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# Cultural Dimensions of Inflation in Weimar Germany

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## I

For many Germans, inflation was one of the most decisive and traumatic experiences of the Weimar Republic, an experience that had repercussions far beyond the economic sphere. Scholars in economic theory and history have thoroughly investigated the German inflation, and the significance of this monetary crisis for the rise of radical right-wing politics in Germany has often been stressed.<sup>1</sup> It is all the more surprising, then, that hardly any work has been done on the impact of this event on the cultural sphere during the twenties. The following article does not claim to fill this gap, but will rather offer a few exemplary perspectives on three discursive themes which link inflation to the larger context of German modernist culture. On the level of conceptualization and representation I will show that a specific discourse of gender links inflation to a prevailing discussion on other phenomena of massification. I will then establish some connections between the experience of inflation and the debate on the relationship between high culture and mass culture. Finally, I will suggest that inflation brings to the fore and heightens our awareness of circulation, especially monetary circulation, as a paradigm for modern culture.

## II

Inflation, in the broadest economic sense, can be understood as a "persistent tendency for the general price level to rise and may be regarded as a spiral, with inflationary pressure arising at many possible points in that spiral."<sup>2</sup> Different economic theories try to explain the phenomenon by stressing the importance of factors such as the quantity of money, levels of income, or influences of the exchange rate.

The origins of the German hyperinflation of 1923 go back to the financing of World War I. Germany had tried to finance the war largely through loans. In addition, the government printed excessive amounts of new money, so that at the end of the war the circulation of money was six times as high as in 1914. The opening of free trade after the war led to an immediate depreciation of the mark against the dollar. The

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terms of reparation in the Treaty of Versailles led to a further weakening of the German economy. But the rapid devaluation of the German Reichsmark also created certain political and economic advantages. Germany's payment of reparations was effectively undercut, and the dumping prices for German export goods resulted in a boom for the German export industry.<sup>3</sup>

A brief classification regarding the magnitude of inflation may be helpful. Charles Maier distinguishes among hyperinflation (over 1000% per year), Latin inflation (10–1000% per year) and creeping inflation (up to 10% per year).<sup>4</sup> Maier gives the following percentage increases in German internal prices:

Year	Internal Price Increase
1914–1918	140%
1919	223%
1920	87%
1921	144%
1922	5,470%
1923	75,000,000,000%

*Source:* Charles Maier, *In Search of Stability: Explorations in Historical Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 194–213.

To translate these numbers into the everyday life of Germans: One loaf of bread cost about 29 pfennig in 1914; in the summer of 1923 it cost 1,200 Reichsmark; in November it cost 428 billion Reichsmark. One kilogram of butter rose from 2.70 Reichsmark in 1914, to 26,000 Reichsmark in June of 1923, to 6000 billion Reichsmark in November 1923.<sup>5</sup> By the middle of 1923, 300 paper factories and 150 printing firms were trying to supply Germany with money. Inflation was quickly brought to a halt at the end of November 1923 when the so-called "Rentenmark" was introduced, the value of which was backed by all of Germany's land and real estate. Germans could exchange one trillion Reichsmark for one Rentenmark.<sup>6</sup>

It remains a much-debated issue among economists and historians whether the inflation, from a macroeconomic point of view, actually stimulated the German postwar economy or damaged prospects for a

solid long-term recovery.<sup>7</sup> What is certain is that the devaluation of the Reichsmark resulted in a tremendous redistribution of income and wealth. While inflation was a disaster for many, others profited from it enormously. The winners included everyone who had to get rid of old debts, everyone who bought items of real value (*Sachwerte*) by making monetary debts, speculators on the stock market, and the export industry, which boomed because of extremely competitive prices on the world market. Despite high inflation, Germany experienced almost full employment through 1922; only towards the end of 1923 did unemployment shoot up to approximately 10%.<sup>8</sup> Another group that could take advantage of Germany's inflation consisted of foreigners holding foreign currencies. "It has been estimated that by 1923 foreigners had acquired 10% of the total share capital of German business. . . . 25,000 houses in Berlin alone passed into foreign ownership."<sup>9</sup>

While the working class had to take significant losses in purchasing power, the real loser from inflation was the middle class, especially the *Bildungsbürgertum*, and retired people: all those who lived from some kind of savings, either entirely or as an addition to their income. These "Rentiers" had contributed tremendously to financing the war by the purchase of war bonds, an investment which became almost worthless after the war.

This brief overview would not be complete without mentioning the role of a handful of businessmen, the "kings of inflation," including legendary figures like Otto Wolff, Friedrich Flick, Hugo Herzfeld, Alfred Hugenberg, and the giant of them all, Hugo Stinnes.<sup>10</sup> These industrialists, through clever investment and the power of their foreign currency savings, were able to assemble large industrial empires within a few years. Inflation resulted in a restructuring of the German economy from a larger number of privately owned companies to a greater concentration of ownership in the hands of large conglomerates.

### III

Whatever position one may take on the long-term consequences of the German inflation, its relevance as a historical event for German politics and society is hardly arguable. Yet in order to investigate the impact of the inflation on cultural representations and discussions in Weimar Germany, I will expand the notion of inflation as a strictly economic phenomenon and look for a general, paradigmatic structure

in the process of inflation.

One central aspect of inflation is the process of massification (*Ver-massung*), the transformation of formerly distinct entities into larger and larger numbers, which causes the single entity to lose its former value and its distinctiveness. This is certainly apparent for the devaluation of money, but it also describes the experience of large parts of the middle class and especially the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Well-established families lost their social status, and inflation in general worked as an equalizing force between the middle class and the lower strata of society. In *Crowds and Power*, Elias Canetti provides an excellent account of the relationship between masses and inflation:

The confusion [inflation] wreaks on the population of whole countries is by no means confined to the actual period of the inflation. One may say that, apart from wars and revolutions, there is nothing in our civilizations which compares in importance to an inflation. The upheavals caused by inflations are so profound that people prefer to hush them up and conceal them. They may also hesitate to attribute to money—the value of which is, after all, artificially fixed by man—an efficacy in forming crowds which is out of all proportion to its practical function, and which seems both contrary to reason and infinitely shaming. . . . What is it that happens in an inflation? The unit of money suddenly loses its identity [*Persönlichkeit*]. The crowd it is part of starts growing and, the larger it becomes, the smaller becomes the worth of each unit. The millions one always wanted are suddenly there in one's hand, but they are no longer millions in fact, but only in name. . . . An inflation can be called a witches' sabbath of devaluation where men and the units of their money have the strangest effects on each other. The one stands for the other, men feeling themselves as "bad" as their money; and this becomes worse and worse.<sup>11</sup>

Canetti points out here that people tend to conceal the profound damage caused by inflation. He attributes this to the tremendous social upheavals of inflation, but there is also a certain inwardly directed threat which affects two structures: inflation destroys reason and attacks moral values, thus causing infinite shame. The basis for such claims is that Canetti equates a system of monetary exchange with a social structure. People establish their identity by participating in a system of symbolic exchanges. Such a system ensures two functions, among other objectives: it allows differentiation, and at the same time it guarantees unity, because any possible difference is expressed

on the basis of a common unit of money. Inflation causes this symbolic system to break down. To own a million, to be a millionaire, a dream of success, turns into a joke. Difference and hierarchy break down, but even more important, established orders between signifier and signified become senseless.

Yet Canetti's observations suggest an additional point: it is the centrality of money itself which characterizes inflation and is "infinitely shaming." The negative connotation of money can be broadened in several directions. First, money has only an artificially fixed value, a claim which provokes the question of whether there is some kind of economic or cultural utopia lurking in the background that operates along the lines of a somehow "natural" fixed value. I will discuss this later by juxtaposing "money" to the notion of "work." A second reading stresses that inflation as a "witches' sabbath of devaluation" causes "infinite shaming." In this sense inflation is seen as a traumatic sexual assault, a sexual harassment, which causes shame and which people want to forget and deny.

Canetti's description is one of several examples I present here to show that inflation is interpreted and conceptualized by male writers of the German middle class and the *Bildungsbürgertum* as an attack not only on their social status but also on traditional structures of gender identity and sexual dichotomy. My argument is that this strategy follows an overriding pattern in German modernist culture of conceptualizing crowds and masses as feminine entities which threaten to destroy male autonomy.<sup>12</sup>

One important concept in this sexual discourse on inflation is the notion of "shame." Walter Benjamin published a small collection of fragments about the inflation as part of his *One-way-street*. The notion of shame appears in several of these fragments:

Not without reason is it customary to speak of "naked" want [*nacktes Elend*]. What is most damaging in the display of it . . . is not the pity . . . in the onlooker, but his shame. It is impossible to remain in a large German city, where hunger forces the most wretched to live on the bank notes with which passers-by seek to cover an exposure [*eine Blöße zu decken suchen*] that wounds them.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, the English translation cannot sufficiently convey Benjamin's play with the double meaning of "Scham," which means 'shame', but also the exposure of female sexual organs (*die Scham = die*

*Blöße*).<sup>14</sup> The observer is ashamed of the “naked misery” of the poor. But it is not so much the economic status of “Elend,” as its nakedness which causes a peculiar reaction. What really affects the passer-by is the *Scham* (*Blöße*) of the victims of inflation. It is due to the intricate play between the observing subject who is ashamed and the other, the object who displays “die Scham” that the notion of “wounding” disseminates in several directions. “Scheine”—note again a double meaning here of “banknote” and “mere illusion”—cannot hide what wounds “them” (which can refer either to the observer or the victim, probably both). What seems to link them together is the “wound” itself, the victim’s wound of castration which, from the observer’s point of view, signifies the victims of inflation as feminized. The effect of inflation is emasculation, the forceful eradication of gender difference into a “wounded” mass of people. Inflationary money cannot hide this wound; on the contrary, it is part of the cause of the naked misery and the *Blöße/Scham*. The wound remains visible to the passers-by, who are horrified to see it.

Inflation as a process that calls into question basic structures of gender identity reappears in many variations in fictional texts concerned with inflation. While the last quote addressed the relationship between inflation and its victims, inflation itself is often represented as a feminine power.

A striking example of such a representation can be found in another work by Canetti, his novel *Die Blendung* (*Auto-da-fé*), written in 1930 and published in 1935. *Die Blendung* takes place in the Vienna of the twenties, and describes the bizarre and violent struggle between Peter Kien, a famous scholar in Sinology, and his “Wirtschafterin,” his housemaid Therese. In Kien and Therese, Canetti creates grossly exaggerated figures, who, in all their overdetermination, constitute caricatures of the “Gelehrte” as “Bildungsbürger” and of what Kien perceives as “die Masse, der Pöbel” in the figure of Therese. She embodies the misogynist coding of the feminine masses: irrational, unpredictable, and unable to think in logical sequences, she expresses herself in paratactic associations. While Kien’s domain is the letter, the character, she is fascinated with numbers, with large sums of money. One of her greatest pleasures is to draw zeroes. Therese wants to have access to Kien’s last will. After relentless attacks, she finally gets his will in her hands and is deeply disappointed by Kien’s meager savings. Her desire for zeroes leads her to alter the testament.



Not only the number itself, 12,650, but the very outline of each figure seemed to be written into her own flesh. She went to fetch a strip of newspaper and wrote down the number exactly as it was written in the will. The figures resembled Kien's to the last hair; not even a graphologist could have told them apart. She made use of the strip of paper lengthwise so that she could put as many noughts as she liked, and added a round dozen. Her eyes brightened at the colossal result. She caressed the strip two or three times with her rough hand and said: "Isn't it beautiful!" Then she took Kien's pen, bent over the will and changed the figure 12,650 into 1,265,000.<sup>15</sup>

Kien himself, completely incompetent in financial matters, does not detect this inflation for quite some time. First, he is carried away by this sudden wealth, then he is humiliated after he finds out about his real worth. Therese inflates Kien's assets with an obvious pleasure, a mixture of lustful obsession with zeros and an overwhelming experience of power.

My last example of the discourse of gender within representations of inflation is from one of the most sensitive accounts of the situation of the *Bildungsbürgertum* during the early twenties, Thomas Mann's (partly autobiographical) story, *Disorder and Early Sorrow* (*Unordnung und frühes Leid*), published in 1925.<sup>16</sup> Mann's story focuses on the breakdown of established gender roles within a family of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. The Cornelius family does not experience "nacktes Elend," but it is certainly impoverished. Its members live as "Villa-Proletarier" in a run-down "Gründerzeitvilla"; they have servants, but the social hierarchy has long since broken down through their common struggle to procure their food. The Cornelius family includes three couples: Father Cornelius, a professor of history, and his wife; Ingrid (18 years old) and Bert (aged 17); and two young children, a boy named Beißer and the father's most beloved daughter, Lorchen. Ingrid and Bert are described as "Inflationsgeneration," and the text gives ample evidence of their nonconformity, especially apparent in the breakdown of gender difference between them. They dress similarly: Bert is portrayed as feminine while Ingrid appears to be quite masculine. They both enjoy the freedom from established social codes that comes with the disorder of inflation. A party given by Ingrid and Bert allows the reader insight into the other side of inflation: the aspect of "Karneval," a joyful decadence, a liberating openness. "Two girls may dance together or two young men—it is all the same. They move to the exotic strains of the gramophone: shimmies, fox-trots, African shimmies,



Java dances . . ." (162).

Needless to say, Professor Cornelius comments on all of this with ironic disapproval. His alienation from Ingrid and Bert is counterbalanced by his relationship to his two youngest children, Beißer and Lorchen. The absence of gender difference between Bert und Ingrid turns into its opposite in this youngest couple: "In clothing and haircut they are twins. Yet they are sharply distinguished after all, and quite on sex lines. It is a little Adam and a little Eve" (144). Cornelius embraces Lorchen, a little model of femininity, with all his love and affection. He realizes that his love for the "little Eva" has something to do with his "sense for the eternal, that has found in his love for his little daughter a way to save itself from the wounding inflicted by the times" (146). This relationship gives him confidence regarding his role as a father, and provides him with a timeless ideal of femininity.

The incident which creates the central narrative tension in the text occurs when little Lorchen is asked for a dance by one of the guests, the youthful, charming Hergesell. It is love at first sight, and her heart is broken when she notices that young Hergesell dances with other women. Only Hergesell can calm her sobbing and weeping. His appearance at Lorchen's bedside works wonders. "And he approaches the bars of the crib, behind which Ellie [Lorchen] sits struck mute. She smiles blissfully through her tears" (168). The text continues: ". . . and the father's feelings towards him are a most singular mixture of thankfulness, embarrassment, and hatred" (169). The seemingly idyllic ending of the story cannot belie the catastrophe which occurred here. Cornelius as father and "Bildungsbürger" loses against Hergesell, the rather superficial yet charming young engineering student, so different from himself. Hergesell embodies everything that Cornelius lacks, especially the enjoyment of the unpredictable ups and downs of these wild times; he is a happy surfer on the waves of inflation.

Lorchen's affection for Cornelius' melancholic fatherly love is limited. It is this moment, embedded in the light-hearted and happy party atmosphere, that displays the painful breakdown of Cornelius' authority. This breakdown is underscored by Cornelius' helpless reaction to inflation. His scholarly meditations about inflationary periods in seventeenth-century England miss the point, and they appear even more obscure when the text interweaves these thoughts with atmospheric pieces from his children's party.

*Disorder and Early Sorrow* reveals how new forms of mass culture enter the house of the Bildungsbürger Cornelius. Mann describes the many new dances, dresses, haircuts, and so forth that produce the "Americanization" of the younger generation. The last section of this article analyzes the link between inflation and mass culture, and the vehement debate which accompanied the expansion of mass culture in Germany.

#### IV

Large parts of the German middle class and certainly many writers and intellectuals experienced inflation and the emergence of mass culture as two very closely related events. Anton Kaes writes about the economic background of this relationship:

The trend towards conglomeration and mass production was intensified by inflation. More and more self-employed people lacked sufficient means of production, lost their social status, and became members of the petty-bourgeoisie or the proletariat. At the same time, the expansion of bureaucracy created a rapidly growing group of white-collar workers. This new, traditionless mass audience was skeptical of cultural products which were linked to "Bildung" and "Belehrung" and required the "Abitur" . . . American mass culture answered to this new mass audience. Unlike German culture, it needed—out of economic necessity—a close communicative relationship with its audience. For American mass culture, art without a buyer was a contradiction.<sup>17</sup>

The so-called "Americanization" of German cultural life, including enormously successful mass entertainment through such media as film, dance revues, and sports, especially boxing and the "Sechs-Tage-Rennen," began to take place during the inflation and gained even more ground after 1923. The debate surrounding mass culture addressing questions of aesthetic value, artistic autonomy, the separation between mass culture and high culture, and so forth represents a central aspect of modernism and continues to be of immense importance in the era of postmodernism.

Both the economic status and the cultural tradition of the German bourgeoisie were threatened in the early twenties. While its economic status was undermined by the devaluation of savings, a traditional notion of high culture—which may also have included many forms of the modern avant-garde—was challenged by new forms of mass cul-

ture. The structural analogies between inflation and mass culture continue on the level of perception and conceptualization of mass culture. From a position which insisted on the superiority of high culture, mass culture was characterized by massification and feminization. Andreas Huyssen has shown in his influential book, *After the Great Divide*, that the notion of mass culture as "somehow associated with woman while real, authentic culture remains the prerogative of men" is indeed grounded in the concept of the feminized masses.<sup>18</sup> Connotations of mass culture as feminine therefore emerge from this discourse. They turn up in literary criticism of best-selling works of fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as in social philosophy. It can be seen, for example, in Horkheimer and Adorno's argument that mass culture "cannot renounce the threat of castration," or in Nietzsche's critique of Wagnerian theater: "In the theater one becomes people, herd, female, pharisee, voting cattle, patron, idiot—Wagnerian."<sup>19</sup> More obvious notions of a feminine mass culture find their origins in the assumption, especially by the end of the nineteenth century, that "light reading" was a female activity. "It is the vivid *image* of girls prostrate on chaise-longues, immersed in their worthless novels, that has provided historical preparation for the practice of countless critics who persist in equating femininity, consumption, and reading, on the one hand, and masculinity, production, and writing on the other."<sup>20</sup>

For representatives of a modernist, autonomous high culture, mass culture carried on a process of devaluation. It continued a kind of "cultural inflation" long after the actual economic inflation had passed. This argument rests on an additional common feature between inflation and mass culture: the centrality of money.

In a lecture given in September 1922 and entitled *Die Not der geistigen Arbeiter*, the sociologist Alfred Weber paints a striking picture of the disastrous consequences inflation had on the traditional cultural scene in Germany. Weber points out that traditional "geistige Arbeit," the work of writers, journalists, and artists, but also scientists, was largely based on the existence of income from savings, property, annuities or pensions.

In their economic and social makeup most modern intellectuals are characterized by their dependence on pensions and annuities. . . . This group of intellectuals constituted almost the only somewhat independent island outside the antagonism of classes and group

interests. It constituted a sanctuary of ideas and thoughts beyond the economical at a time when late capitalism due to its all-pervasive force of economization corrupted and disintegrated the spirit [*das Geistige*].<sup>21</sup>

Weber fears that intellectual work will become “an appendix of economy.”<sup>22</sup> Not only artists and writers are affected by inflation, but also their main audience. He emphasizes the devastating losses of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, the “höhere Beamten,” doctors, and lawyers. Inflation, according to Weber, destroys once and for all the dominance of a cultural scene which was rooted in the “Rentenintellektuellentum” and directed towards the *Bildungsbürgertum*.

The theater critic Max Hermann-Neiße reiterates Weber’s complaint about the increasing economization of culture:

The business and greed which have seized the bourgeoisie . . . are also taking over bourgeois theater. This culture is now falling back on that which was its foundation from the very beginning: capital. Not only is time money, everything in this culture is money: Love, religion, science, art is like money and is counted, traded, forged, and devalued like money.<sup>23</sup>

The force of inflation and the increasingly difficult situation of the *Bildungsbürgertum* bring into the open a decisive difference between traditional high culture and mass culture. Mass culture is characterized by the openly acknowledged breakdown of the border between economy and culture. Economic profitability is an inherent goal and, as Kaes mentions, questions of distribution and consumption very much determine the product of mass culture. High culture, on the other hand, as Weber and Hermann-Neiße understand it, even though it is based on a capitalist economy, keeps an insular status within this economy—or at least had done so in the past. The power of inflationary money destroys Weber’s “Asyl der überökonomischen Ideen- und Gedankengänge” and, according to Hermann-Neiße, strips the theater of any cultural value. But the force which “zersetzt,” which undermines and corrupts Weber’s “Geist” and Hermann-Neiße’s German theater, is not capitalism or the economy per se, but rather money, especially inflationary money.

Just as the diminishing symbolic power of money, changing from millions to billions, loses all importance, the symbolic power of the massively inflated cultural signs decreases as well. Catch-words like

“massification of literature,” “commercialization,” “levelling,” “the culture-business,” and “cultural egalitarianism” are indices which show the fears of an increasing devaluation of cultural values by inflationary massification.<sup>24</sup>

Kaes is perfectly right to point out this analogy between (inflationary) money and culture as symbolic systems. It is the process of inflationary massification that causes the fear of cultural devaluation. Yet this analogy has to be put into a larger framework. Kaes seems to indicate here that the symbolic systems of money and culture coexisted with each other on neutral terms in pre-inflationary times. My argument is that inflationary money only brings to the open and intensifies a deep antinomy between money and high culture which runs through modernist culture in Germany. For Hermann-Neiße, for example, money, whether inflationary or not, appears as the threatening opposite to art. The end of the “bürgerliche Theater” has arrived when art is like money. Counting, trading, forging—and in the case of an inflation, devaluation—are the dangerous results of art as pure commodity. The status of money within the culture of modernism is obviously a very complex issue. In order to investigate thoroughly the relationship between money and artistic production within modern high culture, more methodological groundwork is necessary than I can provide here. But I would like to suggest at least one framework from which one may approach this question.

If economic inflation were perceived as closely related to mass culture, one could then treat German modernist culture itself as an economic system and ask: How does a “cultural inflation” affect and jeopardize the “cultural economy” of high culture?

Alfred Weber’s concept of “geistige Arbeit” is a good example of the cultural economy of high culture. Weber stresses the notion of “Arbeit” when he writes about the activities of intellectuals and artists, yet the result of this work does not directly enter the sphere of distribution and consumption. One might say that traditional high culture measured itself within a Marxian notion of “use-value” while it resisted being drawn into a monetary system of “exchange-value.” Benjamin sees the erosion of “aura” as a sign of the historical transformation from one value system into the other.<sup>25</sup> Inflation may represent the most threatening manifestation of an economic system which places mediation and exchange by money at its core.

Even though high culture in modernism idolized production and downplayed the influence on its products of distribution or consumption, high culture was nevertheless consumed. Yet the form of consumption was understood as radically different from that of mass culture. Consumption of high culture was believed to leave some kind of "Mehrwert" within the consumer. The two operative terms here are "Sammlung" (collecting/saving) and "Bildung" (formation, education/accumulation, growth). High culture itself was organized around these principles: it was conceptualized—especially among Germanists—as a savings account of (national) culture which would accrue a steady amount of interest over time. Mass culture, on the other hand, was believed to be consumed in its entirety without leaving traces of savings within the consumer. Within this dichotomy, the principles of mass culture are "Zerstreuung" (entertainment/dissemination/distraction) and what I call, for lack of a better term, "Vergessen" (forgetting/eradication). Because from the perspective of high culture the consumption of mass culture did not leave traces, because of its low "nutritional" value, but also because it was easily forgotten, it was accompanied by the cry for more. It is not difficult to see to what extent mass culture as a cultural inflation undermined the most basic structures of a traditional "cultural economy." That is not to say that real economic inflation did not leave a heavy burden on German intellectuals and writers. But the binary, opposite construction of these two cultural economies may explain why so many German intellectuals deeply mistrusted—or radically embraced—new forms of mass culture.

Within these two concepts of "cultural economies," money had a very different status and function. Mass culture fully integrated circulation and consumption; money as the main medium for circulation was a fully accepted part of this economy. The economy of high culture suppressed and denied its ultimate reliance on money. Its insistence on production, on originality and uniqueness, its incomparability, all these qualities which Benjamin tried to capture in the notion of "aura," are ideological concepts which resist an integration into a system of monetary exchange.

The reflection on the mutual influences between an advanced money economy and modern culture constitutes a major part of the social philosophy and sociology of Georg Simmel. In his seminal work *The Philosophy of Money* (1900), he points out that the emergence of a money economy is intimately connected to the development of per-



sonal freedom. At the same time, however, he argues that the role of money in modern culture threatens to destroy this personal freedom. Simmel's model of culture is still deeply rooted in German idealist, subject-centered philosophy.<sup>26</sup> Yet he is acutely aware of the radical changes in society and culture at the threshold of the new century. His writings bridge this transformation, and his analysis of culture expresses the bourgeois ambivalence towards money and a modern, metropolitan life.

Simmel's understanding of culture is characterized by the interplay between "objective culture," a world of cultural forms and artifacts which have become independent of the individual human existence, and a "subjective culture," the personal culture of the individual which tries to integrate and to synthesize "objective culture."<sup>27</sup> Simmel's view on modern culture is guided by his observation of a rapidly growing gap between "objective culture" and "subjective culture." "Objective culture" becomes increasingly detached from the individual, it gains a life of its own, and modern culture as whole undergoes a process of "objectification." Cultural praxis, originally formed out of the life praxis of individuals, becomes increasingly remote from these origins or replaces formerly authentic values by purely instrumental values, substituting means for ends.

Money plays a crucial role in this process by providing important instrumental functions. It "serves as a principle for standardizing values so that they can all be compared on the same scale," and it can therefore facilitate their exchange.<sup>28</sup> Money has only one quality, its quantity.<sup>29</sup> For Simmel, modern culture produces a vast variety of cultural artifacts, and money becomes the only means of providing a measuring link between them. Money, therefore, acquires more and more a pure or absolute status. Simmel is fascinated by the fluidity of modern culture, while he bemoans the end of a more stable bourgeois culture.

In many respects, Simmel builds upon and broadens Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism and alienation. While Marx investigated these phenomena by concentrating on questions of production and its effect on social relations, Simmel is interested in the social relationships of consumption.<sup>30</sup> Only a money economy and an advanced stage of the division of labor (which characterize modernity) allow mass production—and mass consumption. Focusing on consumption, he writes:



The broadening of consumption, however, is dependent upon the growth of objective culture, since the more objective and impersonal an object is the better it is suited to more people. Such consumable material, in order to be acceptable and enjoyable to a very large number of individuals, cannot be designed for subjective differentiation of taste.<sup>31</sup>

Such standardization reveals itself in the design of the product; it also shapes the personality of the consumer. Mass production creates a kind of pseudo-subjective culture, and consumers become increasingly indistinguishable from each other. With regard to production, Simmel affirms Marx's argument that the division of labor, which makes mass production possible, disassociates the product from the producer. Simmel opposes this situation to the relationship between the work of art and the artist. "The nature of the art work completely resists a subdivision of labor among a number of workers. . . . The work of art, of all works of man, is the most perfectly autonomous unity, a self-sufficient totality, even more so than the State."<sup>32</sup> Even though Simmel did not yet have a notion of "mass culture," one can easily detect the tension between such a concept and his own theory of artistic production.

In his influential essay, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (*Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben*, 1903), Simmel describes the effects of money on modern life: anonymity, rationalization, a certain blasé outlook on things as the result of the overwhelming stimuli of a big city, and a general indifference towards a distinction between things.

To the extent that money, with its colorlessness and its indifferent quality can become a common denominator of all values; it becomes the frightful leveler—it hollows out the core of things, their peculiarities, their specific values and their uniqueness and incomparability in a way which is beyond repair. They all flow with the same specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of money.<sup>33</sup>

The image of the moving stream of money in which all things, all people are flowing reveals a fundamental principle which constitutes inflation as an essential modern experience: the notion of circulation. Simmel's analysis also shows how closely massification and circulation are related. The experience of inflation, especially the specific anxieties and socio-psychological traumas which result from it, can be understood within the overall nexus of this circulation, with money as its most powerful symbol. Inflation changed this stream into a

furious and unpredictable flood which carried security away.

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1. See, for example: Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich, *Die deutsche Inflation 1914–1923: Ursachen und Folgen in internationaler Perspektive* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980); or Gerald Feldman, *The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics, and Society in the German Inflation, 1914–1924* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
2. George Horsman, *Inflation in the Twentieth Century: Evidence from Europe and North America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), p. 2.
3. Charles Maier, *In Search of Stability: Explorations in Historical Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
4. Maier, p. 200.
5. William Guttman and Patricia Meehan, *The Great Inflation: Germany 1919–1923* (Westmead: Saxon House, 1975), pp. 61–62.
6. It should be noted that Austria and Hungary also had very serious inflations after the war for similar reasons. The extent of these inflations was, however, different. For a discussion of these two inflations, see Horsman, pp. 38–64.
7. For this discussion, see Werner Abelshauser, "Inflation und Stabilisierung: Zum Problem ihrer makroökonomischen Auswirkungen auf die Rekonstruktion der deutschen Wirtschaft nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg," Otto Büsch and Gerald Feldman, eds., *Historische Prozesse der deutschen Inflation: Ein Tagungsbericht* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1978), pp. 163–64.
8. Abelshauser, p. 165.
9. Guttman and Meehan, p. 95.
10. See Paul Ufermann, *Könige der Inflation* (Berlin: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaft, 1924).
11. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (New York: Viking Press, 1962), pp. 183–186. Thomas Mann also describes inflation as a "witches' sabbath": "In the summer of 1923 the inflation, like the legendary witches' dance, became wilder and wilder, the figures rose faster and faster. Then suddenly the cock crowed, the night was over, and the witch, exhausted and disillusioned, found herself back in her old kitchen." This and other quotes which address inflation as "witches' sabbath" are cited in Jürgen Freiherr von Kreudener, "Die Entstehung des Inflationstraumas: Zur Sozialpsychologie der deutschen Hyperinflation 1922/23," in Gerald Feldman, et al., *Konsequenzen der Inflation* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1989), p. 213.
12. I discuss this in my book *Männerbünde und Massen: Zur Krise männlicher Identität in der Literatur der Moderne* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1992).

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13. Walter Benjamin, *One-way-street and other Writings* (New York: Hartcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1978), p. 56.
14. To my knowledge "Scham" is most commonly used to refer to the exposure of female sexual organs.
15. Elias Canetti, *Auto-da-fé* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979) pp. 131–32.
16. Thomas Mann, *Disorder and Early Sorrow*, in *Stories of A Lifetime* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1970). Subsequent page references are in the text.
17. Anton Kaes, "Die ökonomische Dimension der Literatur: Zum Strukturwandel der Institution Literatur in der Inflationszeit (1918–1923)," in Gerald Feldman, et al., *Konsequenzen der Inflation*, pp. 320–21. My translation.
18. Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 47.
19. Huyssen, p. 51. For more information about the history of the perception of mass culture as feminine, see Huyssen, pp. 49–51.
20. Tania Modleski, "Femininity as Mas(s)querade: a Feminist Approach to Mass Culture," in Colin MacCabe, ed., *High Theory/Low Culture: Analysing Popular Television and Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 41.
21. Alfred Weber, *Die Not der geistigen Arbeiter* (Munich: Duncker and Humblot, 1923), p. 14. My translation.
22. Weber, p. 23.
23. Max Hermann-Neiße, "Berliner Theaterwirtschaft," *Die neue Schaubühne* 3, no. 4 (1921), p. 75. My translation.
24. Kaes, p. 322.
25. Walter Benjamin, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit," *Gesammelte Werke I (2)*, Rolf Tiedemann und Hermann Schweppenhäuser, eds. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1980), pp. 471–509.
26. See Jürgen Habermas, "Vorwort: Simmel als Zeitdiagnostiker," in Georg Simmel, *Philosophische Kultur* (Berlin: Wagenbach Verlag, 1986), pp. 7–17.
27. Georg Simmel, *Georg Simmel: On Women, Sexuality and Love*, translated and with an introduction by Guy Oakes, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 7.
28. Simmel, *On Women*, p. 17.
29. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, translated by Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 280.
30. Simmel, *On Women*, p. 20.

31. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, p. 455.
32. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, p. 454.
33. Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, Donald N. Levine, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 330.