a highly formulaic discussion of luxury consumption.[9] Identical

5. "Wie ist dem unter uns eingerissenen Übel der Lesesucht abzuhelfen?," *Neues Hannöverisches Magazin* 81 (1795): 1287; Friedrich Burchard Beneken, "Vielleserey," *Weltklugheit und Lebensgenuss; oder praktische Beyträge zur Philosophie des Lebens* 1 (1788): 298; Johann Rudolph Gottlieb Beyer, "Über das Bücherlesen, in so fern es zum Luxus unsrer Zeiten gehört," in *Quellen zur Geschichte des Buchwesens,* ed. Reinhard Wittmann (1796; Munich: Kraus International Publications, 1981), 10:207; Beneken, "Vielleserey," 301.

6. Heinrich Gustav Flörke, "Luxus," in *Oekonomische Encyklopädie oder allgemeines System der Staats-Stadt-Haus- und Landwirthschaft,* ed. D. Johann Georg Krünitz, http://www.kruenitz1.uni-trier.de/; Beneken, "Vielleserey," 301.

7. "Charakteristik der Wiener," *Der neue deutsche Zuschauer* 1.1 (1789): 47.

8. Ibid.

9. Christopher J. Berry, *Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 137.

accusations can be found in essays on Berlin, Paris, or even Warsaw luxury.[10] More significantly in the current context, the same argumentation can also be found in a variety of contributions to the reading debates. Educator Joachim Heinrich Campe's discussion of *Lesesucht* in his *Allgemeine Revision des gesammten Schul- und Erziehungswesens* (General Review of the Entire School and Educational System, 1785), to give just one example, decries the growth of "literary luxury" and goes on to blame it for the "disorder in household matters, . . . decline in material prosperity, domestic tribulations, domestic dissatisfaction," and "often even privation and misery" that one finds in an increasing number of German families.[11]

These parallels between the condemnations of reading and luxury, which represent only a small sample of those that could be adduced, are by no means coincidental. On the contrary, they have their common root in an eighteenth-century faculty psychology that evaluates discretionary consumption not simply in socioeconomic terms but in terms of its alleged impact on the psycho-physical equilibrium of the individual. The central conceptual categories in this context, as we saw in the introduction, are sensuality (*Sinnlichkeit*), the imagination (*Einbildungskraft* or *Phantasie*), and reason (*Vernunft*)—categories that serve as organizing principles for the arguments in both discursive fields. In the case of the essays and treatises on luxury proper, the dual emphasis on sensuality and the imagination, which we saw in the work of Johann August Schlettwein ("pleasures of the eyes and the imagination") and others, remains remarkably stable throughout the late eighteenth century.[12] It reappears in condemnations of urban luxury, as the citation on Vienna suggests. An additional example is a 1787 essay on Berlin luxury that admonishes the "wig makers, tailors and other such craftsmen" who dress in "silken, in braided, in embroidered clothes" and imagine that they are equal to members of higher estates.[13] It also appears in the article on luxury in the *Oekonomische Encyklopädie,* where the author explains the misery that results from "the strengthening and proliferation of sensual appetites."[14]

Anxieties regarding the overstimulation of sensuality and fantasy, however, prove equally central to the reading debates. J.R.G. Beyer, for example, follows Campe in explicitly characterizing excessive reading as a form of luxury. He bases his claim on the fact that both reading and luxury more generally involve objects that lie outside the sphere of our "necessary and natural needs," and, even more

10. For a discussion of the close eighteenth-century connection between luxury and the metropolis, see Werner Sombart, *Luxus und Kapitalismus* (Munich: Duncker & Humboldt, 1922), 126–32.

11. Joachim Heinrich Campe, "Von den Erfordernissen einer guten Erziehung von Seiten der Eltern vor und nach der Geburt des Kindes," in *Allgemeine Revision des gesammten Schul- und Erziehungswesens von einer Gesellschaft praktischer Erzieher,* ed. Joachim Heinrich Campe (Hamburg: Carl Ernst Bohn, 1785), 1:171, 177.

12. Johann August Schlettwein, *Grundfeste der Staaten oder die politische Oekonomie* (1779; Frankfurt/Main: Athenaeum, 1971), 406.

13. "Über den Luxus in Berlin," *Journal des Luxus und der Mode* 2 (1787): 411.

14. Flörke, "*Luxus*."

importantly, because in both cases these objects are a source of sensual pleasure: "If luxury as a whole has made people more sensual, softer, more pampered, more extravagant, more desirous, and more prone to excesses, then luxury in reading has faithfully contributed its share to these developments."[15] Other examples of the negative association of reading and sensuality—often conceived as seductive visuality—abound in the texts from the period. J. G. Hocke, for example, refers in an essay of 1794 to the "sumptuous depictions, the enchanting images of sensuality" that fill contemporary novels.[16] In both the reading debates and the controversy over luxury consumption, the overindulgence in sensual pleasures, frequently described as an overstimulation of the nervous system, is seen to lead to a lack of interest in and an incapacity for serious work and a corresponding neglect of one's duty to society.

As in the case of luxury consumption, moreover, excessive reading is linked to a runaway imagination. Just as prevalent as and in fact inseparable from the anxieties regarding books full of "sensual images" are fears of escapist reading materials that overstimulate the imagination and give rise to unrealistic expectations about the world. If concerns about sensuality tend to emphasize its psycho-physical impact, concerns about the imagination are frequently linked to anxieties about social order. Campe attributes the alleged rise in broken homes and restless youths to books that overstimulate the nerves, especially of young women, whose spirits are also "carried away from reality by poetic and romantic dream visions."[17] Hocke refers to the "freedom-and-equality enthusiasts" whose "imagination sets forth ideals that cannot exist as conceived."[18] Johann Adam Bergk, who was introduced in the previous chapter and to whom we will return in the conclusion, admonishes those women who read novels "that agitate their feelings, cast them into a world of magic and spirits, [and] lead [them] to knightly tournaments and drunken festivals."[19]

In a sense, this aspect of the reading controversy hardly needs to be mentioned. Scholars have devoted a great deal of attention to the perceived threat posed by escapist reading in the eighteenth century.[20] What has been missed is the fact that condemnations of such escapism, as well as the opposition between a fictional world of the imagination and the sometimes harsh reality of social life, are central to the broader discourse on consumption in the period. As the expressions of

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15. Beyer, "Bücherlesen," 186, 197.

16. Johann Gottfried Hocke, "Vertraute Briefe über die jetzige abentheuerliche Lesesucht und über den Einfluß derselben auf die Verminderung des häuslichen und öffentlichen Glückes," *Quellen zur Geschichte des Buchwesens,* ed. Reinhard Wittmann (1794; Munich: Kraus International Publications, 1981), 10:135.

17. Campe, *Allegemeine Revision,* 180.

18. Hocke, "Lesesucht," 144.

19. Johann Adam Bergk, *Die Kunst, Bücher zu Lesen, nebst Bemerkungen über Schriften und Schriftsteller* (1799; n.p.: Zentral Antiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, n.d.), 413.

20. For a critical overview of some of the scholarship on so-called *Trivialliteratur,* see Wurst, *Fabricating Pleasure,* 117–21.

dismay regarding members of the lower and middle social strata who dress up and act like their social superiors illustrate, categories like verisimilitude and plausibility have a resonance in the period that transcends the sphere of literature. Like bad novels, new forms of consumption that blur the boundaries between estates or challenge existing conceptions of gender identity are not merely condemned; they are dismissed as unrealistic. The expanding markets for both literary and nonliterary consumer goods in the eighteenth century, in other words, are seen to create opportunities for individuals to generate fantasies of alternative selves. If we are to believe contemporary commentators, access to new fashions and exotic foods enable craftsmen's daughters to stroll about like ladies of quality on Sundays and merchants to throw lavish public parties, even if it means that they must starve themselves at home.

The key point here is that reflections on fictionalized identities in late eighteenth-century Germany—fictional in the sense of an imaginatively invented mode of self-representation that fails to capture the "essential" reality of the referent—treat the fantasy world occupied by the addictive reader and the one occupied by the fashion-conscious tradesman as equivalent. In both cases the danger stems less from the misrepresentation itself that from the fact that a particular fiction cannot be maintained; that is, it cannot be integrated into a stable and coherent totality of life practices. Whereas some partial fictionalizations of a currently existing self can function as bridges to the realization of socially sanctioned ideals, others allegedly give rise to a radical break between the life of the imagination and the demands of practical life. The addictive reader, because his or her literary ideals simply cannot be actualized in the real world, increasingly takes refuge in the literary text. This flight from reality leads in turn to a neglect of his or her duties and ultimately ruins the individual, destroys the family, and endangers the health of the body politic. The path of the luxury consumer follows a similar trajectory: the consumption of luxury commodities fosters desires and expectations that are out of sync with the requirements and possibilities of everyday life. This disjunction leads to the consumption of more commodities in order to combat the resultant frustration, with equally disastrous results (fig. 4). Finally, one should note that the spheres of reading and of consumption more generally are seen to exist in a relationship of reciprocal reinforcement. Attempts to perform upward mobility by way of fashionable purchases may be driven in part by actual encounters with members of higher estates. If we are to believe the critics of excessive reading, however, they also owe a large debt to the "romantic dream visions" produced by popular novelists.

Identifying the shared conceptual framework behind the reading debates and the broader discourse on consumption in the period places one in a position to appreciate exactly what is at stake in the former. To characterize these debates solely in terms of categories specific to literature—such as "intensive" and "extensive" reading or "textualization" or even "mediatization"—is to neglect the larger context that lent these discussions their urgency in the period. In addition, such a

Figure 4. "Luxury and Poverty," ca. 1815. Le Bon Genre, Nr. 104, ca. 1815. Photograph from bpk, Berlin / Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany / Knud Petersen / Art Resource, NY.

characterization attributes to the sphere of literary discourse a degree of autonomy that it does not yet possess. Criticisms of excessive reading no doubt reflect the impact of an increasingly mediatized society, where the spread of textual culture is experienced as a decline in sociability, and the consequent abstraction and derealization of personal experience.[21] But we must not forget that the insertion of this new layer of mediation is a consequence of processes of commodification and that, as the parallels with the discourse on luxury demonstrate, it occurs as part of a more general expansion of commercial society. The apocalyptic fears that characterize the polemics against excessive reading, which are manifest in the dire consequences allegedly in store for individual, family, and state, are best understood in terms of an engagement with what Don Slater refers to as a "commercial revolution," in which "concepts of trade, money, new financial instruments and moveable property, contracts and orientation to commercial exploitation of ever more extensive and impersonal markets generated a vast range of new notions and activities which

21. A detailed discussion of the downside of textually mediated knowledge can be found in Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem,* trans. Allan Arkush (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1983), 103–4.

we deem modern."[22] A rapid expansion in the world of goods, in which the proliferation of textual commodities plays a crucial role, not only opens up new and potentially threatening opportunities for experiencing sensual and imaginative pleasure; it also means that those goods are no longer able to make visible and stabilize the basic categories through which individuals understand themselves and their social world.[23]

These anxieties regarding commerce and the market bring us to the second stage of the argument I wish to present here. If the history of consumption can help us to recontextualize the reading debates, then the reverse is equally true: late eighteenth-century reflections on reading can also open up a new perspective on how the broader discourse on consumption is transformed in response to capitalist modernity. The key issue in this context is the development of a critical vocabulary of authenticity understood in terms of a harmonious coherence of behaviors and practices, and of the threat posed to the "authentic" subject by the market. Although, on the one hand, the reading debates help to corroborate the often-discussed link between new consumption patterns and status anxieties, they also shed light on an alleged threat that has received far less attention in the scholarship, one conceived by eighteenth-century commentators in terms of a universal model of individual subjectivity rather than embeddedness in a social hierarchy. In addition, when one recognizes the precise character of this threat and the extent to which it is seen to stem from an expansion of the market, it becomes possible to grasp newly developing strategies of consumption, both as they relate to reading and to commodities more generally, as equally dependent on processes of economic transformation.

Target Markets

A number of the essays on excessive reading, and often those written by the most conservative commentators, include remarkably sophisticated reflections on the impact of the market on literary production and on the psychological development of individual readers. This sophistication is not surprising when one considers the remarkable expansion and growing sophistication of the publishing industry itself in the period; nor is it surprising that these essays often focus on the dangers posed by the novel.[24] The aforementioned Beyer, for example, not only laments the money wasted on the purchase of luxury editions of novels, whose lavish exterior—"beautiful paper, magnificent typography, engraving, and cover"—often has no

22. Slater, *Consumer Culture,* 20.

23. Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 10.

24. Between 1750 and 1760, according to Marion Beaujean, 73 new novels appeared in Germany. Between 1791 and 1800, the number had increased to 1,623. Marion Beaujean, *Der Trivialroman in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1964), 178.

connection to "the inner worth of the book."[25] He also points out the way in which writing for an unregulated market leads to structural changes in the books themselves, as the desire to increase sales tempts authors to overload their works with "images that inflame the imagination, salacious depictions, sensual treats, apparent witticisms, etc."[26] These visually mesmerizing scenes and ingenious plot scenarios, according to Beyer, have a lasting sensory impact on the reader, crowding out any healthy thoughts that the book might also contain.

The market figures even more prominently in a treatise on the *Leserei der Modebücher* (excessive reading of fashionable books) by Ernst Brandes, the cabinet secretary in Hannover who was introduced in chapter 1. At the time of writing he was responsible for the oversight of the University of Göttingen. Today he is remembered primarily for his antirevolutionary writings, his advocacy of Burkean principles, and the influence of both of these on his longtime friend the Prussian reformer Freiherr von Stein. Brandes places a heavy emphasis on the consequences of the commodification of literature—"the mercantile spirit that has unfortunately become so dominant in all literary actitivies."[27] He also makes it clear that the novel is by no means the only object of scrutiny in the reading debates, a fact that has often been neglected in the relevant scholarship. On the contrary, he proves more concerned with the spread of journals and a consequent loss of intellectual depth. Even at its best the periodical genre is suspect, because of its hybrid character: "The perpetual jumping back and forth in the reading of journals, between articles on the most disparate subjects and representing the most disparate approaches, would be a great evil even for ordinary minds, and even if most of the articles were actually good."[28] These rapid shifts in tone and topic among articles, together with the superficial treatment necessitated by their short length, damage the reader's ability to undertake focused, systematic reflection. The result is something like a parody of the Renaissance man, characterized by superficial *Vielseitigkeit* (many-sidedness) that paralyzes "the spirit and courage for action."[29]

Brandes is deeply concerned with the corruption of the publishing industry by commercial interests. In his account, very few readers are actually aware of the extent to which "our literature is factory produced."[30] This mass production is driven by the exigencies of competition and consumer demand rather than by an authentic need to communicate the truth on the part of the author, and the

25. Beyer, "Bücherlesen," 205.
26. Ibid., 197.
27. Ernst Brandes, "Über die Leserei der Modebücher und ihre Folgen in einigen Klassen der höheren Stände," *Neues Hannöverisches Magazin* 8 (1800): 117. The article runs over seven issues of the journal (6–12) with continuous pagination; subsequent references to this article will be cited with issue and page numbers.
28. Brandes, "Leserei," 8:121.
29. Ibid., 10:159.
30. Ibid., 9:143.

consequence is a prostitution of the "most noble gifts of the spirit."[31] The profit motive, Brandes claims, systematically distorts communication between author and reader, because it forces the former to write even when s/he has nothing of value to say. Books are ordered by the dozen without any idea of what the content might be, and the editors of journals and monthlies, because they must publish on specific dates, are often forced to include whatever articles they have on hand, regardless of quality. In addition, he argues, the possibility of profit has tempted too many individuals to enter the industry, and the excessive competition among them leads some to resort to sensationalism to stay afloat.

In the case of both Beyer and Brandes, one must of course remain cognizant of the particular sociohistorical context out of which these arguments emerge. They constitute a specific response to the destabilizing impact of the French Revolution in Germany. In Beyer's treatise this connection is made more explicit in the context of a general discussion of enlightenment and the dangers of the alleged half truths and distorted claims about church and state spread by irresponsible writers and appropriated by those not yet mature enough to recognize them for what they are. Both authors fear the emergence of a disgruntled mass of peasants and craftsmen no longer satisfied with their lot in life. Their concerns, however, by no means pertain only to these groups (Brandes's essay actually focuses on the "higher estates"), nor do they frame their arguments in explicit opposition to social mobility. Rather, their reflections point to a general trepidation regarding commodification and unregulated consumption. Indeed, phrased in neutral terms, the precise target of Beyer's attack can be characterized as the reduction of knowledge to the status of positional commodity. The texts that include the aforementioned distortions, according to Beyer, are especially appealing to the "book-loving layman," because they are new, because they flatter his vanity and give him "the appearance of erudition."[32] Rather than being integrated into a gradual (and estate-appropriate) program of self-improvement through education, something that both authors pay lip service to, knowledge here becomes a kind of fashion accessory, a luxury good whose primary purpose is its function as a mark of distinction. The pastor J.L. Ewald, author of *Gemeingeist: Ideen zu Aufregung des Gemeingeistes* (Public Spirit: Ideas to Help Foster the Public Spirit, 1801), explicitly establishes the link to fashion in a comment that demonstrates the relevance of this critique for a more educated reading public. He rebukes those who browse through "Jean Paul, Kant, and Fichte . . . in order to collect a few choice phrases . . . from their works . . . and to *preen* themselves with these foreign quills and foreign minds."[33]

31. Ibid., 7:101.
32. Beyer, Bücherlesen," 202.
33. J. L. Ewald, "Lesewuth und Spielwuth, die Zwei Furien des Luxus, aus Ewald's Gemeingeist," *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* 15 (1800): 624–25 (my emphasis).

Beyer, Brandes, and Ewald, whose arguments owe much to orthodox Christian theology, are fairly reactionary thinkers by eighteenth-century standards. Nonetheless, their comments demonstrate that concerns about reading often reflect concerns about the market, and more specifically, I would argue, about the replacement of personalized frameworks for controlling the dissemination of knowledge and certain kinds of experiences with the anonymous mediation of market mechanisms. The precise target of their criticism is a variant of one that has accompanied processes of commodification ever since: production for the market gives rise to a homogenization of goods; in other words, goods are not tailored to a known individual but produced for an anonymous public. This homogenization means that the "genuine" needs of specific individuals become separated from the possibilities for their satisfaction. In this particular case, everybody can access the same knowledge, regardless of whether they will actually benefit from it or not. What is lost as a result of the expansion of professional journalism and the book market, according to these commentators, is the ability to match the object to the specific needs of the one who appropriates it.

Of course, in these essays, the determination of needs is undertaken in paternalistic fashion by a group of elites, and this aspect of the discussion leads us back to the specific coordinates of the eighteenth-century discourse on consumption. These authors are certainly not concerned about the manipulation of the consumer by corporate interests, as tends to be the case in twentieth-century critiques of commodity culture. Nonetheless, the threat they address entails an argument that, even though it finds articulation in the context of estate and gender politics, is based on a concept of the self that transcends this context. The self as conceived here consists of a harmoniously integrated constellation of behaviors and practices, a "whole way of life" that is also linked to certain patterns of consumption and forms of knowledge.[34] To mix and match—a strategy that is facilitated by new opportunities for consumption—is to split the self, to perform a public identity that does not correspond to the private one.

From this perspective, these criticisms, whatever their specific target, do not simply reflect fears about social entropy. They also contain an implicit argument about individual authenticity, according to which the possession of certain kinds of fragmentary knowledge leads to a disconnect between outer and inner selves, between social performance and what is understood by these commentators to be an essential identity. The individuals targeted in these attacks are not simply condemned for their efforts at social ventriloquism; they are perceived to be out of balance. Brandes's treatise offers another example. He ridicules those individuals who hold forth on the political topics they read about in newspapers, even though they lack the in-depth knowledge to judge these matters with any precision. Here

34. The phrase comes from Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), xvi.

again, knowledge appears as a fashion accessory. Brandes condemns such posturing because it serves no purpose other than to indulge one's vanity ("a vain, puffed-up political arrogance"), and because it fails to reflect accurately what he considers to be the true identity of the speaker.[35] There is no meaningful way for the speaker to integrate these social performances into his actual life practice; thus, Brandes views them as inauthentic ornamentation, what the previously mentioned Hocke refers to in another context as "borrowed glamour."[36] Comments like these may indeed be reactionary, but they are also representative of a general anxiety regarding the unregulated consumption made possible by the expansion of the market, and seen to give rise to individuals whose behaviors constitute an incoherent jumble rather than a harmonious totality, for whom interiority and exteriority have become detached.

While I would argue that this concern with an "authentic" or balanced self receives its most thorough treatment in the essays on reading, one should note that an identical idea constitutes a powerful subtext in direct attacks on status-driven consumption among the middle and lower social strata in Germany. The author of "Über den Luxus in Berlin" (On Luxury in Berlin, 1787), for example, juxtaposes the domestic lives and public performances of the lower estates: "Others barely scrape by in their domestic lives, purely so that they can show themselves off in clothes and finery."[37] In a similar fashion, the treatise *Über Mode und Luxus, oder über die Armuth und ihre Quellen* (On Fashion and Luxury, or on Poverty and Its Origins, 1799) offers the following comment on those less well-off individuals who imitate the wealthy and powerful: "Such fools prefer to sacrifice everything, simply to enable themselves to appear to be something which, in reality, they are not."[38] At issue here is not just the fact that access to new consumer goods encourages efforts to dress above one's station and thus makes it more difficult to determine status among individuals, but that, with regard to a single individual, it leads to a situation where the parts do not add up to a coherent whole. In fact, a similar argument had already been made fifty years earlier in the article on fashion in Zedler's *Universallexicon* (Universal Encyclopedia, 1739): "In a rational life everything must fit together; . . . does it not seem bizarre that some women seek to emulate noble ladies with regard to their clothing and coffee service, even as their diet and residence resemble those of the most miserable tradesmen."[39] As with the remarks on misguided reading practices, in these cases as well one can speak of a fetishization

35. Brandes, "Leserei," 9:133.
36. Hocke, "Lesesucht," 73.
37. "Über den Luxus in Berlin," 409.
38. *Über Mode und Luxus oder über die Armut und ihre Quellen* (Elberfeld: Comptoir für Literatur, 1799), 11.
39. Johann Heinrich Zedler, "Mode," in *Grosses vollständiges Universallexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste,* ed. Johann Heinrich Zedler (Leipzig and Halle: Johann Heinrich Zedler, 1739), 21:707, http://www.zedler-lexikon.de/.

of individual elements at the expense of the whole, the replacement of a unified framework of consumption with an inconsistent mix of practices that cannot be mapped onto any established system of social coordinates.[40]

In fact, one can locate the anxiety at an even deeper level. In his analysis of consumer culture and postmodernism, the sociologist Mike Featherstone offers a set of reflections that proves remarkably germane to the situation in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Germany. As he points out, increased access to a broader array of commodities and commodified entertainments not only undermines the legibility of consumption practices as markers of a stable social position; it also calls into question the very distinction between reality and fiction.[41] In an eighteenth-century context, if a tradesman's daughter can pass for a lady of quality simply by changing her dress, one cannot help but wonder whether the difference between them is really as substantive as had been assumed. It is unclear which of the two individuals is actually operating under an assumed, fictional identity. Thus, as I pointed out in the introduction, although discussions of luxury certainly reflect concerns about social rank or a loss of social transparency as seen through the eyes of social elites, they are also indicative of more fundamental, existential anxieties among these elites themselves, anxieties caused by what might be termed a derealization or fictionalization of their own selves in the context of a theatricalized public sphere.[42]

To be sure, recognizing the depth of these fears will not help us to grasp consumption patterns for specific commodities in the period, an aim that has been articulated in some recent studies by historians.[43] An awareness of the market-induced threat to the notion of an authentic and integrated self, however, can help us to draw some conclusions about the general approaches taken by individuals to consumption, and this brings us to the third stage of the argument and back to the question of justificatory frameworks that constituted our focus in chapter 2. These approaches suggest that the expansion of the market, and more specifically, the increasing detachment of the spheres of consumption and production as a result of increasing production for the market, required a new way of thinking about the self and its relationship to material culture.[44] In this context, the crucial shift

40. Recognizing the dual nature of these attacks on consumption—namely, that they entail an estatist argument about social order and a more universal argument about individual psychology—can help us understand why there would have been controversy about social mobility within the middle class itself. Cf. Karin Wurst, "Fashioning a Nation: Fashion and National Costume in Bertuch's *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* (1786–1827)," *German Studies Review* 28.2 (2005): 376.

41. Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism,* 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2007), 16–20.

42. E. J. Hundert, "Mandeville, Rousseau, and the Political Economy of Fantasy," in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires, and Delectable Goods*, ed. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 28–40.

43. See, for example, Smith, *Consumption,* 7–8.

44. For an older but still valuable discussion of the rise of the market in this period, see Frederick Nussbaum, *A History of the Economic Institutions of Modern Europe* (1935; New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1968), 165–203. Nussbaum's analysis is heavily indebted to Sombart's *Der moderne Kapitalismus.*

that occurs can be described as a reconception of certain kinds of consumption as productive in themselves. If the market makes available on demand goods, experiences, or knowledge that threatens to overwhelm or deform what is conceived as an essential self, then it becomes necessary to develop strategies to reassert that self.

Productive Consumption

We have seen how expanded access to new commodities in the eighteenth-century required the development of new cognitive and discursive frameworks, frameworks that would enable individuals either to reconcile new patterns of consumption with existing conceptions of the self and the social order, or to legitimate adjustments to these conceptions. Indeed, the entire discussion surrounding the conception of "good" luxury aims precisely to demarcate the scope of these new frameworks. Taking his cue from the work of scholars like John Brewer, Maxine Berg, and John Crowley, Woodruff Smith describes how blanket condemnations of luxury give way at this time to those more differentiated concepts like "taste," "comfort," and "convenience" that serve this legitimating function.[45] Discretionary consumption is partitioned into the useful and the frivolous. For a servant to dress like his superiors is pure theatricality, a pointless and unmaintainable fiction, as the author of the previously discussed essay on Berlin argues in no uncertain terms. For a peasant to produce beyond his immediate needs and use the profits from the surplus to make his home more hygienic and comfortable, however, as J. G. Büsch suggests in his *Abhandlung vom Geldumlauf* (Treatise on the Circulation of Money, 1780), is a realistic effort at self-improvement that deserves to be encouraged.[46]

Smith's approach reveals both the creativity and the complexity of consumption practices in the period, and in this respect his work builds on that of a number of earlier scholars who likewise stressed the idea of consumption as a means to "construct social selves" and "reestablish a sense of both individual worth and community."[47] In German studies, Daniel Purdy and Karin Wurst, although approaching the topic from different perspectives, have brought such insights to bear on the constitution of middle-class identity around 1800 and have also made it clear that textuality and reading constitute a key focal point for reflecting on the societal consequences of an incipient consumer culture in Germany.[48] Both Purdy and Wurst,

45. Smith, *Consumption,* 81–86.

46. Johann Georg Büsch, *Abhandlung von dem Geldumlauf in anhaltender Rücksicht auf die Staatswirtschaft und Handlung,* 2nd ed. (Hamburg and Kiel: Carl Ernst Bohn, 1800), 350. As cited in chapter 2, Büsch writes: "Encourage the peasant to enjoy the fruits of his industry through an affluence that is in keeping with his general circumstances and vocation."

47. Ann Bermingham, "Introduction: The Consumption of Culture; Image, Object, Text," in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600–1800,* ed. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (London: Routledge, 1993), 14.

48. My own analysis is especially indebted to Purdy's elucidation of the link between reading and consumption in the period. See Purdy, *Tyranny of Elegance,* esp. 22–50.

moreover, as well as a number of scholars in other fields, rightly emphasize the creative elements of reading as consumption and thus move us away from some of the more dogmatic Marxist condemnations of consumer culture as manipulation.

What has occasionally been given short shrift as a result of this scholarly emphasis on creativity, complexity, and nuance is the degree to which these expressions of creativity, however diverse they may be, can all be seen as responses to the challenge posed by the market to thinking about subjectivity. It is possible, in other words, to view the arguments of eighteenth-century advocates of strategic surplus consumption in more reactive terms—namely, as an effort to reestablish a transparent relationship between cycles of production and consumption and thereby return to the individual a sense of agency. The spread of market mechanisms thus not only shapes criticisms of discretionary consumption, but also the more positive formulations of those who wish to channel it.

Nowhere does the paradigmatic status of the book market for concerns about an uncoupling of production and consumption, and for the development of strategies to address this problem, become clearer than in a series of lectures delivered by Johann Gottlieb Fichte in 1804/5 and published in 1806 under the title *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (The Profile of the Present Age).[49] Written several years after the high point of the reading controversy, Fichte's lectures offer something of a retrospective on the debate. They reiterate virtually all of the basic criticisms of excessive readers—criticisms, it should be noted, that exhibit a striking uniformity across the entire temporal and political range of contributions to the controversy. Fichte describes the society of his own epoch as divided into two groups, writers and readers: "Just as the former writes on and on without ceasing or pausing, so does the latter read without ceasing" (93). This division, moreover, gives rise to a new type of reader ("the *pure* reader"), who reads "solely for the sake of reading, and lives by reading" (93), and a new experience of reading, which allegedly places one into a state comparable to that induced by smoking tobacco (fig. 5). Fichte's fears here pertain to a mode of consumption that exists purely for its own sake and leads only to more consumption, and in this respect his argument mirrors that of the conservative commentators discussed previously. As Fichte puts it, "Whoever has tasted the sweetness of this condition even once wants only to enjoy it evermore, and no longer wishes to do anything else in life" (93).

To be sure, the basic conception of a historical dialectic that informs Fichte's lectures already has a well-established philosophical pedigree at this point in time; moreover, the historical-philosophical framework of the lectures means that he does not present his arguments in explicitly economic terms. But Fichte is clearly responding to a new social division of labor resulting from the expansion of the book market—namely, the split between a professional class of writers and a class

49. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1956); subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

Figure 5. Johann Friedrich Bolt, portrait of a reader smoking, 1796. Photograph from bpk, Berlin / Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany / Art Resource, NY.

of literary consumers. The problem with this split at the societal level is that it reflects a division at the level of individual psychology—capacities that should naturally coexist within a single individual are now divvied up between individuals. What has been lost is the unity of personality. The argument finds a parallel in Schiller's (or, for that matter, Adam Ferguson's) reflections on the consequences of the modern division of labor, except that here the problem is not specialization but rather is conceived in the more binary framework of a division of society into producers, "the active part," and consumers, "the receiving part" (93).

Where Fichte differs from more conservative commentators like those discussed previously is in presenting readers with a detailed plan for coming to terms with the overproduction of texts. The only appropriate response for Fichte is to transform consumption itself into a productive process. As Fichte writes, a reader's aim must be to understand the intended meaning of the author in historical terms, but he also warns: "To do so one must not proceed by passively giving oneself up to the author" (95). Instead, one must approach the book as one would approach a scientific experiment. Fichte writes that the author, like nature, must be "subjected" or even "subjugated" (the German verb is *unterwerfen*) to a series of questions and forced to respond. If one follows the correct procedure in this regard, then one should not be surprised if "a single printed page requires one to pen twenty more" (97).

The procedure Fichte describes is designed to counter what have long been considered two of the most fundamental negative consequences of commodity culture.

First, it renders the origins of the commodity transparent, or, put somewhat differently, it reestablishes an immediate, communicative relationship between producer and consumer, or author and reader. One must study the work, Fichte writes, "[until one] can reconstruct the author's entire system of thought for oneself, backwards and forwards, in every possible order, deriving all propositions therein from any individual one selected at will" (96). Second, Fichte also conceives his recommendations as a way for the subject to reassert his agency vis-à-vis a potentially despotic world of text-objects. Fichte's "experimental" approach allows the reader to maintain control over himself during the reading process, which consequently becomes a source of positive surplus value: "It is evident that by way of this approach . . . one will often understand the writer even better than he understood himself" (97). Far from passively submitting to the author, the reader in this case becomes the master, a master whose level of productivity exceeds that of the author by a factor of twenty.[50]

This motif of understanding the author better than himself has been a frequent topic in discussions of romantic hermeneutics. These discussions have typically been intellectual-historical in their approach, often focusing on Friedrich Schleiermacher's universalization of a concept that had its roots in theories of biblical and legal exegesis.[51] Fichte's lectures, however, by positing a close link between this motif and fears of a passive mode of consumption that threatens the autonomous subject, suggest a possible material basis for early nineteenth-century developments in the theory of interpretation. The seriousness of this threat is made all the more clear by Fichte's rather aggressive insistence on the need to "subjugate" the text. To avoid being reduced to mere passive reception, the reader must transform the finished product of the author into raw material for his or her own production process, which can thus be seen to operate on two levels. The reader reproduces the work itself (and something more) in the act of reading, and the act of reading becomes part of the production of the rationally organized self, characterized here in terms of an absolute mastery over the artifactual world.

My aim is not to portray Fichte as the most sophisticated theorist of reading in the early nineteenth century. Because of his particular approach, however—the fact that he casts his program of active reading as a response to the problem of *Lesewut* and the overproduction of texts—he presents us with the possibility of viewing the development of hermeneutics in the period in conjunction with the spread of commerce rather than as a purely philosophical or linguistic phenomenon. According to this reading, the proliferation of material culture proves

50. Fichte's terminology, both here and elsewhere in the text, implies an interesting gender aspect to this discussion that would be worth pursuing. Despite the gendered terminology, however, it would seem that Fichte (and others) intend their strategies to be employed by members of both sexes. For an insightful and relevant general discussion on the topic, see Wurst, *Fabricating Pleasure,* 105–16.

51. A paradigmatic example is Peter Szondi, *Einführung in die literarische Hermeneutik* (Frankfurt/Main: Surhkamp, 1975), esp. 135–91.

crucial for the emergence of the idealist subject posited by this hermeneutics, and from this perspective, Fichte's text might be used as evidence in support of (Marxist) analyses that view abstract thought as a consequence of the abstraction of the marketplace.[52]

Any more general arguments to this effect would require an in-depth analysis of other writings on the topic. While such an analysis is beyond the scope of the current investigation, it is possible to show that Fichte is not unique in his characterization of the reading process. Johann Adam Bergk, whose *Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen* (The Art of Reading Books) appeared in 1799 and whose position in the debate has often been described as that of a moderate *Aufklärer*, employs an identical rhetoric of submission versus self-assertion.[53] He argues that a book "must not treat us as a slave" and claims that "we must not allow ourselves be enslaved by the material in the book" (63). The basic problem for Bergk can be characterized as a sphere of objectivity—elsewhere he writes that "every book is a dead mass"—that threatens to overwhelm the individual subject and deform his development.[54] As with Fichte, the solution resides in a reassertion of individual autonomy and control: "We must approach it [the material] as an independent thinker and treat it as the property of our spirit" (63). The precise strategies Bergk offers for taking possession of the text also parallel those suggested by Fichte, except that Bergk takes the emphasis on production one step further and recommends that readers practice writing their own literary texts.[55]

The clarity with which Fichte presents the split between literary consumers and producers and the need to overcome it again suggests that texts occupy a privileged position in articulation of these concerns. But the rhetoric of enslavement and a loss of agency is certainly not limited to discussions of reading. In contributions to the controversy over luxury consumption as well, fears of passivity and a loss of agency are virtually universal. The by-now familiar entry on luxury from the *Oekonomische Encyklopädie*, for example, refers to "slaves of sensuality" and, in a phrase that could have been lifted from Fichte or Bergk, explains "how incapable of serious exertion they render themselves."[56] But perhaps more interesting than the indication of yet another parallel between the consequences of the two "epidemics" is the extent to

52. See Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 67.

53. See Bledsoe, "Harnessing Autonomous Art," 477–78; and Woodmansee, "Genealogy of the Aesthetic," 215–17. Subsequent references to Bergk's work *Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen* will be cited parenthetically in the text.

54. In *Die Kunst zu Denken* (1802); qtd. in Bledsoe, "Harnessing Autonomous Art," 477.

55. Both Bledsoe and Woodmansee address Bergk's conception of active reading, but without discussing the general context of consumer culture. Woodmansee certainly acknowledges the importance of the expansion of the literary market, and my own analysis is indebted to her insights; however, she does not address the connection of active reading to market mechanisms in any detail. Both have recourse to the ideas of extensive and intensive reading elucidated by Rolf Engelsing in *Der Bürger als Leser: Lesergeschichte in Deutschland 1500–1800* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1974).

56. Flörke, "Luxus."

which the solutions proposed by less negative commentators on luxury can also be viewed in the framework of creative, or productive, consumption.

The paradigmatic figure here is Friedrich Bertuch, whose pioneering *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* (Journal of Luxury and Fashions) appeared in Germany between 1786 and 1827. On the level of political economy, Bertuch sought to encourage luxury consumption precisely in order to stimulate production and the growth of domestic industry.[57] Explicitly borrowing his argumentation from the aforementioned J. G. Büsch, Bertuch's introduction to the journal (written together with G. M. Craus) suggests that a healthy circulation of money will ensure that production and consumption remain synchronized. More significant in the current context, however, is the fact that this need for synchronization also pertains to the individual consumer. He or she is to be provided with a guide that will allow him or her to evaluate the newest fashions with an eye toward whether they can be integrated into a project of self-cultivation based on a domesticated version of luxury that he, like Büsch, terms *Wolleben* (living well). The journal purportedly aims to provide criteria that will help the consumer assert him- or herself in the face of an overwhelming number of new products and activities: "Our journal and future works on luxury and fashion intend not only to offer a very pleasant amusement to our readers through the interesting tableaux from these arenas with which it provides them from time to time, but also to teach them, by way of the more general overview that they receive, how to calculate more correctly and to use this tremendous ebb and flow."[58]

Bertuch's remarks here invoke the venerable Horatian ideal of *prodesse et delectare*, an ideal that we will explore in some detail in the next chapter. Moreover, they betray little of the hysteria that characterizes some of the reflections on reading. Nevertheless, the promised overview is clearly framed as an effort to embed desire in a framework of rational control and thus counter the tyranny of fashion; to continue in Bertuch's metaphorical vein, to keep the reader from drowning in a sea of fashionable goods and experiences.[59] As with Fichte and Bergk, the emphasis is on maintaining the agency of the individual. Bertuch's insistence on the necessity of developing a productive approach to personal consumption is also mirrored in articles from the period that purport to provide the same sort of guide for readers. In addition to the works of Fichte and Bergk one finds a number of shorter, less conspicuous texts in which the similarity to Bertuch is more immediately apparent. "Lesen oder Nichtlesen, das ist die Frage" (To Read or Not to Read, That Is the

57. Purdy, *Tyranny of Elegance,* 19–20.

58. Friedrich Justin Bertuch and Georg Melchior Craus, "Einleitung," *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* 1 (1786): 10.

59. Bertuch of course had a complex and evolving agenda, as Wurst rightly explains in *Fabricating Pleasure* (129–45). My own interpretation of Bertuch differs from Wurst's in that I think Bertuch's basic approach to consumption has much in common with those high-cultural conceptions of *Bildung* from which she wants to distinguish it.

Question), for example, which appeared in the *Deutsches Magazin* in 1792, offers the equivalent of a flowchart for determining whether or not one should read a particular book.

Increased consumption, then, whether of books or of other commodities, is not to be condemned *in toto*. But such consumption must never be undertaken for its own sake. That is to say, acceptable surplus consumption, organized around principles like "taste," "comfort," or "convenience," is acceptable because it contributes to a socially sanctioned, rationally pursued project of self-cultivation—it is part of a production process rather than a mere source of passive, anesthetizing, sensual pleasure. On the one hand, this perspective confirms the generally accepted view that "rational and pragmatic" consumption was central to the construction of middle-class identity in the period.[60] Yet it also suggests that this identity took shape less as a conscious or unconscious power play on the part of that class, or even as a form of creative self-fashioning, than as part of an attempt to defuse the threat posed by an expanding world of goods and commodified experiences. Rational consumption appears here as a principle for reestablishing order and reasserting the agency of the subject.

We must certainly acknowledge the framework in which this approach is often taken—that is, the extent to which essentialized notions of gender or estate serve as the basis for the judgment of particular behaviors. The approach itself, however, is rather flexible, and it has a resonance in the period that goes beyond these essentializing categories. In the absence of a transparent referential model for consumption based on a presumptive social identity, rational consumption, understood as productive consumption, offers a strategy for maintaining self-control and negotiating increased access to new commodities. It provides the conceptual basis for reconceiving social and individual life as a coherent totality in a situation where that coherence has been undermined. It should be seen in this context as a coping mechanism, offering a formula for systematizing behavior that provides individuals with a sense of what the sociologist Anthony Giddens has characterized as "ontological security."[61] Giddens's description of the modern "reflexive project of the self" as partly "a struggle against commodified influences" demonstrates the continued relevance of such strategies even today.[62]

Given the emphasis on complexity and *praxis* that characterizes recent work in consumption studies, my interest in how market mechanisms shape the discourse on consumption may seem like a step backward. Many scholars have rightly sought to overcome the "productivist bias" of much economic history, the idea—especially

60. Purdy, *Tyranny of Elegance,* 4.

61. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 42–44.

62. Ibid., 200.

common among Marxist historians—that mass consumer culture is simply a means for industrial capitalism to eliminate excess capacity and sustain itself. Too often this approach has led to a view of consumers as passive dupes manipulated by corporate interests. The turn away from the sphere of production, however, while it has greatly enriched our understanding of the complexity of consumer behavior in the period, has been accompanied in many cases by a wholesale abandonment of capitalism as an explanatory framework for understanding consumer behavior.[63] I certainly agree that we should acknowledge how consumption constitutes social power relationships, as well as how subjects transform "the anonymous products of mass production into 'personal statements.' "[64] It is equally crucial, however, not to lose sight of the dialectical relationship between the possibility or necessity of such practices and the dislocations brought about by the economic transformations of the period—even as we must be careful not to identify these transformations with the industrial capitalism that shapes the nineteenth century.

My contention has been that the reading debates in Germany offer an especially compelling case study in this regard. Here concerns about subjective authenticity emerge as a direct consequence of the commodification of certain forms of pleasure and knowledge, a process that undercuts preexisting mechanisms for the control of their dissemination and makes them widely available. If the discussion of luxury editions emphasizes the allegedly legitimate pleasures that a new range of commodities could provide, the reading debates cast the threat posed by those same objects into starker relief. When viewed in the context of consumer culture, the reading debates not only illuminate "how we use objects to make meaning, to make or re-make ourselves"; they also illuminate our fear that those same objects will ultimately be our undoing.[65] In the remaining chapters, we will see how these two opposing possibilities are negotiated in a series of literary works, as well as how this negotiation gives rise to reflection on the particular qualities of the novel as a literary *artifact*, its status as an object among objects. Stage one is a consideration of two canonical novels of the German Enlightenment.

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63. As Smith puts it, "The complex of developments that produced capitalism affected (and was affected by) changes in European consumption patterns. As we have seen, however, neither the changes in consumption nor the cultural patterns in which they were embedded and which gave them meaning can primarily be understood as 'products' of these extracultural factors." Smith, *Consumption,* 223–24.

64. Bermingham, "Consumption of Culture," 14.

65. Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4.

4

The Enlightenment Novel as Artifact

J. H. Campe's Robinson der Jüngere *and C. M. Wieland's* Der goldne Spiegel

How did German authors respond to the widespread perception of literature as a luxury good and reading as a form of consumption? Or, to use a more modern idiom, how did German literature around 1800 respond to its own commodification? The question is not new to scholars of German culture; nonetheless, the topic deserves further attention.[1] The idea of literature as a potentially pernicious form of luxury posed a serious challenge to writers in this period, a challenge that not only influenced conceptions of the book as artifact and of the impact of reading, but also shaped the narrative structure and rhetorical features of the literary works themselves.

Previous analyses of the subject have tended to be either too broad or too restrictive in their approach. Too broad in the sense that they have addressed general concerns, such as the rise of the middle class or the dehumanizing impact of modern capitalism rather than the way in which evolving, complex, and often conflicted

1. Daniel Purdy addresses the topic in his insightful treatment of neoclassicism (Weimar classicism), and it has also been dealt with in some recent and not so recent genealogies of aesthetic autonomy and of what is known in German as *Trivialliteratur.* See Purdy, *The Tyranny of Elegance: Consumer Capitalism in the Era of Goethe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), esp. 28–34; Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, *Der Kritik der Trivialliteratur seit der Aufklärung* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1971).

attitudes toward discretionary consumption give shape to individual works. Too specific in the sense of approaching the sphere of literature as autonomous and thus in dialogue primarily with itself. With regard to this latter issue, one need only think of the conceptual and semantic overlap between the luxury controversy and concerns about luxury editions or excessive reading to see that conceptions of the literary take shape in the context of a broader discussion, in which various artifacts—ranging from exotic foods and fashions to tools, tokens, and relics—serve as either foils or models for the literary object.

Most scholars, moreover, have drawn a sharp line between the mainstream Enlightenment and the positions adopted by theorists and practitioners of what has come to be termed aesthetic autonomy, especially Moritz, Kant, Schiller, Goethe, and the romantics. For these artists and intellectuals, so the argument goes, it is precisely the lack of any obvious utility that defines true art and sets it in opposition to the sphere of economics. Artworks are self-sufficient totalities whose value is intrinsic. The canonical authors of the Enlightenment, in contrast, remain indebted to the idea of moral instruction, combining the traditional Horatian aim of *prodesse et delectare* with more modern insights into the value of pleasure as a tool of socialization.[2]

In the remaining chapters, I will suggest that we reframe this alleged aesthetic watershed. My intent is not to deny that an important transformation occurs at the end of the eighteenth century in the way authors and intellectuals think about art and literature, but rather to argue that our understanding of this transformation can be enriched if we move from a simple comparison between didactic and autonomous art to a triangulation of both positions vis-à-vis the third element of luxury. Adopting this perspective enables one to grasp these diverse authors as offering different responses to a single dilemma: the possibility that culture is superfluous. Phrased provocatively, what connects the authors of the Enlightenment to those of Weimar classicism and romanticism is precisely the denial of the autonomy of literature. The best example of a truly autonomous literature would be one that serves as pure entertainment. If we return for a moment to the *Lesewut* controversy, we can see that some commentators were in fact prepared to consider the legitimacy of such an idea. The anonymous author of an article that appeared in

2. Two examples from recent reference works confirm that this is the consensus view. Alo Allkemper and Norbert Otto Eke write: "*Prodesse et delectare*, the Horatian formula regarding the utility and entertainment provided by poetry, is also the central aim of poetry in the Enlightenment—whereby the poetics of the Enlightenment tend to emphasize utility, that is to say, instruction, more strongly than entertainment." Allkemper and Eke, *Literaturwissenschaft: Eine Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft,* 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: UTB, 2004), 70. In his history of German literature, Bengt Algot Sørensen writes: "Among the most important ideas of German classicism is the conception of the autonomy of art, according to which the work of art should be determined exclusively by its own immanent laws and never be subordinated to any concepts or ideas or any utilitarian thinking that has been imposed upon it from the outside. With this idea the formula '*prodesse et delectare,*' so beloved in the Enlightenment, had lost its validity." Sørensen, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur,* vol. 1, *Vom Mittelalter bis zur Romantik* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003), 255.

the *Neues Hannöverisches Magazin* in 1795, for example, explains that he does not object in principle to "the reading of enjoyable books that have been written to provide pleasure, something that scholars and laymen, as well as ladies from the cultivated estates, allow themselves from time to time as a means of recreation."[3] The key point here is moderation, in the sense of a temporal embedding. As long as the recreational reading pleasure is confined to the leisure hours, there is no reason to condemn it, even if the book in question promises no real intellectual or moral edification. This argument finds its parallel in the many luxury treatises that insist that conspicuous consumption poses no threat as long as the individual has successfully discharged his duties to the state, his family, and his fellow man before indulging himself.[4]

None of the authors discussed in this study—including, ultimately, the author of the aforementioned article—is prepared to justify literature solely in these terms. All of them, in other words, come down on the side of utility, even if, as outlined in the introduction, they conceive the nature of this utility in dramatically different ways. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 will address the works of Moritz, Novalis, and Goethe, respectively. This chapter considers the constellation of luxury, modernity, and anthropology as it emerges in two celebrated novels of the 1770s: Christoph Martin Wieland's *Der goldene Spiegel* (The Golden Mirror, 1772) and Joachim Heinrich Campe's *Robinson der Jüngere* (Robinson the Younger, 1779). Because these interpretations are intended to foreground a specific facet of the novels, they are necessarily partial rather than exhaustive, but I hope it will also become clear that they extend and complement the insights of existing scholarship. In addition, inasmuch as these chapters contain analyses of complex literary objects, they are intended to offer more multidimensional investigations into the boundaries of acceptable extravagance than was the case in the preceding two chapters. This multidimensionality becomes especially apparent at the level of psychology. Works of literature are of course an especially rich font of material for reconstructing normative subjectivities, and each of these novels provides insight into how discourses of luxury shape late eighteenth-century conceptions of the well-tempered self, whose formation is understood precisely in terms of the controlled stimulation, or controlled de-control, described previously. The novels thus offer early examples of how literature functioned as an imaginative space for thinking through the implications of an emerging culture of consumption for individual identity.

Equally significantly, however, these works also reveal just how closely such reflections are interwoven with an interrogation of the value of the fine arts, and of the legitimacy of the novels themselves as artifacts. As many of the writings on luxury make clear, from the essays of Rousseau and Hume to the lesser-known volumes

3. "Wie ist dem unter uns eingerissenen Übel der Lesesucht abzuhelfen?," *Neues Hannovrisches Magazin* 81 (1795): 1296.

4. Istvan Hont points to Francis Hutcheson as an example. See Hont, "The Early Enlightenment Debate on Commerce and Luxury," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 401.

of the German cameralists, the anthropological orientation of these thinkers means that the fine arts tend to be viewed as a subset of luxury goods more generally. They are thus subject to the same concerns about access and stadial progression that are addressed to the latter. As products of a process of historical development, both are cast simultaneously as either promoting or impeding social cohesion; both are evaluated on the basis of the same set of cognitive-anthropological categories; and both are subject to the same reflections regarding the appropriate locus and type of regulation necessary to maintain psychic as well as social equilibrium. Particularly in the case of the anthropologically oriented novels of the Enlightenment, one finds an engagement with these issues on multiple levels.[5] A preoccupation with luxury codetermines the plot, but it also generates a series of formal responses as well as self-referential attempts on the part of these authors to position their own works along a continuum of artifacts that ranges from well-ordered luxury to dangerous opulence. Both implicitly and explicitly, these novels thus constitute key sites for establishing a category of what constitutes beneficial luxury, and they implicitly construct a literary ideal that derives from this same category.

The tendency of these novels to reflect on the criteria that ground their legitimacy, in other words, means that they serve as a particularly valuable resource for grasping what was new in conceptions of luxury in the eighteenth century—namely, the idea that luxury could function as a positive force. Indeed, one of the broader arguments that will take shape over the course of this and the next three chapters is that the entire range of self-reflexive mechanisms that proliferate so widely in the narrative fiction of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is itself part of the effort to domesticate the luxury of literature, to harness its sensuous and imaginative pleasures and render them productive. Inasmuch as the debates about luxury were, to a large degree, debates about the impact of commerce, all of these mechanisms can also be read as strategies of decommodification, strategies that are no less central to the novels of Goethe and Novalis than to those of Campe and Wieland.[6] We must remember, however, that such narrative mechanisms seek to decommodify through disaggregation—that is to say, not by way of a wholesale condemnation of the impact of commodification, but by decoupling its positive from its negative consequences, encouraging the former while sequestering the latter.

Campe, Wieland, and "der ganze Mensch"

As *Staatsroman* and *Robinsonade,* respectively, Wieland's and Campe's novels represent what can be considered the two most significant anthropological genres of the period. *Der goldne Spiegel,* essentially a treatise on government in narrative form,

5. For a discussion of the anthroplogical novel of the German Enlightenment, see Jutta Heinz, *Wissen vom Menschen und Erzählen vom Einzelfall: Untersuchungen zum anthropologischen Roman der Spätaufklärung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996).

6. I would like to thank the anonymous reader of the manscript for helping me to recognize this point.

relates the fictional history of the Oriental empire of Scheschian as told, in the style of *The Arabian Nights,* to the Persian sultan Schach-Gebal.[7] Joachim Heinrich Campe's *Robinson der Jüngere* was the most significant of the multitude of German imitations inspired by Defoe's 1719 original. Conceived for younger audiences, it features a father-narrator who tells a group of children the story of young Robinson, a spoiled boy who abandons his parents and spends spends several years on a deserted island before returning home with a new appreciation for hard work and responsibility. Though a substantial body of scholarship exists on each of these novels, they have, to my knowledge, never been viewed synoptically. Interpretations of *Der goldne Spiegel* tend to focus on the themes of "enlightened absolutism" and the ability of eighteenth-century German intellectuals to speak truth to power, whereas scholarship on *Robinson der Jüngere* has emphasized its celebration of the middle-class virtues of thrift and industry as well as, more recently, its seminal contribution to the emergence of a uniquely German colonialist discourse.[8] The novels also differ significantly in style, tone, and intended audience, such that one might be forgiven for wondering whether it makes sense to view them together at all.

Against the backdrop of the luxury debates, however, their shared intellectual terrain becomes strikingly apparent. Both novels share a preoccupation with the impact of affluence and ornamentation within the context of a stadial model of human development and an equilibrium-based approach to the faculties of the psyche. Like so many of their fellow authors and intellectuals, Campe and Wieland are deeply engaged by the questions of how to produce self-regulating moral subjects under conditions of affluence, and how the encounter with luxury goods and refined pleasures can both foster and obstruct the constitution of a normative

7. Merio Scattola has insightfully pointed out that the entire narrative is organized according to precisely those fields of inquiry that define the systematic studies grouped under the rubric of the "sciences of state" or *Staatswissenschaften*. Scattola, "Politisches Wissen und literarische Form im *Goldnen Spiegel* Christoph Martin Wielands," *Scientia Poetica* 5 (2001): 90–121.

8. Some more recent examples of these emphases can be found, for example, in the following works. On Wieland, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 335–62; Bernhard Budde, *Aufklärung als Dialog: Wielands antithetische Prosa* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 163–240; Jürgen Fohrmann, "Utopie, Reflexion, Erzählung: Wielands *Goldner Spiegel*," in *Utopieforschung: Interdisziplinäre Studien zur neuzeitlichen Utopie,* ed. Wilhelm Vosskamp (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1982), 24–49; W. Daniel Wilson, "Intellekt und Herrschaft: Wielands *Goldner Spiegel*, Joseph II. und das Ideal eines kritischen Mäzenats im aufgeklärten Absolutismus," *MLN* 99.3 (1984): 479–502. On Campe, see Hans-Christoph Koller, "Erziehung zur Arbeit als Disziplinierung der Phantasie: J. H. Campes *Robinson der Jüngere* im Kontext der philanthropischen Pädagogik," in *Vom Wert der Arbeit: Zur literarischen Konstitution des Wertkomplexes 'Arbeit' in der deutschen Literatur (1770–1930)*, ed. Harro Segeberg (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991), 41–76; Achim Leschinsky, "Campes *Robinson* als Klassiker der bürgerlich wohltemperierten pädagogischen Reform—Ein Erziehungswissenschaftlicher Kommentar," in *Vom Wert der Arbeit,* 77–87 ; Jörg Schönert, "Johann Karl Wezels und Joachim Campes Bearbeitungen des Robinson Krusoe: Zur literarischen Durchsetzung des bürgerlichen Wertkomplexes 'Arbeit' in der Literatur des späten 18. Jahrhunderts," in *Deutsche Literatur in sozialgeschichtlicher Perspective: Ein Dubliner Symposium*, ed. Eda Sagarra (Dublin: Trinity College German Department, 1989), 18–34; Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770–1870* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 102–20.

subjectivity. On the one hand, both depict the desire for pleasure—the pleasures of increased material comfort as well as those of aesethetic experience—as a central motivation for self-improvement and a wholly legitimate facet of human nature. On the other hand, the modern division of labor and the intensified circulation of money and commodities mean that access to these pleasures has become detached from the productive labor that enables them to exist, thereby detaching them from the purportedly natural hierarchy of human needs as well. This problem can be understood as a consequence of uneven development, a disconnect between the achievements of humans as a species and the distribution of those achievements among individuals. While this idea is typically associated with Schiller's *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man), which inaugurate a line of cultural criticism that culmimates in Marx, the idea actually circulates quite widely, and in a variety of incarnations, in eighteenth-century Germany.

In the context of the luxury debates, what all of these variants share is a concern with a perceived split between individual and social timescales. On the one hand, the division of labor enables the production of a social surplus and thus fosters the cultivation of the human race. As we saw in chapter 1, Joseph Sonnenfels explains luxury (*Üppigkeit*) as "the exercise of man's capacity to increase his comforts through the work of others and thereby to make life pleasant."[9] Sonnenfels's remark is not a critique of economic exploitation *avant la lettre*, but an endorsement of a society based on "reciprocal assistance" and a division of labor that, as Schiller puts it almost twenty years later, proves necessary "if the manifold potentialities in man were ever to be developed."[10] But the capricious distribution of this surplus according to the dictates of money, power, or simply blind chance means that certain kinds of goods and experiences become available to individuals at inappropriate times and places. With this perspective in mind, we can see that both novels cast the fundamental challenge of modernity as the challenge of managing this surplus, and this project proves inseparable from the working out of a particular conception of what literature is, a conception that must be understood in the context of attempts to differentiate good from bad luxury, surplus from excess, genuine cultivation from enervating overrefinement.

It is Campe who situates this problem most squarely in the context of a modern commercial society. Nothwithstanding the fact that the story plays out on a deserted island off the coast of South America, *Robinson der Jüngere* can be read as an extended attempt to render transparent a world of commodified objects that has become opaque and thus vulnerable to fetishistic projections, projections that

9. Joseph Sonnenfels, "Anfangsgründe der Handlung," in *Politische Abhandlungen* (1777; repr., Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1964), 63. Sonnenfels uses *Üppigkeit,* which in later texts tends to have predominantly negative connotations, in a manner that is synonymous with the neutral use of *Luxus*.

10. Friedrich Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. and ed. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 102.

redirect human emotions away from interpersonal relationships to things. If luxury in its negative sense is conceived in terms of a disequilibrium between the world of human subjects and that of objects, such that, in the description provided by Krünitz's *Oekonomische Encyklopädie* (Economic Encyclopedia), a broken teacup causes more distress than a servant's broken bone, then *Robinson der Jüngere* intervenes in the luxury debates by offering an exhaustive model of how to reestablish the appropriate hierarchy between these two spheres. It is crucial to recognize in this context that the problem for Campe is not objects per se, which testify to the achievements of human cooperation. Nor is he interested in an across-the-board condemnation of luxury. On the contrary, he offers a textbook example of how eighteenth-century commentators conceive of the trajectory of needs, beginning with the necessary and then progressing through comfort and ornamenation. The key passage in this regard, part of which was cited in chapter 1, appears toward the end of the work, where the father-narrator relates a new stage in the productive activities of Robinson and Freitag, at which they begin to beautify their surroundings. Given its centrality to my interpretation here, it deserves to be quoted in full:

> And now Robinson no longer restricted himself to the mere satisfaction of his most basic needs: rather, over time he began to think about the beautification of his residence. And this, children, is how it has happened everywhere in the world. As long as men still had to direct all their thoughts to the acquisition of their sustenance and the security of their life, it never occurred to them to dedicate themselves to those arts that serve only to beautify the objects around us, and to provide our soul with more refined pleasures than the merely animalistic pleasures of the senses. But no sooner were sustenance and security adequately provided for than they also began to want to combine the beautiful with the useful, the pleasant with the necessary. Thus arose the practice of building in an artistic sense; thus arose painting, sculpture, music, and all of the other artistic skills that are conceived as belonging to the fine arts.[11]

Here Campe not only insists on the legitimacy of luxury, understood as the decorative or ornamental; he also offers a clear example of the tendency to equate luxury with the fine arts. Problems arise only as a result of the disembedding of luxury. If human beings have from time immemorial turned to the decorative once their basic needs have been met, the dilemma of Campe's own present is that the decorative has become available at all times, at least to those who can scrape together the means to pay for it. He is concerned, in other words, with the consequences of commodification, a process that enables objects to circulate independently of their producers and to be consumed without engaging in the productive activity that legitimates their enjoyment.

11. J. H. Campe, *Robinson der Jüngere* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), 251; subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

The presence of this anxiety, and its connection with luxury more narrowly defined, find expression in a variety of critical references in the novel to the negative consequences of an increased consumption of exotic imported goods. Early on in the work, as he describes how enthusiastically Robinson consumes the raw meat he has prepared, the father-narrator chastises the alleged gourmands (*Lekkerrmäuler*) among his compatriots for their "corrupt taste" (84, 85), and later he rails against the negative effects of coffee, tea, and alcohol. The excessively refined taste of these individuals—that is to say, a taste that has been spoiled by the easy access to pleasures that nature itself would distribute sparingly or not at all—testifies to the psycho-physical imbalance that is seen to pose such a threat in condemnations of luxury. Indeed, the young Robinson himself provides an example of this very danger. The narrator depicts him primarily as a victim of bad parenting, to be sure, but the particular variant of bad parenting he experiences is a product of affluence: "Because their dear little boy preferred to play rather than to work and learn something, they mostly let him play the whole day long" (21). This life of ease results in an egotism so pronounced that he gives no thought to leaving his parents behind to embark on a life of adventure at sea.[12]

The threat posed by an expanding world of goods is cast in Campe's novel in terms of the enervating effects of pleasure and the delusions of a renegade imagination, which together prevent the individual from recognizing his reliance on and his obligations to others. Wieland offers a variant of this same concern in *Der goldne Spiegel*. In his novel, however, the connection to luxury is explicit, and the reflections are heavily indebted to the political economy of the time. In fact, it is the concern with luxury that ties together the multiple levels of narration that constitute the novel.[13] Many of the criticisms leveled against the fictional republic of Scheschian, whose history makes up the main plotline of *Der goldne Spiegel,* appear to have been taken directly from the writings of the German cameralists, especially those sympathetic to physiocratic principles. The most striking example is the evil tyrant, Isfandiar, the Scheschian king whose misrule finally leads to revolution and anarchy, paving the way for the beginning of a golden age under the rule of Tifan. Isfandiar's court is described as the site of an unimaginable opulence, even as "agriculture was in the most pitiful state of decline."[14] As in *Robinson der Jüngere*,

12. In his description of Robinson's upbringing, Campe does not draw a direct line to broader societal developments, but this connection is manifest in several of Campe's other texts, including the treatise he wrote in 1786 entitled *Über einige verkannte wenigsten ungenutzte Mittel zur Beförderung der Industrie, der Bevölkerung und des öffentlichen Wohlstands* (On Some Unappreciated or at Least Unused Means to Promote Industry, the Population, and Public Welfare). In this essay he prefaces his recommendations with the claim that "indulgent behavior, love of splendor, the necessity for extravagant expenditure, in short—luxury and the increase in needs gain the upper hand." Campe, *Über einige verkannte wenigsten ungenutzte Mittel zur Beförderung der Industrie, der Bevölkerung und des öffentlichen Wohlstands* (1786; repr., Frankfurt/Main: Verlag Sauer & Auvermann KG, 1969), 2.

13. This point has also been made by Uve Fischer, *Lusso e vallata felice: Il romanzo politico "Lo speccio d'oro" di Christoph Martin Wieland* (Catania: Universita di Catania, 1974).

14. Christoph Martin Wieland, *Der goldne Spiegel und andere politische Dichtungen* (Munich: Winkler Verlag, 1979), 187; subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

here we also have a case of social blindness, an inability to recognize the profound interdependency of all human beings. In Isfandiar's case the abuse of his subjects appears to be a consequence of genuine maliciousness, but in other examples of misguided extravagance it is the objects and pleasures themselves that divert attention from the healthy social relationships that are seen as building blocks of a stable social order. The best example is the story of Alabanda, mistress to the weak king Azor and, as is typical in Wieland's representation of extravagant courts, the real power behind the throne.[15] Thanks to Alabanda's machinations, Azor spends his time enjoying "magnificent festivals and ever-varying amusements" (101), while failing to rebuild the cities that have been destroyed in a recent war. Alabanda herself empties the coffers by constructing not just one but two elaborate pleasure gardens. In order to complete these projects, she must remove peasants from the land and turn them into day laborers, thereby creating "disorder and shortages" (105) in the provinces and causing a dramatic rise in the price of food.

One of the advantages of viewing these texts together is that we can see that although the critique of luxury is instantiated differently with regard to different levels of the social hierarchy, its basic structural elements are not estate-specific. One can certainly make a case for the claim that the behavioral ideal that informs both of these novels, an ideal that is captured fairly accurately by the notion of moderation or *Mäßigung*, has its origins in the middle class. But the threat is perceived as a global one—that is to say, as one that endangers all levels of society—and it is understood in terms of an anthropological model that claims universal validity. We have seen how this model posits a stable but dynamic equilibrium among the faculities of the mind—especially sensuality, imagination, and reason—as the key to the development of a normative subjectivity. Whether and how such a dynamic equilibrium can be achieved and maintained is arguably the central question of these novels, and, as we have seen, it is a question that dogged a wide range of commentators in the eighteenth century. Luxury, according to this model, triggers a failure of self-regulation, understood as the ability to subject one's fantasies and sensuous desires to the dictates of reason. Indeed, to the extent that luxury in the period is understood in both an objective and a subjective sense, as both a thing and a behavior, it sometimes appears as the source of this failure while at other times as the failure itself.

The model is admittedly a rather simple one, but it constitutes the basic conceptual framework underlying a wide range of reflections on luxury and on modernity more generally in the period. One of its most influential advocates is the physiocrat Isaak Iselin, *Ratsschreiber* in Basel, philosopher, historian, and a leading figure in

15. According to Werner Sombart, who takes his cue from sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century commentators, the rise of the courtesan and the consequent *Maitressenwirtschaft* were central to the expansion of the early modern economy. See Sombart, *Luxus und Kapitalismus* (Munich and Leipzig: Duncker & Humboldt, 1922), 45–69.

the Swiss Enlightenment who knew both Campe and Wieland and whose reflections can help to illuminate some of the anthropological underpinnings of their work. In 1764 Iselin wrote *Über die Geschichte der Menschheit* (On the History of Humanity), arguably the first significant German contribution to the genre of conjectural universal history. My interest lies less in establishing a direct line of influence than in elucidating a conceptual framework that enjoyed widespread circulation in the period, but it is worth noting that Iselin's work served as an explicit reference point for Wieland, who had given a series of lectures on it in Erfurt in 1769 (albeit with the alleged intent of refuting Iselin's claims).[16] Iselin describes his version of the aforementioned tripartite model in the introduction to his treatise, where he also uses it as the foundation for an alleged parallel between ontogenetic and phylogenetic development. He writes: "Sensuality provides the foundation for the welfare of the individual; the imagination intensifies his pleasant sensations, but it also confuses and embitters them to an equal degree. Reason, in contrast, keeps the one as well as the other of these mainsprings in its appropriate place. . . . It enlivens and orders the whole of human feeling; and through a sublime harmony it grants to this whole the dignity and perfection through which alone it can become truly admirable."[17] Iselin goes on to explain how each of these faculties dominate at a particular point in the development of both individuals and entire peoples: childhood is associated with sensuality, youth with the imagination, and reason with (male) adulthood.

While it is by no means clear that Iselin's own discussions of various cultures and peoples always conform to this basic framework in every detail, it is clear that he associates the excesses of bad luxury as it is understood in the eighteenth century with an overstimulation of the senses or an overly inflamed imagination or a combination of both. He also associates such excesses with a particular phase of human development, that of a barbarism situated between the earliest childhood of humanity and the beginnings of civilized life (*der gesittete Stand*). One finds in all cultures at this stage an extraordinary affinity for decoration: "anything that sparkles, jingles, is colorful, touches their senses, which are still incapable of perceiving higher beauties" (214). Later on, in his otherwise resolutely optimistic depiction of contemporary Europe, he characterizes the regressive elements among the wealthy and powerful in society as a reversion to this earlier state.[18] Even though there is no

16. Sven-Aage Jørgensen et al., *Wieland: Epoche—Werk—Wirkung* (Munich: Beck, 1994), 74. Walter Erhart makes the case that the attitude toward Iselin and toward *Geschichtsphilosophie* more generally was highly critical. Erhart, *Entzweiung und Selbstaufklärung: Christoph Martin Wielands "Agathon"-Projekt* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991), 207–25.

17. Isaac Iselin, *Über die Geschichte der Menschheit*, vol. 1 (Karlsruhe: Christian Gottlieb Schmieder, 1784), XXI; subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text. For a discussion of Iselin's work within the context of eighteenth-century German anthropology, see Heinz, *Wissen vom Menschen,* 106–8.

18. These individuals have, according to Iselin, abandoned the masculine barbarism of their ancestors, characterized by drinking, hunting, and duels, but they have become enslaved to childish and

one-to-one correspondence between Iselin's tidy tripartite schema and the complex representations in Wieland's and Campe's novels, Iselin's basic model, his notion of a "threefold law" that shapes humanity at the level of the individual and the society, does shed important light on these works. In particular, considering Wieland and Campe together with Iselin allows us to see more clearly how both novels also link the disintegrative impact of affluence to theories of human evolution, in both individual and societal terms.

In *Robinson der Jüngere*, this connection is most apparent in the previously mentioned reference to beautification. The father-narrator presents the progression from the necessary to the ornamental as a universal law of human development, generalizing from Robinson's particular case to humanity at large. His remarks appear as something of an aside in the novel, but in fact they contain the key to understanding Campe's entire pedagogical project. The inviolability of this law of progression is precisely what Robinson learns on the island: not only the fact that failing to follow its dictates has grave consequences, but also that following them is the royal road to genuine happiness. In contrast to Defoe's original, where the protagonist carries his civilization with him in the form of the tools and supplies he rescues from the shipwreck, Campe wants to show how Robinson the Younger reorders his subjectivity from scratch, first relying entirely on the gifts of nature, and only then, once his basic needs have been met, gaining access to human support (through Freitag) and to the accoutrements of modern life (by discovering a shipwreck on his island). The stay on the island enables Robinson to overcome the split between social and individual timescales by forcing him to work his way through each stage of the process of societal development, thereby ensuring that he has an appropriate—and experientially based—understanding of the natural hierarchy of human needs.

This insight requires us to reconsider the generally persuasive protocolonialist interpretations of the novel that have appeared recently. Susanne Zantop was the first to identify the colonialist narrative in the novel, arguing that one finds at the "core" of Campe's pedagogical experiment a metaphorical equation of education and colonization, and that the ultimate aim of the novel is the "domestication of little savages."[19] One can certainly discern such an equation in the novel, but it is equally important to recognize the presence of a counternarrative, one that becomes visible only once one has recognized the significance of the context of luxury for work. The key passage in this context comes shortly after Robinson has rescued his soon-to-be companion, Freitag, from a gruesome death at the hands of a rival tribe. The two escape by retreating into Robinson's cave, the sight of

effeminate pleasures. Iselin describes them as infected by "the plague of making oneself splendid and impressive by way of all kinds of childish decorations; the taste for trifles, excessive adornments, for finery, all are essential characteristics of savagery." Iselin, *Über die Geschichte der Menschheit*, vol. 2 (Zurich: Orell, Geßner, Füeßtin and Comp, 1770), 396.

19. Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies,* 105.

which elicits the following reaction from the "savage": "Here the savage's eyes went wide, as he saw the comfortable and orderly arrangement of his rescuer's dwelling, because in his entire life he had never seen such a beautiful thing. He was more or less in the same state of mind as a peasant who, having never traveled outside of his own village, is brought for the first time into a palace" (203). This description makes clear that domesticating little savages is only part of Campe's pedagogical project. It is certainly true that Campe thinks children need to be "civilized" in the sense of learning to control both affect and desire, and that the absence of this kind of control is characteristic of the natives, with their "barbaric gesticulations and expressions of joy" (196). But, in fact, the children must also be transformed *into* little savages, in order to acquire a Freitag-like sense of wonder at the triumphs of modern European civilization. They must be made to recognize the extraordinary qualities of even the most mundane comforts of daily life to appreciate these comforts as achievements made possible only by a long process of cultural and social development—in short, as luxuries.

The children, in other words, must follow Robinson in his return to the zero point of human development in order to regain an approrpriate sense of the natural trajectory of that development, a sense that has been lost in a society characterized by enormous wealth. Literature, itself a product of that affluence, nonetheless provides the means by which they can complete this virtual journey. It serves as a mechanism for defamiliarizing modern European society, a process that involves above all an effort to reestablish the natural order of objects. And this effort proceeds on the basis of the narrator's relentless elucidation of origins: the origins of human society, the origins of the various artifacts constructed by the protagonists, and the origins of the narrative itself. Modern society is itself revealed as an artifact constituted by artifacts, the product of human ingenuity over the course of history.

An analogous return to origins plays a central role in *Der goldne Spiegel*. The young prince Tifan, later to ascend to the throne, rescue Scheschian from collapse, and usher in an age of prosperity, is first spirited away from the depraved court at a moment of crisis and raised in a distant valley. Despite the fact that he is not alone, Tifan's experience includes a number of Robinsonian elements: far from the corrupting influence of courtly life, his mentor, Dschengis, creates a small colony with a group of freed slaves, and together they transform the wilderness into fertile farmland. Against this backdrop, Tifan experiences an upbringing that could be taken straight from the pages of Rousseau's *Émile*; he is, in the narrator Danischmend's words, "raised upon the lap of nature herself" (205). He, too, must be turned into a "little savage." As with Robinson, Tifan is removed from a corrupt environment and given the opportunity to progress through the stages of individual development in their natural order, thereby overcoming the split between social and individual timescales. And, as with Robinson, the key benefit of this progression appears to be an adequate grasp of the nature of true luxury and affluence. As Danischmend goes on to explain of Dschengis's colony, "The merry residents enjoyed an abundance of the necessary, and lived in that happy poverty in superfluous things that constitutes wealth for the wise or the ignorant man" (206). Affluence is understood here as having more than enough to satisfy one's natural needs, and not in terms of the overrefined goods and tastes that enervate the body or give rise to the desire for social distinction.

Der goldne Spiegel also provides a detailed counterimage to this natural education, one that is cast precisely in terms of the inversion of hierarchy described previously. In a passage that is reminiscent of the description of Robinson's upbringing in *Robinson der Jüngere*, Wieland's narrator Danischmend relates the misguided education given to King Azor. Azor, with the help of Alabanda, manages to impoverish Scheschian through his continuous expenditures on luxury, especially on constant festivals and elaborate pleasure gardens. This penchant for excess appears as the result of an education that emphasized decoration over duty. As Danischmend puts it, he learned "to appreciate the beauties of the poets . . . and twenty other such arts that serve as ornamentation and do have their value, when they are the adornments of essential perfections" (83). Azor grows up to become a well-dressed and witty conversationalist with a talent for both dancing and playing the flute, but he lacks any awareness of the responsibilities of an enlightened ruler. In contrast to Robinson, who is sent away to a deserted island for reeducation, Azor is left to his own devices, creating a court whose opulence eclipses "the radiance of the most magnficent in Asia" (91), while at the same time preparing the ground for a total collapse of the state.

What we find in both texts is the eighteenth-century ideal of "der ganze Mensch," but in a variant that foregrounds the developmental aspect of this model and thereby highlights the crucial yet highly problematic role played by luxury in the realization of this ideal.[20] Campe and Wieland insist (and they are by no means alone in this insistence) on a particular developmental hierarchy according to which the various human faculties must unfold in the proper sequence so as to ensure a well-functioning individual and social order. They also demonstrate the difficulty of locking individuals into such a developmental path in complex modern societies. Read in isolation, Wieland's novel might appear to corroborate the long-held and still common assumption that the eighteenth-century critique of luxury is a middle-class attack on an allegedly decadent nobility. When considered in tandem with Campe's novel, however, it becomes clear that this view misconstrues the problem. It is certainly the case that these authors conceive of the ideal self in estate-specific terms. Ultimately, however, both the promise and the peril of luxury apply to all levels of society, as we have seen in the previous chapters as well. The challenge for Wieland and for Campe resides not in the nobility but in modernity, a modernity in which, as the result of a complex division of labor and the spread of commerce,

20. I borrow this phrase from the anthology that marked the beginning of the current interest in Enlightenment anthropology in German: Hans-Jürgen Schings, ed., *Der ganze Mensch: Anthropologie und Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994).

ensuring that the individual follows the *natural* trajectory of human development is possible only through elaborate and highly artificial mechanisms of control.

Container Narratives

Among the most important of these mechanisms are the fine arts, but they play a decidedly ambivalent role in this regard. As is the case with luxury in a general sense, the fine arts appear in these novels simultaneously as the culmination of a process of human cultivation, as the primary threat to the achievement of that cultivation, and, in one particular variant, as the best means to address that very same threat. Both authors, in other words, are working with three modalities of the fine arts, and of literature in particular, casting them in terms that one can map directly onto the range of eighteenth-century positions on luxury, individual self-cultivation, and social mediation. In one variant the arts lead to physical enervation, a hyperactive imagination, and an inability to fulfill one's duty to society. In another, however, the arts appear as a key resource for reordering the faculties, overcoming the split between individual and social timescales, and enabling the maximum degree of transparency among the various elements in a complex social whole. Curiously enough, the third notion of the arts, understood as capstone or culmination, although invoked as an explicit aesthetic ideal in both novels, is implicitly disavowed by the narrative structure of the works in favor of the second conception of the arts as a form of productive luxury.

The articulation of these three variants of the arts as luxury occurs on three distinct but related levels in the novels: (1) that of the main plot, (2) that of the frame narrative, and (3) that of generic self-definition. In terms of *plot*, we have already considered how both novels are concerned to delineate, through the representation of various behaviors and their consequences, the appropriate relationship between the ornamental or decorative and more fundamental needs. The primary fear expressed appears to be a blurring or inversion of these categories, as in the case of Azor, as well as, to a degree, in the case of Robinson before his sojourn on the island.

Like the other cautious advocates of luxury in the eighteenth century, in other words, both Wieland and Campe are eager to regulate the scope of the pleasures of luxury and thereby mitigate its potentially negative consequences. But those advocates, as we have seen, also present a more positive claim—namely, that the pleasures of "well-ordered" luxury can serve as a motivating force that drives individual industry and enhances social cohesion.[21] In this case as well, one can identify a parallel between the novels' representation of the fine arts (and literature in particular) and the broader luxury discourse. Here the level of the *frame narrative*

21. Hont, "Early Enlightenment Debate," 380. Joseph Sonnenfels refers in his essay "Versuch über das Verhältnis der Stände" to "well-ordered splendor" (*wohlgeordnete Pracht*). Sonnenfels, *Politische Abhandlungen,* 103.

proves most revealing. Both novels contain complex narrative structures, multiple frames that encircle and fragment the primary plots. These framing mechanisms have long attracted the attention of scholars. With regard to *Robinson der Jüngere*, most have remarked on how they serve to steer reception and control the level of the reader's identification with the protagonist, thereby ensuring an appropriately analytical perspective on the fictional content.[22] The same can be said of the "dialogic" elements in the novel and the innumerable digressions on the part of the father-narrator, who frequently interrupts the narrative in order to elicit reflection on moral questions or explain various production processes to his audience. In Wieland's case, scholars have focused on the self-reflexive sophistication with which the author addresses such topics as the possibility of utopia or the relationship between intellectuals and political authority.[23]

From the perspective of luxury, one can read such complexity as a structural reinscription of the arguments about control espoused in the main plot. The aim is not simply to foster rationality and reflection in some general sense, but to ensure the rational consumption of the fictional content. Campe goes to great lengths to demonstrate how the stories told to the children by the father-narrator are carefully regulated, both in the sense that the children enjoy the story only at the end of a day of productive activity (temporal embedding), and in the sense that the father-narrator sometimes interrupts the narrative suddenly in order to give the children the opportunity "to learn to subdue [their] desires" (204). The dampening of desire, however, is only half the story. By also relating the children's boundless enthusiasm for the story as well as the positive practical consequences thereof, the frame narrative foregrounds the value of embedded luxury as a source of motivation. In this role, the story of Robinson the Younger appears as the ideal luxury good—a nonessential object of intense desire whose consumption flows directly into a circuit of socially valuable labor, as the children attempt to recreate for themselves the various utilitarian objects made by Robinson on the island, from umbrellas to woven baskets.

The value of these activities, moreover, is not merely that they lead to the production of useful objects and a sense of individual accomplishment. They also serve to render social relationships more transparent and thereby help to bridge the gap between individual and social timescales. In other words, they enable the children to acquire a more powerful sense of social interdependence, to recognize, in a quasi-experiential fashion, what Robinson learns on the island—namely, that

22. See Heinrich Richartz, afterword to *Robinson der Jüngere*, by Joachim Heinrich Campe, 405–8; Hans-Heino Ewers, "Robinson der Jüngere," in *Handbuch zur deutschen Kinder und Jugendliteratur von 1750–1800*, ed. Theodor Brüggemann and Hans-Heino Ewers (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1982), 222–24; Koller, "Erziehung zur Arbeit," 64–66.

23. Paradigmatic for the former are Peter Uwe Hohendahl, "Zum Erzählproblem des utopischen Romans im 18. Jahrhundert," in *Gestaltungsgeschichte und Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Literatur-, Kunst- und Musikwissenschaftliche Studien*, ed. Helmut Kreuzer (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1969), 79–114; and Fohrmann, "Utopie, Reflexion, Erzählung." A discussion of the latter can be found in Wilson, "Intellekt und Herrschaft," as well as in Budde, *Aufklärung als Dialog*, esp. 191–205.

"a thousand hands are not enough to produce all of the things that a single one of us needs every day!" (91). If the story of Robinson's island sojourn reflects a concern that luxury has given rise to cognitive distortions and a dangerous degree of social opacity, the lesson of the frame narrative is that this very same luxury—in the proper dosage—offers the only real possibility of reestablishing equilibrium.

One finds a similar structural parallel between luxury and literature in the frame narrative of *Der goldne Spiegel*, and here the opposition between its positive and negative incarnations becomes the object of an explicit debate. The occasion is a story related by Danischmend in chapter 3 of the novel. Often referred to in the secondary literature as the "Naturkinderutopie" or the "Talutopie," the episode relates the visit of the sybaritic Emir to an isolated community of families living an idyllic life of pleasure and peaceful prosperity. According to the village elder, the source of their happiness is adherence to the wise constitution of their country's founder, Psammis, who appeared among them several generations earlier and decided to dedicate himself to their well-being.

Narrated by Danischmend as a digression from the main plotline of Scheschian's history, the story is explicitly framed as a reflection on luxury, or more precisely, as a response to the question of what sort of *Polizei* Lili, the memorable mistress of one of a series of Scheschian's forgettable "nameless kings," could have introduced "to prevent luxury . . . from doing any lasting damage" (74). The precise nature of the connection between the story of the happy villagers and the slow decline of Scheschian under the rule of Lili is not immediately apparent, but it eventually becomes clear that we are dealing with two distinct but related case studies on the strategies necessary to render sensuous and imaginative pleasures innocuous. In the case of the *Naturkinder*, the mechanism of control entails nested regulatory systems—social and psychological—that operate in parallel fashion.

At the level of the individual psyche, the goal is to pursue pleasure but avoid the overstimulation that leads to surfeit; as Psammis explains, "Moderation and voluntary abstention are the surest means for avoiding tedium and enervation" (59). This is an essentially psycho-physical argument, the claim being that an excess of pleasure leads to an incapacity to experience any pleasure at all. Eighteenth-century medical discourse is rife with similar claims, the basic idea being that the human being's capacity to respond to stimulation (*Reiz*) is limited and does not regenerate over the course of a life. In the words of the Scottish physician John Brown, who can be seen as the paradigmatic figure in this regard, "Thus every being receives at the beginning of life a certain quantity or energy of it [excitability]."[24] This quantity is used up either more or less quickly depending on the frequency and intensity

24. John Brown, *John Browns System der Heilkunde: Nach der letzteren, vom Verfasser sehr vermehrten und mit Anmerkungen bereicherten Englischen Ausgabe übersetzt, und mit einer kritischen Abhandlung über die Brownischen Grundsätze begleitet*, ed. and trans. C. H. Pfaff (Copenhagen: Prost und Storch, 1796), 5. For a contextualization and discussion, see Philipp Sarasin, *Reizbare Maschinen: Eine Geschichte des Körpers 1765–1914* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), esp. 32–94.

of stimulation. The listless and moody Emir himself offers a textbook example of what happens when one fails to moderate one's desires.

On a societal level, both sensuality and the imagination are managed through a variety of objects, rituals, and institutions that encourage high intensities of pleasure even as they enhance productivity and stabilize social relationships. One example is the temple ceremony in which all fourteen-year-olds pledge to live according to the laws of nature. As part of the ceremony, each individual receives an elegant wooden tablet, made of ebony and engraved in golden letters with the code of Psammis. These are exquisite artifacts, to be sure, but their beauty, coupled with the ceremony itself, fosters a sense of loyalty and equality among members of the community. Rather than a positional commodity that serves to distinguish individuals from one another, these tablets are possessed by all and thus help to intensify social bonds.

The utopia of the *Naturkinder* appears in the novel as a kind of thought experiment, and, as various scholars have pointed out, it should not be taken as the author's final word on the ideal form of social organization.[25] The lively debate between Danischmend and Schach-Gebal's Iman that follows provides ample demonstration of its hypothetical status. In considering this debate, scholars have tended to focus on the self-referentiality of Wieland's utopia, the fact that it weaves into the depiction of utopia a reflection on the conditions of its possibility.[26] Many have taken this aspect of the novel as indicative of Wieland's modernity vis-à-vis the utopian tradition. As Fredric Jameson has made clear, however, this type of self-referentiality is in fact constitutive of the genre from its modern beginings in Thomas More.[27] With the previous discussion of Campe in mind, I would suggest that we approach the complex textual arrangements that surround the *Naturkinder* story from a different perspective, and the Iman's response to Danischmend's story can point us in the proper direction. There can be no doubt, in his opinion, that such stories "can serve no other purpose than to introduce a spirit of weakness into the world, one that scares the citizens of a state away from all arduous exertions and difficult undertakings," such that "no one will any longer be found willing to till the field, to perform hard manual labor, or to risk his life at sea or in defending the state against its enemies" (70). Here we see that the Iman criticizes stories like the one about the uncorrupt lives of the *Naturkinder* with language that is identical to that used in conservative diatribes against luxury. Literature itself or,

25. See, for example, Frank Baudach, *Planeten der Unschuld—Kinder der Natur: Die Naturstandsutopie in der deutschen und westeuropäischen Literatur des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993), 601–4; and Budde, *Aufklärung als Dialog*, 205.

26. As Jürgen Fohrmann writes, "The different levels of fictionality and the interruption of the truth claims of the fiction through commentary enable a manner of writing that can juxtapose to the utopian schemes themselves reflection on the conditions of their possibility." Fohrmann, "Utopie, Reflexion, Erzählung," 25–26.

27. Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2005), 22–41. Jameson focuses on the apparent tension between the first and second books of More's work.

more specifically, a particular kind of speculative literary fantasy now becomes the explicit object of what is at root a debate about the impact of luxury.

Danischmend responds to the attack with a series of counterarguments. The logic and the language are bit convoluted, but his most relevant claim seems to boil down to the following: Even the most seductive images are only images and thus cannot measure up to the pleasures of reality. Ultimately, such representations will inspire people to seek happiness in reality. In a complex society based on inequality (i.e., with a hierarchy of estates and a division of labor), this will be manifest in a desire for wealth and its accompaniments, reputation and power. Such stories will thus foster industry among the populace. This argument of course more or less reiterates the position of the advocates of luxury, who felt that a taste of the pleasures of increased material wealth would generate higher levels of industry.

While the "object" under discussion is a fictional tale, what one finds in the juxtaposition of the views of the Iman and Danischmend are two fundamentally opposing conceptions of how much luxury (in the sense of *Wollust* [sensuality] and *Üppigkeit* [opulence]) can be reconciled with productive activity and progress. Each position had its advocates in the eighteenth century, though the Iman's thinly veiled Spartanism represents a minority view, at least in its stricter variants.[28] Danischmend takes the position that the promise and the experience of pleasure impel people to work, and he suggests that if stories represent scenes of enjoyment they can only help to achieve the aims of government. Danischmend thus seems to offer an unapologetic defense of literary pleasure, one that asserts its unequivocal connection to socially productive outcomes.

From this perspective, it would appear that *Der goldne Spiegel* presents a far more enthusiastic endorsement of literature as a positive form of luxury than does *Robinson der Jüngere*. After all, as we have seen, the motivational value of literature in Campe's novel depends on a carefully controlled dosage administered by the father. In contrast, Danischmend's arguments in the debate with the Iman suggest that he thinks these pleasures are unequivocally positive. They act as a spur for the pursuit of wealth, reputation, social status, and power, because these are seen as the key to happiness in such societies. Literature, and the utopian idyll in particular, thus occupy a structural position in an argument about government that is identical to that occupied by luxury in the claims of its eighteenth-century advocates.

The staging of the *Naturkinder* narrative, however, indicates that the situation is not quite so simple. After all, in terms of both form and content, the story of the Emir is anything but the naive pastoral that Danischmend subsequently defends. The juxtaposition of the enfeebled Emir and the robust village elder tethers any

28. Sekora gives the example of Fielding's *Enquiry into the Cause of the late Increase of Robbers* (1751), where the author argues that "the vast Torrent of Luxury" in recent years has caused workers to abandon themselves to idleness at best, thievery at worst. See John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 92.

direct pleasure taken in the representations of feasts and beautiful slave girls to a consideration of the origins of such a society. In fact, much of the narrative is actually given over to the elder's reflections on government rather than unmediated portrayals of the happy villagers. The story is thus structured as a complex interweaving of moments of unmediated sensual or imaginative pleasure and moments of reflection. To be more concrete, references to "a variety of flower vases in graceful shapes" or "painted wallpapers from the hand of a master" (51) alternate with disquisitions on marriage policy and the most efficient division of labor. To these interruptions of the idyll must also be added the lengthy first-person narrative that relates Psammis's moral philosophy as well as various narrative intrusions and the occasional ironic interjections of the sultan. Finally, the story as a whole is carefully framed within the novel as a digression that responds to a specific question about the appropriate policies through which to neutralize the negative effects of luxury, and it concludes with an intellectual debate regarding the utility of such stories.

In short, even if the narrator (Danischmend) refuses to take the objections of the Iman seriously, the novel itself does. When viewed against the backdrop of the luxury debates, it becomes possible to interpret Wieland's complex narrative structure in terms of an effort to anchor and embed certain forms of pleasure rather than simply to see it, as many scholars have, as a contribution to the history of literary utopia. From this perspective, the self-reflexivity so often mentioned in the scholarship on the novel is more than an indication of Wieland's intellectual sophistication or historical self-awareness: it provides a mechanism for exercising narrative control over the generation of desire, a way of ensuring the appropriate portioning of pleasure. In this respect, Wieland and Campe operate according to the same strategy, with the key distinction, as we will soon see, being the intensity of the dosage rather than the medicine administered. In terms of its framing and the way it interweaves pleasurable scenes and the work of reflection, the *Naturkinder* utopia operates in a manner that responds precisely to the concerns expressed by the Iman: that stories of such blissful and innocent lives will give rise to a "spirit of weakness" (70). What we find in the story is a complex set of explicit reflections on the possibility of regulating luxury that penetrates into the structure of the narrative, a narrative that is itself treated by the interlocutors in the debriefing as a type of luxury good. This impression is only strengthened by Schach-Gebal's decision, upon hearing the conclusion of the tale, to immediately pay Danischmend five hundred bahamd'or for his storytelling efforts.

If, however, literature is presented *and endorsed* as a luxury commodity in the reflections on the story of the Emir, then it appears as a commodity that can be consumed with no ill effects, and this is because it contains within itself a kind of self-limiting mechanism. Readers of the story of the Emir's adventure will never fall victim to the insatiability or enervation that characterizes the Emir himself, and not because the story gives rise to the type of innocent sensuous pleasures enjoyed by the *Naturkinder*.[29] On the contrary, it is because the story incorporates a complex steering mechanism, thereby ensuring that the pleasures obtained are anchored to reason and reflection. In a sense, the story, in its narrative structure, reproduces the rhythms described by the village elder as the secret to happiness—a balance of work and enjoyment.

The Enlightenment Novel as Antifiction

The concerns with regulation that find expression in both novels point to a fundamental tension in their depictions of luxury and its relationship to the fine arts. As far as the plot is concerned, which is characterized by a general insistence on regulation and the prioritization of needs, one finds little in either work to suggest significant qualitative or structural differences among the various forms of luxury, or between luxury in general and the arts more narrowly conceived. The frame narratives, on the other hand, with their emphasis on the stimulation of productive activity, would seem to raise the possibility of precisely such distinctions. Indeed, the novels oscillate uneasily between the conviction, on the one hand, that all of the pleasures born of affluence, including those provided by the fine arts, are identical in character, and the belief, on the other hand, that qualitative distinctions are key.

A belief in the validity of such distinctions becomes more apparent when one shifts the level of analysis to the self-positioning of the novels vis-à-vis competitors in the literary marketplace, what I referred to previously as the level of *generic self-definition*. A full grasp of this facet of the novels, however, requires a brief detour to consider the status of qualitative distinctions in the broader discussion of luxury in the period, and especially as regards questions of construction and design. Luxury advocates like Friedrich Justin Bertuch dedicate themselves to delimiting a sphere of discretionary consumption, which, rather than giving rise to moral corruption and physical enervation, instead serves to integrate "the consumer and the domestic environment into a larger economy of production."[30] The consumption of certain kinds of objects, with certain characteristic features, in other words, is seen to enhance or actualize the physical and intellectual capacities of the individual rather than weaken them.[31]

For Bertuch, this enhancement is directly linked to structure and its interaction with the body, as demonstrated in the following description of a chair included in the first issue of the *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*:

29. In fact, these pleasures are not as innocent as Danischmend suggests. As Frank Baudach has also recognized, the valley of the *Naturkinder*, although it is staged as an idyll, has no shortage of luxury objects: tapestries, vases, sofas, and coffee, just to name a few. See Baudach, *Planeten der Unschuld*, 568–72. What is lacking is both the sway of fashion and the use of wealth as a measure of worth, and this, I would argue, derives from the fact that the provision of pleasure is relegated to a class of slaves. An elaboration of this claim, however, would distract from the main focus of this chapter.

30. Purdy, *Tyranny of Elegance*, 58.

31. Ibid.

> A chair should (1) stand firmly and securely on the floor, (2) not be heavy and, since it is subjected to frequent and often violent movement, certainly be solid and durable as well as (3) comfortable. According to this theory an ordinary chair is most perfect when its body, that is, the seat together with the four legs, creates as much as possible a cube or die, with the surface of the seat never larger than the foundation of the four legs; when the backrest never extends beyond the shoulder blades; the spindles and their pins are wide or high [*seinen Hauptschwingungen und ihre Zapfen breit oder hoch*], the legs not too weak, and all of the major parts straight and not round or bent.

The central criterion of evaluation in this description can be described as utility, but certainly not in the crude sense of basic functionality. As the reference to comfort indicates, a certain degree of pleasure in use is also key, because it is this pleasure and ease that encourage productivity—as well as, it should be noted, enhancing sociability. As we have seen in the work of Woodruff Smith, the category of comfort in the eighteenth century serves as a crucial cognitive framework for the legitimation of certain forms of consumption that might otherwise be condemned, and Bertuch's journal could easily be used to substantiate Smith's argument. A similar preoccupation with the ideal fusion of comfort, functionality, and sociability informs the discussions of other objects in the *Journal*, from travel pillows to writing desks.[32]

Just as significant for the parallel that I want to construct with the novels, however, is the model to which these objects are opposed. In the case of the chair described above, the opposition is between English and French styles, the latter being associated with mere ostentation. Previously in the same article, Bertuch comments on improvements to furniture in recent times by remarking: "Previously ostentation took the place of genuine magnificence, and inappropriate, childish ornamentation was often taken as evidence for beauty and taste."[33] His criticisms of the earlier style emphasize their negative impact on functionality, but this is only part of the story. The subtext of such criticisms is that the alternative to comfortable practicality is not simply ostentation for its own sake but rather ostentation in the service of status. It is precisely the presence of this desire for differentiation through mere externalities that becomes for some commentators the means to distinguish negative from positive luxury in the period, "ostentation" (*Prunk*) from "genuine magnificence" (*wahre Reichheit*) or "luxury in the sevice of vanity" from "luxury in and of itself."[34] A mother's letter to her daughter from the November

32. Purdy, *Tyranny of Elegance,* 61.

33. "Ameublement," 29.

34. Friedrich Benedikt Weber, for example, takes issue with those other economists who define luxury "solely in terms of that striving to distinguish oneself from others on the basis of multifarious and artificial needs for the pleasantries and comforts of life," and goes on himself to distinguish between the categories of "luxury in the service of vanity" (*Eitelkeit im Luxus*) and "luxury in and of itself" (*Luxus selbst an sich*). Weber, *Lehrbuch der politischen Oekonimie,* vol. 1 (Breslau: Carl Friedrich Barth, 1813), 331–32. It is also worth noting in this context that Weber defines the positive variant as "the acquisition of beautifully formed and constructed pieces of furniture, paintings, and other works of art."

1787 issue of the *Journal* provides an example that also demonstrates the fusion of estatist, gendered, and universalist thinking typical of these reflections. The mother describes the "good middle-class housewife" as follows: "Her attire is neat and clean, thoughtfully chosen (certainly not romantic and showy, for this betrays pretentiousness, which is always suspicious in a woman)."[35] "Pretentious" clothing functions solely as a marker of distinction. It neither enhances sociability nor does it signify difference according to the socially sanctioned luxury that continues to be seen by most as necessary in an estate-based society. Rather, it gives expression to an unjustifiable individualized egotism along the lines of Rousseau's *amour-propre*.

Similar efforts to discriminate between harmless or productive and corrupting luxury, as we have seen, inform the frame narratives of Campe's and Wieland's novels. As I mentioned, however, it is against the backdrop of the literary market that we can best see how structural elements in the novels can be assimilated to the kinds of material distinctions stressed by figures like Bertuch. A crucial first step toward understanding this position is to recognize that both novels are conceived and framed as decisive interventions in the sphere of cultural politics. In addition to the similarities already mentioned, *Robinson der Jüngere* and *Der goldne Spiegel* share a further feature: each constitutes an instance of what can be termed antifiction.

I choose this term, to which I will return periodically in subsequent chapters, in order to stress the fact that each novel positions itself in opposition to another type of literary fiction that it posits as inferior. At issue here is a form of self-reflexivity, but not merely in the general sense that has been noted by a number of scholars, and that can be identified with the more common term "metafiction." The point, in other words, is not simply to reiterate the claim that the transformations in literary discourse that occur around 1800 involve strategies of self-reflection and intellectualization.[36] It is that such strategies entail a conscious attempt to differentiate two distinct classes of literary commodities, and that these two classes can be mapped quite precisely onto the coordinates of two distinct classes of luxury goods ("good" and "bad" luxury). The inferior class of "entertainment literature," moreover, is associated by eighteenth-century commentators with the "fictional" both in the sense of being implausible and in the sense of giving rise to unrealistic fantasies about one's place in society. Antifiction is thus intended to serve as a more precise designation for the particular mode of prescriptive and oppositional self-reflexivity that one finds in these novels and that can be identified with a tradition that runs from *Don Quixote* to *Madame Bovary* and beyond. It should also be noted that if, as Patricia Waugh has argued, metafictional works are those that "explore a theory of writing fiction through the practice of writing fiction," then all antifictional works are also metafictional, but the reverse is not necessarily true.[37]

35. "Über weibliche Hauß-Kleidung und häußliches Leben: Zwey Briefe von Tochter und Mutter," *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* 2 (November 1787): 382.

36. My thanks to the anonymous reader of the manuscript for helping me to refine this argument.

37. See Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984), 2.

Campe comments on his antifictional agenda in the preface to the novel, but his motivations receive their most powerful articulation in another text that appeared at roughly the same time. In 1779 he published an essay entitled *Empfindsamkeit und Empfindelei in pädagogischer Hinsicht* (True and False Sentimentalism from a Pedagogical Perspective), which he conceived as a kind of companion piece to *Robinson der Jüngere*. The essay attempts to delineate the distinctions between true and false sentimentalism (*Empfindsamkeit* and *Empfindelei,* respectively), and the dangers of the latter. Revealing a deep hostility to the entertainment literature of the day, Campe refers to the "sweet poison" of sentimental literature and then goes on to remark that one sentimental novel can inflict such harm on the young reader that entire volumes of reasoned prose will be unable to reverse it.

Campe's criticisms of false sentimentalism draw heavily from the register of fashion and luxury. Whereas the genuinely sentimental person appears in "the robes of unaffected natural beauty," the sentimentalizer (*Empfindler*) distinguishes himself through "deliberation [*das Gesuchte*] from head to toe with regard to cut, fold, and trim."[38] Exaggeration and excess are his defining characteristics. The attack also invokes the familiar opposition between natural and artificial needs. Whereas true sentimentalism is always spontaneous and triggered by some naturally occurring event that gives rise to powerful (but never excessive) emotions, the sentimentalizer is at least partly driven by the desire for cheap thrills and social affirmation—the desire, in other words, for distinction. The sentimentalizer remains inactive except in those situations "where someone is looking over his shoulder, and where what matters is showing that one is somebody" (*E*, 11). In a manner identical to the luxury consumer in the more moralistic treatises of the period, he strives to appear rather than to be, and he seeks satisfaction through the artificial stimulation of sensations rather than the genuine pleasures that emerge from real social engagement.[39]

The link between this *Empfindelei* and the literary market is made clear in a short drama that Campe attaches to the essay.[40] "Leonore and Charlotte" relates a brief encounter between two adolescent girls, with Leonore, whose name recalls the heroine of Gottfried August Bürger's poem of 1773, in the role of the sentimentalizer. The story begins with Leonore describing her experience of reading Johann Martin Miller's best-selling novel *Siegwart*. She then goes on to dismiss Charlotte's concerns about their sick neighbor Fritz and to explain that she herself ignored a request to visit another sick neighbor, claiming that she had a headache. When Charlotte (her name a likely reference to the mostly sensible heroine of Goethe's

38. Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Über Empfindsamkeit und Empfindelei in pädagogischer Hinsicht* (Hamburg: Heroldsche Buchhandlung, 1779), 11; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text with the abbreviation *E* and page number.

39. Little has changed. For a discussion, see Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 71–74.

40. The piece is allegedly "von anderer Hand," but no name is given.

Werther) responds incredulously, Leonore replies: "Oh, I couldn't help it; the story is just too beautiful, and I wanted so badly to read to the end" (*E,* 49). Despite her apparent disregard for her fellow human beings, Leonora is later nearly driven to distraction by the alleged cruelty of Charlotte, who captures a butterfly to admire its colors. Charlotte responds to Leonore's paroxyms with the comment "You're out of your mind! You weren't like this before you started reading books" (*E*, 52). The experience of reading sentimental literature, in other words, gives rise to a distorted relationship to the world of nature and one's fellow human beings.

In particular, the individualized experience of reading in isolation—presented here with a predictable gender inflection—constitutes the greatest danger. Early in the conversation Leonore contemptuously identifies the neighbors as "peasant girls" (*Baurmädchen*) and asks Charlotte: "But when have you even seen one of them steal away from the spinning wheel like I did to read a soul-stirring story in solitude?" (*E*, 50). Campe's minidrama thus ascribes to the book two of the central characteristics of the luxury commodity. First, it serves Leonore as a means of social differentiation and group identification, as a means to distinguish herself from the "crude girls" (*plumpe Mädchen*) who have no sense for sentimental literature, and thus to locate herself in an imaginary community of those refined souls who do.[41] And second, it leads to the misguided investment of psychic energy in artifacts (books), or, by a process of transference, in natural objects, one that renders this energy unavailable for real relationships.

What is one to do in the face of the threat posed by this commodified sentimental literature, whose rapid circulation at one point leads Campe to remark: "How they fly about from bedside table to bedside table, from family to family" (40–41)? Somewhat surprisingly, he also looks to literature for a solution. As he explains in the preface to his novel, *Robinson der Jüngere* is conceived as an "antidote" (*Gegengift*) to the poison of *Empfindelei*: it will stimulate the young reader's imagination, but in order to promote productive activity rather than idle daydreaming. Like the comfortable fashions and other luxury goods endorsed by advocates like Bertuch, then, Campe's novel is also designed to "mobilize the individual's productive talents," and to foster sociability, rather than to encourage isolated fantasy play that saps one's energy.[42] And its ability to achieve this aim derives from its particular narrative structure, the fact that it oscillates between moments of intense pleasure and moments of sober reflection. In light of Campe's apparent concern with the uncontrolled circulation of the written word in a commodified literary market, it comes as no suprise that this narrative structure also attempts to build an oral storytelling context into the written artifact.

41. This dual process of distinction and integration has figured prominently in discussions of consumer culture from Veblen to Bourdieu. For an overview, see Peter Corrigan, *The Sociology of Consumption* (London: Sage, 1997), 17–32.

42. Purdy, *Tyranny of Elegance,* 58.

Taken together, then, Campe's essay and his novel draw a distinction between two kinds of literary commodities, both of which are linked to luxury in the sense of discretionary consumption in the service of pleasure, but which are presented as dramatically distinct in terms of their impact. Popular sentimental literature appears as a product that is associated with an overstimulation of both the senses and the imagination as well as ostentation in the service of social distinction. In *Robinson der Jüngere*, on the other hand, we find a product that provides pleasure even as it enhances individual productivity and helps to strengthen social bonds. In these two incarnations, then, literature occupies the poles on either end of the spectrum of positions on luxury.

A similar distinction between two modes of literary production can be discerned in *Der goldne Spiegel*, albeit one that operates on a more subtle level. The key context for understanding Wieland's intervention is the trope, already well established in the eighteenth century, of "Asiatic luxury," and its connection to the genre of the Oriental tale.[43] Wieland's novel owes its founding premise and a number of plot details to *The Arabian Nights*, a book closely associated with the excesses of the Orient, both material and rhetorical. One can point to any number of contemporary commentators who use the descriptions contained in Oriental tales, and *The Arabian Nights* in particular, as a benchmark of sumptuous extravagance.[44] Such tales served as central nodes in a network that included texts, other consumer goods, and commodified entertainments; their descriptions of the magnificent palaces and sumptuous feasts came to represent the epitome of luxurious excess; and both their voluptuous descriptions and their preoccupation with supernatural events, enchantments, and magical objects were viewed—often critically—as a form of rhetorical extravagance.[45] Not the least reason for this skepticism was the degree

43. The key context for this trope is the decline of the Roman Empire, as narrated by Edward Gibbon.

44. A reference from *Hermes, oder Kritisches Jahrbuch der Literatur* refers to the flourishing of Arabian literature "under the dynasty of the Mamluks, whose splendor and luxury is mirrored in the many opulent descriptions of 'One Thousand and One Nights.'" "Tausend und Eine Nacht und ihre Bearbeitungen, historisch-kritisch beleuchtet," *Hermes, oder Kritisches Jahrbuch der Literatur* 33 (1829): 100. Herder, in a description of the decline of the Arabian empire, explains how "the hereditary throne of the Caliphs in Damascus, but even more so in Baghdad, acquired such a radiance that it was as if one were reading a tale from the *Thousand and One Nights*." Johann Gottfried Herder, *Werke in zehn Bänden*, ed. Martin Bollacher (Frankfurt/Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989), 6:839. And Madame de Staël, in a criticism of Napoleon, explains that before being corrupted by him, the military men in France were tough, whereas now they have a taste for opulence. As she puts it, in somewhat puzzling terms, "Truly, for these people there was no series of gradations between the magnificence of the *Thousand and One Nights* and the strict way of life to which they had become accustomed." Anne Germain de Staël, *Betrachtungen über die vornehmsten Begebenheiten der Französischen Revolution*, ed. Herzog von Broglie and Freiherr von Stael, trans. August Wilhelm Schlegel (Heidelberg: Mohr und Winter, 1818), 2:410.

45. In the words of the Scottish philosopher and critic James Beattie, "There is in [the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*] great luxury of description without elegance; and great invention, but nothing that elevates the mind, or touches the heart." Beattie, "On Fable and Romance," *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (London: W. Strathan, 1783), 510. Others were equally skeptical, dismissing the genre of the Oriental tale as "effeminate, insipid, and simply not worth reading." Robert L. Mack, introduction to *Oriental Tales*, by various authors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), xvii.

to which it was implicated in the broader vogue for Oriental fashions and exotic consumer goods: embroidered robes, lavish turban caps, gardens, chairs, cabinets, screens, and elegant tea and coffee tables.[46] Goethe, a lifelong admirer of such tales, described them as being well suited to "Oriental sensuality, a languid tranquility, and a comfortable indolence."[47]

Wieland, although he did as much as any author to popularize the Oriental tale among members of the German reading public, maintained an ambivalent relationship to the genre. He clearly had a predilection for both Oriental tales and fairy tales more generally, returning repeatedly to the themes, motifs, and materials of not only Galland's 1704 translation of *Arabian Nights*, but also the tales of Crébillon and Anthony Hamilton. In the preface to *Dschinnistan*, a collection of original and adapted tales published between 1786 and 1789, he strongly defends the pleasure taken in these depictions of marvelous events. At the same time, however, at least after 1760, his appropriations are shot through with ironic and satirical elements.[48] As was the case with many of his contemporaries, Wieland associated the Orient with boundless excess; in *Agathon* he makes reference to the proverbial "Asiatic prodigality" and explains that the court of Dionysius "rivaled those of Asia in terms of splendor and lavish opulence."[49]

The significance of Wieland's ironic perspective for *Der goldne Spiegel* already becomes apparent in the title of his novel, which evokes the eighteenth-century preoccupation with opulent commodities. It refers, after all, to a *golden* mirror, suggesting not merely basic functionality but the fusion of utility—here in the sense of an accurate and truthful reflection—and exquisite craftsmanship. Mirrors have a long symbolic history, of course, whether as attributes of pride, vanity, or lust, or in the more frequent association with truth and self-knowledge.[50] The tradition of the *Fürstenspiegel*, in which Wieland is self-consciously operating, must be seen as an example of this latter metaphorical usage. In the context of eighteenth-century Oriental tales, mirrors also have a connection to the fantastic and the magical. Wieland would seem to be alluding to this context as well, but only to disappoint the reader, since *Der goldne Spiegel* includes none of the enchanted or magical mirrors one would expect to find in a story that takes its cue from *The Arabian Nights*, or, for

46. Mack, introduction, xii.

47. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Goethes Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden*, ed. Erich Trunz (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1978), 2:145–46.

48. K. Otto Mayer, "Die Feenmärchen bei Wieland," *Vierteljahresschrift für Litteraturgeschichte* 5 (1892): 388–89.

49. Christoph Martin Wieland, *Geschichte des Agathon,* ed. Fritz Martini (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1979), 406, 402. See also Fawzi Guirguis, "Bild und Funktion des Orients in Werken der deutschen Literatur des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts" (PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 1972), 278.

50. Horst S. Daemmrich and Ingrid Daemmrich, *Themes & Motifs in Western Literature: A Handbook* (Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 1987), 182–83. See also August Langen, "Zur Geschichte des Spiegelsymbols in der deutschen Dichtung," in *Gesammelte Studien zur neueren deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, sel. and ed. Karl Richter, Gerhard Sauder, and Gerhard Schmidt-Henkel (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1978), 141–52.

that matter, any other Oriental tale. In this respect Wieland also departs from his predecessor Crébillon, the author who originally introduced the legendary empire of Scheschian or "Chechianea" and who does fill his story, *L'écumoire,* with magical occurrences, remarking of the period in which the story is set: "In these Times Fairies govern'd the Universe."[51] In Wieland's novel one finds no magic or enchantment of any kind, despite the apparent promise of the mirror and the enchanted empire of Scheschian he mentions in the title. In fact, there is no golden mirror at all in the novel, only the novel itself as golden mirror. Wieland's golden mirror is thus an ironic object, one that means both more and less than it appears to mean. To borrow the pithy definition of irony by Linda Hutcheson, it is a (textual) object in which the "said" rubs up against the "unsaid."[52]

Wieland's appropriation of the mirror motif proves paradigmatic for the generally ironic self-positioning of the novel vis-à-vis the generic tradition. And, as with Campe, his alternative to the excessive opulence of the popular Oriental tale is a mode of literary production in the service of individual productivity and greater social transparency. In this case it is Schach-Gebal who occupies the position of consumer, being served up the history of Scheschian at the end of the day in much the same manner as the children in Campe's novel. The tales he is told of the Scheschian kings and the Emir employ the themes and motifs of popular Oriental tales but intersperse these with both ironic asides and lengthy digressions on economic policy, sometimes lifted directly from the cameralistic treatises of the period. The aim of these stories is to overcome both the lethargy caused by the sultan's over-indulgence in luxury consumption and the lack of social transparency that results from the complex social and material mediations that characterize a modern monarchy. The novel makes frequent reference to Schach-Gebal's ignorance of the conditions of his subjects, and the misadventures of the various Scheschian kings are intended to stimulate both reflection and activity in order to remedy the situation.[53]

Scholars who have considered Wieland's interest in Oriental tales or the more general fascination with this genre in the period have mentioned a number of reasons for their popularity, including, as Katharina Mommsen puts it, the appeal of the miraculous and the erotic in an age that "by this point had had more than its fill of Enlightenment."[54] But this reading, at least in the case of *Der goldne Spiegel*,

51. Calude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon, *The Skimmer: Or the History of Tanzai and Neadarne* (London: F. Galike, 1735), 15. In fact, an ironic stance is already adopted by Crébillon, whose narrator explains: "Oriental books are always stuff'd with Trifles and absurd Fables" (ix), and goes on to claim that his translation must thus be much superior to the original, "tho' made from a Language, of which I scarcely understand a Syllable" (xii).

52. Linda Hutcheson, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1994), 12.

53. Whether or not this therapy is effective is another question. Most scholars describe Gebal as unreachable. W. Daniel Wilson writes, for example: "Schach-Gebal is without a doubt a reader who is depicted in a generally negative light, and against whom the implicit reader of the novel is intended to set himself." Wilson, "Intellekt und Herrschaft," 488.

54. Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe und 1001 Nacht* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), XXI. Mommsen actually mentions a variety of reasons for the popularity of these tales: their moral messages, their

would seem to reverse the direction of the calculation. Wieland does not turn to the exotic Orient for relief from an overly rationalized Enlightenment discourse. On the contrary, the exotic Orient is the starting point, and it can be understood as metonymic for an expanding sphere of consumption that threatens to destabilize both the individual and society. Rationalization—whether in the form of systematic irony or episodes of sober reflection—is the response. From this perspective, the work itself, as an adaptation of *The Arabian Nights*, can be interpreted in terms of a domestication of an exotic luxury good, one that poses less of a threat to the consumer than the foreign equivalent. As such, it might be seen to instantiate the consensus view of the political-economic theory of the time, according to which "domestic luxury, that which a country produces within its own borders, is the friend, the promoter of industriousness, of manufacturing and the arts."

Bringing *Der goldne Spiegel* into dialogue with the trope of Asiatic luxury and the surfeit of Oriental tales and fashions that flooded the market in the late eighteenth century also allows us to reframe the various distancing mechanisms built into the novel, to see them as a response to an emerging culture of consumption and as of a piece with those employed by Campe. What Walter Erhart has referred to as Wieland's ideal of a "cold reader" comes into focus as a way to demonstrate one's superiority vis-à-vis an incipient form of commodified mass culture: as such, it represents another variant of the reader-as-rational-consumer outlined in chapter 3.[55] What distinguishes Wieland's approach from that of a number of other authors in the 1770s, and especially Campe, is his playfulness. Wieland's ornate prose, his frequent rhetorical flourishes, and his subtle irony all seem a far cry from Campe's heavy-handed didacticism. Indeed, one might argue that Wieland's highly stylized novel is representative of precisely those distortions of modern civilization that Campe is so keen to counteract. One would not be alone in such a judgment. Erhart has also commented on the long history of debates in the Wieland scholarship regarding the relationship between "enlightened messages" and "aesthetic play" in his works.[56] Wieland was frequently criticized in the nineteenth century for his frivolity and superficiality, criticism that occasionally culminated in his denigration as merely an "author of entertainment literature," as a "lustful Epicurean," even as "un-German."[57] Considered in terms of consumer culture, however, Wieland's irony must be viewed as part of the broader engagement in the novel with questions of regulation and control. As a number of twentieth-century theorists have

highly cultivated characters, and the foundation of their flights of fancy in reason and truth. In all cases, however, the rationalist culture of the Enlightenment appears as the starting point rather than a reaction.

55. Erhart, *Entzweiung und Selbstaufklärung,* 239.

56. Ibid., 4.

57. A summary of this criticism can be found in Jørgensen et al., *Wieland*, 200. One early commentator, for example, explains Wieland's fascination with these tales in terms of the opportunities they offered him for indulging "in a free play of fantasy" and demonstrating his virtuosity through "opulent depictions of overrefined customs." Mayer, "Feenmärchen," 388.

pointed out, irony can be every bit as much a strategy for dealing with commodification as more earnest forms of refusal and resistance. It provides a means for the assertion of authenticity—marking off one's distance from the homogeneity of the commodified world—and of self-control, in that the ironic individual demonstrates his ability to shift between the pleasures of absorption by an object and those of detachment.[58] Irony effects a momentary liberation from the power of things, whether these things are pleasure gardens, paintings, or exotic Oriental tales. With this context in mind, we can understand Wieland's irony as a means for mastering desire, not simply as a strategy for illustrating the relativity of various positions or a demonstration of his rhetorical virtuosity.[59]

The paradox of irony in *Der goldne Spiegel*, from the perspective of the work as consumer good, is its dual status as both ornament and instrument. Wieland's sophisticated irony is what constitutes the novel as luxury in the first place, in the sense that it serves to demonstrate his exquisite craftsmanship as an author. It also serves to distinguish his efforts from cruder alternatives, what he refers to as "nursemaid's tales told in a nursemaid's tone," and thereby make them palatable to the refined readers whom he imagined as his audience.[60] But this very filigree is also what allows the book to serve its didactic purpose, by counteracting the excesses of both rational discourse and sensual description: irony enlivens the one and neutralizes the other. It is, in other words, precisely Wieland's irony that allows him to produce an artifact that achieves a perfect blend of form and function. Irony itself thus constitutes a form of luxury, but one that is not simply layered on top of the object as superficial polish or veneer. On the contrary, Wieland's ironic extravagance actually completes the object and enables maximum utility.

What Good Is a Golden Mirror?

Joseph Vogl has written that in the eighteenth century the term *luxury* "demonstrates a high degree of dispersion across a range of different spheres of knowledge," and that, for this reason, it can be seen as both an "indicator of and a guide to the interpenetration of discourses specific to the knowledge of the Enlightenment."[61] At the center of this "interpenetration of discourses" is, on the one hand,

58. For a relevant discussion that focuses on the twentieth-century consumer, see Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 239.

59. Scholarship on the novel focuses almost exclusively on these latter two facets of Wieland's irony. For a representative example, see Jørgensen et al., *Wieland*, 89.

60. Christoph Martin Wieland, "Vorrede," in *Dschinnistan oder auserlesene Feen- und Geistermärchen, theils neu erfunden, theils neu übersetzt und umgearbeitet* (Winterthur: Bey Heinrich Steiner und Compagnie, 1786), 1:XV. There is a long debate in the scholarship regarding the strength of Wieland's desire to flatter Joseph II with the novel and thereby obtain a position at the imperial court. See Wilson, "Intellekt und Herrschaft."

61. Joseph Vogl, "Luxus," in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, ed. Karlheinz Barck et al. (Stuttgart: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2000), 3:698.

a desiring subject and, on the other, the various objects that constitute the focus of his or her desire. The central concern of Enlightenment knowledge is how to manage the relationship between the two, how to stimulate desire without allowing it to run rampant. The yoking together of literary genre and commodity circulation in both Wieland and Campe can serve as a confirmation of Vogl's claim, by providing concrete examples of the blurred boundaries between literature, luxury, commerce, and reflections on a dynamic but well-tempered subjectivity in the period.

These two novels of Wieland and Campe, however, offer more than just representations of this desiring subject and its relationship to an emerging consumer culture. Both also position themselves as positive luxury goods in the sense that they function as nonessential objects of desire and sources of pleasure whose consumption ultimately fosters the achievement of socially useful ends. In this regard, Campe and Wieland participate in the positive reevaluation of luxury under way in the period. Literature, like the luxury goods described by sympathetic commentators on the topic, is a source both of pleasure and of energizing desires that stimulate industry. The primary distinction between the two authors would seem to reside in their respective judgments regarding the maximum degree of ornamentation and refinement compatible with the aims of social utility. In this regard as well, their positions mirror those of the advocates of good luxury, who often disagreed on where to draw the line between legitimate comfort and excessive opulence.

Most eighteenth-century commentators would have agreed with Krünitz's *Oekonomische Encyklopädie*, which defines luxury in the negative sense as "not merely refinement but an overrefinement."[62] There was, however, by no means any unanimously accepted measure by which to distinguish the two. As we have seen in a range of different discussions, commentators on luxury in the period often attempt to establish conceptual gradations of nonessential consumption. Joseph Sonnenfels makes what in the latter part of the century becomes a standard distinction among three levels of need: "necessity" (*Notwendigkeit*), "comfort" (*Bequemlichkeit*), and "opulence" (*Üppigkeit*).[63] In a similar fashion, Johann Friedrich Pfeiffer distinguishes between "objects of primary necessity," "objects of secondary necessity," and "objects of luxury," which, however, he claims can also be termed "objects of tertiary necessity," since they are the foundation of human cultivation.[64] The *Oekonomische Encyklopädie* itself offers some additional detail on how to identify overrefinement, describing it as follows: "One does not merely consider the simply beautiful, the tasteful; rather, it also has to be magnificent. It not only has to be beautiful as a whole, but must also be beautiful in each of its smallest

62. Heinrich Gustav Flörke, "Luxus," *Oekonomische Encyklopädie oder allgemeines System der Staats-Stadt-Haus- und Landwirthschaft*, ed. D. Johann Georg Krünitz, http://www.kruenitz1.uni-trier.de/.

63. Sonnenfels, "Anfangsgründe der Handlung," 61–63.

64. Johann Friedrich Pfeiffer, "Bedürfnisse," in *Deutsche Encyclopädie oder allgemeines Real-Wörterbuch aller Künste und Wissenschaften* (Frankfurt/Main: Varrentrapp und Wenner, 1778), 3:158–59.

individual elements, such that true good taste often suffers as a result."[65] At issue here is the relationship between part and whole, and, more specifically, the question of whether the individual elements that constitute an object are integrated into the functionality of the whole, or whether they become sources of sensuous pleasure in their own right. Here the author is concerned with clothing and furniture, but this question of coherence also goes to the heart of eighteenth-century discussions of literature and the arts, and it provides a basis for elucidating a key distinction between Campe's and Wieland's conception of the novel as artifact.

Campe's work resembles the utilitarian objects that it celebrates to the extent that it seeks to maximize the degree of clarity characterizing the relationship between structure and function, between the object and its intended use. Just as there is never any doubt regarding the appropriate use of the artifacts constructed by Robinson and Freitag on the island, the precise pedagogical aim of the novel is never in question. To be sure, the structure of the novel, with its back-and-forth between frame and inset narrative, is relatively complex. Each individual element, however, exists in a wholly transparent relationship to Campe's general pedagogical intent. This insistence on a complete functionalization of the narrative provides the context for understanding his decision to jettison large sections of the original as "tedious, superfluous twaddle" (11)—in other words, as unnecessary surplus. Any ornamentation that interferes with utility must be removed.

Campe's approach, however, cannot simply be identified with a bare-bones utilitarianism. The novel still operates within a framework of refinement as a positive category. This can be seen within the narrative in the increasing sophistication and intricacy of the tools and objects available to the protagonist. A telling example can be found in the progressive refinement of Robinson's clothing. Initially, he is forced to make due with a crude costume constructed of llama skins, which is hot and uncomfortable but necessary to protect him from the mosquitoes (fig. 6).

Later both he and Freitag recover sailors' uniforms from a stranded ship, and the pleasure they take in their improved attire is enormous. But it is enormous, first, because of the new clothing's increased functionality, and second, because of the improvement in comfort. Freitag, the father-narrator explains, "jumped with joy, like a child, because he saw himself so transformed, and because he realized how comfortable this clothing was and how well it would protect him from the bite of the mosquitoes" (272). Precisely this emphasis on a limited level of refinement, I would argue, one that combines comfort or the pleasant with maximum functionality, also defines the concept of literature that shapes the novel as a whole. Responsible pleasures are not to be denigrated, but they must be transparently incorporated into a circuit that leads to the fulfillment of what are seen to be genuine needs. A novel is like a well-made but unadorned article of clothing—not only

65. Flörke, "Luxus."

Figure 6. Robinson in skins. Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Robinson der Jüngere: Ein Lesebuch für Kinder* (Braunschweig: Im Verlag der Schulbuchhandlung, 1797). Reproduced courtesy of Bibliothek für Bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung, DIPF Berlin.

in the sense that it is seamlessly integrated into the fabric of a moral existence, but also in terms of its construction, which is intended to ensure that the pleasure it gives never becomes detached from its primary function. Indeed, as is the case with Robinson's new uniform, the pleasure or comfort that it provides actually enhances its functionality by enabling the reader (the wearer in Robinson's case) to undertake life's truly meaningful tasks with greater vigor and efficiency.

Wieland's novel is no less committed than Campe's to a general system of moderation or *Mäßigung*, at both the level of the individual and that of social organization. *Der goldne Spiegel,* in other words, is no less an "antiluxury" treatise than *Robinson der Jüngere*, to the extent that one understands luxury in terms of pernicious excess. Within the context of that general program, however, Wieland's novel indicates a willingness to endorse a higher degree of independence and intensity with regard to the sources of pleasure and fantasy. This basic attitudinal difference maps on to the representation of material culture in the novel, which includes a whole host of positively connoted objects, which, even in the allegedly pastoral world of the *Naturkinder*, embody the highest levels of refinement, from sofas upholstered in linen and the "so soft, so bouncy, so voluptuous ottomans" to the best "coffee from Moka" (55) (fig. 7).

It also maps onto the construction of the novel itself as artifact. In objective terms this means a higher level of ornamentation within the work, in terms of both the relative autonomy of various plot elements and the level of rhetorical flourish that characterizes the narration. In subjective terms this translates into a greater intensity of sensual and imaginative pleasure as well as a less transparent relationship between that pleasure and the didactic aims of the work. Yet Wieland is just as interested in maximum functionality as Campe, and I have tried to show how this very intensity of ornamentation, most notably in the form of irony, is intended to serve this end. Ultimately, both authors are equally committed to an equilibrium-based model that embeds luxury consumption within a larger constellation of attitudes, behaviors, and practices that are considered characteristic of a fully realized humanity. Like so many of the contributors to the debates about luxury in the period, they are attempting to determine just how much and what kinds of individual comfort and pleasure are compatible with an ethically responsible life, an effort that also requires them to situate literature itself on a continuum that runs from necessity to comfort to opulence.

With regard to both plot and narrative structure, then, literature occupies a range of structural positions that mirror the entire array of positions adopted with regard to the luxury commodity more generally. At their best, literature, and the fine arts taken as a whole, can increase the intensity of social exchange and help to solidify social relationships as well as encourage individual productivity. In this incarnation, like luxury as it is understood by its eighteenth-century advocates, the arts are both a consequence of the historical process of human cultivation and the best hope for placing the complex societies that emerge from that process on a firm foundation.

Figure 7. Children of Nature, sitting comfortably. Christoph Martin Wieland, *C. M. Wielands Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 6 (Leipzig: Göschen, 1795). Reproduced courtesy of University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia.

At their worst, the fine arts serve to increase isolation through the redirection of libidinal energies away from the human community toward things and the solipsistic pleasures they can generate, or to degenerate into a means of mere status seeking. The degree to which both of these novels oscillate back and forth between these two poles reveals some of the ambiguities that surround the production and consumption of literature in the period, and this oscillation also reveals a related ambiguity with regard to the question of qualitative distinctions among various types of artifacts.

Interestingly, neither work aligns itself with the fine arts as they are explicitly defined at the level of the plot. For his part, Campe's father-narrator casts the arts in terms of pure, if cultivated pleasure: "those arts that serve only to beautify the objects around us, and to provide our soul with more refined pleasures than the merely animalistic pleasures of the senses" (251). And we have seen how Wieland's novel depicts the fine arts in terms of "ornamentation" and "adornments" in the discussion of Azor. Although they are writing long before Kant's *Critique of Judgment* or Karl Philipp Moritz's aesthetic treatises, both authors acknowledge the claim that a work of art exists "for its own sake" (Wieland uses this precise phrase at one point), but they consciously reject this model for their own works.[66] Instead, they cast these works as artifacts that strive to achieve the optimium blend of the pleasant and the useful. From this perspective, the Enlightenment novel appears to understand itself less as a fine art than as a particular kind of handicraft, one that stakes its legitimacy on the allegedly energizing desires associated with discretionary consumption and the goods that satisfy them. The literary ideal implied by these novels, in other words, can be better understood in the context of a late eighteenth-century engagement with the impact of commercial society than in terms of the Western tradition of literary and art criticism.

This final insight requires us to reconsider some traditional approaches to German Enlightenment literature, especially those that focus on its alleged didacticism. Given the reference to the "pleasant and the useful," one might argue that the rhetorical strategies and narrative structures I have elucidated thus far can also be explained through reference to a conventional Enlightenment belief in the Horatian ideal of *prodesse et delectare*. Campe and Wieland compose their own novels with precisely this aim of combining entertainment and instruction in mind. Indeed, whether implicit or explicit, this ideal is virtually ubiquitous in the literature of the 1770s, to such a degree that its meaning tends to be viewed as self-evident by scholars. There are, however, two key shortcomings associated with the typical use of this maxim in elucidations of eighteenth-century German literature. To begin with, they are ahistorical, in the sense that merely acknowledging

66. Wieland already addresses the nonutilitarian nature of the beautiful in a short essay that appeared in 1775. Christoph Martin Wieland, "Zufällige Gedanken über das Verhältnis des Angenehmen zum Nützlichen," *Teutscher Merkur* 9 (1775): 85–89.

the ubiquitous invocation of a 2,000-year-old aesthetic paradigm does nothing to explain the reasons for its resonance in the period.

As the preceding consideration of both Campe and Wieland has shown, the interest of these authors in finding an appropriate balance between entertainment and instruction, which entails striking a balance between sensuality, the imagination, and reason, is part and parcel of the effort to come to terms with new opportunities for consumption. The establishment of this equilibrium has both a subjective and an objective aspect; in other words, the insistence on the need to balance the faculties of the soul connects with a set of arguments about the objects themselves that strengthen or destabilize this balance. In terms of these object-centered arguments, the idea of didactic literature fails to do justice to the complex and evolving field of material culture within which the literary work, as well as the work of art more generally, seeks to define itself. The digression on Bertuch reveals that questions about the status of the ornamental, or the relationship between part and whole, form and function, prove just as relevant to discussions of manufacturing and trade as to discussions of the fine arts; indeed, these two spheres of activity can be fully understood only in relation to one another, as Campe's and Wieland's implicit and explicit reflections on the artifactual character of art and literature demonstrate. Moreover, reflections on all three of these spheres (trade, manufacturing, and the fine arts) shape ideas not only about the composition of a successful literary work, but also about how to create and maintain a well-ordered modern state, one that incorporates the benefits of luxury and commerce as a source of motivation without falling prey to enervating effects of overrefinement.

The interest in combining entertainment and instruction is thus to be understood as a response to concrete sociohistorical realities, more precisely, to an aestheticization of everyday life that calls into question a whole range of socially relevant distinctions. The compulsive insistence on a balance between utility and pleasure (or ornamentation) reveals nothing so much as a loss of certainty regarding the appropriate relationship between those two categories. While much has been written about how German aesthetic theory around 1800 comes to define autonomous art in terms of the exclusion of considerations of utility, far less attention has been paid to the unease with which commentators react to the incursion of the aesthetic into the realm of the useful arts. Such unease is widespread, however. Campe's entire novel can be read as an object lesson on how to harness aesthetic pleasure without allowing it to overwhelm more fundamental needs. Wieland's Tifan makes the regulation of the aesthetic a specific target of his economic policies. As Danischmend explains, these are intended to prevent manufactured goods from becoming too refined and to prevent luxury from transforming the trades into fine arts. Otherwise, "the useful will be sacrificed to the beautiful, the purposeful to the capriciousness of fashion, the simple delicacy of forms to an exaggerated refinement in the details of composition" (276). The danger of luxury, in other words, is that it leads to an overemphasis on aesthetic concerns and thereby to less useful tools and household goods.

These concerns by no means disappear with the rise of theories of autonomous art. We have seen how they inform Goethe's short essay "Kunst und Handwerk" (Art and Handicraft), which I discussed in chapter 1. In a manner similar to Wieland's Tifan, Goethe takes issue with what he perceives as an inflation of the aesthetic, an inflation that he links explicitly to the spread of mass production, the "machines and manufacturing," which, combined with commerce, have left the world "awash in pretty, delicate, and pleasing things."[67] Another example can be found in the very aesthetic treatises of Karl Philipp Moritz that have been seen as inaugurating the discourse of aesthetic autonomy. Interpretations of Moritz tend to stress his claim that considerations of utility have no place in aesthetic judgments; however, he is equally concerned to prevent aesthetic considerations from entering into our evaluation of useful objects. The pleasure we take in a knife or a clock, he writes, must not derive from any contemplation of its beauty, from "the preciousness of the watch case, or of the handle of the knife."[68] Kant as well, in his *Critique of Judgment*, struggles with this issue, first insisting on the distinction between art and handicraft and then offering a lengthy series of qualifications that might be seen to nullify the original claim.[69]

When viewed together with Wieland and Campe, these three examples suggest a continuity of concern where many scholars have sought to identify a rupture, and they also suggest a correction to those influential readings of the rise of aesthetic autonomy that have cast the aims of art in terms of a relibidinization of an increasingly disenchanted and rationalized lifeworld.[70] The qualms expressed in Wieland's and Campe's novels, as well as those of Goethe and Moritz (to whom we will return in subsequent chapters), can help us to recognize the equally prevalent concern with what can be seen as an early form of commodity aesthetics, suggesting that we read the *theory* of aesthetic autonomy in the fine arts as a response to the *practical reality* of a form of aesthetic autonomy in the sphere of consumer culture. The seepage of untethered sensual and imaginative pleasure into the realm of utility threatens to distract from or even neutralize that very utility: to turn what should serve as practical objects into sources of mere indulgence or into positional commodities. Both the relibidinization approach and the standard interpretation of the Horatian ideal—that rational knowledge must be sweetened in order to be

67. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*, ed. Karl Richter et al., vol. 4, pt. 2 (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1986), 120.

68. Karl Philipp Moritz, *Werke in zwei Bänden*, ed. Heide Hollmer and Albert Meier (Frankfurt/Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1997), 2:944.

69. Kant writes: "Whether in the list of arts and crafts we are to rank watchmakers as artists, and smiths on the contrary as crafstmen requires a standpoint different from that here adopted—one, that is to say, taking account of the proportion of the talents which the business undertaken in either case must necessarily involve. Whether, also, among the so-called seven free arts some may not have been included which should be reckoned as sciences, and many, too, that resemble handicraft, is a matter I will not discuss here." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 133.

70. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (London: Blackwell, 1990), esp 14–28.

made palatable—only get it half-right. As we have seen, Campe's and Wieland's conception of literature takes shape as part of an attempt to libidinize reason *as well as* to beat back a self-destructive form of desire. To paraphrase Albert O. Hirschmann, reading literature, like making money, appears as the countervailing "calm passion" that, in the best circumstances, is able to overcome other passions with more destructive consequences.[71]

The complexity of this twofold task brings us to the second shortcoming of the Horatian perspective on Enlightenment literature, which is that it purports to have solved the case at the very moment at which the most interesting questions arise. Virtually all eighteenth-century authors agree that literature should combine entertainment with instruction, or the pleasant with the useful. Campe makes this explicit on the title page of *Robinson der Jüngere,* where he includes the subtitle "For the Pleasant and Useful Entertainment of Children." As we have seen, however, authors hardly agree on the question of how these two elements should be calibrated. Utility itself is a complex category, not least because it operates on two levels—that of the "useful entertainment" to be combined with the pleasant as well of that of the higher-order utility arising from this combination.

Juxtaposing Campe's and Wieland's novels and placing both against the backdrop of the luxury debates enables us to see that such disagreements constitute one node of a much broader network of concerns pertaining to the emergence of a commercial society. Like a host of authors writing in a more narrowly political-economic vein, Campe and Wieland seek to delineate the limits of productive or at least acceptable pleasure—that is to say, the levels and types of pleasure that can drive self-improvement and yet still be reconciled with an individual's position in what remains a hierarchical society of orders. Each is seeking to steer a course between the Scylla of enervation and the Charybdis of feverish egotism. If the response in both cases can be framed in terms of restraint and self-control (or perhaps, "discipline"), one must also acknowledge that dramatic differences exist with regard to both the level of restraint demanded and the mechanisms—straightforward renunciation versus playful irony—through which it is exercised. Moreover, these reflections on the responsible enjoyment of pleasure, or consumption, have an analogue in reflections on the nature of the artifacts that provide it. Both *Robinson der Jüngere* and *Der goldne Spiegel* not only offer a catalogue of eighteenth-century artifacts and their uses; they also engage in an extended meditation on how these objects can be used to construct subjects.[72]

One of these objects, of course, is the literary work, which both authors self-consciously model on one kind of artifact (a craft object of differing degrees of

71. A. O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests* (1977; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 66.

72. Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 16, 18.

sophistication) and distance emphatically from another kind (rare and exotic goods that serve no purpose beyond irresponsible sensual indulgence or ostentation). As we will see in the remaining chapters, the anxieties regarding literature as luxury artifact continue to circumscribe reflections on its legitimacy in later novels by Novalis and Goethe, despite the fact that they were written in the wake of German idealism and idealist aesthetic theory in particular. The distinction between these novels and those of the 1770s resides in the strategies they employ to ensure the appropriate embedding of desire, and in the levels of pleasure and desire that appear compatible with order. Before turning to these novels, however, we will take a detour through the work of Karl Philipp Moritz. When read together, Moritz's aesthetic writings and his novel *Anton Reiser* provide the period's most compelling challenge to the hierarchical conception of human needs that has played such a key role in our investigation thus far. Understanding this challenge can help us to gain a better sense of what really shifts in aesthetic and poetic theory around 1800, and to see this shift not as a radical break but as a new phase in the engagement with the same commercial society to which Campe and Wieland were also responding.

5

Karl Philipp Moritz and the System of Needs

Both Joachim Heinrich Campe and Christoph Martin Wieland approach the fine arts with considerable ambivalence, an ambivalence that can be traced back to the perceived status of the arts as a form of luxury. While the previous chapter emphasized the relationship between the fine arts and the idea of utility in its broadest sense—both individual and social utility—the analysis also revealed that to view the arts as luxuries is necessarily to situate them within a framework of needs, to ask whether and under what circumstances human beings can be said to *need* art. This question is not quite the same as whether works of art are *useful*. While the latter question moves into the foreground in late eighteenth-century German aesthetic theory and has figured prominently in the scholarship on that theory ever since, approaching the arts from the perspective of needs allows us to sharpen our focus on the interrelationship of art, anthropology, and an emergent consumer culture in the period. Even today, debates about consumer culture tend to pivot on the status of needs, often questioning the very legitimacy of talking about human needs in any substantive sense. As Don Slater has written, "Liberal society and consumer culture do not easily accommodate the concept of need at all, but rather are concerned with preferences and effective demand. . . . They are a matter for the sovereign consumer and cannot be judged by any external standards or by reason."[1] On

1. Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 128.

the other hand, as he and others have pointed out, without "substantive and critical concepts of need," it is hard to imagine any position from which one could criticize the excesses of modern consumerism.[2]

The idea that the sphere of consumption represents an arena of false or merely virtual freedom—indulged in at the expense of more fundamental needs—finds frequent expression in the *Lesewut* debates, often from a conservative perspective. Wieland's *Der goldne Spiegel* (The Golden Mirror), using consumption of the fine arts as the foundation for its criticisms, demonstrates that this idea can be just as effectively employed in the interests of moderate political reform. But both *Der goldne Spiegel* and Campe's *Robinson der Jüngere* (Robinson the Younger) also reveal the complexity and equivocation that characterize attempts to untangle the relationship between consumption, the fine arts, and human needs in late eighteenth-century Germany. In this chapter I want to consider how this same complexity and equivocation shape the novels and theoretical texts written by Karl Philipp Moritz in the 1780s and early 1790s.

Moritz might seem an unlikely candidate for such an analysis. His aesthetic writings, at least, seem anything but equivocal, sacralizing the work of art and elevating the artist to the status of second creator. Scholars like M. H. Abrams and Martha Woodmansee have characterized Moritz's aesthetic theory as a displaced theology, in which, as Abrams puts it, "the Platonic Absolute, and Augustine's God, have been displaced by a human product, the self-sufficient work of art."[3] Once one moves beyond the theoretical essays, however, one cannot help but be struck by Moritz's tendency to renege on this elevation. One striking example is found in the novel *Andreas Hartknopf: Eine Allegorie* (Andreas Hartknopf: An Allegory), which appeared in 1786. In *Hartknopf,* Moritz presents the activities of an exemplary innkeeper named Knapp in a manner that suggests a deeply conflicted attitude toward the arts; his depiction underscores the paradigmatic status of the work of art for understanding God's creation even as it casts doubt on the legitimacy of artistic endeavors. Knapp's selfless acts are described by the narrator as efforts to make improvements in "the great masterpiece of the greatest of all artists," but immediately before the narrator makes this claim Knapp remarks: "Let others concern themselves with the happy people . . . that they might become even happier through beautiful paintings, beautiful statues, and beautiful poems—if only I can contribute in some way to making the unhappy people a little happier in accordance with their nature, through health, contentment, and work."[4] And Knapp goes on to argue that the divine artwork of creation is best served by an effort to eliminate the

2. Ibid., 129. See also Conrad Lodziak, *The Myth of Consumerism* (London: Pluto Books, 2002), 85.

3. M. H. Abrams, "From Addison to Kant: Modern Aesthetics and the Exemplary Art," in *Doing Things with Texts: Essays in Criticism and Critical Theory* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 168.

4. Karl Philipp Moritz, *Werke in zwei Bänden* (Frankfurt/Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1997), 1:564; subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

remaining flaws rather than by the addition of "exquisite new decorations" (566). Here again we see an oscillation, familiar from the previous chapter, between a depiction of the arts as the pinnacle of human achievement, with divine creation as the model, and a conception of the arts as merely ornamental, of dubious value as long as more essential needs have not yet been attended to. Moritz's earlier and much more famous novel, *Anton Reiser*, to which we will turn shortly, casts the arts in an even more ambivalent light, as the focus of a quest for social distinction that leads to an endless series of torments for the hapless protagonist.

This apparent contradiction between Moritz's elevation of the arts in the theoretical writings and the skepticism to which they give rise in both novels can best be resolved, I would argue, by placing these texts in dialogue with the increasingly variegated understanding of human needs that was taking shape in the period. Approaching this topic from the perspective of conceptual history, Margit Szöllösi-Janze has elucidated a shift that occurs over the course of the eighteenth century, a shift captured by the decline of the idea of *Notdurft* and the rise of that of *Bedürfnis*. While the relationship between these two concepts, both of which translate as "need," is complex, one can discern a few key distinctions. As Szöllösi-Janze writes, *Notdurft,* as it is used before the latter part of the century, implies fixed consumption patterns, "a proportional parity differentiated according to one's estate" in the distribution of goods.[5] This usage assumes what Isabel Hull has termed the "subsistence worldview," the idea that economic life is a zero-sum game where any form of excessive behavior or consumption poses a threat to the entire social order.[6] Surplus consumption, to the extent that it is acceptable at all, has to occur within the stable framework of what was considered an estate-appropriate lifestyle.[7]

In contrast, the new concept of need captured by the term *Bedürfnis* reflects a recognition that needs evolve, and that a desire to improve one's condition is innate and can also have a stimulative impact on society as a whole. As we have seen, reflections on needs figure prominently in a wide range of economic and political writings across Europe in the period, but in Germany it is the cameralists, those prolific academics and state officials occupied with the science of good government, who offer the most detailed investigations of the concept.[8] While the topic of needs

5. Margit Szöllösi-Janze, "Notdurft—Bedürfnis: Historische Dimensionen eines Begriffswandels," in *Der lange Weg in den Überflu : Anfänge und Entwicklung der Konsumgesellschaft seit der Vormoderne*, ed. Michael Prinz (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), 155.

6. Isabel Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 158–59; see also Szöllösi-Janze, "Notdurft—Bedürfnis," 159.

7. Torsten Meyer, "Zwischen sozialer Restriktion und ökonomischer Notwendigkeit: 'Konsum' in ökonomischen Texten der Frühen Neuzeit," in *"Luxum und Konsum"—Eine historische Annäherung*, ed. T. Meyer and R. Reith (Münster: Waxmann, 2003), 73.

8. I use the term "cameralists" loosely here to include all German-speaking authors in the period writing on the topic of political economy. Overviews of cameralism can be found in Hull, *Civil Society;* and in Keith Tribe, *Governing Economy: The Reformation of German Economic Discourse, 1750–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

has been addressed at various points in this study, it will be useful for the argument of this chapter to devote some time to a more systematic elucidation of the treatment of the topic in the work of a representative cameralistic author, Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling.[9] Jung-Stilling was of course engaged in a wide range of activities over the course of his life. He was a respected eye surgeon and the author of a famous autobiography—published without his knowledge by Goethe—as well as of several sentimental novels influenced by his Pietist views. Beginning in 1778, however, he had appointments as a professor of economics and cameralism, first in Kaiserslautern, then Heidelberg, and then Marburg, and in the context of his duties he published a number of textbooks on the foundations of what was still a relatively new discipline. Considerations of need (*Bedürfnis*) are at the center of his most important political-economic treatise, *Die Grundlehre der Staatswirtschaft* (Fundamental Principles of the Sciences of State, 1792), where they are presented in the context of a set of typical Enlightenment-era reflections on how rulers can maximize the happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) of their subjects. Jung-Stilling claims that "the business of making people happy" is the "first and most sacred duty" of the regent, and happiness, he continues, "consists in the satisfaction of human needs."[10] According to the author, however, one must be careful to distinguish between true and false needs. True needs are those whose satisfaction heightens both our own perfection (*Vollkommenheit*) and the general welfare, whereas false needs are those that make our conditions or those of others worse. Jung-Stilling then proceeds to make two additional distinctions, which complicate matters even more. First, true needs can be divided into those that are essential (*wesentlich*) and those that are enhancing (*erhöhend*). Second, false needs can be categorized as either opulent (*üppig*), to the extent that they satisfy only "the penchant for pleasure" (24), or selfish (*selbstsüchtig*), if their satisfaction serves individual welfare while being detrimental to the general welfare.

In keeping with the egalitarian aspirations of the Enlightenment, Jung-Stilling's description of essential and enhancing needs presupposes an idea of the self defined in universal rather than estatist terms. And, as the category of "enhancing" needs in particular makes clear, it suggests that all individuals, not just those of a certain estate, have a right to strive to accumulate goods beyond those necessary for mere survival. Other cameralist authors make the point more concrete and illuminate the link between new ways of thinking about need and an expanding world of goods in the period. The prolific and peripatetic Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi, who briefly served as professor of cameralism at the Ritterakademie Theresianum in

9. For a recent discussion of the economic contexts of Jung-Stilling's autobiographical *Lebensgeschichte*, see Richard T. Gray, *Money Matters: Economics and the German Cultural Imagination, 1770–1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 173–229.

10. Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, *Die Grundlehre der Staatswirtschaft* (1792; repr., Königstein/Ts.: Scriptor Verlag, 1978), 20, 21; subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

Vienna, although still using the term *Notdurft*, writes in his *Grundfeste zu der Macht und Glückseligkeit der Staaten* (The Foundations of State Power and Happiness, 1760) of humans' innate desire "to make their lives comfortable and pleasant."[11] An article in the *Deutsche Encyclopädie* (German Encyclopedia) of 1780 describes *Bedürfnisse* as "a potentially nearly infinite quantity of things" that individuals employ in order to "maintain their lives and make them more comfortable as well as for enjoyment."[12] All of these writers can be seen as participating in what Michael Kwass, writing about France, has described as an attempt to naturalize the desire for sensuous pleasure, to separate certain forms of pleasurable consumption from considerations of social status and anchor them instead in "a universal biology of man."[13]

If an acceptance of the inborn human drive to self-improvement figures in the writings of virtually all eighteenth-century cameralists, however, previous chapters have made clear that ideas about the legitimate scope of that drive remain narrowly circumscribed.[14] Jung-Stilling's discussion of essential versus enhancing needs reminds us of the conceptual frameworks of hierarchy and temporal progression that prove crucial to the efforts of even liberal thinkers in their justification of the pursuit of pleasure and self-interest. Like many of his contemporaries, Jung-Stilling stresses that there are circumstances "in which the resources that could serve our enhancement are essential to others, and where we would thus be acting in violation of the rules of the general welfare were we to appropriate these resources for ourselves despite this fact" (25). The implication of this argument—one that continues today to shape debates about consumer culture as well as public funding for the arts—is that, whatever self-improvement we may be able to experience through discretionary consumption, it should be pursued only once the basic requirements of all members of society have been met.

In his efforts to establish a conceptual context for the legitimate production and enjoyment of works of art, Karl Philipp Moritz provides a uniquely nuanced perspective on the tangled relationships among luxury, commerce, the fine arts, and human needs. A careful reading of *Anton Reiser*, together with the aesthetic writings, reveals that he both confirms and complicates the hierarchical conception of needs presented by authors like Jung-Stilling, Wieland, and Campe, all of whom seem to adhere to the idea of a natural and normative trajectory from necessity to luxury. On the one hand, virtually all of the artistic pursuits in *Anton Reiser* can be read in terms of an inversion of this "natural" hierarchy of needs; indeed, as the

11. Qtd. in Szöllösi-Janze, "Notdurft—Bedürfnis," 166.

12. J. F. Pfeiffer, "Bedürfnisse," in *Deutsche Encyclopädie, oder Allgemeines Real-Wörterbuch aller Künste und Wissenschaften* (Frankfurt/Main: Varrentrapp Sohn und Wenner, 1778), 157–59; subsequent references of this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

13. Michael Kwass, "Ordering the World of Goods: Consumer Revolution and the Classification of Objects in Eighteenth-Century France," *Representations* 82 (Spring 2003): 101.

14. Hull, *Civil Society,* 159.

novel progresses Anton's artistic aspirations are increasingly depicted in terms of the false needs and self-indulgent egotism that constitute the focus of critique in so many contributions to the luxury debates. At the same time, however, the novel makes it clear that this inversion results from the neglect of what appears as one of the most basic and natural human needs, the need for social recognition and a sense of membership in a larger social body.

In contrast to these other thinkers, in other words, Moritz can be seen, through his emphasis on a fundamental human need for recognition, to challenge the very notion of a category of basic needs that can be abstracted from intersubjective and cultural contexts. As a consequence, *Anton Reiser* illuminates the degree to which even the most basic forms of consumption are inextricably intertwined with considerations of social identity and individual self-worth.[15] Because of this facet of his work, I would argue that Moritz must also be seen as an early and sophisticated contributor to the theory of recognition, a philosophical paradigm that is generally seen to have its roots in Hegel's social philosophy and has acquired some prominence in the past decade thanks especially to the work of Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser. Of particular interest in this context is how Moritz's novel sheds light on the dialectical relationship between an unmet need for recognition and Anton's misguided turn to the arts, a turn that can in fact be understood as a form of conspicuous consumption. In contrast to conventional notions of conspicuous consumption, however, in this case the performance is not undertaken primarily to make group or class distinctions visible, but rather to stabilize a self threatened by extreme isolation.

Anton Reiser: Culture as Distinction

A cursory reading of Moritz's two novels might lead one to conclude that the impact of the arts on human development ranges from epiphenomenal to highly pernicious. The arts play a decidedly subordinate role in *Andreas Hartknopf,* and in *Anton Reiser*, their primary function is to provide a target for Anton's misguided quest for fame. The latter novel clearly represents Anton's pursuit of a career in the arts as a self-destructive form of egotism, one that demonstrates, in the words of Allo Allkemper, "a hypertrophic self-seeking, which views everything exclusively in relationship to itself."[16] The narrator peppers his descriptions of Anton's experiences with critical references to his desire to stand out, whether in terms of his fantasies of "brilliant objects" (129) or "brilliant dreams and future prospects" (94) or "his inclination towards vanity" (116).[17] Toward the end of the novel the narrator

15. See Slater, *Consumer Culture,* 133–36, for a discussion of how this idea shapes more recent theories of consumer culture.

16. Allo Allkemper, *Ästhetische Lösungen: Studien zu Karl Philipp Moritz* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1990), 154.

17. Karl Philipp Moritz, *Anton Reiser: A Psychological Novel*, trans. Ritchie Robertson (London: Penguin Classics, 1997); references to this translation will be cited parenthetically in the text.

sums up the situation with what appears to be a fairly damning assertion: "To attain fame and applause had always been his supreme desire" (247).[18]

The target of Anton's aspirations is initially the sphere of letters and later the theater. Although some distinctions must be drawn between the precise character of these spheres of interest, the similarities, in terms of motivation as well as impact, would seem to outweigh the differences.[19] The decisive factor in both cases is an overpowering desire for social affirmation achieved through performance. This desire is obvious in the case of the theater, where, thanks to the immediacy and intensity of this affirmation, it finds its most logical outlet: "The applause was not to be too remote—*he wanted to have it immediately*, and, in keeping with the natural inclination to sloth, would have liked to reap without sowing.—And thus, of course, it was the *theater* that appealed most strongly to his ambition. Nowhere else could he expect such *immediate applause* as here" (247). The same desire, however, also figures crucially in Anton's reading addiction. His early encounter with Schnabel's *Insel Felsenburg* (Felsenburg Island), for example, leads to fantasies of playing "a prominent part in the world and drawing to himself a small but increasing circle of people, of whom he should be the centre" (24). Anton's *Theatromanie* can thus be seen as the culmination of a long history of delusions of grandeur, a culmination to the extent that theatrical performance infuses these illusions with the highest possible degree of reality.[20]

Several scholars have adduced Moritz's Pietist upbringing as the key to understanding his skeptical depiction in the novel of both reading and the theater. Wolfgang Martens, for example, traces the critique of the arts in *Anton Reiser* back to the "deep pietistic mistrust of the illusory, the romantic, the fictional, and theatrical."[21] Although one can certainly find a number of parallels between the novel and Pietist treatises on reading and the theater, this approach fails to acknowledge the ubiquity of such criticisms in the period. With regard to reading in particular, *Anton Reiser*

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18. The phrase *Ruhm und Beifall* (fame and applause) appears nine times in the novel in reference to Anton. *Beifall* alone or in other combinations appears sixty-seven times.

19. Cf. Lothar Müller, "Die Erziehung der Gefühle im 18. Jahrhundert," *Der Deutschunterricht* 48.2 (1996): 5–20.

20. The heightened reality of the theater is related, as Müller points out, to the mobilization of the body as a means of expression: "It is not the content of the plays performed that is the decisive factor for [Anton], but rather the stage as a medium for the vivification of script and text through the 'eloquentia corporis.'" Müller, "Erziehung," 18.

21. Wolfgang Martens, "Zur Einschätzung von Romanen und Theater in Moritz' *Anton Reiser*," in *Karl Philipp Moritz und das 18. Jahrhundert: Bestandaufnahmen—Korrekturen—Neuansätze*, ed. Martin Fontius and Anneliese Klingenberg (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1995), 102. A more multidimensional perspective (that also points to the Pietist inheritance) can be found in Christopher J. Wild, "Theorizing Theater Antitheatrically: Karl Philipp Moritz's Theatromania," *Modern Language Notes* 120: 507–38. Pietism has also served as an explanatory framework for other aspects of the novel, such as the emphasis on introspection. As Lothar Müller explains, however, "Self-observation . . . is not a monopoly of the pietistic, religiously motivated attention of the individual to the small and smallest movements of his soul." Müller, *Die kranke Seele und das Licht der Erkenntnis: Karl Philipp Moritz's "Anton Reiser"* (Frankfurt/Main: Athenaeum, 1987), 202.

dramatizes the alleged dangers adduced in virtually all of the treatises on *Lesewut*: excessive vanity, debilitating lethargy, and unrealistic expectations about the world.

There may indeed be a strong Pietist strain in these criticisms; certainly many of these writers approach the problem from a religiously informed perspective. To explain them solely in terms of Pietism, however, is to neglect their entanglement with the most basic questions of European political economy in the period, and especially with the question of human needs. Ultimately, for these commentators, the problem of excessive reading stems from a misunderstanding of one's natural needs. The language of false needs is everywhere in these texts; as one anonymous contributor remarks, *Lesesucht* is a consequence of the fact "that we are no longer the children of nature, but rather protegés of art, . . . that we despise the pleasures that nature offers us, invent artificial needs, and employ artificial means to satisfy them."[22] In many respects, Moritz appears to agree. He also depicts Anton's reading and theatergoing in terms of false needs, and he resorts to the same language of addiction that is a regular feature in the reading debates. As Moritz sums up Anton's plight at one point, "Reading had become as much a necessity to him as opium is for Orientals. . . . When he was without a book, he would have exchanged his coat for a beggar's smock, in order to obtain one" (142).

The reference to an inadvantageous exchange ("his coat for a beggar's smock") also reminds us that reflections on needs are inseparable from the debates about luxury in the period. In fact, notwithstanding the seemingly insuperable poverty that defines Anton's existence, there is much in *Anton Reiser* to connect the protagonist to the discourse of luxury consumption. Throughout the novel, Anton proves incapable of recognizing his needs and acting in a manner that would enable their fulfillment; instead, he chases after unrealistic fantasies of fame and glory. As he reaches adolescence, his sense of self-worth is entirely dependent on the affirmation of others, and he strives to garner this affirmation on the basis of various types of performance. In this respect, despite his notable lack of material possessions, he has a great deal in common with the luxury consumer as typically described by eighteenth-century critics. Precisely this link between self-display and a desire for social acclaim is crucial to negative depictions of luxury and consumer culture in the period; indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, some commentators define luxury as any expenditure on objects that is motivated solely "by the desire to distinguish onesself, or by imaginary pleasures."[23]

In fact, in *Anton Reiser,* the sphere of culture and the arts seems to stand in for the entire panoply of negative characteristics associated in other works with luxury and consumer culture more generally. Reading and the theater are explicitly linked to the economic sphere, whether through the unscrupulous bookseller who

22. "Wie ist dem unter uns eingerissenen Uebel der Lesesucht abzuhelfen?," *Hannöverisches Magazine* 81 (1795): 1288.

23. Pfeiffer, "Bedürfnisse," 158.

capitalizes on Anton's addiction or through the constant references to his inability to economize and prioritize his expenditures. If the previous remark about Anton's willingness to trade his own coat for that of a beggar remains in the realm of the hypothetical, there are many occasions where Anton does in fact forgo basic necessities in order to purchase luxuries, not just books or theater tickets but also the items he needs to be able to participate in his own student theatrical productions. As the narrator observes of the latter case, "Now that he had become a member of the theatrical company, he was misled into much expenditure that exceeded his income—and into many acts of negligence that reduced his income" (245). Referring to Anton's *Lesewut* in particular, Lothar Müller is certainly correct to claim that this "subordination of primary needs to that of reading" is a symptom of a "sick soul" as it is understood in the anthropology of the period.[24] His general insight becomes more precise, however, when one recognizes, first, that the expansion of a sphere of commodified cultural goods is what enables Anton's pathology, and, second, that the phenomenon of inverted needs is central to the discourse of luxury in the late eighteenth century.

Precisely the combination of extravagance in one sphere and privation in all others, it will be remembered, characterizes the luxury consumer. In the words of one commentator condemning those individuals of modest means who imitate the wealthy and powerful, "Such fools would rather sacrifice everything simply in order to put themselves into a position where they can appear to be something which they are not."[25] Anton's incapacity to maintain either his economic or his psychic equilibrium is a recurring theme in the novel, which proves deeply preoccupied with the challenge of self-regulation in a relatively unsupervised market economy. Anton's education, for example, notwithstanding the various patrons who help to fund it, becomes an experiment in entrepreneurial self-management, in which his ability to make due often depends on his ability to economize, or to supplement the charity he receives with other sources of income.

Anton, of course, ultimately fails to rise to this challenge, and in his turn toward the arts as a source of fame, he would seem to embody the claims of the century's most famous theorist of false needs, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. There are in fact so many evocations of Rousseau in *Anton Reiser* (and elsewhere in the writings of Moritz) that one might be tempted to read the novel simply as a literary rewriting of various aspects of Rousseauian philosophy.[26] The autobiographical elements call to mind the *Confessions*, while the basic pedagogical orientation is unthinkable without *Émile*, as is the concern with a runaway imagination caused by reading.

24. Müller, *Die kranke Seele*, 328.

25. *Über Mode und Luxus, oder über die Armuth und ihre Quellen* (Elberfeld: Comptoir für Litteratur, 1799), 11.

26. See, for example, Barbara Vökel, *Karl Philipp Moritz und Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Außenseiter der Aufklärung* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

In terms of the topic of social distinction, however, the texts that offer the most interesting starting point for a comparison are the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750) and the *Discourse on Inequality* (1755). In the latter work the author memorably laments that "the sociable man . . . is capable of living only in the opinions of others; and, so to speak, derives the sentiment of his own existence solely from their judgment."[27]

According to Rousseau, it will be remembered, both arts and letters and the luxury to which they give rise are "born of men's idleness and vanity."[28] Only under the conditions of civilization, where some are relieved of the need to labor constantly for their own subsistence and that of their compatriots, do individuals begin to cultivate the arts and sciences. This occupation not only diverts them from more socially valuable activities; it also leads to an obsession with distinguishing oneself and impressing others. As a result, writes N. J. H. Dent, "inquiry and learning are not pursued for the sake of truth, benefit and edification, but for celebrity and applause."[29] For Rousseau, of course, the human sentiment that grounds this hypocrisy is *amour-propre*, which is "born in society" and "inspires in men all the evils they do to one another."[30]

In many respects, Anton Reiser appears as the epitome of Rousseau's modern man, driven by an ethic of self-display and hopelessly dependent on the opinions of others for his happiness. A purely Rousseauian reading of *Anton Reiser*, however—at least one that proceeds along the lines I have suggested here—ultimately fails to satisfy. The reason is that Moritz goes to great lengths to exculpate his protagonist by clarifying the origins of Anton's pathological need for external affirmation. In other words, despite the often negative view of Anton taken by the narrator, a view that becomes increasingly critical as the novel progresses, Anton's general privation and the vivid depictions of his mistreatment at the hands of others cause him to appear (for the most part) as a victim, and thus elicit sympathy from the reader.[31]

But what, precisely, is he a victim of? The obvious answer, one that we also saw in the novels of Campe and Wieland, is bad parenting. Anton's problems cannot be attributed solely to childhood neglect, however, even if a few passages in the novel suggest as much.[32] A careful reading reveals a much broader pattern of disregard, a pattern that can be located historically in the processes of disembedding

27. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men," in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 187.

28. Rousseau, "Discourse on the Sciences and Arts," in Gourevitch, *The Discourses*, 18.

29. N.J.H. Dent, *A Rousseau Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 96.

30. Rousseau, "Discourse on Inequality," in Gourevitch, *The Discourses*, 221–22.

31. Virtually all recent commentators have emphasized the distinction between narrator and protagonist. A lucid discussion of the narrative situation can be found in Michael Minden, *The German Bildungsroman: Incest and Inheritance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 91–94.

32. The narrator refers in book 3 to "the undeserved paralysis of his soul, resulting from his own parents' disregard of him, that from his childhood on he had not yet managed to overcome " (259).

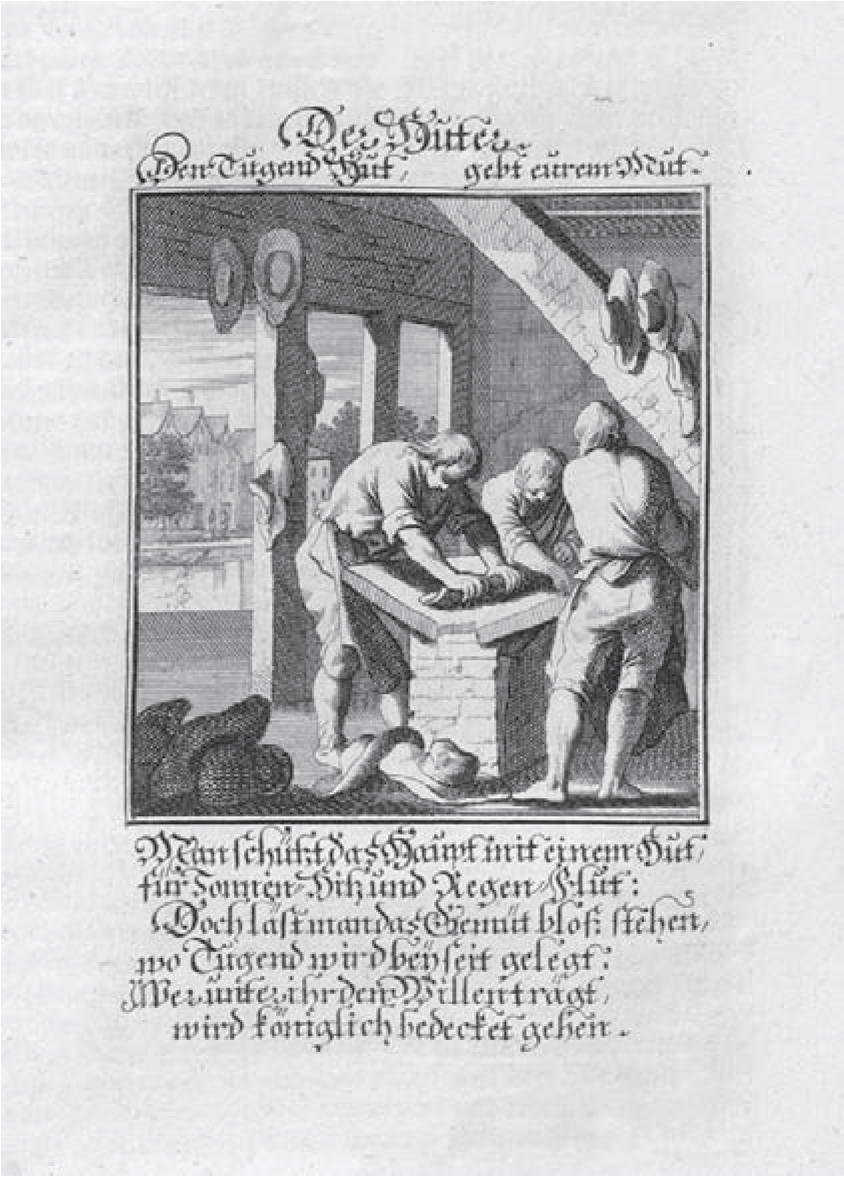

Figure 8. Hatters, with aprons, 1698. Christoph Weigel, *Abbildung Der Gemein-Nützlichen Haupt-Stände* (Regensburg: Weigel, 1698). Photograph from SLUB Dresden / Deutsche Fotothek.

Figure 9. Mid-nineteenth-century boys' choir, with coats. *Berthold Auerbach's deutscher Familienkalender* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1858). Reproduced courtesy of Universität Hildesheim.

characteristic of modernity, the decontextualization of individual life that results from the disintegration of a stable, estate-based society.[33] Anton's recurring feelings of complete isolation, his aversion to "the isolated, incoherent and fragmented character of his existence" (316), although often framed in transhistorical, even metaphysical terms, is nonetheless characteristic of an identifiably modern pathology. Anton's troubles derive from his marginal social status, not marginal in the sense of occupying a low position in the social order but in the sense of having no fixed position at all.

Anton's troubles may begin at home, but as he matures he continues to lack a stable framework of social relations that could provide him with a sense of purpose and restraint as well as positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior. The intensity with which he experiences this lack, as well as its sociohistorical context, becomes clear when one considers just how powerfully he longs for a form

33. I thus agree with Allkemper that Moritz has written "a milieu-theoretical analysis of individual socialization that traces the ultimately determining factors back to social circumstances." Allkemper, *Ästhetische Lösungen,* 50. Whereas he reads this analysis—somewhat anachronistically in my opinion—against the backdrop of the instrumental rationality and reification of a modern bourgeois society, I want to place the emphasis on Moritz's diagnosis and critique of the decline of the corporatist order.

of community that most closely models that of the estate (*Stand*), as, for example, in the case of the choir, which he joins, "not so much to earn money, but rather to acquire a new and honourable status [*ehrenvollen Stand*], of which he had formed such lofty notions even as a hatter's apprentice in Brunswick" (114). The narrator even compares the pleasures of group membership in the choir to those of a wandering acting troupe, thereby suggesting that Anton's later plans are motivated by a similar desire.[34] To these examples one can add Anton's recurring fantasies of becoming a farmer, as well as the numerous positive references to the pleasures of standing "shoulder to shoulder" (*in Reihe und Glied*) with others of his rank."[35] This longing for a clearly defined social identity, it should be noted, also tends to be linked to specific forms of consumption and material culture, such as the "black apron" of the hatter's apprentice (fig. 8), the choir member's "blue coat" (99) (fig. 9), or the "certificate of matriculation" (313) from the university.

Anton Reiser: Culture and Recognition

Anton's craving for social distinction on the basis of performance can thus be read as a consequence of this lack of a well-defined social identity. Borrowing a term from the recent work of Jerrold Seigel, we could say that Anton lacks that sense of "relational self" that could provide him with recognition through a sense of collective identity within the larger social totality.[36] The precariousness of his connection to the collective is made clear by the narrator: "But as it was, his fate was linked to other people's sympathy by such tenuous threads that the apparent loss of one such thread made him fear the destruction of all the others, and he then saw himself in a state where he no longer attracted anyone's notice but considered himself a being that was completely unheeded" (120). The novel does not merely foreground Anton's isolation, however. It also illuminates the dialectical link between this isolation and his artistic endeavors, which represent an effort to compensate for the lack of membership in a social body that could provide a lasting source of self-esteem.[37] As a consequence of this lack, Anton is reduced to seeking an abstract and fleeting form of affirmation in the theater, one that has no organic connection to a deeper sense of self.

Phrased in sociohistorical terms, Moritz's depiction suggests that the disintegration of traditional society actually gives rise to the ethic of self-display so often seen

34. As the narrator explains, "Such a choir has much in common with a wandering troupe of actors, in which people also after a fashion share joy and sorrow, good and bad fortune with one another, which always knits them more closely together" (112).

35. The narrator uses this phrase four times in the novel, once in the context of Anton's apprenticeship, twice in regard to the choir, and once in reference to his enrollment at the University of Erfurt.

36. Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5.

37. Klaus-Detlef Müller provides a relevant elucidation of this dialectical relationship, without, however, focusing on the issue of fame or providing a sociohistorical explanation. Klaus-Detlef Müller, "Karl Philipp Moritz: Lebenswelt und Ästhetik; *Anton Reiser* und das Konzept der Kunstautonomie," *Études Germaniques* 50.7 (1995): 62–63.

to be the cause of this disintegration in the writings of contemporaries. The novel, in other words, inverts the claims of Rousseau and like-minded German commentators, for whom displays of luxury—embodied by the status-seeking craftsmen's daughters who dress above their station—constituted the greatest threat to social stability. In *Anton Reiser*, the desire to stand out appears instead to stem from the loss of that stability.

Moritz is not the only thinker in the period to acknowledge this link, and we can gain a better understanding of his implicit argument, together with its connection to consumer culture, by taking a detour through a work of a later and rather more famous philosopher of recognition. In paragraph 253 of his *Philosophy of Right*, G. W. F. Hegel looks back on developments of the late eighteenth century to provide an explanation for the widely criticized excesses of the commercial classes. The mechanization of work is one cause, he writes, but one should also consider the impact of the decline of the corporation:

> When complaints are made about the luxury of the business classes and their passion for extravagance—which have as the concomitant the creation of a rabble of paupers . . . —we must not forget that besides its other causes (e.g. increasing mechanization of labour) this phenomenon has an ethical ground, as was indicated above. Unless he is a member of an authorized Corporation (and it is only by being authorized that an association becomes a Corporation), an individual is without rank or dignity, his isolation reduces his business to mere self-seeking, and his livelihood and satisfaction are insecure. Consequently, he has to try to gain recognition for himself by giving external proofs of his success in business, and to these proofs no limits can be set. He cannot live in the manner of his class, for no class really exists for him, since in civil society it is only something common to particular persons which really exists, i.e. something legally constituted and recognized. Hence he cannot achieve for himself a way of life proper to his class and less idiosyncratic.[38]

This rather dense paragraph contains a remarkable insight. Hegel essentially posits a causal relationship between the decline of a corporatist social order and conspicuous consumption as a means to social status. According to the argument, the concept of *Standesehre* (translated here as "rank or dignity") had previously fulfilled a limiting function, providing a way of reconciling an individual's legitimate desire for recognition with the needs of the community. The corporation served to mediate between the individual and society as an abstraction. It provided an acceptable (and legally recognized) framework for the pursuit of self-interest, inasmuch the individual pursuit of recognition as *Standesehre* redounded to the greater good by

38. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 153–54. When Hegel speaks of the Corporation in this context, he is primarily referring to the professional guilds.

reinforcing the values of the estate (the *Stand*). And the estates in turn were understood by all as an integral part of a larger social whole; each was, as Hegel puts it in the paragraph immediately preceding, "itself an organ of the entire society," which promoted "the comparatively disinterested end of this whole."[39] To use the terminology of my introduction to this book, the estate provided a reliable framework for the selective indulgence of potentially threatening individual desires, a means of enabling "controlled de-control."

The consequence of this arrangement was a felicitous harmonization of individual and collective interests. Because the estates were seen as contributing to the general welfare, mere membership was enough to garner the degree of respect that Hegel considers crucial to the full realization of one's humanity. As he puts it, "The Corporation member needs no external marks beyond his own membership as evidence of his skill and his regular income and subsistence, i.e. as evidence that he is a somebody."[40] In this state of affairs, there was no need for conspicuous displays of wealth and prestige—no need, in other words, for performative consumption.

In evaluating Hegel's arguments, it is important to recognize that he does not condemn the desire for recognition (or for pleasure, *Genuß*) in and of itself, only its perversion in posttraditional commercial society. In the absence of the limiting framework of the guild or estate, which had provided the individual with a legally recognized sense of self-worth as well as a set of values to restrain and shape his actions ("in the manner of his class"), the free-floating man of commerce has no choice but to pursue recognition through external indications of material success. And this pursuit, according to Hegel, has no natural limit.

Returning now to *Anton Reiser,* we can see that Moritz is concerned with the same phenomenon but is focusing, in a manner typical in late eighteenth-century German literature, on the sphere of culture rather than the sphere of commerce more generally. Rather than the luxury and extravagance of Hegel's commercial classes, in other words, one has Anton's profligacy in relation to his artistic aspirations. Unlike the guild member, who needs "no external marks" to establish his sense of self-worth, Anton can acquire the self-affirmation only by putting himself on display. Even his obsessive reading, as we have seen, includes a strongly performative element, whereby Anton becomes the audience for an imaginary performance of his own sensitivity and noble character. Such performances can provide no more than a momentary satisfaction of his need, however, because they are not embedded in any larger institutional framework, in contrast to the durable sense of self-worth provided by a life in accordance with the values of a legally recognized corporate body. Hence the necessity of constant repetition. With one or two notable exceptions, all of Anton's forays into the sphere of the arts are characterized by a compulsive seriality. When viewed in conjunction with Hegel's text, it becomes

39. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right.*
40. Ibid.

possible to discern the parallels between these performances and the repetitive "external proofs" of success characteristic of the commercial class. Both Anton and the members of this class lack precisely that coherent and self-evident identity that allows the member of the corporation to dispense with such displays.

Thus, if Moritz shares Rousseau's abhorrence for the modern pathology of performative status-seeking, *Anton Reiser* simultaneously demonstrates that there is nothing artificial or inauthentic about the need for social recognition *per se.* When one reads the novel in conjunction with Hegel, it becomes clear that Anton's slavish dependence on the opinion of others, his lack of what the narrator himself describes as an adequate "sense of his own worth" (144) or *Selbstgefühl,* stems from the fact that his legitimate need for recognition is not met. Moreover, the institutions that might meet this need all fail to provide safe harbor; not only his family appears dysfunctional, but also the guilds, the school, and the military. This lack of membership in an intermediary body leaves him isolated and forced to confront society as an abstract totality. As the narrator remarks in a sentence that gives expression to Anton's own thoughts, "He saw himself forced out of all social relationships, where was he to fix his place in this great *dreary* world?" (192).[41]

It should also be clear from the above discussion that analyses of the novel that describe Anton's pathology as a response to a generally oppressive environment fail to identify the precise sociohistorical coordinates that give this response its particular form. Virtually all of the scholarship on the novel has pointed out the compensatory or escapist character of Anton's artistic endeavors, but this observation, in and of itself, simply reiterates a point that the narrator of the novel himself makes in very explicit terms. As Michael Minden has written, "Anton's 'misunderstood inclination towards poetry and acting' is clearly not only the novel's most important single psychological preoccupation, but also its main moral reference point."[42] Much more interesting, in my opinion, is the specific character of the neglect that Anton experiences, and the way in which the novel implicitly casts one variant of the desire for recognition—a form of celebrity that exhibits a clear connection to discourses on luxury consumption—as compensation for the more mediated forms of recognition that would be available in a well-functioning, corporatist social order. Recognizing this opposition can help us to understand better the eighteenth-century precursors of a long line of more recent criticisms of consumerism, a point to which I will return later in the chapter. In the intellectual-historical context of eighteenth-century Europe, it can also help us to grasp Moritz's contribution to reflections in the period on the relationship between art and human needs. In fact,

41. Fritz Breithaupt has also recognized the significance of institutions for the formation of the self in Moritz's work. Whereas he focuses on Moritz's condemnation of the "usurpative force of the instution," however, I want to stress the potentially positive role that can also be discerned in his writings. See Breithaupt, *Der Ich-Effekt des Geldes: Zur Geschichte einer Legitimationsfigur* (Frankfurt/Main: Surhkamp, 2010), 61–70.

42. Minden, *German Bildungsroman,* 97.

only by acknowledging the importance of this relationship can we make sense of the ambivalence with which the fine arts are treated in the text, an ambiguity that has been a significant point of contention in the scholarship on the novel.[43]

If, however, Moritz draws attention to the fundamental significance of social solidarity for human development, this does not mean he rejects the idea of a natural hierarchy of needs. On the contrary, one finds in the novel a number of passages in which Anton's artistic aspirations appear as misguided precisely because they invert this natural hierarchy. As the narrator remarks in book 4, for example, "If ever the charm of the poetic formed a contrast to anyone's life and fortunes, then it did with Reiser, who from childhood onwards was in a sphere that lowered him to the dust, and where he could only attain the poetic by leaping over one stage of education (*Menschenbildung*) without being able to maintain himself at the next stage" (335). The implication of this reference to jumping over "one stage of education" is that true poetry can be written only once a certain level of material (and psychological) well-being has been achieved. Other passages suggest a similar natural progression by depicting negatively connoted artistic or philosophical activities as a displaced fulfillment of more basic material needs. Again, the most notable example occurs in book 4, where Anton's repeatedly attributes his unhappiness, which actually results from his lack of adequate clothing, to more metaphysical problems, because "the lack of linen seemed too petty and too unpoetic a subject" (314).

Even as it confirms this hierarchy, however, the novel also challenges such abstractions by demonstrating that these more basic "natural needs" are inseparable from the need for what Rousseau, in his *Discourse on Inequality,* negatively refers to as "consideration from others."[44] Through its depiction of the self-destructive behavior that results from the absence of a stabilizing web of relations, in other words, *Anton Reiser* suggests that this social need is every bit as important as the more obviously natural requirements of food, clothing, and shelter, and that these allegedly different levels of need are in fact virtually impossible to disentangle. In this context, it is interesting to note that in virtually all of the situations that give rise to or reinforce Anton's craving for distinction, precisely the material culture of food, clothing, and shelter serves as the primary medium through which he experiences

43. The key question is whether Anton's reading, theatergoing, poetic creations, and acting are purely "escapist" in character or whether they must be seen as having a lasting positive effect on his development. Christopher Wild can be seen as representative of the latter view when he writes that "it would be far too reductive, as much of the scholarship has done, to give theater merely an escapist and compensatory function in Anton's psychic economy." Wild, "Theorizing Theater," 525.

44. Rousseau, "Discourse on Inequality," 219. There has been some disagreement in the Rousseau scholarship about whether he unequivocally condemns this desire for consideration or whether he is working with different modalities of the category. The former view can be found in Don Slater, "Affluence and Disorder," in *Consumption: Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences*, ed. Daniel Miller (London: Routledge, 2001), 1:60–63. For an example of the latter, see Frederick Neuhouser, "Rousseau and the Human Drive for Recognition," in *The Philosophy of Recognition: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch and Christopher F. Zurn (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 21–46.

neglect or mistreatment. The humiliating experiences associated with Anton's free meals, for example, offer a striking illustration of the profoundly social context of consumption, serving to illuminate his utter marginalization and detachment from any larger social network. The novel also contains frequent references to Anton's disastrous living conditions—the cramped quarters, unheated rooms, beds on the floor, and pianos functioning as tables—material factors that, far from being simply a source of physical discomfort, prove inseparable from his sense of worthlessness.

It is fashion, however, that plays the most significant role in demonstrating the fallacy of abstracting basic needs from the social frameworks that infuse them with meaning. As the narrator claims early in book 1, not only the "disheartening sense of being despised" that Anton suffers as a result of his parent's attitude toward him makes him unable to approach and befriend other children, but also "his shame at his wretched, dirty, ragged clothes" (10). The lack of appropriate clothing comes up repeatedly in the work, as when Anton is forced to wear an old, red "military coat" to school, where "even the poorest of all was better dressed than he" (103), or when, in book 3, he is nearly prevented from declaiming his poem in honor of the queen for lack of appropriate attire. And it is the new suit, purchased by his guardians, that finally places him on an equal level with his fellow students and thus fills him with "courage and self-confidence" (215).[45]

With the exception, perhaps, of the theater costume Anton wears during his peregrination in book 4, references to fashion in the novel bear little resemblance to the typical condemnations of peasants who dress above their station or women whose rapidly changing tastes threaten their families with financial ruin. Rather, Moritz's understanding of the significance of clothing would seem to reflect the traditional and still prevalent association of fashion with membership in a particular estate, and thus helps to support the claim that Anton is in search of an estate-like form of community.[46] Anton's previously mentioned fascination with the blue coat of the choir members, "[which] did approximate in some degree to priestly garb" (121), offers one example of such a view. From this perspective, Moritz's representations of Anton's clothing can be seen as a challenge to the conventional dividing line between luxury and necessity. By foregrounding the signifying value of all fashion, the novel also makes it clear that Anton's psychic health depends on more than merely having enough to fulfill basic needs; as previously mentioned one can adduce a number of passages where his desire to maintain some sense of self-worth

45. A similar link between clothing and a sense of self-confidence is expressed by Lessing in a letter to his mother dated January 29, 1749. He writes from Berlin: "I could have long since found my footing if my clothing had allowed me to make a better impression. This is simply indispensable in a city, where one mostly relies on one's eyes in the judgment of another human being." This assertion is not intended as a criticism of urban superficiality but rather as a statement of fact. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Gesammelte Werke in Zehn Bänden*, ed. Paul Rilla (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1957), 9:13.

46. Allkemper also connects the representation of clothing to an estate-based order, but he suggests that the link between clothing and social identity is a target of Moritz's social criticism. Allkemper, *Ästhetische Lösungen,* 55–57.

leads him to sacrifice more basic needs in favor of those forms of consumption (reading or theater) that will at least provide him with an occasion to fantasize about social solidarity.

Anton's "*craving for applause*" (257), then, although Moritz presents it as distinctly modern pathology, and although it manifests itself in behaviors that parallel those of the luxury consumer, is by no means a pathology of affluence. It arises as a consequence of privation, both material and psychological, and it appears as the perversion of a legitimate need to experience the degree of self-esteem provided by membership in a larger social body. There is, in other words, an inverse relationship between social embeddedness and the aesthetics of insincere performance.[47] This relationship appears in its most extreme form at the height of Anton's crisis in book 4. Shortly after hearing that the Barzantische theater troupe has left Eisenach for Mühlhausen, Anton, penniless and desperate, wanders toward Mühlhausen. As the narrator explains, "While Reiser spent these days roaming about in a kind of trance, he was entirely dominated by his imagination; for as he was living in the fields, he felt there was nothing left to restrain him, and gave free rein to his imagination" (303). At this moment Anton's utter detachment from all social, institutional, and material frameworks, a detachment underscored by the narrator's reference to the open and empty field, becomes the occasion for his complete withdrawal into the "world of ideas" (304). We have of course seen in previous chapters many other examples of the dangers of a runaway imagination. But what proves remarkable about this particular passage is the fact that at the moment of existential crisis, Anton's withdrawal into a world of fantasy and fiction appears absolutely necessary for his survival: "And this was the only thing that saved him from despair" (304).

There are, to be sure, moments in the novel where what could be termed basic (i.e., physiological) needs simply overpower Anton's desire to maintain a positive and integrated sense of self. The severity of the situations in which this occurs, however, serves only to confirm the degree of deprivation to which human beings must be reduced before the abstract category of basic needs becomes relevant. As Don Slater has written in the context of consumer culture studies, "It is only at the most horrific extremes of inhumanity, economic catastrophe, war, when social and cultural life has broken down . . . that 'basic needs' might emerge."[48]

To recapitulate: *Anton Reiser* suggests that lack, rather than affluence, begets excess, and that a modest level of wealth and pleasure, including the pleasure provided by a sense of social belonging, appears as a prerequisite for rationally self-interested behavior and self-regulating productivity. To the extent that one accepts this interpretation, it would seem to place Moritz, who was, after all, a lifelong Anglophile, closer to the Scottish Enlightenment than to Rousseau. In his acknowledgment of

47. See also Allkemper, *Ästhetische Lösungen,* 158–59.
48. Slater, *Consumer Culture*, 134.

the role of recognition in the development of a stable and autonomous self, Moritz not only anticipates Hegel; he also echoes claims made by authors like Adam Smith and David Hume. Unlike Rousseau, both Smith and Hume saw a concern with the regard of others as the foundation of morality and social solidarity.[49] The desire to be, in Hegel's words, "a somebody" is innate. As Smith puts it in a discussion of the pursuit of riches in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, "From whence . . . arises the emulation which runs through all the different ranks of men and what are the advantages which we propose by that great purpose of human life which we call *bettering our condition*? To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency and appreciation, are all the advantages that we can propose to derive from it."[50] Smith here makes it clear that the refinement of needs in modern societies has as much to do with the desire for recognition as with objective improvements in the quality of human life. The fact that he and Hume acknowledge and validate the role of approbation in individual and societal development helps to foreground the difference between Moritz and Rousseau and points to the larger European context in which Moritz's concern with social distinction and subjectivity should be read.[51]

Corporate Culture: Moritz's Aesthetic Theory

The ambivalent status of the arts as depicted in the novel should thus not be traced back to a general Pietist suspicion of fictionality, but to the fact that the arts become the focus of a displaced need for recognition. In the absence of an institutional framework that can provide a mediating structure for both the expression and the containment of this need, it degenerates into a quest for distinction, and in late eighteenth-century Germany, the arts serve as a key arena for the pursuit of this quest. But, as Moritz's treatment of the arts in the context of his aesthetic writings indicates, under the right circumstances the fine arts also have a significance that far exceeds this quest. The framework of distinction, recognition, and human needs that shapes *Anton Reiser* returns us to the issue with which we began our discussion of Moritz: how to reconcile the elevation of the arts in the aesthetic writings with their denigration elsewhere. An analysis of the novel from the perspective of needs, in other words, raises the question of whether Moritz's aesthetic writings can be situated within a similar framework. If "distinction" is a conceptual category that can be used to describe artistic endeavors in their negative incarnation, can we understand Moritz's aesthetic theory in terms of a model of mediated recognition in the sense described by Hegel?

49. Ibid., 81.

50. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 50–51.

51. This is not to say that there are not important similarities between Smith and Rousseau. For a discussion, see Pierre Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42–47.

Before turning to Moritz's two major essays on beauty, it should be noted that the novel itself raises the possibility of an alternate model of the arts on a few occasions. One example is the recitation Anton has been selected to deliver at the celebration of the queen's birthday. As a result of Anton's early successes as a student, he is chosen to recite a poem in the queen's honor. Events leading up to the celebration provide him with an opportunity to meet "the grandest inhabitants of the town," who receive him "with the most gratifying displays of politeness" (225). The narrator goes on to point out how valuable this exposure to the world was for Anton's self-confidence and self-cultivation. As in the case of Hegel's corporation, but at the level of civil society as a whole, here ambition and the desire for recognition are integrated into a self-regulating mechanism in such a way that they serve the best interests of both the individual and society. In this case, Anton's desire for approbation does not lead to misguided and excessive behavior. Instead, this desire stimulates industry, focuses and regulates the passions, and encourages sociability, thereby allowing him to become aware of his membership in a larger human community, even as it helps to overcome artificial divisions in that community.

This homeostatic model of a beneficial and self-regulating engagement with the arts stands in sharp contrast to the serial character of Anton's reading addiction and theater mania, and to much of his artistic production as well. The positive model ultimately proves unstable in the novel, however, and from the perspective of an estatist framework its failure might be attributed to the fact that it operates at a level that is too general (civil society as a whole). At any rate, this instability appears to confirm that the arts in the novel are seen to have more in common with the insincere performativity of luxury consumption than with the identity-anchoring function of the corporation. In the case of Anton's later friendship with Neries, the role of literature is reduced to precisely this form of self-aggrandizing performance, as the two young men seek to outdo each other in contrived demonstrations of their refined literary sensibilities.

A different perspective on the arts, however, emerges from the aesthetic writings. One can read these texts as an attempt to establish a model of aesthetic production and consumption that channels the desire for recognition in much the same way as Hegel's corporation, with regard to both the producer and the consumer. That is to say, rather than serving merely as a means for the gratification of the isolated ego (whether by generating pleasurable fantasies for the observer or applause for the artist), the true artwork mediates recognition through commitment to a principle of unquestionable social value, which itself gives rise to a sense of community, much in the way that membership in Hegel's corporation provides both community and a sense of contributing to the general welfare.

Hegel's man of commerce, because of his isolation, must seek recognition "by giving external proofs of his success in business," whereas the member of the corporation receives his sense of self-worth simply by living in an estate-appropriate manner (*Standesgemäß*), which helps to strengthen the estate in turn. In a similar manner, the connoisseur of art in Moritz's first major treatise on beauty, "Versuch einer Vereinigung aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften unter dem Begriff *des in sich Vollendeten*" (An Attempt to Unify All the Fine Arts and Sciences under the Concept of *That Which Is Complete in Itself,* 1785), dedicates himself to the advocacy of the beautiful: "Hence our impatient demand that everyone pay homage to what we have recognized as beautiful. . . . We intercede on its behalf, we exert ourselves to win it admirers."[52] Membership in what we might call the "art connoisseurs" estate gives rise to a kind of *Standesehre* that impels dedication to the cause of beauty. The connoisseur seeks from his fellow humans recognition of the beautiful, not recognition of himself. But his dedication both furthers the cause of beauty and enhances the pleasure of the individual in his own membership: "The more generally it is recognized and admired as beautiful, the more valuable it becomes in our eyes as well" (98). As in the two positive examples from *Anton Reiser*, what one finds here is a model based on a self-regulating equilibrium, in which a commitment to the institution of art, rather than an unmediated desire for distinction, provides the basis for an indirect but more durable sense of self-worth.

Equally significantly, we learn from Moritz that the pleasure granted by the contemplation of the artwork stems from the merging of the finite self with a larger entity. Moritz explains the phenomenon as follows: "While the beautiful draws our contemplation entirely to itself, it draws our contemplation away from ourselves for a while and causes us to seem to lose ourselves in the beautiful object" (96). This temporary self-forgetting, however, also enhances the feeling of selfhood on another level by enabling participation in "a kind of higher existence" (96). The dedication to this higher form of existence, moreover, appears directly opposed to the desire for individual distinction. To the extent that one places the artwork in a "special relation" to oneself, Moritz explains, the pleasure received is characterized by "a supplement that is lost on others" (946). Moritz's language here suggests that this "impure" form of pleasure entails a desire for more than one's fellow man ("a supplement"), an effort to use the artwork as a means to separate oneself from others. Along the same lines, he also makes the claim that an imperfect artwork is one that allows the observer to maintain an instrumental attitude: "If the inner purposiveness in a beautiful work of art is not great enough to cause me to forget its external purpose, I naturally ask, What is the whole work of art good for?" (99). The implication of this question is that the observer wants to know what good it is, how can he use it to his immediate advantage. The opposing ideal of mediated recognition, in contrast, channels the need for affirmation into a limiting framework.

An identical model of mediated recognition can also be seen in the description of the artist in the essay. Here as well, according to Moritz, the primary commitment

52. Karl Philipp Moritz, "An Attempt to Unify All the Fine Arts and Sciences under the Concept of *That Which Is Complete in Itself*," trans. Elliott Schreiber, *PMLA* 127.1 (2011): 98; subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

must be to beauty, understood as "the greatest inner purposiveness or perfection" of the work (100). Whatever social approbation one receives is always mediated through this commitment; as Moritz puts it, "Even the most beautiful applause cannot be hunted down but can only be garnered along the way" (99). As is the case with Hegel, it is not the desire for acknowledgment in and of itself that is condemned, but only its unmediated, abstract form—that is to say, the quest for the fulfillment of this desire as a primary aim.

In approaching Moritz's essay from this perspective of mediated recognition, I am taking a somewhat different tack than much of the recent scholarship on his aesthetic theory. This scholarship has tended to stress the objective qualities of the work of art, Moritz's efforts to distinguish between its inner purposiveness and the external purpose of useful objects such as knives and clocks. One could certainly place this aspect of the essay into dialogue with the novel, by identifying, for example, the extent to which the autonomous work of art, which rejects any form of external validation, appears as an alternative to Anton Reiser's heteronomously defined self. There are a number of excellent studies that elucidate the parallels between artworks as self-sufficient totalities and either the self-regulating subject or the self-regulating state.[53]

My sense, however, is that the emphasis on the particularities of the art object in these analyses has drawn attention away from the fact that the impact of the work, its capacity to shape the behavior of the subject, remains at the center of Moritz's theory. This assertion holds for the observer, and even more so with regard to the artist, whose status occupies Moritz for at least half of the essay but who has been largely excluded from recent investigations thereof. For Moritz, beauty is not simply defined in terms of an objective self-sufficiency understood as the absence or even the negation of external utility, as a number of scholars have claimed.[54] Such a claim does not go far enough, because beauty is also defined positively as that which channels the desire for subjective utility, in the sense of the egoism of the observer and the creating artist, toward socially useful ends through a process of

53. Such interpretations are of course quite common in scholarship on Schiller and German romanticism. With regard to Moritz in particular, Fritz Breithaupt, for example, elucidates the link between the self and the artwork in *Der Ich-Effekt des Geldes*. A discussion of the parallel to the ideal state can be found in Jonathan Hess, *Reconstituting the Body Politic: Enlightenment, Public Culture, and the Invention of Aesthetic Autonomy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999). Most recently, Elliott Schreiber has advanced the intriguing claim that Moritz's conception of the autonomous artwork "provides a model for understanding the autonomy of modern value spheres in general, . . . what I shall refer to as institutions." Schreiber, *The Topography of Modernity: Karl Philipp Moritz and the Space of Autonomy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 2.

54. Hess and others have described this renunciation of utility as Moritz's primary innovation. See Hess, *Reconstituting the Body Politic,* 155–73. These scholars certainly acknowledge that the advocacy of "disinterestedness" is in the service of a higher form of interest (or utility), but they situate this interest in a different conceptual framework than I do. Hess, for example, focuses on absolutist politics, and Martha Woodmansee emphasizes the literary market. See Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 11–34.

mediation. Ultimately, Moritz, however innovative his model of the inner purposiveness of the work, nonetheless remains focused on issues of pleasure (albeit of a disinterested kind) and on the management of desire. When one keeps this facet of the essay in mind, it becomes clear that we should be wary of overstating the difference between the affective aesthetics (*Wirkungsästhetik*) of the Enlightenment and the "objective" aesthetics of German idealism, at least in the case of Moritz. Affect remains crucial in his theory; the key shift vis-à-vis earlier theories is that in this case art, rather than merely arousing emotions and desire on the part of the observer, becomes a means to contain and harness them.[55]

One can thus view the advocacy of the beautiful in these essays as analogous to the concept of *Standesehre* in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right.* But Moritz's quest for a way to channel the artist's legitimate desire for recognition also resembles the reflections of some of his more immediate contemporaries. In a sense, Moritz's admonitions to the artist engage with the central dilemma of cameralism as described by Isabel Hull: how to harness self-interested desire, seen as the source of productivity and achievement, while at the same time restraining it and placing it in the service of the general welfare.[56] In "Versuch einer Vereinigung," Moritz does not completely exclude the quest for fame from the sphere of motivation. Instead, he writes: "Relegate even the sweetest thought of fame to the shadows, so that it only *occasionally emerges* to enliven you when your mind begins to slacken" (99; my emphasis). Thus the desire for fame is not denigrated; rather, true fame, which is even cast in quasi-estatist terms as the "applause of the noble" (99), can be achieved only indirectly, by dedicating oneself entirely to the perfection of the work.

An appeal to honor also constituted one of the ways in which cameralists sought to modulate the allegedly innate human desire for comfort and advantage, which had its origins in the love of self that they deemed both dangerous and necessary to the improvement of society.[57] For the cameralists, concern with reputation—that is to say, with "consideration on the part of others"—was less the source of excessive individualism than a means to regulate it. Already in the early eighteenth century, Christian Wolff had claimed: "Everyone is bound to do their utmost to make themselves worthy of honor and thus also to provide evidence of such goodness as they possess and to seek the friendship of everyone."[58] For both Wolff and later cameralists, the idea of honor provided a powerful mechanism through which to

55. Hess makes a compelling case for the political origins of Moritz's aesthetic theory, claiming that autonomous art becomes a "repository for the political ambitions that could find no articulation within the structure of an absolutist body politic." Hess, *Reconstituting the Body Politic,* 172. I think this is a plausible claim, but I also think that it understates Moritz's preoccupation with a more general perversion of individual self-interest in an emerging consumer society (one in which the policies of the absolutist state are certainly a key factor).

56. Hull, *Civil Society,* 159–72.

57. Ibid., 169.

58. Christian Wolff, *Vernünftige Gedanken von dem gesellschaftlichen Leben der Menschen und insonderheit dem gemeinen Wesen* (1721; repr., Frankfurt/Main: Athenäum, 1971), 398.

reconcile self-interest, or *Selbstliebe,* with collective values.[59] Jung-Stilling actually defines honor precisely in terms of the individual's obligation to society: "The very concept of honor illuminates the fact that only those actions can be dishonorable which redound to the detriment of the state."[60] The key point for an illumination of Moritz is that these appeals also rely on the notion of an indirect mechanism. One cannot achieve honor simply by seeking it out; one must, according to Jung-Stilling, pursue perfection as the primary goal: "When we discover certain perfections in someone, we experience a form of love that is termed esteem. . . . As long as we are . . . not selfish, believe ourselves to be perfect, as long as our self-love is well ordered, then the perfections of others will spur us to emulate them, we . . . will seek . . . to become in our own sphere of activity that which they are in theirs; thus originates the drive to perfect ourselves, the reasonable love of honor."[61] As in the aesthetic writings of Moritz, then, Jung-Stilling also presents a model of productive activity in which the desire for recognition (here captured by the notion of a "reasonable love of honor") is filtered through a commitment to perfection.

Although he describes honor in very general terms in the previous quotation, one can also discern in Jung-Stilling's reference to the individual's "sphere of activity" the adumbration of a social division of labor. The remainder of this section in his *Lehrbuch der Staatspolizeiwissenschaft* (Coursebook on the Science of State Policy, 1788) deals in greater detail with the intricacies of "the honor of one's estate" (*Standesehre*), "the honor of birth" (*Geburstehre*), and "the honor of a people" (*Volksehre*). This emphasis on demarcating particular societal groups mirrors the more exclusivist conception of honor that emerged in the discussion of Moritz and Hegel, and it can help us to understand more fully the degree to which the novel and the aesthetic writings illuminate different facets of the same problem. While one can certainly view the theory of aesthetic autonomy as conceived by Moritz as an alternative to the aesthetics of distinction that dominates the novel, *Anton Reiser* also makes it clear that one paradigm cannot simply be substituted for the other in any give case. Phrased more concretely, the model of the arts presented in Moritz's aesthetic essays does not actually offer a solution to Anton's particular dilemma. On the contrary, the novel indicates that Anton's artistic aspirations are fundamentally misguided, and that his need for recognition, which becomes perverted into a "*craving for applause*," would be best addressed through a reform of existing social institutions and a better integration of the individual into those institutions.

The novel, in other words, leads one to conclude that Anton would not have developed into a great artist under any circumstances.[62] Rather than narrating the

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59. Hull, *Civil Society,* 169.

60. Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, *Lehrbuch der Staats-Polizei-Wissenschaft* (Leipzig: In der Weidmannischen Buchhandlung, 1788), 277–78.

61. Ibid., 252.

62. In the scholarship on the novel, this fact tends to be treated under the rubric of a critique of dilettantism. See, for example, Müller, *Die kranke Seele*, 365.

story of an artistic talent crushed by an oppressive environment, Moritz, particularly in the fourth book, seems most concerned with establishing criteria for the exclusion of those who do not belong to the artists' estate. This question of how to determine membership in this group, or any group for that matter, is crucial. This is because in a posttraditional society, birth no longer provides adequate justification for one's position in the social order. That Moritz approaches this determination from a cameralist-like perspective of self-regulation and rational choice becomes clear in a comment from the preface to book 4 of *Anton Reiser*. As the narrator explains, "*This fourth part of Anton Reiser's biography, like the earlier ones, really treats of the important question to what extent a young person is able to choose his vocation*" (268). Anton proves wholly incapable of making the right choice; he inverts what Moritz considers the appropriate relationship between cause and effect, pursuing a self-destructive career in the arts as the result of a displaced need for self-affirmation, rather than because of an "artistic impulse" (*echten Kunstrieb*, 291).

The very notion of an impulse or drive (*Trieb*) to produce art, however, reveals a further tension in Moritz's reflections on the arts. On the one hand, genuine art can come into existence and be truly appreciated only in the absence of need. As Klaus-Detlef Müller explains in a paraphrase of the narrator himself, Anton's theatrical efforts fail because they have their origins "in an immediate survival need."[63] Passages from Moritz's own *Andreas Hartknopf* and the comments of numerous other authors make clear, however, that on a societal level such a position renders any and all artistic endeavors suspect until more basic needs have been met, including, it would seem, the need for recognition. Moritz attempts to resolve this tension, I would argue, by invoking the notion of an "artistic impulse" or an "artistic need" (*Kunstbedürfnis*, 340) or an essential drive to create, thereby delimiting a sphere of artistic production that has legitimacy even in the absence of such widespread prosperity. The existence of such an innate drive is already hinted at in the novel—for example, in the opposition between Anton and Iffland, who, according to the narrator, is "born to be an actor (111).[64] But this particular aspect of his theory comes into focus most clearly in his second major treatise on the arts, "Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen" (On the Formative Imitation of the Beautiful, 1788). Whereas, in his "Versuch einer Vereinigung" Moritz admonishes the artist to choose the integrity of the work over the acclaim of the public, the later essay appears to remove art entirely from the realm of intentional activity.[65] Through

63. Müller, "Lebenswelt und Ästhetik," 63.

64. Müller also mentions this opposition, and he has also identified the dialectical relationship between art as represented in the novel and art in the theoretical writings. His elucidation of the "social-historical genesis of the concept of autonomy" (Müller, "Lebenswelt und Ästhetik," 69) has influenced my own thinking about the topic, but he does not pursue the question of recognition specifically, nor is he interested in broader debates about luxury or consumer culture in the period.

65. While I recognize that Moritz's aesthetic theory undergoes an evolution between "Versuch einer Vereinigung" (1785) and "Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen" (1788), I would not go

what can be described as an involuntarization of aesthetic production, Moritz brings it into the sphere of the physiological, and thus of the absolutely necessary.[66] The artist, according to Moritz, is a "natural" genius whose perceptual apparatus (*Organisation*) is so "finely woven" that, when confronted with certain situations, he cannot help but create: "If an organization of this finer tissue (*Gewebe*), at the stage of its full development, should now, in the dim apprehension of its active power, conceive of a whole that entered it through neither the eye nor the ear, through neither the imagination nor thinking, then a disturbance must necessarily arise, an disequilibrium between the various capacities in play that will last until they return to a state of balance."[67] Moritz does not characterize the artist exclusively in these terms, but in this passage and elsewhere in the essay, no choice between self-interested creation and dedication to the work ever has to be made, since production is a reflex response to a stimulus from the natural world. The total absence of any reference to subjective agency in the above citation, the emphasis on a disequilibrium, and the need to restore a balance underscore the involuntary character of the creative process.

Interestingly, one can identify a similar involuntarization of the appreciation of the beautiful in the essay. In this case the capacity that allows for appreciation is "taste or the capacity for sentiment" (*Empfindungsfähigkeit*), a capacity that is unevenly distributed among individuals. Moritz's main objective in this discussion is to point out the danger that those with a highly developed form of this capacity will mistake it for "formative power" (*Bildungskraft*) and thus attempt to be artists themselves. On one level, this distinction provides an anthropological backdrop for understanding Anton Reiser's failure as an artist. Moritz's reflections, however, also have a broader implication—namely, that the ability to appreciate beauty is an innate endowment rather than a learned response. Any intentional desire to cultivate good taste would seem to be a guarantee of failure: "If we consider the beautiful not for its own sake but rather in order to first cultivate our taste for it, then through this very effort our consideration already takes on a self-interested quality" (982–83). Taste, he continues, like beauty itself, belongs to that category of things

as far as Chenxi Tang, who claims that Moritz's aesthetic thought undergoes a "remarkable transformation" between the two essays. In terms of their preoccupation with egoism, at least, the two essays demonstrate a significant continuity of concern. See Tang, "Figurations of Universal History in Moritz: From Freemasonry to Aesthetics," in *Karl Philip Moritz: Signaturen des Denkens,* ed. Anthony Krupp (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 301.

66. Edgar Landgraf has also written on this involuntarization, but he approaches it within the context of a reflection on the origins of the idea of a self-constituting (and thus divided) subjectivity. See Landgraf, "Self-Forming Selves: Autonomy and Artistic Creativity in Goethe and Moritz," *Goethe Yearbook* 11 (2002): 159–76.

67. Moritz, *Werke*, 2:972; subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text. For a different perspective on the anthropological origins of this notion of *Gewebe,* and especially the link between artistic production and theories of procreation, see Barbara Thums, "Das feine Gewebe der Organisation: Zum Verhältnis von Biologie und Ästhetik in Karl Philipp Moritz' Kunstautonomie- und Ornamenttheorie," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 49.2 (2004): 237–60.

"the need for which arises only through their possession" (983). Thus, in one sense, his description places art squarely in the realm of the superfluous; of both taste and beauty he claims: "[They number] among those things for which we have no need as long as we are unfamiliar with them" (983). But this holds only for those who are born without what we might call, for lack of a better term, the "beauty gene." For a select few, the reaction to beauty occurs at the level of basic drives, and for those individuals, far from being superfluous, the need for beauty is so essential as to be woven into the very fiber of their being.

Moritz's description of both artist and art connoisseur in these lines can also be understood in terms of the new conceptualization of needs that was gaining traction in the period. Parallel to the previously discussed hierarchization of universal human needs found in writings such as those of the cameralists, one also finds assertions regarding the specificity of individual needs as a basis for a harmonious social order.[68] Such assertions tend to presume a highly differentiated society of individuals, whose reciprocal fulfillment of each other's unique needs gives rise to a self-regulating system.[69] As C. F. Flögel explains in his *Geschichte des menschlichen Verstandes* (The History of Human Reason, 1778), "Human beings must be very different in accordance with their different needs. For these needs determine the way in which they act in the world and are the reason that each estate finds individuals who are well suited to it and the circumstances of which are appropriate to those individuals in turn."[70] With this further reconceptualization in mind, it becomes possible to see Moritz's characterization of the artist, as well as the art connoisseur, in terms of an effort to establish their legitimacy within such a diverse system.

In viewing Moritz's representation of the arts from the perspective of needs, my primary aim has been to demonstrate how his writings engage with a broader set of eighteenth-century reflections on political economy and especially with debates about luxury. This interpretation is intended, among other things, to provide a broader intellectual-historical context for understanding his works than has been the case in much of the existing scholarship. The idea that Moritz's conception of aesthetic autonomy constitutes a response to the rise of commerce, for example, has been eloquently advanced by Martha Woodmansee, whose own analysis of "Versuch einer Vereinigung" constructs a compelling argument in support of her more general claim that "'art was invented to stem the commercialization of literature."[71]

68. This argument can in fact be traced back to antiquity. In *The Republic*, Socrates justifies the division of labor by remarking: "No two people are born exactly alike. There are innate differences which fit them for different occupations." Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. with an introduction and notes by Francis McDonald Cornford (London: Oxford, 1941), 56.

69. See Szöllozi-Janze, "Notdurft—Bedürfnis," 170–71.

70. C. F. Flögel, *Geschichte des menschlichen Verstandes* (1788; repr., Frankfurt/Main: Athenäum, 1972), 206.

71. Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market,* 4.

Woodmansee's interpretation focuses on the rapidly expanding book market and presents Moritz's theory as a defensive strategy, one designed to provide a justification for a particular conception of art in the face of widespread public indifference to it.[72] Such an interpretation, however, while accurate as far as it goes, construes the problems addressed in the essay too narrowly. To explain Moritz's theory exclusively in terms of elite artists' fears about the viability of their works fails to acknowledge just how widespread the concern with egotism and social disintegration was in the period, and just how closely commentators linked the arts to other forms of consumer culture. As the writings of Rousseau, Hegel, and the cameralists demonstrate, questions about the desire for distinction and the legitimacy of egotistical behavior go to the heart of late eighteenth-century political economy.

One way to place *Anton Reiser* in this broader framework is to read it as a depiction of two competing models of self-interest, which are reflected in the novel as two types of ambition. The first, negatively connoted type corresponds to Anton's delusions of grandeur as they relate to both his reading and his theatrical aspirations. The key components of this type include not only the desire for social distinction achieved on the basis of performance, but also a disjuncture between that performance and the material reality of one's everyday life. In the novel, this form of ambition is associated with the sphere of the arts as consumer culture, but in a manner that suggests that the distinction between production and consumption proves less important that the basic orientation toward self-display and celebrity and the consequent inability to structure one's existence as a balanced, well-functioning economy. Whether Anton is reading or writing, attending plays or performing them, the motivation tends to be the same. Thus, although the rise of a sphere of consumer culture is crucial to the action of the novel, the key conceptual category for understanding this action in an eighteenth-century context is not consumption per se, but rather luxury, understood in its negative incarnation as extravagant behavior stimulated by fantasy and undertaken out of a desire for prestige or sensuous pleasure.

We will return in a moment to the compensatory character of this behavior in Anton's case, but first it is necessary to elucidate the other model of ambition that finds expression in the novel. While this positively inflected form of ambition remains largely implicit in the work, it is nonetheless alluded to in various ways, most noticeably through the numerous positive representations of Anton's intelligence and motivation to learn, as well as through the recurring lament regarding Anton's lack of a positive sense of self ("lack of self-confidence," 260) and the highly negative depictions of the Quietists' efforts toward total self-abnegation. In fact, the novel suggests that their efforts can actually be subsumed under the first, more destructive category of ambition, inasmuch as they degenerate into a competition

72. As she puts it, "Moritz makes a triumph of defeat and 'rescues' art from determination by the market." Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market,* 33.

undertaken with an eye toward increasing one's status in the community of believers. The positive form of ambition, in contrast, can be understood under the rubric of recognition: it is based on a legitimate desire to have the opportunity to develop one's general capacities as a human being as well as one's unique talents—and to have those talents recognized by others. To be legitimate, however, this desire must be subject to a realistic assessment of those talents and one's position in society. In other words, it constitutes a form of rational or enlightened self-interest.

Interestingly, in the novel, those passages that present successfully realized instances of this form of ambition also relate to the sphere of arts and letters. As previously mentioned, Anton's education can be read as an exercise in entrepreneurship with upward mobility as the goal. Anton ultimately fails to achieve this aim, but there is a short period of time in which he appears to have a chance at success. He manages to supplement the grants and charity of others with the money he receives as a member of the choir as well as through his tutoring efforts. In the case of the tutoring business, moreover, his successful artistic endeavors function as a kind of advertising, bringing in additional clients interested in benefiting from his talents. This is perhaps the moment where the novel comes closest to integrating artistic pursuits into a stable model of economic self-management based on rational egoism. In this case the legitimate goal appears to be that of a university career, and at least some of his artistic endeavors appear as an effective means to achieve that end.

When one keeps these two models of ambition from the novel in mind, characterizations of the theory of aesthetic autonomy in terms of a straightforward opposition between art and commerce become less compelling. To the extent that one accepts the dichotomy between distinction and recognition that I have developed in the preceding analysis, the arts do not appear as an alternative to the commercial sphere; instead, they reproduce the structure of that sphere *in its entirety*—above all, the presence within that structure of different modalities of self-interest. On the one hand, negative depictions of the arts, in both *Anton Reiser* and the aesthetic writings, evoke in various ways the eighteenth-century debates about luxury and all of its undesirable consequences—under consideration here is what we might term a "bad" commercialism. On the other hand, as a comparison with both the cameralist authors and Hegel makes clear, Moritz's positive depictions of the arts are just as indebted to the political-economic discourse of the period, and can be understood as a form of "good," regulated commercialism.

Thus one finds in Moritz's writings not an opposition between the instrumental rationality of the economic sphere and the noncoercive, nonalienated sphere of the arts; one finds instead a dichotomy between two models of artistic activity that corresponds to an identical dichotomy between two models of economic activity. It should be noted, moreover, that both of these models presuppose a modern, commercial economy supported by a complex division of labor and a group of producers operating according to some form of self-interest. In other words, one cannot simply map the dichotomy onto an opposition between feudal and capitalist systems.[73] Through his specific elucidation of these two models and their relationship to human needs, moreover, Moritz also provides a key to understanding how these two forms of activity interrelate, and in this regard he goes beyond his cameralist contemporaries. Cameralist authors tend to present an abstract hierarchy of *material* needs that proceeds from necessities to comforts to luxuries, and that is allegedly based on the natural evolution of humankind. While Moritz seems to accept this hierarchy in theory, he also provides, by illuminating the social and cultural framework that shapes even basic needs, a framework for distinguishing between bad luxury and genuine art. The former represents the fulfillment of a displaced need and is thus compensatory, whereas genuine art appears as the product of a paradoxical convergence of abundance and absolute physiological necessity.

In addition to allowing us to reconnect the works of Moritz to the concrete discursive contexts out of which they emerged, a consideration of *Anton Reiser* and the aesthetic writings can also help us to better understand the origins as well as some of the blind spots of much more recent criticisms of consumer culture. Most significantly, perhaps, the role played by the theater in the novel (and by fantasy more generally) illuminates the centrality of the notion of theatricality or fictionality to virtually all attacks on consumer society. Marx's reflections on money in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 offer one of the earliest and most celebrated examples. If I am a man of wealth, Marx explains, "what I *am* and *am capable* of is by no means determined by my individuality."[74] An ugly individual, he continues, can buy beautiful women, and money can enable the lame to walk.[75]

Marx's critique is directed toward the capitalist in this case, but it nonetheless elucidates what becomes a central feature in later discussions of the typical consumer—namely, that identity acquired through the consumption of commodities is a deceptive or self-deceiving performance that has no connection to one's essential being. Twentieth-century theorists writing in the Western Marxist tradition have tended to stress the compensatory nature of this performance—that is to say, its origins in a displacement or perversion of human needs. Erich Fromm, for example, echoing Marx, writes that "consuming is essentially the satisfaction of artificially stimulated phantasies, a phantasy performance alienated from our concrete, real selves."[76] In *An Essay on Liberation*, Herbert Marcuse claims that in late capitalism, "self-determination, the autonomy of the individual, asserts itself

73. When Moritz criticizes "the prevailing idea of the *useful*" and laments the fact that questions of human cultivation play no role "in the organization of the estates and the professions," he is not calling the modern division of labor per se into question, only its deformation. See Allkemper, *Ästhetische Lösungen,* 68.

74. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 103.

75. Ibid.

76. Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1955), 134.

in the right to race his automobile, to handle his power tools, to buy a gun."[77] Marcuse's description not only points to the simulated character of "commodified" self-determination, but also hints at its connection to an aggressive desire to derive self-esteem from domination, a desire that is not unrelated to eighteenth-century concerns with self-aggrandizement, even if expressions of those concerns lack the psychoanalytic conceptual framework that informs Marcuse's work.

Don Slater sums up the basic orientation of what can be termed the Western Marxist tradition as follows: "Consumer culture is basically a lot of false compensations for the fundamental loss of human authenticity in the form of praxis."[78] In many respects, this sentence applies equally well as an analysis of *Anton Reiser*. Again one is reminded of a central tenet of this study: that an emerging cultural marketplace was crucial for the development of a critical vocabulary that in later incarnations tends to focus on commodities more narrowly understood. But Moritz, writing in a preindustrial context, also helps to illuminate the tendency of many Marxist writers to understand the two key terms in Slater's summary—*authenticity* and *praxis*—too narrowly, as referring to a particular kind of labor. As the philosopher Axel Honneth has pointed out in his own work on recognition, Marxist discourse is often based on the assumption that one can move directly from economic structures to forms of social consciousness—alienated labor or commodity exchange lead inexorably to the reification of all human relationships.[79] The flip side of this approach is that any recovery of authenticity must focus exclusively on the elimination of alienated labor, whereas the wide range of other intersubjective and institutional contexts that frame this relationship tends to be viewed as derivative.

In *Anton Reiser,* however, Moritz presents the ideals of authenticity and nonalienated praxis in terms of a broader context of social integration, in which intersubjective relationships and institutional frameworks prove to be more important than the precise character of the labor undertaken. The novel, moreover, by illuminating the symbolic value of even the most basic acts of consumption, reminds us that consumption is always and everywhere a crucial form of praxis, and a key source of identity. The same point is made in the aesthetic writings, where the production *and* the reception of the artwork are intimately linked to a sense of selfhood, even though the aesthetic experience itself is described in terms of a temporary loss of self.

In this regard, Moritz anticipates the approach of more recent work in cultural studies, which has focused on the agency of the consumer and on consumption as a legitimate and even oppositional form of self-definition and self-expression. But

77. Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 12.
78. Slater, *Consumer Culture,* 125.
79. See Axel Honneth, interview by Krassimir Stjanov, *Eurozine*, December 18, 2006, http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-12-08-honneth-de.html.

his writings also reveal a common shortcoming of these approaches. While Moritz's writings indicate that consumption is always a symbolic act, his critique of theatricality nonetheless sets up a distinction between what can be termed authentic and inauthentic or compensatory forms of consumption. And the key category against which authenticity is measured—a criterion that is often implicit in the Marxist tradition even if it is not always explicitly discussed—is that of totality.

What Moritz helps us to recognize is that the key factor for the establishment of a stable identity concerns neither the precise character of production nor that of consumption practices, but rather how they relate to one another and how both are embedded within a framework of intersubjective and institutional relations.[80] By the same token, however, his works testify to a crucial historical transformation in this relationship. The world of *Anton Reiser* is characterized, on the one hand, by the decline of traditional structures of community and, on the other hand, by an expansion of opportunities for discretionary consumption, especially reading and the theater. In the absence of these structures of community, which had provided a meaningful framework under which both production and consumption were subsumed, the sphere of discretionary consumption takes on an expanded role in the search for meaningful, self-affirming activity. Zygmunt Bauman, in his *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1992), offers a description of a similar process, albeit one that dates its occurrence at a much later historical moment. Bauman explains: "The same central role which was played by work, by job, occupation, profession in modern society, is now performed in contemporary society, by consumer choice."[81] Bauman's remark echoes the concerns of late eighteenth-century critics of excessive luxury, even if his own perspective on consumer culture is substantially more nuanced. But the eighteenth-century context also helps make it clear that the real source of concern is not that consumption constitutes identity, which has always been the case, but that the connection between production and consumption practices has been severed, with the consequence that identity loses its substance and becomes theatrical. Moritz provides a unique perspective on the role played by commodified culture as a source of this detachment as well on how the theory of autonomous art, understood here in terms of an institutional autonomy, is conceived as a response to it.

One final question remains to be considered—namely, that of how Moritz's reflections on art, commerce, and luxury relate to his own novelistic practice in *Anton Reiser*. The generic status of *Anton Reiser* as a "psychological novel" has been a central preoccupation of the secondary literature, and it would be impossible in these brief concluding comments to address the entire range of reflections on this aspect of the work. There is, however, one general area of agreement in more recent

80. For an comprehensive and insightful elucidation of Moritz as an institutional theorist, see Schreiber, *Topography of Modernity*.

81. Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 223.

scholarship on the topic that can provide a starting point for answering our question. A number of commentators have argued that *Anton Reiser*, despite its subtitle, is not really a novel at all, at least not in the sense that eighteenth-century readers understood the genre. Christof Wingertzahn, for example, points out that in choosing to make the genre attribution explicit, Moritz "polemically places himself in opposition to the tradition of the romantic [*des Romanhaften*]."[82] And Wolfgang Martens offers an elucidation of the nature of Moritz's alternative to this tradition, explaining that his abstract and unmetaphorical language "in fact [corresponds] more closely to the level of reflection found in a scientific treatise than to that of a novel."[83] Others have stressed the significance of the case study, and of the medical-anthropological narratives of the *Magazin für Erfahrungsseelenkunde* more generally, as the key discursive context for understanding *Anton Reiser.*[84] What makes such claims relevant to the current analysis is the fact that they allow us to discern a structural parallel between Moritz's work and the novels of both Campe and Wieland. As is the case with the latter two authors, one can understand Moritz's novel not merely as an example of metafiction—what Hans Joachim Schrimpf refers to as "the fully transparent novel, which analyzes itself as such"—but, like *Der goldne Spiegel* and *Robinson der Jüngere,* as a kind of antifiction.[85] *Anton Reiser* is a fictional work (autobiographical elements notwithstanding) that understands itself as a critique of and an alternative to an allegedly inferior kind of fictionality, one that is similarly associated with excess, a dangerous egotism, and a hyperactive imagination. Moritz himself states his general position on the publication of new novels explicitly in the preface to the *Magazin*, where he explains: "What reassures me in my decision to increase the present deluge of books with yet another new one is this: that I am delivering facts, and not any moral claptrap, not a novel, and not a comedy, nor am I reproducing excerpts from any other books."[86] The most compelling evidence for the antifictional stance of *Anton Reiser*, however, is to be found in the novel itself, both in its explicit skepticism toward any and all "romantic [*romanhafte*] Ideas" and in its employment of a narrative structure that repeatedly disappoints expectations of adventure and demands instead reflection and analysis from the reader.[87]

82. Christof Wingertzahn, "Überblickskommentar," in *Karl Philipp Moritz: Sämtliche Werke; Kritische und kommentierte Ausgabe*, ed. Anneliese Klingenberg et al., vol. 1, pt. 2 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006), 588.

83. Wolfgang Martens, afterword to *Anton Reiser: Ein psychologischer Roman,* by Karl Philipp Moritz (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986), 564.

84. See, for example, Christiane Frey, "Der Fall *Anton Reiser*: Vom Paratext zum Paradigma," in *Karl Philipp Moritz: Signaturen des Denkens*, ed. Anthony Krupp (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 19–43; as well as Andreas Gailus, "A Case of Individuality: Karl Philipp Moritz and the *Magazine for Empirical Psychology*," *New German Critique* 79 (2000): 67–105.

85. Hans Joachim Schrimpf, "Anton Reiser," in *Der deutsche Roman vom Barock bis zur Gegenwart: Struktur und Geschichte*, ed. Benno von Wiese (A. Bagel: Düsseldorf, 1963), 1:106.

86. Moritz, *Werke*, 1:811. See also Allkemper, *Ästhetische Lösungen,* 34.

87. Forms of the word *romanhaft* appear twenty times in the novel. For a discussion of the narrative means of fostering analytical detachment on the part of the reader, see Martens, "Nachwort," 563–64.

Here as well we can see a parallel to Campe and Wieland, and all three extend their condemnation of the fictional *qua das Romanhafte* beyond literature to encompass an entire sphere of cultural artifacts and entertainments, a sphere explicitly linked at various points with commodity exchange. As is the case with Campe and Wieland's novels, moreover, *Anton Reiser* sets up a duality between this sphere and the realm of genuine art, which, in the novel at least, is implied to exist in a realm beyond need. Finally, Moritz's novel also proves similar in positioning itself as external to both of these models. In other words, the novel casts itself neither as entertainment commodity nor as artwork: it condemns art in its role as pernicious luxury but does not align itself with the emphatic conception of art articulated in the aesthetic writings. The novel presents itself instead as a third option. One way to think about this third option is in terms of the medical discourse addressed in the scholarship mentioned previously. *Anton Reiser* understands itself as a type of scientific inquiry in the service of the public good. Pursuing the analogy with Campe and Wieland one step further, however, I would argue for an even more radical position—namely, that the novel establishes its legitimacy not simply through the appropriation of scientific language, but by aligning itself with a particular kind of scientific artifact whose legitimacy is unassailable: the experimental apparatus. This is, after all, the conclusion to which we are led if we take seriously the claims of scholars like Lothar Müller, who describes the narrative in terms of a "microscopy of misery."[88] Microscopy requires a microscope, and it requires but a small step to view the novel in these terms. Through isolation, magnification, and a razor-sharp focus, the narrative reveals relationships of causality invisible to the naked eye, what Moritz elsewhere refers to as the "inner mechanisms" of the soul.[89]

To be sure, in the case of Moritz, this artifactual aspect of the novel has a less straightforward connection to the fashions of the literary marketplace than is the case with either *Der goldne Spiegel* or *Robinson der Jüngere.* As I hope to have shown, however, there is a great deal of evidence, both in *Anton Reiser* and elsewhere, of Moritz's ambivalence toward a commercialized cultural sphere. In addition, on a more general level, as numerous commentaries in the period make clear, science and luxury are seen to represent two closely intertwined paths on the same historical trajectory of human self-cultivation. The sciences are seen as a consequence of luxury, in the sense of being a product of human development and increased affluence.[90] Unsurprisingly, the young Rousseau offers a critical variant of this view:

88. Müller, *Die kranke Seele,* 255. While I do not cite him directly, the inspiration for this insight comes from Nico Pethes, *Zöglinge der Natur: Der literarische Menschenversuch des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2007).

89. Moritz, *Werke*, 1:800. The German term is *das innere Triebwerk*.

90. Isaak Iselin is one of many examples; he captures the basic idea in his *Versuch über die gesellige Ordnung* when he writes: "For as long as those human beings who tilled the soil were unable to plant and harvest more food than they required for their own maintenance, the inhabitants of the earth must have constituted a very poor kind of society; during this time the pleasantries of life, the arts, the sciences,

"From riches are born luxury and idleness; from luxury arose the fine Arts, and from idleness the Sciences."[91] Others, however, as we have seen in the discussion of luxury editions, stress the advancement of science and technology as a positive or patriotic employment of social wealth ("riches"), and thus a form of luxury that is not luxury (in the sense of empty ostentation).[92] Approaching *Anton Reiser* from this perspective, one can make the case that Moritz betrays the same reluctance we saw in Campe and Wieland, a reluctance to identify his novel as art or even as "literature" in the sense of a self-justifying source of pleasure. And one can also plausibly claim that this reluctance, which stems from a suspicion that such entertainment is an unnecessary or possibly dangerous extravagance, similarly leads him to assimilate the literary work to a particular kind of material object whose merit is beyond question: the scientific apparatus. Only with the emergence of romanticism, as the discussion of Novalis in the next chapter will demonstrate, do we find an emphatic endorsement of the novel as both luxury and fine art, although we will also see that the continuities between *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (Henry of Ofterdingen) and the previous works we have examined are at least as significant as any rupture.

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everything that adorns and enobles human existence would not have arisen among them; during this time they would not have been able to rise above the state of barbarism, or at least not by much. " Iselin, *Versuch über die gesellige Ordnung* (Basel: Bey Johann Schweigbauer, 1772), 5–6.

91. Rousseau, "First Discourse: Replies," in Gourevitch, *The Discourses,* 45. Rousseau felt misunderstood, and there was something of a debate in the period about the exact relationship between science and luxury, a debate that, from our perspective, can be seen as turning on the question of whether luxury is defined as essentially identical to "civilization" or whether it is seen to represent one mode of expending the social wealth generated by the civilizing process. See, for example, Edward Gibbon, *Essay on the Study of Literature* (London: T. Becket and P. A. De Hondt, 1764), 161; Oliver Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World, or, Letters from a Chinese Philosopher Residing in London to his Friends in the East* (London: R. Whiston et al., 1790), 2:86.

92. The most succinct statement on the topic is probably that of Oliver Goldsmith, who writes: "The *sciences* are not the cause of *luxury*, but its consequence, and this destroyer thus brings with it an antidote, which resists the virulence of its own poison." Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World,* 86.

6

Products of the Imagination

Mining, Luxury, and the Romantic Artist in Novalis's Heinrich von Ofterdingen

The representation of mining in German romantic literature can be read as an allegory of romantic aesthetics, and nowhere more so than in the work of Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), himself a graduate of the Freiberg mining academy. On this much all commentators agree. Theodore Ziolkowski describes the mine as "the image of the soul" and links it generally to the ideas of descent and inwardness so prevalent in romantic literature.[1] Herbert Uerlings takes a similar tack in a recent interpretation of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (Henry von Ofterdingen): "Mining serves Novalis as no other material does as a means to illustrate different dimensions of the idea that 'the mysterious path leads inward—but it also leads back out again.'"[2] In other interpretations of Novalis's novel as well, mining figures as a root metaphor for understanding the romantic project, whether in terms of a psychoanalytically inflected journey of self-discovery, as an example of a

1. Theodore Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 18, 28.

2. Herbert Uerlings, "Novalis in Freiberg: Die Romantisierung des Bergbaus—Mit einem Blick auf Tiecks *Runenberg* und E. T. A. Hoffmanns *Bergwerke zu Falun,*" *Aurora* 56 (1996): 64. Although Uerlings's interpretation bears a number of similarities to Ziolkowski's, it is in fact conceived in opposition to the latter's institutional approach, which Uerlings feels glosses over the tension between the aesthetic agendas and professional responsibilities of the romantic authors.

nonalienated relationship between humans and nature, or as an anticipation of an early romantic social utopia that seeks to recombine science, art, and religion into a harmonious and integrated totality of human existence.[3] Dennis Mahoney deftly summarizes the general view as follows: "Thus mining becomes for Novalis a symbol of romantic art, in which the fusion of old and new as well as the discovery and excavation of that which had been shadowy and inaccessible shall give rise to genuine enlightenment and a reconciliation of humans and nature."[4]

Indeed, Heinrich's encounter with the miner in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* numbers among the most frequently discussed passages in the secondary literature on the novel, and it is difficult to imagine that much more can be said about it. There is, however, one aspect of the passage that has been neglected, the illumination of which can also open up a fresh perspective on the composition of the work as a whole and on its relation to the sociohistorical context out of which it emerged. While a number of scholars have noted the possibility of reading the miner in the novel as a cipher for the romantic artist, such readings generally take as their starting point a positive articulation of the romantic project; that is to say, they view the miner and mining in conjunction with Novalis's theoretical statements about what romantic aesthetics intends to achieve. It is also possible, however, to approach the representation of mining from the opposite direction, to interpret it first and foremost as a defensive strategy on the part of the author rather than as the affirmative embodiment of an ideal. From this perspective, mining proves most significant as a model of how intense passion and desire can be productively channeled toward socially useful goals. Mining, when interpreted along these lines, provides a conceptual framework for a defense of the legitimacy of literature, and especially of the fragile legitimacy of the novel, which, despite the various apologias published in the eighteenth century, was by no means beyond reproach in 1802.[5] Reframing the representation of mining in the work in this way also necessitates a reevaluation of other key aspects of the novel—most significantly, its negotiation with processes of economic modernization and especially its stance toward an incipient consumer culture in which reading and literature play a paradigmatic role.

3. In addition to Ziolkowski and Uerlings, see, for example, Kenneth S. Calhoon, *Fatherland: Novalis, Freud, and the Discipline of Romance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 97–116; Helmut Gold, *Erkenntnisse unter Tage: Bergbaumotive in der Literatur der Romantik* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990), 56–106; Irene Bark, *"Steine in Potenzen": Konstruktive Rezeption der Mineralogie bei Novalis* (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1999), esp. 309–422. Gerhard Schulz's dissertation of 1958 can be seen in many respects as the starting point for the entire discussion: "Die Berufstätigkeit Friedrich von Hardenbergs (Novalis) und ihre Bedeutung für seine Dichtung und seine Gedankenwelt" (PhD diss., University of Leipzig, 1958).

4. Dennis F. Mahoney, *Friedrich von Hardenberg* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), 128.

5. For one of many recent discussions, see Claire Baldwin, *The Emergence of the Modern German Novel: Christopher Martin Wieland, Sophie von La Roche, and Maria Anna Sagar* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002), esp. 13–37.

Romantic Anticapitalism?

Novalis was no stranger to questions of political economy, and his frequent and often enigmatic comments on money, gold, and commodities have given rise to a wide range of interpretations of his attitude toward the economic transformations under way at the end of the eighteenth century. In the case of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, few passages have received as much attention as that in which the miner offers what many have read as a scathing critique of circulation and commodity exchange. Given its significance, the passage is worth quoting in its entirety:

> He [the miner] is content to know where the metal powers are found and to bring them to the light of day, but their dazzling glamor has no power over his pure heart. Uninflamed by perilous frenzy, he takes more delight in their peculiar structures and their strange origin and habitat than in their possession which promises so much. They have no charm for him any more once they are turned into commercial articles, and he had rather look for them within the strongholds of the earth amid a thousand dangers and drudgeries than to follow their call into the world and to strive after them up on the surface by means of deluding, deceitful arts. . . . Nature desires not to be the exclusive possession of a single individual. As property, nature changes into an evil poison which drives away tranquility and makes those who possess wealth lust ruinously after power over all things, entailing a train of endless cares and wild passions. (69–70)[6]

A similar line of thought informs the conclusion of the first song performed by the miner just a few paragraphs later: "What though in vales they kill / For greed of goods and gold; / High up on yonder hill / The lord of earth behold" (73) (fig. 10).

Scholars have certainly been right to point out the crucial relevance of this passage for understanding Novalis's economic views and their relationship to his literary aesthetics. Often, however, their interpretations have relied on a rather static understanding of capitalism, one that has its roots in the industrialized society of the nineteenth century and that places particular emphasis on the impact of instrumental rationality. And yet, if one reads the passage carefully, the question arises as to what, precisely, can be identified as modern in this context, or, for that matter, as capitalist. Certainly not the mere association of insatiable greed with self-destruction. The real challenge presented by the passage, and by the representation of mining in general in the novel, is how to elucidate a peculiar endorsement of both modern and premodern ideas about the value and societal impact of economic activity. This aim can be only partially achieved by a comparison of the novel with Novalis's philosophical fragments or through the juxtaposition of both with the

6. Novalis, *Henry von Ofterdingen*, trans. Palmer Hilty (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1964), 69–70; subsequent references to this translation will be cited parenthetically in the text.

Figure 10. Early nineteenth-century miners. *Neuer Leipziger Orbis pictus* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1811). Reproduced courtesy of Bibliothek für Bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung, DIPF Berlin.

theories of later authors like Marx. Rather than resorting to a vague and historically undifferentiated notion of anticapitalism (or, for that matter, philocapitalism), it makes more sense to situate the miner's comments explicitly within the political-economic discourse of the period.

As I have been arguing throughout this book, the category of luxury provides the primary discursive context in which contemporaries seek to come to terms with economic modernization in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The luxury debates themselves, however, focus less on production than on changes in consumption patterns and the perceived impact of these changes on the stability of an estate-based society as well as the psychic economy of its members.[7] Widening access to an

7. To be sure, critical commentators are often very concerned about the impact of new opportunities for consumption on the productivity of the individuals doing the consuming.

expanding world of goods and commodified experiences proves more salient here than the consequences of incipient industrialization. Thus, while eighteenth-century critiques of luxury are inextricable from the structural economic changes occurring in the period, they often mirror the critiques of antiquity and the Middle Ages in their focus on the individual psychology or even physiology of the consumer. In Germany, as we have seen, commentators generally reflect on the topic within a framework of faculty psychology, and they view the threat of luxury in terms of a psycho-physical imbalance. An early but representative example is Johann August Schlettwein, who made a brief appearance in the introduction. In his *Grundfeste der Staaten oder die politische Ökonomie* (Foundations of the State or Political Economy, 1779) he offers the following definition: "Luxury is always an expenditure on pleasures designed to stimulate the senses and the imagination."[8]

Up until now, Schlettwein has been only a minor character in this study. The significance of his conceptual framework for an understanding of Novalis, however, is great enough to justify a more substantive engagement with his treatise. As a physiocrat who believed that expenditures on nonagricultural commodities were roughly equivalent to stealing food from the poor, Schlettwein numbered among the most vociferous critics of luxury in Germany.[9] But his basic framework for understanding luxury is shared by many writers throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century, including those more favorably inclined toward surplus consumption. The problem for Schlettwein and others is essentially one of allocating scarce mental and emotional resources. His argument proceeds from a crucial distinction between "real" and "imaginary" goods. Whereas appropriation of the former leads to some sort of substantive improvement of the self—a healthier, stronger, or more beautiful body, a wiser and more just soul—the latter are appropriated with only the thought of increased social status in mind. As he puts it in a concrete example, "It is not reality for me and my fellow human beings that I cover my head with all manner of feathers. I simply imagine that it is beauty, and wish thereby to excite the senses of other people and to enkindle in their souls the desire to enjoy my charms" (396). To the extent that an individual becomes devoted to "sensuous pleasure" in this way, he or she is simply no longer capable of allocating intellectual or emotional energy to more appropriate ends: "[The] organs are entirely robbed of the elasticity necessary for thinking, acting, and enduring discomfort" (397). The fact that such a discussion occurs in a treatise on political economy underscores the aforementioned psycho-physical orientation of this field of knowledge in the period. The health of the state is seen to depend not only on macroeconomic

8. Johann August Schlettwein, *Grundfeste der Staaten oder die politische Ökonomie* (1779; repr., Frankfurt/Main: Athenaum, 1971), 404; subsequent references to Schlettwein will be cited parenthetically in the text.

9. "The resources expended on a single sensuous pleasure, and those which vanity requires for its satisfaction, could save a human being from ruin or provide the material necessary to sustain a human life " (398).

factors, such as the ability of government to maintain a lively circulation of money and a positive trade balance. As any reader of Foucault is well aware, it is understood as equally dependent on the successful management of the psychic economy of individual subjects—what Foucault referred to as the "anatomo-politics of the human body"—as reflected in the remarkably wide array of behaviors and activities considered to be legitimate targets of state administration.[10]

Even for a skeptic like Schlettwein, good government entails not the absolute repression of sensuality and fantasy ("the senses and the imagination") but rather their integration into a framework of social utility. While he certainly does not follow those advocates who argue for the encouragement of luxury as a stepping stone toward the full realization of one's humanity, his comments nonetheless indicate an interest in harnessing the motivating force of potentially harmful human capacities.[11] In two later sections of the work he provides lists of appropriate and inappropriate forms of enjoyment for young people. The former, which include physical exercise and the imitation of agricultural, artisanal, or domestic activities, are not intended to stifle all stimulation of the senses or the imagination, but to ensure that they remain anchored to production, in the form of socially valuable labor and of the reproduction of the existing social order. This focus on channeling rather than repression reveals that Schlettwein, just as much as the advocates of luxury, participates in the modern rejection of what can be termed an Aristotelian paradigm, according to which the ideal state of existence is one absolutely free of desire. From this perspective, the differences between the two sides of the luxury debate must be seen as differences in degree rather than kind.

Physiocratic Romanticism?

It is against this by-now familiar backdrop of luxury, its key components of sensuality, fantasy, and desire, and its revaluation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that the socioeconomic (and aesthetic) significance of the miner's comments comes into focus. And these comments suggest that Novalis and Schlettwein, the romantic author and the physiocrat, are ultimately dealing with the same problem. That problem is how to ensure that luxury, understood in the sense of new opportunities for the stimulation of sensuality and fantasy, remains linked to socially productive activity rather than becoming narcissistically self-referential.

Perhaps the most obvious indication of their shared concern is the semantic overlap between the passage from the novel cited above and Schlettwein's critique of luxury. In both cases the discussion centers on issues of self-control and on the

10. Michel Foucault, "Right of Death and Power over Life," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 261–62.

11. An example of a more positive view is F. K. Schulze, "Bemerkungen über den Begriff, die Natur und die Schädlichkeit des Luxus," *Braunschweigisches Journal* 5 (1790): 67–107.

fear that unrestrained passion, fueled by the desire for sensual and imaginative pleasures, will lead to a loss of that control. The miner's dismissive reference to the "dazzling glamour" (*blendender Glanz*) of the precious metals mirrors Schlettwein's adducement of "glimmer and glamour" (*Shimmer und Glanz*) as "a main concern of luxury" (406). And whereas the miner remains "uninflamed [*unentzündet*] by perilous frenzy" (a phrase that evokes an imagination out of control), Schlettwein's luxury consumer has as his aim "to enkindle [*entzünden*] in their souls the desire to enjoy my charms" (396). One can also point to the frequent use of *Reiz* (charm/stimulation) and *Reize* in both texts, an indication of the two authors' common concern with sensory stimulation, even if Novalis's use of the term has a more particular referent in the stimulus theory of the Scottish physician John Brown.[12] The miner's references to the commodified treasures as an "evil poison which drives away tranquility" and to "endless cares and wild passions" also find a close parallel in the luxury debates. In Krünitz's *Oekonomische Encyklopädie (Economic Encyclopedia),* for example, the author of the article on luxury admonishes other writers to show those who pursue it "what an enemy of their tranquility they are allowing to burrow into their breast," and to demonstrate how miserable they will become if they "strive after every new object with unruly passion."[13] Even the opposition between depth and surface, inner and outer, captured by the miner's distinction between the "strongholds of the earth" and the "surface" (*Oberfläche des Bodens*) echoes the claims of countless articles on luxury goods, according to which "the objects of luxury often have little intrinsic value; rather, this is sought merely in the outer forms."[14]

In fact, Novalis's concern with luxury manifests itself at a much earlier point in the narrative. As the narrator explains in chapter 2, in Heinrich's age "the splendor and comforts of a prince could hardly compare with the amenities which in later times a well-to-do private individual could provide for himself and for his own family without extravagance" (24). In the sentences that follow, however, it becomes clear that the increase in creature comforts characteristic of these later ages has been purchased at the cost of a flattening of the topography of experience and the loss of transcendence. In the "more prosperous modern age," instead of a material culture that gives rise to "wondrous hopes," one has "the monotonous and more humdrum picture of a commonplace day" (25).

This passage is noteworthy for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the reference to commerce ("well-to-do private individual") as a force that elides social distinctions. And this reference is negatively inflected: the material equality between the private individual of the present and the prince of yesterday appears as

12. For a discussion, see Mahoney, *Friedrich von Hardenberg,* 60–61.

13. Heinrich Gustav Flörke, "Luxus," in *Oekonomische Encyklopädie oder allgemeines System der Staats-Stadt-Haus- und Landwirthschaft*, ed. D. Johann Georg Krünitz, http://www.kruenitz1.uni-trier.de/.

14. Ibid.

a regrettable development. While it may be tempting to point to Novalis's political conservatism here, one can better understand what is at stake in these lines if one views them in more general terms, as a reaction to the homogenizing impact of commerce and commodification; in other words, as significant here as the particular estate-based distinctions perceived to have been lost is the loss of meaningful distinction as such, the fact that in the "monotonous" (*einförmige*) present specific forms of material culture no longer seem to have any organic connection to distinct social identities. It should be clear by this point that Novalis is by no means the only one making such arguments in the period; on the contrary, the connection between an increased availability of commodities and the loss of those social distinctions that allow individuals to make sense of their world is one of the central concerns of the luxury controversy.[15] Such fears help explain Novalis's digression on the "feeling people had for the utensils and possessions" (24), which, as cherished objects, had the capacity to reestablish meaningful relations of identity and difference, to anchor the individual's sense of self within the context of a larger and multigenerational community.

Novalis's discussion of these cherished objects, moreover, also helps to illuminate his distance from commentators like Schlettwein who adopt a more ascetic position on the question of luxury consumption. If Novalis is celebrating an age in which human beings had a different, less homogeneous relationship to the artifactual world, it was by no means an age free of luxurious excess. The decisive difference is that the experience of this excess was anchored to normative social frameworks in a manner that enabled it to strengthen communal bonds and foster an awareness of higher things. Heinrich's age may have been characterized by an "idyllic poverty," but this poverty provided the necessary backdrop for a meaningful experience of luxury: "In that semidarkness these treasures gleamed all the more significantly for being sparingly distributed, and they filled the thoughtful heart with wondrous hopes" (25). The use of the word "significantly" (*bedeutend*) is crucial here—it is not the "gleaming" per se that constitutes the primary problem with modern luxury, but the fact that this "gleaming" has become detached from any deeper values. In the present it signifies nothing beyond itself, whereas it had previously been closely connected to the experience of the divine.

Returning to the miner, with this earlier passage in mind, one is in a better position to grasp his self-characterization as a response (a response, it should be noted, that takes the alleged threat very seriously) to the concerns voiced by Schlettwein and other commentators in the luxury debates. The miner is constantly exposed to the temptations of luxury, both to the sensuous appeal of the sparkling metals

15. As we have seen, these fears often take the form of anxieties about the increasing illegibility of social status as a result of new fashions or consumption patterns. A good example is the essay "Über den Luxus in Berlin," *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* 2 (1787): 399–414.

and to the seductive fantasies of increased status triggered by the thought of their possession, and yet he suffers no negative consequences; on the contrary, as is the case with the description of the "treasures . . . sparingly distributed" from chapter 2, luxury proves crucial to the health of society and, one could argue, of the miner himself. As in the earlier passage, moreover, the positive role of luxury depends on what can be termed its social embedding, the way in which it is integrated into a coherent and allegedly "organic" social totality. Rather than contributing to the "gold and silver sheen" (394) of the fashionable embroidered clothing that Schlettwein finds so appalling, the precious metals unearthed by the miner find their ultimate resting place "in royal crowns and vessels and holy relics . . . in the form of respected and well-preserved coins" (67). Here the metals presumably serve to strengthen both the sense of political unity among members of society and their sense of a dynamic interpenetration of the quotidian and the divine.

While the allusions to religion ("relics") and the state ("royal crowns and vessels") in this remark show how Novalis uses mining to indicate the potential societal value of embedded luxury, the idea of embeddedness proves equally significant at the level of individual behavior. The miner himself appears as an ideal example of how to productively stimulate and harness both sensuality and fantasy while avoiding their potentially negative impact. To be sure, one finds much in the miner's self-description to indicate a modest, even ascetic existence, but it is nonetheless an existence punctuated by moments of intense desire and pleasure, all of which are positively connoted. The treasures he uncovers may lose their charm (*Reiz*) once they become commodities, but this should by no means be taken as an indication that the "bright and sparkling stones" have no allure at all. He describes his relationship to mining as one characterized by "inexpressible pleasure" (64); as a youth he can hardly wait to try on "the fascinating [*reizende*] miner's outfit" (65); and of his first descent into the mine he writes: "[It] delighted me greatly" (67). Even the verb "inflame" (*entzündet*), which appears in the initial description in conjunction with "perilous frenzy," takes on a positive connotation in the first miners' song: "His bosom friend is she [the earth] / And near to him allied; / Inflamed by her is he / As though she were his bride" (72). Indeed, the song as a whole, as a number of scholars have pointed out, identifies the experience of mining with sexual gratification.[16]

There is hardly anything surprising about the valorization of sensuality and fantasy in a romantic novel. The point that I want to make here, however, is rather less obvious—namely, that this valorization represents only part of the story. It proves inseparable from a simultaneous reflection on strategies of containment. In other words, even as Novalis foregrounds the role of sensuality and fantasy in

16. Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism,* 50.

the experience of the miner, he also illustrates the way in which these two capacities are anchored—and thus rendered productive.[17] First, like the precious metals themselves, the intense pleasure and desire experienced by the miner are socially embedded in the institution of mining, through which they are attached not only to a stable political and religious order, but also to the powerful corporate identity that characterizes mining as a profession (note the "the fascinating miner's outfit" and "singing and playing on the zither" [72]).[18] Second, they are similarly embedded at the level of character. Two contexts are of particular significance here. The first is that of need or *Bedürfnis*. As we saw in the previous chapter, the discursive shift that occurs in the understanding of needs around the end of the eighteenth century leads to a hollowing out of the static and estate-specific concept of *Notdurft* and the rise of the more individualized and variable concept of *Bedürfnis*.[19] The miner can be seen as an embodiment of this more modern sense of need; his intense desire to pursue his particular profession, and the intense pleasure he experiences while mining, appear as expressions of his unique and essential nature. He himself places great emphasis on the singularity of his desires, the fact that his descent into the mine represented a "complete satisfaction of an inborn desire," even if others found this occupation "common, trifling, and even repulsive" (67). Here, then, the pursuit and satisfaction of desire appear as the fulfillment of a divinely ordained destiny. In representing this passionate yearning as present at birth, Novalis extracts it from the framework of false or unnatural needs so central to theorizations of luxury in the period. This idea of a unique, inborn, and thus natural longing also plays a key role in romantic reflections on the artist, and, as we saw in the previous chapter, it plays a role in the aesthetic writings of Karl Philipp Moritz as well.

Closely related to this first context is a second—that of curiosity, or *Neugier*. The concept of curiosity has a long and complex history, and its rehabilitation in the early modern period has been a popular subject of intellectual-historical inquiry since the publication of Hans Blumenberg's *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (The Legitimacy of the Modern Age, 1966).[20] What proves most significant in the case of Novalis is

17. In emphasizing the need for containment of the imagination, I diverge from Richard Gray's generally superb reading of the parallel between the role of the imagination in late eighteenth-century German political economy and the shift from mimesis to imagination as the motivation for poetic creativity. To put it briefly, I think Gray understates the degree to which the unbridled imagination continues to be perceived as a threat throughout the period, both in economic writings and in the works of the German romantics. Richard T. Gray, *Money Matters: Economics and the German Cultural Imagination, 1770–1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), esp. 145–68.

18. For a relevant discussion of the role of the uniform in the construction of national identities, see Karin Wurst, "Fashioning a Nation: Fashion and National Costume in Bertuchs's *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* (1786–1827)," *German Studies Review* 28.2 (2005): 367–86.

19. Margit Szöllösi-Janze, "Notdurft—Bedürfnis: Historische Dimensionen eines Begriffswandels," in *Der lange Weg in den Überfluss: Anfänge und Entwicklung der Konsumgesellschaft seit der Vormoderne*, ed. Michael Prinz (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöning, 2003), 151–72.

20. Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit,* rev. ed. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), esp. 440–510.

the way in which curiosity takes shape as a potential counterbalance to the threat posed by luxury, again understood in psycho-physical terms. The sheer frequency with which the word appears in chapter 5 indicates a special significance: the miner describes his youthful interest in mountains as a "great curiosity" (64); a traveler tells him that becoming a miner will enable him to "satisfy his curiosity" (65); as he stands on a pit hill for the first time he experiences "unbelievable curiosity" (65); the little that he understands initially merely heightens "the pitch of [his] curiosity" (66). The list could be expanded. For the miner, curiosity guarantees a positive channeling of desire, and its particular effectiveness lies in the way it anchors sensuality and fantasy to the higher faculties of reason and reflection.

If, following Schlettwein and countless others, we characterize the threat posed by luxury as the threat of a sensuality and fantasy that have become autonomous and self-referential, where the pleasurable stimulation of the senses leads only to a craving for more stimulation, then we can view curiosity as a way of relating to the world that attaches such pleasure to this desire for comprehension and thus, ultimately, to socially valuable activity. The miner's curiosity motivates him to search for a deeper understanding of what he sees rather than merely to abandon himself to the sensuous shimmer of the treasures he finds or to fantasize about their possession. Curiosity, one could argue, helps ensure that he maintains a complex and multifaceted relationship to the social and material world, rather than becoming obsessed with a single object.

A comparison with Schlettwein's reflections offers an interesting perspective on this phenomenon. Schlettwein describes the pleasures of luxury (here he uses the term *Üppigkeit*) as creating a kind of eternal here and now, in which the individual loses the ability to think in terms of structural and causal relationships: "The aim, the spirit, and the meaning of opulence are nothing but the stimulation of the senses and the imagination through forms, colors, and appearances, through impressions of moments in time and variations in successions of such impressions. The unchanging, the enduring, the value of the past and the present in the future, the evaluation of the impressions and of causes in terms of their effects, and the progression thereof; these are not the goal of opulence" (406–7). Against this backdrop of what can be described as a loss of depth and complexity in both a temporal and a spatial sense, the specific emphasis the miner places on understanding the origins and complex structure of the "metal powers" takes on greater significance. He strives to grasp originary causes ("their strange origin" [69]) and to comprehend formal features ("their peculiar structures" [69], "the wondrous architecture" [86]). Whereas the pleasures associated with the "glamour" of luxury goods are episodic and undifferentiated, those of the miner entail an architectonic element and require attention to the whole. This holistic aspect can be understood both in the sense that the profession of mining corresponds here to Raymond Williams's definition of culture as a "whole way of life," and in the sense that the miner views the stones and metals themselves as embedded in a dynamic and evolving natural totality.

Again, it is crucial to recognize that sensuality and fantasy are not repressed here or simply replaced by rational reflection; rather, they constitute key aspects of the miner's experience. Both, for example, find expression in the miners' songs, and fantasy receives a rather conspicuous endorsement in the imaginary narratives created by the miner to depict his own situation: "It seemed to me it [the king of metals] was held in strong prisons, as it were, and gleamed amiably at the miner who amid much danger and drudgery had broken a way through the mighty walls to bring this king to the light of day" (67). Here, however, such flights of fancy never threaten to become self-sufficient, an end in themselves; instead they inspire the miner to redouble his efforts.

A striking number of elements from Novalis's representation of mining thus find either a parallel or a foil in antiluxury treatises like Schlettwein's. As a final example, one can point to the authors' shared belief in the value of physical activity as a way to help maintain psycho-physical equilibrium. The miner makes the connection between mind and body explicit in the assertion "His occupation teaches him tireless patience and does not permit him to distract his attention with useless thoughts" (71). As becomes clear in the subsequent reference to the earth as a "singularly hard and unyielding power" (71), the sheer physical challenge of mining focuses concentration and keeps the mind from wandering. The somatic aspects of mining are stressed at other points in the passage as well, especially in the multiple references to its "drudgeries" (70), which keep "his heart fresh and his mind stout" (70). Arguments about the value of physical activity also appear in countless treatises on luxury, indeed, in countless pedagogical treatises in general as a solution to the problems of overstimulated nerves and an overactive imagination. For Schlettwein, "a purposeful motion" (419) constitutes the primary source of acceptable pleasure for the young. As he puts it in a passage that reads like a prose version of the miner's more poetic reflections, "Adequate physical activity in the fresh air . . . can awaken a healthy constitution and simultaneously creates thousands of occasions to provide a young mind and heart with the most pleasant and wholesome nourishment through a knowledge of and feeling for the works of nature, and for their relationship to human life" (419).

If the miner's remarks on physical exertion can be situated in the context of the luxury debate, however, they also illustrate what can be viewed as Novalis's most fundamental departure from the approach of writers like Schlettwein. The "drudgeries" referred to so frequently by the miner represent a level of physical intensity far beyond the "purposeful motion" described by Schlettwein. One can view the physical challenges experienced by the miner within the framework of containment mentioned previously as a kind of counterbalance to his intense emotional experiences and the intense degree of temptation to which he is exposed by unearthing precious stones and metals. The key distinction between the two authors, in other words, is not that the romantic poet glorifies the sensuality and fantasy condemned by the physiocrat. On the contrary, one can convincingly claim that Novalis and Schlettwein are operating with a similar conception of psychic equilibrium here. In

Novalis's case, however, the level at which this equilibrium is achieved and maintained has been ratcheted up a notch. The entire system has been reconfigured to accommodate a higher level of sensory pleasure and imaginative activity without breaking down.

Scholars have long recognized the intensification of somatic experience that accompanies the shift from Enlightenment to romantic literature, as captured, for example, in the transition from the stroll (*Spaziergang*) to the ramble (*Wanderung*).[21] When the miner's remarks are viewed in combination with those of writers like Schlettwein, however, it becomes clear that this intensification should not be understood simply as a celebration of corporeality (or sensuality or imagination) that reverses the Enlightenment valorization of abstract reason. At least in the case of Novalis, one finds a similar model of the psychic economy, one based on balance, compensation, and even a hierarchy of the faculties in which reason serves as the ultimate authority. The key difference lies in the degree of dynamism that characterizes the various elements that constitute the whole.

This increase in the acceptable level of intensity of fantasy and sensuality is related to a second key difference between Schlettwein and Novalis, a difference that also figures crucially in both aesthetic and political-economic discourse in the period. It has to do with methods of regulating the activity of these capacities. Joseph Vogl elucidates a shift that occurs around 1800 in conceptions of political economy, which can be schematically described as a shift from an understanding of political-economic regulation in terms of direct intervention, as is found in cameralist texts, to one based on cybernetic principles of self-correction. Adam Smith's concept of the invisible hand offers but the most conspicuous example of a wide range of theories (Malthus on population, Adam Müller on the circulation of money) in which belief in the need for intervention to maintain equilibrium is replaced by belief in the self-regulating properties of various systems.[22]

The second key difference between Schlettwein and Novalis can be understood within this framework. Schlettwein's remarks on the dangers of "imaginary goods" culminate in a political-pedagogical program for the regulation of sensuality and fantasy through direct intervention (though not, it should be noted, through simple prohibition). Novalis's representation of the miner raises many of the same concerns both directly and indirectly, but here the system of mining contains the necessary feedback mechanisms that prevent these forces from getting out of control even as it harnesses them for productive purposes.[23] If, then, one accepts that the

21. See Helmut Schneider, "Selbsterfahrung zu Fuß: Spaziergang und Wanderung als poetische und geschichtsphilosophische Reflexionsfigur im Zeitalter Rousseaus," in *Rousseauismus: Naturevangelium und Literatur*, ed. Jürgen Söring and Peter Gasser (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1999), 133–54.

22. Joseph Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft: Poetik des ökonomischen Menschen um 1800* (Zurich and Berlin: Diaphanes, 2004), 246–55, 270–84.

23. Novalis in general, and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* in particular, also figure prominently in Vogl's discussion, though he does not discuss the miner, nor is he interested in the precise nature of the mechanisms that help maintain equilibrium.

passage on mining can be read as a reflection on luxury, a luxury understood primarily in terms of the potentially destabilizing forces of sensuality and fantasy, then the solution to the problem might be said to take the form of a particular species of experimental science understood as vocation. The seductive luster of the precious metals is neutralized by the instinctive desire to understand their origins, by the intense physical exertion necessary to unearth them, and by the powerful sense of professional identity that provides a nonegoistic framework for instilling this activity with meaning.

Text Mining

Simply recognizing the extent to which concerns about luxury shape the representation of mining in the novel can shed new light on Novalis's work, but the argument I want to make here requires an additional step. What makes this representation most interesting, I would argue, is not its engagement with luxury as a general social problem, but rather the extent to which the miner's ability to channel desire is of particular significance to the artist. This approach to the relation between mining and romantic art, moreover, also suggests that the crucial parallel lies less in a particular conception of the artwork or the process of artistic creation (though such parallels are certainly relevant) than in concerns about the social legitimacy of art and about the artist's ability to maintain self-control. Like the miner, who finds himself continuously confronted with the temptations of sensuality and fantasy as embodied in the treasures of the earth, the artist can also be seen as especially vulnerable to the seductions of luxury, and even worse, as the purveyor of a particularly dangerous sort of luxury good. It is no coincidence that Schlettwein, for example, uses a discussion of painting to illustrate the impact of the nonproductive worker, or when Martin Ehlers describes artists as "wards of the state, who actually become a burden to others who work to produce the necessities of life."[24]

The implication of art—and especially literature—in the perceived dangers of luxury has of course been my focus throughout this study. Their intersection was addressed by many authors in the period, and Novalis was no exception. In his unpublished *Dialog* of 1798, he combines a discussion of mining, literature, and luxury in a manner that sheds crucial light on the pivotal conclusion of chapter 5 of the novel, in which Heinrich discovers the manuscript that narrates his own life story. The dialogue, which B initiates by presenting A with a copy of "the new book fair catalogue," includes a discussion of the pros and cons of the recent and remarkable expansion of the literary market. In response to A's accusation of being a "eulogist of this book epidemic," B responds by describing the explosion of book

24. Schlettwein, *Grundfeste der Staaten*, 403. Martin Ehlers, *Betrachtungen uber die Sittlichkeit der Vergnügungen in zween Theilen,* 2nd rev. ed. (Flensburg, Schleswig, and Leipzig: In der Kortenschen Buchhandlung, 1790), 1:177.

production in Germany as "the discovery of these bountiful mines" and goes on to explain: "We now collect from wherever we like the crude ore or the beautiful forms—resmelt the one and understand how to imitate and surpass the other."[25] As the debate continues, A reminds him not only of the "disadvantageous consequences of reading" but also of "the enormous amounts expended on these articles of modern luxury" (2:427). B responds with a comparison between the intellectual stimulation that results from a lively circulation of books and the economic stimulation caused by the unhindered circulation of money.

This exchange not only reveals, on the basis of the mining metaphor, the general interpenetration of literary and economic discourse in the period. It also illuminates the potentially vulnerable positions of both author and reader, precisely because they can be accused of encouraging or of indulging in a corrupting form of luxury consumption. As we saw in chapter 3, the heated late eighteenth-century controversy about reading reveals an abundance of commentators prepared to make precisely this accusation. Viewed in conjunction with our previous analysis of the *Lesewut* controversy, Novalis's remarks in the dialogue enable us to grasp *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as an intervention into a wide-ranging debate about luxury and the fine arts, in which the production and consumption of literature play a particularly significant part. From this perspective, the miner's apparent immunity to the dark side of luxury, his valorization of certain forms of socially embedded surplus ("in royal crowns . . . and holy relics"), and his productive channeling of sensuality and fantasy would seem to have a special relevance for the romantic author. In addition, like the author, the miner, especially in his incarnation as a "treasure-grubber" (*Schatzgräber*, 64), is a figure still viewed by many with suspicion at the end of the eighteenth century. Agricola's treatise *De re metallica* (1556), which includes a long list of alleged prejudices against mining and an attempt to refute them, has been adduced by scholars as an especially relevant intertext for understanding this section of the novel.[26] A more temporally proximate example can be found in Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (1782). According to Rousseau (who borrows his argumentation from Seneca) the true treasures of the earth are to be found on the surface, and it is only as a result of corruption and greed that men hunt after "imaginary goods" in the bowels of the earth.[27] What Rousseau's comments illuminate is the vulnerability of mining to the accusation of avarice, an accusation that, as Rousseau's opposition between "imaginary" and "real" goods suggests, is inseparable

25. Novalis, *Schriften: Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, ed. Richard Samuel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftlicher Buchgesellschaft, 1999), 2:426; subsequent references to this three-volume edition of Novalis's works will be cited parenthetically in the text, either with page number or, if necessary to avoid confusion, volume number and page number.

26. Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism,* 38, 54–55; Uerlings, "Novalis in Freiberg," 70.

27. Rousseau, "Reveries of a Solitary Walker," in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, ed. Christopher Kelly, trans. Charles E. Butterworth, Alexandra Cook, and Terence E. Marshall (Hanover, NH and London: University Press of New England, 2000), 8:62.

from the luxury controversy in the period. Both the author and the miner, then, can be said to operate in environments where they are exposed in a particularly powerful way to the temptations of luxury, and both are viewed by some as dubious characters, because of their alleged egoism as well as their profession's promotion of the spread of luxury. At one level, Novalis's representation of mining must be understood as part of an effort to rehabilitate that profession in particular, an effort based on his own experiences and especially his friendship with Abraham Gottlob Werner. But it is more than just that. In rehabilitating the profession of mining, Novalis is simultaneously defending his own social utility as an author.

It thus makes sense that the miner himself offers a eulogy to literature in his conversation with the hermit in the second half of chapter 5. His own remarks are brief and somewhat cryptic. Both the association of poets with "the searching spirits of light" (85), however, and the claim that their songs enabled his own nature "to coordinate its members with calm delight" (85) evoke a sense of rational self-control and dynamic equilibrium and can certainly be seen as part of an effort to differentiate romantic literature from the kinds of texts that come under attack in the *Lesewut* debate.[28] Even more telling is the fact that he presents his remarks as a confirmation of the much more detailed reflections of the hermit, whose own justification of poetry has explicit recourse to ideas about structure and causality. Novalis is no doubt engaging with a variety of discourses in this passage, but these reflections, which constitute a defense of a certain kind of literature on the basis of its architectonic narrative, can also be understood as a response to attacks on the reading addiction and those authors who feed it.[29] And these attacks must themselves be grasped in the context of the broader discussion of luxury and surplus that so exercised European intellectuals throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

This interweaving of literature, mining, and luxury finds a compelling expression in the critical scene that concludes the chapter. At this point Heinrich begins to leaf through the "large and beautifully illuminated books" (90) that belong to the hermit. These books, whose description suggest that they are illuminated manuscripts, can themselves be read in terms of the ideal of embedded luxury. They certainly have little in common with the mass-produced "miserable novels" that

28. The original German better captures the physiological aspect of this equilibrium: "Mit stiller Lust ihre Glieder gegen einander schwingen." Novalis, *Schriften,* 1:307.

29. Aristotle's comparison of poetry and history is important here, as well as reflections on causality in contemporary historiography. While contributors to the *Lesesucht* debate sometimes make a show of distinguishing between "trivial" authors and those with greater ambition, they tend to implicate the latter in their condemnations as the initiators of regrettable fads. Johann Gottfried Hocke, for example, refers to "a deserving scholar" who wrote a book entitled *Der Geisterseher* (The Ghost Seer). He then goes on to muse: "Is it not peculiar that a man who has provided the sciences with such admirable works must, against his will, provide the occasion for so many deleterious buffooneries!" Johann Gottfried Hocke, "Vertraute Briefe über die jetzige abentheuerliche Lesesucht und über den Einfluß derselben auf die Verminderung des häuslichen und öffentlichen Glückes," in *Quellen zur Geschichte des Buchwesens*, ed. Reinhard Wittmann(1794; repr., Munich: Kraus International Publications, 1981), 10:53.

commentators like Johann Adam Bergk were lamenting at roughly the time of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen's* publication.[30] The fact that the biographical *Roman* that Heinrich ultimately discovers is not a commodity produced for the anonymous market but a handwritten manuscript from the library of the hermit's deceased friend underscores this distinction. When read in combination with articles from the *Lesewut* controversy and the miner's self-characterization, several other aspects of this passage stand out as well. The first is the immediate emphasis on visual stimulation and its link to the imagination ("the neatly executed pictures . . . to underprop the imagination of the reader" [90]). In parallel with the case of the miner, however, and in contrast to the superficial sensual pleasures under attack in the reading debates, here the images trigger Heinrich's desire to penetrate more deeply and to understand: "His curiosity was greatly stimulated" (90). Closely related to this familiar anchoring of desire through curiosity is the role of the hermit as mediator, who not only functions as gatekeeper, controlling access to the books, but who also personally explains the representations to Heinrich. The emphasis placed on this function in the work reads like a direct engagement with the fears expressed in the treatises on reading, where, as we have seen, a primary concern is a lack of such mediation, the fact that increased availability means the wrong books are being read by the wrong individuals, or the right books are being read at the wrong time. The solution, even for the most conservative commentators, is rarely direct prohibition. Instead they place their faith in various methods of indirect control exercised through respected individuals.[31] The reader, as Johann Gottlieb Beyer puts it, "[must] be led unobtrusively toward the goal, without himself knowing that this is the goal that one has set for oneself."[32]

The above statement reads as if it could have been written specifically to describe Heinrich's introduction to literature. Juxtaposing this statement with the emotional intensity of his reading experience, however, reminds us of the previously discussed experience of the miner and its departure from the standard condemnation of luxury. Heinrich "could not get his fill of looking" (90); he leafs through the books "with endless joy [*Lust*]" (90); and finally, the discovery of figures from the dream with which the novel begins fills him "with deepest ecstasy" (91). Here as well, it would seem, one is confronted with a mix of powerful sensual and imaginative pleasure and a variety of mechanisms designed to keep that pleasure in check: material, structural, spatial, and interpersonal.

30. Johann Adam Bergk, *Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen* (1799; repr., n.p.: Zentral Antiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, n.d.), 412.

31. In this regard as well one can discern a parallel to the luxury controversy, where all but the most staunch critics point out the outmoded character and the ineffectuality of sumptuary laws and argue instead for the use of indirect mechanisms of control.

32. Johann Rudolph Gottlieb Beyer, "Über das Bücherlesen, in so fern es zum Luxus unsrer Zeiten gehört," in *Quellen zur Geschichte des Buchwesens* (1796; repr., Munich: Kraus International Publications, 1981), 208.

The situation acquires a new level of intensity when Heinrich is subsequently left alone with the books. Viewed against the backdrop of the reading debates, this scene can be read only as a provocation. In critical treatises on reading, reading alone, especially among women and male adolescents, is often associated with moral degradation and with masturbation in particular.[33] Indeed, the rather peculiar reference to the "curious embarrassment" (91) that befalls Heinrich upon the sudden return of his companions might be seen as an ironic evocation of such fears. It would not be the first allusion to onanism in the novel.[34] But even as Novalis seems to poke fun at contemporary anxieties about excessive reading in this scene, it nonetheless constitutes a serious engagement with the concerns expressed by critical commentators on the topic. In the first case, the entire experience is temporally and spatially enframed; that is to say, it occurs in a carefully controlled environment. Even if the reader is not supervised at all times, an external authority (the hermit) determines the duration of the experience.

Even more interesting in the context of self-regulation, however, is the way in which mechanisms of control are built into the book itself. If one of the primary concerns of the *Lesewut* discussion pertains to the availability of inappropriate reading materials, here the satisfaction of the appropriateness criterion is taken to the extreme: Heinrich himself is the protagonist, and the book tells the story of his life. And yet the composition of the novel, its incomprehensible language, the unidentifiable and yet familiar figures, the missing conclusion, also prevent a wholesale identification with this protagonist. Heinrich's encounter with the book is characterized by a dialectic of identification and distance, one that combines an intensity of experience with moments of defamiliarization. These moments not only have a sobering effect on the otherwise enthralled reader; they also heighten his wish to understand the book in its entirety: "Henry . . . wished for nothing more fervently than to be able to read [i.e., understand] the book and to possess it altogether" (91). The reference to possession in this context suggests that the parallel to the selflessness of the miner, who rejects direct possession of the precious metals he unearths, breaks down at this point. One could read this apparent contradiction simply as an indication of Heinrich's immaturity, his inability to exercise the capacity for self-restraint exercised by the miner. If, on the other hand, one interprets the "and" in this sentence as implying a degree of causality—to possess *to the extent that* he is able to read the book—then ownership here appears as a function of exhaustive knowledge rather than of any contractual or transactional relationship. From this perspective, which finds support in some eighteenth-century usages of the phrase *vollständig zu besitzen*, Heinrich's intense desire to fully comprehend the book—the most valuable treasure

33. Dominik von König, "Leesucht und Lesewut," in *Buch und Leser: Vorträge des ersten Jahrestreffens des wolfenbüttler Arbeitskreises für Geschichte des Buchwesens*, ed. Herbert G. Göpfert (Hamburg: Dr. Ernst Hauswedell, 1975), 101–2.

34. Calhoon, *Fatherland,* 113.

of all—and his inquiry after its title and language offer yet another parallel with the miner, who was motivated by a similar interest in origins and structure.[35]

"Intoxicated with Rapture and Yet Conscious of Every Impression"

A discussion that began with the miner has led us to a reflection on Heinrich's first encounter with a text, an encounter that constitutes a crucial moment in his self-actualization as an artist. In a sense, these two halves of what many scholars consider to be the most important chapter in the work could have been considered separately. One could, in other words, situate the miner's comments within the framework of luxury without drawing a connection to literature, just as one could view Heinrich's reading experience in the context of the *Lesewut* debate without making the connection to luxury. By bringing these two halves of the chapter into dialogue with one another, however, one is able to recognize the extent to which reading and literature are themselves inseparable from reflections on political economy in the period. At a time when political-economic regulation is still understood largely in terms of the administration of human drives rather than the manipulation of abstract macroeconomic indicators, literature serves both as a key medium for reflecting on the nature of such drives and as one of the principal, and potentially most dangerous, sources for their stimulation. The same concepts that structure political-economic debate in the period, not merely *Luxus* but also the related notions of egotism (*Eigennutz*), happiness (*Glückseligkeit*), and true versus false needs (*Bedürfnisse*), figure just as prominently in fictional texts and in discussions of the impact of those texts. As the treatises on both luxury and *Lesewut* make clear, the intense desires generated by an emerging economy of surplus—best embodied in Germany by the expanding market for cultural commodities—continue to be viewed by many as a grave threat to social stability. The confident assertions of artists from the period about the value of their activity should not distract us from the fact that they were very much implicated in this threat; indeed, such assertions, together with the aesthetic programs that support them, should be regarded as an anxious attempt to respond to this criticism.

35. Goethe's description of the artist Cellini in his free translation of the autobiography of the same (1803), for example, includes the following statement: "So stand es seiner heftigen und drangvollen Natur wohl an, daß er, um jenes Geistige, wornach er sich sehnte, recht gewiß und vollständig zu besitzen, endlich den zerstreuten und gefährlichen Layenstand verließ." (It was thus befitting his intense and impetuous nature that he finally left the distracted and dangerous class of laymen, in order to possess entirely and with complete certainty that spirituality for which he longed.) Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Friedmar Apel et al., sec. 1, vol. 11 (Munich: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1998), 505. It is also worth noting in this context that Novalis uses "possessor" (*Besitzer*) in a similar manner in *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, when one of the figures explains that future philosophers can be recognized by the joy they find in having become "possessor and master of a new power and knowledge." Novalis, *Schriften,* 1:210.

Viewed from this perspective, the miner appears as a model for the young artist, whose education can be understood as an education in the containment of subjective desire, one allowing, however, for the highest possible degree of sensuous and imaginative intensity. When one recognizes the relevance of this notion in this particular instance, moreover, a number of other sections of the book appear in a new light. The dream sequence that opens the novel, often viewed as containing the quintessence of the entire romantic project, can be read as a twofold instantiation of such an ideal. Not only the dream experience itself resonates in this context—the narrator describes Heinrich at the moment of his greatest pleasure as "intoxicated with rapture and yet conscious of every impression" (17). The strategy of containment also pertains to the anchoring of the experience within the clearly demarcated boundaries of the dream, which can be viewed as the temporal equivalent of the spatial sequestration of the reading experience in the cave. What might be termed, perhaps too negatively, the "chilling effect" of the explorers' return in that passage finds a parallel in the sobering remarks of Heinrich's father on the insignificance of dreams. At the very least, in both cases a period of reflection follows on a period of intense stimulation; indeed, in the case of the dream, Heinrich challenges his father's claim by pointing out that dreams have value precisely because they give rise to subsequent reflection: "promote our meditation [*Nachdenken*]" (19). In a similar fashion, the evening celebration at the home of Heinrich's uncle, which caps the first part of the novel, can be seen as an example of emotional release embedded within a clearly demarcated social framework. Here as well one can speak of a doubling of this motif, inasmuch as Klingsohr's fairy tale is itself embedded within the celebration. And with regard to the content of the tale, while there can be no doubt regarding its transgressive eroticism, one must not forget that it concludes with the domestication of eros (through poetry), and no less importantly, that the fairy tale itself is both clearly identified as such within the narrative and decisively linked to a particular social and temporal context. Novalis may have remarked in his letter to Schlegel that "the novel should gradually transform itself into a fairy tale" (1:740), but here he appears to place emphasis on the maintenance of clear distinctions. And this is the only plausible strategy for one seeking to recover the "skillful distribution of light, color, and shadow" that characterized an earlier age, and so to avoid the "monotonous and more humdrum picture" (25) of the present.[36]

The behavioral model that finds its clearest articulation in the representation of the miner, and that can be described as one based on a "controlled de-control" of emotion, would thus seem to function as an ideal for the artist and as a structuring

36. Though he operates with a more traditional interpretive vocabulary, Gerhard Schulz hints at a similar interpretation in an essay of 1968 on Novalis's theory of the novel: "It is in other words not the liberation of fantasy with which Novalis begins his work, but rather the reverse—its attachment to forms or 'figures', not contempt for reality, but rather a reciprocal restriction of fantasy and reality." Gerhard Schulz, "Die Poetik des Romans bei Novalis," in *Deutsche Romantheorien*: *Beiträge zu einer historischen Poetik des Romans in Deutschland*, ed. Reinhold Grimm (Frankfurt/Main: Athenäum, 1968), 98.

principle of the novel.[37] And it has an equally powerful resonance in the political-economic discourse of the period, which is engaged with the question of precisely what forms and what levels of desire and egoism can be rendered socially productive, and which also finds itself in a period of transition from an emphasis on interventionist management to self-regulation.

While the representation of mining provides the best starting point from which to understand the significance of this model, one should note that it proves equally illuminating in a discussion of the other group of figures in the novel whose relation to both economic modernization and romantic aesthetics has been the source of some controversy.[38] I am referring of course to the merchants who accompany Heinrich on his trip to Augsburg. If earlier commentators often viewed the merchants as representatives of a traditional medieval economy, most recent analyses of the work have placed them in the proximity of modern capitalism.[39] Accompanying this shift has been tendency to criticize the instrumental character of their behavior, the extent to which they are in thrall to the exclusively means-ends rationality that allegedly typifies this form of economic organization. As Helmut Gold has written, "The merchants represent the most economically advanced position in this transitional epoch"; moreover, Gold argues that this position can be linked to what he views as their severely limited capacity for aesthetic experience.[40] Unlike the miner, for whom music and song are constitutive of his very identity, the merchants' relationship to art remains within the framework of compensatory, escapist entertainment. They describe their experience of poetry in terms of the "pleasure and intoxication of the moment," the memory of which is later erased by "incessant business details" (32), and they express their appreciation for the poet's ability "[to snatch] us away from the familiar present" (32).[41]

A number of points need to be kept in mind when evaluating these remarks and the characterization of the merchants in general, the first of which concerns the topic of instrumental rationality. A thorough investigation of Novalis's attitude toward means-ends rationality would require a separate analysis, one that would address his debt to Hemsterhuis and elucidate concepts like the "indirect

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37. The numerous other festivals, celebrations, gold chains, and gemstones that appear in the novel can also be understood in terms of embedded luxury and surplus. I borrow the phrase "controlled de-control" from Mike Featherstone, who borrows it in turn from the Elias-inspired sociologist Cas Wouters. See Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Sage, 1991), 24–25.

38. See Richard Samuels, *Die poetische Staats- und Geschichtsauffassung Friedrich von Hardenbergs (Novalis)* (Frankfurt/Main: Diesterweg, 1925), 115; Ulrich Stadler, *Die theuren Dinge: Studien zu Bunyan, Jung-Stilling und Novalis* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1980), 130–49; Jochen Hörisch, "Übergang zum Endlichen: Zur Modernität des *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*," afterword to *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, by Novalis (Frankfurt/Main: Insel, 1982), 229; Gold, *Erkenntnisse unter Tage,* 64–65; Uerlings, "Novalis in Freiberg," 70–71.

39. Gold, *Erkenntnisse unter Tage,* 65.

40. Ibid., 64–65.

41. Ibid., 63.

instrument" (*indirektes Werkzeug*).[42] Even in the absence of such an investigation, however, one can justifiably claim that the scholarly discussions of his efforts to transcend such rationality are overdrawn and represent something of a distraction from the real concerns of the novel. After all, the activity of the miner, who is often viewed as the antithesis of vulgar utilitarianism, is solidly situated within a framework of means and ends, both with regard to the tools and technologies used to extract the precious metals and with regard to the ultimate goal of enriching the prince. Such instrumentality is simply detached from a context of egoism and greed.

One can take a similar approach to the alleged differences in the modes of aesthetic experience embodied by the merchants and the miner. There is some textual evidence linking the merchants to the negatively depicted *Philister* from Novalis's *Blüthenstaub* (Pollen), who live solely "for the sake of earthly life" and who mix in a bit of poetry "only when absolutely necessary . . . just because they are accustomed to a certain break in their daily routine" (2:263). It is also true that aesthetic experience appears more fully integrated into the life of the miner and that he appears to have an understanding of the impact of art that more closely approximates that of the early romantics. Here as well, however, one needs to be careful of exaggerating the opposition. The merchants' juxtaposition of days spent in the diligent "pursuit of gain" and "the stimulating enjoyment of the fine arts (27) in the evening, although pointing to a more definitive split between work and leisure than one finds in the case of the miner, does not necessarily indicate a qualitative difference in the nature of their aesthetic experience. Their remarks on the need for "recreation and variety" (27) are virtually identical to the miner's claim that music and dance "help to ease his toilsome hours and shorten his long solitude" (72). In fact, the similarity goes even deeper. The miner comments that music and dance are like a "joyful prayer" (72), and goes on to say that the "recollection and hope of them" (72) are what ease the burdens of his vocation. His religiously inflected language here does perhaps suggest an increase in intensity vis-à-vis the aesthetic experience of the merchants, but it also suggests that he understands this experience not primarly as an aspect of everyday life, in the sense that the miners sing and play while working. On the contrary, he seems to be referring to the memory and anticipation of specific moments of intense celebration, moments that can be seen as a form of compensation for the difficult tasks completed and that thus have much in common with the pleasures of the arts enjoyed by the merchants at the end of the workday. Again one is reminded of the narrator's earlier remark that only a "skillful distribution of light, color, and shadow" (25) can reveal the possibilities of transcendence that exist in the visible world.

Ultimately, one can point to a long list of similarities between the miner and the merchants. Both can be described as hybrid figures, combining elements that

42. Ulrich Stadler has undertaken such an analysis; see Stadler, *Die teuren Dinge,* esp. 150–83.

testify to enlightenment (especially an interest in science) and those that point back toward an earlier era. Both are driven by pride of profession and a powerful belief in the social utility of their labor; in the case of the merchants, it is this shared sense of professional identity, rather than reified consciousness, which best explains their lack of individual characteristics.[43] But more significant from the perspective of the education of the artist is the fact that both the merchants and the miner are engaged in professions that continue to be viewed with suspicion at the end of the eighteenth century, their own enthusiasm for their work notwithstanding. In the case of the merchants, one need only think of the effort expended by various authors in their defense. Moses Mendelssohn's preface to his translation of Manasseh Ben Israel's *Vindiciae Judaeorum* (1782) is the best-known example, one that indicates the anti-Jewish context in which the debate occurred, but it is far from the only one.[44] An article of 1799 from the *Neue Handlungsbibliothek* carried the title "Welches sind die Ursachen, daß der Stand des Kaufmannes und der Kaufmann selbst in Allgemeinen minder geschätzt wird, als er geschätzt zu werden verdiente, und wodurch kann man dieser Geringschätzung entgegen arbeiten?" (What Are the Reasons for the Fact That the Merchant Class and the Merchant Himself Is Generally Less Esteemed than He Deserves to Be and What Can One Do to Counter This Disparagement?).[45] *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* can thus be said to advocate for a rehabilitation of both professions, and in both cases this rehabilitation proves inextricable from a depiction of these characters' immunity to the temptations with which they are confronted. While this immunity may be most apparent in the case of the miner, it is no less significant for the merchants. The relevant passage here is their often-noted celebration of commerce, which, because it parallels Novalis's own comments so closely, has always presented difficulties for those scholars who would view them negatively. As they put it in their description of Augsburg, "Money, work and goods produce each other in turn and course in swift circles, and the country and cities flourish" (27). Crucial in this context is not merely the fact that this claim mirrors Novalis's own remarks in the *Allgemeine Brouillon* (Universal Notebook): "The spirit of commerce . . . sets everything into motion and connects everything. It awakens countries and cities—nations and works of art. It is the spirit of culture—the perfection of the human race" (2:706). More significant is the fact that both statements reiterate the then standard argument of what

43. Cf. Gold, *Erkenntnisse unter Tage,* 66.

44. Moses Mendelssohn, preface to *Rettung der Juden*, by Manasseh Ben Israel, in *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe,* ed. Alexander Altmann et al. (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Friedrich Fromann Verlag, 1983), 8:1–25.

45. L. C. K. Veillodter, "Welches sind die Ursachen, daß der Stand des Kaufmannes und der Kaufmann selbst in Allgemeinen minder geschätzt wird, als er geschätzt zu werden verdiente, und wodurch kann man dieser Geringschätzung entgegen arbeiten?," *Neue Handlungsbibliothek* 1 (1799): 1–13. See also K. Steinmann, "Was ist der Kaufmann im Staat, und in wie fern verdient dieser Stand Achtung?," *Minerva* 2 (1809): 428–38.

can be called progressive commercialism, as represented by Hume in Britain and figures like Johann Georg Büsch and Friedrich Justin Bertuch in Germany.[46] The merchants' statement, in other words, must be seen as an intervention in an ongoing debate about the legitimacy of commerce and consumption, a debate that, in the eighteenth century, is conducted primarily in the context of a discussion of the impact of luxury.

If Novalis appears to side with the advocates of luxury here, however, it is important to recognize that for these advocates the positive impact of commerce depends on the active circulation it promotes, and that maintaining this circulation requires the merchants themselves to function solely as (creative) intermediaries. Like the miner, who unearths the precious metals only to immediately give them up, then, the merchants must transfer wares from seller to buyer without becoming personally invested in the objects or attempting to manipulate their movements for the sake of personal enrichment. In a relevant passage from his treatise *Der geschloßne Handelsstaat* (The Closed Commercial State, 1800), Fichte explains that they have a contractual obligation, "to buy or sell at any time," since the refusal to do so can only indicate their intent to bring about "an artificial price increase."[47]

While Fichte asserts that any withholding of commodities from circulation should be subject to prosecution, however, Novalis's representation of the merchants implies that the solution lies in an especially highly developed capacity for self-control, again suggesting a link to the larger discursive shifts thematized by Vogl. To be sure, one does not find in their remarks the same explicit evocation of the dangers of sensuality and fantasy as one does in the self-characterization of the miner. Nonetheless, their narration of the story of Arion and the sea traders addresses similar themes. The story tells of a musician who enlists a group of seamen to ferry him to a foreign land. Along the way, the greed of the traders, kindled (*reizten*) by the "splendor and elegance" (33) of Arion's treasures, causes

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46. As Hume argues in "Of Refinement in the Arts" (1752), "Thus *industry*, *knowledge*, and *humanity,* are linked together by an indissoluble chain, and are found, from experience as well as reason, to be peculiar to the more polished, and, what are commonly denominated, the more luxurious ages." David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary,* ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1987); also available at Library of Economics and Liberty, http://www.econlib.org/library/LFBooks/Hume/hmMPL25.html. The essay was originally titled "Of Luxury." And in "Of Commerce" (1752) he writes: "If we consult history, we shall find, that, in most nations, foreign trade has preceded any refinement in home manufactures, and given birth to domestic luxury. . . . Thus men become acquainted with the *pleasures* of luxury and the *profits* of commerce; and their *delicacy* and *industry*, being once awakened, carry them on to farther improvements, in every branch of domestic and foreign trade." Hume, *Essays*. Bertuch, before offering his own, more cautious endorsement of *Wohlleben*, provides the following summary of the argument presented by the advocates of luxury: "Luxury, say the financier and the technologist, is the greatest resource for the state; the universal lever of industry, and the most powerful engine of circulation. It wipes away all traces of barbarism from custom; creates arts, sciences, commerce, and trade; increases the population and the power of the state; and gives rise to enjoyment and happiness in life!" "Einleitung," *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* 1 (1786): 4.

47. Fichte, "Der geschloßne Handelsstaat," in *Ausgewählte politische Schriften*, ed. Zwi Batscha and Richard Saage (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 82.

them to breach their contract, steal the treasures, and throw Arion overboard, an act that ultimately leads to their own demise. While the story has been interpreted as an implicit condemnation of the instrumental rationality of the merchants who tell it, it makes more sense to view it as a cautionary tale that they have taken to heart.[48] The danger related by the story pertains not to the exchange principle as such, which is after all the source of prosperity, but rather to the interruption of exchange and circulation as a result of runaway greed and a desire to hoard. Rather than mediating Arion's circulation, bringing him to the foreign land as he had requested, they decide to put an end to that circulation by pitching him into the sea. Likewise, the merchants' efforts to turn the various episodes that interrupt their journey into business opportunities should be seen as evidence of their self-possession rather than their philistinism. This self-possession becomes apparent not only in their capacity to fully enjoy the party hosted by the crusaders and also leave in a timely fashion, so that they are "up again bright and early" (62). Even more important is the effort to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the appearance of the Bergman: "The merchants discussed the possibility of striking up a profitable trade with Bohemia by the help of this old miner and getting metals at reasonable prices" (76). Rather than providing evidence of a propensity to objectify and exploit others, as some have argued, the comment indicates their ability to immerse themselves in an unfamiliar environment full of new stimuli and yet remain focused on a higher (at least from their perspective) goal. One could in fact argue that precisely their desire to create new connections here ("striking up a profitable trade with Bohemia") identifies them as representatives of what Novalis terms elsewhere "the true, creative spirit of commerce" (2:706), and distinguishes them from the small-minded "peddlers" (*Krämer*) that he finds so common among contemporary Germans.[49]

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48. Cf. Stadler, *Die teuren Dinge,* 148–49.

49. An analysis of the merchants within the context of Novalis's own remarks on commerce would be deserving of a separate essay. Here, two observations will have to suffice. First, the opposition between *Kaufmann* and *Krämer* invoked by Novalis appears to be a fairly common one in the period. Its origins can perhaps be traced back to an article of 1774 by Justus Möser entitled "Der nothwendige Unterschied zwischen dem Kaufmann und dem Krämer," which appeared in the *Hannoverisches Magazin*. Moser's article is quoted at length in the entry "Kramer" in the *Oekonomische Enzyklopädie* (1801). For Moser, who holds the *Kaufmann* in the highest esteem but has nothing but contempt for the *Krämer*, the key distinction between the two lies in the fact that the *Kaufmann* sells domestic goods abroad and thereby enriches the state, whereas the *Krämer* simply acts as a domestic middleman: "For there is certainly very little skill involved in taking possession of one hundred pounds of sugar, coffee, or raisins and then weighing it back out in smaller amounts." The noble-minded *Kaufmann*, Möser argues, should be given the exclusive right to trade in goods like tea, coffee, sugar, and wine, because the opportunity to increase his wealth and status would lead these already patriotic individuals to think up "new methods of conquest for his fellow citizens . . . in order to maintain his trade and his honor through new channels." Qtd. in "Krämer," in Krünitz, *Oekonomische Encyklopädie*. The merchants' interest in creating new business relationships needs to be viewed against this backdrop. The second, more minor point has to do with the use of the verb *anspinnen,* translated as "striking up." While the word can have a negative connotation ("to orchestrate [*anspinnen*] a thing, a love affair, a deception"), the examples from

Both the miner and the merchants, then, because of their ability to operate effectively in environments characterized by an unusually high degree of temptation and emotional intensity, offer uniquely appropriate models for the romantic artist. Our recognition of their exemplary role, however, should by no means lead us to conclude that the explicitly economic moments in the novel are simply to be understood allegorically. The point, rather, is that political economy in this period, because it is still primarily occupied with the management of a psychic economy of passions, interests, and desires, intersects at key moments with literary aesthetics. In a period in which a rapid rise in the availability of new consumer goods brings into the foreground a concern with consumer desire as both a destabilizing and a potentially constructive force, questions related to the management and harnessing of that desire prove crucial to both discursive fields. Linked to these questions are those having to do with the mechanisms of regulation, and from this perspective the novel can also be seen as participating in the discursive shift described by Vogl, a shift from a focus on external control through a central authority to a model of autoregulation, where complex systems control themselves through processes of feedback and self-optimization.[50]

If eighteenth-century discussions of luxury allow us to place Novalis's novel more squarely within its contemporary political-economic context, one can further elucidate the problem faced by the miner and the artist on the basis of more recent reflections, specifically, by way of scholarship on the nature and origins of modern consumer culture. However problematic the political implications of *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism,* Daniel Bell offers the important observation that contemporary consumer society appears to be characterized by a paradox—namely, the split between the Puritan work ethic that drives the productivity of capitalism and the ethic of hedonistic self-fulfillment that is required to ensure that its products are consumed. As Bell puts it, the modern consumer must be a "Puritan by day

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Grimm's dictionary suggests that a more neutral usage is equally common in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A citation from Johann Karl Wezel even places it within the context of literary aesthetics: "Every poetic whole has two parts—the introduction (*die Anspinnung*), complication, and development of the plot: the exposition and progressive development of the main character or main characters." Wezel, *Hermann und Ulrike*: *Ein komischer Roman* (1780; repr., Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlerische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1971), 5.

50. The identification of this shift represents but one facet of Vogl's complex and ambitious argument. As I mentioned previously, Vogl includes *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* in his analysis and offers a compelling characterization of the way Novalis backgrounds instances of explicit, authoritative control and direction in favor of other, more subtle mechanisms. While he is primarily interested in how these steering mechanisms manage contingency on a more abstract narrative level in the novel, his insights can also be applied to the question of desire that figures so prominently in the representation of the merchants and the miner, and in the education of the artist. At this level, however, rather than a representation of a fully realized model of autoregulation—as Vogl sees it—the novel appears to me as an interrogation of its conditions of possibility.

and a playboy by night."[51] More recently, Colin Campbell, in *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, has returned to the eighteenth century to challenge this opposition, not in order to deny its relevance but to demonstrate how both "puritan" and "romantic" character traits can be quite smoothly integrated into an individual's personality system. Campbell makes a number of important points: not only that emotional restraint and delayed gratification are just as crucial for the "romantic" (understood as hedonistic) as for the "puritan" ethic, but also that apparently contradictory attitudes and beliefs can be held without tension "if their expression is successfully separated in time and place." This, he continues, "is generally true of the way puritan-utilitarian and romantic-sentimental values are institutionalized in contemporary middle-class society."[52]

While Campbell focuses on the British context, his elaboration of Bell's paradox can also shed light on *Heinrich von Ofterdingen.* What proves most fascinating about the work from this perspective, however, is not simply that it provides supporting evidence for Campbell's argument, but that it includes a sustained reflection on precisely these same issues: how to combine intense desire and productive efficiency, how to manage the dialectic between emotional release and rational control. And central to this thematics is the related question of the locus of restraint: to what extent the forces of control operate at the level of the individual psyche and to what extent they require a supporting apparatus of institutional, temporal, and/or spatial constraints. *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, moreover, in terms of both its plot and its compositional structure, illuminates the key role played by literature, and the novel in particular, in this interrogation. Not only does the reading episode in the hermit's cave resonate with widespread contemporary concerns about the spread of literary commodities; the intertwining of Heinrich's aesthetic education with the more explicitly economic issues evoked by the representation of mining suggests that literature offered a unique imaginative space for addressing concerns traditionally associated with political economy. In addition, what has been recognized as the ironic structure of the novel, its nested narratives and metafictional digressions, and the consequent relativization of various points of view, provides additional evidence for a link between genre and such concerns.

Heinrich von Ofterdingen thus offers compelling support for the claim that literature in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries functioned as a crucial means of training consumer desire, and, one should add, harmonizing it with the productivity requirements of an emergent capitalist system. But even more significantly, it indicates that Novalis was fully aware of this function, and that his self-understanding as an author took shape on the basis of a determined, if cautious,

51. Qtd. in Featherstone, *Consumer Culture,* 21.

52. Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 223.

embrace of the seductions of that system. In the final chapter of this book, we will see how Goethe incorporates these seductions into a sophisticated and highly self-conscious textual engagement with modernity, one that initially seems to invoke traditional conceptions of luxury as universal disorder, but that ultimately parallels *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* in its acknowledgment that commodification signals less the demise of literature than its resurrection in modern form.

7

Symbolic Economies in Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*

Johann Wolfgang Goethe's final novel, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (Elective Affinities), is a work obsessed with exchange and equivalence. Most conspicuously, the question in this novel is whether one partner can be exchanged for another: whether the protagonist Eduard can replace his wife, Charlotte, with her cousin Ottilie, giving Charlotte in turn to his friend the Hauptmann in order to balance the accounts. The famous parable (*Gleichnisrede*) in the novel, in which the dissolution and reconstitution of various chemical elements serves as a metaphorical representation of the possible recombinations of the four main characters, can be seen as the epicenter of this obsession. But the reader is in fact confronted with questions about the possibility of value substitution on virtually every page of the work. We are asked to consider what is gained and what is lost when Charlotte transforms a cemetery into a garden, for example, or when a farmstead (*Vorwerk*) is mortgaged to finance a pavilion (*Lustgebäude*) or when the narrator substitutes a prose summary for a speech in verse.

David Wellbery was one of the first to elucidate the centrality of these categories to the work, and to situate them in the context of the decline of Old Regime Europe.[1] In what remains one of the most penetrating analyses of the novel to date,

1. David Wellbery, "*Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809)," in *Goethes Erzählwerk: Interpretationen*, ed. Paul Michael Lützeler and James E. McLeod (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984): 291–318.

he characterizes the novel as a tale of modern *Entgrenzung* (de-delimiting) and *Entortung* (displacement) in which a decontextualization and flattening of objects and signs marks the destruction of the complex tissue of symbolic relations that had previously invested them with social meaning. The consequence is a collapse of the stable link between signifier and signified, creating a kind of universal commensurability and fungibility of objects, not least as sources of aesthetic pleasure: a churchyard, an architect's collection of grave mound artifacts, a series of *tableaux vivants*, and even, when reduced to a topographical map, nature itself. While Wellbery's primary interlocutors appear to be Luhmann and Lacan, one could just as well speak with Jean-Joseph Goux of the emergence of a general equivalent and read the *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* as an interrogation of this idea.

In this final chapter, I would like to offer an elaboration and specification of this line of interpretation (which has been taken up by others as well) and thereby to bring what one scholar has termed the *Tausch-Rausch* (frenzy of exchange) depicted in the novel more squarely into the orbit of late eighteenth-century political economy.[2] This phenomenon, I would argue, is best understood not simply in terms of a general destabilization of meanings, or of the loss of the spatial and temporal depth that had previously anchored signification. Such a general perspective can certainly be discerned in the novel, and much recent scholarship has rightly sought to link it to the social and political upheaval that occurred in the wake of the French Revolution and the battles of Jena and Auerstedt.[3] Probably the most vivid example of this leveling and its consequences for signification is Charlotte's transformation of the local church cemetery. As a result of her decision to relocate the grave markers, the "bumpy graves" are turned into "a fine colourful carpet" (118), and a debate ensues regarding the most appropriate way to commemorate the dead.[4] A flattening and a destabilization of meaning, to be sure, but this same example, when one looks closely at the diction, also suggests a more precise concern. What was once a kind of dwelling ("graves") has been transformed into an ornament ("carpet"). At issue here is the status of the decorative, in a description that suggests the by-now

2. Thomas Wegmann, *Tauschverhältnisse: Zur Ökonomie des Literarischen und zum Ökonomischen in der Literatur von Gellert bis Goethe* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002), 251.

3. See, for example, Nils Reschke, *"Zeit der Umwendung": Lektüren der Revolution in Goethes Roman "Die Wahlverwandtschaften"* (Freiburg i. Br.: Rombach Verlag, 2006); and Peter Schwartz, *After Jena: Goethe's "Elective Affinities" and the End of the Old Regime* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2010). An important recent interpretation that takes a different tack is that of Fritz Breithaupt, whose antiessentialist Goethe would seem to have as his goal precisely the fluidity of meaning that others have seen as the target of criticism in the novel. In fact, there is less of an opposition than one might think between Breithaupt's reading and that of scholars like Wellbery and Reschke, since the flattening associated with modernity ultimately reduces the complexity and dynamism of signification. Nonetheless, I think that Breithaupt's otherwise insightful interpretation underestimates the extent to which *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* reflects a deep anxiety regarding the social disintegration brought about by processes of modernization. Fritz Breithaupt, *Jenseits der Bilder: Goethes Politik der Wahrnehmung* (Freiburg i.B.: Rombach Verlag, 2000).

4. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Elective Affinities*¸ trans. David Constantine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); references to this translation will be cited parenthetically in the text.

familiar inversion of a natural hierarchy of needs, whereby the superfluous has been given priority over the necessary.

As was the case with the other works we have considered in this study, the eighteenth-century discourse of needs and the concomitant interrogation of the value of luxury can open up new avenues for interpretation of Goethe's work. More specifically, they can help us to anchor the societal critique in the novel to the universalist anthropological model of evolving needs elucidated in chapter 5, and to see that this model proves to be at least as important to a full understanding of the work as its endlessly debated class content.[5] In addition, an analysis of luxury and needs in the novel can help us to grasp the profundity of Goethe's engagement with the expansion of consumer culture in the period. While the economic themes of the novel have figured prominently in a range of incisive interpretations, these interpretations have tended to operate with rather general analytical categories (such as exchange, capital, or commodification) and to remain rather vague regarding the historical specificities of the "capitalist" system allegedly under investigation in the work. Without an adequate consideration of the centrality of a blossoming cultural consumerism to the plot of the novel, such analyses, however insightful, remain incomplete.

As we will see, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* looks backward to the extent that it shares many of the basic assumptions regarding luxury, consumption, and needs that also shape earlier works. What makes the novel unique, and uniquely modern, is, first of all, the extent to which cultural consumerism appears as an identifiable and relatively autonomous phenomenon, and, second, the manner in which this cultural consumerism becomes foundational for a much broader and more self-conscious analysis and critique of modernity. A consideration of the symbolic economies in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* can thus not only deepen our understanding of Goethe's text; it can also shed light on the evolving material and intellectual saliency of an expanding world of goods and on the consequences of this evolution, both negative and positive, for the development of the German novel.

Consumer Culture in the "Age of Goethe"

Some of the best recent scholarship on *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* has sought to restore the novel to its historical, and especially its political-historical, contexts, illuminating how it addresses, in ingenious ways, a wide array of pressing political issues related to the French Revolution and its aftermath.[6] While these interpretations

5. I use the problematic term "class" here for reasons of expediency. I am referring to those interpretations that read the novel as a reflection on the conflict between middle-class or bourgeois and aristocratic value systems. This interpretive framework is so ubiquitous that it makes little sense to cite specific examples. It is striking how many interpreters, however innovative their methodologies and however critical they are of previous readings, end up positing some kind of essentialized opposition between the estates as the ultimate truth of the novel.

6. Reschke, *"Zeit der Umwendung";* Schwartz, *After Jena.*

have provided an invaluable corrective to the long-standing assumption that *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is a resolutely unpolitical novel, they have tended to neglect another, equally important historical context: that of the culture of consumption that was in full swing by 1809. What is so striking about Goethe's novel in this regard is not simply that it includes references to a remarkable variety of luxury goods and commodified entertainments, but that it provides a comprehensive overview of virtually all of the key arenas of discretionary consumption around 1800.

The historian Michael North has provided a useful catalogue of these arenas in his recent study *"Material Delight and the Joy of Living": Cultural Consumption in the Age of Enlightenment in Germany.*[7] A brief consideration of his analysis will allow us to gain a better sense of both the breadth of Goethe's depictions and the level of detail at which he operates. North divides what he terms "cultural consumption" in the period into nine categories: (1) books and reading; (2) the culture of travel; (3) fashion and luxury goods; (4) the culture of domestic interiors; (5) gardens and country houses; (6) art and taste; (7) musical culture; (8) theater and opera; and (9) the new stimulants and sociability. Every single one of these categories is represented in the novel; indeed, they provide the scaffolding of the entire work, essentially creating the narrative space in which the catastrophe unfolds, sometimes marking its stages and sometimes serving to drive it forward.

At the risk of lapsing into a simple inventory of passages, it is worth taking a few moments to review some of the examples that can be used to support this claim. With regard to books and reading, we have not only Eduard's performances of reading aloud, but also references to prestige editions such as "the volumes on English country houses, with the engravings" (46) and the "folio" (168) with images of apes that Charlotte provides to Luciane.[8] It should also be remembered that a book is implicated in the death of the infant Otto. As Jochen Hörisch writes, "Otto dies because Ottilie not only holds this child, but also a book in her arms."[9] The burgeoning culture of travel is reflected in the references to Eduard's travels (and the corresponding journals) as well as in the figure of the English traveler who visits the estate late in the novel. Also significant are Eduard's and the Hauptmann's interest in the "buying . . . of horses" (23), and "the new carriages" (66) that arrive on the scene with the duke and the baroness. Fashion and luxury are of course everywhere in the novel, most notably (and most ominously) in the case of the chest that Eduard orders for Ottilie's birthday—"covered in red morocco, studded with

7. Michael North, *"Material Delight and the Joy of Living": Cultural Consumption in the Age of Enlightenment in Germany*, trans. Pamela Selwyn (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008).

8. The "before and after" plates that are described in the novel suggest that the book in question is a copy of Humphrey Repton's *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, which first appeared in 1803. For more on the sources, see Brigitte Peuker, "The Material Image in Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften*," *Germanic Review* 74.3 (1999): 221–24.

9. Jochen Hörisch, "Die Dekonstruktion der Sprache und der Advent neuer Medien in Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*," *Merkur,* 1998, 826.

steel nails, and filled with presents that were worthy of such a vessel" (91). Domestic interiors become a focus of attention at various points, and the novel mentions precisely those artifacts that constituted the focus of interest and artisanal innovation in the period: upholstered furnishings such as the "sofa" (154) and "upholstered chair" (*Sessel*, 54) as well as specialized tables such as a "card table" (134), "desk," and "a low table" (54).[10] And the centrality of gardens and country houses in the novel goes without saying.

This list goes on: private concerts, sheet music available for purchase, and Luciane's guitar all exemplify the latest developments in musical culture; various collections of prints, engravings, and artifacts speak to concerns with art and taste; the theater and derivative entertainments take center stage after the arrival of Luciane, who is the driving force behind the pantomimes and *tableaux vivants* that figure so centrally in the work. Even coffee, tea, and sugar, the three stimulants most closely associated with new modes of sociability, receive brief mention.[11] Both the extraordinary range and the specificity of these references suggest a conscious examination of the new consumer culture rather than a coincidental appearance of contemporary social phenomena. Indeed, these artifacts and activities are enmeshed in a set of subtle and sophisticated reflections on the status of the ornamental, reflections that can be fully understood only in terms of period debates about luxury. A number of scholars have noted the preoccupation of the narrative with the themes of excess and superfluity, as for example in the case of Eduard's infatuation, because of which he becomes "immoderate in the giving of himself and of presents and promises" (91). And some of these same scholars have pointed out the ways in which the novel engages with processes of commodification and the increased circulation of money and goods. There has, however, been little attempt to place these references in a contemporary political-economic discourse with any real specificity.[12]

"Abwechselung und fremde Gegenstände"

This oversight is all the more surprising given that the construction of a garden pavilion or *Lustgebäude*, which proves so central to the unfolding of events in the work, also serves as an anchor for the examination of luxury and needs in the novel.

10. See North, *Material Delight,* 66–68. The narrator also mentions a variety of other home decorations, for example when he describes Lucian's tendency to mock "what people put on their walls. From the oldest high-warp tapestries to the most modern papers, form the most dignified family portraits to the most frivolous modern engravings . . ." (143).

11. See North, *"Material Delight,"* 153–67. On sugar, see Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600–1800* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 92–103.

12. An exception is Joseph Vogl, to whose discussion of the novel my own interpretation is indebted, though Vogl is less interested in consumer culture than in more general models of societal and narrative regulation. Joseph Vogl, "Nomos der Ökonomie: Steuerungen in Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*," *Modern Language Notes* 114.3 (1999): 503–27.

The link to eighteenth-century reflections on luxury first becomes clear in a crucial early discussion among the four main characters during which a decision is made regarding the location of the pavilion on the estate. It is the Hauptmann, often viewed as the embodiment of an Enlightenment faith in progress through social engineering, who justifies the placement of the structure by referring to a process of historical evolution. Contrasting the original construction (*Schloß*) with the new structure, he explains: "Building the Hall where they did, an older generation showed good sense, for it has shelter from the winds and is near the things we need every day; but a house intended more for social gatherings than for living in will be very well placed up there, and many pleasant hours may be spent in it during the summer months" (53). Here we see both the hierarchy of needs—shelter ("shelter from the winds") and nourishment ("near the things we need every day") precede pleasure—as well as the way in which this hierarchy is mapped onto a succession of generations. The discussion, however, also makes clear that the placement of the pavilion at the top of the hill entails a symbolic severing of the purportedly natural link between necessity and luxury. According to the Hauptmann, unlike "the older generation" the current residents demand "novelty, variety" (*Abwechselung und fremde Gegenstände*, 53). As Ottilie has already pointed out, from the new location the *Schloß* will be invisible, as will the village and all the homes. At issue here is thus not simply an "unacknowledged inclination to withdraw."[13] This is certainly one important aspect of the project, but one must also recognize the particular nature of this withdrawal, that it entails a conception of leisure and pleasure that seeks to obscure the existence of its own foundations.

The same framework of progressive needs also finds expression in another key passage relating to the pavilion—namely, in the description of the celebration that accompanies the laying of the foundation stone. Wellbery points to the relative stability of the symbolic order suggested by the mason's detailed speech at this event, contrasting it with the trivialization of ritualistic speech delivered later in the topping-out ceremony. In the latter case, the speech is lost to the wind, and as a consequence the individual words lose their independent meaning. They have been rendered equivalent as so many identical units that constitute the abstract collectivity of the "celebration speech." More recent interpretations have argued that this trivialization is already apparent in the initial speech, which is, after all, given not by a Meister but by a "young mason" (61) who attempts to compensate for his lack of experience by adopting the appropriate "manner of a public speaker" (*Rednermiene,* 61).[14] Regardless of which of these approaches one finds more compelling, what is clear is that this speech raises questions not only about the stability of the link between signifier and signified, but also about that of the link between the

13. Hans Vaget, "Ein reicher Baron: Zum sozialgeschichtlichen Gehalt der *Wahlverwandtschaften,*" *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft* 24 (1980): 151.

14. Reschke, *"Zeit der Umwendung,"* 65.

essential and the ornamental. The entire idea of a ritual to mark the laying of the foundation stone (at least in its original conception if not in this particular instantiation) can be grasped as a form of socially sanctioned luxury. The construction of a dwelling serves as the occasion for a celebration, thereby directly anchoring pleasure, leisure, and surplus to the requirements of daily life. The mason draws attention to this link when he immediately progresses from a reference to the "sculpted" (*wohlzugehauenen*) and thus supremely functional stone to remark on the "walls of earth, for the present still *decorated* with beautiful and dignified living figures" (59; my emphasis).

Even more telling are the mason's remarks on the appropriate relationship among the various architectural elements that make up the structure. The adornments that decorate the exterior, he explains, rely on the existence of a stable foundation. The organization of his comments in this passage is particularly revealing, because it again suggests a normative model of progression, in both spatial and temporal terms, from the necessary to the ornamental. Beginning with the "foundations, properly laid" (59), he proceeds to the construction of the walls, which, he remarks, already threaten to obscure the existence of the foundation work. The more decorative but still structural contributions of the stonecutter and the sculptor further contribute to this occlusion, until the whitewasher completely eliminates the traces of the mason and appropriates his work, "because he covers it and colours it and smooths it over" (60). Finally, when the floor has been tiled and the exterior decorated, it would seem to be the mason alone who can still see through all of the concealments to recognize "those regular and careful joints to which the whole owes its existence and its stay" (60).

Read in an allegorical fashion, then, one of the main implications of the speech is that the sphere of basic needs, however indistinct it may become as a result of the passage of time or the addition of increasingly refined and ornamental elements, must always be kept in mind. Indeed, the subsequent call for contributions to the time capsule seems intended to reinforce the connection between spheres, as guests are invited to participate in a ritualistic reintegration or recombination of the superfluous and the foundational. One is tempted to invoke Marcel Mauss in this context and to see in this passage a distant echo of the potlatch, as the guests compete in the destruction of wealth—"a couple of buttons off my uniform," "little combs," "bottles of smelling salts and other fine articles," and, of course, Ottilie's "golden chain" (60). The foundation-stone ritual thus not only evokes, perhaps only as a memory, the existence of a stable symbolic order based on a hierarchy of needs. It also instantiates a form of socially sanctioned prodigality, a model of productive-unproductive luxury that actually serves to maintain that stability and to foster community rather than undermine them.[15]

15. See Wegmann, *Tauschverhältnisse*, 247–48.

That Goethe chooses to raise these issues in the context of the construction of a pavilion is itself significant, as a comparison with political-economic writings of the period illustrates. In the works of commentators on both sides of the debate, from Mandeville to Isaak Iselin, architecture figures prominently.[16] Joseph Sonnenfels, in his *Versuch über das Verhältnis der Stände* (Essay on the Relationship among the Estates) of 1777, includes a criticism that proves particularly illuminating for *Die Wahlverwandtschaften.* In the course of a series of reflections on "well-ordered" versus "immoderate" luxury, Sonnenfels laments the negative impact of "so many pavilions [*Lustgebäude*], most of which stand empty," occupying land that could be cultivated and thus more productively used to feed a growing population.[17] Rather than such static and unproductive accumulations of affluence, Sonnenfels endorses those forms of expenditure "which derive from surplus, which propel wealth through all of the ateries of the state."[18] Precisely this kind of productive use of wealth proves strikingly absent from the novel, and with it the reciprocal relations among the estates that many more liberal commentators around 1800 see as the key to an affluent state and a stable social hierarchy.

Is *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* best read, then, as an admonition against the dangers of unproductive luxury? One finds many passages in the work that support such an interpretation, especially when one approaches it with the previous chapters of this study in mind. It requires only a minor shift in perspective, after all, to see Eduard as a reincarnation of Wieland's sultans on a smaller scale, lavishing funds on superficialities as he neglects those projects that would increase the productivity of his lands and the well-being of his subjects. Even his surrender to Ottilie of the decision about where to place the pavilion, a decision described by the mason as the "privilege of the lord" has a clear pendant in the *Mätressenwirtschaft* that defines the courts of Scheschian.[19] What is Eduard doing, after all, if not constructing a pleasure garden for his mistress? The parallel is strengthened by the ambiguous designation of Ottilie as the "mistress [*Herrin*] of the household" (54). Hans Vaget's seminal interpretation of the novel actually argues along similar lines, even if his focus is on Goethe's notion of dilettantism and on the rigidity of the minor nobility in postrevolutionary Germany. As Vaget writes, Eduard's

16. Mandeville writes: "The greatest excesses of Luxury are shewn in Buildings, Furniture, Equipages and Clothes." Bernhard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits,* with a commentary by F. B. Kaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 1:119. Iselin, in an article in *Ephemeriden der Menschheit*, substantiates his claims regarding luxury with the example of a prosperous trading state whose citizens are bitten by the building bug ("The spirit of building takes hold of their souls"). Isaak Iselin, "Betrachtungen über den Luxus," *Ephemeriden der Menschheit* 7 (1777): 27.

17. Joseph Sonnenfels, "Versuch über das Verhältnis der Stände," in *Politische Abhandlungen* (1777; repr., Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1964), 111.

18. Sonnenfels, "Die Anfangsgründe der Handlung," in *Politische Abhandlungen,* 73.

19. As Wellbery writes, "Eduard has, namely, delegated to Ottilie his privilege and his duty as lord of the manor." Wellbery, "*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*," 294. See also Reschke, *"Zeit der Umwendung,"* 108–9.

"ill-considered plans and projects . . . reveal this rich baron to be incapable of managing his estate in an economically responsible manner."[20] But while the connection between Goethe's intervention and the specific situation in Napoleonic Europe is undeniable, the similarity with Wieland indicates that the elements of the critique also derive from a more expansive political-economic framework.

A preoccupation with the status of allegedly natural and fundamental needs—and the potentially baleful consequences that result from their neglect—runs through *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* like a red thread. At times the references are explicit, as when the assistant from Ottilie's school posits a cyclical ebb and flow of surplus and scarcity across the generations. More often, however, the question of needs is thematized only indirectly or through allusion, as with the pavilion. These moments of indirect thematization, moreover, frequently illuminate one another in reciprocal fashion. In order to grasp the full resonance of the allusion in the case of the pavilion, for example, we must take a step back and also consider the object in conjunction with its enabling condition—namely, the decision to sell the tellingly named *Vorwerk* in order to finance improvements to the park. The staging of the decision to sell this outbuilding, a facility with real, if unrealized, economic potential, provides additional details that can help us to grasp more precisely how the discourse of luxury informs the novel's critique of what we might, following Zygmunt Baumann, term a "liquid modernity." Because of the significance of this passage for my argument, it deserves to be quoted at length:

> They climbed down to the summer-house and sat there all four together for the first time. It was, very naturally, the unanimous wish that the day's walk, which they had done slowly and not without difficulty, should be so devised and accommodated that it could be done more companionably, at a stroll and in comfort. Everyone made suggestions, and they calculated that the route for which they had needed several hours, if it were well laid out, must lead back to the Hall in an hour. Below the mill, where the stream flowed into the ponds, they were already erecting a bridge which would shorten the way and adorn the landscape when Charlotte reined in their inventive imaginations a little by reminding them of the costs which such an undertaking would entail.
>
> "There too we have a solution," Eduard replied. "All we need do is sell the holding in the woods that looks so well situated but brings in so little, and spend the revenue on this project, and in that way, having the pleasure of a priceless walk, we enjoy the profits of a good investment, whereas at present, according to our last accounts at the end of the year, we draw, to our annoyance, only a pitiable income from it." (52)

As in the subsequent consideration of the pavilion, here we also find a subtle reference to a "natural" progression, from "difficulty" (*Beschwerlichkeit*) to "comfort"

20. Vaget, "Ein reicher Baron," 150. Peter Schwartz has taken up this line of interpretation and provided extensive historical contextualization. Schwartz, *After Jena,* 68–91.

(*Behaglichkeit*), the latter term also being associated with the combination of efficiency ("which would shorten the way") and pleasure ("adorn the landscape") so frequently connected with the legitimizing categories of comfort and convenience as characterized by Woodruff Smith.[21] Equally significant is the contrast between the "inventive imaginations" and Charlotte's attempt to anchor them to reality with her rational reflections on the cost of such an endeavor.

It is tempting to see this moment as something as a turning point in the novel, not least because it reiterates a previous discussion while adding an ominous twist. When the idea of the pavilion is first mentioned in the previous chapter, the claim is not only that it will "bear on the Hall" (*sollte einen Bezug aufs Schloß haben*, 46), but also that it will be financed on the basis of a careful allocation of existing resources—in other words, through surplus funds. What follows Charlotte's objection in this second instance, however, is the abandonment of that plan in favor of one that requires the inversion of priorities that I mentioned previously. Even more portentous is the nonchalance with which Eduard blurs key conceptual categories in the subsequent paragraph. What is in fact a liquidation of potentially productive capital in order to finance nonessential consumption is presented as "a good investment," with aesthetic pleasure as its metaphorical interest.[22]

Luxury and Entropy

This blurring of categories brings us to one of the most significant facets of Goethe's appropriation of the luxury discourse in the novel. I am referring to the leveling of distinctions mentioned at the outset of the analysis, a leveling that Wellbery captures with the phrase "dis-organization of symbolic orders," and that others, following Foucault, have taken as evidence of a general crisis of representation around 1800.[23] A concern with the reduction of dimensionality, the loss of depth and context, suffuses Goethe's work, finding expression in examples ranging from the previously mentioned gravestones to the seemingly painted images of the landscape from the door and windows of the "little summer-house" (3) described by the narrator as "like a sequence of framed pictures" (4) to the abstraction of the estate in the topographical map prepared by the Hauptmann. Related to these phenomena is a flattening of the existing relationship between linguistic signifier and signified, what Wellbery refers to as "the contraction of the signifier to an opaque power

21. Smith, *Consumption,* 84–85.

22. Vaget, "Ein reicher Baron," 151.

23. Wellbery, "*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*," 291. Reschke, for example, refers to the "epistemic rupture around 1800." Reschke, *"Zeit der Umwendung,"* 136. Jochen Hörisch sees the novel as an inquiry into the questions of "whether and how the order of being and representation is to be newly constellated." Hörisch, "Dekonstruktion der Sprache," 828. Helmut Schneider writes of "modernity's de-delimiting of the imaginary." Schneider, "Wahllandschaften: Mobilisierung der Natur und das Darstellungsproblem der Moderne in Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*," in *Rereading Romanticism,* ed. Martha Helfer (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 299.

unto itself," and Nils Reschke terms "the abolition of the topological conception of language, which presumes a fixed relationship between words and things, signs and ground."[24]

This aspect of the novel in particular has been taken as evidence of its modernity, or even its postmodernity. This very same aspect, however, is also what draws the novel most powerfully into the orbit of the classical and republican attacks on luxury. The work of John Sekora, whose monograph of 1977 has, in more recent scholarship on the topic, not always received the attention it deserves, provides the most comprehensive account of luxury and social disintegration. Luxury, Sekora writes, is "a theory of entropy that explains as it describes how men, singly or collectively, lose vitality and fall from grace"; and he goes on to explain that "luxury in the Old Testament begins in the neglect of necessity and the forgetting of one's place in the hierarchy."[25] We have seen on various occasions how these exact ideas of "entropy," the "neglect of necessity," and the "forgetting of one's place in the hierarchy" carry over unchanged into the more vociferous attacks on luxury in the late eighteenth century. The blurring of social categories, for example, and the increasing unreliability of traditional markers of status, are set pieces in critiques of the spread of fashion as far back as Zedler. They find their paradigmatic eighteenth-century expression in the work of Johann Peter Süßmilch, who, as we have seen, describes *Luxus* as "that magnificence, opulence, and expenditure, which eliminates all order, which confuses everything, and mixes the noble with the lowest class of citizen, which is born of a vain pride, characterized in particular by a ceaseless forward motion, without ever resting, since by dint of arrogance each wants to appear to be more than he is, until finally everything is identical to everything else, such that one can no longer distinguish one from the other."[26] And it is precisely this sort of relentless, egotistical, boundary-blurring expenditure that defines the plot of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* as well, as a number of insightful interpretations have noted, without, however, recognizing the venerable discursive tradition being activated in its representation.

The shared nexus of concerns that links Goethe to these other commentators can be expanded if we reconsider the claims of Johann August Schlettwein cited

24. Wellbery, "*Die Wahlverwandtschaften,*" 301; Reschke, *"Zeit der Umwendung,"* 111. Approaching the ambiguity of signs from a different perspective, Thomas Herold writes of a universal "failure in reading signs," which he traces back to protagonists' tendency "to misinterpret symbols as allegories." Thomas Herold, "Zeichen und Zeichendeutung in Goethes *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*," *Seminar* 45.1 (2009): 2. Referring specifically to the reorganization of the churchyard, Barbara Thums writes of the "obscuring of the referent or, as the case may be, the materiality of the body of the sign in favor of the self-referential sign." Thums, *Aufmerksamkeit: Wahrnehmung und Selbstbegründung von Brockes bis Nietzsche* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2008), 361.

25. John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 26, 27.

26. Johann Peter Süßmilch, *Die Göttliche Ordnung in den Veränderung des menschlichen Geschlechts* (Berlin: Im Verlag des Buchladens der Realschule, 1762), 2:72.

in the previous chapter. Schlettwein, it will remembered, described "the aim, the spirit, and the meaning of opulence" not only in the familiar terms of the senses and the imagination; he also stressed the loss of any capacity to think in causal terms, to focus on the future consequences of present actions: "The unchanging, the enduring, the value of the past and the present in the future, the evaluation of the impressions and of causes in terms of their effects, and the progression thereof; these are not the goal of opulence."[27] In the case of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (Henry von Ofterdingen), we saw that the miner proved uniquely resistant to the temptations of luxury as described in this passage, serving as a model for the romantic artist. Faced with "the stimulation of the senses and the imagination through forms, colors, and appearances," he nonetheless managed to embed these stimulations in a meaningful causal framework, thereby channeling his egoism toward socially productive ends and maintaining the appropriate balance between surface and depth, past and present.[28] Eduard, in contrast, appears as the embodiment of Schlettwein's opulent individual, driven exclusively by sensuality and the imagination. Past and future obligations (the "value of the past and the present in the future") mean nothing to him; his perceptions of causal relationships are deeply distorted by his unbounded desire; and he establishes the value of all things solely on the basis of their capacity to satisfy this desire. He acts, as Thomas Wegmann writes, as "the omnipotent despot of signs."[29] In this role, he mirrors many of the figures we have considered in this study, not least those targeted in books and treatises critical of luxury consumption. There as well the target was an alleged revaluation or misappropriation of signs based on a fantasy construction of the self, in a manner that detached them from their allegedly natural contexts of meaning. The key difference is that Eduard, as a result of his social position and his financial resources, proves uniquely capable of extending his semiotic tyranny over a much broader range. Like those other luxury consumers, however, his ability to engage in this fantasy play is closely linked to the availability of new commodities and commodified entertainments, a point that the novel underscores on numerous occasions.

At times, to be sure, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* suggests that its catastrophic events can be traced back to Eduard's moral failings, failings that themselves appear to have their origins in a combination of a weak character and a failed upbringing. Not unlike Campe's Robinson the Younger or Wieland's Azor, he is "the only child of wealthy parents, spoiled by them" (10; translation slightly modified). But the process of social entropy related by the novel clearly transcends the agency of any one figure, and beyond that, Goethe's narrative style, the often-noted "symbolic" character of the work to which I will return in my concluding remarks, seems to

27. Johann August Schlettwein, *Grundfeste der Staaten oder die politische Oekonomie* (1779; repr., Athenäum: Frankfurt/Main, 1971), 406–7.

28. Ibid.

29. Wegmann, *Tauschverhältnisse*, 251.

demand an interpretation of individual characters in emblematic terms.[30] Along these lines, one should also note that Eduard is far from the only character who can be illuminated by reference to Süßmilch and Schlettwein. Luciane offers an even more concentrated embodiment of Schlettwein's opulence, as evidenced by her excess in all things, from the "valises," "portmanteaus," "leather containers," "little boxes," and "cases" (133) that crowd the house upon her arrival to her "endless change of clothes" (135). Her prodigality is the stuff of legend—or, perhaps, allegory.[31] She proves a voracious consumer of material and financial resources in her efforts to stage an endless series of ephemeral entertainments, each of which has at its primary purpose the gratification of her own ego. It comes as no surprise that the description of her departure makes conspicuous use of the verb *aufzehren* (translated as "exhausted," 149) and refers to her entourage as a "swarm" (149), associating her with that quintessential consumer of the animal kingdom, the locust.

Luxury and Commodification

Recognizing the discursive context of luxury that informs Goethe's critique, I would argue, gives us a more historically nuanced perspective on the fear of an absolute equivalence and exchangeability that haunts the novel. One can certainly affirm Helmut Schneider's claim that the "epochal transformation of modernity" constitutes "the global background of the novel," but one must also acknowledge that the reading of modernity offered by the novel owes a clear debt to a conceptual framework with origins in the premodern period.[32] Of course, my argument from the outset has been that precisely this framework becomes the focus of controversy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Goethe's novel takes up a unique position within this controversy. If one finds much in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* that is familiar from the other texts we have considered in this study, one also finds a number of crucial differences. Most notable is the level of detail in the novel's articulation of the link between commodification and luxury.

While one can certainly claim (as I have done repeatedly) that all of the works addressed thus far need to be understood against a backdrop of commercial expansion, none of them lavishes anywhere near the same level of narrative attention to commodities as *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. One would in fact be hard pressed to find any novel written around 1800 that contains such a highly elaborated treatment of

30. J. Hillis Miller writes of "Goethe's extraordinary gift for reconciling allegorical emblem and obedience to the stylistic decorums of realism." J. Hillis Miller, "Interlude as Anastomosis in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*," *Goethe Yearbook* 6 (1992): 117.

31. Barbara Thums describes Luciane as "modernity personified" as well as "the figure of luxury and fashion," Thums, *Aufmerksamkeit*, 376. Of course, to limit the personification of modernity to the figure of Luciane is to restrict one's conception of modernity in such a way as to exclude, for example, the rational planning of the Hauptmann.

32. Schneider, "Wahllandschaften," 287.

either processes of commodification or the material culture of the period. Goethe's novel, I would argue, can be seen to signal the historical moment at which the traditional discourse of luxury as entropy becomes inextricably entwined with the modern world of goods.

In this context as well we owe a debt to David Wellbery, who first noted the significance of these processes and objects for the novel, which he collected, for obvious reasons, under the rubric of the "K-paradigm." There is the *chemische Kabinett* (chemistry cabinet, 32), which is intended to demonstrate the principles of elective affinity; the ultimately deadly *Kahn* (rowing-boat, 80), which "at considerable expense Eduard had sent away for"; *der Koffer* (box, 97) that Eduard orders for Ottilie's birthday; the various *Kataloge* (catalogues, 107), from which Eduard and the gardener order flowers and shoots; the *Kästchen* (box) of the architect, which resembles *das Kästchen eines Modehändlers* (the little trinket boxes, 123) as well as having a link to the *Kästchen* (little boxes, 133) of the Englishman's companion; finally, one has the *Naturalienkabinett* (natural-history cabinet, 169) mentioned by Ottilie in her journal, and the *tragbare dunkle Kammer* (portable *camera obscura,* 182) that the Englishman uses to sketch the landscape.[33]

The crucial point here is not simply that the novel makes reference to a large number of commodities, but that these artifacts are explicitly linked to processes of monetization, and that these processes are linked in turn with the flattening of distinctions and the social entropy that so many scholars have identified in the novel. The very existence of the "K-paradigm," by establishing a linguistic parallel among disparate objects, suggests commensurability, a collapsing of the distinctions that separate the spheres of art, science, agriculture, and entertainment. All find a common denominator in their status as mobile property.[34]

Nowhere is the link between commodification, luxury, and the obliteration of difference clearer than in the case of the chest or box that Eduard gives to Ottilie, which certainly figures as one of the most prominent and narratively significant commodities in all of eighteenth-century German literature. The gift of "muslins, cambrics, silks, shawls, and lace-work" (97) tucked away in the drawers of the "marvelous little box" (97) indicates nothing so much as Eduard's narcissistic excess and his desire to remake Ottilie in his own image, "to dress her head to foot, and more than once" (97; translation modified). The gift is profoundly impersonal; nothing about it suggests an effort to address the unique individuality of the recipient. Framed as a purchase undertaken through a third party (Eduard's valet) in contact with "tradespeople and people from the fashion houses" (91) who presumably know what "young women" like, the chest offers a material challenge to any readers who would take seriously the authenticity of Eduard's affection.

33. A similar list can be found in Wellbery, "*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*," 310–11.
34. Wellbery, "*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*," 311–12.

Its impersonal character is further cast into relief by the description of another gift, the hand-knitted vest given to the architect by Charlotte and Ottilie on the occasion of his departure. In this case the emphasis is on the absence of mediation, on the object as a direct repository of the (innocent) affection of the giver and as the product of a direct personal investment of time ("which for a long time he had watched them both working at," 160). The chest thus appears in the novel as the quintessential luxury commodity, both in terms of its cost and exclusivity and in its link to the intensification of erotic desire through external display. Despite this exclusivity, however, it is no less the product of what Arjun Appuradai terms "culturally standardized recipes for fabrication," produced for an anonymous purchaser and ordered from anonymous merchants in—where else?—the city.[35] The object and its contents demonstrate the powerful symbolic role of such commodities, their expressive function as markers of identity, even as they unmask this identity as a fantasy construction (Eduard's) completely detached from the essential qualities of the recipient. One can hardly be surprised that Ottilie finds the object unsettling—"so costly and exotic that she could not bring herself to think of it as hers" (97).

Eduard's desire to use the chest and its contents to refashion Ottilie according to his ideal can be read as an attempt to enmesh her in a wider circuit of exchange and equivalence. That Ottilie herself ultimately turns to these same goods in order to irrevocably signal her disengagement from this circuit is a key point to which I will return shortly. Before doing so, however, it is worth mentioning a few more examples of the explicit connection between monetization or commodification and the blurring of distinctions in the novel. In the case of the *Vorwerk*, as we have already seen, the decision to sell is framed by a confusion of conceptual categories (investment, interest) that obliterates the difference between the necessary and the ornamental. In the case of the cemetery as well, one finds a reference, albeit a subtle one, to the financial interests that helped facilitate the transformation of the "bumpy graves" into "a fine colourful carpet" (118). The narrator points out that the pastor was ultimately reconciled to the new arrangement because Charlotte gives him the right to capitalize the property, thereby ensuring that this beautiful carpet "moreover would be of benefit to his household" (118).

A more significant example, however, is the drinking goblet that was originally created for Eduard in his youth, onto which were engraved the first initials of his two names, an *E* and an *O,* "together in a very decorative intertwining" (61). Like the chest, the goblet has a complicated life history that reflects what Igor Kopytoff refers to as successive phases of commodification and decommodification.[36] Having

35. Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 42.

36. Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process," in Appadurai, *Social Life of Things,* 65. Kopytoff uses the terms "commoditization" and "decommoditization," which I have changed throughout for the sake of consistency with other sections of the book.

begun as a gift to Eduard in his youth, it is then incorporated into the foundation stone ritual, where the young journeyman tosses it into the air, for, according to the narrator, "we mark the superabundance of our joy by destroying the vessel we made use of when we were joyful" (61). At this point the goblet has long been removed from the sphere of commodities, and within the ritual it functions as a sign whose meaning reflects a shared and presumably stable community of values. Like the various items submerged in the time capsule, its destruction can be seen as part of the socially sanctioned prodigality described previously.

Rather than shattering on the stones as expected, however, the goblet is caught by one of the spectators, who is then persuaded by Eduard to part with it "at a high price" (113). At this moment of recommodification, the goblet is extracted from a socially agreed-upon sphere of meanings and becomes a merely private symbol; more specifically, it becomes Eduard's private token that the hand of fate is involved in his relationship to Ottilie.[37] This transition, moreover, from a set of socially fixed meanings anchored to particular rituals to a sphere of exclusively private meanings, a transition that the novel identifies with the process of (re-)commodification, initiates a development whereby the distinction among artifacts evaporates entirely. The novel marks the final stage of Eduard's decline after Ottilie's death by way of another reference to the goblet, which, having meanwhile been shattered by accident, is quietly replaced by Eduard's valet. When Eduard discovers what has happened, he loses all interest in food and drink. As if to indicate the instability of private signs and the fragility of meanings privately constructed through commodities, the narrator foregrounds this final substitution as the beginning of the end.

One finds other passages in the novel where artifacts explicitly identified as commodities are linked to a modern destabilization of the traditional social order—for example, the second-rate grafts (presumably French) that are featured in the catalogs of "fruit-growers nowadays" (107), or the row-boat that Eduard has delivered at great expense from afar.[38] Of particular significance in the case of the three crucial artifacts discussed above, however (the chest, the *Vorwerk*, and the goblet; the case of the cemetery is less clear-cut), is the way the novel emphasizes the *moment* of commodification as a key point of origin for the processes of social destabilization related by the work as a whole. In light of this emphasis, it comes as no surprise that some have seen in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* an anticipation of Marx's characterization of capitalist modernity as a social order in which "all that is solid melts into air."[39] The novel certainly does anticipate Marx in this respect, but to

37. Wegmann writes of the glass: "But instead of experiencing the fate that corresponds to its actual purpose, namely that of ritualized destruction, it becomes entangled in a logic of exchange." Wegmann, *Tauschverhältnisse*, 202.

38. On the French origins of the grafts, see Reschke, *"Zeit der Umwendung,"* 100.

39. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 476. See also Schneider, "Wahllandschaften," 285.

read *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* exclusively in these terms is to miss the extent to which the novel captures a discourse in transition (and this is still the case, it should be noted, in the work of Marx and Engels). The novel gestures toward both the future and the past. It illuminates, on the one hand, how deeply the conception of modernity as entropy, which finds a dramatic though by no means final articulation in the *Communist Manifesto*, is indebted to an older discourse on luxury. But the novel also foregrounds the indelible transformation of that discourse through processes of commodification, processes that seem to obliterate traditional models of social order, but also, as we will see, raise the possibility of new kinds of depth and distinction.

In order to better understand the innovations of Goethe's novel in this regard, we can turn to the work of Igor Kopytoff, who approaches the category of the commodity from a more anthropologically informed perspective than is often the case in the Marxist tradition. Kopytoff points out that the existence of a commodity depends not simply on its being produced as such, but also on a "cultural and cognitive process" by which individuals mark certain things (or people) as commodities, and thereby as participating in a sphere of universal commensurability.[40] On this reading, commodities exist in all societies, traditional and modern, "exchange being a universal feature of human social life" (68). Important differences between societies come into play, however, with regard to both the number and kinds of items that occupy this sphere as well as the circumstances under which they are allowed to do so.

All societies can be located between the two extremes of complete commodification, a state in which any person or thing could be exchanged or sold for any other, and a state of perfect decommodification, in which everything is completely singular. Indeed, for Kopytoff, one of the primary tasks of culture is to identify and maintain those areas in which people and/or things can be understood as equivalent and those in which they cannot. With the spread of new institutions and technologies of exchange in early modern Europe, however, establishing the boundaries between what can be exchanged and what cannot becomes a much more dynamic and contested process. Shifts in the location of these boundaries or an expansion in the terrain they mark off tends to be accompanied by conceptual unease: "The flattening of values that follows commodification and the inability of the collective culture of modern society to cope with this flatness frustrate the individual" (88). Beyond this, moreover, these shifts also generate counterreactions. According to Kopytoff, "The counterdrive to this potential onrush of commodification is culture. . . . And if, as Durkheim saw it, societies need to set apart a certain portion of their environment, marking it as 'sacred,' singularization is one means to this end. Culture ensures that some things remain unambiguously singular, it resists the commodification of

40. Kopytoff, "Cultural Biography of Things," 64; subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

others; and it sometimes resingularizes what has been commodified" (73). What we see in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, is, on the one hand, the encroachment of the principles of exchange into arenas from which they had previously been excluded, and a corresponding "flattening of values." The sale of the *Vorwerk* proves particularly relevant in this regard, since it hinges on both the monetization of landed property and the expansion of credit instruments.[41] Equally important, however, is the diagnosis in the novel of a counterreaction, of strategies employed to reestablish meaningful discriminations through attempts at singularization.

As Kopytoff points out, traditional, small-scale and modern, complex societies alike respond to commodification by demarcating certain areas of activity that are excluded from such exchange—a process that he terms "singularization." The key difference between the two lies in the fact that in complex societies this process no longer reflects a stable social consensus but rather the idiosyncrasies of individuals and small groups. He contrasts, for example, the modern institution of high art with the fixed exchange hierarchy of the Tiv of central Nigeria. With regard to the former, he writes: "Singularity is confirmed not by the object's structural position in an exchange system, but by intermittent forays into the commodity sphere, quickly followed by reentries into the closed sphere of singular 'art'" (82–83). The problem in complex societies involves not just the existence of extensive spheres of equivalence, and not just the loss of meaning, but also the ambiguity of objects and the corresponding proliferation of *individualized* meanings. And here we can establish a link back to the novel. As much as *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* relates a "disorganization of symbolic orders," it also reflects on a remarkable range of attempts to reestablish order and distinction on the basis of new and largely individualized value hierarchies. These attempts, moreover, often operate through the mechanisms of commodity exchange itself. What is Eduard's purchase of the goblet, after all, if not an attempt at singularization, a "foray into the commodity sphere" immediately followed by a withdrawal into the closed sphere of (private) singularity?

An even more dramatic example is Ottilie, who singularizes the chest she receives from Eduard by turning it into a sacred object, a kind of altar before which she worships in the evening: "But how often at nights, having locked herself in, Ottilie knelt before the open box and looked at her birthday presents, not one of which she had used or cut or made up" (108). Even more significantly, her concluding gesture, her ultimate act of independence, self-determination, and self-expression, makes use of this commodity as its primary vehicle. By using the materials from the chest to construct her burial gown, she transforms what was a rather straightforward

41. In this context one should note that the sale can be broken down into two phases. In the first, the plan is to use the monthly payments on the *Vorwerk* to finance improvements; in the second, a loan is taken out that the protagonists intend to pay off with those payments. "They conferred, and agreed they would rather speed up the schedule of work themselves, borrow money for that purpose, and pay it back as the instalments still due on the sale of the farm came in. By ceding the franchise this could be done almost without loss" (86).

Figure 11. Ottilie and her *Koffer*. *Urania*, *Taschenbuch für Damen auf das Jahr 1812.* Reproduced courtesy of Princeton University Library, Princeton, New Jersey.

token of desire into a highly idiosyncratic prefiguration of her imminent death. As if to underscore the confusion that results from the privatization of meaning through the dialectic of commodification and singularization, the narrator explains how her friends completely misinterpret this "most meaningful" (*das Bedeutendste*) act, taking it to be an indication of her steady improvement (fig. 11).

Objects of Distinction

At stake in these two examples is the status of the commodity as a means of confirming, asserting, and even constructing individual identities, not, as is the case in traditional societies, on the basis of a stable set of correspondences between artifacts and status, but in terms of highly idiosyncratic, individualized value systems. This dialectical entwinement of commodities and identity, whereby commodities both threaten and help to ground a sense of self, constitutes one key way in which Goethe departs from the straightforward enervation/motivation dichotomy that is typical of eighteenth-century debates about luxury. In addition, the novel offers a rather different perspective on the fetishism of commodities than we have come to expect from authors writing in a Marxist vein. It seems clear that both Eduard and Ottilie have a fetishistic relationship to the commodities in question, but their fetishism is itself a reaction to the leveling effects of commodification. That Eduard's and Ottilie's attempts to singularize are so closely linked to their deaths suggests a profound skepticism toward their efforts and toward privatization of value and identity in complex, highly commodified societies. The novel, in other words, implies that private singularization, though it may be opposed to homogenization, is too weak to counter the "flattening of values" caused by new technologies of and opportunities for exchange. The conflicts between individual value systems that the novel relates would seem to confirm Kopytoff's claim that the "complex intertwining of the commodity exchange sphere with the plethora of private classifications" leads to "anomalies and contradictions and to conflicts both in the cognition of individuals and the interactions of individuals and groups" (88).

But the situation is not quite so simple. Even as the novel relates a loss of distinction and the confusion of values, it insists on the need to recontextualize within the new order, to resist the leveling.[42] One central figure in this regard is the architect, whose profession not only evokes that of the author but also suggests an interest in structure and stability, an interest that reminds us of the journeyman's speech

42. Approaching the novel from the perspective of the landscape garden, which he views as Exhibit A in the novel's critique of the alienation from nature in modernity, Helmut Schneider has also recognized a counterdiscourse of "recontextualization" in the work. Quoting from Ottilie's journal, he writes: "Thereupon follows the idea of a recontextualization through representation, a kind of secondary enrooting of a body of knowledge that is far from her world and isolated from her lived experience, and for which for her (and for the author Goethe behind her) the naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt serves as an example." Schneider, "Wahllandschaften," 298.

on the occasion of the foundation stone ritual. He also owns a collection of diverse artifacts taken from old Germanic burial mounds: "tiny one-sided and weightier coins, seals" (123). As if to underscore the homogenizing impact of the fashionable commodity, the narrator explains how these artifacts have been arranged "in drawers and compartments on trays fitted into these and lined with cloth" such that these "ancient and solemn objects seemed in his handling of them almost modish, it was a pleasure to look at them, like looking into little trinket boxes at a milliner's [*Modehändlers*]" (123).

On the one hand, such a description seems to confirm what James Bunn, with regard to the English context, has described as the eclectic aesthetic of the curio cabinet, an aesthetic that emerges as a consequence of commercialization, expanded trade, and the exotic imports that accompanied them. The central features of this "mercantile aesthetic" would appear to apply equally well to the architect's collection: decontextualized objects combined "without consideration of a unifying principle," which thus "no longer signify in a figure-ground relationship" but only in terms of a "circumscribed allusiveness among a collection of others."[43] And not just to his collection. As we have seen, processes of disembedding, decontextualization, and semiotic collapse suffuse the novel.[44]

In the case of the architect, however, the conclusion that these artifacts have been transformed into little more than an unrelated collection of fashionable diversions is undercut in a later passage. Here the novel draws a clear distinction between the discriminating care with which the owner treats his "treasures" (123) and the homogenizing extravagance of a figure like Luciane. Asked by Ottilie why he refused to bring out his collection during one of Luciane's soirées, he responds: "If you knew . . . how roughly even cultured people handle the most precious works of art, you would forgive me for not wishing to have mine passed around. They seem not to know that a medal should be held along the edge. Instead they touch the face, however beautifully and cleanly stamped it is, they rub the loveliest pieces between finger and thumb as if that were the way to appreciate artistic forms!" (155). Particularly the rubbing movement described toward the end of this response, which evokes the typical approach to testing the quality and character of fabrics, seems calculated to highlight precisely that these artifacts are *not* the wares of a milliner and need not be treated as such.

A further example of discrimination within the new (dis)order can be seen in the depiction of the *tableaux vivants*. Goethe's ambivalence toward this form of

43. James H. Bunn, "The Aesthetics of British Mercantilism," *New Literary History* 11.2 (1980): 304.

44. One even finds in Goethe the same linguistic phenomenon that Bunn identifies with the British aesthetic—the use of undifferentiated lists. Just as Alexander Pope refers to Belinda's "Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux," Goethe's seemingly dismissive narrator lists off the contents of the architect's collection—"tiny one-sided and weightier coins, seals, and other things of that kind" (123)—as well as the "Muslins, cambrics, silks, shawls, and lace-work" (97) that fill Ottilie's chest and the "gauzes, crapes, fringes, spangles, tassels, and crowns" that arrive with Luciane (135).

entertainment is well documented, and it appears to have stemmed from the way the genre elides the distinction between art and life, thus vitiating attempts to treat the representation as an object of disinterested contemplation.[45] As a transformation of a two-dimensional painting into a three-dimensional display, the *tableaux* might seem to counter the general tendency toward a loss of depth that the novel relates and criticizes. The loss of depth in this case, however, pertains to the balance of the faculties in play during the process of reception. The overwhelming power of the sensuous aspect of the presentation flattens the combination of sensory stimulation and reflective contemplation that constitutes the normative approach to painting. Brigitte Peucker, situating the *tableaux* within the context of the history of the visual arts, explains how they turn the material body itself into an image and thereby "collaps[e] as far as possible the distance between signifier and signified."[46]

On a more superficial level, the skepticism toward the *tableaux* no doubt stemmed partly from their association with a commodified entertainment culture viewed by some as overrefined and excessive. The examples depicted in the novel can certainly be linked to commerce and luxury, both in terms of the expense required to stage them and in the sense that each of the paintings represented would have been known primarily through the popular engravings available for purchase.[47] They were also associated in popular discourse with luxury consumption, as is made clear by Karl August Böttiger's description of these displays as a "confection, which, at events where one expects lavish entertainments, is sometimes brought out as a dessert."[48] Goethe himself, in a journal entry from the *Italienische Reise* (Italian Journey) that anticipates key episodes in the novel, also places them in the context of financial extravagance. After first commenting on the Neapolitan fascination with Christmas nativity scenes, "for the outfitting of which the house expends great sums," he goes on to describe living pictures as one of the most beloved entertainments of "high-ranking and wealthy families."[49]

If, however, one can discern in the novel a general suspicion toward such entertainments, a distinction is nonetheless drawn between the *tableaux* featuring Luciane and the nativity scene in which Ottilie plays the lead role. Goethe's description of the latter repeatedly draws attention to those details that render the display more than a mere imitation, that enable it to shed—quite literally—new light on such a familiar

45. See Karin Wurst, *Fabricating Pleasure: Fashion, Entertainment, and Cultural Consumption in Germany, 1780–1830* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 226–29.

46. Peuker, "Material Image," 233.

47. Ibid., 230. By the early nineteenth century, moreover, they had themselves become a form of commodified entertainment for which tickets could be purchased, especially in large urban centers. See Wurst, *Fabricating Pleasure,* 219–20.

48. Karl August Böttiger, "Plastisch-mimische Darstellungen," *Abend-Zeitung auf das Jahr* 11 (1818): n.p.

49. Goethe, *Goethes Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden*, ed. Erich Trunz (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1977), 11:331–32.

scene.[50] The uniqueness of this particular effort stems in part from a "clever arrangement of the lighting" (157) but also from the serendipitous slumber of the child and from Ottilie's inimitable "pose, bearing, expression and looks" (157). And yet another distinction is drawn in this passage, between the first staging of the image and a second, misguided attempt to turn the modest evening scene into an "image . . . of daylight and glory" (158). In the latter case, as a result of "a vast [*unmäßige*] illumination" (158) the texture-producing chiaroscuro of the original staging is bathed in a homogenizing light, an "infinite brightness" (158). One is reminded here of the narrator's reference in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* to the "skillful distribution of light, color, and shadow" that has been lost as a result of the homogenizing affluence of the modern age. To be sure, like so many of the representations in the novel, these scenes are characterized by an inscrutable ambiguity, and one can certainly agree with Jochen Hörisch's claim that "the pathos-laden and sublime sounding ambiguities are clearly infused with a soberly objective, sometimes even sarcastic force."[51] One can never be sure, in other words, just how seriously to take the claims of the narrator. The juxtaposition of multiple variants of these "trivial" art forms, however, a juxtaposition that offers just one example of the mirroring so central to Goethe's technique as a novelist, suggests an effort to establish meaningful distinctions, and this suggestion forces the reader to consider whether such distinctions are valid.[52] One is reminded here of a remark made by Walter Benjamin in a remarkably similar context in the notes for his *Arcades* project: "And of course: isn't it profaning Goethe to make a film of 'Faust'; and isn't there a world of difference between Faust as text and Faust as film? True. But isn't there also a whole world of difference between a bad and a good film of 'Faust'? It is never a matter of the "major," but only of the dialectic contrasts, which often seem nothing more than nuances. But it is from them that life always springs anew."[53] If we consider the novel with Benjamin in mind, it becomes possible to read the disintegration of the symbolic order as a moment of opportunity, albeit one less relevant to the ethical and political spheres in general than to the ethical and political dimensions of literary production.

Literature as Myth

The key conceptual category for grasping this opportunity, I would argue, is that of myth. The mythic quality of Goethe's novel has been a source of interest and

50. Peuker describes Luciane's efforts as "the image as reality" and Ottilies as "reality as image." Peuker, "Material Image," 230–31. See also Breithaupt, *Jenseits der Bilder*, 172.

51. Hörisch, "Dekonstruktion der Sprache," 826.

52. For a characterization of this mirroring techinque, see Hans Vaget, "Goethe the Novelist: On the Coherence of His Fiction," in *Goethe's Narrative Fiction: The Irvine Goethe Symposium* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1983), 1–20, esp. 7–11.

53. Walter Benjamin, "N [Re the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress]," in *Benjamin—Philosophy, Aesthetics, History*, ed. Gary Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 46.

controversy ever since Benjamin described the work as a "mythic shadowplay staged in the costumes of the Age of Goethe."[54] Others have since challenged this claim, whether by insisting on the work's topicality or, more fundamentally, by casting the work as antimythic in its essence.[55] These interpretations have illuminated important facets of the novel, but my own interest in myth takes a different approach to the question. In agreeing with Benjamin regarding the mythic character of the work, I am referring not so much to what Burkhardt Lindner terms the "inexorability of the narrated events" but to what virtually all scholars have agreed on as the symbolic mode of narration.[56]

In reading Goethe's symbolism as mythic, I take my cue from the Victorian author and critic John Ruskin, who understood myth as a form of enigmatic allegory, or, in his more precise language, "a theory of the universe under the grotesque of a fairy tale."[57] What he means by this claim is simply that myths signal the existence of the deeper truths they intend to convey precisely through their inclusion of circumstances deemed by readers to be "extraordinary, or in the common use of the word, unnatural."[58] Ruskin had in mind such events as Hercules's slaying of a water serpent in the lake of Lerna, but we might substitute the seemingly miraculous similarity of the infant Otto to Ottilie and the Hauptmann, or the resurrection of Nanny after her apparently dead limbs brush the gown of the truly deceased Ottilie. As Ruskin further explains, because stories like that of Hercules may be read simply as fantastic tales and thus generate no deeper reflection, "it will be wise in me to surprise your attention by adding some singular circumstance; for instance, that the water-snake had several heads, which revived as fast as they were killed, and which poisoned even the foot that trod upon them as they slept. And in proportion to the fullness of intended meaning I shall probably multiply and refine upon these improbabilities."[59]

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54. Walter Benjamin, "Goethe's Elective Affinities," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1 (1913–1926), ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard, 1996), 309.

55. The latter approach has taken various forms. To give just a few of many possible examples, Burkhardt Lindner interprets the novel as a critique of the "mythic constitution of civil society"; Gabrielle Bersier sees it as an elaborate parody of the religious-patriotic mythmaking of Friedrich Schlegel; and Reschke focuses on Goethe's unveiling of the processes through which historical events are transformed into mythic narratives. See Burkhardt Lindner, "Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* und die Kritik der mythischen Verfassung der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft," in *Goethes "Wahlverwandtschaften": Kritische Modelle und Diskursanalysen zum Mythos Literatur*, ed. Norbert Bolz (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), 23–44; Gabrielle Bersier, *Goethes Rätselparodie der Romantik: Eine neue Lesart der "Wahlverwandtschaften"* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997); Reschke, *"Zeit der Umwendung."* Fritz Breithaupt's interpretation could also be added to this list, to the extent that one understands myth as a form of metaphysical knowledge that establishes a particular perception of reality as definitive. See Breithaupt, *Jenseits der Bilder*, esp. 9; 185–88. My own use of the term *myth*, however, as will soon become clear, insists on its role as a means to resist the ossification of meaning.

56. Lindner, "Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*," 38.

57. John Ruskin, "The Queen of the Air: Being a Study of the Greek Myths of Cloud and Storm," in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1905), 19:297.

58. Ibid., 296.

59. Ibid.

There is much that can be (and has been) said about Ruskin's claims, and this is not the place for a detailed elucidation. The aspect of his theory relevant to this discussion, which may seem rather commonplace, is that it allows us to think of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* as mythic without linking it (along the lines of Benjamin's essay) to questions of fate or implying a connection to the ideologically dubious mythologizing of some German romanticism.

Starting from Ruskin's notion of myth as a polysemic and often ambivalent allegory, an iridescent hieroglyph that can contain multiple natural, moral, historical, and social resonances, we can grasp Goethe's narrative strategies in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* as strategies for creating depth.[60] As such, they represent a variant of the same kind of singularization or even sacralization undertaken by Ottilie and Eduard, a means of resisting homogenization. The novel, in other words, counters at the level of narrative technique the loss of depth and the drive toward universal commensurability that seems to prevail at the level of plot. What makes this possible, moreover, is precisely the attenuation of a stable link between signifier and signified brought about by an expansion of the sphere of exchange. Returning to Kopytoff's idea of informal singularization and focusing on the author rather than the characters of Ottilie and Eduard, we can reinterpret the loss of a social consensus regarding the space of singularity as a moment of tremendous creative opportunity, whereby a universe of objects with fixed signification gives way to one in which artifacts open themselves up to the possibility of new metaphorical resonances. Commodification poses threats on many levels, but it likewise expands the scope of potential literary creativity.

One of Goethe's many achievements in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is to have taken advantage of this opportunity to a degree unmatched by his contemporaries, turning precisely those profane objects of the commodity sphere into repositories of deep and multifaceted symbolic resonance. Reading Benjamin's interpretation against the grain, one might claim that the real force of his statement about the "mythic shadowplay" stems from the insight that precisely the "costumes" of the age of Goethe become the raw material for the construction of a mythically charged narrative. And not only the costumes—which are crucial—but a whole range of fairly trivial objects and events that the novel infuses with a mythic significance: a collection of coins and seals, a little chest, a goblet, a rowboat, and a *Vorwerk*, as well as concerts, a fireworks display, and, of course, an evening presentation of living pictures.

Goethe's profane illumination of the depths of reflection to which we can be led by quotidian objects gestures toward a new foundation for justifying literary

60. Fritz Breithaupt comes to a similar conclusion from a different direction, focusing on Goethe's critique of the reductive consequences of image making and his search, in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and elsewhere, for alternative models of perceiving (and representing) reality. See Breithaupt, *Jenseits der Bilder*, esp. 174–88.

practice as more than a mere superfluity. By way of a conclusion, I would like to offer just a few—admittedly somewhat speculative—remarks regarding how we might understand this foundation. Against the backdrop of debates about luxury and with the previously discussed novels in mind, Goethe's approach can also be understood as an effort to reconnect the superfluous to the necessary, the latter being understood in this case not in terms of basic material needs but of existential significance. In this regard, the novel as edifice embodies the same sort of attempt to reintegrate the structural and the ornamental that finds expression in the foundation stone ritual. The dubious status of the novel as a primarily commercial genre makes such a strategy all the more comprehensible, and this insight allows us to place *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* within the category of antifiction that has served as one framework of interpretation throughout this study. Goethe's work includes a variety of ironizing allusions to the tropes and plot conventions of the popular romance, from the subtle yet telling reference to Eduard's "legendary [*romanenhafte*] fidelity" (10) to his rather overheated insistence that the success of the Hauptmann's efforts to persuade Charlotte to divorce him be announced with "a few cannon shots" (205). To these must be added the reference to the book that indirectly causes the death of Otto, which the narrator describes as "one of those that draws a tender-hearted reader in and will not let go" (205).[61] I would agree with Jochen Hörisch that the desire "to live as one reads" drives the catastrophes that shape the work, and that the fact "that they read becomes for the characters a source of calamity."[62] But I would also point out, first, that it is not reading per se but a certain kind of reading, of a certain kind of literature, that gives rise to disaster, and, second, that with this qualification, this position is shared by all of the authors considered in the previous chapters as well.

A number of the more recent studies of the novel have elucidated Goethe's extraordinarily complex intertextual practice, and Gabrielle Bersier in particular has composed an incisive and compelling interpretation of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* as an elaborate parody of Friedrich Schlegel's aesthetics. My primary objection to this form of radical contextualization is that it situates the ultimate significance of the novel in a localized literary border skirmish. In once again invoking the category of antifiction in regard to *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, I want to suggest that we intentionally reduce the degree of precision with which we approach the text, zooming out to a somewhat higher level of abstraction in order to reveal those features of the topography that allow us to place Goethe into dialogue, not just with Schlegel or even romanticism more generally, but with broader transformations in the literary market and the sphere of cultural consumption. From this broader perspective,

61. While it is possible that this book is one of the exotic travelogues described earlier in the novel (as Helmut Schneider claims), the description seems more appropriate to a novel. See Schneider, "Wahllandschaften," 298.

62. Hörisch, "Dekonstruktion der Sprache," 835, 833.

such ironizing allusions to the sentimental-romantic tradition indicate that *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, like all of the novels considered in this study, employs a set of narrative techniques designed to restrict the dosage of pleasure and limit the generation of desire on the part of the reader. All of these techniques, which range from the crude didactic interventions of Campe's father-narrator to the sophisticated container narratives of Wieland and Novalis, can be construed as ironic in a broad sense. Against this backdrop, the mirroring technique so often commented on in the scholarship on Goethe, which gradually reveals meaning through the juxtaposition of characters and episodes, appears in a new light. Rather than the expression of a general skepticism toward the possibility of meaning as such, as Hans Vaget has suggested, it comes into focus as a means to anchor pleasure to reflection, to balance the two. To write in such a way that "meaning has to be assembled in the reader's mind from fragments and refractions" is to retard the forward momentum of plot and thus check readerly desire.[63]

On this reading, Goethe's mirroring technique, as well as the sophisticated structural irony to which it is related, helps to constitute Goethe's novel as another example of self-limiting luxury, a text that, like the novels of Campe, Wieland, Moritz, and Novalis but unlike those at the heart of attacks on reading mania, cannot be devoured (*verschlungen*). If the general unraveling related by the narrative suggests a profound skepticism toward the possibility of achieving a self-regulating equilibrium at the societal level, the narrative structure raises the possibility that this equilibrium has in fact been displaced to another level, where, in a manner similar to Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, it manages to contain a remarkably high degree of dissonance within a work that is nonetheless experienced as a unity.[64] However comprehensive the societal dissolution related by the plot of the novel, in other words, two hundred years of scholarship would seem to confirm that the work itself demonstrates an extraordinary—albeit extraordinarily complex—coherence.

One can also identify an additional level of engagement with the contemporary literary market in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, one that deemphasizes the opposition to romanticism so frequently adduced in recent scholarship and instead points

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63. Vaget, "Goethe the Novelist," 8.

64. Joseph Vogl has also addressed the question of self-regulation in the novel, but he views the novel as a kind of transitional piece between *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and *Faust*, which relates "das Versagen rechtsförmiger Steuerungen" (the failure of legal forms of regulation) and adumbrates a new economy/society characterized by "regulation through scarcity." Vogl, "Nomos der Ökonomie," 516, 517. As I mentioned previously, Vogl's argument has influenced my own reading of the novel; however, I think he overstates the historical rupture between the two modes of regulation, which, to my mind, together constitute the "new order" of regulation. The issue is not one of substituting self-regulation "through scarcity" for more interventionist forms, but of establishing a new equilibirum between the two. In contrast to Fritz Breithaupt, however, I would agree with Vogl that the novel is ultimately concerned to secure some stable basis for regulation, rather than to establish a critical distance vis-à-vis all steering mechanisms and institutionalizations. Cf. Breithaupt, *Jenseits der Bilder,* 185.

to a literary-ideological strategy of domestication similar to the one deployed by Wieland in the case of *Der goldne Spiegel* (The Golden Mirror). We are indebted to Jane Brown for an insightful interpretation of how *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* appropriates and transforms the narrative codes of the English novel of manners. As Brown explains, "The novel . . . was preeminently an English genre, and the tradition in which Goethe was working was that of Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, and Goldsmith, the developing novel of manners."[65] There are indeed striking structural and plot similarities between Goethe's novel and those of Jane Austen, especially *Mansfield Park* (1814). But the novels of these English authors also differ from Goethe's work in crucial ways. Emil Staiger elucidates the primary distinction between *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and the novel of manners by foregrounding Goethe's mode of narration: the novel of manners depicts the world "as it is," whereas Goethe's novel is "symbolic."[66] Brown herself notes that while *Mansfield Park* may have a "pat, fairy-tale like ending," it remains within a recognizable social world, unlike the "even more arbitrary and fairy-tale-like" union of lovers that concludes *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*.[67] With Ruskin's remarks on myth in mind, we can view such elements as examples of those "improbabilities" that help generate reflection. The symbolic or mythic mode of narration, in other words, can also be read in terms of an effort to reembed a more quotidian manner of representation, preoccupied with what might be seen as trivial forms of sociability, within a constellation of higher and thus more fundamental human concerns. If Goethe was generally admiring of those English authors who wrote novels of manners, he was far less enthusiastic about German imitators who produced formulaic sentimental novels of the "Yorick-Sterne" variety without "humorous irony of the British."[68]

If we accept that Goethe appropriates the forms and themes of the English novelistic tradition while adding symbolic depth to the sentimental realism of its most popular incarnations in Germany, his approach can be grasped as an attempt to reenchant the novel, or, perhaps more accurately, to decommodify it through a process of singularization, a process that, paradoxically, becomes possible only as a result of the commodification of culture. Despite the historical and the aesthetic chasm that separates Goethe from an author like Campe, then, both prove to be concerned with reconnecting the pleasures of an increasingly commodified entertainment culture with foundational human needs. Rather than resorting to didacticism, Goethe turns to myth. This is, to be sure, a peculiar form of myth, one whose irony and ambiguity are precisely the source of its depth, and thus a form that challenges the prevalent mythologies of his day. If this claim seems overdrawn, it may

65. Jane Brown, "*Elective Affinities* and the English Novel of Manners," *Comparative Literature* 28.2 (1976): 97.

66. Qtd. in Brown, "*Elective Affinities,*" 98.

67. Brown, "*Elective Affinities,*" 104–5.

68. *Goethes Werke*, 10:322.

help to point out that Goethe himself linked luxury and myth in a similarly double-edged fashion. In *Maximen und Reflexionen* (Maxims and Reflections), he offers the following equation: "mythology = luxury of belief."[69] What remains unclear in this identification is whether mythology is to be understood as a "luxury" in the sense of being its highest and most refined form, or in the sense of being excessive. The enigmatic category of the mythic, then, offers the best framework from within which to make sense of the "enigmaticalness" of the novel.[70] Against the backdrop of needs and luxury that frames Goethe's novel, the desire called myth can be seen as a distortion, but only in one of its variants. In another, it also appears as an attempt to reintegrate a social surplus, to functionalize the literary and render it socially meaningful without reducing it to a mere tool or transforming it into a source of dogmatic belief.

69. Ibid., 12:377. The original equation is in French: "Mythologie.–*Luxe de croyance*."
70. Wegmann, *Tauschverhältnisse*, 235.

Conclusion: Useful Subjects?

The discourse of luxury in late eighteenth-century Europe speaks to the shifting status of the ornamental, to the possibility of embedding the seemingly superfluous—literature included—within meaningful social and cultural frameworks and thereby rendering it productive. In this respect, luxury is a discourse of both subjects and objects. Its dual character results in a tension, one that runs through virtually all of the novels and treatises discussed in the previous chapters. Many of these texts assert that managing the impact of the arts as luxury depends primarily on the ability to anchor sensuous and imaginative pleasures to a natural hierarchy of needs. What matters are the mechanisms for integrating and regulating pleasure rather than the particular character of the objects and experiences that give rise to it. As long as these mechanisms ensure that a person maintains the ability to meet his or her obligations to society and family, all objects of desire are equally legitimate. It makes no difference whether that person collects books or bonnets; the fine arts are a luxury like any other. One can also identify, however, a powerful opposing inclination, one that drives commentators to insist that the character of the object matters a great deal. Central to this set of arguments is a belief in the uniqueness of the work of art as a very special kind of luxury object, one whose intrinsic structure ensures a particular mode of consumption that neutralizes the potentially pernicious influence of conventional luxury goods.

My aim in these concluding remarks is not so much to resolve this tension as to hone in on some of the complexities related to the second position. Doing so will enable me to reiterate and strengthen my claim that an awareness of the contexts of luxury enables us to grasp how normative conceptions of the fine arts, and literature in particular, emerge in the period by way of a complex negotiation with an expanding universe of material artifacts and the behaviors associated with them. Literature constituted one important node in an evolving network of objects, and the meanings it comes to acquire must be seen as a function of its particular position in that network and the growth of the network as a whole.

Artifacts as Artworks

This situation finds its most forceful expression in recurring attempts to locate the literary work within an expanding world of goods, goods whose qualities are conceived as parallel or in opposition to it. Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* (Elective Affinities), where the representation of artifacts provides the lens through which the novel interrogates its own status as a literary work, offers a particularly multifaceted illustration of how such an attempt looks in practice. The results are by no means easily interpretable. *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* contains such an extraordinary array of artifacts, and so many that are presented, whether ironically or not, as touchstones for the work of art, that it proves difficult to single out any particular example as a definitive model. The pavilion or *Lustgebäude* as described in the foundation stone ceremony would appear to have a strong claim to this designation, characterized as it is in terms of a polished facade resting on a multilayered foundation of remarkable complexity. The building embodies an integration of surface and depth, ornament and structure, which, at least if we take the ritual at face value, is also fused with conventions of sociability that strengthen a sense of community across the divisions among estates. If, however, the *Lustgebäude* appears in the novel as an exemplary aesthetic artifact in some respects, Goethe simultaneously links it to the illusory sense of self-sufficiency that underlies much of the devastation depicted in the narrative.

Casting a glance backward over the previous chapters reveals that in fact all of the novels incorporate reflection on their own status by way of an engagement with material objects. Not only is the plot of *Robinson der Jüngere* (Robinson the Younger) dominated by expansive descriptions of the construction and use of tools and other quotidian artifacts (clothing, umbrellas). Through its structure and composition it posits itself as a kind of tool, one that, like those Robinson and the children produce within the world of the novel, appears as a counter to transitory pleasures of the senses and the quest for social prestige, being linked instead to permanence, recurring use, and a progressive increase in knowledge. In the case of Wieland, one might point to the exquisite ebony tablets distributed to the children of nature on the day they pledge to live according to the laws of nature. Upon these tablets the moral law of the wise Psammis is inscribed with golden letters. Although they are exquisitely crafted of rare and expensive materials, their beauty fosters a sense of loyalty and equality among members of the community, who keep them close at all times. Rather than a positional commodity that serves to distinguish individuals from one another, these tablets are possessed by all and thus help to bond them more tightly together. *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (Henry von Ofterdingen) relates the significance of the cherished objects of old, which, again by way of a series of recurrent encounters, helped to attach the individual affectively to a stable framework of social relationships, in this case across the generations. As the narrator puts it, "The welfare of widely scattered families and of whole empires depended upon their preservation."[1] Given the parallels between these cherished objects and the rare manuscript found by Heinrich in the hermit's cave, it is but a small step to posit the embedded materiality embodied in the former as a literary ideal. In *Anton Reiser*, finally, Anton's desire for recognition is closely associated with particular forms of material culture (the black apron of the hat makers, the blue cloak of the choir members), and these durable markers of corporate identity are opposed to the ephemeral and compulsively serial search for prestige that characterizes Anton's engagement with novels and the theater. Analogous evocations of a corporate identity pepper his aesthetic writings, evocations that implicitly cast the autonomous work of art—a category that does *not* appear to include his own novel—as a kind of extraordinary handicraft created by the members of an elite artists' guild.

Artworks as Artifacts

Because Moritz is often credited with inaugurating the modern discourse on what has come to be known as aesthetic autonomy, his writings provide a particularly apt starting point for a consideration of how the lens of luxury, and the related idea of artwork as artifact, can also open up a new perspective on the broader social and cultural significance of this idea—what Martha Woodmansee has memorably referred to as "the interests in disinterestedness."[2] Virtually all of the scholarship on aesthetics around 1800 makes reference to a pivotal transformation in thinking about art at this moment, although there are significant differences with regard to whether the origins of the allegedly new approach are traced back to the economic, political, or metaphysical sphere. Woodmansee offers a precise formulation of what can be seen as the consensus view. As she writes in her reflections on "Versuch einer Vereinigung aller schönen Künste" (An Attempt to Unify All the Fine Arts and Sciences), "It is hard to imagine a more radical departure from the two millennia

1. Novalis, *Henry von Ofterdingen*, trans. Palmer Hilty (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1964), 25.
2. Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 11.

that preceded his essay. For the arts up until his time had been perceived as intervening directly in human life . . . and their value and excellence as works of art had been measured, *instrumentally*, in terms of their success (or failure) in serving these broad human purposes. . . . Art, according to this new way of thinking, is a discrete realm of ultimate purpose. Its value is intrinsic."[3]

If we return for a moment to *Robinson der Jüngere*, it would seem that the novel supports Woodmansee's assertion. In direct contrast to Moritz's claim that true artworks exist for their own sake, Campe's novel represents an emphatic attempt to intervene "directly in human life," to inspire behaviors with direct social utility. We should remember, however, that Campe's project is in crucial respects a negative one: Robinson and the children are not simply constructing umbrellas. Rather, the process of construction serves to neutralize a self-indulgent egotism driven exclusively by the quest for selfish pleasures, an egotism that been exacerbated by the spread of new opportunities for consumption, cultural and otherwise. This neutralization project, moreover, involves the reestablishment of a psychic equilibrium, which is accomplished, for readers at the diegetic and the extradiegetic level, by way of an encounter with a text whose substantive content and formal complexity render any superficial, ego-driven appropriation impossible.

This concern with egotism, with *Nutzen* understood less as utility in the sense of instrumental rationality than in the sense of self-interest or *Eigennutz*, can serve as a bridge connecting Campe and Wieland to later writers like Moritz, Novalis, and Goethe. Precisely this neutralization or recalibration of a self-destructive egotism, after all, is at stake in all of the novels we have considered, and it plays a central, if subtle, role in conceptions of the autonomous work of art. Moritz himself offers a case in point. He claims that any unadulterated aesthetic experience involves an extinguishing of the ego, "the *pleasant forgetting of ourselves*."[4] For Moritz, true beauty can be appreciated only in cases where no specific relation to the particular individual consumer exists: "The beauty in the work of art is not pure and unmixed until I remove the special relationship to me" (98; translation slightly modified). This self-forgetting ensures the neutralization of any free-floating desire that might be enjoyed independently of the artwork. The neutralization of the ego and the rebalancing of the self in fact turn out to be a common theme in other reflections on classical and romantic aesthetics as well. Schiller, for example, argues that

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3. Ibid., 12. Also important in this context is Jonathan Hess, *Reconstituting the Body Politic: Enlightenment, Public Culture, and the Invention of Aesthetic Autonomy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999). Benjamin Bennett has recently called for caution in the making of such assertions. He writes: "The assertion that an idea on the scale of aesthetic autonomy is invented, or originates, in one particular text is always ill-advised." Benjamin Bennett, "The Irrelevance of the Aesthetics and the De-Theorizing of the Self in 'Classical' Weimar," in *Camden House History of German Literature,* vol. 7, *The Literature of Weimar Classicism*, ed. Simon Richter (New York: Camden House, 2005), 321.

4. Karl Philipp Moritz, "An Attempt to Unify All the Fine Arts and Sciences under the Concept of *That Which Is Complete in Itself*," trans. Elliott Schreiber, *PMLA* 127.1 (2012): 98; subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

the encounter with the beautiful returns us to the zero point of human development ("In the aesthetic state, then, man is *naught*"), a moment of absolute freedom from desire and thus a moment of infinite potential.[5]

Johann Gottlieb Fichte, however, has written the text that most clearly illuminates the connection between what has come to be known as autonomous art and luxury. In *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (The Profile of the Present Age), the same text in which he laments the modern pathology of compulsive reading and writing, Fichte also provides a characterization of the true work of art. As he explains it, we return to such works again and again, and each time "behold the same thing in a different form." And he goes on to assert: "We will no longer hunger after something new, because we have found the means to transform that which is most ancient into the most lively and vital novelty."[6] Fichte thus presents the encounter with the work of art in terms of a feedback loop in which individual desire becomes both self-perpetuating and self-limiting. The subject revisits the same object repeatedly rather than indulging in the compulsively serial consumption of the pathological reader (or the luxury consumer), which requires a never-ending succession of new objects and is motivated by the desire to increase one's status vis-à-vis one's contemporaries.

Fichte's description bears significant similarities to a number of other depictions of the work of art by canonical figures around 1800. As we saw in chapter 1, Goethe, in the short essay "Kunst und Handwerk" (Art and Handicraft), also opposes genuine art to luxury, and the opposition is grounded in an identical set of assumptions. Whereas the latter provides only "a momentary pleasure" and is driven by the desire "to enjoy a certain prestige in the eyes of others," the former is distinguished through its ability to provide enjoyment "throughout life" and to anchor that enjoyment to a project of progressive education, enabling "an ever-greater pleasure as a result of one's ever-increasing knowledge."[7] Friedrich Schlegel takes a similar view, defining a classic work in his fragment of 1797 as one that "can never be entirely understood" but from which "those who are cultivated and are cultivating themselves must always want to learn more."[8] The implication is that these inexhaustible works constitute a world unto themselves, offering, like a Leibnizian monad, "a perfect living mirror" of the whole universe expressed from a particular point of view—what Hegel later termed an "organism infinite in itself."[9] Especially salient in Fichte's and Goethe's definitions is the degree to which

5. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters,* ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 147.

6. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1956), 98–99.

7. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*, vol. 4.2, ed. Klaus H. Kiefer et al. (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1986), 119–20.

8. Friedrich Schlegel, "Lyceums Fragmente," in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler (Munich: F. Schöningh, 1967), 2:149.

9. G. W. F. Hegel, *Ästhetik*, ed. Friedrich Bassenge (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1955), 899.

this inexhaustibility is conceived in opposition to an alternative modality of desire (for "something new" or "a certain prestige"), one that is inextricably entwined with luxury, fashion, and the quest for distinction in the period.

These remarks by Fichte and Goethe provide us with a pithy elucidation of the centrality of art to the concept of *Bildung*, a concept that takes shape here as precisely the dynamic but self-limiting feedback loop of pleasure to which the art object gives rise. This loop ensures that the only desire for distinction in play is distinction from an earlier, less cultivated self. It is, moreover, a form of distinction based on a frame of reference that proves to be universal and, in theory, accessible to all—that of humanity in its normative sense. Historically situating the concept of *Bildung* in this manner implies that we may want to rethink its origins as well as those of the broader ideal of the cultivated self that becomes so central to nineteenth- and twentieth-century German and European conceptions of the social function of the arts. Rather than being primarily a reflection of the values of a rising middle class or an uneasy compromise with an oppressive political system or an effect of the rise of a disciplinary society, we should view it first and foremost as a response to the unsettling impact of a world becoming ever more opulently dense with things.

The contexts of luxury thus not only enable us to read literary depictions of artifacts as implicit reflections on the status of the artwork; they also allow us to perform the reverse operation. Fichte's remarks (as well as those of Moritz, Goethe, Schlegel, and others) posit the work of art as a particular type of material object, one with a particular impact on subjects. Tools, fashions, furniture, musical instruments, coaches, country houses, *and* works of art are all objects that shape the constitution of individual subjectivities. The specificity of art within this constellation, as represented in both the novels and many discussions of aesthetic autonomy, appears to be the way in which it establishes and helps maintain the equilibrium of faculties that constitutes the well-tempered self. To the extent that one accepts this assertion, then claims about the repudiation of utility in German classicism and romanticism, at least in the sense of impact or *Wirkung*, prove sharply overdrawn. Whatever their differences, all of the canonical descriptions of the autonomous work of art previously adduced indicate that such works serve not merely as objects of disinterested pleasure, but as objects constituted in such a way as to defuse "interested" pleasure, to neutralize self-interested desire.

Commodification and Control

Inasmuch as efforts to manage such desire are a response to the spread of a market-driven consumer culture, it makes sense to view them in terms of a strategy of decommodification. As I pointed out in chapter 4, however, we must be careful in applying this label, emphasizing its connection to the broader aims of reembedding and reinscribing, lest it be associated with a wholesale repudiation of commerce.

In the first place, these strategies entail an engagement with material culture that cannot be fully captured by an exclusive focus on the commodities, despite the fact that commodification can be seen as the trigger for this engagement. Even more importantly, neutralization is only part of the story. Literature and the arts as conceived by these authors, like the positive forms of luxury described by advocates of commerce in the eighteenth century, do provide intense pleasure, pleasure that is directly or indirectly linked to positive social outcomes. As Fichte's case makes clear, equilibrium is in no way to be identified with stasis; on the contrary, the experience of self-cultivation through art appears as a progressive process, but one characterized by a dialectic of activation and restraint, since the individual's desire always remains circumscribed by the framework of a normative conception of humanity. This dual focus on stimulation and containment, which I have been referring to throughout this study as controlled de-control, is a characteristic also shared by all of the novels we have considered. And in both the novels and many discussions of the artwork, what enables the effective regulation of the psychic economy is a kind of structural complexity, one that anchors surface to depth, pleasure to reflection and knowledge.

A further significant aspect of art as a positive luxury, then, is that the ideal artwork would seem to be possessed of the ability to regulate itself. If discussions of luxury more generally tend to stress that positive outcomes from discretionary consumption depend on effective government or educational policies and good role models, assertions by authors like Fichte as well as the example of the novels suggest an interiorization or narrativization of regulatory mechanisms. This applies just as much to Campe's rather crudely explicit interventions as to Goethe's sophisticated mirroring mechanisms, though the distinction between the two at the level of technique does suggest a developmental trajectory of increasing refinement, in this case with regard to the strategies of narrative regulation. In short, the meta- and antifictional aspects of these novels open up a perspective on the emergence of literature as a normative category deeply entwined with the ideal of a self-regulating luxury good.

Have We Ever Been Modern?

A key question remains, however. Is this literary ideal really modern? Works of fiction have always been in dialogue with other material objects and artifacts, and a cursory review of Aristotle will quickly reveal the long-standing perception of a link between the arts and psychic equilibrium or an economy of affect. Nonetheless, I have tried to make the case that in late eighteenth-century Germany a specific idea of literature emerges at the confluence of a set of recognizably modern phenomena. One important facet of my argument has been that new opportunities for discretionary consumption facilitate what is perceived as a fictionalization of the self, but that the question of precisely which consumption practices and behaviors constitute an unsustainable fictionalization, and which represent legitimate efforts at self-improvement, remains a point of controversy. This controversy plays out within the discursive field of debates over luxury. With a few very conservative exceptions, all of the participants have renounced a correspondence-based model of the self, which presumes the existence of a divinely ordained and self-evident connection between consumption practices and an immutable identity, and according to which any departure from historical precedent constitutes an unacceptable fictionalization. Instead they adhere to some form of a coherence-based model, founded on an ideal of equilibrium that obtains on both the psychic and the societal levels.

Within this context, literature appears as part of the problem and as a preferred solution to it. In one of its modalities, literature serves as a point of origin for pernicious fictionalizations, but in another as a kind of antidote. Lest one approach this latter role too narrowly, as a phenomenon whose relevance is limited to the field of literature itself, it is crucial to remember that the category of the antifictional as I have attempted to define it constitutes a response to a much broader set of practices than those associated solely with the production and consumption of literature. Even if literary representations possess a paradigmatic status in this context around 1800, I have attempted to make clear that the concern with fictionalization or theatricalization that figures so prominently in the novels also proves central to reflections on luxury more generally. Indeed, literary texts exist in a symbiotic, reciprocal relationship with other nodes in the broader network of consumer goods and consumption practices.

Assuming one accepts that a recognizably modern idea (and ideal) of literature evolves out of the context I have been describing, one might also wonder about its durability. One can, for example, find evidence in the early nineteenth century of a shift in attitudes toward literature and the fine arts as luxury production. In the field of political economy, for example, the work of Adam Müller contains the most conspicuous early example of an effort to view the fine arts less as a form of ornamentation than as a form of productive capital. Thinkers like Johann Georg Büsch, writing in the 1780s, assigned artists to the class of producers who accommodate "the needs of refined affluence," and cast their contribution to society solely in terms of the intensification of commodity circulation.[10] In contrast, in an essay on Adam Smith from 1808, Müller criticizes the father of modern political economy for failing to acknowledge the value of "the thoughts of the statesman, . . . the words of the clergyman or the artist" as a crucial source of national prosperity. And in *Die Elemente der Staatskunst* (The Elements of the Art of Government), he develops the category of "spiritual capital," by which he means the store of "experiences, ideas, and worldly wisdom" that a nation has accumulated over the centuries and that are circulated through the medium of language rather than money.[11]

10. Johann Georg Büsch, *Abhandlung von dem Geldumlauf in anhaltender Rücksicht auf die Staatswirtschaft und Handlung*, 2nd ed., pt. 2 (Hamburg and Kiel: Carl Ernst Bohn, 1800), 80.

11. Adam Müller, "Adam Smith 1808," in *Adam von Müllers gesammelte Schriften* (Munich: Georg Franz, 1839), 1:112; Müller, *Die Elemente der Staatskunst* (Berlin: Bei J. D. Sander, 1809), 3:40.

To accept the epochal character of these differences, however, is to recommit ourselves to the idea of a fundamental split between enlightenment and romanticism, after having just called into question this idea as regards the theory of aesthetic autonomy. How different is Müller's approach, ultimately, from that of someone like Büsch? His characterization places the artist in more illustrious company, and it also suggests an association with foundations ("spiritual capital") rather than mere ornament ("needs of refined affluence"). Nonetheless, his polemic against Adam Smith (leveled, it should be noted, by an art critic if not an artist) indicates an ongoing perception that artistic activities need to be justified, and this justification continues to operate according to the logic of a social utility grounded in the stimulative effects of the arts, especially their role in fostering integration within a community. Müller's category of *national* wealth (*Nationalreichtum*), moreover, has a normative component, and can be understood as a limiting framework intended to ensure that the self-interested behaviors of the producers of the fine arts are ultimately motivated by a commitment to higher values and do not generate any structural imbalances in the system.

In light of this ambivalence, which, as periodic references in the foregoing chapters indicate, continues to inform diverse reflections on consumption and the fine arts throughout the nineteenth (Marx) and twentieth centuries (Marcuse, Fromm, and many others), it probably makes the most sense to refrain from trying to establish any definitive end point. We should think instead in terms of a coexistence of perspectives circumscribed by the transformation of consumption practices that not only extends across the whole range of decades considered in this study but continues to have an impact in the present.

To be sure, one needs to be cautious in making such broad assertions. Nonetheless, as I pointed out in chapter 2, Fichte's insistence that "everyone should first have enough to eat and a place to live before anyone adorns his home," however implausible it sounds in the twenty-first century, continues to haunt both producers and consumers of cultural commodities, as do fears of a loss of self-control in the face of an onslaught of desirable artifacts—despite the proliferation of informal justificatory and regulative frameworks for discretionary consumption.[12] What has clearly shifted is the status of literature within this context. Novels like *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, which appeared in the same year as Müller's lectures, both confirm the continuing preoccupation with the legitimacy of the arts and also illuminate the ways in which concerns about egotism and fictionalized identities are becoming associated with a sphere of consumer culture that more closely resembles our own, one in which books no longer play the same paradigmatic role. If twentieth-century theorists remained critical of untenable fantasies of the self, in these interpretations literature no longer serves as a particularly privileged source of such fictions.

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12. J. G. Fichte, "Der geschloßne Handelsstaat," in *Ausgewählte politische Schriften*, ed. Zwi Batscha and Richard Saage (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 79.

The concept of luxury has also lost much of its resonance. Contemporary usage of the term rarely, if ever, presupposes a particular model of societal evolution or of the human psyche or expresses fears of a loss of social order. Yet one can still discern echoes of this earlier discourse in a whole range of ongoing attempts to explain the value of the arts, both their production and enjoyment as objects of consumption as well as their study in the context of a liberal arts education. An Internet search on the connection between the humanities and luxury, for example, generates numerous hits, from a recent Phi Beta Kappa symposium entitled "Are the Humanities Now a Luxury?" to the *New York Times* headline of 2009 proclaiming the need for the humanities to "justify their worth."[13] At issue in these examples is the rather straightforward identification of luxury with the superfluous and the ornamental, acceptable once the essentials have been taken care of but not to be overestimated. Other examples suggest a more nuanced connection to the past. The headline of an article in the *Hartford Courant,* "Humanities Temper Self-Interest with Empathy," evokes eighteenth-century claims regarding self-regulating subjects.[14] With regard to the fine arts themselves, the National Endowment for the Arts' insistence that it should be funded because "artists, art workers, and arts industries play a crucial role in shaping the life of the community" and "can improve the civic pride of its residents" is reminiscent of eighteenth-century claims about the value of "patriotic luxury."[15]

My aim in adducing these few contemporary examples is not to argue a particular thesis or advocate for some kind of facile equation of past and present. Quite the contrary—it is to argue, first, that ambivalence and uneasiness still define our relationship to both the arts and discretionary consumption more generally, and, second, to argue for the value of a further investigation of what, precisely, has changed and what has remained the same. Such an investigation is the task of another study. My hope in completing this study is that by returning to eighteenth-century Germany, we are in a position to discern with greater clarity the origins of this uneasiness, and thereby to understand more fully a history of modernity read, with Lukács, as "the history of the unceasing supersession of the forms of objectivity that give shape to human existence."[16]

13. Announcement of the fourth biennial conference of the American Conference of Academic Deans and the Phi Beta Kappa Society, held November 10–12, 2011, in Charleston, South Carolina, http://www.pbk.org/home/FocusNews.aspx?id=765; Patricia Cohen, "In Tough Times, Humanities Must Justify Their Worth," *New York Times,* February 24, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/25/books/25human.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

14. Horacio Sierra, "Humanities Temper Self-Interest with Empathy," *Hartford Courant,* September 25, 2011, http://articles.courant.com/2011-09-25/news/hc-op-sierrais-humanities-students-0925-20110925_1_humanities-liberal-arts-personality-science.

15. National Endowment for the Arts, "Art Works for America: Strategic Plan, FY 2012–2016," 8; http://www.nea.gov/about/Budget/NEAStrategicPlan2012-2016.pdf.

16. Georg Lukàcs, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1968), 372.

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