

# The SPIRIT of LUXURY

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**Abstract** The aim of this article is to introduce and examine the concept of the “spirit of luxury.” Accordingly, we commence by delineating the philosophical idea of luxury, emphasizing its discursive meaning, and contemplating its earliest historical and etymological origins. We continue through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by means of a discussion of the philosophical, political, and economic writings of David Hume, Karl Marx, Thorstein Veblen, Émile Louis Victor de Laveleye, and Werner Sombart. Employing Sombart’s sociological work on the spirit of capitalism, we advance and elaborate on the notion of the spirit of luxury. Offering a “Sombartian” account of recent luxury research, specifically the core contributions to this special issue of *Cultural Politics*, we conclude by critically assessing the concepts of luxury, spirit, and capitalism.

**Keywords** luxury, spirit, capitalism

## *Introduction*

The purpose of this article is to introduce and explore the concept of the “spirit of luxury.” We begin by defining the philosophical idea of luxury, highlighting its discursive meaning, and discussing its ancient roots. We then document the changing perspectives that underpinned the “de-moralization” of luxury in the eighteenth century. It is in this de-moralization process that we locate the emergence of modern understandings of luxury and their connection to the rise of capitalism. Yet, as we show, these new perspectives on luxury were subject to significant radical critique in the late nineteenth century from a diverse set of writers, including Karl Marx, Thorstein Veblen, and Émile Louis Victor de Laveleye. Nevertheless,

for Werner Sombart, luxury is intimately connected to the early development of capitalism.

Indeed, in this article, we argue that Sombart's historical, economic, cultural, and political theories facilitate the elaboration of our conception of the spirit of luxury, a notion that utilizes ideas of vitality and vivaciousness concerning luxury-loving human beings. Our next task, then, is to consider Sombart's understanding of the "spirit of capitalism" so that we may derive from it our own appreciation of the spirit of luxury. Beginning with a discussion of Sombart's *Luxury and Capitalism* and *Der Moderne Kapitalismus (Modern Capitalism)*, we survey his cultural-political approach to the spirit of capitalism. In so doing, we summarize the key elements of Sombart's work and compare it to that of his contemporary Max Weber, whose analysis of the rise of the spirit of capitalism is well known. Yet, we argue, what is important is not so much the spirit of capitalism or even a definition of luxury; rather, it is that there was an exceptional unity of the spirit of luxury under early capitalism.

Having identified and explored extant ideas on the rise of the spirit of capitalism and its connection to luxury, we then consider the contemporary spirit of luxury through a "Sombartian" account of recent luxury research and, specifically, the core contributions to this special issue of *Cultural Politics*. Here, we cover a wide range of topics, including art as a luxury brand and Starbucks coffee as a "luxury line," the psychoanalysis of Roman *luxus*, "disruptive luxury" haute couture fashion, rococo-inspired feminist art, and the "antiwork ethic" of Indian female luxury embroiderers.

Finally, in the conclusion, we return to the question of luxury, prior to critically

assessing the concept of spirit. However, we also highlight the continued value of the idea of spirit concerning analyses of capitalism, as exemplified by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. We close with a call for further research efforts to explore the relationship between contemporary capitalism and the present-day spirit of luxury. Let us begin, then, with our consideration of luxury.

### **On Luxury**

As the sociocultural production and reproduction of a sense of sumptuousness, meaning here "extremely comfortable" living or surroundings, the concept of a life lived in luxury is thoroughly embedded in contemporary consciousness. However, as a sphere of meaning concerned with things that are inessential, the provision of pleasure and comfort can both unify (e.g., the sphere of the "entitled" or the "elite") and divide (e.g., the sphere of the "barred," the "constrained," the "run-of-the-mill," or the "mediocre"). Luxury, therefore, might be seen as the sphere of meaning that unites luxury production (the political economy of luxury) and the sociocultural and political relations that it engenders.

That said, it is often possible to use or read the word *luxury* simply and uncontentiously. We can easily think of a luxury car, such as a Ferrari F12berlinetta; the luxury of flying in a private jet, such as a Gulfstream G650; a luxury celebrity wedding replete with every extravagance; or even a luxury dining experience involving Tasmanian leatherwood honey, Shanghai hairy crab, Caspian "000" beluga caviar, and other culinary frills. The problem arises when we observe that, even in these instances, the concept of luxury appears to mean different things. The question, then,

is what do all these things share, such that they can all be encompassed by the single term *luxury*?

The answer is: not very much. The idea of luxury, as Patrizia Calefato (2014: 3–4) has remarked, is multidiscursive; it can be mobilized in numerous diverse discourses. This means that we cannot introduce a set definition of luxury into any and every context and expect it to make sense. What we have to do is ascertain the discursive context itself (e.g., the “spirit” of luxury detailed below). It might be a discourse that entails the feeling of being “entitled” to a few luxuries after working hard; or one that entails buying expensive things, such as a Fendi Borromini sofa; or one that expresses desire for that fashionable haute couture Chanel dress or that hard-to-obtain bottle of wine, such as a Pétrus 2005 fine Bordeaux; or even one that centers on booking a trip on a Virgin Galactic spacecraft. In each instance, the meaning of luxury will be established relationally, by its difference from others in that discourse—such as necessity, which is the antonym of luxury—rather than by reference to any inherent or indisputable properties that are everlastingly fixed as being typically luxurious. Furthermore, the concept of luxury cannot be “proven” by referring its meaning to phenomena or acts or objects “out there” beyond discourse. There is, for example, no way of “proving” that enjoying a stay at a luxury hotel, such as the Burj Al Arab Hotel in Dubai, is the “true” meaning of luxury. What the concept of luxury denotes is decided by the term itself, in its discursive context—for example, the discursive context of luxury perfume, which is populated by the producers of extravagant fragrances, such as Clive Christian’s Imperial Majesty—and by its wealthy consumers.

In view of the above, luxury’s recognized senses and uses clearly arise from the history of its usage within different discourses. Luxury derives, originally, from an old French root: luxury as *luxurie*, from the Latin *luxuria*, *luxus*, or “abundance.” By extension, luxury includes sumptuous enjoyment. Luxury such as this suggests not just indulgence but also—in Latin and in the Romance languages—vicious indulgence, a nonneutral sense of the English word *luxury*, which is also expressed by Latin as *luxus*, hence the French *luxe*, the Spanish *lujo*, and the Italian *lusso*.

If we relate all of this back to people, it becomes clear that the concept of luxury offers productive grounds for a discussion of minds turned toward extravagance—the conscious pleasure in and enjoyment of rich, comfortable, and sumptuous living—and toward things considered luxuries rather than necessities. It is not without importance that this usage of the idea of luxury overlapped with the establishment of the modern market economy in England and elsewhere (see, for example, Sekora 1977). Indeed, the early agrarian capitalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries coincided with what Christopher J. Berry calls the “de-moralization” of luxury. For Berry (1994: 169–73), the process captured by the term *de-moralization* is part of a broad shift involving the debate over commerce from the seventeenth century onward. Certainly, for him, this debate was a crucial component in the reevaluation of luxury in seventeenth-century England, in particular, as consumption expanded and marketing structures, including credit networks, became more complex, reaching considerable sophistication by the eighteenth century. Picking out Nicholas Barbon and David Hume as key representatives of the reevaluation of luxury, Berry

shows how the previous centuries' severe opposition to and "moralization" of luxury as a "vice" was defeated through the new coupling of luxury or "refinement" with happiness and virtue. For Hume ([1752] 2012: 263), for instance, humans seek gratification and are motivated by "avarice and industry, art and luxury." Moreover, since luxury and avarice were uniformly condemned by stern moralists from Plato (in *The Republic* [380 BC]) and Cicero (in *Three Books of Offices, or Moral Duties* [44 BC]) to St. Augustine (in *City of God* [AD 426]), then Hume's statement alone, argues Berry, is an indicator of the demoralization of luxury in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, encapsulating, as it does, the change in evaluations that took place.

Berry (2016) ascribes these shifts in conceptions of luxury consumption to changing notions of desire; from the premodern standpoint wherein desire was characterized as a transgression of "some value laden purposive order with definite limits" to the modern view of desire as "the definitive element in human motivation" and, hence, acknowledged for what it is—the engine and chief influence on human morality. Sumptuary laws, for example, sought to police luxury transgressions in premodern Europe (Hunt 1996). Yet these laws' decline and dismissal by modernists such as Barbon and Hume is viewed by Berry as indicative of something else—a new perspective on "desire":

Once desires are seen as the bearers of values then any individual self-discipline is a matter of calculation—the desire for the piece of pie against the desire to fit into that new dress. The social counterpart is a matter of weighing up the merits of freeing or restricting commerce. Hence the construction of a positive

role for luxury goods; not only did they serve as aspirational incentives, leading to increase in employment and diffusion of pleasing/desirable goods, but also they brought with them the crucial corollary that, as objects of universal desire, everyone is entitled to these aspirations and the free enjoyment of those goods. In contrast, the moralised world was in reality a world of slavery. (2006: 52)

In other words, people are not just preoccupied with meeting their needs as part of a value-laden purposive order (with fixed boundaries). Rather, desire is now made sense of as the decisive component of human motivation. Hence, the systematic dissemination of the grounds of luxury as desire increased employment, and the "democratization" of ambition and pleasure.

Moreover, the early hegemony of the aristocratic and Aristotelian landowning capitalists was subjected throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere to the altogether more troublesome growth of luxurious desires, pleasure, and attractive goods and services in the urban, industrial, and commercial spheres of capitalism (Berg 2005; Berg and Eger 2003). No sooner was luxury recognized as a term that alluded to things of quality, and delight considered an indulgence rather than a necessity without echoes of excess, than economic and political transformations (e.g., the importation into Britain of luxury goods like porcelain from the Far East) began to challenge what products were to be considered luxuries rather than necessities (e.g., fine art). Inventive entrepreneurial and imperial capitalism, for instance, appeared to be no respecter of how luxurious material objects, such as glass and chinaware, were made or which

were conducive to the physical comfort and “grammar of the polite table” (Berg 2005: 117). Metal candlesticks, shoe buckles, and tea urns—helpful tools and pleasant ornaments, all—thus created “a nation of shoppers” out of the men and women of the middle classes (Berg 2005: 193). Obtaining self-esteem through shopping in the advertising-bedecked arcades, which were replete with fashionable luxury commodities, such men and women pursued their newly formed consumerist dreams and desires. In fact, the growing media coverage in the press and in journals, such as the German *Das Journal des Luxus und der Moden* (*The Journal of Luxury and Fashion*), established in 1786 and published until 1827, had the principal aim of disseminating information about luxury and fashion (Bertuch and Kraus [1786] 2016, this issue).

Thus, on the one hand, the British, American, and German middle classes embraced the concept and the material objects of luxury in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. On the other hand, by the late nineteenth century, the German political economist of *Capital*, Karl Marx, was condemning both the idea of luxury and luxurious things. In fact, for Marx ([1867] 1976: 1045), luxury goods are only “absolutely necessary for a mode of production which creates wealth for the non-producer” rather than for the poor producer, and which consequently must deliver that wealth in forms that authorize its procurement only by those such as the richer capitalist and middle classes discussed above who, above all, sought enjoyment. Yet, as Adam Dunn (2016, this issue) observes in his review of Kristin Ross’s *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (2015), the concept and the *immaterial* objects of the luxurious imagination were very much

alive in the Paris Commune—the radical socialist and revolutionary government that ruled Paris from March 18 to May 28, 1871. Ross demonstrates that “communal luxury”—a program meaning “public beauty,” such as the improvement of cities or the right of all to live and work in pleasurable surroundings—is essential even for alternative modes of production such as the Paris Commune, which produced a different conception of “wealth” out of revolution. Accordingly, the idea of wealth takes on an atypical form here from that normally associated with money, riches, capitalism, and class-based perceptions of pleasure. To be sure, wealth is not only redefined as the total reconfiguration of people’s relationship to art and labor, personal relations, and nature but also as the social mobilization of devolution and full participation in art, beauty, and everyday life. However, it was left to other, later, orthodox liberal political economists, such as France’s Paul Leroy-Beaulieu ([1894] 2016, this issue), and, occasionally, religious ministers, such as the American Unitarian Charles F. Dole (1898), to continue the debate over the concept of luxury. Hence, throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, luxury began to be sharpened by some in Germany (see, for example, Breckman 1991) and in the United States into quite a precise critical idea of consumerism and leisure, an idea that is still influential today.

In the United States, and particularly in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* by Thorstein Veblen ([1899] 2009), the critical idea of luxury was founded through his analysis of economics, institutions, and “conspicuous consumption.” For Veblen, the concept of conspicuous consumption denotes the acquisition of luxury goods and services in order to publicly display

one's economic power, either through one's income or through one's accumulated wealth (68–101). Because Veblen's objective was a critique of leisure, not just an appreciation of luxury, and an appreciation of social class, not pleasure, he saw luxury as a facet of consumerism and of the social stratification of people founded on the division of labor. Yet the extant division of labor in the late nineteenth century, as Veblen remarked, was a social institution that had been in place since the feudal age. As a critic of luxury, Veblen thus struggled to determine what, precisely, could be done about a division of labor that was controlled by the plutocrats who owned the means of production or about the social institutions that allowed them to capitulate to the economically unproductive practices of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure. As an opponent of luxury as leisure, Veblen tended to see himself as a social and economic theorist fighting against the infringements of useless activities that neither contributed to the economy nor to the material production of the useful goods and services needed for the functioning of society. From Veblen's perspective, therefore, it is the middle class and the working class who are usefully employed in the industrialized, productive occupations that support the entirety of society. Certainly, his late nineteenth-century socioeconomic critique of the business of luxury as leisure incorporated everything from the price of luxury goods and services to the cultural politics of luxury in the United States and elsewhere. Moreover, Veblen's critique also offered a superb analysis of the emergent division of labor based on technologists, scientists, and engineers, or what we know today as the socioeconomic structure of the mass-industrial societies of the twentieth century.

However, Veblen was not the only critic of luxury and leisure to emerge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Émile Louis Victor de Laveleye, for instance, was an influential Belgian political economist who published an important text simply titled *Luxury* in 1912. Laveleye's themes include the politics of luxury, the economic nature of luxury, and the feelings that induce it. Laveleye thus tries to capture, in the scope of a single volume, the impact of luxury on justice and the ethical development of civilization in an era dominated by questions of necessity, machinery, and (un)employment. Laveleye's attention was fixed on what he saw as various crucial aspects of the issue of luxury, including luxury and the ideal life, luxury concerning the wealth of nations, luxury and justice, and luxury as allied with diverse forms of statehood and government. Laveleye's energy and dedication to the problem of luxury were thus historical and contemporary.

In truth, Laveleye's (1912: 2) particular approach to luxury was shaped by the fact that, at least for him, luxury is "pernicious to the individual, and fatal to society." Yet this outlook was not dedicated to a new kind of disapproving Christianity on behalf of human kindness and modesty but, rather, to a critical sort of political economy on behalf of usefulness and fairness. Key influences on Laveleye's understanding of luxury were Henri Joseph Léon Baudrillart (1821–92) and John Stuart Mill (2008). However, Laveleye writes that, unlike Baudrillart, for instance, who "does not trouble to seek a definition" (3), he will not presume that everybody understands what luxury means. Laveleye therefore takes refuge in the belief that the history of luxury will be written at a more profound political and economic level if it begins with a precise definition, adopting the

French politician Comte Émile de Kératry's definition of luxury as "that which creates imaginary needs, exaggerates real wants, diverts them from their true end, establishes a habit of prodigality in society, and offers through the senses a satisfaction of self-love which puffs up, but does not nourish, the heart, and which presents to others the picture of a happiness to which they can never attain" (quoted in Laveleye 1912: 4). In fact, Laveleye was less interested in de Kératry's definition of luxury than in coming to grips with criticizing luxurious things, luxurious objects, and anything else that cannot be procured without great expense.

Laveleye was centrally concerned with the issue of our primary needs because, for him, luxury is whatever does not answer to them. He argues that luxurious phenomena cost a great deal of money to purchase and a great deal of labor to produce, and yet are only within reach of the few. In Laveleye's (1912: 4) terms, this means that the "extreme of luxury is that which destroys the product of many days labour without bringing any rational satisfaction to the owner." He notes: "The queen of the ballroom destroys in the mazes of the waltz a lace skirt worth 10,000 francs: there you have the equivalent of 50,000 hours of labour, and labour of the most tedious kind, and fatal to the eyes, destroyed in a moment." Yet Laveleye readily acknowledges that luxury is a relative concept: all nations and all epochs contemplate everything as unnecessary that they do not regularly utilize; people grumble about the "sophistication" of their neighbors in every age; and authors of all periods are irate that *this* material is being used to make a particular luxurious object instead of *that* material. For example, the fourteenth-century author Slaney was outraged that oak was being

used in construction, in place of willow. "Formerly," he writes, "houses were of willow and men were of oak; now-a-days, houses are of oak and men are of willow" (quoted in Laveleye 1912: 15). Similarly, during the Industrial Revolution, the wearing of linen shirts, flowered cottons, and muslins contributed to the development of machine-driven skills. Hence, little by little, more and more luxurious objects were brought within reach of the majority. Even so, Laveleye (1912: 6–24) never loses sight of the fact that, for him, the "true" definition of luxury is that it "is at the same time dear and superfluous," much like the emotions that lead to expensive vanities, sensuality, and the impulse to adornment (see, for example, Simmel 2000). Small wonder, therefore, that, for Laveleye, "Luxury Is Unjustifiable" ([1912] 2016, this issue), because it disregards essential human needs that, then as now, remain unmet in large parts of the world. In short, Laveleye considers luxury improper, immoral, unjust, and inhuman. However, Laveleye's efforts to stop what he saw as the inappropriate spread of the taste for luxury was averted not only by those "guilty" of plotting against the happiness of nations by indulging in opulence but also by the arrival of alternative theories of luxury, such as the one proposed by Werner Sombart in 1913, in his *Luxury and Capitalism* ([1913] 1967).

Indeed, as contemporary proponents of a conception of the taste for luxury not as happiness, indulgence, or opulence but as "the spirit of luxury"—of luxury as a kind of animating or vital principle in human beings—we want to offer a theoretical perspective to others in cultural politics derived from Sombart's *Luxury and Capitalism* ([1913] 1967). However, before engaging with the spirit of luxury, we need to understand Sombart's

philosophical viewpoint on the culture and politics of modern capitalism, the place of *Luxury and Capitalism* within it, and, crucially, his conception of the spirit of capitalism.

***From the Spirit of Capitalism to the Spirit of Luxury***

Sombart was born in Ermsleben, Harz, in 1863, and eventually became a leading German economist and sociologist. He was head of the “Youngest” Historical School and was one of Europe’s foremost social scientists during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Sombart’s criticism of the liberal political economy tradition led him to socialism and to a career in economic history. He studied law and economics at the universities of Pisa, Berlin, and Rome, gaining a reputation as a left-wing social activist, which also initially prevented him from obtaining a permanent university post. With the rise of Marxism, Sombart used and interpreted Marx’s *Capital* and, later, began to call himself a convinced Marxist, before finally claiming that Marx had made mistakes on numerous points of significance, inclusive of luxury and capitalism. *Luxury and Capitalism* was first published in 1913 as *Luxus und Kapitalismus*, but its significance was missed, except by one or two reviewers (e.g., Keasbey 1914), almost certainly due to the interruptions of the First World War.

Prior to *Luxury and Capitalism*, Sombart, much like his friend and colleague Max Weber, worked for years on the intrinsic contradictions of capitalism, ultimately producing his magnum opus, *Der Moderne Kapitalismus* (1902), before adding more volumes (including *Luxury and Capitalism*), totaling six in all by 1927. *Der Moderne Kapitalismus* is a methodical history of economic development through the centuries

and a work influenced by the Historical School. Dealing with the transition from feudalism to the capitalism of the twentieth century, *Der Moderne Kapitalismus* presents an examination of the growth of capitalism split into three phases: “early capitalism” (finishing before the Industrial Revolution), “high capitalism” (starting around 1760), and, lastly, “late capitalism” (commencing with the First World War). According to Sombart, the driving forces behind the first phase of capitalism were innovative businesspeople, nobles, explorers, merchants, and craftspeople. In the second phase, Sombart argues, the capitalist entrepreneur was the exclusive director of the economic process. Finally, the third phase of capitalism, at least for Sombart, is not a phase of decline; quite the reverse, he asserts that this phase signifies capitalism in its heyday, even if purely economic motivations are, in Sombart’s estimation, no longer dominant, having been supplanted by “the principle of agreement.”

In 1967, the English translation of *Luxury and Capitalism* was published. The book was no best seller in Germany in 1913 and the English translation published in 1967 is now out of print. In the first decades of the twenty-first century, however, *Luxury and Capitalism* is starting to enjoy the international acclaim it deserves (see, for example, Schrage 2012; Franchetti 2013). Let us locate the text in its context before considering it with regard to the contemporary research and writers contained in this special issue.

Sombart is well known for exposing the need to discard key Marxist principles, such as the materialist dialectic, in support of a mode of elucidation that is associated with pre-Marxian German idealism and the renunciation of the cogency of Marx’s effort to clarify the roots of capitalism by



recourse to economic determinism. In theorizing luxury and capitalism, for instance, Sombart emphasized the idiosyncratic development of capitalism as the manifestation of an interdependent cultural event given direction by a spirit of calculating rationality that pervaded the entirety of culture with its singular individuality and drive. He argues that the historical changes in the economy can only be correctly understood by examining changes in the spirit or the ethos of capitalism, which, for Sombart, was the basis of tangible experiences. The concept of the spirit of European capitalism formed the limits and the integrating principles of his economic investigations, which permitted Sombart to manage huge amounts of historical information. He does not intend *Luxury and Capitalism* to be understood in the unilinear, theoretical, historical, and evolutionary terms born of the Enlightenment's faith in the inexorable-ness of human progress. All that Sombart claims is that capitalism's moral exhaustion can be demonstrated. What readers often miss is Sombart's methodological originality. He avoids purely economic thinking in favor of what we might call "cultural thinking," but which we can here insist should be known as "cultural political thinking." In fact, as Reiner Grundmann and Nico Stehr (2001: 274) observe in their tellingly titled article—"Why Is Werner Sombart Not Part of the Core of Classical Sociology? From Fame to (Near) Oblivion"—Sombart's "self-conception encompasses much of the social sciences and some fields that can be included in the humanities." Consequently, Grundmann and Stehr insist that Sombart's contributions on modern capitalism should be regarded as contributions to the cultural sciences (*Kulturwissenschaften*). From this angle, it is reasonable to consider Sombart's distinctive method and contributions to the

cultural sciences as an intellectual forerunner of cultural studies and thus of cultural politics. Sombart's approach, for instance, is based on the realization that "each culture is unique and self-actualizing—integrated by its own spirit or ethos," inclusive of the lack of "preparations for realizing higher unities" (Siegelman 1967: ix). The fault of much cultural political thinking is that it reduces everything to "preparations for realizing higher unities," to fragmentary endeavors at improvement of sociocultural, political, and economic difficulties. For Sombart, these preparations and efforts blur our recognition of the remarkable unity of the capitalist spirit.

Sombart developed a variety of religious-influenced methods and concepts to overcome the thinking of Weber ([1905] 2011) on, for example, the importance of Puritanism for the development of the capitalist system. For Weber, Calvinist and Puritan enterprise personified the spirit of capitalism through business transactions characterized by a moral approach to economic, social, and cultural life. It was a spirit that was lacking in the Middle Ages but which later shaped the new and distinguishing varieties of modern development and rationality, organization, labor, production, industrialism, enterprise, and the factory system. Yet Weber's "spirit" was a general concept, envisioned to function as shorthand for the characteristic traits of modern capitalism, such as science, technology, control of industry, a free labor force, commercial activity, rational book-keeping, and so on. Additionally, Weber's oeuvre was a comparative analysis, incorporating the economics and the ethics of other world religions. It was also a comparative examination that afforded a form of control in Weber's hunt for an underlying explanation of the capitalist spirit, or the lack of it, in, for example, Asian religions,

all of which permitted Weber to highlight Protestantism's singular role in the construction of the spirit of capitalism.

In contrast to Weber, Sombart ([1913] 1962) contends, in his *The Jews and Modern Capitalism*, that "the spirit of capitalism was crucially nourished by Judaism's rationality, its legalism, the commercial genius of its religious leaders, the Deuteronomic injunction which permitted different commercial dealings and a different moral code in relations between Jews and non-Jews (especially regarding usury)" (Siegelman 1967: xiii). Sombart claims further that Judaism was fundamental to the evolution of capitalism in Europe. Indeed, for Sombart, it was the use of securities and credit systems, moneylending to heads of states, proficiency in luxury trading, and overseas financing of colonial ventures that allowed Judaism to introduce "the rational and calculating spirit of capitalism" into England through Antwerp and Holland (Siegelman 1967: xiii). One important role of Judaism, aside from functioning as a catalyst for economic diffusion and the acceleration of international trade and for building up modern nation-states, institutions, and organizations, is its pivotal effect on the development of "the principles underlying economic life—that which may be termed the modern economic spirit" (Siegelman 1967: xiii). Unlike Weber, then, Sombart gave historical precedence to Judaism in the origin of capitalism: Judaism had already started the spirit of capitalism in the sixteenth century. Contra Weber, Puritanism for Sombart was not the ethical dynamism powering capitalism; capitalism was the determining influence driving Puritanism. Yet, for all of Sombart's claims that Puritanism was antagonistic to capitalism, he does grant that some of its features unintentionally accelerated the progress of the capitalist spirit. In

other words, Sombart never relinquished his assertion that Judaism was the point of departure for the spirit of capitalism. However, "Sombart and Weber were," writes Philip Siegelman (1967: xiv–xv), "one in their insistence on discovering the special role of religion in forming the spirit of Western capitalism. Both were interested in countering the economic and materialistic determinism of the Marxist interpretation of history; for both the quest for an alternative explanation led to an emphasis on discovering attitudinal factors, the ethos, the *spirit* that infused the newly heightened commercialism of Western Europe" (emphasis in original). Furthermore, both Sombart and Weber were central to shifting the historian's customary emphasis from the industrialized and technological foundations of capitalism to its cultural, philosophical, spiritual, and socioreligious roots.

Demonstrably, Sombart expounds an alternative historical account of the spirit of capitalism to sociologists such as Weber but also a different account of luxury to political economists such as Lavelle. Furthermore, we argue that Sombart's historical, economic, cultural, and political theories permit the development of our conception of the spirit of luxury, an idea that employs notions of dynamism and vitalism regarding luxury-loving human beings. To advance our idea of the spirit of luxury theoretically, practically, culturally, and politically, then, in the rest of this article, we draw on Sombart's *Luxury and Capitalism*.

As we have seen throughout this section, there is an intrinsic link between Sombart's notion of the spirit of capitalism and his work concerning what we call the spirit of luxury. Additionally, within the pages of *Luxury and Capitalism*, Sombart details—along with the growing demand

for luxury goods and services—the appearance of the new society of the princely courts in the Middle Ages, the increase in middle-class prosperity, and new varieties of aristocracy, as each of these took shape in the initial stage of European capitalism. Sombart argues that it was the sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century cities of Europe that generated a new spirit, a new culture, and a new politics of luxury as the evolution and internal structure of the metropolis adapted to capitalism. Theorizing the development of the city from the eighteenth century onward, however, entails more than the investigation of capitalism. Undoubtedly, it also entails the analysis of morality from the methodological perspective of the cultural political thinking adopted by Sombart in his contributions to the cultural sciences. For early capitalism was not purely directed by questions of industry and technology but also by questions concerning what Sombart (1967: 42) calls the “secularization” of love, by the cultural politics of the recent appearance of the courtesan, and by the cultural development of luxury as a society-wide spirit or philosophy. Yet what matters most is not the definition or the traits of luxury but the extraordinary unity of the spirit of luxury under early capitalism. Whether medieval court or knight in armor, nouveau-riche man or woman of status, in the home or in society, the spirit of luxurious capitalism is triumphant. For Sombart, and for us, therefore, the relationship between luxury and the retail and wholesale trades, as well as between luxury and agriculture and colonialism and industry, is a revolutionary spiritual relationship and force that transformed the consumption of luxury goods and services in early capitalism. In summary, while Sombart’s and Weber’s conceptions of the spirit of capitalism are extremely valuable,

so, too, is the idea of the spirit of luxury. Accordingly, we argue that, in uncovering the singular role of religion in the creation of the spirit of Western capitalism, Sombart also exposed the extraordinary role of luxury in the development of the spirit of Western capitalism. However, as we conceive it, the spirit of luxury is neither economic nor materialistic but psychological, stimulating, and energetic. Indeed, it is a force that infuses everything from highly commercialized luxury brands to our sense of history and industry, technology, culture, philosophy, and, above all, capitalism.

### *The Contemporary Spirit of Luxury*

But how are we to consider what we call the spirit of luxury in the contemporary historical phase of twenty-first-century capitalism? Perhaps we can subject the concepts of luxury and capitalism to a contemporary critical “Sombartian” analysis. “The general thesis of *Luxury and Capitalism*,” writes Siegelman (1967: xviii), “is that the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries witnessed the first significant step in the appearance of a new society: the emergence of great fortunes in Italy that were no longer based on the feudal economy.” According to Sombart, this capital accumulation was the outcome of trade with Asia, the detection of new reserves of silver, and private moneylending at extortionate rates. Furthermore, this growth of capital accumulation in the subsequent centuries throughout Europe was characterized by the development of princely states, a new urbanized aristocracy, and the renewal of the arts, sciences, and the absolute secular state.

Similarly, we argue that, today, we are seeing the first important global stages of the emergence of a new spirit of luxury founded on the recent appearance of the huge wealth of the “super-rich” (Freeland

2013; Hay 2013; Irvin 2008; McQuaig and Brooks 2013; Wilkin 2015) in the United States and elsewhere. Additionally, such wealth is not based on the capitalist economy typical of those in the advanced societies of the twentieth century. For this capital accumulation comes, at least in part, from luxury trade largely with Southeast Asia and the Middle East (China, Dubai, South Korea, Saudi Arabia) (Kapferer and Bastien 2012; Som and Blanckaert 2015). Equally, the development of new supplies of luxury goods and services, and the easy availability of money at low interest rates, has promoted a luxury-based model of capital accumulation in the present period on a global scale.

Consider, for instance, the capital growth of the extended families of super-rich royals from Brunei and Thailand, Saudi Arabia and Swaziland—the new urbanized upper class. The Sultan of Brunei, Hassanal Bolkiah, for example, is the owner of the Dorchester Collection, which was established in 2006 to manage ten luxury five-star hotels in Europe and the United States: the Dorchester, the Beverly Hills Hotel, Plaza Athénée, Le Meurice, Principe di Savoia, Hotel Bel-Air, Coworth Park, 45 Park Lane, Le Richemond, and Hotel Eden.

Alternatively, contemplate the “renaissance” of the contemporary art market, the growth of artist-celebrities in the advanced societies, and the additional concentration of immense wealth as these self-same artist-celebrities, such as Damien Hirst, collaborate with luxury brands such as Lalique, the French glassmaker founded by the renowned jeweler René Lalique in 1888. In 2015, for instance, Lalique introduced a new limited-edition range of multipurpose crystal panels created in collaboration with Hirst. Titled “Eternal,” this collaboration celebrates Hirst’s iconic subject, the

butterfly, in three series, “Love, Hope, and Beauty,” each of which is signified by a differently shaped butterfly. Hirst considers the butterfly to be an emblem of the beauty and delicacy of life. Hence, the panels are “limited” to “just” fifty pieces (of each of the twelve available colors). The panels can be used in a multitude of ways, including being mounted on an easel, framed, and hung on a wall. Costing £12,000 (US\$18,290) each, every panel is individually signed, numbered, and arrives with a signed edition certificate. There are, therefore, various increasing parallels and consequently almost imperceptible differences between contemporary art and a contemporary luxury brand. Certainly, it is argued by Giulia Zaniol (2016, this issue) that, while branding has always been significant in the overpriced art world, today’s luxury branding prevents a critical approach both to the artist-celebrity and to his or her art. For these and other reasons, then, it is hardly unreasonable to object to the notion of a work of art as a luxury brand since such an idea bypasses cultural decisions concerning aesthetic quality or cultural value in favor of an economic decision regarding how much super-rich art collectors are willing to pay for luxury-branded artists’ work.

Further, there seems to be an eerie degree of fit between sidestepping cultural decisions in support of economic decisions and other sociocultural divisions—for instance, those of regard and disregard. Sombart, of course, was a keen observer of the deliberate refinement of social graces in sixteenth-century Europe. In the court of Francis I, he relates, women had unmatched power because they contributed to court life a formerly unparalleled amount of plotting and pretense, an insistence on social graces, and a hunger for luxury goods ([1913] 1967: 3).

But what should we say about the state of social graces in the twenty-first century, particularly in the United States? Taking the “court” of Starbucks as her example, Patricia Mooney Nickel (2016, this issue) considers the growing importance of the corporation’s recent introduction of a new “luxury line” for users of the Starbucks card mobile app. Delivering a previously unprecedented degree of (im)materialization while generating new questions about the impact of apps on the everyday practice of order, Nickel maintains that today’s social graces—much like yesterday’s, but in very different ways—are products of time, power, and the (im) material desire for and practices associated with luxury goods and services. Far removed from Sombart’s studies of the seventeenth century, we are therefore currently entering yet another major stage. Yet this stage is not that of the appearance of a new society but the appearance of the end of all those promises of “community” and “social consciousness” so adored by so-called “responsible” corporations such as Starbucks. To highlight the level of Starbucks’ “responsibility,” for instance, one has only to refer to the Reuters investigation in 2012 that demonstrated how the corporation had booked “cumulative sales of more than £3bn [US\$4.5 billion] since opening in Britain [in 1998]” but had “paid only £8.6m [US\$12.9 million] in corporation tax over the same period” (Bowers 2015: 1–2). At the same time, toward the closing stages of the Obama administration, middle-class wealth is apparently growing once again in the United States. At present, Nickel argues, time in the United States and elsewhere is thus made luxurious through the power of the app to redistribute how one is positioned with respect to others waiting in line for coffee. In twenty-first-century America, then, as

in Sombart’s seventeenth-century Europe, a nouveau riche has arrived, but today it is a nouveau riche of time (Sharma 2014). Undoubtedly, it is a nouveau riche that is further changing the spirit of our luxurious times by developing new alliances with the “graciousness” that is clearly associated with a mode of (im)materialization that discloses the latest role of what we might call the “social disgraces” of disregard in luxury relations at large. In this contemporary period of capitalism, then, relatively affluent individuals are accordingly permitted to form “luxury lines” that involve them inserting themselves in socioculturally superior spatiotemporal relation to the “(s)lower classes” (Armitage and Roberts 2002: 50). By virtue of the acquisition of an app and the readiness to disregard others’ practices of ordering and consuming in time and space, one’s own monetized practices are exposed through the business-related consumption of “luxury lines” of material goods produced by Starbucks, which itself makes an explicit claim to regarding others with generosity. Yet such exposure gives a fake sense of middle-class social standing as harmonious, according to Nickel, because it is related by twenty-first-century fictions of community-producing luxury that profess to be practicing regard for others while actually practicing regard only for the new aristocrats of time, the wholly monetized classes of neoliberalism.

Additionally, the discourse of what we have called “critical luxury studies” (Armitage and Roberts 2016) works not merely to unmask a bogus feeling of middle-class social status as congenial but also to raise questions concerning *luxus* and other kinds of sociocultural primacy associated with Thanatos, or the death drive. Drawing on the psychoanalytical and philosophical writings of Sigmund Freud ([1920]

2001) and Georges Bataille ([1967] 1991), Mark Featherstone (2016, this issue), similar to Sombart before him, considers the development of the European city. Sombart, however, focused on the large and crowded consumer cities of medieval Europe centered on the existence of a royal court, with its extravagant expenses and urbane delights, while Featherstone investigates the psycho-politics of Emperor Nero's (54–68 BC) Rome and, in particular, the Roman concept of *luxus* as excess. Avoiding a consideration of those Roman luxury industries that flourished by supplying the affluent of Rome with a vast tide of consumer items (Dalby 2000), Featherstone instead scrutinizes the cultural politics of Roman *luxus*. In addition, he does so by way of a comparative analysis of Nero, who drove Roman *luxus* to its psychopathic limits, and the Stoic philosopher Seneca, who advocated *mos maiorum*, or the moral life of moderation, equilibrium, and proportion. Long before Sombart's study of seventeenth-century cities, Rome, Featherstone argues, was the site of an unadulterated experience of *luxus* that surpassed any mere object, which was always too ignoble and tangible for the Romans to be genuinely luxurious. From Featherstone's psychoanalytic viewpoint, then, Nero's Rome was not a city increased by the attendance of creditors, financiers, and bankers, as Florence was for Sombart, but a city expanded by the quest for the orgy of *luxus*, by people whose drives produced a "thanatology" able to shift beyond Freud's "pleasure principle" to luxurious excess.

Furthermore, and comparable to Sombart's highly innovative explanation of transformed sexual values in early capitalism, Featherstone, too, identifies the advent of a new spirit of luxury. But

Featherstone's is a new spirit of "hyper-pleasure" beyond this or that manifestation of simple enjoyment, since hyperpleasure inhabits the realm of the infinite repetition of pleasure that we find in the experience of addiction. Thus, whereas Sombart ([1913] 1967: 39–112) shows that, from the eleventh century onward, love became progressively secularized in Europe and, consequently, no longer subject to religious laws and organizations, Featherstone reveals that, in the age of Nero, the pursuit of excess led the emperor to a luxurious space where he effectively disappeared into a universal substance beyond being itself. Sombart's economic and historical consideration of feelings regarding sexuality in the art and literature of medieval Europe is thus complemented by Featherstone's psychoanalytic analysis of attitudes toward *luxus* and what Andrew Dalby (2000: 266) calls "the art of being Roman" that impelled the experience of luxury beyond its objective limits.

For Featherstone, however, it is the writings of Bataille that lead beyond both Nero and Freud's understandings of *luxus*. Where Sombart observed the self-indulgent aesthetic idea of woman developing in the fourteenth century as being against the religious institutional fetters to which love had been subjected in the past, Featherstone senses a pleasure-seeking aesthetic notion of humanity that has forever been in opposition to the luxury we associate with the ownership of this or that particular object. Consequently, Featherstone is led to the conclusion that, today at least, it is not the cultural values of art, literature, or hedonistic womanhood that are responsible for the manifestation of our shifting attitudes toward *luxus* but the economic values of consumerism driven by neoliberal global capitalism.

Thus, although for Sombart love eventually became its own defense, as an amorous entity that lives outside every institution, for Featherstone, it is love of endless consumption that, currently, has become its own vindication as a passionate object that exists beyond all organizations. In short, the fourteenth-century emancipation of love has now been joined by the twenty-first-century liberation of “economies of excess” (Armitage 2001). For Sombart, of course, the development of luxury was propelled by the entrance of a new group of women in the Middle Ages, such as courtesans, at the court, a group of women that boosted the sociocultural wish for prosperity and for splendor, conspicuous consumption, and majestic recreation. From Featherstone’s standpoint, though, the advance of luxury is not to do with the arrival of female courtesans at court or in society but to do with the essential problematic of humanity: how to contend with excess. What happens when there is no more expansion of luxury left and the economy can no longer develop? What happens when the longing for affluence conflicts with the fact that there is no more space for tinsel and sequins and no more time for conspicuous consumption? Featherstone’s answer to these questions is that, in the time of “Empire” (Hardt and Negri 2001), in the time of the hacked Ashley Madison website for hopeful adulterers and of the super-rich spending immense sums on ostentatious amusements— from haute couture fashion shows to the styling of their luxurious homes—excess has been transformed into useless expenditure on a planetary scale.

The struggle to disrupt, if not dismantle, the supremacy of haute couture fashion items, such as mink, is analyzed by Jonathan Faiers (2016, this issue).

Inadvertently reconfiguring Sombart’s psychological hypotheses concerning the changing aspects of luxury in the creation of contemporary capitalism, Faiers introduces and discusses the concept of “disruptive luxury.” In his contribution, Faiers discloses his knowledge of the practical techno-architectural apparatuses and philosophical diversities of this aspirant “corrective” to luxury’s established models of production and consumption (Spuybroek 2009). Yet, for Faiers, and reminiscent of Sombart’s descriptions of luxury as erotic satisfaction or Featherstone’s analysis of Roman sexual excess, the idea of disruptive luxury is so vague that, like the concept of luxury itself, with its multifaceted historical, cultural, and sensual configurations, it will probably take a new Freud to survey all the potential implications of disruptive luxury.

What is more, if we accept Sombart’s ([1913] 1967: 60) dictum that all “personal luxury springs from purely sensual pleasure,” then we may also have to accept Faiers’s statement that, today, an increasing amount of personal luxury arises from technological pleasure. No longer preoccupied with simply captivating the senses, contemporary notions of luxury are inclined to find their ideal manifestation in the rapid prototyping and 3-D printing of objects not in everyday usage. In other words, the relatively inexpensive expenditure on such new technological objects apparently establishes one conceivable path to luxury’s disruption. However, for Faiers, what matters most of all is the customary relationship between luxury companies and new technology. In fact, it is this relationship that Faiers believes lies at the root of the socioeconomic and aesthetic parallels between today’s Gilded Age of luxury consumption and the art nouveau

architects of the belle époque, such as Hector Guimard. Unquestionably, the main problem for the growth of disruptive luxury in the present period is whether mainstream luxury companies will ever feel the power of disruptive luxury's efforts to disturb the status quo.

For these reasons, and employing a fashion spread from American *Vogue* in 1977, Faiers finds a persuasive exposition of the imbrication of conventional luxury with technological innovation in the ascendant wherever fur begins to force itself into fashion media and that season's fur coats are freely expressed as the archetypal luxury. Conversely, as fur coats are increasingly deprived of expression, as they are in our own era, where animals are not viewed as ours to wear, fur is technologized rather than being worn. Thus, technology-clad models are integrated with fashion and other media, particularly in such technological forms as robots (e.g., *Star Wars*) and, today, as technology-clad androids with artificial intelligence, such as Ava, the chief character in Alex Garland's film *Ex Machina* (2015).

The technological initiatives documented by Faiers are also taken up in the form of the "moral hazards" that arise within critical luxury studies, in which the concept of luxury undergoes a radical painterly transformation, as in the work of the visual artist Susan Hamburger (2016, this issue). While discussing her aural consumption of news radio in her studio, Hamburger turns to an examination of the aesthetic consequences of near-solitary confinement on her art. Hamburger deduces that without her news-radio-accompanied solitary confinement and the informationalization of her tastes in entertainment, which are due to the influence of the "outside world," this development of her art would never have

taken place. In particular, Hamburger sees a fundamental correlation between her feminist-inspired imagery (which Hamburger explains as being derived from the artists and artisans from the baroque and rococo periods) and her consumption of news radio. Because of the predominant role of news radio's "outside world" as political background talk, especially during the 1990s and the first decade of this century, news radio fast became Hamburger's preferred source material. Thus, it was only because of the extensive dissemination of news radio that such stimulation as the Iran-Contra hearings, the O. J. Simpson trial, and the Clinton sex scandals were integrated so readily into Hamburger's paintings and appropriations of the art-historical canon. Employing painting as a medium to investigate political, criminal, and sexual disgrace, Hamburger consequently produces interpretations of femininity that only indirectly reference the female body. Excavating the repertoire of the polite nineteenth-century cultured "lady," Hamburger's feminist-influenced art accordingly highlights the importance of the decorative arts as a model for narrative discourses on contemporary political, social, and economic concerns.

In 2016, therefore, traditional notions of women, feminism, and the luxurious decorative arts are being reworked in terms of numerous aesthetic, political, sociocultural, and economic approaches. In addition, although the questions concerning luxury have in no way been answered, they are being productively opened up. For Tereza Kuldova (2016, this issue), for instance, luxury is understood as a fatalistic characteristic of unequal sociocultural activities, and therefore appreciated as an important sphere for the reproduction of both sociocultural "wasting" and an "antiwork ethic" in contemporary India.



Distinct from Sombart, who also produced a decidedly idiosyncratic study of the significance for the development of capitalism of luxury consumption in global trade with the “colonies,” Kuldova’s long-standing ethnographic research among producers of contemporary luxurious embroideries has been conducted in Lucknow, a North Indian city famed for its golden age as an influential cultural center of wealth and overindulgence. Furthermore, Kuldova’s contemporary research unintentionally contests Sombart’s earlier claim that, by the close of the seventeenth century, the swollen prosperity widespread in Europe induced strengthened requests for luxury goods that shook traders out of their handicrafts view of trade into industrial capitalism. Kuldova demonstrates that, by the twenty-first century, the ever rising affluence dominant in Europe, while still provoking deepened calls for luxury goods, has not shaken producers, if not traders, from a handicrafts perspective on trade. Instead, rather than focusing on reveries of industrial capitalism, the women embroiderers of luxury pieces sneer at luxury goods, designers, and middle-class campaigners, and embrace what Kuldova calls an “antiwork ethic.” In this primarily agricultural setting, and challenging Sombart’s claims of 1913, the response of these female producers to the demand for luxuries, especially in Lucknow, is to valorize their own leisure time. Consequently, although today the pleas of Europe, as in Sombart’s day, are for a rational capitalist form of postagricultural production, “manned” by women and dedicated to the large-scale production of embroidered luxury pieces, Kuldova discovers not the essential function of luxury consumption but the critical role of luxury consumption as that of the women “wasting” their time instead of working.

Rejecting large-scale industrialism and the luxury industries, these women favor “luxuriating” rather than indulging in the production of luxury goods in a sweatshop founded on a capitalistic footing. Against Sombart’s assertion that, by the eighteenth century, all genuine luxury industries were changed into capitalistic businesses generally distinguished by large-scale production, Kuldova reveals that, in the twenty-first century, at least some perceptions of luxury are less converted into capitalistic businesses than they are typified by the small-scale experience of hierarchical inequality. In contrast to Sombart ([1913] 1967: 171), Kuldova essentially maintains that luxury is not “a legitimate child of illicit love” that “gave birth to capitalism” but an illegitimate producer of sociocultural resignation, aggressive inequity, and dishonest guarantees of meritocracy that were, in part, triggered by neoliberal capitalism (Harvey 2007).

***Conclusion: On the Terra Incognita of the Spirit of Luxury***

In conclusion, we must return to the question of the relationship between luxury and the other “spirits” that permeate the unique spirit of capitalism. Can the values of rationality or asceticism ever surpass the demand for luxury production and consumption? How are luxury production and luxury consumption related to other sociocultural and political “true” or “false” needs (Armitage and Roberts 2014)? Such questions generally provoke the stipulation for luxury production and luxury consumption to be “well defined.” However, not unlike Sombart, and while we do respect the management of pertinent dependant variables and the careful marshaling of empirical evidence, we suggest that any appropriate investigation into the spirit of luxury will forever involve

more sociocultural value and conjecture than knowledge of market price (Roberts and Armitage 2016). For the answer to the question “Did luxury create capitalism or did capitalism create luxury?” is almost certainly destined to remain unknown. As we suggested in our elaboration of the meaning of luxury above, no one can prove that this or that good or service is really luxury, just as Sombart cannot prove that there was a necessary causal association between luxury production and luxury consumption and the development of capitalism in the advanced countries. There is no final accounting, either, for the fact that luxury production in the advanced countries helped establish capitalism or for the fact that extravagant tastes and the demand for marital infidelities are seemingly historically and geographically universal. “We want fish from the Syrtes that cost a shipwreck to bring to Rome: we’re tired of grey mullet,” wrote Petronius in *The Satyricon*. “We fancy a mistress, not a wife. Roses are out: we want cinnamon” (quoted in Dalby 2000: 266). Sombart’s occasional vagueness regarding the causal relationship between luxury and capitalism is thus the result not of poor scholarship but of a sensible acknowledgment that the “influence” of luxury on the development of capitalism and the “influence” of capitalism on the growth of luxury is, ultimately, unknowable.

None of this closing discussion of Sombart’s perspective on luxury and capitalism is intended to avoid a critical approach to the concept of spirit. As mentioned, we have used spirit to mean the enlivening or fundamental wellspring in humankind that imparts life to physical organisms, contrary to their purely material components. However, conceptualizations that conjure up the “breath of life” also have a dark side. During the Weimar Republic (1919–33), for example, Sombart

championed National Socialism, and his association with Nazism is still disputed today (Lenger 1994). In 1934, for instance, Sombart published *Deutscher Sozialismus (German Socialism)*, wherein he asserted that a “new spirit” was set to “rule mankind”: the spirit of German Socialism (i.e., National Socialism). Espousing the well-being of the whole over the well-being of the individual, the “total mobilization” of sociocultural life, a planned economy, large-scale state regulation, and dutiful citizens without rights, Sombart’s German Socialism was saturated with talk of a *Volksgeist* (national spirit), which, like Hegel (1979) before him, he saw as metaphysical yet also against the “Jewish” capitalist spirit (Harris 1942). Unsurprisingly, later cultural historians, such as Jeffrey Herf (1984: 130), characterized Sombart (together with Ernst Jünger [see Armitage 2003], Carl Schmitt, and Martin Heidegger) as a “reactionary modernist.” Moreover, it is doubtful that, at the time, Sombart would have rebuffed this accusation, particularly as his work left no room for uncertainty or later clarification regarding his defense of nationalism, precapitalist forms of everyday life, and the rejection of modern technology (Grundmann and Steher 2001: 271–73).

Yet Sombart’s idea of the spirit of capitalism lives on. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello’s (2005) *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, for example, argues that, historically, there have been three consecutive spirits of capitalism. The first took form in the nineteenth century through the important figure of the bourgeois entrepreneur as speculator, innovator, investor, and ascetic paterfamilias. However, during the period 1930–60, particularly in France, there arose a new figure: the superhuman director of the large bureaucratic corporation. Planner, rational organizer, and careerist, this second spirit of capitalism

was shunned throughout France's crisis of 1968 as novel antiauthoritarian mobilizations emerged as the third spirit of capitalism, which is the focus of the investigation that Boltanski and Chiapello undertake. Unequivocally following Sombart's lead, Boltanski and Chiapello comparatively examine French management texts from the 1960s to the 1990s (59). Refusing whatever hints at hierarchy or constancy, today's third spirit of capitalism is found by Boltanski and Chiapello to be one predicated on the perpetuity of transformation, the ever-rising intensity of global competition, and, of course, the dominant organizational figure of the contemporary "network enterprise" (see Castells 2000: 151–200). "Leanness" and "teamwork," customer "satisfaction," "visionary" leadership, "coordinators" (not managers), and the relentless mobilization of "operatives" (not workers) are, then, the watchwords of the third spirit of capitalism. Hence, the perfect capitalist organization is one made up of self-organized teams that externalize their costs to subcontractors and practice information-driven knowledge management (Roberts 2015) rather than the management of "manpower." Charisma and "gifts" of communication, "intuition," mobility, and generalism are therefore the ideal attributes of today's "dressed-down," "cool" capitalists, such as Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook fame. Shunning the symbols of administrative or technical authority, these "liberated" leaders and their networked enterprises delegate organizational control to their employees, quality control to their customers, and any disadvantages of their utopian dreams to labor at the cost of the latter's security or any prospect of a fixed career path. The third spirit of capitalism is thus based on projects of "continuous improvement" and seemingly endless talk of "employability

skills," "personal capital," "reputation," "integrity," "sincerity," and, above all, "loyalty." The ideal figure of the third spirit of capitalism is consequently the itinerant networker who appears weightless and flexible, accepting of cultural difference and fluctuation while being "realistic" about people's desires in an "informal," "friendly" fashion. For Boltanski and Chiapello, then, Sombart's writings on the spirit of capitalism offer a route into comprehending how we came to be controlled by network enterprises and new ideas of exploitation that, for them and for us, necessitate a sociocultural critique that can unify demands for solidarity and fairness with those for freedom and authenticity.

Truly, studying Boltanski and Chiapello, one cannot help but feel that Sombart was correct to define the development of the spirit of capitalism ambiguously. For, as we saw with the arrival of the network enterprise above, the development of the third spirit of capitalism is vague, even if the experience of exploitation is not. Any post-Boltanski and Chiapello efforts to redefine the third spirit of capitalism must therefore allow for various comparative methodologies. Yet such endeavors must also offer a critique of contemporary capitalism that is not only historically informed and socially, culturally, and politically open-minded but also focused on the embryonic and thus inherently intuitive properties of "the fourth spirit of capitalism."

In the end, however, wherever luxury, spirit, and capitalism are conjoined, we researchers will need all our abilities of synthesis and formulation, of marshaling disparate evidence in the defense of our theses and our cultural values, whether of unity or equality, even when considering the liberty to luxuriate. In the search for some sort of authenticity, though, we argue that we are unlikely to discover it in historical inquiries

into economic systems that disdain philosophies concerned with our attempts to release the body through sensuality, adornment, and even sexual depravity. As Sombart ([1913] 1967: 48) puts it: "This necessary cycle seems to encompass the deepest tragedy of human destiny; that all culture, being an estrangement from nature, carries in itself the germs of dissolution, destruction, and death." No traditional economic history can incorporate all of these ideas, but Sombart's *Luxury and Capitalism*, if both an undervalued masterpiece and a "failed" explanation of the precise relationship between luxury and the spirit of capitalism, is an honorable failure. It is up to us to continue Sombart's work on the spirit of capitalism through the mapping of the terra incognita of the contemporary spirit of luxury.

### Acknowledgments

We are particularly grateful to Mark Featherstone for a productive discussion concerning the idea of the spirit of luxury. We would also like to thank Mark and Ryan Bishop for their valuable comments on an earlier version of this article.

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