

The Consumer Revolution:
Accounting for Demand in the French Porcelain Industry, 1780–1800

By the early 1780s, the French strategy of supporting the Royal Porcelain Manufacture at Sèvres in order to elevate the entire French porcelain industry was proving successful. Not only had the state-run Royal Manufacture become the envy of Europe, but dozens of private companies in Paris and beyond were now flourishing thanks to the material techniques and decorative styles pioneered at the factory in Sèvres. By the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, there were at least twelve companies operating within Paris, 11 more in its environs and another 12 throughout the country.¹ Yet at the heart of this success lay a paradox. The plan to develop the French porcelain industry was based on using the Royal Manufacture to establish a distinctly French porcelain style that would build the international reputation for French porcelain products, but to do so through a monopoly privilege that prevented other manufacturers from invoking the same stylistic modes. Thus, the plan was to generate business for French manufactures by inventing a category of and reputation for French style, but then forbid French manufactures from using it.

In practice, this paradox seems to have been fairly easy to reconcile before 1780. Most of the larger private manufactures operated under the patronage of members of the royal family and had acquired sufficient material quality and artistic skill to compete in the domestic and international market. And the express purpose of the Royal Manufacture's privilege was to prevent low-quality products from undermining its hard-won reputation.

¹ AN F¹² 1493¹ "Extrait de registre du Conseil d'État" ([Summer] 1784). [[[I'm still pinning down a definitive count, but these are the best figures I currently have]]]

Because the manufactures supported by royalty had developed enough to not threaten the reputation of French porcelain, the Royal Manufacture was largely content, through selective enforcement of the privilege, to allow them to continue their work unimpeded.

Around 1780, however, two developments challenged this system. First, new private manufactures, many of them smaller and operating without the patronage of noble protectors, began to establish themselves and to cater to a more popular market than those older manufactures whose target clientele remained French and foreign courtiers. As these smaller producers took root, they bristled at the restrictions placed on their businesses by the privilege and resented the selective enforcement of it that had prevailed until then. Second, the Royal Manufacture itself came under increasing financial pressure. As French involvement in the American War of Independence grew, so too did its already enormous debts. The Royal Manufacture had since its nationalization in 1760 enjoyed an annual contribution from the king intended to cover any losses incurred and to keep the company solvent, an expense justified by the role the manufacture played in elevating the rest of the industry. But with royal finances now squeezed by mounting debts, supporting a company that many thought should have been able to cover its own costs appeared as an unnecessary extravagance. At the same time, an economic downturn dramatically reduced sales, which plummeted nearly 60 percent from a high of 522,128lt in 1779 to a near all-time low of 210,882lt in 1780 before gradually recovering.² Furthermore, a problem in the manufacture's accounts led to an enormous budget shortfall and forced a restructuring of how the company approached its finances. Thus, by mid 1780 the Royal Manufacture found

² AMNS Vy 7 and 8.

itself facing spiraling debts of nearly a quarter million livres.³

In response to the gaping hole in its bottom line and the threatened withdrawal of royal funding, the directors at Sèvres decided to fall back on their privilege as a tool no longer to support the industry as a whole, but to salvage their own interests. As the expanding private manufactures bumped up against the strictures of renewed enforcement of the privilege, they lobbied for the government to change its industrial policy by invoking a new conception of how markets for consumer goods ought to operate. Whereas what existed in 1780 was a segmented industry in which the king shaped the discourse of taste, these businessmen now argued for a market unified under the rule of a new sovereign: the consumer.

Economic growth in the late eighteenth century ushered in a new era for French industry. As Daniel Roche has demonstrated, consumer goods in this period increasingly permeated the daily lives of every class of society.⁴ As luxury and fashion spread beyond the halls of Versailles and into the salons of Paris, the monarchy's exclusive control over the material markers of status waned and, as the Court itself collapsed amidst Revolution, was eclipsed by the rising star of bourgeois society.⁵ Several recent studies have shown how

³ AMNS B3 "Mémoire" to Le Noir (November 1779), "Mémoire," Dut (3 April 1780).

⁴ Daniel Roche, *The People of Paris: An Essay in Popular Culture in the 18th Century*, trans Marie Evans with Gwynne Lewis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 97–196; *idem.*, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the 'Ancien Régime,'* trans Jean Birrell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); *idem.*, *A History of Everyday Things: The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600–1800*, trans Brian Pearce (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp 54–80 and 166–92.

⁵ Sheryl Kroen, "A Political History of the Consumer," *Historical Journal* 47, no. 3 (September 2004) 712–7; Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) 51–74, 147–85; *idem.*, *Cultural Revolutions: Everyday Life and Politics in Britain, North America, and France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) 113–48; Philip Mansel, *The Court of France, 1789–1830* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 3–47; *Au temps des merveilles : la société parisienne*

this transition quickly politicized access to commodities as people asserted their rights as both citizens and consumers.⁶ Meanwhile, as political economy has begun to emerge in recent historiography as the quintessential Enlightenment science, the ideation of a public constitutive of both political and economic order has gained recognition as a contributing factor to the French Revolution.⁷

Perhaps the most fruitful research on the economic, social, and political ramifications of shifting patterns of consumption in the late eighteenth century has revolved around the debate over luxury. As a range of historians have demonstrated, over the course of the eighteenth century the concept of luxury gradually shifted from being a moral category to a political critique and economic motor. In the process, as luxury became increasingly accessible to the broader public, it gave them a rhetorical platform around which to shape political and even national identity.⁸

sous le Directoire et le Consulat (Paris: Musées, 2005); Philippe Perrot, *Le Luxe : Une richesse entre faste et confort, XVIII^e–XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995).

⁶ For recent work connecting consumer culture to the French Revolution, see: Colin Jones, "The Great Chain of Buying: Medical Advertisement, the Bourgeois Public Sphere, and the Origins of the French Revolution," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 1 (February 1996) 13–40; William H Sewell, jr., "The Empire of Fashion and the Rise of Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France," *Past & Present* no. 206 (February 2010) 81–120; Michael Kwass, *Louis Mandrin and the Making of a Global Underground* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014) 318–53; Rebecca L Spang, *Stuff and Money in the Time of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Katie Jarvis, *Politics in the Marketplace: Work, Gender, and Citizenship in Revolutionary France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁷ Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) 157–94; Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Felicia Gottman, *Global Trade, Smuggling, and the Making of Economic Liberalism: Asian Textiles in France, 1680–1760* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁸ Christopher J Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Michael Kwass, "Ordering the World of Goods: Consumer Revolution and the Classification of Objects in Eighteenth-Century France,"

Collectively, this work has emphasized the historical connections between the growth of consumer culture and the combined social, political, and intellectual origins of the French Revolution. In doing so, it has explored the various ways consumers and intellectuals responded to the impacts of increased consumption by rethinking long-held conceptual categories. This chapter builds on this body of scholarship by considering how changing conceptions of demand came to restructure the practice of supply. As manufacturers became increasingly attuned to the existence of a consumer society, they had to adapt their inherited conceptions of value and methods of accounting to a new reality in which abstract demand could be internalized into the practice of industrial production. In doing so, they invoked consumer demand to both justify economic liberalism and necessitate labor controls as they developed a self-consciously capitalist approach to business. By examining consumer demand as a unifying thread between liberalism, accounting, and capitalism, this chapter depicts the shared origins of all three during the era of the French Revolution.

Conceiving the Consumer

The catalyst for the debate over the future of the French porcelain industry came at the turn of 1780 when the directors of the Royal Manufacture ordered the police to raid several manufactures in the Paris basin for violating its monopoly privileges in the hopes

Representations 82, no. 1 (Spring 2003) 87–117; Serge Latouche, *L'invention de l'économie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2005) 175–91; John Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism, and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Clare Haru Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex: Economies of Regard in Old Regime France* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013) 246–82; Audrey Provost, *Le luxe, les Lumières et la Révolution* (Seyssel, France: Champ Vallon, 2014).

that doing so would leave Sèvres as the sole remaining provider in the luxury market.⁹

Under the penalties enumerated by the 1766 privilege, this would be a crushing blow: all manufactures found guilty of violating the Royal Manufacture's monopoly by sculpting, gilding, or painting with multiple colors faced immediate seizure of all goods, a three thousand-livre fine, the razing of its kilns, and a lifetime ban for the owners from manufacturing porcelain ever again. In early spring, a series of police raids on manufactures and boutiques discovered XXX It worth of contraband porcelain manufactured by the producers at Cligancourt, St Denis, rue Thiroux, rue Fontaine au Roy, bourg la Reine, and Sceaux and confiscated every last piece of merchandise found on site.¹⁰

The targeted manufacturers' immediate reaction to the crackdown was to ask for leniency. After all, manufacturers argued, many of these companies predated both the 1760 privilege and even the Royal Manufacture itself and had always gilded and painted in multiple colors without problem.¹¹ Royal officials accepted this defense and urged leniency. After all, officials responded, the purpose of the privilege had been to establish the Royal Manufacture "as a point of emulation and a support for the industry" designed to share

⁹ AMNS A4 Letter [de Mauroy] to Lieutenant General of Police (14 December 1779); AMNS B3 "Affaires de la manufacture royale" (1780).

¹⁰ AMNS A4 "Procès verbal de saisie sur le Sieur Le Bœuf" (28 January 1780), Letter de Mauroy to Lieutenant General of Police (15 February 1780), Letter to Lieutenant General of Police (28 February 1780), Letter to Lieutenant General of Police (8 March 1780), Letter de Mauroy to Lieutenant General of Police (11 March 1780), "Procès verbal de saisie sur le Sieur Jaquetes" (20 March 1780), "Procès verbal de saisie sur le Sieur Glot" (20 March 1780), Letter Cousin to Lieutenant General of Police (11 April 1780), Letter de Mauroy to Buffenoux (20 April 1780), Letter de Mauroy to Lieutenant General of Police (15 August 1780).

¹¹ AMNS A3 Letter Glot to Régnier [1780], Letter owners of the manufacture at Rue Thiroux [1780]; AMNS A4 Letter de Mauroy to Jurien (13 March 1780).

with it “everything that is about taste and invention,” “not as the enemy” of the industry.¹²

This was an about face for officials, who just five years earlier had refused requests to allow manufacturers to gild and paint in multiple colors because “the king’s intention is not to grant [this exception] to any establishment.”¹³ Now they recommended discretely conveying to inquiring manufacturers the “little concession” that they be permitted to continue operating as they had.¹⁴ But to the directors at the Royal Manufacture trying to staunch its losses, such tacit permission to violate its monopoly was tantamount to renouncing the system of privilege entirely.¹⁵ Thus, they pressed the issue and sparked a debate over the shape of the industry and the role of the state in it that would continue for two decades. As the director of the Royal Manufacture had predicted just months before the entire affair started, private manufacturers had been holding their tongues about their liberal opinions in the hopes of avoiding attention so that they might “hide their impertinence.”¹⁶ But, once outed, they no longer had reason to remain silent.

The first protestations against the spring raids came, unsurprisingly, from the royal patrons of many of the manufactures targeted. The king’s brother had extended his “eminent protection” to the manufacture in Cligancourt, the Marquis de la Salle had

¹² AN O¹ 2059¹ Letter Bertin to Inspector General of Police (7 May 1780); AMNS A3 Letter Bertin to Le Noir (7 May 1780). [comme un point d’émulation et un secours pour l’industrie] [tout ce qui est du goût et de l’invention] [non comme l’ennemie]

¹³ AN O¹ 2062¹ Letter Beaupoil and St Aulaire to Bertin (15 January 1775), Letter Bertin to Beaupoil and St Aulaire (8 March 1775), Letter Bertin to Trudaine (18 March 1775). [l’intention du roy n’est pas de l’accorder plutôt à aucun établissement]

¹⁴ AMNS A3 Letter de Clerigny to Régnier [10 May 1780], Letter Bertin to Le Noir (12 May 1780), Letter Le Noir to Bertin (14 May 1780).

¹⁵ AMNS A3 “Réponse au mémoire du propriétaire de la manufacture de porcelain établie à Sceaux” [Spring 1780], “Observation sur la porcelaine de Monsieur le Normand,” Boileau [c. 1780].

¹⁶ AMNS A3 Letter Régnier to Lieutenant General of Police (25 July 1779). [ils cachent leurs impertinence]

extended his to the manufacture in St Denis, and the queen had extended hers to the manufacture on rue Thiroux in order to “protect, and also encourage the industry of her subjects.”¹⁷ This meant that the initial response to the Royal Manufacture’s efforts to defend its privileges was simply to assert counterbalancing privileges granted by other members of the royal family.

The Royal Manufacture, seeking to retain both its privilege and annual royal contribution, first replied at this superficial level. The Royal Manufacture, its management argued, “is not simply a Royal Manufacture, but the King’s Manufacture, managed for and on behalf of his majesty...to furnish for the service of his majesty and of his royal family, porcelains of every type” as well as to supply diplomatic gifts.¹⁸ Furthermore, by providing exemplary training and stable employment for highly skilled workers that might otherwise emigrate, Sèvres helped retain the skills on which its international reputation for taste and quality depended. Because in the absence of a Royal Manufacture these needs would be met by imported goods, maintaining it through a monopoly privilege and annual contributions was the cheapest option and one that “concerns the magnificence of the Prince, commerce, national industry and humanity.”¹⁹ These arguments quickly backfired. The king responded that in the future the Royal Manufacture must pursue these laudable

¹⁷ AMNS A3 Letter de Mauroy to Le Noir (13 May 1780), Letter Jolivet to de Mauroy (10 November [1780]); AMNS A4 Letter Barreau to Regnier (29 April 1780), Letter de Mauroy to Demilly (23 May 1780). [protection éminente] [protéger, et même encourager l’industrie de ses sujets]

¹⁸ AMNS A3 Note (20 July 1782). [n’est pas simplement une Manufacture Royale, mais une Manufacture du Roi, régie pour et au compte de sa majesté...à fournir pour le service de sa majesté et de sa famille royale, des porcelaines en tout genre]

¹⁹ AMNS A1 “Mémoire régie pour et au [...] du Roi” [c. 1780]; AMNS A3 “Mémoire,” de Mauroy [c. 1780]; AN F¹² 1493¹ “Mémoire” (7 July 1780); AN O¹ 2061^{2bis} “Compte rendu,” d’Ormesson to d’Angiviller (15 September 1783). [intéresse la magnificence du Prince, le commerce, l’industrie nationale et l’humanité]

goals at lower cost and with a smaller annual contribution from the Crown. If their arguments were true, he reasoned, the monopoly ought to at least be able to cover its own expenses.²⁰ Arguments in favor of the system of privileges would henceforth have to justify themselves not with the wellbeing of the privileged company, but with the ramifications for the industry as a whole.

As the debate intensified, private manufacturers broadened their critique from the balancing of particular privileges and began denouncing the 1780 crackdown and the whole system of privileges it represented as an “astonishing contradiction!”²¹ They acknowledged readily that the Royal Manufacture had served a crucial role in supporting the French porcelain industry by promoting its technological and artistic development. The 1760 and 1766 privileges had been successful in the sense that they had enabled dozens of private manufactures to establish themselves under the aegis of Sèvres’s hegemony. But now these private manufactures had attained a “degree of taste and perfection” sufficient to enable them to compete not just with Asian imports, but with those from Saxony as well. “The French,” they reminded their bureaucratic interlocutors, “are ingenious and have a distinctive taste unknown to other nations” that would captivate foreign consumers and conquer foreign markets if they were only permitted to do so.²² Just as they were finally in a position to conquer the French and European luxury markets, the directors of these manufactures lamented, the assertion of the royal privilege threatened to reduce their market to the cheapest dregs where quality had to be abandoned in favor of cost. If the

²⁰ AMNS A3 “Régie pour et au compte du Roy” [1780].

²¹ AMNS A3 Letter Renard to Necker (3 August 1780). [étonnante contradiction !]

²² AMNS A3 “Mémoire concernant les défences de peindre et dorer sur la porcelaine” [1780]; AN F¹² 1494¹ “Mémoire sur les manufactures de porcelaines” [c. 1784]. [degré de goût et de perfection] [Les français] [sont ingénieux et ont un goût particulier inconnu aux autres nations]

intent of French industrial strategy had been to raise the quality of French porcelain to the point where it could compete with the finest manufactures in the world on material mastery and artistic excellence, they asked, why would it now subvert this strategy at the very moment it had succeeded?²³

Yet underlying the private manufacturers' arguments about their capacity to supply the market was a deeper argument about the role of demand. While the luxury market had once been the preserve of the court aristocracy, the emergence of an urban bourgeoisie and the shifting of elite society from Versailles to Paris had created a concentrated and educated consumer market. In a collective rebuff of a new series of privileges being considered, the owners of several Parisian manufactures argued that Paris had become a "city in which primarily resides good taste." "The taste of the consumer," they continued, "has grown in proportion to the ease it has found to satisfy it."²⁴ With the emergence of a consumer class, according to a group of lawyers representing Parisian porcelain manufacturers, there now existed a public to be considered: "The public, whose utility should be the end and the measure of all the government's plans." And the public's utility included its ability to access the luxury goods to which it had grown accustomed. "The public interest" thus now demanded access to a range of products without arbitrary restriction. In place of monopoly privileges that raised prices, competition should now serve as "the protection or the remedy."²⁵

²³ AMNS B3 "Mémoire," Dut (3 April 1780); AN F¹² "Consultation" (10 April 1785).

²⁴ AN F¹² 1494¹ "Mémoire sur les manufactures de porcelaines" [c. 1784]. [ville dans laquelle reside essentiellement le bon goût] [Le goût du consommateur] [s'est accru en proportion de la facilité qu'il a trouvé à le satisfaire]

²⁵ AN F¹² 1494¹ "Consultation" (10 April 1785). [Le public, dont l'utilité doit être le but et le mesure de toutes les spéculations du gouvernement] [L'intérêt publique] [le préservatif ou le remède]

These private porcelain manufacturers were not the only ones advocating for the relaxation of market regulations in this period. With the rise of liberal economic thought in the second half of the eighteenth century, government officials proved increasingly willing to turn market operations over to market forces, albeit in fits and starts over several decades.²⁶ Underlying this liberalizing push was a new conception about the economic equilibrium and systemic balance produced by individuals pursuing their own interest.²⁷ And at the center of this Russian doll lay a novel conception of the consumer that first emerged in the political economy of the late eighteenth century, according to which consumers seek “utility” by purchasing goods and services and thus generate a market price.²⁸

²⁶ On the liberalization of economic regulations in this period, see: Harold T Parker, *The Bureau of Commerce in 1781 and Its Policies with Respect to French Industry* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1979); *Idem.*, *An Administrativ Bureau under the Old Regime: The Bureau of Commerce and Its Relations to French Industry from May 1781 to November 1783* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993); Jean-Pierre Hirsch, *Les deux rêves du Commerce : Etreprise et institution dans la région lilloise (1780–1860)* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1991); Paul Butel, *L'économie française au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Sedes, 1993) 266–76; Alain Plessis, ed. *Naissance des libertés économiques. Liberté du travail et liberté d'entreprendre : le décret d'Allarde et la loi Le Chapelier, leurs conséquences, 1791–fin XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Institut d'Histoire de l'Industrie, 1993); Philippe Minard, *La Fortune du Colbertisme : État et industrie dans la France des Lumières* (Paris: Fayard, 1998) 263–374; Judith A Miller, *Mastering the Market: The State and the Grain Trade in Northern France, 1700–1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁷ Albert O Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); Simone Meyssonier, *La balance et l'horloge : La genèse de la pensée libérale en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions de la Passion, 1989); Jean-Claude Perrot, *Une Histoire Intellectuelle de l'économie politique, XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1992) 195–286.

²⁸ For early instances of utility theory in continental political economy, see: Étienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac, *Commerce and Government Considered in their Mutual Relationship*, trans Shelagh Eltis (Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 2008) 97–108; Ferdinando Galiani, *On Money*, trans Peter R Toscano (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1977) 19–38; Daniel Bernoulli, “Exposition of a New Theory on the Measurement of Risk,” trans

This would prove to be the very same core concept embedded within the manufacturers' argument. According to their lawyers, the problem of monopoly pricing in the absence of competition was that it "gives an *arbitrary value*."²⁹ But arbitrary compared to what? In modern economics, the definition of a monopolistic firm is one has the ability to act as a price maker, while a competitive firm has to act as a price taker. Taking a price entails the existence of an external market whose forces of supply and demand operate so as to generate a given price for a given commodity that, in order to remain competitive, the firm must accept. Although for the neoclassical economist the mechanics of consumer demand operate out of an imperceptible black box, they are revealed through market actions that demand specific quantities at specific prices within the market.³⁰ Neoclassical economics thus assumes the preexistence of sufficient consumer demand to compel the market mechanism into action. Similarly, by promoting competition as a remedy that would improve public utility by removing monopoly and its "arbitrary values," opponents of the privilege system implicitly asserted the preexistence of a consumer market cohesive enough to effectively set prices for firms to take.

The owners of the Parisian porcelain manufactures believed that, domestically and internationally, consumers "prefer our forms and our designs." All that they asked was the

Louise Sommer, *Econometrica* 22, no. 1 (January 1954) 23–36. For the history of the development of utility theory, see: Hannah R Sewall, *The Theory of Value before Adam Smith* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1901); Emile Morand, *La théorie psychologique de la valeur jusqu'en 1776* (Bordeaux, 1912); Philippe Steiner, *La "science nouvelle" de l'économie politique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998) 52–6.

²⁹ AN F¹² 1494¹ "Consultation" (10 April 1785). Italics added. [donner une valeur arbitraire]

³⁰ Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics: An Introductory Volume*, 8th ed. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1948) 15–6; Paul A Samuelson, "A Note on the Pure Theory of Consumers' Behavior," *Economica*, new series 5, no. 17 (February 1938) 61–71; *idem.*, "Consumption Theory in Terms of Revealed Preference," *Economica*, new series 15, no. 60 (November 1948) 243–53.

opportunity to meet this existing demand.³¹ Their legal representatives acknowledged the interest of the State in balancing the supply of porcelain with its demand in order to prevent a speculative glut that could topple the entire industry. But, they maintained, the manufactures “only make that which they are...certain to be able to sell: and the government has an infallible guarantee to assure that the harm, if it exists, will soon stop. This is also the interest of the entrepreneurs.”³² In other words, they argued, the consumer had become the determinant force in the market, and competition and self-interest would be sufficient to ensure an orderly economy.

The defenders of the royal privilege were not convinced of the wisdom or power of the consumer class, however. The Minister of Finances Jacques Necker was brought in to mediate the initial complaints in 1780 and did so by maintaining much of the existing privilege while permitting private manufactures to gild the edges of their pieces and to produce small vases.³³ Underlying his decision were two beliefs related to the virility of the consumer marketplace. First, he implicitly recognized the limitations of consumers to possess knowledge about the quality of manufactured goods. For Necker, consumers in this period relied on the reputation of manufacturers as a way to gauge the quality of their products. He believed this was especially true for international consumers far removed from the product's place of origin.³⁴

³¹ AN F¹² 1494¹ “Mémoire sur les manufactures de porcelaines” [c. 1784]. [préférant nos formes et nos desseins]

³² AN F¹² 1494¹ “Consultation” (10 April 1785). [ne fabriquent plus que ce qu'ils sont...certains de pouvoir vendre : et le gouvernement a un garant infallible pour s'assurer que le mal, s'il existe, ne tardera pas à cesser. C'est l'intérêt même des entrepreneurs]

³³ AMNS A3 Letter Necker (7 September 1780), “Proposition des manufactures particulières,” [Necker] [1780].

³⁴ AMNS A3 “Observations pour Monsieur le lieutenant général de police,” [Necker] [1780].

Necker's concerns aligned with those of the defenders of the Royal Manufacture's privilege who worried about the impact of counterfeits on the market. With the opening of new decorative and stylistic opportunities to private manufactures through the relaxation of the privilege, officials worried that these private manufacturers would use the opportunity "to imitate, or to speak more accurately to counterfeit" the products from Sèvres.³⁵ Their concern was not simple mimicry of styles, but that these producers would "aspire to make absolutely the same things as the King's [manufacture]."³⁶ The ramifications of such actions would be twofold. First, it would lead private manufactures to poach workers trained at the Royal Manufacture's expense in order to gain their valuable skills and stolen designs for the purpose of counterfeiting them.³⁷ More importantly, however, it was feared that even with these workers the manufacturers themselves "who have...neither the taste, not the goodness of that of the royal manufacture, will tend to discredit [the royal] manufacture in the mind of foreign nations who until now have admired it."³⁸

The emphasis in these arguments on the importance of reputation in the international market reveals a shifting understanding of the growing consumer market and its limitations. On the one hand, the defenders of privilege did worry that domestic

³⁵ AN O¹ 2059¹ Letter Fleury to d'Angiviller (4 July 1782). [a imiter, ou pour parler plus correctement à contrefaire]

³⁶ AN O¹ 2061^{2bis} Letter d'Angiviller to Calonne (24 August 1785); AN O¹ 2060¹ Letter d'Angiviller to Calonne (24 December 1783). [aspirent à faire absolument les mêmes choses que [la manufacture] du Roy]

³⁷ AN F¹² 1493¹ "Projet d'arrêt" [early 1784], "Projet d'arrêt" (January 1784).

³⁸ AN O¹ 2059¹ "Exposition et refutation des raisons alleguées contre le privilege exclusif de la manufacture royale de Sèvres de fabriquer des porcelaines dorées, peintes, etc." [c. 1780]. [qui n'ayant...ni le goût, ni la bonté de celle de la manufacture royale, tendra à discrediter cette manufacture dans l'esprit des nations étrangères qui jusqu'ici l'ont admirée]

consumers would be “cheated” by counterfeit goods.³⁹ But they also believed that the burgeoning domestic market was primarily oriented around products much more affordable than those produced by the Royal Manufacture or counterfeited by its rivals. Yet though opposed to the swindling of consumers, this concern was not sufficient to drive industrial policy. Rather, the overriding fear was that the exportation of “defective and poorly painted porcelains under the name of porcelain from France” would “discredit French porcelain.”⁴⁰ Thus, whereas the opponents of privilege argued that the luxury market within Paris had grown sufficiently large to produce a consumer class educated enough on both quality and taste to be entrusted with making purchasing decisions, proponents of privilege argued that over vast distances such knowledge could not be assumed and that regulations were therefore required to protect the reputation of French porcelain as a whole in international markets. Whereas the opponents of privilege argued that freedom of industry was necessary to meet the demands of the consumer, the proponents of privilege argued that transmitting reliable knowledge to the consumer remained a necessary step for protecting industry.

Necker’s second disagreement with the private manufacturers’ position dealt similarly with the relationship between supply and demand. In their arguments against the Royal Manufacture’s privilege on certain types of decorations, private producers claimed that they were bound by what they could sell and would thus only produce what

³⁹ AMNS A3 “Observations pour Monsieur le Lieutenant Général de Police,” [Necker] [1780], Letter Joly de Fleury to d’Angiviller (3 July 1782); AN O¹ 2059¹ Letter Fleury to d’Angiviller (4 July 1782). [trompé]

⁴⁰ AN F¹² 1493¹ “Projet d’arrêt” [early 1784]; AN O¹ 2060¹ Letter d’Angiviller [to Calonne?] [Late 1783]. [les porcelaines défectueux et malpeintes sous le nom de porcelaine de France] [discréditer la porcelaine de France]

consumers would purchase. But for Necker there remained a difference between the functioning of the market as a whole and the motivations for individual producers to seek the most *potentially* profitable market niche. Permission to compete with the Royal Manufacture would lead private manufactures to invest enormous sums in the skills, techniques, time, and materials necessary to do so, but ultimately they would never be able to match its quality and so would have to beat its prices by selling low—much lower than that which would cover their investments: “What results, if the buyers are cheated, the sellers are equally [because they] spent money in order to establish the illusion of the assimilation of their porcelains to those of the King.” Loans would follow, and a bubble of “speculations” would lead to a glut that could take down the entire industry with it.⁴¹ What Necker’s decision reveals, therefore, is a lingering doubt in the mind of officials about the power of consumer demand to effectively discipline the marketplace, about the strength of its sovereignty.

Necker’s opinion was echoed by a range of officials who feared that the balance between supply and demand was not inherently stable. By their estimation, demand for common porcelains accounted for 90 percent of the domestic market and should have offered enough opportunity to occupy the private manufacturers.⁴² But rather than compete within this broad consumer market, these officials believed, each private manufacturer would try to break into the more lucrative luxury market, “always wanting to

⁴¹ AMNS A3 “Observations pour Monsieur le Lieutenant Général de Police,” [Necker] [1780]; AN F¹² 1493¹ “Projet d’arrêt” (5 September 1780). [Qu’en résulte, si les acheteurs sont trompés, les vendeurs le sont également [because they made] de dépense pour établir l’illusion de l’assimilation de leurs porcelaines aux celles du Roy] [spéculations]

⁴² AN O¹ 2059¹ “Exposition et réfutation des raisons alléguées contre le privilege exclusif de la manufacture royale de Sèvres de fabriquer des porcelaines dorées, peintes, etc.” [c. 1780].

attempt the best...rather than sure or real profit.”⁴³ Within the luxury market, therefore, private producers were producing a “quantity of porcelain that...greatly exceeds the output that can be made,” a situation “equally damaging” for the common consumers deprived of products as for the manufacturers who would bankrupt themselves chasing after an elusive elite consumer class.⁴⁴

As the defenders of the Royal Manufacture’s privilege saw it, the porcelain market was bifurcated. Since its founding, the French porcelain industry had been framed in relation to its foreign competitors. With the establishment of European manufactures and their conquest of the luxury market, the distinction between Asian and European styles became the dividing line between a luxury market and a common market. In markets for everyday goods comprised of homogeneous commodities, competition over price drove down costs and benefitted the consumer because the market was unified and straightforward, quality being relatively fixed and price the only variable.⁴⁵ In common markets, therefore, officials were increasingly willing to accept demand as a positive market force. In the market for everyday porcelain, their policies sought to encourage “abundance in the fabrication [of] simple and practical forms, easily made, a simply agreeable appearance and a price that everyone can approach.” In the eyes of aristocratic officials, this “everyone” was comprised of “those of ignorance, of bad taste or of the greed of the greatest number of buyers.”⁴⁶ By restricting private manufactures to this market for

⁴³ AMNS A3 “Note sur la situation à la manufacture en 1783” [1783]. [qu’à de voulais toujours tenter le mieux...qu’à profit sûr ou réel]

⁴⁴ AN F¹² 1493¹ “Projet d’arrêt” (28 April 1784). [quantité de porcelaine qui...excède de beaucoup le débit qui peut s’en faire] [également nuisible]

⁴⁵ AMNS A3 Letter Joly de Fleury to d’Angiviller (12 October 1782).

⁴⁶ AN F¹² 1494¹ “Observations sur les demandes des petites manufactures,” [d’Angiviller] [1787], “Petites manufactures de porcelaine,” d’Angiviller [1786]; AN K/909/28

everyday porcelain, continuing the Royal Manufacture's privilege would ensure that they would continue to lower prices and "subjugate themselves strictly to the taste and aptitude of the greatest number of consumers."⁴⁷

The market for luxury goods, however, followed its own logic. Here the defining characteristic was that each commodity was unique. The principles of competition that operated in everyday markets did not function in luxury markets, royal officials argued, because luxury was not an everyday commodity.⁴⁸ Luxury was art. As art, "luxury demands equally meticulousness on the side of taste and richness in the work and in the execution....all the delicacy and the resources of art and an exquisite taste."⁴⁹ And, as art, the size of the public who could both afford and appreciate luxury was limited and had to be limited: "superfluity diminishes all of its magnificence."⁵⁰ Yes, the Royal Manufacture ought to serve a didactic role for the public in demonstrating perfection in technique and

"Observations sur les demandes des petites manufactures de porcelaines contre la manufacture royale," d'Ancer (29 December 1786). Interestingly, both d'Angiviller and d'Ancer use the phrase "d'ignorance" and "du mauvais goût" to describe common consumers. [l'abondance dans la fabrication [of] des formes commodes et simples, un travail facile, un coup d'œil simplement agréable et un prix dont tout le monde puisse approcher] [tout le monde] [ceux de l'ignorance, du mauvais goût ou de l'avarice du plus grand nombre d'acheteurs]

⁴⁷ AN O¹ 2060¹ "Compte rendu au Comité des finances concernant la manufacture royale des porcelaines de la France," d'Angiviller (28 August 1783). [s'assujétir strictement au goût et aux facilités du plus grand nombre des consommateurs]

⁴⁸ AN F¹² 1494¹ Letter d'Angiviller to Calonne (12 January 1787).

⁴⁹ AN K/909/28 "Observations sur les demandes des petites manufactures de porcelaines contre la manufacture royale," d'Ancer (29 December 1786); AMNS A3 Letter de Mauroy to [d'Angiviller] [Late 1783]. [ce luxe demande également la recherche du côté du goût et la richesse dans le travail et dans l'exécution....toutes les finesses et les ressources de l'art et un goût exquis]

⁵⁰ AN F¹² 1494¹ "Observations sur les demandes des petites manufactures," [d'Angiviller] [1787], "Petites manufactures de porcelaine," d'Angiviller [1786]; AMNS A2 "Mémoire" (1777); AN K/909/28 "Observations sur les demandes des petites manufactures de porcelaines contre la manufacture royale," d'Ancer (29 December 1786). Interestingly, both d'Angiviller and d'Ancer use the phrase "étoile toute sa magnificence" here. [le superflû étale toute sa magnificence]

taste.⁵¹ But, much like the princess who could not sleep atop a single pea no matter how many mattresses lay in between her and it, ultimately only “the man of a distinguished rank in society...or more often the wealthy man of exquisite taste” would be able to appreciate the mastery of Sèvres. “It is only a matter of the greatness and the majesty of the monarch who gives, of the importance of the person who receives, and always of the glory of the nation; here the [royal] manufacture has no rival.”⁵² The royal position was therefore to uphold that there were various strata in the market, and that while the demand of the masses may be capable of positively guiding the markets for common goods, they were categorically incapable of shaping the market for luxury, a market whose demand must be reserved for the aristocracy.

As may be expected, private manufacturers did not particularly agree with these assessments. In their eyes, there was but one market with countless gradations of quality and price from which all consumers made decisions. While the new privilege implemented in 1780 permitted private manufactures to expand their product lines by painting in multiple colors and gilding around the edges, the follow-up privilege passed in 1784 and strengthened in 1787 restructured the market in a new way. Citing the desire to both ensure an adequate supply of porcelain products for the public and protect against counterfeiting and speculation, these privileges did away with much of the binary market structure. In place of two markets divided between the ornate and the affordable, the new

⁵¹ AN O¹ 2060¹ “Compte rendu au Comité des finances concernant la manufacture royale des porcelaines de France,” d’Angiviller (28 August 1783).

⁵² AN K/909/28 “Observations sur les demandes des petites manufactures de porcelaines contre la manufacture royale,” d’Ancer (29 December 1786). [l’homme d’un rang distingué dans la société...ou plus souvent encore qu’à l’homme opulent et d’un gout exquis] [Il ne s’agit que de la grandeur et de la majesté du monarque qui donne, de l’importance du personnage qui recoit, et toujours de la gloire de la nation ; ici la manufacture [royale] n’a point de rivale]

market would promote “the competition of several manufactures who make porcelains at different prices.” Private manufactures would still be prohibited from undertaking large decorative pieces, and the direct “counterfeit” of Sèvres designs would remain illegal, but otherwise they would be permitted to produce at will. The one caveat was that henceforth all porcelain manufactures would have to register a distinctive “*marque*”—literally a mark or imprint and subsequently the word for “brand”—with the State and print it on the bottom of all their products.⁵³

Requiring manufactures to brand their products ushered in a new era for the French porcelain industry. The system inaugurated with the creation of the Royal Manufacture in 1760 and the privileges of 1760 and 1766 reserved for it alone the right to produce all but the most basic pieces of porcelain in order to establish a reputation for taste and quality for all French porcelain. Such a policy made sense in an era when consumer access to information was frequently limited to country of origin, especially in the international marketplace. In this situation, a privilege ensuring that all decorated porcelain originated from the Royal Manufacture in Sèvres was a simple and effective method of introducing quality controls because every piece of porcelain that reached luxury boutiques and foreign courts had its taste and quality assured by its provenance in an esteemed and reputable manufacture tied to the French Crown. Two changes in the marketplace allowed this model to be replaced by the system of *marques* in the 1780s. First, on the supply side, the establishment of a number of private producers and the demonstrated ability of many of

⁵³ AMNS A1 “Arrêt du Conseil d’État du Roi” (16 May 1784); AN F¹² 1494¹ “Projet d’arrêt, Montarou and d’Angiviller [1787]; AN F¹² 1493¹ “Arrêt du Conseil” (17 January 1787). [la concurrence de plusieurs manufactures qui les fabriquent [porcelaines] à différens prix] [contrefaire] [marque]

them to create tasteful, high-quality porcelain eased officials' fears that a flood of cheap products made in France would undermine the reputation for French porcelain that had been established at such effort and expense. Second, on the demand side, the burgeoning consumer culture of the late eighteenth-century convinced many that there existed (at least in Paris) a consumer class sufficiently well-informed to weigh quality and price for itself and make its own purchasing decisions. This was coupled with the shift in cultural authority from merchants to manufacturers that allowed product information to spread further and more cheaply, diminishing the demand-side transaction costs that slowed consumption. With the invention of the system of *marques*, consumers no longer had to evaluate the merits of each individual piece of porcelain for themselves, rely on the superior knowledge of merchants for assurance, or fall back on vague ascriptions of nation of origin. Instead, the *marque* offered a middle ground that was at once general enough to cover a collection of products yet specific enough to prevent free-rider problems.

Private porcelain manufactures immediately embraced this new system. They expressed their support for the system of *marques* and called on the police to enforce its strictures by inspecting all manufactures to ensure that they were adhering to it.⁵⁴ In the immediate, this offered them a mechanism through which to move against competition from small-scale producers working out of their own homes, who frequently decorated discarded wares from large manufactures and attempted to pass them off on consumers either without a *marque* or with a counterfeit *marque*.⁵⁵

In the longer term, however, having a system of *marques* cemented a new business

⁵⁴ AN F¹² 106 pgs 769–73 (24 and 31 January 1788); AN F¹² 107 pg 91 (3 April 1788).

⁵⁵ AN F¹² 106 782–3 (14 February 1788); AN F¹² 1494² “Jugement,” Senac de Meilhan (2 December 1787).

model in the porcelain industry. With the emergence of a discerning consumer class for decorative goods outside of the rarified and affluent corridors of Versailles, the relationship between price and quality became more complex. On the consumer market, “It is as much by the beauty, the abundance, and the assortment of its works as by the price” that a manufacture attracted consumers.⁵⁶ And attracting consumers meant sparking their imaginations with visions of luxury and esteem that required a broad palette of glittering design for which “Monochromatic painting is a style too narrow and too monotonous for one to hope to draw the taste of the public for a luxury good, so subject to the vagaries of fashion and the variations [of] taste.”⁵⁷ Instead, they needed something magnificent enough to be “capable of fixing the attention” of consumers.⁵⁸ But there was a tradeoff here, because decoration fantastic enough to lure consumers’ eyes was typically too expensive to open their purses, while the simple wares that lay within their reach also sat beneath their notice. With the introduction of the *marque*, however, this circle could be squared. By producing a few display items of elaborate decoration intended more for display than sale and bearing the *marque* of the producer, a manufacture could build its public demand. By then producing a range of simpler, more affordable wares bearing the same *marque*, the manufacture could reassure the consumer that despite the lower price these cheaper pieces flowed from the same reservoir of taste and quality that had drawn their attention to the more ornate piece. In short, the same relationship between a set of masterpieces

⁵⁶ AMNS A2 Letter Beyerlé to Bertin (18 February 1768). [C’est autant par la beauté, l’abondance, et l’assortiment de ses ouvrages que par le prix]

⁵⁷ AMNS A3 Letter Owners of Manufacture de la Reine to Le Noir [1780]. [La peinture en camayeux est un genre trop borné et trop monotone pour que l’on puisse espérer de fixer par le goût du publique pour une marchandise de luxe, si sujette au caprice de la mode et aux variations [du] goût]

⁵⁸ AN F¹² 1494¹ “Mémoire,” Dihl and Guerhard [1786]. [capable de fixer l’attention]

designed to build a reputation for quality and taste that would then inspire public trust in and demand for plainer pieces that had driven French industrial policy since 1760 could now be internalized within each individual firm.

In the decade following the introduction of the *marque*, this is precisely what private manufactures began to do. In a series of proposals written by private porcelain manufacturers and merchants in the late 1790s to advise a restructuring of the (recently renamed) National Manufacture, this new relationship becomes clear. First, it was imperative for a manufacture to “create these masterpieces of art,” with “all the brilliance and charm of novelty,” capable of creating “a spectacle of the most enticing styles” that would kindle desire among the well-to-do.⁵⁹ But demand “among the rich, the collectors and the connoisseurs of fashion,” they cautioned, could not sustain a manufacture. It had to be converted into mass demand by convincing “everyone to spend their wealth when they can do so cheaply.”⁶⁰ Thus, ultimately the successful manufacture had to “put [their porcelain] into the hands of the greatest number” “at a modest price to have sales and profits.”⁶¹ As one manufacturer summarized: “Beautiful things excite admiration, but few people are able to buy them.” “It is the sale that gives birth to the product.”⁶²

⁵⁹ AN O² 914 “Courtes observations sur la manufacture nationale des porcelaines de Seves,” Bosc (9 Floréal an VI); AN O² 916 “Projet de dépôt des manufactures nationales” [an X]. [créant ces chefs d’œuvre de l’art][tout le brillant et le charme de la nouveauté] [un spectacle sous des formes plus séduisantes]

⁶⁰ AN O² 916 “Projet de dépôt des manufactures nationales” [an X]. [entre les riches, les curieux et les amateurs de la mode] [tout le monde de rentrer la fortune lorsqu’on peut se faire à peu de frais]

⁶¹ AN O² 914 “Courtes observations sur la manufacture nationale des porcelaines de Seves,” Bosc (9 Floréal an VI); AN O² 916 “Pétition au citoyen Ministre de l’Intérieur,” Deruelle (24 Floréal an VIII). [mettant à la portée du plus grand nombre] [à un prix modique pour avoir débit et profit]

⁶² AN O² 915 Letter Blancheron to Bonaparte (c. 17 Pluviôse an VIII). [Le beau excite l’admiration, mais peu de personnes sont en état de l’acheter] [C’est la vente qui enfante le produit]

Demand-Side Pricing and Supply-Side Accounting

The extensive ramifications of the conception of consumer demand vocalized by private manufactures in the mid 1780s now became clear. Under the Old Regime conception of pricing that had been employed by the Royal Manufacture, value was an inherent quality of an object.⁶³ The first step in establishing the price of a product lay in the materials that went into it, materials that varied in quality and thus in price. Material costs were seen as contributing very little to a product's value.⁶⁴ Labor costs were seen as contributing much more of a product's value.⁶⁵ But while this may have set a reference point for the price that could be charged for a product, together labor and materials only accounted for an average of 50 percent of the value.⁶⁶ Ultimately, "Porcelain is just a white ceramic, it pulls all of its value from the beauty of its forms."⁶⁷ And because this beauty resulted from the work of artisans who, however skilled, were still humans working by hand with difficult materials and processes, it was impossible to assign blanket prices to products, especially before their completion.⁶⁸ Thus, the crucial role of the *Garde des Magasins* was to "establish a just evaluation of the porcelains put up for sale, on each of

⁶³ On the Old Regime conception of value, see: Jean-Yves Grenier, *L'économie d'Ancien Régime : Un monde de l'échange et de l'incertitude* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996) esp 60–78. I use the word "inherent" to distinguish this conception of value from "intrinsic value," according to which, while individual prices may fluctuate, in the aggregate the intrinsic value of products reflects their cost of production. *Ibid.*, 20–35; Richard Cantillon, *Essai sur la nature du commerce en général* (Paris: Institut Coppet, 2015) 29–36. See also: Jean-Yves Grenier, "Modèles de la demande sous l'Ancien Régime," *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 42, no. 3 (1987) 497–527.

⁶⁴ AN F¹² 1495² "Rapport au Comité d'agriculture et des arts de la Convention nationale" (Germinal an III).

⁶⁵ ADHV C 3005 Letter Vannier to Alluaud (13 September 1788).

⁶⁶ [[[CITATION NEEDED]]]

⁶⁷ AN F¹² 1493¹ "Mémoire" (7 July 1780). [La porcelaine n'est qu'une poterie blanche, elle tire toute sa valeur de la beauté de ses formes]

⁶⁸ AN O¹ 2061² "Du tems passé à décorer la pièce," Hettlinger (31 January 1785).

which should be attached a label indicating its sale price, a price that should be invariable and thus inspire the confidence of the buyer.” Any defective pieces were to be clearly marked, priced accordingly, and sold on site to prevent merchants from attempting to pass off defective pieces at a higher price than they were truly worth.⁶⁹ As discussed in chapter four, this insistence on setting and maintaining prices at the manufacture stemmed in part from an effort to build enduring consumer trust in the value of its products. Yet it also reflected the belief that each individual piece of porcelain had its own value, one that was related to the value of the labor and materials that went into it, but that ultimately belonged to each piece inherently and eternally. This is why the directors of the Royal Manufacture steadfastly refused to auction off unsold pieces, no matter how old, because to do so would be to admit to the consumer that the porcelain was not in fact worth what it had been valued at. And with that, all the dominoes of reputation so painstakingly put in place over the preceding half century would fall one after the other.

The concept of inherent value can best be demonstrated with a case study. On what would have been, by the Gregorian calendar, New Year’s Eve, 1797, a merchant named Honein was touring the Sèvres factory store when he accidentally toppled and shattered an enormous vase bedecked with intricate painting and extensive gilding. Under the you-break-it-you-buy-it rules of the factory store, this unfortunate head of a large family would have to pay the cost of the broken vase. The question sent to the Minister of the Interior to resolve was what should this cost be? The listed price of the vase was a staggering 1200fr,

⁶⁹ AN O² 915 “État des fonctions du garde générale des magasins,” d’Angiviller (1 April 1785). [établir une juste appréciation des porcelaines mises en vente, sur chacune desquelles doit être collée la marque indicative de son prix de vente, prix qui doit être invariable et par là inspirer la confiance de l’acheteur]

while the manufacturing cost of the vase was only 500fr. But the breaking of the vase revealed that it had “a critical fault, that of a hairline crack where it was attached to its base,” which had remained hidden at the time of its initial valuation of 1200fr. For the directors of the manufacture steeped in the Old Regime conception of inherent value, now that this fault was known, to persist in valuing it at its original price would be to “conduct a fraud on the buyer,” and thus “cheat the buyer, which is repugnant to justice and to good faith.” Thus, they suggested that the true value of the piece had it remained unbroken yet the crack known, and thus its fair price, would actually be only 300fr, less even than it had cost to make.⁷⁰ The Minister of the Interior, a stranger to such accounting and under immense pressure to right the manufacture’s finances, decided to charge poor Honein 600fr for the shattered vase—one half what it had been valued at, twice what it was revalued at, and probably most importantly a little bit more than it had cost the manufacture to produce.⁷¹

We can also see the impact of this method of thinking in the pay and accounting practices in use by the Royal Manufacture since its founding. As mentioned in chapter four, the shift from piece rates to salaries for artisans and artists was an important development when the Eloy Brichard Company was nationalized became the Royal Manufacture. It also meant that any potential link between cost of production and market price was obviated. Accounting practices employed at Sèvres used two distinct systems. On the cost side, every expense encountered by the manufacture from building, to salaries, to bonuses, to clay, to

⁷⁰ AN O² 914 Letter Hettlinger to Dubois (11 Nivôse an VI), “Rapport présenté au Ministre de l’intérieur” (16 Nivôse an VI). [un défaut capital, celui d’une fêlure arrivée lorsqu’on la fixa sur son pied] [user de supercherie envers l’acheteur] [tromper l’acheteur, ce qui répugne à la justice ou à la bonne foi]

⁷¹ AN O² 914 Letter Dubois to Salmon and Hettlinger (18 Nivôse an VI).

candles, were all calculated by department and tallied to form an annual expense report. On the income side, after each individual piece had been marked with a price, each piece sold was written down along with a brief description, the name of the purchaser, and whether it had been sold for cash or on credit. At the end of the year these sales would be added up along with any recovered credit, any royal gratifications, and any sums remaining from the previous year, and then compared against the expenses to determine whether there was a surplus or a deficit.⁷² What is crucial is that this was not a statement of profit or loss, nor could it be.

As historians of accounting have documented, this type of account keeping was quite standard in the eighteenth century. The combined weight of experience, law, and education operated to create a consensus within companies of this type to determine how accounts should be kept. First, unlike in industries like textiles that were dominated by merchants with experience of double-entry bookkeeping, the porcelain industry was more akin to metallurgical and mining industries in that it was dominated by aristocrats whose experience was with the types of charge-discharge accounting used in running their demesnes.⁷³ Second, the *Ordonnance pour le Commerce* implemented by Colbert in 1673 continued to legally require merchants and manufactures to keep specific types of account books throughout this period.⁷⁴ Perhaps most importantly, however, ever since the

⁷² AMNS F 1–36, Vf 1–65, Vy 1–24.

⁷³ Yannick Lemarchand, "Double Entry versus Charge and Discharge Accounting in Eighteenth-Century France," *Accounting, Business & Financial History* 4, no. 1 (1994) 119–45; *idem.*, *Du dépérissement à l'amortissement : Enquête sur l'histoire d'un concept et de sa traduction comptable* (Nantes: Ouest Éditions, 1993) 70–80, 142–60.

⁷⁴ *Ordonnance de Louis XIV, Roy de France et de Navarre, Pour le Commerce*, new ed. (Paris: 1709) 12–7; Stanley E Howard, "Public Rules for Private Accounting in France, 1673–1807," *Accounting Review* 7, no. 2 (1932) 91–102; Richard C Baker and Bertrand P Quéré, "Historical Innovations in the Regulation of Business and Accounting Practices: A

publication of the first edition of Jacques Savary's *Le parfait négociant* in 1675 and its many subsequent editions, his comprehensive system of nine separate account books continued to be influential.⁷⁵ In fact, even at the dawn of the Revolution over a century later, the directors of the Royal Manufacture in Limoges followed his model account books to the letter.⁷⁶ And the surviving account books of the Duke of Orléans's porcelain manufactures also used several of the categories suggested by Savary and kept separate ledgers for money spent and money received.⁷⁷

Although much has been made about the importance of double-entry bookkeeping for the rationalization of capitalist business practices and their centrality in the calculation of profit, such calculations were not really a factor for eighteenth-century businesses regardless of which accounting methods they used. While double-entry bookkeeping does make possible profit calculations, it does not make such calculations automatically. Indeed, most merchants who kept double-entry accounts did not routinely balance them, nor did they use them to evaluate gain against capital. Rather, these accounts served as ledgers of credit, both financial and personal, that expressed the position of the merchant externally rather than providing a tool of analysis of his or her condition internally.⁷⁸

Comparison of Absolutism and Liberal Democracy," *Accounting History* 20, no. 3 (2015) 250–65.

⁷⁵ Jacques Savary, *Le parfait négociant, ou instruction générale pour ce qui regarde le commerce des marchandises de France, & des Pays Étrangers* (Paris: Frères Estienne, 1777) I:272–307.

⁷⁶ ADHV C 2991–3001.

⁷⁷ AdP D⁵B⁶ 126 (26 June 1786–6 March 1789), 433 (11 July 1786–31 March 1789), 3298 (1786–1789), 762 [1786–1789].

⁷⁸ Basil S Yamey, "Scientific Bookkeeping and the Rise of Capitalism," *Economic History Review*, new series 1, no. 2/3 (1949) 99–113; *idem.*, "The 'Particular Gain or Loss upon Each Article We Deal In': An Aspect of Mercantile Accounting," *Accounting, Business & Financial History* 10, no. 1 (March 2000) 1–12; Pierre Jeannin, *Marchands d'Europe : Pratiques et savoirs à l'époque moderne* (Paris: Éditions ENS, 2002) 4–5–18; Yannick Lemarchand,

Accountants at Sèvres saw their system as being akin to that employed by merchants: the presence of overlapping circulations of various durations meant that “each day it sells, each day it pays and buys.”⁷⁹ Thus, the purpose of their accounting was to keep track of money coming in and money going out to ensure that there was always enough to meet ongoing expenses. Indeed, under a concept of inherent value, this is all that could be done.

Under the neoclassical economic model, markets tend toward an equilibrium point at which the market will clear, which is to say that buyers and sellers will settle on a price at which all goods are sold. But within this model there exist different temporalities, ranging from the immediate to the very long run, with the distinguishing characteristic of each time period being the ability of producers to adjust supply to best meet the demand price at the highest point of profit.⁸⁰ Under the ideas about value in place at the Royal Manufacture, however, such adjustments were not possible. Each piece of porcelain was assayed at its inherent and fixed value. To reduce its price would be to deny that value. This left room for efforts to convince consumers that the listed price was in fact a fair reflection of that value, but not to lower price as a method of luring them in. This is why, whether

Cheryl McWatters, and Laure Pineau-Defois, “The Current Account as Cognitive Artefact: Stories and Accounts of *La Maison Chaurand*,” in *Merchants and Profit in the Age of Commerce, 1680–1830*, eds. Pierre Gervais, Yannick Lemarchand, and Dominique Margairaz, trans. Darla-Rudy Gervais (Brookfield, VY: Pickering & Chatto, 2014) 13–31; Pierre Gervais, “Why Profit and Loss Didn’t Matter: The Historicized Rationality of Early Modern Merchant Accounting,” in *Merchants and Profit*, 33–52.

⁷⁹ AN O² 914 Letter Salmon and Hettlinger to Dubois (20 Frimaire an IV). [chaque jour elle vend, chaque jour elle paye et achète]

⁸⁰ Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 323–80. This portrayal emphasizes the conception of consumer demand as a necessary precondition for the distinctive temporality of capitalism. See: William H Sewell, jr, “The Temporalities of Capitalism,” *Socio-Economic Review* 6 (2008) 517–37; Jonathan Levy, “Accounting for Profit and the History of Capital,” *Critical Historical Studies* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2014) 171–214.

during booms or busts in consumer demand, the price of Sèvres porcelain stayed the same. What changed was quantity sold, something that again could be remedied by marketing and distribution, but not by adjusting price.

Similarly, on the expenses side of the equation, production cost what it cost. Workers were paid what they were worth as a reflection of their skill and seniority, the materials used were necessary and similarly came at their fair price, and management was paid what it deserved. In any case, the costs of these inputs did not directly determine the value of the finished product, which was independent and individual even if partially related in the abstract. Expenses were therefore fixed and ongoing while income fluctuated according to the willingness of consumers to pay the products' inherent values. Thus, an annual comparison of income and outflow that aimed above all to assess solvency was all that could be done.

The financial challenges that began in 1780 put pressure on the Royal Manufacture's management to change this system, however. Since its founding, the company had struggled to "establish order" in accounting for expenses in such a complex firm operating with hundreds of employees in multiple workshops as pieces transferred from one to the other on their way to completion.⁸¹ Yet despite these efforts, audits revealed that few records were systematically saved in these early years and that miscalculations bedeviled the bottom line as some workers were occasionally paid double and others not paid at all—even the director once missed a whole year's paycheck.⁸² In a sense, this all came to a head

⁸¹ AMNS B1 "Projet de régie" [1746]. [établir l'ordre]

⁸² AMNS B5 "Procès verbal de la vérification de la caisse," de Mauroy and Boileau (24 September 1770), "Procès verbaux," Guyot and Bahot (4 June 1774); AMNS B3 Letter d'Angivillers to de Mauroy (December 1781), Letter d'Angiviller (7 May 1782).

in 1780 when Roger, the accountant at Sèvres, was imprisoned to atone for the Royal Manufacture's losses. Roger's defense was that he had inherited from his predecessor a mess of incomplete records and that he had merely kept the accounts and followed orders as management spent substantially more than it brought in, culminating in a 240,000lt budget shortfall by the end of 1779.⁸³ The court judgment, however, was that "as the result of his accounting there is a gap in his accounts, he has been reasonably condemned to repay it."⁸⁴ Lacking access to such an enormous sum, Roger languished in prison for three years before his family could sell their home and convince the king to accept a sixty thousand-livre settlement to secure his release.⁸⁵

As this saga demonstrates, proper accounting was seen as the key to fiscal viability for a company. Yet given the use of running accounts for tracking expenses and income and the belief in inherent value, efforts to right the ship could only founder. And these doomed efforts intensified following the economic disaster of the Revolution. Now, with the National Manufacture hemorrhaging red ink and the State intent on covering its losses, plan after plan came forward to bring "good order, savings, and the greatest prospects."⁸⁶ The hope was to transform the National Manufacture from a drain on the Republic's coffers into a source of profit. But how was this to be done?

The answer embraced by both the manufacture's managers and the nation's

⁸³ AMNS B6 Letter Roger [1780].

⁸⁴ AMNS B6 "Mémoire," Roger [mid 1780]. [par le résultat de sa comptabilité se trouvant un vuide dans sa caisse, il a été condamné valablement à l'y rétablir]

⁸⁵ AMNS B6 "Projet d'acte" (August 1783), Letter d'Angy to [de Mauroy] (30 August 1783), "Pardevant" to d'Angiviller [October 1784], Letter d'Angiviller to de Mauroy (20 January 1785).

⁸⁶ ADHV C 3010 "Règlement provisoire pour la manufacture royale des porcelaines de Limoges et instructions sur sa direction" (20 April 1788). [le bon ordre, l'économie et la plus grande débouché]

ministers was that proper supervision and accounting would suffice. According to the would-be reformers, the problem was that Sèvres had been established at a time when it did not need to “calculate expenses.”⁸⁷ But that time had passed. Now, the faith that “a more economical and better directed administration” would magically produce profits was waved like a talisman in front of the project.⁸⁸

The new organizational system reinforced and further divided the existing hierarchy at the manufacture. Under the watchwords of “administration,” “order,” and “savings,” the workforce was divided into fourteen units: “separate the masses and divide them up, to bring light and order.”⁸⁹ Each unit would be headed by a workshop chief responsible for maintaining detailed daily records and reports on expenses, consumption, production, prices, labor—any and everything that could be measured was to be measured.⁹⁰ At the top, a new managerial triumvirate would conduct this lumbering orchestra: “In a word there will be inspection and general surveillance of the manufacture, reporting to the higher authority who will approve any expense whatever, and that alone will be able to authorize any type of change, and to approve the various requests.”⁹¹ The

⁸⁷ AN F¹² 1460 Letter Gillet to Minister of Interior (23 Nivôse an II). [calculer les dépenses]

⁸⁸ AN F¹² 1460 “Observations sur les dépenses relatives à l’ordre des batimens nationaux et à l’administration des établissements” [an II]; AN O¹ 2061² Letter Hettlinger to d’Angiviller (22 July 1785); AMNS A1 “Arrêt d’Angivillers” (31 December 1782). [une administration plus économique et mieux diriger]

⁸⁹ AN F¹² 1460 Letter Minister of Interior to Gillet (Nivôse an II). [administration] [ordre] [économie] [diviser des masses et les amorceler, pour y porter la lumière et l’ordre]

⁹⁰ AN F¹² 1495¹ “Plan d’organisation intérieur de la manufacture nationale des porcelaines” [Ventôse an III].

⁹¹ AN F¹² 1495¹ “Le directeur, ses fonctions, ses pouvoirs,” Salmon (15 Brumaire an III), “Arrêt du Comité d’agriculture et des arts” (13 Pluviôse an III). [Il auroit en un mot l’inspection et la surveillance générale de la manufacture, en rendant compte à l’autorité supérieure qui ordonnoit toutes dépense quelconques, et pouroit seule autoriser toute espèce de changement, et valider les diverses demandes]

apparent intent of this system was to reduce expenses by reducing waste through closer supervision of the production process, with detailed accounts providing a microscopic lens through which to identify and target waste and fraud.

An important element of this organizational system was a changed relationship between the manufacture and its workforce. In order to close the gap between costs and income, management directed its scrupulous attention toward the workers themselves. “Order” and “subordination” were the keys.⁹² Each worker would be tracked, every effort tallied, every cost noted, and every piece of training or venting of frustration diligently entered into his record. The goal? “The acceleration of labor and savings in the costs of production.”⁹³ And it was explicitly to this end that a rigid time structure was implemented, its indefatigable march to be marked by the sounding of a new clock erected at the manufacture, its insistent chime warning that the gates were about to be locked, and laggards to lose a day’s pay.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, the workdays and the workweeks grew longer and longer even as pay fell further and further behind inflation.

⁹² AN O¹ 2062² “Plan pour l’administration de la manufacture” (13 October 1787). [ordre] [subordination]

⁹³ AMNS A5 “Règlement pour la manufacture nationale des porcelaines de Sèvres” (14 Prairial an III). Accounting historian Rob Bryer in particular has emphasized the connections between cost accounting and labor control during the transition to capitalism from a Marxist perspective. See: Rob Bryer, “The History of Accounting and the Transition to Capitalism in England. Part One: Theory,” *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 25 (2000) 131–62; *idem.*, “The History of Accounting and the Transition to Capitalism in England. Part Two: Evidence,” *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 25 (2000) 327–81; *idem.*, “Capitalist Accountability and the British Industrial Revolution: The Carron Company, 1759–circa. 1850,” *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 31 (2006) 687–734; *idem.*, “Accounting and Control of the Labour Process,” *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 17 (2006) 551–98. [L’accélération du travail et à l’économie des frais d’exécution]

⁹⁴ AN O¹ 2061^{2bis} “Mémoire de Grémond pour réparations à l’horloge de Sèvres” (1785); AMNS B4 “Règlement des ateliers des fours” [an III], “Règlement pour les ateliers de la manufacture nationale des porcelaines de Sèvres” (28 Brumaire an VIII).

In the proposals submitted to the National Manufacture by private producers, we see that cost accounting was directly linked to labor control. They counseled not only for the need to sell its products at the price consumers were willing to pay, but to adjust the costs of production in response to that price. This meant paying workers piece rates based on the market value of what they made and “firing the workers without talent nor intelligence.”⁹⁵ Looking glowingly to Wedgwood—whose efforts at cost accounting and labor control Neil McKendrick has documented—one manufacturer wrote: “It’s by the division of labor and the wise use of time that great manufactures prosper.”⁹⁶

The National Manufacture’s experiment in cost accounting fit within a broader trend at the time. The practice of cost accounting itself only emerged with the vertical integration of industry as managers have to find ways to assign prices to internally exchanged products.⁹⁷ As vertically integrated firms became more common in Britain and France during the final decades of the eighteenth century, managers here reacted to a range of financial pressures by attempting to calculate and minimize their internal costs, although these early efforts were ad hoc practices adopted and abandoned following the fortunes of the market.⁹⁸ The earliest publications on and systematic implementations of cost

⁹⁵ AN O² 916 “Pétition au Citoyen Ministre de l’Intérieur,” Deruelle (24 Floréal an VIII); AN O² 915 Letter Blancheron to Bonaparte (c. 17 Pluviôse an VIII). [supprimer les ouvriers sans talent n’y intelligence]

⁹⁶ AN O² 914 “Courtes observations sur la manufacture nationale des porcelaines de Seves,” Bosc (9 Floréal an VI). [C’est par la division du travail et le sage emploi du tems que les grandes manufactures prospèrent]

⁹⁷ H Thomas Johnson and Robert S Kaplan, *Relevance Lost: The Rise and Fall of Management Accounting* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1987) 1–46; Margaret Levenstein, *Accounting for Growth: Information Systems and the Creation of the Large Corporation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998) 20–39.

⁹⁸ Neil McKendrick, “Josiah Wedgwood and Cost Accounting in the Industrial Revolution,” *Economic History Review* 23, no. 1 (April 1970) 45–67; Haydn Jones, *Accounting, Costing and Cost Estimation. Welsh Industry: 1700–1830* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1985);

accounting quickly followed.⁹⁹

Yet despite this effort at cost accounting, the Royal Manufacture could not stop losing money, much less turn a profit for the expectant Republic. In a 1780 memoire written to the manufacture, a critic agreed with contemporary wisdom that “The [administration’s] errors, the administration’s vices and the accounting abuses, are the sole causes of the enormous expenses of the porcelain manufacture of Sèvres.” For the memoire’s author, however, the failure of accounting did not stem from an insufficient number of records or a lack of worker controls, though either may have been tangentially true. The true problem lay in *how* the accounting was done: “No order records the intrinsic value of the objects manufactured, so their valuation is made at random. One piece ends up less than it cost, while others are assessed at twenty times their real value, which causes the greatest harm to consumption.”¹⁰⁰ In the conclusion to this sentence is revealed precisely what the author meant by “the real value.” Having already rejected the notion of

John Richard Edwards, “Industrial Cost Accounting Developments in Britain to 1830: A Review Article,” *Accounting and Business Research* 19, no. 76 (1989) 305–17; John Richard Edwards and Edmund Newell, “The Development of Industrial Cost and Management Accounting before 1850: A Survey of the Evidence,” *Business History* 33, no. 1 (1991) 33–57; Sidney Pollard, *The Genesis of Modern Management: A Study of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 1993) 209–49; Richard K Fleischman and Thomas N Tyson, “Cost Accounting during the Industrial Revolution: The Present State of Historical Knowledge,” *Economic History Review*, new series 46, no. 3 (August 1993) 503–17.

⁹⁹ RS Edwards, “A Survey of French Contributions to the Study of Cost Accounting during the 19th Century,” *The Accountant*, supp. (June 1937) 1–36; Marc Nikitin, “Setting Up an Industrial Accounting System at Saint-Gobin (1820–1880),” *Accounting Historians Journal* 17, no. 2 (1990) 73–93; Trevor Boyns, John Richard Edwards, and Marc Nikitin, “Comptabilité et révolution industrielle : une comparaison Grande-Bretagne/France,” *Comptabilité. Contrôle. Audit* 2, no. 1 (March 1996) 5–20.

¹⁰⁰ AMNS B3 “Mémoire,” *Le Champ* (6 August 1780). [Les erreurs [de l’administration], les vices de l’administration et les abus de la comptabilité, sont les seules causes des dépenses énormes de la manufacture de porcelaine de Sèvres] [Aucun ordre ne constate la valeur intrinsèque des objets manufacturés, aussi leur estimation est-elle faite au hasard. Telle pièce est venue moins qu’elle n’a coûté, tandis que d’autres sont évaluées vingt fois leur valeur réelle, cequi fait le plus grand tort à la consommation]

an inherent value that existed without direct reference to the cost of production, he states that a product not at its “real value” is one that fails to sell. Implicitly, in place of an arbitrary value asserted by officials at the manufacture, “the real value” would be one that would permit consumption. In other words, “the real value” was the price consumers were willing to pay.

This same argument appears in the collection of proposals submitted by private merchants and manufacturers to salvage Sèvres at the end of the Revolutionary decade. The prices charged by the National Manufacture, they said, were simply out of step with those charged by their competition or willing to be paid by consumers. According to one merchant, the failure to sell reflected the truth that the manufacture had “put between this and other [manufactures] such a large difference in price that it drives away buyers and completely paralyzes sales.”¹⁰¹ One manufacturer suggested that it “should offer [its porcelain] at the same price as the other manufactures if it doesn’t offer them cheaper,” and that even if this entailed a loss it would be a “useful speculation” because “it would be enough to have tidy and visible merchandise, and that it was cheap.”¹⁰² Another manufacturer went even further, suggesting that anything that did not sell immediately should have its price cut in half, “and above all not neglecting to manufacture and decorate with taste at a modest price to have turnover and profit.”¹⁰³ Thus, if the National

¹⁰¹ AN O² 916 “Projet de dépôt des manufactures nationales” [an X]. [mettre entre celle c’y et les autres [manufactures] une si grande différence de prix qu’elle éloigne les acquéreurs et paralyse tout à fait les ventes]

¹⁰² AN O² 915 Letter Blancheron to Bonaparte (c. 17 Pluviôse an VIII). [doit donner [sa porcelaine] au même prix que les autres manufactures si elle ne donne à meilleur compte] [spéculation utile] [il suffiroit d’avoir de la marchandise soignée et bien apparente, et qu’elle fut à bon marché]

¹⁰³ AN O² 916 “Pétition au Citoyen Ministre de l’Intérieur,” Deruelle (24 Floréal an VIII). [et surtout en ne négligeant point de fabriquer et décorer avec goût à un prix modique pour avoir débit et profit]

Manufacture was to survive, it would have to adapt itself to the realities of the market by selling what consumers were willing to buy and at the price they were willing to buy it. In short, it was time for the National Manufacture to recognize the consumer as sovereign.

To do so would be to renounce the Old Regime principle of value that had underpinned the manufacture since its founding. Yet even by the time these private citizens made their recommendations, this is exactly what Sèvres had started to do. Under the immense pressure of the economic reality of the Revolution and the unwillingness of the State to shoulder the burden of a manufacture whose very existence was anathema to the principles of the Republic, as early as 1793 the directors considered a new course of action.

As the Royal Manufacture in Limoges tottered toward collapse at the beginning of the Revolution, reports came in from various merchants that it was no longer tenable to maintain the established prices. In order to clear the few items remaining in the boutiques, the merchants would have to mark down prices by 50 or even 60 percent, and even then feared some would be “objects that remain maybe forever.”¹⁰⁴ Within months the Royal Manufacture in Sèvres was forced to follow suit. Working through a prestigious merchant on rue St Honoré in Paris, management agreed to allow a one-time auction in order to clear out some of the mounting backstock overwhelming the manufacture’s warehouses. Yet this was still a limited relaxation of the idea of inherent value, being confined to “scraps,” old, and mismatched pieces that prevented “the possibility of a placement equal to the price that they have been [marked] at for many years.”¹⁰⁵ The results were less spectacular than

¹⁰⁴ ADHV C 3004 Letter Mme Denis to Alluaud (6 September 1792). [bien désassorti] [objets qui restent peut-être toujours]

¹⁰⁵ AN O² 913 Letter Regnier to Minister of Interior (25 April 1793). [rebut] [la possibilité d’un placement égal aux prix auxquels elle était [marked] depuis nombres d’années]

had been hoped and make plain the problems of the Old Regime conception of value. In total, the pieces sold at auction went for half the price they had been valued at.¹⁰⁶ Yet even at this price some of the pieces raked a profit, some sold at a minor loss, and others went for only a fraction of their manufacturing cost.¹⁰⁷ There was, in other words, little correlation between marked price, market price, and manufacturing cost.

Management at Sèvres resisted further auctions out of fear that doing so would undermine the manufacture's reputation and create an expectation of future deals among consumers. But by the end of the Revolutionary decade the National Manufacture was still drowning in an ocean of red ink as debts mounted and sales languished. Thus, the new director determined, it was finally time to accept the realities of consumer-determined pricing. Henceforth, the National Manufacture would adjust its prices every six months "according to the flow of the porcelains. I am convinced like all merchants that the commerce of a manufacture cannot gain with eternally fixed prices."¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, such revaluation was to be done not just for the rebut or old pieces, but for anything that failed to sell at the marked price.¹⁰⁹

"The Best Capitalist"

During the 1790s, a new shape began to emerge within the porcelain industry. Previously, it had been divided between those manufactures producing for the luxury

¹⁰⁶ AN O² 913 "Bordereau de la vente des porcelaines de la manufacture nationale de Sèvres," Barrau (19 April 1793), "Porcelaines retirés du magasin Laguerre et Lignereaux pour être vendues par huissier" (25 April 1793).

¹⁰⁷ AN O² 913 Letter Regnier to Minister of Interior (7 April 1793).

¹⁰⁸ AN O² 916 Letter Brogniart to Minister of Interior (6 Brumaire an IX). [selon le courant des porcelaines. Je suis convaincu comme tout les négociants que le commerce d'une manufacture ne peut se concilier avec des prix éternellement fixes]

¹⁰⁹ AN O² 916 Letter Brogniart to Minister of Interior (21 Ventôse an X).

market and those producing for the mass market. But with the ending of the royal privilege and the opening of the consumer market to all during the Revolution, the more salient division came to be between those producing for the sustenance of workers and those producing for the profit of capitalists.

The economic downturn that both preempted and wallowed in the wake of the Revolution revealed a range of approaches to business in the porcelain industry. On the one hand were those manufactures run with a commitment to the wellbeing of their workers. Personal and professional letters between François Alluaud, the director of the Royal Manufacture in Limoges, and several private porcelain manufacturers reveal a deep commitment to providing for their workers in these difficult times. Alluaud personally spent over sixty-four thousand livres to keep the manufacture in Limoges from shuttering under his watch, lent forty-five thousand livres more to one competitor running a factory in Paris, and advanced the raw materials necessary to keep another Parisian manufacture operating as well.¹¹⁰ The express purpose of these loans was to answer the workers' just demands for bread because "the workers must be kept from suffering."¹¹¹ At the same time, Alluaud partnered with the two other largest porcelain producers in Limoges to put together a public subscription from the city's well-to-do to purchase grain for the public granary and together oversee the secure purchase of and delivery of grain for it.¹¹²

As the situation for the National Manufacture in Limoges continued to deteriorate

¹¹⁰ [[[Need Limoges debt data]]] ADHV L 1200 "Reçu du Citoyen Chevailler" [25 Floréal an III], Letter Bernard, Lefebvre, Hebert and Co to Alluaud (11 Brumaire an IV).

¹¹¹ ADHV L 1200 Letter Chevailler to Alluaud (28 Thermidor an III), Letter Alluaud to Chevailler (12 Messidor an III). [il faudra bien empêcher les ouvriers de souffrir]

¹¹² AMLimoges ID 3 Délibérations du Conseil Municipal (14 March 1792), (24 March 1792); AM Limoges ID 4 Délibérations du Conseil Municipal (27 August 1792).

and the potential of any future profitability was cast in doubt, the workers there revived the possibility that they simply run the factory themselves.¹¹³ Nor were they the only workers to propose such a solution amidst the malaise in manufacturing. At Sèvres as well the workers attempted to assert greater control over the manufacturing process. Already possessing the tacit knowledge of porcelain manufacture won through years of dedicated labor, in 1792 they temporarily seized a vault they believed held notebooks containing the scientific secrets of porcelain production.¹¹⁴ This was for them a symbolic move meant to assert their place rather than result in any practical gain.¹¹⁵ Two years later, inspired in part by Jacobin sympathies, workers there demanded the right to form a representative body and elect from within their own ranks the manufacture's management.¹¹⁶ It is little surprise that the radical Assemblyman Jean-César Battelier attempted at the same time to remove the company's entire administration, calling the position of accountant in particular "an object of luxury."¹¹⁷

Yet while such attempts at worker control were not unique, they ran counter to the general liberalism of the era. At the heart of the issue was the distinction between businesses run for workers and those run for profit. The prefect of the Vendée, for instance, elaborated on his repeated efforts to found a porcelain industry within his department

¹¹³ AN F¹² 1496² Letter Prétat to Minister of Interior (2 July 1793); AN O¹ 2063 Letter Workers to Administration de Département de la Haute Vienne (22 Prairial an IV).

¹¹⁴ AN F¹² 1496¹ Letter Caron to Faipoult (2 February 1793), Letter Regnier to [Faipoult] (11 February 1793), Letter Hettlinger to [Faipoult] (13 February 1793), "Extrait du procès verbal de levé des scellés et triage des papiers" (3 April 1793).

¹¹⁵ AN F¹² 1496¹ Letter Caron to [Faipoult] (17 February 1793).

¹¹⁶ AN F¹² 1496¹ Letter Le Riche and Gerard to Commission d'Agriculture, Arts et Manufactures (18 Vendémiaire an III); AN F¹² 1495¹ Letter Chalot to Comité d'Agriculture et des Arts (25 Thermidor an III).

¹¹⁷ AN O² 913 Letter Barrau to Minister of Interior (18 October 1793). [un objet de luxe]

throughout the Revolution. He had succeeded in creating a number of small ceramics manufactures—manufactures that, given his description, would likely have been workshops run by artisans. He had failed, however, to “interest any capitalists in this enterprise; the trade of money offers them a more lucrative employment of their funds.”¹¹⁸ Here we see several implicit assumptions being made. First, that the path to industrial success lay in attracting investments from “capitalists.” Second, that capitalist investments flowed to wherever profits were highest—whether Parisian money markets or Vendéen pottery production—without regard for personal ties to any particular industry or place. Finally, that capitalists were also defined in contradistinction to what they were not: workshops run by workers. The differentiation drawn between capitalists and workers is evident in a letter written by the owner of a Bordeaux porcelain manufacture who had liquidated his holdings and shifted them into a different industry: “I consider that these enterprises should only be done by workers who work for themselves and who make use of everything, whereas they would ruin the best capitalist.”¹¹⁹

And it was clear that for the Revolutionary State production by capitalists was always preferable to that undertaken by workers. Thus, despite departmental approval of the plan to turn the National Manufacture in Limoges over to its workers, the government in Paris insisted that it be instead sold to a private buyer.¹²⁰ “The only way to revive the

¹¹⁸ AN O² 916 Letter Secretary General of Prefecture of Vendée to Minister of Interior (29 Thermidor an X). [intéresser des capitalistes à cette entreprise ; le commerce de l'argent leur offrait un emploi plus lucratif de leur fonds] [Je regarde que ces entreprises ne doivent être faite que par des ouvriers qui travaillent eux mêmes et qui tirent parti de tout, tandis qu'ils ruineroient le meilleur capitaliste]

¹¹⁹ ADHV L 1246 Letter Bertrand to Alluau (3 Pluviôse an V).

¹²⁰ AN O¹ 2063 “Rapport au Ministre de l'Intérieur,” Meyer (9 Ventôse an IV), Letter Minister of Interior to Central Administration of Département de la Haute Vienne (26 Messidor an IV). In fact, multiple offers to buy or rent the manufacture had already been

manufacture of Limoges,” they concluded, “was to turn it over to industry and to private interest.”¹²¹ Parallel to this opposition to worker ownership was opposition to state ownership. In decisions sent from the Bureau of Arts in Paris, Revolutionary bureaucrats stated that “It is well demonstrated by experience that the government should no longer think of administrating the national manufactures for its own account. The administrator will never put into his job the zeal and the energy that the private interest of the owner and the operator demands of him.”¹²² In fact, they argued, “the administration [of the State...] is an irremediable obstacle to the progress of the manufactures.”¹²³

A similar logic was extended to the National Manufacture in Sèvres as well. In 1792, the manufacture was both nationalized and stripped of its monopoly privileges. Arguments continued to come from its directors about the unique function in the national industry filled by the state-owned factory, an argument not entirely lost on its bureaucratic benefactors. But this function was increasingly separated out from its operation as a business. As the director of the manufacture wrote in 1793, there were three paths forward for Sèvres. The first would be to turn control over to the workers themselves, though he left little doubt that their leadership could never attain prosperity. The second would be to render it a profitable enterprise, but he believed that given the absence of a functioning

made: AN O¹ 2063 Letter Deruelle to Commission des Arts et Manufacture (21 Brumaire an III), Letter Meyer to Minister of Interior (16 Nivôse an IV).

¹²¹ AN O¹ 2063 Letter Minister of Interior to Guineau (3 Thermidor an IV), Recommendation of Conseil des Arts et Manufactures (26 Floréal an IV). [Le seul moyen de relever la manufacture de Limoges] [était de la livrer à l'industrie et à l'intérêt particulière]

¹²² AN O¹ 2063 Letter Bureau des Arts to Meyer (Pluviôse an IV). [Il est bien démontré par l'expérience que le gouvernement ne doit plus songer à faire administrer pour son compte les manufactures nationales. L'administrateur ne mettra jamais dans ses fonctions le zèle et l'activité que l'intérêt particulier du propriétaire et du fermier commande de lui]

¹²³ AN O¹ 2063 Letter Bureau des Arts to Minister of Finances (4 Floréal an IV). [les administrations [of the State...] font un obstacle irrémédiable au progrès des manufactures]

luxury market this would require moving to a place with cheap labor and producing modest pieces for a mass market, primarily exports. Third, the manufacture could reestablish itself as “the academy of art, and the nursery of good workers” by refashioning itself along the lines of a museum or state school to train only the best artists, aiming to cover its own costs but at a much smaller scale.¹²⁴ What is notable here is that each of these three paths was presented as distinct from the others: the National Manufacture could either be run by and for the workers, it could become profitable by pursuing a lower market, or it could train artists as an academy, but it could not do all three or even any two of these.

The liberalizing bent of the government here conflicted with its populist roots. It was politically untenable to deprive the manufacture’s three hundred workers of their jobs or leave their fates up to the vagaries of the market. Thus, until well into the period of the Consulate the workers were kept fully employed even as the warehouses filled, and even if their pay was frequently in arrears by months if not years they were assured a daily ration of bread and meat for them and their families.¹²⁵ But such ongoing aid could be further justified by the manufacture’s new position in the porcelain industry. Henceforth, while theoretically expected to cover its own costs although in practice granted regular state assistance, “it becomes a national school of porcelain...where taste will be preserved in all of its purity...[and where it would train artists] who would spread into the other

¹²⁴ AN F¹² 1496¹ “Notes sur la manufacture nationale de Sèvres,” Hettlinger (24 May 1793). [l’académie de l’art, et la pépinière des bons ouvriers]

¹²⁵ AMNS A5 “Extrait du registre des arrêts du Comité de Salut Publique de la Convention Nationale” (24 Messidor an III), “Extrait des registres du Directoire Exécutif” (3 Thermidor an IV), “Arrêté du Comité du Salut Publique” (1 Brumaire an IV); AN O² 913 Letter Salmon and Hettlinger to Dubois (10 Germinal an V). [[[Continue through an X]]]

manufactures, bringing their precious knowledge and skills.”¹²⁶

As a member of the National Manufacture’s management summed up its new role, “we should consider the manufacture and its commercial role...not as market-oriented and self-interested...that its goal was not profit...but general usefulness.” He described a direct opposition between the manufacture’s place as an institute of artistic education and that of the merchant, driven by “speculation” and who has “no other goal but profit, no other orientation but [self] interest.”¹²⁷ For proponents of liberalization, however, the private manufacturers’ pursuit of profit through cost savings and obedience to consumer demand was the real success; the National Manufacture’s lofty aspirations of shaping the industry were the “speculation.”¹²⁸ The best capitalist, therefore, was the one that took prices, managed costs, and made profits.

The importance of cost accounting has long been recognized as central to capitalist profitability. In the earliest two manuals of cost accounting, it is clear that it is the difference between income received and amount spent that forms profit. In this sense, profit can only be realized by taking the outcome of market sales and accounting for the internal costs of production.¹²⁹ And such eminent luminaries of economic history as Max

¹²⁶ AN F¹² 1495¹ “Rapport au Comité d’Agriculture et des Arts de la Convention Nationale” (7 Pluviôse an III); AN O² 914 “Apperçu des fonds nécessaires au Bureau des Arts et Manufactures pour les dépenses de l’an sept” (12 Floréal an VI). [il devient une école nationale de porcelaine...ou le goût y soit conservé dans toute sa pureté...[and where it would train artists] qui se repandent dans les autres manufactures, y portent des connaissances et des pratiques précieuses]

¹²⁷ AN F¹² 1495¹ Letter Salmon to Besson (1 Frimaire an III). [on doit considérer la manufacture et son œuvre commercial...non en marchands et mercantile....que son but ne fut pas le profit...mais l’utilité générale] [spéculation] [d’autre but que le profit, d’autre tendance que l’intérêt]

¹²⁸ AN O¹ 2061⁸ “Mémoire sur l’arrangement financier” (February 1791).

¹²⁹ MS Boulard, *Le manuel de l’imprimeur, ouvrage utile à tous ceux qui veulent connaître les détails des ustensiles des prix, de la manutention de cet Art intéressant, & à quiconque veut lever une imprimerie* (Paris: Boulard, 1791), 70–80, 94; Payen, *Essai sur la tenue des livres d’un manufacturier* (Paris: Johanneau, Bailleul, & Payen, 1817) esp 35.

Weber, Werner Sombart, and Joseph Schumpeter have long presented accounting as a key indicator of the rationalization of production and thus as central to narratives of capitalist growth.¹³⁰ Yet a subtle and perhaps obvious element of Weber's original argument has been subsequently lost, that rational capitalist activity presupposes the existence of a consumer market. Rational decisions about production, according to Weber, require first a "budget" set by the anticipated market price.¹³¹ This means that "profitability depends on the prices which the 'consumers'...can and will pay," and that "rational money-accounting presupposes the existence of effective prices and not merely of fictitious prices."¹³² In short, for Weber: no consumer culture, no capitalism.

The significance of consumption for industrial production was not lost on commentators of the late eighteenth century. It is no coincidence that the very first manual on cost accounting began with an impassioned speech in favor of the liberty of commerce.¹³³ This is because, as state inspector and Girondist leader Roland de la Platière put it: "The merchant's demand, the samples he presents, the price he offers: *voilà* the rule of the producer. The business of the first is to study the taste of the consumer; that of the

¹³⁰ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff et al (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968) I:82–108; *idem.*, *General Economic History*, trans. Frank H Knight (New York: Greenberg Press, 1927) esp 275–8; Werner Sombart, "Medieval and Modern Commercial Enterprise," in *Enterprise and Secular Change: Readings in Economic History*, eds. Frederic C Lane and Jelle C Riemersma (Homewood, IL: Richard D Irwin, 1953) 37–40; Joseph A Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942) 122–4. For recent reconsiderations of these works, see: Bruce G Carruthers and Wendy Nelson Espeland, "Accounting for Rationality: Double-Entry Bookkeeping and the Rhetoric of Economic Rationality," *American Journal of Sociology* 97, no. 1 (July 1991) 31–69; Eve Chiapello, "Accounting and the Birth of the Notion of Capitalism," *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 18 (2007) 263–96.

¹³¹ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 87–8.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 93.

¹³³ Boulard, *Manuel de l'imprimeur*, 1–8.

latter, to conform to it," because all "consumption depends on the subjection of [the products of industry] to the tastes, the fantasies, the whims of [the consumer]."¹³⁴ These authors both argued in favor political change in order to enable economic growth, but in doing so they invoked a new cultural order.¹³⁵ Through the growth of the porcelain industry in late eighteenth-century France, we can see how the rise of consumer culture not only propelled liberalizing critiques, it rationalized the economy.

¹³⁴ Jean-Marie Roland de la Platière, *Encyclopédie méthodique. Manufactures, arts et métiers* (Paris: Pancoucke, 1785) 290–1. [La demande du marchand, l'échantillon qu'il présente, le prix qu'il offre :voilà la règle du fabricant. L'affaire du premier est d'étudier le goût du consommateur ; celle du dernier, de s'y conformer] [consommation dépend de l'assujettissement de [produits de l'industrie] aux goûts, aux fantaisies, aux caprices d[u consommateur]

¹³⁵ On the culture of capitalism, see: DR Scott, *The Cultural Significance of Accounts* (New York: H Holt, 1931) 20–61; William H Reddy, *The Rise of Market Culture: The Textile Trade and French Society, 1750–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) esp 1–18.