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Ilmakunnas, Johanna; Stobart, Jon

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Chapter 000

## **Display, acquisition and boundaries of luxury and taste**

Johanna Ilmakunnas and Jon Stobart

The image on the cover of this volume, *The Officers' Mess or The Remains of a Lunch*, painted by Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin in c. 1763 visualizes some of the key issues of luxury and taste during the long eighteenth century. The small still life (38 x 46 cm) depicts a table on which the remains of a lunch are left in a serving room. There are a sugarloaf, bread, cheese and pâté, fruits, decanters of vinegar and oil, and jars of compote. A large porcelain tureen with a decorated knob, a porcelain dish and a small silver vessel are placed on the table, and a white linen towel in the middle of the table catches the eye. To the right of the serving table there is another table, small and painted red, on which a sugar bowl and two teacups of Chinese porcelain are placed.<sup>1</sup> Together, these objects and commodities suggest the global dimension as well as the comfort and pleasures of everyday luxury. As such, they encapsulate perfectly our concerns in this book: the nature of taste and luxury, the acquisition of luxurious goods and the shifting meaning of these objects as they moved across spatial and social boundaries.

### ***Thinking about luxury***

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1 Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *La Table d'office, ou les Débris d'un déjeuner*, c. 1763. Oil on canvas, 38 x 46 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, M.I.1040.

Many of the things illustrated in Chardin's painting had been expensive novelties in the seventeenth century, beyond the means of most European households, but they were more widely consumed by the middle decades of the eighteenth century, even by those of very limited means.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary commentators were alive to this spreading consumption of luxury, Daniel Defoe noting of Britain that 'the Way of Living [is] large, luxurious, vain and expensive'. Moreover, Defoe was clear about the mechanisms that allowed this change: the rich would take the best wines, spices, tea, linens, muslins and so on, but there were cheaper versions of all these goods readily accessible to those of lesser means.<sup>3</sup> The same was also true of a wide range of manufactures; from ceramics and snuff boxes to buttons, ribbons and fans. Such goods were made in various materials and styles in order to suit consumers across the social scale. Producers and merchants created endless new products to meet the growing markets for luxury and semi-luxury goods, and they used skilful marketing strategies to sell their wares.<sup>4</sup>

That everyone could have their own slice of luxury raises two important issues. The first is that

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2 Anne E. C. McCants, 'Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption, and the Standard of Living: Thinking about Globalization in the Early Modern World,' *Journal of World History* 18 (2007), 433–62: see also Martin Bruegel, 'A Bourgeois Good? Sugar, Norms of Consumption and the Labouring Classes in Nineteenth-Century France,' Peter Scholliers (ed.), *Food, Drink and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2001) 99–118; Philippe Meyzie, *L'alimentation en Europe à l'époque moderne* (Paris: Armand Collin, 2010); Craig Muldrew, *Food Energy and the Creation of Industriousness: Work and Material Culture in Agrarian England, 1550–1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

3 Daniel Defoe, *A Plan of the English Commerce* (London, 1728), 144, 166.

4 See Natacha Coquery, *Tenir Boutique à Paris au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle: Luxe et Demi-Luxe* (Paris: CTHS histoire, 2011); Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*; Carolyn Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchands Merciers of Eighteenth-Century Paris* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996).

luxury was relative rather than absolute; it was contingent on time, place and spending power, and on cultural and political norms. An object or a material luxurious for a shopkeeper was neat and simple for a gentleman; extravagant use of silver and gold was ostentatious luxury for an aristocrat, but a necessity in the display of sovereign power. Definitions of luxury are thus dependent upon the consumer as well the commodity or, as Maxine Berg puts it, they are ‘shaped by public structures of meaning and private experience’ which were mutually constitutive.<sup>5</sup> The second issue, and closely related to this public-private nexus, is that luxury had considerable moral, social and economic significance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Across Europe there was an ongoing, but shifting debate about the characteristics of luxury goods and the ways in which these impacted upon society and economy.<sup>6</sup> To summarise these very briefly, there was a gradual move, away from seeing luxury as harmful to the national economy and towards a view that it formed the bedrock of economic growth. Through much of the seventeenth century, mercantilist understandings of the economy blamed luxury for draining away resources as money was spent on unnecessary imported goods. Starting with Mandeville, political economists increasingly viewed luxury, and consumption more generally, as an economic stimulus and an employer of the poor. A parallel debate on the morality of luxury critiqued elite excess, which was often associated with foreignness (and especially French) and effeminacy, but the real focus for censure was the poor. This was partly because, as John Sekora in particular has argued, luxury was seen as breeding indolence and crime

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<sup>5</sup> Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 31.

<sup>6</sup> For useful summaries, see: Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: a Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (eds), *Consumers and Luxury. Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650–1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Berg and Eger, ‘Luxury debates’, 7–27; Deborah Simonton, Marjo Kaartinen and Anne Montenach (eds), *Luxury and Gender in European Towns, 1700–1914* (London: Routledge, 2015).

amongst the lower orders, and partly because the spread of luxury broke down traditional markers of social distinction.<sup>7</sup>

This debate has informed much of the historiography on consumption, framing discussions about the relationship between consumption and economic development, the shifting character and definition of luxury goods, and the motivations underpinning luxury consumption.<sup>8</sup> In casting consumption as the central plank of industrial capitalism, Werner Sombart explained the rise of luxury in psychological, sensual and ultimately sexual terms. Yet individual gratification is a poor explanation for the rise of luxury consumption, even in the rarefied atmosphere of court society. Norbert Elias's reading of a court-based aristocracy offers a more sociological basis for luxury consumption, courtiers being obliged to spend in accordance with their rank.<sup>9</sup> There is a parallel here with the prescriptions of sumptuary legislation and with the 'old luxury' identified by Jan de Vries as a marker of status which relied on 'grandeur and exquisite refinement' in order to distinguish the elite from other social groups. In contrast, 'new luxury' was socially inclusive and revolved around notions of comfort, pleasure and sociability, and encouraged civilised communication.<sup>10</sup> It was characteristic of the new urban middling sorts who, by implication, felt less need to emulate the luxury spending and lifestyles of the old elite. There are problems with this neat alignment of luxury spending and social groups, not least the mutual exclusivity implied for the

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<sup>7</sup> John Sekora, *Luxury: the Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore, 1977); see also Leif Runefelt, *Att hasta mot undergången: Anspråk, flyktighet, förställning i debatten om konsumtion i Sverige 1730–1830* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example: Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*.

<sup>9</sup> Werner Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967); Norbert Elias, *The Court Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

<sup>10</sup> Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 44.

two modes of behaviour. However, the refinement of luxury as comfort and decency has been picked up in the work of John Crowley and Woodruff Smith, who respectively argue for an increasing search for physical comfort and social respectability as leitmotifs in eighteenth-century consumption.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Defining taste***

If luxury is a mutable concept, then taste is even more difficult to define and delimit. It is often viewed as a means of refining luxury and moderating the ostentation of straightforward displays of wealth through material possessions. In this sense, taste was critically important in distinguishing those of rank and breeding from the rest of society; indeed, it became central to elite identity.<sup>12</sup> Thus we see London's *Beau Monde* being characterised by Lord Chesterfield as possessing a certain 'je ne scay quoy ... which other people of fashion acknowledge'.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, [another example- from France?trying to find one]. For these commentators, good taste was an innate quality of the elite, closed to others by birth, rank and dignity. In reality, however, it could be learned; indeed, the cultivation of taste formed a central element of the education of elite men and women. It was carefully nurtured from early childhood both within the family and in social circles, social life being a central arena for refining as well as displaying one's good taste. For men, tutors, private

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<sup>11</sup> John Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early-Modern Britain and Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600–1800* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Didier Masseur, *Une histoire du bon goût* (Paris: Perrin, 2014), 23; see also Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: an Economic Study of Institutions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1912).

<sup>13</sup> Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

schools, university and especially the Grand Tour were both a vehicle for enculturation and a means of refining behaviour, manners and taste. For women, these same qualities were acquired from governesses, drawing, music and dancing masters, as well as social visiting.<sup>14</sup> This process of learning was especially true of new money, which had to be educated in the choice, display and use of goods in order to develop the manners, deportment and good taste that formed what Thorstein Veblen has called ‘the voucher of a life of leisure’.<sup>15</sup> The importance of education in cultivating taste and thus cementing status distinctions is central to Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of the persistence of class divisions in post-war France. His focus was on France in the 1960s and 1970s, where the metropolitan elite perpetuated their privilege through the educational opportunities afforded by the *Grand Écoles* and through the cultivation of cultural capital. This involved the construction of a set of tastes that were very different from those of the lower orders and often involved a Kantian aesthetic, i.e. a preference for ‘difficult’ things that were less immediately accessible and pleasurable. For Bourdieu, this was a conscious strategy of social reproduction through cultural distinction – an idea that resonates with many eighteenth century elite practices.<sup>16</sup> Taste also has other meanings, most importantly in terms of the bundling of goods, practices and manners into a set ‘type’ that has specific and distinct characteristics. We might see this in ‘le goût Rothschild’.<sup>17</sup> More usually, though, taste in this sense is seen in national terms: notably Italian,

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<sup>14</sup> See Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man’s Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities, 1660–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 85–184; Greig, *Beau Monde*, 36–47.

<sup>15</sup> Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, 49. See also Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 39–43.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984); for a useful critique, see M. Savage, ‘Status, lifestyle and taste’, in Frank Trentmann (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 557–67.

<sup>17</sup> Nicola Pickering, ‘Mayer Amschel de Rothschild and Mentmore Towers: Displaying ‘le goût Rothschild,’ in Jon Stobart and Andrew Hann (eds), *The Country House: Material Culture and*

French and English/British. Taste was linked to national qualities well before the rise of nationalism and nation States in the nineteenth century. However, the building of a national identity had begun early in France, where good taste was considered quintessentially French. From the seventeenth century onwards, Louis XIV deliberately constructed the image of France as a power state, in which French culture and taste played a significant role. The production of high quality engravings and books ensured the wide dissemination of the idea of French taste as the most exquisite in Europe.<sup>18</sup> Thus, during the second half of the seventeenth century, the image of sophisticated French taste was embedded to the European imagination of luxury and taste. Obviously, this carefully cultivated image represented only one strand of what was a complex and fluid concept. Didier Massieu discusses the rivalry between French and English taste in the eighteenth century, the subject having evoked an abundance of contemporary commentators to argue over whether English or French manners, products and gastronomy were supreme.<sup>19</sup> The rivalry was symbolic, but impacted on real political, cultural and economic spheres, in which the two countries became more serious rivals in the course of the eighteenth century. In a broader European context, Italian taste has perhaps been most closely linked to the Grand Tour and its idealisation of classicism and Renaissance artistic achievements – a view that looked backwards, rather than drawing on contemporary society. The key quality of taste has thus always been its ability to mark distinctions, whether social, cultural, political or national.<sup>20</sup> Much the same could be said of luxury. In the course of history, taste and luxury have been important tools for separation, differentiation and power; they have

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*Consumption* (Swindon: Historic England, 2016), 185–96.

18 Rémi Mathis, Vanessa Selbach, Louis Marchesano and Peter Fuhring (eds), *A Kingdom of Images: French Prints in the Age of Louis XIV, 1660–1715* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015).

19 Masseur, *Une histoire du bon goût*, 114–9.

20 Bourdieu, *Distinction*; Masseur, *Une histoire du bon goût*.

created influential and enduring boundaries between social groups and countries. However, individuals or groups who possessed the means to define and shape ‘good taste’ have also possessed considerable power to define an individuals’ societal place and the opportunities to increase or consolidate their own power, both in the material world of producing, distributing and consuming luxuries and at a more immaterial level of cultural and political competence.

### ***Luxury and taste: some unanswered questions***

Luxury and taste are thus familiar, perhaps even over-familiar, ideas in the historiographies of consumption; and yet there are many aspects of both that remain under-explored. First, whilst we know that displays of luxury and their refinement through taste lie at the heart of attempts to display wealth and status, we understand less well the ways in which luxury and taste were constructed and delineated in particular places. It is easy to observe that luxury is a relative term, but much more difficult to say what this meant when it came to defining luxury or taste in different parts of Europe. What was permitted and what was not; what constituted ‘good taste’, and how important was novelty and tradition in shaping ideas of luxury and taste? More fundamentally, what was the role of economics, culture and the law in these processes? Second, recent years have seen a growing interest in the processes of acquiring goods, particularly the luxuries and novelties bought from metropolitan retailers.<sup>21</sup> This work has rightly placed considerable emphasis on the reputation and

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Linda Levy Peck, *Consuming Splendor: Society and culture in seventeenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Claire Walsh, ‘Shops, shopping and the art of decision making in eighteenth-century England,’ in John Styles and Amanda Vickery (eds), *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 151–77; Coquery, *Tenir boutique à Paris*; Johanna Ilmakunnas, ‘The luxury shopping experience of the Swedish aristocracy in eighteenth-century Paris,’ in Deborah Simonton, Marjo Kaartinen and Anne

kudos of particular retailers, and the emergence of distinct zones of elite shopping, both of which helped to define the parameters of rank and taste. But how did consumers, even amongst the elite, know what to buy? What defined particular goods as tasteful or luxurious? Are these qualities that were attached to the goods or to the retailers who sold them? On a more practical level, how did consumers ensure that the goods they were acquiring (or getting others to purchase on their behalf) were tasteful? Third, and implicit in the above, is the question of the boundaries of luxury and especially taste. Much has been written on this in an aesthetic and material sense: the discernment of the connoisseur and collector, the ignorant ostentation of the nouveau riches, the excesses of the macaroni, and so on. Equally, contemporaries and historians alike are alive to social boundaries and the anxiety created by transgression of these distinctions.<sup>22</sup> But what of geographical boundaries: how were they bridged or transgressed by luxury goods and cultures of taste? Here, there is a growing body of work on the impact of eastern goods, although variations in their reception and meaning in different European countries has received rather less attention.<sup>23</sup> Intra-European transfers have received less attention: what did French taste or English goods, for example, actually mean when they were transferred to Spain or Sweden; and what happened to notions of luxury and taste when society, politics or economies were transformed, through revolution or reform? This book attempts to address some of these questions and, in doing so, revise our understanding of the link between taste, luxury and identity both at a personal and national level. The various surveys

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Montenach (eds), *Luxury and Gender in European Towns, 1700–1914* (London: Routledge, 2015), 115–31.

<sup>22</sup> See Penelope Corfield, ‘The Rivals: Landed and other gentlemen,’ in Negley Harte and Roland Quinault (eds), *Land and Society in Britain, 1700–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> For a rare comparative analysis, see Giorgio Riello and Prasanna Parthasarathi (eds), *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

and case studies of consumption practices, material culture, political economy and retail marketing offer new readings of luxury and taste; fresh perspectives on the processes of acquiring commodities and the ways in which these helped to define them as tasteful or luxurious objects, and a more nuanced picture of the practices and experiences of luxury. They are arranged into three broad sections: displaying taste and luxury, making and acquiring taste, and crossing boundaries of taste and luxury. Readers may thus choose to explore one or more of these organising themes. However, there are a number of key ideas that run through the whole volume and which draw together chapters, time and places, and which offer the reader a different route through the book and the worlds of luxury and taste.

### ***Key ideas***

It is something of a truism to say that both luxury and taste are relative and contingent, their meaning varying over time and space. However, the reasons for and processes of changing tastes are too rarely given the attention that they deserve. The introduction of novel goods, either through overseas trade or industrial innovation, is well recognised as a stimulus for new forms of consumption. This point is brought out in several of the chapters in this volume, Murhem and Ulväng, for example, demonstrating how a taste for Chinese porcelain impacted on ways of selling as well as the homes of the wealthy – and not so wealthy – citizens of Stockholm. Here, it was traded goods that drove change; elsewhere, the ability of the individual to bring home exotic items was instrumental in shaping their domestic environment, as with the wealthy nabob studied by Kuiper.<sup>24</sup> New wealth, of course, brought greater capacity for luxury consumption and the nabob has long been recognised as a problematic figure, disrupting traditional hierarchies of wealth and

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<sup>24</sup> See also the various case studies produced by the project East India Company at Home:

<http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/case-studies-2/>.

status and established norms of taste.<sup>25</sup> More generally, political change could form important moments of transition in taste. Pinedo and Thépaut-Cabasset, and Clemente show how the introduction of new ruling house, in Spain and Naples respectively, could transform taste especially amongst the elite. In contrast, Coquery demonstrates that even an event as traumatic as the French Revolution could leave some expressions of taste and the demand for certain luxuries largely unchanged, although the power of political idealism swept others aside.

In as much as it represents the replacement of one set of material and cultural values with another, we might see this as an extreme version of the kind of process modelled by de Vries.<sup>26</sup> His ideas of a transition between old and new luxury are adopted in many of the chapters. Pajur, for example, uses it to frame her analysis of sumptuary laws in seventeenth-century Tallin, whilst Ijäs argues that the ideals of new luxury engendered particular consumption choices amongst the merchant elite of nineteenth-century Vyborg. A fuller and more critical engagement comes in the chapter by Blondé and de Laet, who argue for the Southern Netherlands that transition between the two was partial and far from linear: material aspects of new luxury were found amongst both established and new elite groups, whilst the emerging elites adopted many of the trappings of old luxury to bolster their status. These arguments are echoed in Clemente's chapter, which highlights divisions within the established elite of Naples – old and new marking political as well as status groups.

Geographically, elite ideas of taste and luxury are often seen as being characterised by a pan-European cosmopolitanism – a shared culture that helped to draw together Europe's aristocracy and distinguish them from the lower orders.<sup>27</sup> The European was mixed and enriched by an exoticism

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<sup>25</sup> Stephanie Barczewski, *Country Houses and the British Empire, 1700–1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 136–64.

<sup>26</sup> de Vries, *Industrious Revolution*, 44–5, 57–8.

<sup>27</sup> Gonthier Louis Fink, 'Cosmopolitisme,' in Michel Delon (dir.), *Dictionnaire européen des Lumières*

that might be strikingly bold, as with the black servants brought home from India by returning nabobs (see Kuiper), but was increasingly internalised and domesticated, as it apparent from the consumption of Chinese wallpapers and porcelain (see Stobart, Murhem and Ulväng, and Steinrud).<sup>28</sup> Despite this, what emerges over and again are the barriers and resistance to any notion of transnational taste. These were most obviously expressed in the restrictions introduced by many countries to protect domestic industries from luxuries being imported from other countries, especially France. As Clemente notes of Naples, for example, a taste for such goods was recognised as being deeply problematic for local craftsmen. However, as Pajur makes clear, sumptuary laws could also play a powerful role in shaping local identities by marking in material terms differences with people coming in from other countries or cities.

In Tallin's sumptuary laws, cosmopolitanism came into direct conflict with localism. More generally, there was an ongoing tension between the national and the transnational, often seen in pan-European influence of French and later English taste.<sup>29</sup> The powerful influence of French taste is discussed in broad terms by Clemente, who sees it as an important aspect of the ebb and flow of cultural and political power in eighteenth-century Naples. This intimate binding of taste and politics also comes through Ilmakunnas's analysis of the role of envoys and ambassadors in conveying taste and transporting luxury goods from France to Sweden. In this instance, French goods spoke of

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(Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 2007), 320–3. These ideas are most explicitly discussed in this volume by Clemente.

<sup>28</sup> Emile de Bruijn, 'Consuming east Asia: continuity and change in the development of Chinoiserie', in Jon Stobart and Andrew Hann (eds), *The Country House: Material Culture and Consumption* (Swindon: Historic England, 2015), 95–104.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, William H. Sewell, 'The empire of fashion and the rise of capitalism in eighteenth-century France,' *Past and Present* 206 (2010), 81–120.

power, luxury and the economic and social ‘reach’ of the consumer – being able to afford and access French luxuries told of their owner’s status. In the homes of the elite of Brussels and Antwerp, French goods perhaps held less of a political charge, but they remained important markers of status (see Blonde and de Laet), as they in many country houses in England. Here, though, there were tensions born of political conflict, patriotism and prohibitions. These sometimes led to consumers seeking goods on the grey market, as we see in Bristol’s chapter on Sabine Winn of Nostell Priory; but French styles more often were internalised and re-imagined through the practices of craftsmen such as Chippendale. The confidence with which English taste was deployed at home grew alongside the country’s expanding influence across Europe. Clemente notes its growing influence in Naples, where English taste formed a conscious counterpoint to French taste and, in some ways, its natural successor as economic and political power swayed towards England from the middle decades of the eighteenth century. The march of English taste across Germany and into Scandinavia is familiar enough, although the chapters by North and Ijäs make clear the depth and range of influence carried by English styles and English goods – they marked modernity and social progressiveness. What is perhaps more surprising is Coquery’s assertion that demand for English goods and tastes in Revolutionary France remained high, at least until the start of the Reign of Terror in the autumn of 1793.

Despite the undoubted importance of political and economic power in exerting cultural influence, it would be mistaken to see these changes as a simple reflection of two superpowers competing for cultural supremacy. As North’s discussion of German fashion journals makes clear, French and English taste also represented different social values, especially in relation to luxury; it was no accident that the established and aristocratic elite favoured the former, whilst the emergent urban bourgeoisie latter aligned themselves with the latter.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, it is possible to read the ideals and

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<sup>30</sup> See also Michael North, *‘Material Delight and the Joy of Living’: Cultural Consumption in the Age of*

cultural contexts of old and new luxury in these two national systems of taste. And yet, however alluring they might be, these simple dichotomies are problematic. For one thing, the precise meaning of French and English was highly complex. They might refer to tastes or goods directly imported from France or England, an important aspect in supplying the wealthy consumers studied by Ilmakunnas, Ijas and Blonde and de Laet in particular; but these same consumers were also acquiring locally produced goods in the French or English style or, more loosely, local interpretations of what French or English taste might look like. As Ilmakunnas notes, for example, French servants may well have been brought over from France, but they might equally be French trained or simply French-speaking. Moreover, other national tastes were also being asserted, a practice seen most directly in the construction of national costumes. In Sweden, Gustav III launched the national Swedish dress in 1778, both praised and criticized, and mainly worn by courtiers and civil servants.<sup>31</sup> Similar attempts in Germany were perhaps less successful, although North notes in his chapter the ownership of clothes that broadly conform to published ideals. The way that North links the rhetoric of journals with the reality of people's wardrobes highlights the important materiality of taste and luxury. These were ideals and concepts, but they were, in the end, expressed in tangible objects and spaces. Berg argues that the physical characteristics of luxuries were important in defining them as such; indeed, luxury was a visceral experience that

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*Enlightenment in Germany*. Transl. by P. Selwyn. (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate 2008) and Karin Wurst, *Fabricating Pleasure: Fashion, Entertainment, and Cultural Consumption in Germany, 1780–1830* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005).

31 Lena Rangström, *Kläder för tid och evighet: Gustaf III sedd genom sina dräkter* (Stockholm: Livrustkammaren, 1997), 165–77; Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe, 1715–1789* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 196–201.

appealed to all of the senses.<sup>32</sup> Refining this sensuality through taste often had the effect of privileging the visual, outward appearance being central to assessments of people, their social worth, integration into the community, wealth and status, political allegiance, and so on. Clemente makes this point most clearly in relation to Naples, but it also comes out in Sabine Winn's concern with her clothing (see Bristol); the importance of appropriate clothing and specifically the Dorpat costume in Tallin (Pajur), and the significance of wig ownership in Brussels and Antwerp (Blonde and de Laet). With each of these, the material qualities of the goods were important. Pajur details the specific cloth, colour and cut of clothing that sumptuary laws prescribed to each layer of society, making it quite clear that luxury – or its absence – was marked in clearly visible and unambiguous material terms. Pinedo and Thépaut-Cabasset also emphasise the importance of different grades and colours of cloth, and their differential acquisition by different groups within mid-eighteenth-century Madrid. High status was marked by the ownership of the finest imported cloths.

Importantly, they also note that these textiles might be used to adorn the home as well as the body, reminding us that the domestic realm was an important venue and showcase for taste and luxury. In many ways, this is familiar ground,<sup>33</sup> but the manifold constructions and expressions of taste in the domestic realm have yet to be fully explored. In this volume, Stobart highlights the importance of co-ordinated schemes and the often-protracted process of creating an appropriately tasteful backdrop to domestic life in the English country house. More fragmented, but equally telling, is the picture painted by Steinrud of the houses of wealthy and titled owners of ironworks in Sweden. Here, it is some of the small details that are telling: the arrangement of chinaware or the flowers in

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<sup>32</sup> Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 37–8.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

the garden. For the super-rich, such as the Dutch nabob, Sichterman, the materiality of luxury could be extensive and costly (a showy frontage for the townhouse and a huge collection of armorial porcelain), but still the subject of refined taste (a gallery of old masters – see Kuiper). What is particularly striking is that taste and luxury interacted differently in different parts of Sichterman's material life. Two things are important in this. The first is that taste was not necessarily something that was or could be expressed equally in all aspects of spending. Thus, as Fatsar demonstrates, Prince Esterhazy's taste in art perhaps fell short of his taste in music – an imbalance which calls into question easy assumptions of the innate 'good taste' of the nobility.<sup>34</sup> The second is that the location and setting of luxury was significant in shaping its impact. Blondé and de Laet demonstrate this in relation to the display of paintings in the homes of the elite in Brussels and Antwerp, their gradual relocation into more private spaces being linked to changing genres and motivations. Stobart shows how assembling more luxurious goods together could mark important distinctions, even between ostensibly similar spaces like guest bedrooms.

What also come out through Stobart's analysis, and are apparent in many other chapters, are the practical and logistical challenges facing even wealthy consumers: learning taste and acquiring luxury was a difficult process involving lots of hard work. For many consumers, this meant bringing goods over long distances, a process which almost invariably involved engaging the help of intermediaries. Quite apart from the practicalities of communicating and transferring payment, this meant that the purchaser was reliant upon someone else to exercise taste and judgment, be it diplomats in Paris (Ilmakunnas), family members in Stockholm (Steinrud) or business partners in England (Ijäs). These proxy shoppers, as Claire Walsh has called them, were important sources of consumer intelligence as well as consumer goods,<sup>35</sup> but most wealthy consumers, even in relatively

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<sup>34</sup> Masseau, *Une histoire du bon goût*.

<sup>35</sup> Walsh, 'Shops, shopping'.

remote locations, also gathered information from a variety of other sources. Steinrud's bachelor ironmaster and Kuiper's returning nabob both visited the homes of their friends and neighbours, picking up decorative ideas appropriate to their tastes and purses, whilst the Stockholm elite visited shops for inspiration as well as goods (see Murhem and Ulväng). Isolated in West Yorkshire, Sabine Winn was reduced to scouring the newspaper advertisements (Bristol), although, as Coquery makes clear, these could remain an important source of consumer intelligence even in the most challenging times. Journals formed an increasingly important source of guidance, a development that North explores in detail; although readers needed to read the polemic with some care. Indeed, the perils faced by even wealthy consumers meant that the ideals of taste were sometimes compromised by the exigencies of the immediate situation (Stobart).

Finally, there are the pleasures to be gained from luxurious and tasteful goods. The sensual nature of luxury, highlighted by Sombart and reiterated by Berg, are too easily forgotten; but we need to remember that luxury and taste – indeed, consumption more generally – were not all about appearance and identity.<sup>36</sup> Physical pleasure could be gained from food, as the Swedish nobles with their French-trained cooks no doubt appreciated, as did the wealthy patriarchs drinking chocolate in Madrid; flowers could fill the air with fragrant smells, and music could captivate and transport the listener, especially when it was of the quality produced by Joseph Haydn (see Ilmakunnas, Pinedo and Thépaut-Cabasset, Steinrud, Fatsar). Equally important were the emotional responses elicited by even quite modest luxuries such as the ribbons and lace bought by Sabine Winn or the English dog acquired by the Hackmans in Vyborg.

Taken together, then, the chapters in this volume reveal the nuances and complexities of luxury and taste as they played out in particular local settings. Consumption, taste and luxury were situated in particular political, economic and social contexts that shaped the parameters within which

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<sup>36</sup> See Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 37–8.

individuals and groups could operate. This is not to fragment human experience into a series of unconnected episodes, but rather to emphasise the relational and contingent nature of taste and luxury, and thus to challenge universal and normative understandings of consumption and identity.