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Feeling Luxury: Invidious Political Pleasures and the Sense of Touch

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Luxury is everywhere, and yet it has become inconceivable. We say: “Luxury is whatever goes beyond what’s needed,” and then go on to admit that luxury neatly meets a need, “in the display of status.” So doing, we define luxury one way with respect to the body, and another way with respect to the mind. Some may be deterred by the split from going further; others, dissatisfied, will aver that recognition is everything. Inward rushes a utilitarian common sense, one that eviscerates luxury as a conception of political, social, or cultural analysis. Recognition-as-utility becomes the vanishing point for luxury as a system of discourse whose power prior to the modern age can scarcely be overstated.¹

This conviction that no distinction between needs and luxury can hold is a hallmark of modernity. Its coordinates are fast and familiar. Citing Bernard Mandeville, we aver that such a distinc-

tion must be both culturally and historically contingent. Every attempt to draw the line can only be, we insist, a disciplinary move. Adding incantations from the more rigorous Adam Smith, we are assured that luxury consumption, like normal consumption, contributes to the circulation of goods. Luxury stimulates commodity production precisely because it gratifies the putatively transhistorical and transcultural human need for social esteem. With its excesses neutralized, any modern conception of luxury is whittled to the point that it is scarcely distinguishable from the rhetoric of marketing.

The collapse of luxury's distance from needs is a conspicuous register of its apparent weakness as a conceptual hook for political theory today. Rarely noted is that the weak modern conception of luxury has taken the means by which Classical and Christian moral discourses condemned luxury—by pointing to its *lux*, perceptible light or shine, its glitter, sparkle—as the very essence of luxury's appeal. Framed within these vitiated remainders of Classical and Christian critiques, luxury becomes a mere species of fashion, another bit of segmented consumer culture, a niche marked by its pretense of hierarchical stratification. If such a picture of luxury still has anything to offer to modern social theory, its contribution lies in how it appears as the apotheosis of consumption-for-others. For theorists like Thorstein Veblen, luxury becomes the paradigm for modern consumption as a whole.² Social and political theories of luxury are thus assimilated wholesale to the modern fashion pattern that abetted the explosion of consumer culture, and that undergirds the entrenchment of that culture today.³

It is doubtful, however, that luxury's conceptual weakness, as compared to its power as a premodern discourse, reflects the attenuation of luxury's power in the life of late modern polities. Indeed, in the face of the incongruity between luxury's conceptual weakness and its symbolic and material powers in late capitalism, the weakness of this conception for grappling with the life of the present-day commercial polity is even more striking. The problem with the weak conception, I argue, is that it renders us

insensitive to aspects of luxury that exceed, and even contradict, the patterns of visibility by which luxury appears to be little more than expensive fashion. We should instead understand luxury's appeal in terms of irreducible surplus, an excess that the visual, with its emphasis on display and other-directedness, cannot apprehend. With this in mind, if one sense should serve as a synecdoche for luxury consumption, it may well be touch rather than sight. The touch-related, or "haptic" dimension of luxury, I contend, speaks less to how persons' identities are encoded or inscribed in a consumer society, than to how capacities for pleasure are exercised, refined, and partitioned in a late modern context—and how hierarchy and subordination are sources of pleasure, felt upon the body.

With this in mind, restoring luxury's haptic dimension to political economy gestures to political questions. These questions may be most broadly framed in terms of what Jacques Rancière has called the "distribution of the sensible;" Davide Panagia's discussion of this distribution, offered by way of reading Kantian aesthetics, provides an especially apt point of reference. The haptic dimensions of luxury bring us to the limit of what Panagia has described as "an exploration of sensation as a radical democratic moment in aesthetic judgment." Describing this moment, he notes that "rather than taste being inextricably bound to privilege ... there is no ground for privilege because there are no rules to determine the beautiful and hence, no reliable sources of authority to impose aesthetic standards."⁴ Inasmuch as the aesthetics that resonate with Kant are those that pertain most to artistic production—seeing, hearing, and perhaps tasting—the haptic dimension of luxury directs us to senses, like feeling or hearing, that are met in the proximity of persons to objects and to others. And whereas seeing and hearing pertain to modern pictures of knowledge and dialogic reasoning and persuasion, the haptic dimension of luxury speaks directly to pervasive aesthetic dimensions of societies that are both commercial and marked by entrenched privileges and power. If, as Panagia has it, "aesthetic experience ungrounds our subjectivity,"⁵ then we must look closely at luxury, with its close ties to social stratification, and

consider how luxury's haptic dimension and relation to pleasure buttresses the structure of class domination—and how it may undermine it. We know much about how the visual codes of fashion are subverted and upended in a continual play of appearances. We know little about how sensations that do not strike us as signs, which are experienced as intimate and private, shape desires for boundaries, status and hierarchy into political subjectivities.

In grappling with luxury's tactile side, we confront the point at which partition and hierarchy may themselves become sources of pleasure, and the question of whether and how the intrinsic excess of luxury's pleasures are openings to hierarchy's subversion. While the eighteenth-century disappearance of sumptuary laws is held out as a democratic moment in terms of political economy, the simple gutting of classical notions of luxury leaves political thought unable to handle the late modern power of consumption to democratize the pleasures that can be taken in inequality. The visual media of modern marketing only serve to reinforce a picture of luxury as intrinsically a matter of status and exclusion. We need a conception of luxury, therefore, that can speak to how human desires for identity and for difference are patterned, and capacities cultivated, into pleasures to be taken in hierarchy and superordination. In other words, re-opening luxury to critical theory in the current conjecture means not only, and not even primarily, attending to the effects of inequality's ostentation upon the sensibilities of the modern consumer-citizen. Rather, grappling with the hedonics of inequality is a critical endeavor because these hedonics speak to how the potentially democratic pleasures of distinctiveness and difference can be and are blocked by the pleasures that people take in inequality itself.

Luxury's haptic dimension will raise each of these problems for the political theorist. But for their salience and force to be evident, we need an accounting of just how touch sensation supports luxurious desires and how hapticity itself has been lost to the prevailing traditions of political economy. In order to open a critical perspective on the hedonics of inequality in this essay, I

first look to marketing discourse to see how even the most technologically mediated and virtual aspects of luxury bear traces of luxury's haptic dimension. I then examine Adam Smith's classical treatment of luxury—and its intimate relation to the workings of the “invisible hand”—to get a sense of how luxury's haptic dimension subtends his account of luxury even as his most explicit treatment of luxury reflects the consolidation of modernity's emphasis on visual culture. Next I explore the concept of luxury in a grammatical and historical registers of conceptual analysis, in order to explore the ways that luxury—as distinct not from needs, but from comfort and fashion—denotes its own peculiar, and peculiarly haptic forms of pleasure. So doing, I seek to recover a conception of luxury that can grapple with invidious political pleasures and desires.

Signs of the Tactile

Even the most technologically mediated and virtual forms of luxury bear traces of luxury's intrinsic, though seldom-discussed, relation to touching and feeling bodies. On August 6, 2008, the online App Store of Apple's iTunes began to offer an application, created by developer Armin Heinrich, for \$999.99. Categorized as a “lifestyle” application, the program placed on the screen of the iPhone an icon that depicts a ruby-like pentagon floating in a hot crimson rectangle. Touching the icon causes it to glow momentarily brighter and the pentagon to “lift” softly against its backdrop. The name of this application, “I Am Rich,” appears below the icon. According to the product description that appeared on iTunes, “the red icon on your iPhone always reminds you (and others when you show it to them) that you were able to afford this. It's a work of art with no hidden function at all.”

All the usual touchstones of modern luxury discourse—amusement and derision, sewed into satire—surfaced in the small-time media that follows these trends. A few commentators chafed predictably at the idea that the ruby icon could be called a work of art. Most commentators bemoaned the application's arrogance or aimed at its sheer silliness. While the “absurdity” and “use-

lessness” of so expensive a bauble excited some, it was not lost on most that the ostensibly useless application did indeed have a function, namely illustrating that the purchaser could afford to spend another \$1,000 for a status symbol. Of course, none of this contradicted the developer’s description of “I Am Rich,” since it claimed only that the app had no *hidden* function. Here we confront a clear instance of the “Veblen Effect”: Signs of Wealth are Valuable in Themselves

By the end of the day on August 7, Apple pulled “I Am Rich” from its stores. By then eight people had purchased the program, two of these claiming to have done so by accident.⁶ Response by the digital commentariat to Apple’s removal of the program was simply more derision. Those who had expressed glee at the thought of the rich wasting their own money thought that the rich ought to be able to continue doing so. Others noted that the original program, now rarified, would become only more valuable (and that knockoffs would abound). Those who had lambasted the original program as silly and its purchasers as idiots also criticized its removal in the same terms. It appears that in the face of commercial offerings such as these, the *only* appropriate—which is to say, rational—response is to stand back and snicker loudly. In sum, such a product is ridiculous to develop, to market, to buy, and to prohibit. When every aspect of and response to such a development is simply absurd, it’s no wonder that the only rational response is satire.

By November 23 of the same year, stock markets around the world had plummeted, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average down 36% from the day Apple pulled “I Am Rich” from its online store. On that day, the *New York Times* reported that advertising revenues in luxury publications had fallen off precipitously in the previous quarter.⁷ The financial effects of this drop were being felt not only in the thick glossy magazines most often associated with luxury advertizing, but also in revenues of the news publications—including the *Times*—that had come to depend ever more heavily on such advertising to support sagging revenues from sales of newspapers. Although the stock market, housing prices,

and employment had been in steady decline for a year or more, major publishing companies had seen strength in the luxury market; the Dow Jones & Company had itself launched *WSJ*, a glossy magazine meant to attract luxury advertising. But steep market drops in October and November were enough to drive luxury consumption into a startling remission. As econometricians know, luxury expenditures and stock prices rise and fall together because people who consume luxuries—known to the economist as goods that command a greater proportion of a consumer's budget as income rises—are the same persons who are not so risk-averse as to avoid investing in the stock market in the first place.⁸

Luxury and advertising appear locked in a death-grip of reciprocity, one that is made evident by recurrent crises of capitalism. This reciprocity merely reinforces our sense that luxury is essentially about visibility. After all, it's obvious that luxury marketing works in large part by expanding awareness of a good on the part of those who cannot enjoy it, like the *New Yorker* subscriber who will never stay at a the Mandarin Oriental. Only a very tiny fraction of those who see these advertisements will ever consume these products. Following a line of argument drawn a century ago by Thorstein Veblen, we cite "snob effects," seeing the point of luxury marketing in increasing the value of these goods to those who *do* spend their money on them. We are reassured that what the consumer of luxury most desires is the envy of scores of thousands of incidental voyeurs.⁹

The visibility of luxury, however, particularly in relation to advertising, is not the entire or even most important story of luxury. Other dimensions of the Great Recession's economic effects reveal luxury's invisible patterns. While the recession troubled purveyors and consumers of luxury, it also has been deeply worrisome for the charity fundraisers whose yields depend on the same patterns of consumption that define, for the economist, the luxury good. Like other luxury spending, charitable giving increases out of proportion with disposable income.¹⁰ Therefore, economists consider charitable giving is itself to be a luxury good, one that delivers utility in the form of what they call a

“warm glow.”¹¹ The economist’s perspective reveals, however unwittingly, an aspect of luxury that is lost to those who theorize its social power primarily in terms of its visibility. It would be comforting to believe that the social effects of charitable giving’s “warm glow” are more profound than the red LCD glow emitted by the “I Am Rich” icon (perhaps still perhaps on the screens of six iPhones). But the suggestion of tactile warmth, in addition to the unmistakable if quite visibility offered by its glow each, in different ways, suggest something crucial about luxury consumption in our modern era. No matter how virtual or abstracted luxury consumption may become in the age of smartphones and aggregated economic data, sensations of light and warmth—not only of sight, but also of touch—remain keywords in the grammar of luxury.

The recent crisis of debt-driven capital accumulation reveals this other, tactile side of luxury in yet other ways. Reports abounded, in late 2008 and throughout 2009, that wealthy shopper found herself avoiding conspicuous luxury, preferring instead high-end items that can be worn discreetly under clothing.¹² “Then you still can know,” one such consumer attests, “that you still can have the very best.”¹³ Such a remark reveals with uncanny precision the overlooked sensory life of luxury consumption. This sensory life was at work long before the recent crisis, and one it will endure periodic reports that the skyrocketing fortunes of the wealthy are at an end.¹⁴ The media makes regular hay over fears that luxury markets will be mortally wounded by the explosion of knockoffs in Shanghai and the other global manufacturing centers that lie beyond the reach of capitalist patent laws,¹⁵ but luxury consumers, time and again, themselves dismiss the devaluation of the real thing. The cognoscenti will attest to what every person who has sought to distinguish cashmere from acrylic already senses: while the eye may be fooled by the knockoff, *you know by the touch*. Social theory might profit handsomely by reckoning that, and how, the invisibility of luxury renders its invidiousness no less pleasurable.

The Invisible Hand

The luxury consumer who knows by the touch puts us into contact with a vestige of a once-dominant episteme, one that privileged (and at times, denounced) touch as the “sense of all senses.”¹⁶ The figure of the Doubting Thomas, who would not accept that Jesus has risen from the dead until he probed his teacher’s wounds with his own hands, aptly conveys how this pre-Enlightenment episteme construed the relationship of sight to touch as media of knowledge. The lesson of this story was encapsulated in a common proverb, whose second half has been all but lost to us moderns: “seeing is believing, but touching’s the truth.”¹⁷

The vestigial haptic knowledge of luxury contends today with a modern perspective on knowledge and the self, usually associated with Descartes. This perspective privileges light as the metaphor and sight as the medium of truth.¹⁸ This Cartesian view undergirds myriad modern discourses, including the classical tradition of political economy, leaving its understanding of luxury’s psychological roots and social power ill-equipped to handle luxury’s haptic edge. Moreover, the erasure of luxury’s sensory and affective pleasures is historically coincident with the rise of political economy. On the one hand, political economy follows Thomas Malthus in treating the body as a bundle of needs whose only capacities are to breed, to work and to consume.¹⁹ On the other, it follows Mandeville in regarding the patterns of emulation set by the rising bourgeoisie in the novel urban environment of the eighteenth century as luxury’s paradigm.²⁰ Here, the Cartesian perspective that privileges light and sight is accompanied by its more famous split of body from mind. The classical distinction between need and luxury becomes a modern one between metabolic flesh and disembodied seekers of recognition. As a result, political economy’s treatment of luxury remains almost exclusively focused on the visual, the virtual, and the vicarious. This focus undergirds our understanding of the excess of consumption in terms of its conspicuousness. It thrives in an environment where critical theory readily reduces politics to “spectacle.”

Adam Smith's perspective on luxury is generally seen to have fully assimilated Mandeville's view of luxury as a rather pitiable, but essentially unavoidable and even beneficial vice, whose social power is mediated by sight and imitation.²¹ And, as we shall see, the most conspicuous register of Smith's treatment of luxury is, like Mandeville's, emphatically visual. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is notable for the attention it pays to sympathetic pleasures throughout, and vision is the primary means by which these sympathetic pleasures are transmuted. The opening sentence of the work is a case in point. Smith observes that men take pleasure "in seeing" the happiness of others.²² Even so, the experience of these pleasures retains layers of other senses. Luxury's haptic dimension lurks at the edges of his discussion of it in *Moral Sentiments* in ways that suggest how the power of luxury is subtended by the senses, if not the pleasures, of touch. Returning to Smith's accounts of luxury in *The Wealth of Nations*, and recovering the haptic edges of these accounts, can give us a feeling for lacunae in modern luxury discourse that a return to touch can remedy.²³

In the most conspicuous of Smith's discussions of luxury—found in the chapter regarding "the Effect of Utility upon the Sentiment of Approbation" of *Moral Sentiments*—the passion of ambition and the luxury toward which it leads follow sympathy in their mediation by the visual. They also represent a point at which the visual is doubled, and at which the broader sensory richness of moral sentiment correspondingly reduced. This doubling appears in the form of the "impartial spectator," an often-imagined but sometimes quite real other whose perspective on moral actions is observed by one who gauges the moral fitness of those actions. While the psychology that animates the impartial spectator serves a moral function, Smith notes that it also abets luxury. "The poor man's son," he writes, "whom heaven in its anger has visited with ambition, when he begins to look around him, admires the condition of the rich."²⁴ This "condition" turns people's tendency to admire the not the convenience, but instead by those ostentatious "palaces, gardens, equipage, and retinue" which de-

light the impartial spectator with their “numberless artificial and elegant contrivances for promoting ease and pleasure.”²⁵ Of course, Smith himself looked askance upon these affectations. He described them as “immense fabrics, which it requires the labor of a life to raise, which threaten every moment to overwhelm the person that dwells in them, and which while they stand, though they may serve him from some smaller inconveniencies, can protect him from none of the severer inclemencies of the season.”²⁶ The impartial spectator, whose values are form in the same culture of ostentation and display, commends rather than condemns luxurious consumption and display—Smith’s own competing and indeed sobering reflection on the moral virtue of luxury notwithstanding.

In Smith’s account, it is sickness that reveals the moral hollowness of men’s esteem for luxury. “In the languor of disease,” he writes, “the pleasures of the vain and empty distinctions of greatness disappear.”²⁷ The invisible spectator’s myopia becomes palpable to the man “when reduced either by spleen or disease to observe with attention his own situation, and to consider what is really wanting to his happiness.”²⁸ But if these moments of with its “splenetic philosophy,” returning to and from the body at its most acute moments of pain and anhedonia, may put any of us momentarily in touch with luxury’s moral dimension, they cannot attenuate its essentially positive societal effects. Smith famously goes on to celebrate the “continual motion” that luxury—especially with its deception regarding “the pleasures of wealth and greatness”—lends to “the industry of mankind.” Indeed, Luxury launches a paean worthy of Sophocles’ *Ode to Man* in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.²⁹ Characterizing this power, Smith invokes the “homely and vulgar proverb, that the eye is larger than the belly.”³⁰ In other words, the insatiability of vision is the spring to improvement. It is a more formidable basis for the wealth of nations than readers who seek Smith’s picture of political economy only in *Wealth of Nations*, with its emphasis on the division of labor and expansion of markets, are apt to realize.

It turns out that *Wealth of Nations* offers a more complex, and

more critical, account of luxury than is generally attributed to Smith. In this work, Smith situates luxury as an attack not on morality, but rather one on parsimony, a key virtue of commercial society. Defying the near-total emphasis on production and consumption that has since come to characterize mainstream traditions of political economy, Smith writes that “parsimony, and not industry, is the immediate cause of the increase of capital.”³¹ While industry is the source of what parsimony accumulates, “if parsimony did not save and store up, the capital would never be the greater.”³² Of course, the gentlemen’s luxurious expenditures upon “idle guests and menial servants, who leave nothing behind in return for their consumption,” are a problem because these expenditures fall into unproductive hands.³³ This problem takes on a dangerous social dimension when these expenditures become more visible. The danger posed by the role of spectacular unproductive expenditure is a seldom-appreciated detail of Smith’s account. The insatiability of the eye that dispensed the abundance of the landed estate in an agricultural society becomes, instead, a potent source of ruin in an industrial society.

Smith postulates that for the most part, people are parsimonious and not prodigal. The interest of bettering one’s condition usually overrides the passion for present enjoyment. Public spending is, in Smith’s view, a more prominent threat to the steady accumulation of capital and increase in the circulation of goods. The most dangerous of this spending however, is not on public works, but rather is expenditure upon the pomp and circumstance of “a numerous and splendid court, a great ecclesiastical establishment, and great fleets and armies.”³⁴ All of these are grossly spectacular, and Smith is all too aware of how the imagery they entail are sought as means to power, even as they undermine the wealth of a nation. The importance of display in the court is evident from Smith’s remark; as for the Church, its particular emphasis on visual spectacle is the evidence marshaled by Martin Jay for the persistence of a visual culture from the Greeks through the consolidation of its influence into outright hegemony in Enlightenment thought and cultures. The army appears to be an exception to simple spectacle during times of war, but even

then, they “acquire nothing which can compensate the expense of maintaining them, even while the war lasts.”³⁵ Even so, Smith assures his reader that the “frugality and good conduct” of most men “is upon most occasions...sufficient to compensate, not only the private prodigality and misconduct of individuals, but the publick extravagance of government.”³⁶ Threats to individual parsimony, however, loom nonetheless. And without an inherent counterweight, these threats are all the more dangerous.

While parsimony is the chief virtue of everyman in Smiths’ “system of perfect liberty,” it is also precisely that virtue most corroded by mercantilism and monopoly—and by the merchant class created by these latter distorting systems of political economy. When profits are high, Smith contends, parsimony “seems to be superfluous, and expensive luxury to suit better the affluence of [the merchant’s] situation.”³⁷ The systematic danger of this corruption lies in luxury’s visibility. Mapping the slave’s imitation of his master in the Aristotelian *oikos* neatly onto seventeenth-century mercantile enterprise and cottage industry, Smith worries that when laborers imitate merchants’ expenditures, a scenario looms in which “accumulation is ... prevented in the hands of all those who are naturally the most disposed to accumulate; and the funds destined for the maintenance of productive labor receive no augmentation from the revenue of those [i.e., the laborers] who ought naturally to augment them the most.”³⁸ Smith’s meditates upon this problem in a chapter on colonial trade, a fact which speaks directly to his view that an expansive colonial policy and program of open trade (i.e., the “system of perfect liberty”) were the clearest antidotes to a mimetic problem. Freedom of trade would attenuate the wealth of merchants and produce a leveling effect as workers accumulate “naturally.”

Smith’s proscription was not to find its power in a world of freer and more widespread trade, however. Emerging industrialization and the explosion of class mixture in urban public spaces—developments roughly contemporary with *The Wealth of Nations*, and which reveal a backward-looking aspect of its analysis—presented opportunities for this imitation on the literally massive

scale of a nationalized *oikos*. Social distances collapsed not within the master's household but instead in the sightlines of fashionable urban districts. Developments immediately subsequent to Smith's classical formulation of political economy all but eviscerated the power of the system of perfect liberty to attenuate luxury's spectacular threat to accumulation.

At the same time, however, the accumulation of capital appears not to have been much thwarted by luxury's attack on the parsimony of the worker. We may attribute this to the countervailing power of luxury to stimulate improvement—a power that Smith described not in *Wealth of Nations* but in *Moral Sentiments*. Although the sympathetic power of luxury is mediated by vision in this discussion, a non-visible force—the “invisible hand”—mediates its essentially positive social effects. Indeed this famous trope of Smith's political economy makes one of its only three appearances in the same passage of *Moral Sentiments* where Smith describes luxury as the essential driver of historical, not to say social and political, progress and civilization.

Smith's “invisible hand” is usually explained as referring to the harmonious natural order of human interaction. Smith's use of the phrase in *Wealth of Nations* in particular is thought to secure its reference as an essentially economic one regarding the convergence of natural and market prices, and the power of these prices to coordinate the activities of consumers and producers, in the system of perfect liberty.³⁹ The accuracy of these interpretations, which mainly seek to attach a signal idea from another part of Smith's work to an extremely popular catchphrase, is doubtful however.⁴⁰ As for the term's literary or historical reference, one scholar notes a third (but earlier) Smith's use of the same phrase—or rather, the expanded phrase “the invisible hand of Jupiter”—in his earlier work on astronomy. He speculates that Smith drew returned to this working because of his penchant for “pithy, forceful phrases,” even as Smith reversed the original's implication of caprice with the themes of prudence and harmony that run throughout *Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations*.⁴¹ If the pithiness of the phrase is what mattered most to Smith, there is

little reason to suppose that the phrase has a stable meaning across its two appearances in the latter two texts.

We may concede that Smith's use of this metaphor in *Moral Sentiments* refers to a natural, providential order without diminishing the force of the peculiar metaphor that he chose to represent this order. The counter-visual dimension of this compelling, if too-often cited and poorly-understood figure demand an accounting, especially considering the rich and time-honored synecdoche of the hand as the organ of touch. The hand is *invisible*; it is not the gesturing or signaling hand that modern-day economists' theories of price suggest. Rather it directs men to what they cannot see and by means that are not visual at all. It guides by push or by pull. Perhaps it escorts by genteel pressures upon the elbow. Whatever the case, the power of this hand, like luxury itself, is felt upon and through the tissues of the body.⁴² The insatiable eye may motivate the man of means to amass more than he can consume, but the touch of an invisible hand transforms luxury's inevitably vain exclusivity into universal opulence.

Smith's account pulls us in two directions. On the level of commercial society and its systems, the visual is the conspicuous register of luxury's power. Yet its mechanism, the invisible hand, counterposes this visual medium with a power that is quite opposite and seems more fundamental. Meanwhile, the moral truth of luxury becomes sensible only within a "splenetic philosophy" which arises when the haptic and pleasure-sensitive aspects of the body, and its susceptibility to the caress of the invisible hand, are rendered insensate. Smith himself concedes the ultimately impotence of such a philosophy to generate a just society, and thus he relies instead upon the impartial spectator to do the trick. The "man within the breast" must be one's own future self. This figure signals the internalization of regimes of visibility behind the order that governs commercial society.⁴³ This path of market-generated prudence, that later utilitarian and liberal ages are apt to laud as "self-interest," is by now quite familiar in the tradition of political economy.

In order to point beyond the recursion to the visual that the tradition of political economy followed, we need to open theoretical reflection to how non-visual sensation—particularly the tactile ones, of warmth and touch—nonetheless pervade luxury discourse today. Deploying the tactile as a paradigm of luxury’s many pleasures, we encounter a side of luxury that marketers, whose own media are overwhelmingly visual and aural, may capture only in derivative form. But the perspectives of the economist and the marketer should not delimit political theorists’ sense of luxury. A moral response to luxury, as well as a complete accounting of luxury’s power in a commercial society, must return to the repressed or abandoned side of Smith’s account, namely, luxury’s close connection to touch, to feeling, and to sensation. Only then can political theory become fully sensitized to the affective dimensions of luxury that make it so pervasive and powerful a feature of the life of the economic polity.

Conceptualizing Haptic Luxury

Touch sensation remains a hidden but foundational dimension of luxury’s material and symbolic work in the political economy of modern societies. It forms a boundary of luxury discourse. It is a point at which luxury sheds its inauthenticity and is known—both in-itself and in its social powers. Yet so long as the modern privileging of sight and vision as tropics of knowledge continues to structure the way political thought engages with luxury consumption, this boundary can only be perceived as an ever-retreating horizon.⁴⁴ The oft-remarked weakness of modern luxury discourse is in part, I argue, symptomatic of the modern failure to grapple squarely with luxury’s haptic dimensions. A robust conception of luxury incorporates the relation of luxury to touching and feeling bodies, and extends the sensibility of these relations into the well-known and even prosaic ways that the production, exchange, and consumption of luxury mediate regimes of superordination in late modern life.

We may begin the incorporation of touch and feeling into a conceptualization of luxury by examining uses of the term “luxury”

itself, bearing in mind that each of them has something to tell us about what luxury is—even, and especially, if these uses are in ways incongruent. The sense of touch is not hard to find here: things described as ‘luxurious’ are often marked with a relation to touch and feeling. A mink coat (or even a rabbit one) can be luxurious, but a symphony? A couch may be luxurious, but a painting? A towel may be luxurious, but an aroma? We can answer “yes” to these questions, but in each of these comparisons, the latter item (a symphony, a painting, an aroma) becomes a luxury by way of being a commodity. The former need not. Where its hapticity is not one of its most salient dimensions, an item becomes pleasurable through an expenditure that is considered excessive. Can the ability to place oneself beyond need act as a surrogate for the haptic pleasure of luxury’s other side? Even ambiguous cases can be sorted helpfully with this rubric: when a box at the opera is described as “luxurious,” we take it to mean that it is well-appointed, not that it enjoys superior acoustics (the contrary is often the case). In sum, touch ties together what we might call a family of resemblances among ways that we use the term. Looking at these uses, we sense a bifurcation among those that attend to ways of touching and being touched, and those that invoke patterns of commodifying and appropriating.

The clues provided by uses of the term “luxury” are bound to be complex, and it is important neither to attempt to draw rules from them nor to wish for clear distinctions and boundaries. Instead, these clues sensitize us to ways that the equivocality of the term “luxury” makes a luxurious relation of bodies to pleasure inseparable from the other ways we praise, condemn, analyze, and experience luxury. The social exclusions promised by luxury’s expense must be understood in light of its haptic aesthetic promise. The luxury box at the opera offers an example. Not only is the box finely appointed (with wider seats, quality upholstery, and so on) but the haptic pleasures of this space are also characterized by what one does *not* feel there, namely, the nudging of strangers’ limbs and the jostling of bodies passing toward the aisle that are found elsewhere in the hall.

We need to revisit some prominent conceptual analyses and histories of luxury in a way that foregrounds the neglected relationship between touch and luxury. So doing demands and supports two major conceptual reorientations. The first is a relatively narrow and basic move that attenuates the conflation of luxury and fashion. The second reorientation is broader, in that it restores the distinctive roles of desire and pleasure to discourses of political economy that have conflated them with need and satisfaction. By reorienting the usual story of luxury in these ways, I aim not only to restore the haptic dimension of luxury for political theorizing, but also to limn the intellectual junctures at which this dimension has been rendered insensible.

Luxury versus the Modern Fashion Pattern

If a true grasp of luxury begins by suspending the privilege accorded to the visual, we may begin by setting aside the usual, and usually unhelpful, distinction between luxury and needs, instead distinguishing luxury from fashion. The usage of the term “luxury” suggests and supports this move, in that while fashion is sometimes derided (or even flaunted) as uncomfortable, something that is painful or unpleasant will never count as “luxurious.” Recovering a critical conception of luxury from the visual dominance of modernity and its marketeers will benefit by following this clue.

It is now well-established that the modern fashion pattern deserves special credit for sustaining the emergence of capitalism and its transformation into a political economy essentially based on what Veblen so aptly termed “conspicuous waste.”⁴⁵ Yet a subtle conflation of fashion and luxury lies at the heart of political economy’s insensitivity to luxury’s haptic dimensions and has thus hobbled our appreciation for the distinctiveness of luxury. Fashion, far moreso than luxury, is a language of highly visible, portable, and readily subverted codes.⁴⁶ This is not to say that some luxuries are not quite fashionable, or to deny that some fashions are marketed as luxurious. Rather, it is to note that while fashion and luxury may coincide in certain objects, they

represent distinctive aspects of the object: fashion, the object's message to others; luxury, the object's effect upon the body and to the body's capacity to respond. Fashion communicates and represents; luxury affects. But this difference between luxury and fashion is practically never observed in discussions of luxury. We see this partly because marketers hope to profit from conflating the two, though theorists can be expected to do better. For scholars, the confusion may stem from an eighteenth-century historical coincidence. The modern fashion pattern emerged at about the same time as modern celebrations of luxury as promoting prosperity and democratizing society. Conceptual historians and political theorists who take their cues from historians seem to have allowed the former development to overdetermine their understanding of latter.

Revisiting the early modern demise of sumptuary laws offers telling clues to what's missing from historical and theoretical discussions and why. Modern luxury discourse emerged when the political and economic anxieties of an emerging commercial society turned for economic gain and moral solace alike to medieval denunciations of luxurious consumption. Yet the primary object of late medieval sumptuary, clothing, was in the same period regulated by a wholly new, entirely visible force of fashion. While sumptuary enjoys an ancient provenance, these laws were most actively used in the early modern period. Simply put, sumptuary was a governmentality. Early modern sumptuary in particular spoke to concerns raised by urbanization and by the emergence of modern class distinctions. It especially sought to intervene in gender relations that grew gradually more independent of the sexual division of labor, and that were therefore in need of supplementary regulation.⁴⁷ Laws in this period more or less appropriated the longstanding moral denunciations of luxury, both classical and Christian, but in the service of novel aims. For example, a great many mercantilist initiatives emphasized the potential of sumptuary legislation to serve as a tool for promoting a favorable balance of trade, by discouraging the importation of "luxurious" foreign wares.⁴⁸ Here the discourse of luxury moralizes from its classical roots, where luxury is vicious in that it threat-

ens dearth or ruin.⁴⁹ For a time, this sort of justification became nearly the whole of luxury discourse in England. Opposition to myriad sumptuary efforts so justified account for nearly everything that David Ricardo, to name one prominent economist, wrote on the topic of luxury.

The sole exception in Ricardo's writings would be the single reference he makes to the potential for luxurious tastes to attenuate the "constant efforts" of the laboring race toward procreation. Even there, Ricardo's point runs deeply counter to the thrust of sumptuary legislation, and against another (and somewhat older) aim of sumptuary laws. This aim was to help the increasingly materially compromised nobility resist the aspirations of their inferiors to realize higher status by way of emulating their superiors' conspicuous behaviors.⁵⁰ Here, denunciations of luxury leaned more on Christian critiques, which framed classical concerns about luxury leading to dearth and ruin, but saw these threats as emerging from luxury's defiance of an order, and particularly the hierarchy of men, conceived by God.⁵¹ In sum, where straightforward claims about the benefits of trade surpluses failed to excite, and where showing outright contempt for the lower orders was unlikely to secure their subordination, ancient condemnations of luxury offered a moralistic means of justifying a role for the state in directing patterns of change in an emerging commercial society.

It was convenient for both of these purposes, especially in a nation (like England) whose economy was ever-more dominated by textile manufacture, that by the late medieval period sumptuary legislation had already come to center on the regulation of clothing.⁵² But it was inconvenient, for elites in particular, that early in the eighteenth century modes of dress came to be regulated largely by the modern fashion pattern, in other words, to be marked by very rapid pace of change in the shaping, materials, and colors of garments.⁵³ So powerful was the fashion pattern that elite status itself came to be marked by a person's capacity to display proximity to incipient standards. There was no shortage of frustration among the highborn upon this point, particu-

larly regarding how reliant it made them on low-status tastemakers. The contempt heaped upon hairdressers in eighteenth-century England vividly attests to this development.⁵⁴ But more to the point, the modern fashion pattern defeated sumptuary legislation, which simply could not keep up with the pace of changes. It could not legislate stability in practices now dominated by the emergence of the unforeseen.

Both celebrants and critics of luxury took the patterns of fashion—be they in styles of clothing, or in other exotic consumer items—as the template for grappling with luxury. So doing, modern luxury discourse left behind what it could not see: the haptic pleasures of the sensorium and the touch of sociability. These feelings and pleasures remain with us and intrinsic to the experience of luxury, as evidenced how we talk about luxury in everyday contexts. But they have been lost to the modern theorist who, retreating from the elusive distinction between luxury and need, understands the former in terms of recognition, visibility, and the utilities augured thereby. Having proposed a return to understanding luxury in terms of touch and feeling, and therefore in distinction to fashion, we may now reconsider the contrast between luxury and need and its entailments.

Luxury versus Need

The superfluity of fashion allowed the classical and Christian notions of luxury to be subsumed with relative ease. After all, new luxury was still whatever exceeded the strictly necessary, and particularly whatever exceeded the necessary in the name of pursuing social status. Yet in maintaining a conception of luxury as simply whatever exceeds the necessary, modern luxury discourse rested on the thinnest of foundations. The medieval notions of dearth and want spoke to the contingencies facing a manor or a village; the necessity that Christians found in a hierarchical social order had little to do with the sustenance of any one natural person. But modernity transferred “need” to the individual human body as a site of production and reproduction: of sex, of metabolism, of labor. This transfer of need to the imperatives of the

single human body dramatically changes the conception of luxury to which it is so often and inaptly opposed.

When attached to an individual human body in a social context, the conception of need itself was found to be a shifting one. In this new context, the Achilles' heel of critiques of luxury was their reliance on a notion of "real needs"—a notion that was progressively undermined by the demands of a commercial society, even if it was tentatively endorsed by some of its most prominent theoretical defenders.⁵⁵ But acknowledging that needs and luxuries are analytically indistinct robs 'need' and 'luxury' neither of semantic, nor metonymic, nor effective differences. In clarifying these differences, we come face to face with complexities that cannot be handled within any straightforward juxtaposition of these terms.

Mandeville understood that the line between luxury and necessity could not be drawn, though his way of both deploying and denying the difference in *The Fable of the Bees* has become central to the modern discourse of luxury that he promoted. "In the remote Beginnings of every Society," he writes, "the richest and most considerable Men among them were a great while destitute of a great many Comforts of Life that are now enjoy'd by the meanest and most humble Wretches: So that many things, which were once look'd upon as the invention of Luxury, are now allow'd even to those that are so miserably poor as to become the Objects of publick Charity, nay counted so necessary, that we think no Human Creature ought to want them."⁵⁶ Mandeville's observation that yesterday's luxuries are today's needs, in other words, his ability to make such a distinction by means of historical reference, allows him to undermine the distinction between needs and luxury. By focusing on, and deploying, the distinction between needs and superfluities, Mandeville sufficiently shifts the debate away from anything about luxury that exceeds the superfluity of need. To make the pursuit of luxury a fundamental of political economy and of social order more generally—as a prime-mover of production and exchange—is, appropriately enough, to lay a foundation on a receding horizon, just as the infinity of the

land, available in New Worlds, appeared to Locke and to Smith.

The essential weakness of the modern conception of luxury stems from our modern insistence that it is the other of need, forgetting that the negation of need—satisfaction—is not pleasure. A more robust theorization of luxury calls for a careful delineation of this relation. Two scholars, Christopher Berry and Colin Campbell, have examined this relationship in nuanced ways.⁵⁷ Each of them allows that luxury and need cannot be “distinguished” as a matter of conceptual sumptuary, that is, of classifying objects as luxurious or not. Since most luxury discourse today focuses—and founders—on conceptual sumptuary, setting this approach aside is essential for recapturing the sense that luxury offers of the aesthetic, haptic, and affective aspects of commercial society.

Berry’s analysis of needs provides theoretical leverage to escape the modern insistence that luxury cannot be theorized because of the historicity of needs. He points out that we need a thing for what it really is; we desire it, by contrast, for what we believe it to be.⁵⁸ But recognizing that wants can create needs—my desire to win the lottery creates a need to buy a ticket—we must distinguish “basic needs,” which are those with an essential relation to the body, by contrast to the “instrumental needs” that follow from desires. The difference between instrumental and basic needs is an important one, because we are prone to elide this distinction when we argue whether needs change over time. The dispute over the historicity of needs itself, however, reveals an important aspect of the distinction. Basic needs are abstract; instrumental needs, like the desires that create them, are particular.⁵⁹ The basic needs for food and shelter, for example, say nothing regarding the particular kind of shelter, or what specific food meets the need. In other words, one needs food—but one wants rice, or fillet mignon, depending on this evening’s recipe. (In relation to the body’s need for nutrition, one never needs rice, because another grain, like quinoa or couscous, can substitute for it.) Because instrumental needs and desires are particular, however, they are inevitably conditioned by culture and by history within which all particulars are situated. Here is where luxury’s sensory

dimension, not explored by Berry, makes his critical opening useful for our purposes. Because luxury resides in sensible particulars, it will always appear to contrast with *essential* needs, which are abstract. At the same time, it will converge with *instrumental* needs which, like luxury, are intrinsically particular. Hence, because luxury is sensed, luxury appears both superfluous of and indistinct from needs. The point, however, is that superfluity and indistinction reflect the complexity of needs, not the “fuzziness” of luxury or its uselessness as a critical concept. We must remain closely attuned to luxury’s sensory dimension in order to navigate the rocky straits of its relation to needs, to reject conceptual sumptuary, and to grapple with the importance of luxury in a political democracy of invidious consumers.

Campbell, for his part, explicitly rejects the utilitarian framework that underlies present-day economic theory as suitable for grappling with luxury. Even though luxury is not the focus of Campbell’s discussion regarding the origins of the modern hedonism that underlies consumer culture, his exploration of pleasure—which Campbell himself draws largely from Tibor Scitovsky’s work, *The Joyless Economy*—merits exposition for the ways that it speaks to luxury.⁶⁰ It shows that the attempt to define luxury in relation to need involves a kind of category mistake, one that mimics sumptuaries’ and marketers’ attempts to treat luxury taxonomically. The sensuous and pleasurable side of luxury instead alerts us to the human capacities that are presupposed by and cultivated in luxurious consumption. In other words, we must examine this side of luxury if we are to trace a pervasive affective dimension of commercial society.

In order to get at the sensuous and pleasurable side of luxury, we must distinguish need and satisfaction, on the one hand, from desire and pleasure, on the other. The former terms speak to a state of being whose disturbance, which we call need, is resolved in a return to equilibrium we call satisfaction. Desire and pleasure, by contrast, speak to qualities of experience pertaining to stimulation. Desire is a disposition to be stimulated, which is in turn answered by a favorable response to the stimulation, or

pleasure. Hunger and food are paradigmatic of need and satisfaction, while the initiation and enjoyment of sexual activity are paradigmatic of the other pair.⁶¹ Each of these pairs entails a different orientation to the object of need or desire. Satisfaction of a need depends on an object's qualities. In other words, an object's fitness to satisfy a need depends on what it is. By contrast, pleasure is a capacity, more specifically, the capacity to react to stimuli in a way that gratifies and indeed stimulates desire. Of course, the pleasure we take in an object can be partly a function of what an object is taken to be or represented as. In other words, what is potentially pleasing about an object goes beyond its objective qualities, drawing also from its social meanings. But this fact should not strand all pleasure in the category of other-directed behavior. Drawing on Scitovsky's research, Campbell emphasizes that the ability to feel pleasure demands the exercise and refinement of the capacity to respond to stimuli in a pleasing way. It requires, for example, that we "pay attention" to the pleasurable object, process, or event.⁶² And this attention is required because we are stimulated, first and foremost, by change—so all pleasure depends, in some respect, upon our prior experiences and memories.⁶³ In luxury, we confront not just the pleasure, but rather the cultivation of the capacity of the body to be pleased alongside the meeting of these needs. It is in this sense that luxuriating in a meal or in a bath may be less about the squander of time implied in these activities and more about the expansion of this capacity for pleasure that they entail.

This analysis offers two insights that can set critical study of luxury down a new path. First, because luxury is pleasure (recall that what is displeasing will never count as luxurious), when we juxtapose luxury and need, we contrast opposite points of two different pairs: a double miss. After all, pleasure is to satisfaction what desire is to need; "luxury versus need" collapses two dimensions of these terms' difference. It obscures how the intrinsic relationship of luxury to pleasure renders luxury intrinsically unfit for a utilitarian analysis. To the extent that superordination may represent a response to a human need for status, luxury must also be understood in light of the opportunity it presents to

cultivate the capacity to take pleasure in status.

The second and related point is that any particular object can be pleasurable, when we exercise our capacity for pleasure with respect to it, and it can satisfy a need, to which its actual qualities correspond. For example: I need food, and a filet mignon has digestible and nutritious calories. At the same time I am disposed to enjoy a filet mignon, to savor its texture, aroma, and flavor, to compare it to lesser cuts and victuals, to recall the joys of filets mignon past, and to anticipate filets mignon to come. A vegetarian may benefit nutritionally from eating filet mignon in ways very similar to me, but may be unwilling or unable to exercise a capacity for pleasure with respect to this food. If luxury consumption can be said to satisfy a need for recognition and superordination, this satisfaction is neither inclusive nor exclusive of the opportunities it presents for the development of one's capacity to take pleasure. Insofar as the other-directed need for recognition is mediated by the visible signs of luxury consumption, the satisfaction of this need must be seen as crossed in some way with the capacities and pleasures that luxury consumption affords.

The tactile dimensions of luxury speak to the persistence of direct experience of pleasurable sensation in the body—a form of pleasure Campbell calls “traditional hedonism” and contrasts to what he sees as the imaginative hedonistic force that supports the modern fashion pattern.⁶⁴ Luxury, particularly in its tactile, pleasurable, felt sensory dimension, reveals that “traditional” hedonics have not been wholly superseded by the modern fashion pattern, with its “democratic” potential to subvert dominant codes, or the emergence of mass consumer culture, with its “democratization” of wants and satisfactions. Instead, the persistent felt side of luxury draws our attention to the aesthetics of inequality in a capitalist society that delivers the goods of consumerism. This persistence must be interpreted in light of the felt pleasures that attend experiences of superordination and that do not depend solely or even mainly on the visual or spectacular media of mass culture today.

Conclusion

Luxury, with its intrinsic kernel of felt pleasure, provides an opening to a theory of consumption that does not resolve itself into a split between mind and body. Rather luxury draws us to the way that a consumer good retains its relation to a body that senses. For this body, sensation and the opportunity for pleasure that it presents is deeply woven with the satisfaction of needs, including other-directed needs for recognition, for esteem, and even for superordination.

The tactility of luxury, its relation to pleasure and especially the non-visual pleasures represented by the skin and by touch, must be brought back into contact with the broader range of associations of the term luxury. And here the exclusivity of luxury consumption raises an urgent problem and suggestive potential. These speak not only to theorizing consumption, but more broadly to the “distribution of the sensible,” to invoke a phrase from Rancière. In grappling with luxury’s haptic side, we encounter an especially literal aspect of this distribution. More than other senses, touch is intrinsically connected to proximity; it is therefore less extended than other senses, and more spatially rarefied. In this context, close associations of luxury with superordination, which have been most apparent to observers, shape the politics of luxury’s sensibility. And so, while much consumption has a tactile dimension, the capacity to cultivate ones relation to this dimension is celebrated as exclusive to a class of consumers who can afford to be *cognoscenti*. In luxury, the tactile dimension of consumption is declaimed as hinging on its exclusivity, as though the presence of other bodies diminishes, rather than amplifies, one’s own capacity to feel.

Luxury therefore presents an especially difficult case for the democratic moments of aesthetics. By the same token, however, it also may present especially rich political potential. Whereas many discussion of aesthetics, especially those that take their bearings from Kant and other Enlightenment philosophers, privi-

lege sight and hearing as senses that structure their accounts of beauty, of imagination, and of the sublime, luxury presents aesthetic experiences modeled on boundaries, limitations, and exclusions, which themselves may be threatened by luxury's intrinsic excess. Even so, openings for these aesthetic experiences to exceed the highly structured canons of luxury consumption appear rarified by design. Therefore, the search for democratic moments in luxury must not rest with the "democratizing" effects of knockoffs or the appropriation and scrambling of what appear to be luxury's conspicuous visual codes. Instead, such a search must feel out democratizing fissures within the ways that luxury distributes the capacity for pleasure.

Notes

- ¹ John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 4.
- ² Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998).
- ³ Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987).
- ⁴ Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2009), 17.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.
- ⁶ "Apple Removes \$1000 Featureless Application." *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 7, 2008 <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/technology/2008/08/iphone-i-am-ric.html>
- ⁷ "For Luxury Brands, Less Money to Spend on Ads." *New York Times*, Nov. 23, 2008 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/24/business/media/24luxury.html>
- ⁸ The stock market has a considerably higher rate of return than, say, the purchase of short-term government debt, which makes the very existence of a market for bonds a puzzle from the point of view of the economist. This puzzle, known as the equity premium, can be explained by noting that the class of consumers who are not rich, and who spend money primarily on normal goods, are risk-averse enough to create a market for low-risk, low-yield investments. See Yacine Aït-Sahalia, Jonathan A. Parker, and Motohiro Yogo, "Luxury Goods and the Equity Premium," *The Journal of Finance* 59, no. 6 (2004)
- ⁹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990).
- ¹⁰ Christopher D. Carroll, "Why Do the Rich Save So Much?" in *Does Atlas Shrug? The Economic Consequences of Taxing the Rich*, ed. Joel B. Slemrod (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000)
- ¹¹ James Andreoni and John Miller, "Giving According to Garp: An Experimental Test of the Consistency of Preferences for Altruism," *Econometrica* 70, no. 2 (2002)
- ¹² Present-day luxury discourse follows to the letter a timeworn pattern. When luxury is dangerous (i.e., during lean years), the luxury consumer is nearly always a woman. When prosperity reigns (i.e., during fat years), the news is that men have become consumers of luxury. The implication of course is that luxury emasculates, and therefore threatens in other ways.
- ¹³ "Even in a Recession, Spend They Must: Luxury Shoppers Anonymous." *New York Times*, December 10, 2008.
- ¹⁴ "Rise of the Super-Rich Hits a Sobering Wall." *New York Times*, August 22, 2009.
- ¹⁵ Dana Thomas, *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster* (New York: Penguin, 2007).
- ¹⁶ Elizabeth D. Harvey, "The Touching Organ: Allegory, Anatomy, and the Renaissance Skin Envelope," in *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 83. Ambivalence toward this predecessor in medieval cultures can be traced to a broader Christian suspicion of knowledge that can be gathered from the senses in general.
- ¹⁷ Simon J. Bronner, "The Haptic Experience of Culture," *Anthropos* 77, no. 3 (1982): 352.
- ¹⁸ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 70-82.
- ¹⁹ See T. R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. Geoffrey Gilbert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- ²⁰ See Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees* (New York: Penguin, 1989).
- ²¹ Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, "Needs and Justice in the *Wealth of Nations*," in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 10.
- ²² Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984), I.i.1.1-4
- ²³ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- ²⁴ Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, IV.i.8.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.i.8.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, IV.i.8-9.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, IV.i.8.
- ²⁹ Sophocles' *Ode to Man* is a section of *Antigone* delivered by the chorus. See Sophocles, "Antigone," in *Greek Tragedies*, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), lines 332-372.
- ³⁰ Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, IV.i.10.
- ³¹ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 199.

- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid., 200.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 204.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 205.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 357.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 357.
- ³⁹ Alec Macfie, "The Invisible Hand of Jupiter," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32, no. 4 (1971): 598.
- ⁴⁰ William D. Grampp, "What Did Smith Mean by the Invisible Hand?" *Journal of Political Economy* 108, no. 3 (2000).
- ⁴¹ Macfie, "The Invisible Hand of Jupiter," 598.
- ⁴² For a discussion of the skin's rich sensitivity, and the relation of its physical properties to the sense of self, see Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, trans. Chris Turner (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989). Regarding the skin as a sensitive register of affect, see Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 25.
- ⁴³ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 215. On Smith's theory of civic morals, see Nicholas Phillipson, "Adam Smith as Civic Moralist," in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- ⁴⁴ Regarding the prominence of the visual as the modern paradigm of knowledge, and the reaction to this prominence in European philosophy, see Jay, *Downcast Eyes*
- ⁴⁵ Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 22.
- ⁴⁶ It's worth noting here that while the visual codes of fashion are readily subverted, subversion that amounts to fashion is itself regulated by codes of hierarchy. Consider, as evidence, the archly condescending welcome proffered by a *New York Times* fashion critic to a J. C. Penney store in midtown Manhattan. The critic jeered that "J. C. Penney has always trafficked in knockoffs that aren't quite up to Canal Street's illegal standards...it was never 'get the look for less' so much as 'get something vaguely shaped like the designer thing you want, but cut much more conservatively, made in all-petroleum materials, and with a too-similar wannabe logo that announces your inferiority.'" See "Critical Shopper: J. C. Penney," by Cintra Wilson. *New York Times*, August 11, 2009.
- ⁴⁷ Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 3-4, 10. See also Susan Mosher Stuard, *Gilding the Market: Luxury and Fashion in Fourteenth-Century Italy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, Ch. 4.
- ⁴⁸ See, for example, "The Petition of the Ladies at Court, Intended to be Presented to the House of Lords: Against the Pride and Luxury of the City Dames," R. J., London, 1681.
- ⁴⁹ Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions*, 78.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 25.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 79.
- ⁵² Ibid., 27.
- ⁵³ Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 22.
- ⁵⁴ Don Herzog, *Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), Ch. 11.
- ⁵⁵ See, for example, John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), §37, and Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, I.vii-viii. Both Locke and Smith regard the increase of population as the sole means and mark of expanding markets and wealth in part because they regard basic (or "real") needs as stable.
- ⁵⁶ Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, 188.
- ⁵⁷ Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*; Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- ⁵⁸ Berry, *The Idea of Luxury*, 9.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 10. Berry's analysis up to this point is useful, particularly for the way it handles the controversy over the historicity of needs. But from here, Berry's analysis resolves into the same distinction between mind and body that attends Descartes' and the classical political economists' privileging of sight. Moreover, Berry recurs to the taxonomic impulse of the sumptuary, underwritten by the modern utilitarian framework that distinguishes luxury in relation to needs (40).

⁶⁰ Tibor Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy: An Enquiry into Human Satisfaction and Consumer Dissatisfaction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). Campbell's analysis of need-satisfaction and desire-pleasure, drawn from Scitovsky, closely resembles Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's adaptation of Sylvan Thompson's analysis of drives and affects. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 18-21 and chapter 3.

⁶¹ Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 60-1.

⁶² Comfort, being the absence of pain, relates mainly to the pair "need-satisfaction." Comfort does not call upon us to exercise a capacity; it is in the very nature of comfort that it requires no effort. It's no surprise, therefore, that when Mandeville contrasted luxury and need, he arrived at the conclusion that luxuries become comforts. With luxury's distinctive pleasures unacknowledged, its reduction to satisfaction, and therefore its positive, rather than contrasting relation to need, becomes a matter of course.

⁶³ Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 62-3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.