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JERROLD SEIGEL, *Modernity and Bourgeois Life: Society, Politics, and Culture in England, France and Germany since 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), xii + 626 pp. ISBN 978 1 107 01810 5. £55.00 (US \$95.00) (hardback). ISBN 978 1 107 66678 8. £19.99 (US \$29.99) (paperback)

This is a timely and challenging book. It deals with a problem that first structured, then complicated the historiography of the nineteenth century: the assumption that the 'bourgeoisie' was responsible for the evolution of economic, political, and cultural 'modernity'. Once an immensely popular field, the historiography of the nineteenth-century European middle classes has lost much of its lustre in recent decades. Just as it displaced the history of the working classes in the 1980s, it has had to give way to studies that focus on what are now considered social *loci* of political power and economic influence: aristocracy and monarchy.

This state of affairs is admittedly somewhat curious. An immense amount of effort directed at reconstructing the social history of the middle classes, motivated by the assumption that this could explain the political development of European countries, has resulted in the conclusion that their direct political importance was relatively limited. Yet middle-class studies took their predictions from significant representatives of nineteenth-century public opinion, who considered the middle classes a social phenomenon of growing importance that did shape the present and future of European countries.

One response to this state of affairs has been to rephrase the question: to consider talk of middle-class dominance either as an aspiration for the future or as a collective social illusion, and therefore to ask why people convinced themselves that the middle classes were not just crucial, but permanently on the rise. In this vein, David Cannadine and Dror Wahrman have produced fascinating narratives that describe the uses and abuses of simplified descriptions of society as a function of political struggles for (in-)equality.

Seigel's approach is very different. The question he formulates is not why the middle class loomed larger in political and social observation than in reality, but what made the future seem bourgeois, and why the bourgeoisie appeared particularly modern. Seigel offers a way around the dilemma that there is no particularly strong proof that all modern practices had a bourgeois social origin by arguing

that this is not the relevant criterion. He argues that what was important was something else: middle-class peculiarities were intrinsically modern because they all resulted from integration into a 'network of means' which he defines as 'a chain or web of people and instruments that links distant energies and resources to each other, allowing individuals and groups to draw them together, create synergies between them, and employ the capacity they generate for some particular purpose or goal' (pp. 7-8). Seigel identifies three networks of means relevant to the topic: '1. markets, 2. the state and other administrative structures; and 3. webs of information and communication' (p. 8). The market was, of course, the arena in which the bourgeoisie was first observed and in which bourgeois capitalists operated. The other two arenas produced the other parts that made up the *Bürgertum*: administrators and professionals. Thus, nineteenth-century observers were correct in pointing out that something was happening that was at once bourgeois, forward-looking, and innovative.

All three networks of means depended on a medium of exchange that facilitated communication between individuals unknown to each other across great distances. The medium was most clearly visible in the marketplace: (paper) money. For the second sphere, Seigel describes it as legitimacy; in the third sphere, the currency of exchange was 'communicative competence' (p. 14).

The first part of Seigel's book is devoted to tracing the evolution of the three networks of means in the three spheres in each of the countries named in the title (England, France, and Germany). Three chapters are devoted to the period before 1850, three further chapters to the years up to (roughly) 1900. Seigel argues that all three countries witnessed the replacement of local relationships based on prior acquaintance and rank by modern networks of means open to anyone able to obtain the currency required. He seeks to document that the decisive transitions occurred everywhere only after 1850 (thus siding with interpretations that place the modernization of the British economy in the 1870s), but that the three countries did differ in the relationship between the three networks. Market integration came first in England, but politics and the cultural sphere continued to rest on old-style relations longer than in France or Germany. Political integration was the key in France, where the state created a national market and a national public sphere. Germany was the latecomer with regard both to market integration

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and the political sphere, but precocious in terms of cultural integration.

Part two discusses ways in which the currencies of interaction became standardized after 1850: national bank notes replaced metal coins of different values and types; time became a quantity that was easily and uniformly measured; relationships between men and women were less focused on marriage and reproduction, and there were fewer constraints on the expression of sexuality. The final chapter in this section focuses on 'Jews as bourgeois and network people'.

The book's last part leaves behind a systematic consideration of networks of means and a comparative focus on England, France, and Germany in order to look instead at the arts in the 'culture of means' that shaped the (late) nineteenth century: museums, music and musicians, education as a means of integration and class distinction, and, finally, the depiction of bourgeois life in modern art, with French artists' impressions of the USA and Gustav Klimt's paintings of Austrian scenes and people looming quite large. The conclusion seeks to demonstrate the salience and relevance of the book's approach by casting the internet as the present-day equivalent of the networks of means that revolutionized the nineteenth century.

Seigel's text is clearly based on a lifetime of reading and thinking about the problems it treats. His approach is comprehensive, and he refers to the literature on the bourgeoisie's social profile and intellectual world view as effortlessly as to specialized studies of the social makeup of German provincial towns or the artistic production of individual members of the European avant-garde. The book is refreshingly free of a marked preference for traditional or postmodern approaches, general studies, or particular cases. Seigel places considerable importance on artistic interpretations of the nineteenth century in novels, paintings, and historiography without, however, losing sight of their context or perspectives. The theory he expounds is fascinating and likely to move the debate out of the dead end in which it has remained for some time, although it is, at some levels, similar to the Bielefeld School's emphasis on *Bürgerlichkeit*, that is, a bourgeois culture, not a bourgeois position in the economy or a middle-class income, as the key nineteenth-century class distinction.

A few critical observations are, of course, inescapable in response to such a wide-ranging book. One can quibble about a few details. For example, the *Kleinbürgertum*, which Seigel places after the 1850s

(pp. 248–9), was introduced into German social and political discourse via radical interpretations of the 1830 revolution in France about twenty years earlier. As with other grand interpretations of the nineteenth century, it is possible to wonder whether Seigel's book could have done without some of the narratives of well-known facts or interpretations to make room for the systematic exposition of the 'networks of means' he postulates. The general observations about the economic and political itineraries of England, France, and Germany summarized very briefly above are unlikely to be disputed, but take up space that could have been used more profitably for a more systematic exposition of what the various networks of means accomplished, how they were structured, and how (or why) they related to the bourgeoisie. Perhaps for reasons of space, the treatment of the three networks is very uneven, and the book's topics become less focused as the text progresses. While the account is fairly systematic with regard to the economy (particularly concerning money), and broad, though more impressionistic, with regard to the arts (which serve as the key example of networks of information and communication), it is extremely parsimonious in following up the fascinating ideas about ways of documenting 'legitimacy' set out in the introduction and, indeed, in its treatment of politics.

My second query relates to the way in which Seigel appears to frame his story, at least in the first two parts of the book. There it seems that the networks of means operate primarily within national boundaries. They serve to enhance national integration and thus contribute to the mobilization of energies and potentials within and for states. Framing the argument in this way strikes me as potentially problematic, especially as it is not always entirely clear whether Seigel's networks are an empirical reality or a theoretical and in some ways normative description. This is apparent, for instance, in the discussion of railways' impact on market integration or communication, which implicitly assumes that the integrative effect was national, not regional or transnational, even though very few railway lines stopped at borders. It is worth pointing out that Paris was linked to Cologne by rail much sooner than to the rest of France, and that the chronology of political conflict in the Rhineland was thus perhaps not accidentally more closely influenced by Paris than by Berlin in the early nineteenth century. Perhaps the absence of a national focus (and thus of pronounced national cultural distinctions) was a feature

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of bourgeois modernity enhanced by transnational networks of means. If so, this could go far towards explaining its crisis or its end in the twentieth century.

The problem also appears in Seigel's treatment of the British Isles. That he has chosen to look at England is clear, for example, in the treatment of the evolution of national paper money, where the examples given apply neither to Scotland nor to Ireland. But networks governed by legitimacy or communicative competence surely failed to exclude Scotland, Ireland, or the Empire, so that the network boundaries appear to be blurred rather than clear. However, the book's final chapters, which place the bourgeoisie in a more global context, implicitly make this point, thus complementing the nation-state focus of the earlier ones in an interesting way.

In a field characterized by many simplistic assumptions about the relationship between classes, nations, states, and economic development, a framework that avoids every questionable unit of analysis is obviously not possible. By providing alternative ways of thinking about the relationship between social class and cultural change, Seigel's magisterial account of the relationship between modernity and bourgeoisie is one of the most interesting books on the subject for decades, and therefore likely to spark debate, provoke responses, and serve as a starting point for research agendas for a considerable time.

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