

Carolina Brown

Comfortable Everyday Life at the Swedish Eighteenth-Century Näs Manor

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Comfortable Everyday Life at the Swedish Eighteenth-Century Näs Manor

Carolina Brown

*Translated by
Wendy Davies*

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Introduction

Abstract

During the eighteenth century, comfortable everyday life became a new ideal. The privileged life of the elite was no longer about grand representation or manifestation of material excess. Instead, the new luxury was a domestic ideal: life set at home, with rooms arranged for relaxed living in comfortable furniture. Research has highlighted the development of a new culture of comfort within French and British elite circles and examined how it reflected a notable change in upper-class identity. The purpose of this study is to examine the development of similar changes in the north of Europe and to investigate how various attitudes towards comfort were formed and expressed in the material and social culture of a Swedish country estate environment.

Keywords: eighteenth century, material culture, visual culture, consumption, comfort, *commodité*

Free of the noise of the wider world,
among books and among good friends,
to be loved more, rather than become famous,
enables you to feel the force and right sweetness of life.

These words can be read on one of the overdoor decorations that embellish the entrance hall of Näs Manor in Uppland.¹ Splendour, magnificence or grand mannerisms are not what impart strength and sweetness to life; life's little pleasures do that instead. Good, comfortable everyday life was the new luxury of the eighteenth century. Carl Eric Wadenstierna, who commissioned the new manor house on the Näs country estate in 1775, felt the winds of change blowing in Sweden and elsewhere in the wider world. Social, political and economic changes in Sweden, together with impressions from sources such as the French Enlightenment and

¹ The author of the overdoor text is unknown, although Carl Eric Wadenstierna himself has been singled out as the possible writer; Karl Asplund, 'Näs i Rö', *Fataburen*, Nordiska Museet, Stockholm 1960, pp. 14–5.



1. Gustaf Lundberg (attrib.), *Unknown Woman*. Pastel, 53 × 43 cm. National-museum, Stockholm (NMGrh 2306).

the British bourgeoisie, contributed to creating conditions for new lifestyle ideals within the upper strata of society at that time. These ideals are the subject of this study of the eighteenth-century culture of comfort, focusing on the Gustavian estate Näs. From here, we view a changing European upper-class culture, and this study continually returns to this small manor house in the coastal Roslagen area of Uppland Province – to the furniture, paintings and rooms that surrounded the Wadenstierna family.

At some point in the 1770s, a woman relaxes in a comfortable armchair. She sinks into the soft cushion and rests her head tranquilly on her hand. Perhaps daydreams will soon drift into dozing. The relaxed atmosphere conveyed by the small painting is accentuated by the woman's soft clothes (Image 1). Unbuttoned and creased, they do not appear to have been arranged to be seen in public. The scene feels intimate, and it is easy to imagine the room in which the woman is sitting, where the light and warmth are reflected from the fireplace, if it is a cold time of year, and the shadows are cast onto the warm wooden floor. The painting, attributed to the artist Gustaf Lundberg, depicts a now unknown woman. Yet, she – or what she represents – seems familiar. However, the familiarity is not with her role as a decorative eye-catcher, the sleeping beauty, *la belle dormeuse*, but with the moment when there is no friction, neither figuratively nor literally, and

where the context requires no formalities. Why were depictions of comfortable everyday life created in the eighteenth century that viewers still feel affinity with today?

In a sense, the emergence of a new culture of comfort, sometimes described as a ‘comfort revolution’, that developed within the upper strata of society in the eighteenth century shaped modern people.² Its significance is confirmed by the recognition evoked by a scene such as this. However, only contemporary sources can bear witness to how radical this was once perceived to be. By shining a light on the people who implemented, developed and experienced it, we can understand the change that it entailed. The changes may not seem particularly drastic to us, but the transformation of people’s lives was shown in everyday details, in how they designed and used their clothes, furniture and possessions, and in how they described themselves and their day-to-day life in words and pictures. This study aims to investigate what the new comfortable everyday life could mean for a few individuals who emerge from the eighteenth century’s rich source material. Here, ‘comfort’ refers to both idea and practice in an eighteenth century where a new material culture and a new lifestyle with new ideals developed in constant interplay. Comfort was both an individual, physical experience and a social standpoint and attitude.³

The feeling of comfort expressed in the introductory painting is likely to have been even more striking to a contemporary viewer. A woman who wore the formal attire of that era must have experienced the contrast in thin, soft garments in a particularly tangible and concrete way. Rigid corsets and stiff petticoats, heavy, lined layers of fabric and parts of the outfit that were sewn or pinned into place, resulted in complicated conventional garb that was difficult to wear and restricted movement, and meant that the wearer required assistance when dressing and undressing. In such clothing, a woman would hardly be able to sit in the same way as the woman in the painting. In formal fashion, women instead had to stand up straight and subordinate themselves to the rules of social etiquette which accompanied the demands of presenting a distinguished appearance. The revolutionary aspect of the woman in the painting being portrayed *déshabillé* was perhaps not that she showed herself ‘undressed’ (the French word referred rather to the fact that she had abandoned wearing formal attire) but the new freedom that her body was thereby given. Here, the clothes did not shape and control her body; instead, her

2 It was not a revolution in the true sense of the word, but the word is used here as a rhetorical device to emphasise the radical changes that this meant. For information on the present-day consequences of this early modern comfort revolution, *Bekvämlighetsrevolutionen. Stockholmskhusällan och miljön under 150 år och i framtiden*, Ronny Pettersson (ed.), Stockholm 2008.

3 Cristina Prytz and Jon Stobart, ‘Comfort in English and Swedish country houses, c. 1760–1820’, *Social History*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2018, pp. 239–40.

body gained freedom to shape itself – and feel.⁴ This sensuous freedom sparked criticism in contemporary debate, but in parallel, criticism also grew of the formal, artificial and affected conventional garb and the lifestyle that accompanied it.⁵

The French philosopher and author Denis Diderot formulated his view of comfort in a similar way at around the same time. This was expressed in his metaphorical reflection on a beloved old dressing gown. *Regrets sur ma vieille robe de chambre ou avis à ceux qui ont plus de goût que de fortune* was written in 1768 and published the following year in *Correspondance littéraire*. The old dressing gown had shaped itself to Diderot's body, and every fold and stain conveyed something about his personality and way of life. This was a garment that he effortlessly mastered and that did not control or hinder him in the slightest. In comparison, Diderot's new dressing gown was rigid, formal and demanding in its expensive and delicate fabric, which required him to be careful and constantly aware of how he moved and behaved. It represented a luxury that was enslaving and costly, and it offered no relaxation for body or soul. It was for public display, not for personal comfort.

Xavier de Maistre presents a corresponding experience of his furniture in the 'travelogue' from his room – *Voyage autour de ma chambre* – in which he was placed under house arrest for six weeks following an unsuccessful duel in Turin in 1790.⁶ He praises his armchair, so important and useful for a contemplative man, in which he could recline on long winter evenings, shielded from the noise and din of the surrounding world. He describes the perfect sitting position: how he slides forwards on the seat so that his feet rest on the adjacent mantelpiece. He emphasises his warm bed in which to meditate, while his footman discreetly busies himself with his morning duties around him.⁷ It is the lived-in, informally relaxed home that provides comfort, like being in the undemanding company of an old friend. In one of his drawings from the mid-eighteenth century, Louis Carrogis (Carmontelle), artist and *lecteur* in the service of Louis Philippe I, Duke of Orléans, has depicted a friend of the duke, Louis de Mornay, in a similar position (Image 2). Clothes and furniture clearly enabled a new form of comfort, and the sources confirm how it was valued, but also normalised. These different experiences and depictions of physical comfort, from both the early and late eighteenth century, and the fact that they were documented in words and pictures, were all manifestations of a change process that shaped new approaches and values. In turn, they had consequences for how people chose to shape their lives.

4 Joan Dejean, 'Dressing for comfort', *The Age of Comfort. When Paris Discovered Casual – And the Modern Home Began*, New York 2009, pp. 186–204.

5 For an example, see the critical statement 'De l'usage des paniers' about the absurdity of the fashion's stiff petticoats in Antoine-Angelique Chomel, *Aménités Littéraires, et Recueil D'Anecdotes*, II, Amsterdam 1773, pp 247–9.

6 Xavier de Maistre, *Voyage autour de ma chambre*, Lausanne 1794. Translated into Swedish in 1798.

7 Xavier de Maistre, New York 1994, p. 8 and p. 25.



2. Louis Carrogis (Carmontelle), *Mr de Mornay, Gouverneur de St Cloud, dessiné d'après nature dans la posture habituelle de sa siesta*. Watercolour and gouache, 27.1 × 19 cm. Private ownership. Photo: Sotheby's.

A portrait miniature, contemporary with the introductory painting, also shows a woman in soft *déshabillé*, but her comfort is expressed in a different way (Plate 1). Admittedly, her pose is at ease, but it is rather her surroundings that are presented as comfortably furnished. The elegant and dainty sewing table on which she is resting her arm is perfectly adapted to her needs. It is just the right height, equipped with practical storage boxes so that she does not need to stand up and fetch various accoutrements of her work, and the edging of the table top is softly rounded to avoid abrasion of a delicate forearm or fragile piece of embroidery. Her garments and furniture make her everyday tasks easier and her life pleasant. In eighteenth-century Swedish, the word *kommoditet* (commodity) from the French *commodité*, was sometimes used as the apt term for this modern form of comfort and amenity.⁸ Originating from the Latin *commodus*, it meant something of just the right dimensions, something suitable, practical and comfortably appointed. French culture applied *commodité* in descriptions of most things that made life easier, from *fauteuils de commodité* with adjustable backrests (though a *siège de commodité* referred to a toilet chair/commode chair), to hair pomades and modes

8 Peter Thornton, *Authentic Decor. The Domestic Interior 1620–1920*, London 1985, p. 17, and Stobart and Prytz 2018, p. 239.

of transport.⁹ The suitability of giving the new storage unit with drawers the name *commode* was self-evident. The difference between a compact, modern chest of drawers and the older storage solution in the form of a heavy, bulky chest, was like comparing a negligee with a rigid corsetted court dress.

The fact that the Swedish word *kommoditet* was associated with the new range of products and services was also clear. By portraying herself in *déshabillé* next to a modern, practical sewing table, the woman showed her physical comfort but also her informed taste as a consumer *à la mode*. The dividing line between private and social comfort was not always clear or discernible. An eighteenth-century woman who viewed the introductory painting may have observed the expressions of physical freedom, but probably paid equally close attention to the portrayed woman's fashionable lace bonnet *à la dormeuse* – in keeping with the latest French trend. This lace bonnet symbolised the depicted woman's social, cultural and economic status, and whoever she was, it must have afforded her a special sense of well-being in the context. The experience of comfort was therefore strongly linked to the social self and to social norms and conventions, as well as a sensibility to changes in them. *Kommoditeter* could be for personal benefit and enjoyment but could also serve as socially coded signs, as expressions of conspicuous consumption.¹⁰ They were thereby part of incessant social aspirations for novelties, which constantly generated a new range of products and new demand in the growing market.

Comfort as an idea and practice

Comfort, my good Sir, is unknown in Savoy. – What we English call comfort, is not understood I believe in any other country, nor to be exprest in any other language. It is rest of the body, it is repose of the mind, without business, without bustle, and with every thing convenient and pleasant about you: – it is often lost in a palace, and found in a cottage, – it is in itself a trifle: – a trifle gives it – a trifle takes it away: – it is a cheerful room – a good fire – a dish of tea – but – not as I am now drinking it, with a chimney that smokes, a door I can't shut, and a window that is broken.¹¹

9 In D'Alembert and Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, the word *commodité* above all referred to the concealed spaces in which the toilet chair/commode chair could be stowed, Paris 1751, III, p. 714.

10 Thorstein Veblen's often referenced term 'conspicuous consumption' was presented in his socio-economic study *The Theory of the Leisure Class. An Economic Study of Institutions*, London 1899. For a more recent discussion, see economic historian Jan De Vries *The Industrious Revolution. Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present*, Cambridge 2008.

11 Beckford 1805, pp. 53–54.

In his letters from his sojourn in Italy in the 1780s, the English country gentleman Peter Beckford summarised his view of comfort. In all simplicity, it was the relaxation that came from an everyday life that ran smoothly. In the book *Home: A Short History of an Idea* from 1986, Witold Rybczynski discusses how the concept of comfort is relative. In his investigation he found how a view, a conversation by letter, a piece of embroidery, a card game or just a cup of tea could be called 'comfortable' in the eighteenth century – as readily as a soft armchair.¹² But one common denominator was the satisfaction felt via emotions and sensations. When Johan Gabriel Oxenstierna in his diary in 1771 tries to describe the most pleasurable form of 'comfort' he can imagine, it is an experience that involves all the senses:

In the moment of being happily in love, in the moment of visual and sensual delight, one should rest on a bed of lilies and lavender, hear exquisite music and hold a piece of pineapple in one's mouth. This thought is somewhat giddy and slightly too sensual, but as pleasure occurs so rarely, could it not be permissible to savour it for once in all its glory?¹³

Oxenstierna's words perhaps exceeded the experience of normal everyday comforts but were nonetheless characteristic of the Age of Enlightenment's confidence in the ability of the senses to discover and experience what made life good and comfortable – and ultimately their ability to further civilisation.¹⁴ Philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac summarised his thoughts on sensations and their fundamental significance for how our surroundings are perceived and how knowledge is built in his *Traité des sensations* published in 1754. He shared his ideas with the Encyclopaedists such as Diderot and D'Alembert, who, in words and pictures, described the conditions for comfort in their work on the *Encyclopédie* (1751–72). Advances in science and technology resulted in everything from new furniture to new textiles adapted to the human body's sensory needs. According to the *Encyclopédie*, the new luxury was not ostentatious; it instead comprised what could make daily life more comfortable and pleasant: a flushable toilet, a table specially adapted for certain functions, an armchair that offered the body support and repose.¹⁵ And for Diderot, naturally a dressing gown adapted to the body's needs.

This positivism based on sensory experiences entailed a new attitude to the human body and by extension to its health and hygiene – aspects that were also

12 Witold Rybczynski, *Home. A Short History of an Idea*, New York 1986, pp. 230ff.

13 Johan Gabriel Oxenstierna, *Dagboksanteckningar. Åren 1769–1771*, II, Uppsala 1881, pp. 145f.

14 Here, compare the discussion of luxury in relation to the view on desire, the body and pleasure in Sonya Petersson, *Konst i omlopp. Mening, medier och marknad i Stockholm under 1700-talets senare hälft*, Stockholm 2014 [diss.], pp. 109–24.

15 DeJean 2009, pp. 15, 67–79, 80–92.

linked to personal and social comfort. In *De la santé. Ouvrage utile à tout le monde* by Armand-Pierre Jacquin from 1771, we are reminded of the importance of regularly changing shirts and shifts, bathing, ventilating one's home and avoiding sleeping next to an unemptied chamber pot.¹⁶ It was deemed particularly important to guard the distinction between private and public spheres and in all social contexts to comply with *propreté*, cleanliness and tidiness – a crucial condition for sociality.¹⁷ Here, reference was made to a sensibility that could easily be offended by both strong odours and clumsy body language. People who were deficient in *propreté*, were deficient in social judgement and revealed this in each context by appearing *uncomfortable*, in the sense of appearing to be awkward or an embarrassment to themselves and to those around them. A person who was socially comfortable was instead someone who had honed this sensibility through their upbringing, taste and cultivation. *Propreté* and *politesse* were the conditions for casual comfort – the essential skill in all social relations. In 1774, the Earl of Chesterfield, Philip Stanhope, wrote instructions for fashionable comfort and corresponding body language. Straight and rigid were wrong at that time and were associated with social insecurity. The view of comfort had instead brought new ideals:

You may also know a well bred person by his manner of sitting. Ashamed and confused, the awkward man sits in his chair stiff and bolt upright; whereas the man of fashion is easy in every position; instead of lolling or lounging as he sits, he leans with elegance, and by varying his attitudes, shews that he has been used to good company.¹⁸

The significance of emotions to comfort became a cherished theme at the time. In Jean-François Bastide's strange tale *La petite maison* from 1758, sensuous comfort is used as a means of power and manipulation in the romantic drama between the wooing suitor Trémicour and the resistant Méлите. Trémicour is convinced that he can make Méлите fall for him by showing her his house, designed and furnished with exquisite and refined taste. The material luxury offers an orgy of sensations that are heightened with each new room that Méлите enters. Everything seems to be furnished to offer comfort and pleasure. Sofas and armchairs swell with soft down cushions,

16 Armand Pierre (Abbé) Jacquin, *De la santé. Ouvrage utile à tout le monde*, Paris 1771, (<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9763540b/f23.item.r=propreté>), pp. 329–30, 355–7.

17 Armand Pierre (Abbé) Jacquin 1771, p. 351.

18 Christopher Daniel Bunth, *An Essay on English Lecture, Selected for the most part from late authors*, Lund 1792, p. 189. Bunth was an associate professor in English and French at Lund University. In his book, Swedish readers can peruse extracts from English literature. The Earl of Chesterfield's advice on 'cleanliness of person' and 'genteel carriage' dating from 1774 shows how a gentleman should conduct himself, and it also includes specific instructions for fashionable comfort.



3. François Boucher, *Madame de Pompadour, Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson*, 1756. Oil on canvas, 201 × 157 cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich (HUW 18). Wikimedia Commons.

and expensive sulphur-yellow and purple silk fabrics frame illuminated mirrors, sliding doors and all sorts of mechanical furniture. A hidden orchestra fills the rooms with music and the paint on the walls has been mixed with perfume scented with violets and roses. Oxenstierna's pineapple would have been a fitting addition here. It all becomes an overwhelming physical experience for Mélite. She sighs, trembles, pants and, finally, overpowered with emotions, sinks into one of the boudoir's armchairs. Mélite's sensibility is what makes her so receptive to the impact of the environment, but also her informed taste. She is experienced in the ways of the world, a connoisseur of fashion, luxury and *commodité* and immediately identifies works painted by Bachelier and carved by Dandrillon or the various imported artworks. Her receptive gaze also notices how the joints between the panes of mirror glass have been concealed with realistically created 'tree trunks' adorned with flowers. This was a fashionable eye-catching detail. Two years earlier, François Boucher's portrait of the Marquise de Pompadour had taken Paris by storm, in which she rested on a soft daybed in front of a mirror framed by sulphur-yellow silk drapes – and where the joints of the mirror glass were hidden by gilded 'tree trunks' (Image 3).¹⁹

19 Critics, such as Friedrich Melchior von Grimm in *Correspondance littéraire* in February 1761, claimed that the true aim of Bastide's tale was to advertise the fashion and art merchants in Paris, *marchandes de*



4. Bernard Picart, *Mode: aux colonnes d'Hercules avec Priv. du Roy*. Engraving, 10.3 × 6.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



5. Nicolas Dupin after Pierre-Thomas Le Clerc, *Femme en deshabilité du matin couchée négligemment sur un Sopha, et jouant avec son chien*. From *Galerie des modes et costumes français*, Paris, 1778.

The desire evoked by Trémicour's comfortably furnished rooms echoes the eighteenth century's expanding commercial culture in general and the market for luxury items and *commodité* products that enhanced everyday comfort in particular.²⁰ Having the knowledge to be able to buy the 'right' thing – knowledge that the sensorily informed consumer Méliete possessed – was necessary in a market that tended to focus on specific groups of consumers within an increasingly heterogeneous

modes; Paul J Young, *Seducing the Eighteenth-Century French Reader. Reading, Writing, and the Question of Pleasure*, Farnham 2008, p. 56. The title of Bastide's book also alludes to the 'petites maisons' that Louis XV had commissioned for his rendezvous with his mistress Madame du Barry and that subsequently developed into the name for brothels; Jean-François de Bastide, *The Little House. An Architectural Seduction (La Petite Maison)*, (1763) New York 1996, pp. 13–4. The descriptions of the surroundings, which make Boucher's portrait topical, were apt in the context, both through the roles of the Marquise de Pompadour and Méliete as mistresses and through their informed feeling and taste for the era's fashion and trends.

²⁰ *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Arjun Appadurai (ed.), Cambridge 1986, p. 37.

upper stratum of society, where producers, sellers and consumers were all very familiar with the complicated social and cultural codes of the era.²¹ The value of the products as status symbols also became ever more rapidly characterised by their novelty value rather than more lasting qualities.²² The regularly published and increasingly distributed fashion plates in the latter half of the eighteenth century were an expression of the value of the products as novelties. The fashion images were also mainly aimed at women, who now emerged as a new target group with considerable spending power.

The fact that this market and the forces that drove it were certainly not new for the eighteenth century is obvious by the fashion plates shown here (Images 4 and 5). They also clarify that comfort as a type of luxury was not only a feature of the eighteenth century.²³ The woman in the figure-enhancing thin negligee, nonchalantly reclining on the chaise longue in Bernard Picart's engraving from Paris in the 1690s, could still be regarded as modern just under a century later in Leclerc's version from 1778.²⁴ Comfort, formulated as *négligement* or nonchalance in the eighteenth-century plate, was already well established in the late seventeenth century.²⁵ The fashion plate conveys which products were necessary to attain it – a *deshabillé du matin* and *un sofa* – and how the woman should position herself and what she should occupy herself with to demonstrate an air of *négligement*. The woman resting at the start of this chapter was obviously not only sitting comfortably; she was also deceptively similar to the ideal woman portrayed in the contemporary fashion image: a consumer well-versed in fashion and trends of that time. Comfort was thus also fashion and an inexhaustible stream of 'lifestyle goods' associated with the fashionable comfort that filled the market.

The market grew in the eighteenth century, even though the phenomenon itself was not new. The fashion image from the 1690s, engraved *avec privilège du roi*, was part of Louis XIV's extensive campaign to launch France's leading position in Europe. The multifaceted images spread the idea of the superiority of French taste, an idea

21 This was important in pre-industrial production when artisan knowledge and artisan qualities were met with connoisseurship among merchants and consumers, but this changed with the advent of industrially manufactured goods and the spotlight shifting to the production technique itself. See 'Introduction. Commodities and the politics of value' in Appadurai 1986, pp. 41–5.

22 Erin Mackie, *Market à la Mode. Fashion, Commodity and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator*, London 1997, p. 13.

23 Thornton 1985, p. 17.

24 The word 'nonchalant' spread as a loanword from French in the 1670s in Swedish. According to Elise Urbain Ruano, 'The Négligé in Eighteenth-Century French Portraiture', *The Journal of Dress History*, 1, issue 1, Spring 2017, p. 92, the word *négligement*, in the late seventeenth century, was applied to an attitude of affected indifference or elegant casualness (source: *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 1694).

25 *Kommoditet* in the sense of comfort, comfortable furnishings, was used in Swedish from the mid seventeenth century and for the first time at the start of the seventeenth century.

6. Antoine Trouvain, *Mademoiselle d'Armagnac en robe de chambre*, 1695. *Découpure*, engraving and textile, 27.31 × 20.32 cm. Minneapolis Museum of Art, the Minnich Collection, Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 1966 (66.25.5).



that continued to be conveyed in the eighteenth century and did not encounter competition until the end of the century from English ideals as well as ideals with more bourgeois influence. The development surrounding Louis XIV's Versailles had launched luxury as an asset that, at least theoretically, could be accessible to ever more people. The fashion plates reflected a growing production and market but also hinted at new lifestyles. Louis XIV, and later also Louis XV, often preferred to conduct their unofficial everyday lives in their smaller rooms and preferably in the company of a mistress rather than an official queen.²⁶ The significance of the royal mistresses for the development of the informal lifestyle as an ideal and their impact on fashion and consumption culminated with the Marquise de Pompadour in the mid-eighteenth century.

The engraving *Mademoiselle d'Armagnac en robe de chambre* by Antoine Trouvain from 1695 is a reminder of how relaxed everyday life was portrayed as an ideal (Image 6). The picture is both a society portrait of Princess Charlotte de Lorraine-Armagnac at the royal court of Louis XIV and a fashion plate in its own right. The princess posing in a dressing gown was a confirmation of the new culture of comfort

²⁶ Nicole Castan, 'The Public and the Private', *A History of Private Life*, III, Roger Chartier (ed.), Massachusetts and London 1989, pp. 422–5.

and the eye-catching fabric was proof of the significance of trade and the market for this fashion. In this *découpage*, parts of the engraving have been cut away and replaced by sections of fabric that were pasted in, which emphasises the effect of the fabric here – a *robe de chambre* could also be known as *une indienne* to specify the influences.²⁷ The efforts to achieve comfort can partly be explained by the impressions and impulses from the increased accessibility of the surrounding wider world. With trading contacts and diplomatic connections came insight into foreign cultures, and the introduction of new, high-status products that extensively came to be linked to *kommoditet* (comfort, amenity). Dressing gowns and negligees were inspired by Indian or Persian garments and sofas, divans and drinking coffee by Turkish customs, for example. The radically loose garments, the relaxing furniture and spicy beverages were accompanied by perceptions of a freer lifestyle in which sensuous experiences were given preference.

The homes of the elite also gradually gained the imprint of changed lifestyles. A typical Baroque floor plan contained the *appartement de parade* with rooms for morning entertaining and the *appartement de société* for afternoon entertaining, but also an *appartement de commodité* for secluded or private life.²⁸ One of the new rooms, the boudoir in the lady's apartment, could also be used for informal socialising.²⁹ Differentiating between the functions of rooms was deemed to contribute to comfort in several ways. The possibility of retiring to 'private' rooms such as a study or dressing room was an expression of a privileged lifestyle and clarified the distance between the gentry and servants, but also unwanted socialising. Passages and hidden staircases – *dégagements* – separated the public and private spheres of the home but additionally constituted effective connecting links behind the scenes.³⁰ The planning often resulted in more but smaller rooms, which also contributed to comfort in terms of heating and proximity to various functions.³¹ Architects also acted as interior decorators and designed furniture that was suitable for the home layouts and lifestyles of the new era.³² Specific rooms required specific furniture, which became increasingly specialised and focused on function.

27 DeJean 2009, p. 207.

28 Thornton 1985, pp. 93–7.

29 Diana Cheng, *The History of the Boudoir in the Eighteenth Century*, Montreal, Quebec 2011, [diss.], pp. 35f.

30 Carl Wijnblad, *Ritningar på Fyratio Wäningshus Af Sten, och Trettio af Träd, Samt åtskilliga Lusthus, m.m.*, Stockholm 1755, p. A3 and Gösta Selling, *Svenska herrgårdshem under 1700-talet*, (1937) Stockholm 1991, p. 41.

31 Gunhild Eriksdotter, 'När slottet blev beboeligt. Inneklimatets betydelse på Skoklosters slott under Wrangels tid', *Bebyggelsehistorisk tidskrift* No. 66, 2013, pp. 8–29.

32 DeJean 2009, p. 128. There were clearly similar aims between the images that launched the new fashion and the images that showed the new furniture. For example, Jean-Charles Delafosse's engravings of new types of furniture were in the style of 'fashion images'.

The role played by France in these changes is noticeable in the many words that were incorporated into the Swedish language in the eighteenth century and that were associated with room layouts, interior design and types of furniture, including *korridor*, *garderob*, *fåtölj*, *schäslong* and *sekretär*.³³ The architect Nicodemus Tessin the Younger brought the new ideals to Sweden following trips to France, but also to Italy, the Netherlands, Austria and Germany.³⁴ He was ably assisted by the young diplomat Daniel Cronström, specially dispatched to purchase drawings and engravings that illustrated the new ideals. This pictorial treasure trove became a key source of reference for artists and architects throughout the eighteenth century in Sweden. Tessin summarised his impressions in an initial tract about interior design in 1717: 'Traicté de la Decoration Interieure, pour toutes sortes de Maisons Royales, et autres de distinction tant â la Ville, qu'â la Campagne.'³⁵ The aim was above all to provide guidelines for the construction of the new Royal Palace in Stockholm, which came to serve as a channel for new French impulses in much of the eighteenth century. Its innovative significance is also seen in the Swedish environments that arose in its wake, designed by architects such as Carl Hårleman, Jean Eric Rehn or Carl Wijnblad.³⁶

After the death of Louis XIV in 1715, the lifestyle from Versailles moved to the elite's smaller private residences, known as *hôtels particuliers*, in Paris. Jean-François de Troy's painting from 1728, sometimes called *Lecture de Molière*, portrays comfortably appointed city life (Image 7). The wide armchairs with comfortably angled backrests and armrests were designed to accommodate the women's wide dresses. The fashion's mantua or *manteau* was partly related to the dressing gown, and it was worn with high-heeled mules. The armchairs have been moved in front of the fire, where coffee awaits and a folding screen creates spatial intimacy and warmth around the group of people. All the interior decoration details display an ideal that prevailed throughout the eighteenth century. Parquet flooring and silk-clad walls provided sound insulation and warmth, and the candle arms were positioned to create the most light and least shadow when you looked into the mirror.³⁷ The positioning of the chairs and the generously proportioned styles of dresses demonstrate how

33 Corridor, garderobe, fauteuil, chaise longue, écrivain.

34 Bo Vahlne, 'Inredningskonst i teori och praktik', *Tessin. Nicodemus Tessin d.y. Kunglig arkitekt och visionär* (Nationalmuseum) Stockholm 2002.

35 *Nicodemus Tessin the Younger. Sources, Works, Collections: Traicté de la decoration interieure 1717*, ed. Patricia Waddy, (Nationalmuseum & the Swedish Museum of Architecture), Stockholm 2002.

36 Queen Lovisa Ulrika made a notable statement about the Royal Palace of Stockholm in a letter to her brother August Wilhelm in 1749: 'Everything is very beautiful and completely magnificent, but without the slightest comforts. The decorations are extremely tasteful and very splendid, yet I believe that comfort in an apartment is preferable above all else' (Vahlne 2012, p. 112).

37 DeJean 2009, p. 155.



7. Jean-François de Troy, *Lecture de Molière*, c. 1728. Oil on canvas, 74 × 93 cm. Private ownership.

furniture had become movable and clothes now gave the wearer greater ease of movement. The clock on the bookcase shows us that the time is half past three, and the pastime during the afternoon is reading aloud. The book in the centre of the painting indicates that the people wearing the clothes and using the furniture also have freedom to spend their time in the way they choose.³⁸

The choice of Molière, if the title of the painting is contemporary with the time of its creation, may well have been the group's own free choice of book to read aloud. Molière's social criticism remained topical in 1728 and could also convey something of the elite's attitude to themselves and the world around them. Perhaps the man with the book had gathered the women to entertain them by reading aloud from *Les précieuses ridicules* from 1659, which was about a group of society ladies who distinguished themselves through exaggerated refinement and complicated ceremony in society. In the satire, the affectatious figures represent everything artificial and affected that characterised the official and strictly regulated life

38 See Thorstein Veblen's study (1899) and to those who own production but engage in consumption, both 'conspicuous consumption' and 'conspicuous leisure'.

at the royal court and in aristocratic drawing rooms. Molière's play now became a reverse mirror for the new modern people who could be entertained by the old mannerisms that they had now distanced themselves from. In the painting, the members of the group embody the criticism through their relaxed, comfortable postures.

Comfort for all?

Jean-François de Troy's painting depicts urbane and aristocratic social life in Paris in the 1720s. The new comfort is the privilege of a limited elite. During the rest of the eighteenth century, concurrently with social, economic and political changes, the issue of this lifestyle democratisation became a recurring topic of debate. However, products that enhanced everyday comfort and new consumption behaviours had already started spreading outside the top social elite, and the celebrities in high society and the performing arts influenced new trends in fashion and socialising.³⁹ The desired ideals were no longer exclusively taken from the aristocracy and royal courts, which were instead associated with conservative norms, strict etiquette and formal ceremony. During the embourgeoisement processes in the late eighteenth century, old social structures were further dissolved. The royal court gossip that young Malla Silfverstolpe reflects on in her memoirs echoes these changes. The rigid formality personified by the queen dowager Sofia Magdalena in the late eighteenth century clearly shows that she was part of a bygone era:

She described how, during the more than twenty years that she had visited the queen almost daily, she had never ever seen the queen leaning; she constantly sat up straight and rigidly, and her closest friends Mrs Manderström and Mrs Ehrengrenat had to do likewise.⁴⁰

Even without capital, creditors or contact networks, a broader echelon of society was now able to utilise copies and versions of the market's more exclusive range of products. What had been the luxuries of the elite at the end of the seventeenth century, had become more everyday elements for broader levels of society in the mid-eighteenth century. The gradual levelling of social classes gave increasing numbers of people the opportunity to experience comfort. 'The furniture of the large houses is now filling ordinary people's drawing rooms, and one sees women

³⁹ DeJean 2009, p. 35.

⁴⁰ *Malla Montgomery-Silfverstolpes memoarer*, published by Malla Grandinson, I (1799), Stockholm 1908–20, p. 213.

without rank, mixed with the most distinguished of people, with the same ornaments,' Pierre-Joseph Boudier de Villemert complains in his educative *Lami des femmes* from 1758, which was translated into Swedish in 1763.⁴¹ Many regarded the changes as threatening. Instead of being a democratic opportunity, the critics saw a demoralising danger in offering comfort to the masses.⁴² This could only result in a weakened, unproductive society, in which everyone wishes to live as 'gentlemen' – where conspicuous consumption leads to conspicuous indolence.⁴³ Fittingly, *Sedolärande Mercurius* raised the subject of moral degeneracy back in 1731:

Nature and reason advise us to work and move the body. Fashion says it is base conduct. Sit still and receive guests, enjoy yourself with them, learn to play cards, so that you will always have something to occupy your hands with. If you finally wish to go out, use your carriage for your comfort, do not let the wind blow on you, it disfigures the complexion and dishevels your coiffure; we do this until the blood rots in our bodies, and many illnesses afflict our health. ... But what do the people care about nature and reason?⁴⁴

However, the increasingly widespread desire for comfort was also a driving force, of which the energy could be harnessed as an asset. Handled correctly, this energy could increase employment and occupation and spur the competition that developed society financially – for the welfare of all citizens. The idea had already taken shape in the wake of the emerging comfort reforms of the late seventeenth century. In *The Fable of the Bees* (1714) by philosopher Bernard Mandeville, the bee colony thrives as long as the bees are driven by a desire, and this metaphor drove the debate onwards during the Age of Enlightenment, and also in Sweden during the Age of Liberty (1719–72).⁴⁵ Anders von Höpken from the political party called the Hats, gave an inflammatory speech about the utility of luxury at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in 1740. The speech was praised by many who claimed that the production of luxury goods sustained the entire social pyramid.⁴⁶ But the attitude that each layer in the pyramid shared the same driving force that had previously been the privilege of the elite was new for the eighteenth century.

41 Pierre Joseph Boudier de Villemert, *Qwinno-könets wän. Öfwersatt ifrån fransyskan*, Västerås 1763, p. 45.

42 Leif Runefelt, *Att hasta mot undergången: anspråk, flyktighet, förställning i debatten om konsumtion i Sverige 1730–1830*, Lund 2015, p. 199.

43 See note 38.

44 *Sedolärande Mercurius*, Second part, No. 15, Stockholm 9 March 1731.

45 Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, London 1714.

46 Anders von Höpken, *Tal, om yppighets nytta. Hållit för kongl. svenska wetenskaps academien, år 1740*, Stockholm 1741.

The architect Carl Fredric Adelcrantz, trained at and later responsible for the construction of the Royal Palace in Stockholm, saw the power in art to develop and civilise society for all. In his speech about the value and utility of the fine arts in 1757, he explains that wealthy and healthy people ‘are those who in addition to the sustenance of life, own several comforts and pleasures’.⁴⁷ A country where the arts are driven to the highest heights also has the greatest opportunity to contribute to its citizens’ comfort.⁴⁸ The explanation is found in Mandevillian ‘desire’:

The bourgeoisie are by nature entitled to the same pleasures and comforts as the nobility: they pursue their trade and craft with unusual drive and cheerfulness: they get up early in the morning and go to bed late, in order to, as the former, have a comfortable house, decorated rooms, modern furniture. ... If the farmers cannot extend their desires as far as the bourgeoisie, they at least strive for fine-looking clothes, elegant and beautiful household utensils. This desire encourages them, with doubled diligence, to cultivate their soil, of which the produce must not solely suffice as the farmers’ necessary food, but also for their comforts and pleasures.⁴⁹

Comfort for all developed into a key political ideology in the eighteenth century, but also into a concrete manifestation of a process of social change.⁵⁰ In an article written during the Age of Liberty in Stockholm, the politician Carl Eric Wadenstierna writes about ‘the natural right to utilise and harness one’s wealth for comfort and for one’s own benefit’.⁵¹

In similarity with several others in the field of eighteenth-century consumption and manifestation research, in the anthology *A Taste for Luxury in Early Modern Europe* (2017) the historians Johanna Ilmakunnas and Jon Stobart describe how changed attitudes led to a new form of luxury in the eighteenth century. In contrast to the older, ostentatious consumption, it was more about different aspects of comfort and about new expressions of cultivated social life within the urban upper middle class – a social group that was also less inclined to follow the older consumption patterns and lifestyle of the elite.⁵² The ‘new luxury’ admittedly still

47 Carl Fredric Adelcrantz, *Tal om de fria konstens värde och nytta*, Stockholm 1757, p. 17.

48 Adelcrantz 1757, p. 19.

49 Adelcrantz 1757, pp. 19–20.

50 Petersson 2014, pp. 109–33 and Charles Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth Century Decoration. Design and the Domestic Interior in England*, London 1993, pp. 50–3.

51 Carl Eric Wadenstierna, *Fria Tankar*, Stockholm 1769, p. 16.

52 *A Taste for Luxury in Early Modern Europe*, Jon Stobart and Johanna Ilmakunnas (ed.), London 2017; see the chapter ‘Display, Acquisition and Boundaries of Luxury and Taste’, pp. 1–17. Stobart and Ilmakunnas here refer to the historians Woodruff Smith (*Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600–1800*,

remained an expression of distinction, but was shaped more by taste, sensibility and cultivation.

The development of comfort was therefore linked to the eighteenth century's dynamic changes in social hierarchies, where an upper-class culture based on birth and descent had to make way for the emergence of an urban culture characterised by the bourgeoisie. Luxury now became above all tantamount to a functioning everyday life with comfortable, practical clothes and beautiful, functional furniture and household utensils.⁵³ The aspirations of the bourgeoisie to a good and comfortable life were also formulated on the basis of Christian virtues such as industriousness, diligence and order. The literature, drama, music and art of the era highlighted bourgeois values and ideals of happiness as an alternative to aristocratic decadence and wastefulness. The changes brought new attitudes to home and family as well as a different relationship to nature.⁵⁴ The idea of every individual's responsibility to seek their natural context, fostered by the Enlightenment's philosophers, gained renewed topicality during the structural transformations that imbued the latter half of the eighteenth century. Comfort was associated with unaffected, simple and informal family life, preferably in a country home, and it was linked to moral values and sentimental, nature-romantic and patriotic ideas. According to this ideological 'natural order', the woman's place was in the home, and it was her task to endeavour to keep it tidy and pleasant. Moralising texts presented an antithesis and warning examples in the form of the self-absorbed woman who devoted her time to fashion, social calls and balls and made her home a 'public space' where people came and went.⁵⁵ The idealisation of the family and the home and their significance in shaping character and morals developed into one of the strongest expressions of a bourgeois-tinted culture in the late eighteenth century. For example, the aim of Pierre Jean-Baptiste Legrand d'Aussy's work *Histoire de la vie privée des français depuis l'origine de la nation jusqu'à nos jours* (1783) was to explain, from a historical perspective, the character of a nation based on how its people designed their homes and their habits – how they furnished their rooms, dressed and ate.⁵⁶

New York 2002); John Crowley (*The Invention of Comfort. Sensibilities and Design in Early-Modern Britain and Early America*, Baltimore 2003) and the economic historian Jan De Vries (*The Industrious Revolution. Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present*, Cambridge 2008), whose differentiation between 'old and new luxury' they use as a basis.

53 'When luxury became bourgeois, its illegitimate margins needed to be neutralised by other social signs,' Petersson 2014, pp. 128ff.

54 Martin Lamm, *Upplysningstidens romantik. Den mystiskt sentimentala strömningen i svensk litteratur*, II, Lund (1920) 1963, pp. 459–66.

55 Boudier de Villemert 1763, p. 55.

56 Pierre Jean-Baptiste Legrand d'Aussy, *Histoire de la vie privée des Français depuis l'origine de la nation jusqu'à nos jours*, Paris 1783, 3 Vol. d'Aussy's work discusses all the furniture, utensils, textiles, lighting, manners and customs required for a meal.



In the eighteenth century, the home thereby gained a new and central position in the upper-class culture of the era.⁵⁷ And the homely feeling and feeling of comfort went hand in hand. When Jean-François Marmontel's opéra-comique *Lucile* from 1769 was performed in Stockholm in 1776, translated into Swedish by Anna Maria Lenngren, this was the launch of the genre in Swedish, but also for the staging of everyday life in a home environment.⁵⁸ The protagonists who had gathered for breakfast in the dressing room, wearing dressing gowns and *déshabillé*, sigh contentedly: 'Believe me, one cannot become blissful and happy if one does not seek happiness within one's own home.'⁵⁹ The theme of the plot, which criticised descent and ancestry, was about the triumph of love over inherited titles, and it added bourgeois contours to the morals and innocent virtues of the characters. The intimate room and the informal, unaffected attire, without pretensions and mannerisms, not only expressed their comfort but also signalled the sincerity of their emotions and actions. The sensibility represented by the aristocratic Méliete in *La petite maison*, her ability to identify and experience comfort, had now become a possibility in wider social contexts. One's own house and home were symbolically charged expressions in the cultural and political debate of the time. The home became the place where the private individual could find fulfilment. Witold Rybczynski regards the rise of the new luxury – comfort in the home – as being linked to a new, crucial view of humankind, the individual and the family during the eighteenth century.⁶⁰ In 1767, Alexander Roslin portrayed Marmontel holding a manuscript in his hand – and wearing a dressing gown.⁶¹

Aim, materials and method

In recent years, research has above all highlighted the development of a new culture of comfort within eighteenth-century French and British upper-class circles and has investigated how it reflects a revolutionary change in the elite's self-image

57 Hanna Greig's article 'Eighteenth-Century English Interiors in Image and Text' centres on English source material but is also applicable to the phenomenon from a larger perspective, *Imagined Interiors. Representing the Domestic Interior Since the Renaissance*, Jeremy Aynsley and Charlotte Grant (ed.), V&A, London 2006, pp. 102–27.

58 Jean François Marmontel, *Lucile, opera-comique i en act, öfversatt från fransyskan och upförd på kongl. svenska theatren, i deras majestäters och det kongl. husets närvaro, första gången den 19 junii 1776*. Stockholm 1776. Gustaf Johan Ehrensward, *Dagboksanteckningar förda vid Gustaf III:s hof, utgifna af D:r E. V. Montan*, I, Stockholm 1877, p. 40: 'never has any play been received in such a way; it seems as though seeing the adventures of people is preferred over those of the gods'.

59 Marmontel 1776, p. 12.

60 Rybczynski 1986, p. 35.

61 Alexander Roslin, *Jean-François Marmontel*, 1767, oil on canvas, 64 × 54 cm, the Louvre, Paris.

and identity. The aim of this study is to assess Swedish conditions from a similar perspective. By utilising images and objects as historical sources and by analysing them in the light of source material comprising estate inventories, biographies, letters, diaries, pamphlets and newspaper articles, this is a search for the pieces of the puzzle that make up the profound change in civilisation that the culture of comfort and consumption entailed in eighteenth-century Swedish everyday life. The recurring references to the term *culture* – as in *culture* of comfort or coffee *culture* – indicate that both material and social patterns and practices are central to the study.

The overall aim is, from an art-history perspective, to examine the attitude to this change in comfort in the eighteenth century and how it was manifested in the material and social cultures of a Swedish country house environment. The relevant questions are: In what way was this international, urban elite culture translated into a wider upper-class stratum in rural Sweden? and How was a French-influenced lifestyle managed or reshaped in the shadow of the critical debate on consumption and excess in the Age of Liberty? With a focus on Swedish upper-class culture in the period from 1750 to 1800, the goal is thereby to examine how the European culture of comfort was expressed in Sweden. The study centres on an illuminating example: the Wadenstierna family on the Näs country estate in Uppland Province.

The introductory painting with the woman resting in her armchair seeks to draw attention to eighteenth-century pictorial art in general, and portraiture and genre works in particular, as a key starting point for the study. The pictures convey how 'comfort' was perceived, what was required for comfortable living and how it was expressed in accordance with various social roles and situations. The study presents a number of people from the eighteenth century, from different social groups and of different nationalities, ages and genders. Some of the individuals are familiar, whereas others remain unknown. Some of them gradually appear more prominently – such as politician Carl Eric Wadenstierna (1723–1787) and both of his wives, Jacobina Sophia Psilanderhielm von Seulenberg (1733–1768) and, subsequently, Fredrica Carleson (1743–1794). They are the protagonists in this study. Here, Wadenstierna's two daughters, Sophia (1758–1830) and Carolina (1762–1848), also play key roles. Their portraits, personal effects and homes create a picture of the eighteenth-century culture of comfort. It is specific to their family but includes elements that are representative of the social group and era to which they belonged. The story of the Wadenstierna family must also be viewed in a wider context and related to the world around them. In the following chapters, the perspective alternates between their country estate in Uppland Province and the wider world. But they are the focus of this study.

The Wadenstierna family's Stockholm residence was on the corner of Klara Västra Kyrkogata and Stora Vattugränden in the district of Norrmalm. However, in 1775 the conditions of the family's life changed through the creation of an additional



home, when the new manor house Näs was built. In the years that followed, this is where a more rural home took shape, located 50 km north-east of the capital. The manor at Näs was an exemplary construction in the spirit of the architect Carl Wijnblad, and through the design of the interiors and the commissions and orders of furniture, artworks and household utensils, the Wadenstierna family created a home characterised by their own preferences, but also by the aesthetic ideals and political debates of the period. Preserved drawings, estate inventories and receipts convey a picture of a Gustavian country house environment shaped by the era's ideas of comfort, but also of social, cultural and national identity.⁶² The family did not belong to the uppermost elite, but represented a flourishing and urban echelon of the upper class in late-eighteenth-century Sweden. Carl Eric Wadenstierna's roots in the enlightened and occasionally radical and young nobility who served the state in a bureaucratic capacity also gave him a degree of freedom in relation to conventions linked to the hereditary aristocracy which was steeped in tradition. This freedom may have also been significant for the design of the family's country home at Näs. Compared to many older and grand upper-class environments in the countryside, Näs was much more modest. Here, design and function were coupled with new values and with a more pronounced desire to create a comfortable and well-functioning home for a more informal day-to-day life. It is in this type of environment that the modern culture of comfort becomes most clearly visible in Sweden in the eighteenth century – the new form of luxury that research has highlighted in various international contexts.

The choice of the Wadenstierna family as the case study here also involves examining the entire family and not only the father in his role as patriarch and as an individual with status and influence in the Gustavian society. He certainly stands out as the formal commissioner of the construction of Näs and the person who ordered furniture and paintings, but in this study the manor at Näs is perceived as an environment shaped by the entire Wadenstierna family. Fredrica Carleson and Wadenstierna's daughters Sophia and Carolina probably participated in the creation of this milieu that comprises the family's private sphere and their public sphere for entertaining. They are depicted in the paintings performing various tasks, and some of the rooms and furniture around them were especially for the women in the family. The lack of sources prevents detailed scrutiny of the family relations and decision-making paths in the creation of Näs, and in the patriarchal system of the era Carl Eric Wadenstierna would have unquestionably had extensive influence on the construction, orders and commissions, and furnishings. In this study, the environment that emerged at Näs will therefore also be interpreted in the light of

62 The link between national identity and norms associated with taste and consumption has been pointed out by, among others, Stobart and Ilmakunnas 2017.

his social roles and political standpoints. Nonetheless, it was also an environment in which the women had decisive significance, and this study will largely centre on their activities at various types of tables. The following chapters are therefore based on the assumption that the women also played a key part in the creation of the home at Näs. Their roles, tasks and comfort constitute the main core of the environment.

The ambition here is also to include source material that has previously been relatively unused. Alongside archival documents, the collections of paintings and objects that can be linked to Näs when it was owned by the Wadenstierna family offer a rich source of knowledge about eighteenth-century Swedish upper-class culture. Today, the source material is in both public collections and private ownership. Archival materials in the form of legal documents such as insurance policies, estate inventories and wills are stored in Stockholm's city archive and the Swedish National Archives, while inventory lists and reports and a small collection of photographic documentation from Näs in the 1960s is stored in the museum archive at Nordiska museet. The large collection of objects has now been dispersed and is largely in private ownership. The art collection has partly been found in various public collections, including those of Nationalmuseum, while the photographic documentation of the Swedish Portrait Archive (SPA) can provide some information about the privately owned items. An important purpose of the study has been to compile the data about this now dispersed source material in order to recreate a picture of life at Näs and thereby provide new insights into Gustavian country house culture.

From an international perspective, Sweden has an extensive and largely unexplored holding of portraits, not least in private collections. Swedish portraiture also constitutes one of the primary sources for this project. The portraits of Wadenstierna and his wives, by Johan Henric Scheffel and Niclas Lafrensen, recur during this study. Regarded as important artefacts permeated by a specific culture and social practice, they are also studied in dialogue with the rest of the eighteenth-century pictorial world. The art collection at Näs also included eleven paintings by Pehr Hilleström. Wadenstierna commissioned the suite in the run-up to the completion of Näs in the 1770s, and the thematic motifs interplayed with the environment for which they were intended as well as the family and social circle who inhabited it. Hilleström's paintings, dated to around 1774 and 1775, were early works in the artist's oeuvre. They were commissioned shortly after Gustaf III repealed the obligation to belong to a guild in 1773 for artists associated with the reformed Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts; they were thereby given the opportunity to work in an open market.⁶³ The paintings for Näs were one of the most extensive private commissions

63 Mikael Ahlund, 'Konsten att försörja sig som konstnär. Pehr Hilleström och konstmarknaden i 1700-talets Stockholm.', *Ekonomisk kulturhistoria. Bildkonst, konsthantverk och scenkonst 1720–1850*, Klas Nyberg (ed.), Stockholm 2017, pp. 55–71.

of Hilleström's works and were preserved in their original environment at Näs in the Roslagen area of Uppland Province right up to the second half of the twentieth century.

Equally notable is Wadenstierna's commission of around twenty paintings from the landscape painter Johan Philip Korn, who was newly established at that time. Other categories of pictorial art were also represented at Näs and serve as pieces that make up a larger comprehensive picture. A collection of cut-out silhouette portraits documented the family's circle of friends and their social life, and the library's collections of books, engraved plates and maps provide additional references to the Wadenstierna family's way of life and preferences. Furthermore, five painted overdoor decorations remain in their original location in the entrance hall of Näs Manor, and their inscriptions convey ideas about placid life in the countryside. This pictorial source material at Näs is studied here in the light of the eighteenth century's wider visual culture, represented in both international and Swedish collections.

The estate inventory of Carl Eric Wadenstierna dated 1787 goes through the disposition of the rooms at Näs and offers readers a fascinating tour of the family's home. This document reveals an environment full of life, furniture and objects.⁶⁴ The inventory shows which items of furniture belonged to the part of the home used for entertaining and which belonged to the more private or personal rooms in the gentleman's and lady's respective areas. The economic valuation of the objects also hints at how the era rated Swedish veneer furniture by makers such as Georg Haupt or examples of faience from the Marieberg factory in Stockholm. Viewed individually, the different parts of the source material are fragments, but together they create coherence. Other sources may also contribute to the overall picture – the lack of personal letters or diaries associated with the family can be complemented by other contemporary memoirs and written correspondence that sheds light on the ways of life and patterns of socialising that characterised the Wadenstiernas' era and circle. The preserved portraits and collections of art, furniture and literature that can be connected with Näs are also key statements on self-image and identity. Studying the preserved fragments in the light of a wider context also clarifies the connections. Although the Wadenstierna family chose to create a comfortable everyday life for themselves in the Uppland countryside, the reasons for their choices and their taste can be found in the wider world around them. The French fashion

64 Estate inventories have their limitations. They can never provide a comprehensive view of what a person owned throughout their life; instead they give us an insight from a specific point in time. Additionally, these types of inventories cannot tell us what the person acquired themselves and what they received as gifts or inheritances, nor do they indicate which items were personally valued or not; Gudrun Andersson, *Stadens dignitärer. Den lokala elitens status- & maktmanifestation i Arboga 1650–1770*, Stockholm 2009, pp. 133ff.

that disseminated the knowledge of the eighteenth century's new ideals regarding comfort can be traced in the source material's variety of expressions – from the '*commodes*' (chests of drawers and cabinets) listed in the estate inventory to the indoor scenes depicted in Hilleström's paintings.

The fragments' relationship to a complex and multifaceted whole also involves the methodological approaches used in this study. To find paths to the choices made by the family – such as selecting Lafrensen to create the portraits, commissioning furniture from Haupt or paintings by Hilleström, or having their home designed in the style of Carl Wijnblad's models – requires examination of a series of different types of textual and pictorial sources. A portrait can be studied in detail using iconographic methods and analysed comparatively in relation to the visual culture of that time, but it must also be studied in a broader context. Choices, preferences and taste could be shaped by fashion images and opinion pieces in newspapers and magazines, as well as by supply and demand or decrees and ordinances. A wide variety of written source materials, from estate inventories to novels, have been used in this study to obtain greater understanding of how ideas regarding concepts such as comfort were disseminated and took root.⁶⁵

There is also interplay between texts of that time and the era's pictorial world, objects and environments, and this constantly interactive process that shaped eighteenth-century culture requires different readings of both contemporary and older sources. For example, engraved pictures from Paris in the 1670s can serve as reminders of how the eighteenth century's culture of comfort was a consequence of earlier changes and ideals. Witold Rybczynski uses 'the Onion Theory of Comfort' when he asks himself how changed attitudes to comfort came about:

Like an onion, the notion of comfort has many layers, which were added historically. The image of the onion also conveys the elusive nature of comfort: if you take it apart and look at the layers one by one, you lose the overall shape, and yet the layers are still visible one beneath the other. These layers consist of ideas such as privacy or intimacy, convenience, physical ease. Each generation has added something to the definition, has added a layer without necessarily contradicting what came before.⁶⁶

It is not sufficient to analyse one of the outermost layers because they have in turn been shaped by previous layers and, ultimately, by their core.

65 Source material from various databases has proved useful: Litteraturbanken.se; Project Runeberg (runeberg.org); Digitaltmuseum.se; Nationell ArkivDatabas (NAD) and the database tidningar.kb.se.

66 Witold Rybczynski in an interview with Barbara Spronk 1990, <http://aurora.icaap.org/index.php/aurora/article/view/65/77>, accessed: 10 January 2020.

Theoretical starting points

This study connects with international art-history research that in recent years has deepened the inclusion of the subject in new and interdisciplinary research contexts, where, for example, pictorial art is perceived as an integrated part of a wider material culture and of wider social and economic contexts. The theoretical starting points are mainly taken from interdisciplinary research that focuses on consumption and manifestation, from gender research and from perspectives that have been developed within the research fields of material and visual culture studies. With these starting points, the aim of the study is to deepen understanding of the material culture and cultural identity that shaped the elite's self-image in the eighteenth century and thereby also their attitude to comfort.

The fact that the pictures and objects can tell us about the identity-building processes that shaped individuals and groups in Swedish eighteenth-century upper-class culture is thereby a fundamental starting point for the study. The Wadenstierna family's Näs, along with their portraits and furniture, or the clothes and books described in the estate inventory, were filled with meanings in the social context in which the family lived and worked. The objects convey their taste, cultivation, contact networks and lifestyle – perhaps also some of their thoughts and feelings. Their possessions represented the family in their contact with the world around them. Material culture studies is one of the theoretical gateways into analysing this relationship between people and their possessions and what this relationship can tell us. To define a concept that is as elusive and relative as 'comfort', the approach here has been to examine a selection of the tangible objects that the family owned, how they were used, by whom and in what context. The selection has been made on the basis of the thematic starting points of the study, each of which are significant for the era's attitudes to comfort for body and soul: at writing and sewing tables, and at dressing tables, coffee tables and games tables. These themes are presented in more detail in the section on the disposition of the study.

The material culture's economic, aesthetic and emotional value is therefore the focus of the study, and a selection of furniture, clothes, pictures and texts – in combination with their original contexts for which they were intended – thereby constitute some of the study's primary sources. Interpreting objects as meaningful social and cultural signs, *incarnated signs*, that convey messages about their owners and users, is the point of departure for social-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's work *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* from 1986.⁶⁷ His examination of how goods (and services), commodities, are charged with values and associations that have been projected onto them and that make

67 Appadurai 1986, p. 38.

them desirable within a social group, has been a key theoretical starting point for this study. With similar points of departure, Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin have compiled three anthologies that analyse women's relationship with material culture from various perspectives. In *Material Women, 1750–1950: Consuming Desires and Collecting Practices* (2009), *Women and Things, 1750–1950: Gendered Material Strategies* (2009) and *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950* (2009) the authors give examples of how production and consumption of objects shaped women's day-to-day life and identity over the course of 200 years.⁶⁸ The attitude to activities that were defined as particularly female, such as letter writing or embroidery, and the items related to these activities and how they can be linked to aspects of everyday life and comfort, have been of considerable interest to this study.

The field of research grouped under the term *visual culture studies* is especially significant here. As shown, pictorial art can also be studied as actively coded signs or traces in a specific culture and social practice.⁶⁹ The pictures' function as meaningful objects also comprises the identity-building relationship between people and pictures – essential in a generally visually oriented culture such as that of the eighteenth century. Through the portraits, and the cultural and social values with which they were associated, Wadenstierna and his family wanted to define their role and their position as people of rank. But people were also shaped by their belongings. Based on both eighteenth-century literary fiction and the century's different material cultures, art historian Mimi Hellman uses trains of thought from visual culture studies when she examines the relationship between French people in the eighteenth century and their furnished rooms.⁷⁰ In the interplay between people and furniture, Hellman regards the objects as social actors, designed to meet the requirements of and even actively govern people's social role-play and movement patterns: 'objects were not simply owned, but indeed *performed*'.⁷¹ Joan DeJean, in her study *The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual – and the Modern Home Began* (2009), claims that the new armchairs encouraged and taught – or

68 *Material Women, 1750–1950. Consuming Desires and Collecting Practices*, Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (ed.), New York (2009), 2016; *Women and Things, 1750–1950. Gendered Material Strategies*, Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (ed.), New York 2009; *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950*, Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (ed.), New York 2009.

69 Lena Johannesson, 'Att studera konsthistoria och visuell kultur. Begrepp, metod och historiografi', *Konst och visuell kultur i Sverige. Före 1809*, Lena Johannesson (ed.), Stockholm 2007, pp. 12–21. To place eighteenth-century portraiture in the field of visual culture studies, works by Marcia Pointon and Mary D. Sheriff have been of crucial significance.

70 Mimi Hellman, 'Furniture, Sociability, and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century France', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1999), pp. 415–45.

71 Hellman 1999, p. 417.

even forced – people to relax.⁷² Correspondingly, this study aims to show how the possessions that surrounded the Wadenstierna family were not only expressions of identity-building consumption but also normative co-creators of their social roles.

Many researchers of eighteenth-century cultural history paraphrase the relationship between people's material and social culture as a piece of theatre. This device is often applied in consumption research. In *Consumption and the World of Goods* (1993), John Brewer and Roy Porter examined a culture of consumption during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which had the social game or performance as its motives: 'material life formed a stage with its sets, props and actors engaged in the drama of being'.⁷³ Defining oneself as an informed consumer (the actor) was an active identity-building action (the role on the stage) that conveyed who you were in relation to your surroundings (the audience). Sociologist and anthropologist Erving Goffman used the stage as a metaphor in his study *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), where he showed that people, based on social and cultural norms and attitudes, endeavoured in different ways to control themselves and the impressions they wished to make on the people around them. Goffman called this social control mechanism 'impression management'. To take to the stage and act convincingly as an 'actor' in front of an 'audience', the correct mask, costume and decor were required for the role in question.⁷⁴ The country house that Wadenstierna commissioned for himself and his family served as such a social stage, on which furniture and people took part in the performance. In the same way, his portraits can be regarded as the most refined and lasting form of 'impression management'. Through the portraits, he was able to control the image of himself that he left for posterity, in a similar way to controlling the image of his deceased wife by commissioning a posthumous portrait of her.

The metaphor is far from a recent construction. In 1730, Wadenstierna's father-in-law, Edvard Carleson, describes in *Sedolärande Mercurius* how people strive in various ways to gain prestige and accolades in their attempts to distinguish themselves in life. But how should people handle their aspirations? He refers to the rules of life of the Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus:

Epictetus utilises a different allusion, which is quite agreeable, and relatively serviceable to convince us to be careful with the class in which divine providence has placed us. Here we are, he says, as if in a theatre, where each individual has his assigned role. A person's greatest obligation is to play their role to perfection. We could very well say that our role does not suit us and that we could play another

72 DeJean 2009. p. 103.

73 John Brewer and Roy Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, New York (1993) 2003, p. 6.

74 Erving Goffman, *Jaget och maskerna. En studie i vardagslivets dramatik*, (1959) Stockholm 2004.

better. But he says that is not our business. All we should care about is to excel in the part given to us. But if the part is unserviceable, that is not our fault, but that of he who allocates all the roles and who is the director of the entire drama.⁷⁵

In an age when consumption enabled unprecedented social climbing and where increasing numbers of people seemed to be able to adopt whatever role their finances permitted, or rather the appearance of credibility permitted, it was tempting to take matters into one's own hands. However, the key was to navigate, and do so elegantly, in the expanding, material world that the eighteenth century became. The sources are permeated by a sense of wonder at living in an era when everything appeared to be possible, and where everything was available for purchase that could make life beautiful, pleasant and comfortable. The newspapers enthusiastically report on the new inventions: a comfortable and elastic hooped petticoat; paper that is not destroyed by water or fire; English fans that imitate Chinese ones; a new type of blinds used in *voitures anglaises*; a harpsichord that imitates a number of different instruments; various kinds of dentures; artificial fruit to wear in hairstyles; a new fabric made of grass – more lustrous than silk – from which coats, waistcoats and trousers can be made; a washing machine from London that can wash up to twenty-four shirts at the same time, and new, comfortable furniture to meet all needs.⁷⁶

The constant supply of new consumables had consequences that challenged older conventions and in the longer term also the foundations of the hierarchical class society. The assignment of roles between groups in society was affected by the distribution of resources, for example, between men and women, as women were identified as the eighteenth century's new major consumers.⁷⁷ As claimed by Brewer and Porter, women therefore feature more prominently in consumption research in contrast with production research.⁷⁸ The restless changeableness that was deemed to characterise the market for new fashions and luxury objects was also ascribed to women, who, according to attitudes at the time, were vain, sensual, capricious, impressionable, coquettish and envious, which made them

75 *Sedolärande Mercurius*, 8 September 1730.

76 *Almanac de Gotha contenant Diverses Connoissances Curieuses et Utiles*, pp. 102, 104; 1787, pp. 80, 132; 1789, p. 75; 1791, pp. 67, 169; in the 1791 issue 1776, pp. 99, 100; 1792, p. 75. Detailed descriptions of new fashions were also distributed through the fashion images of the era, for example, in *Cabinet des modes* (1785–6) and *Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises* (1786–9).

77 See the articles in the section on 'Shopping' in *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700–1830*, John Styles and Amanda Vickery (ed.), *Studies in British Art* 17, New Haven and London 2006, pp. 125–225. Here, the male consumer is also highlighted, as well as the fact that the sources are often silent about whether the woman's or the man's decisions are behind the household accounts and purchases, pp. 5–8.

78 Brewer and Porter 2003, pp. 1–7.



especially susceptible to the temptations of consumption and constant stream of new products.⁷⁹ In a satire in the newspaper *Stockholms Posten* in 1782, a young wife rebuking her husband for taking an interest in the purchases exclaims, 'But my God! Is it suitable for a man to meddle in such trifles? No, frankly, *mon cher*, you don't understand such things.'⁸⁰

This distinction between the genders, with their specific rules and spheres, was reinforced during the eighteenth century. The woman's role in the home in contrast to that of the man in society was rooted in the changed perceptions and attitudes that developed during the century.⁸¹ As mentioned, the woman was assigned a large part of the responsibility for the design of the home and the housekeeping.⁸² The woman's aesthetic and social abilities and her feeling for taste and refinement made her the new, strong target group for fashion and consumables, associated with the comfort and representativeness of the home. The market was quickly adapted to these gender-specific norms and ideals, which were confirmed and reinforced in the various pictures and texts of the time.⁸³ In France, the women-dominated influential salon culture was also important in shaping 'female' taste and consumption.⁸⁴ Women within the elite took on the role of promoters of art and culture and therefore also became shapers of taste – such as the Marquise de Pompadour.⁸⁵ In contrast with Louis XIV, who had extensive control over the royal court's aesthetic expression as a key manifestation of autocracy and the sovereignty of French taste, Louis XV and Louis XVI transferred much of this responsibility to their queens or mistresses. The eighteenth-century market for specific 'women's furniture' such as various types of dressing tables, writing tables and sewing tables was one result of this development. New, lightweight, moveable items of furniture

79 Throughout the eighteenth century, the female consumer is also portrayed as immoral, indolent and to blame for the country's social and economic imbalance. Malicious portraits and caricatures were thought to be educational and corrective (*Sedolärände Mercurius*, 31 August 1731).

80 'Om rika Flickors upfostran', *Stockholms Posten*, 21 December 1782.

81 Here, the distinction between ideal and reality should be highlighted: although the norm advocated these two separate spheres, in reality the relationships between men and women and their responsibilities and tasks were more differentiated and complicated; *Everyday Revolutions. Eighteenth-Century Women Transforming Public and Private*, Diane E. Boyd and Marta Kvannd (ed.), University of Delaware Press, Newark 2008, pp. 17–29.

82 See the description of the woman's areas of responsibility in *En fullkomlig Ägta Hustrus Bild, Tecknad Efter den målning, som finnes i Ord-språks-Bokens sidsta Capitel*. Translation from German by Eric Forssén, Gothenburg 1787.

83 Dutch seventeenth-century painting, which was coveted in the eighteenth century, also affected the attitude to marriage, family and homes. The paintings and engraved pictures conveyed bourgeois ideals to eighteenth-century upper-class consumers. Eighteenth-century artists, such as Chardin and Greuze, dressed the ideal in modern attire, and their pictures had a major impact on a wide audience.

84 Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France*, London 1996, p. 64.

85 DeJean 2009, p. 163.

were designed on the basis of a specific female decorum, with everything from drawer mechanisms that meant women did not need to pull drawers out towards them – a gesture regarded as unseemly for a woman – to armchairs and sofas with female names such as *'bergère'* or *'duchesse'*.⁸⁶ So when Trémicour tries to seduce Mélite in *La petite maison*, he knows exactly how to do it: the perfect home with the latest in interior decoration will make the connoisseur fall for him. The luxury that Mélite sees and experiences makes her constantly want more.

On the basis of the gender theory perspective described here, the female Swedish eighteenth-century consumer accordingly gains a prominent role in this study. Both of Wadenstierna's wives and his two daughters come to the fore in the various chapters. Their portraits and possessions constitute the main examples in the study.

Previous research

It is clear that there are many and extensive paths of discovery leading into the eighteenth-century culture of comfort. The recent decades' interest in eighteenth-century material culture and how it related to concepts such as comfort or consumption is one of these broad paths that encompasses a wealth of research initiatives within a series of different disciplines. A few examples that have been of particular interest to this study are highlighted here in the following condensed research review.

The study *The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual – and the Modern Home Began* (2009) by literary historian Joan DeJean became a crucial starting point for the project and sparked curiosity about what the consequences of the comfort revolution were in a corresponding Swedish context.⁸⁷ DeJean starts from the changes in late-seventeenth-century France that led to the comfortable eighteenth century. She emphasises the concrete conditions for eighteenth-century home environments and the consequences of changed attitudes to the human body, clothes and furniture for the growth of a new lifestyle. In 2011, the exhibition 'Paris: Life & Luxury in the Eighteenth Century' was shown at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, which developed a few of the issues that DeJean had raised in her book. In the extensive annotated exhibition catalogue, DeJean presents the themes of the exhibition in more detail, followed by a series of more in-depth studies of the relationship between the material and social culture of the eighteenth century by Charissa Bremer-David, Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, Mimi Hellman and

⁸⁶ Auslander 1996, p. 67.

⁸⁷ Joan DeJean, *The Age of Comfort. When Paris Discovered Casual – And the Modern Home Began*, New York 2009.

Björn Kerber.⁸⁸ The physical objects are here not only regarded as expressions of shape and function during the eighteenth century but also as sources of the relationship between people and environment and pertinent norms and values. Here, art historian Katie Scott's studies of eighteenth-century art and interiors in relation to physical and social contexts should also be highlighted, for instance, in *The Rococo Interior* (1996) and in the anthology *Between Luxury and the Everyday: Decorative Arts in Eighteenth-Century France* (2006).⁸⁹

The significance of the eighteenth century's considerable visual culture for the era's identity-building processes is further discussed in many new art-history and interdisciplinary publications. The influential artists of the eighteenth century such as François Boucher or Jean Siméon Chardin consciously endeavoured to meet the needs of an audience shaped by new lifestyle ideals, in which fashion, comfort and sociality were important expressions. In turn, their works generated new ideals. Both Paula Radisich's *Pastiche, Fashion and Galanterie in Chardin's Genre Subjects: Looking Smart* (2014) and Melissa Hyde's *Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics* (2006) provide new angles on known oeuvres, where aspects such as gender, consumption and manifestation are highly significant.⁹⁰

Within consumption research, the anthology *Consumption and the World of Goods* (1993) by John Brewer and Roy Porter is a standard work, as is Maxine Berg's *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2005), which shows how the growth of the wider commercial market had socially and culturally far-reaching consequences.⁹¹ There is also a focus on the eighteenth-century culture of comfort in the work of historian Jon Stobart, where he and fellow researchers have recurrently examined the environments of the elite. His latest, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House* (2022), was published after the Swedish edition of this book but has several interesting points in common. In an anthology co-edited with Andrew Hann, *The Country House: Material Culture and Consumption* (2015), and in *Consumption and the Country House* (2016), co-written with Mark Rothery, Jon Stobart examines consumption as a performative action and aspects such as the upper-class environment's male and female spheres.⁹²

88 *Paris: Life and Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, Bremer-David, Charissa (ed.), Los Angeles 2011.

89 Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior. Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris*, New Haven and London 1996; *Between Luxury and the Everyday: Decorative Arts in Eighteenth-Century France*, Katie Scott and Deborah Cherry (ed.), New Jersey, 2006.

90 Paula Radisich, *Pastiche, Fashion and Galanterie in Chardin's Genre Subjects: Looking Smart*, Plymouth 2014; Melissa Hyde, *Making Up the Rococo. François Boucher and His Critics*, Los Angeles 2006.

91 John Brewer, and Roy Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, New York (1993) 2003; Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Oxford 2005.

92 Jon Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, Routledge, New York 2022; *The Country House. Material Culture and Consumption*, Jon Stobart and Andrew Hann (ed.), Swindon 2015; *Consumption*

In this context, his predecessor John Crowley's *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain and Early America* (2003) should also be mentioned.⁹³ Together with historian Johanna Ilmakunnas, Stobart has also compiled the anthology *A Taste for Luxury in Early Modern Europe* (2017), which examines the identity-building significance of luxury consumption in early modern Europe.⁹⁴ Ilmakunnas has also delved deeper into studying consumption and manifestation behaviours, especially in Swedish country house culture, for example, in her book *Ett ståndsmässigt liv. Familjen von Fersens livsstil på 1700-talet* (2012).⁹⁵ Christer Ahlberger's work *Konsumtionsrevolutionen 1. Om det moderna konsumtionssamhällets framväxt 1750–1900* (1996) is another key contribution to consumption research in Sweden.⁹⁶

Christine Adams' *A Taste for Comfort and Status: A Bourgeois Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (2000) is interesting as a comparative study as its point of departure is a high-bourgeois family from the heterogeneous upper-class stratum that characterised the eighteenth-century French countryside. Here the subject of study is not people from the uppermost echelon of the urbane French elite, which brings nuance to the picture of class-based consumption and manifestation that is otherwise often represented by the exceptional conditions that characterised royal families and the nobility. The Lamothe family in the case study were part of a privileged social stratum who, well-educated and locally influential, were critical of the aristocratic elite and royal court culture, yet also strived for a certain degree of concordance with the modern, urbane upper-class ideals. In a similar way to the Lamothe family, the status and identity of the Wadenstierna family were not based on old historical roots or an ostentatious lifestyle. Adams' description of the Lamothe family's identity-building activities can therefore, in certain aspects, also

and the Country House, Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery (ed.), Oxford 2016; 'Comfort in English and Swedish country houses, c. 1760–1820', *Social History*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2018, pp. 234–58.

93 John Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort. Sensibilities and Design in Early-Modern Britain and Early America*, Baltimore 2003.

94 *A Taste for Luxury in Early Modern Europe: Display, Acquisition and Boundaries*, Johanna Ilmakunnas and Jon Stobart (ed.), London and New York 2017.

95 Johanna Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmässigt liv. Familjen von Fersens livsstil på 1700-talet* Stockholm 2012, and Johanna Ilmakunnas, 'The Luxury Shopping Experience of the Swedish Aristocracy in Eighteenth-Century Paris', in *Luxury and Gender in European Towns, 1700–1914*, Deborah Simonton, Marjo Kaartinen & Anne Montenach (ed.), New York 2015, pp. 115–31; Johanna Ilmakunnas, 'Adelns arbete och vardag på 1700-talets svenska herrgårdar. Johan Gabriel Oxenstiernas och Jacobina Charlotta Munsterhjelm's dagböcker', *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, the 98 2013:2 issue and Johanna Ilmakunnas, 'Konsten att avbilda arbete. Kvinnors sysselsättningar och vardag på Pehr Hilleströms genremålningar från 1770-talet till 1810-talet', *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, 103, 2018:1.

96 Ahlberger studies the consumption of tea and coffee during the mid-eighteenth century with the help of estate inventories. Christer Ahlberger, *Konsumtionsrevolutionen 1. Om det moderna konsumtionssamhällets framväxt 1750–1900*, the Faculty of Humanities, the University of Gothenburg 1996.



apply to the Wadenstierna family's position: 'Rather, it was dependent on family ties, professional expertise, and satisfaction, cultural contribution and personal cultivation, and a sense of local status based on their respected achievement and position in the community.'⁹⁷

Amanda Vickery's *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (1998) and *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (2009) are examples of adjacent research with strong points in common with comfort and consumption.⁹⁸ Alongside historian John Styles, Vickery is also the editor of the anthology *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700–1830* (2006).⁹⁹ The female consumer in the comfort revolution is also highlighted in Erin Mackie's *Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator* (1997), which discusses the significance of the press for the gender-specific dimension of consumption and the rise of 'female spheres'.¹⁰⁰ Jennifer Jones' *Sexing la Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (2004) examines how fashion was increasingly clearly defined as a female, urbane and superficial matter during the latter half of the eighteenth century.¹⁰¹ *Att hasta mot undergången: anspråk, flyktighet, förställning i debatten om konsumtion i Sverige 1730–1830* (2015) by historian of ideas Leif Runefelt is a study of corresponding Swedish conditions and examines the attitudes of the press, literature and public debate in Sweden to luxury and consumption as well as their female preponderance.¹⁰² In the anthology *Det svenska begäret. Sekler av lyxkonsumtion* (2015), edited by Paula von Wachenfeldt and Klas Nyberg, a number of researchers from various disciplines address the impact of luxury on Swedish culture in various periods; the subjects of discussion include various aspects of eighteenth-century luxury consumption.¹⁰³ Research projects focusing on eighteenth-century gender practices include the interdisciplinary project 'Early Modern Cultural History' at Uppsala University, which has, for example, resulted

97 Christine Adams, *A Taste for Comfort and Status. A Bourgeois Family in Eighteenth-Century France*, Pennsylvania 2000, p. 2.

98 Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter. Women's Lives in Georgian England*, New Haven (1998), 2003; Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors. At Home in Georgian England*, New Haven 2009.

99 *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700–1830*, John Styles and Amanda Vickery (ed.), *Studies in British Art* 17, New Haven and London 2006.

100 Erin Mackie, *Market à la Mode. Fashion, Commodity and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator*, Baltimore 1997.

101 Jennifer Jones, *Sexing La Mode. Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France*, Oxford 2004.

102 Runefelt 2015.

103 *Det svenska begäret. Sekler av lyxkonsumtion*, Paula von Wachenfeldt and Klas Nyberg (ed.), Stockholm 2015.

in *Performing Herself: Everyday Practices and the Making of Gender in Early Modern Sweden* (2017), edited by Mikael Alm.¹⁰⁴

One of the project's aims is to study how the culture of comfort is manifested in the Swedish country house environment in the light of this new and international research. In order to maintain the Swedish perspective, the active research into Swedish palaces and country houses has been of essential assistance – from Gösta Selling's *Svenska herrgårdshem under 1700-talet* (1937) to Bo Vahlne's *Frihetstidens inredningar på Stockholms slott. Om bekvämlighetens och skönhetens nivåer* (2012).¹⁰⁵ Another highly significant source has been Göran Ulväng's country manor research, not least his extensive works *Herrgårdarnas historia. Arbete, liv och bebyggelse på uppländska herrgårdar* (2008) and *Hus och gård i förändring. Uppländska herrgårdar, boställen och bondgårdar under 1700- och 1800-talens agrara revolution* (2004).¹⁰⁶ International manor house research that has also inspired this study includes Rainer Knapas' *Monrepos, Ludwig Heinrich Nicolay och hans värld i 1700-talets ryska Finland* (2003).¹⁰⁷

There is, however, scant previous research into Näs Manor and the Wadenstierna family. The cultural-historical value of Näs is briefly addressed by Lars Sjöberg in his book *Svenska trähus* (2002) and in a few articles from the middle of the twentieth century: Bengt G. Söderberg, in *Slott och herresäten i Sverige* (1967); Karl Asplund, in *Fataburen* (1960) and Gunnar Mascoll Silfverstolpe, in *Svenska hem i ord och bilder* (1940).¹⁰⁸ Gustaf Näsström also draws attention to a few details from Näs in the cultural-historical review *Forna dagars Sverige* (1962).¹⁰⁹ The government official Carl Eric Wadenstierna is presented in Erik Fahlbeck's biography of Wadenstierna's

104 *Performing Herself. Everyday Practices and the Making of Gender in Early Modern Sweden*, Mikael Alm (ed.), *Opuscula Historica Upsaliensia* 53, Uppsala 2017.

105 Gösta Selling, *Svenska herrgårdshem under 1700-talet*, Stockholm (1937) 1991; Bo Vahlne, *Frihetstidens inredningar på Stockholms slott. Om bekvämlighetens och skönhetens nivåer*, Stockholm 2012. Selling claims that the representativeness was equally strong in eighteenth-century homes as in the seventeenth century, but that a type of integration of the functions of the reception rooms and the residential rooms (or *appartement de commodité*) occurred during the eighteenth century, p. 341.

106 Göran Ulväng, *Herrgårdarnas historia. Arbete, liv och bebyggelse på uppländska herrgårdar*, Uppsala 2008; Göran Ulväng, *Hus och gård i förändring. Uppländska herrgårdar, boställen och bondgårdar under 1700- och 1800-talens agrara revolution*, Hedemora 2004 [diss.].

107 Rainer Knapas, *Monrepos, Ludwig Heinrich Nicolay och hans värld i 1700-talets ryska Finland*, Stockholm 2003. Similar perspectives concerning Russian country house culture have also been discussed in Priscilla Roosevelt, *Life on the Russian Country Estate. A Social and Cultural History*, New Haven and London 1995.

108 Lars Sjöberg, *Svenska trähus*, Stockholm 2002; Bengt G. Söderberg, 'Näs', *Slott och herresäten i Sverige*, Malmö 1967; Karl Asplund, 'Näs i Rö', *Fataburen*, Nordiska museet, Stockholm 1960; Gunnar Mascoll Silfverstolpe, 'Näs i Roslagen. En gustaviansk herrgård' in *Svenska hem i ord och bilder*, issue 28, Stockholm 1940, pp. 1–8.

109 Gustaf Näsström, *Forna dagars Sverige*, III, *Kulturhistorisk bilderbok om frihetstid och gustaviansk tid*, Stockholm 1962.

son-in-law *Lars August Mannerheim* (1969) and is also glimpsed in Hallesvik's article 'Partimotsättningarna vid 1771–72 års riksdag som bakgrund till Gustav III:s statskupp', in *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift för politik – statistik – ekonomi* (1962).¹¹⁰ Older sources that mention Wadenstierna include Anders Fryxell's *Berättelser ur svenska historien. Fyrariondeandra delen. Frihets-tidens sista år och revolutionen 1772* (1873) and Carl Gustaf Nordin's *Dagboksanteckningar för åren 1786–1792* (1868).¹¹¹

To the table! Disposition of the study

A few cut-out silhouette pictures from the early 1780s show women at the court in Weimar, busily doing various activities at tables (Images 8–10). They are serving tea, writing letters or making lace. The pictures belonged to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, an enthusiastic collector of silhouettes, and they provide insight into everyday life and social life at the cultural court. The silhouette as a genre of pictures was also an expression of a form of socialising at that time. As part of social life, silhouette cutting was an appreciated pastime undertaken by both amateurs and professionals. The women in the silhouette collection have been above all portrayed at tables, and the choice of table also conveys something about the depicted women. The detailed types of tables, dainty and slender in shape, were all adapted to the activities and working positions of the women – the height and width of the tea table differed from the measurements of the needlework table, and the lightweight writing table could easily be moved to the window for better light. At the tables, and via them, the women were able to express important skills and characteristics strongly associated with social and cultural status. For example, the woman brewing the tea elegantly handles the expensive utensils without tipping the tea cups over the table edge and without a quivering of the plumes in her hat. The serving of tea was additionally a social act accompanied by conversation and socialising. The interplay between objects, gestures and displays of behaviour presents a picture of a knowledgeable and cultivated person. The table plays a key part in this overall picture. The person who created the silhouettes must also have been seated at a table. The significance of the tables in various social, cultural and identity-building processes therefore occupies a central role in this study.

110 Erik Fahlbeck, *Lars August Mannerheim. Politiker. Justitieombudsman. Bruksägare. Jordbrukare*, Lund 1969; Stig Hallesvik, 'Partimotsättningarna vid 1771–72 års riksdag som bakgrund till Gustav III:s statskupp', *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift för politik – statistik – ekonomi*, Lund 1962, pp. 383–405.

111 Anders Fryxell, *Berättelser ur svenska historien. Fyrariondeandra delen. Frihets-tidens sista år och revolutionen 1772*, Stockholm 1873, pp. 226–31; Carl Gustaf Nordin, *Dagboksanteckningar för åren 1786–1792*, Stockholm 1868.



8–10. *At the Tea Table*, 30.5 × 23 cm; *Henriette von Knebel*, 24.6 × 17 cm; *Friederike Louise, princesse of Hessen-Darmstadt*, c. 1783, 25.6 × 17.8 cm. Ink on paper. From Anne Gabrisch, *Schattenbilder der Goethezeit*, Leipzig, 1966.

The comfort revolution of the eighteenth century became clearly linked to new types of furniture and new ways of furnishing rooms. Furniture became movable – mobile – as indicated in the Swedish word for furniture: *möbler*, from *mobilis* in Latin. An important aspect of the development of comfort was this new mobility and flexibility in form and function that the home and its interiors now displayed. Seat furniture had already started to be developed in the late seventeenth century, while many new types of tables were launched in above all the eighteenth century. In contrast with the heavy sofas and armchairs, these small, lightweight tables, designed to be easily lifted or rolled on castors, characterised the new comfort. There were *table courante* and *table volante* – tables that ‘ran’ or ‘flew’ – that could rapidly meet all the conceivable needs of the era.¹¹² In Pehr Nordquist’s painting *Caffe-Beslaget* from 1799 (Image 89), the women are saved from being caught drinking the forbidden coffee thanks to the lightweight and easily moveable small table that a woman hastily moves away from the scene when the law enforcers come knocking.

The new, dainty tables were associated with the modern woman for whom they had been designed and symbolised a new lifestyle, so comfortable that the woman virtually never had to leave her various tables. In 1731, *Sedolärande Mercurius* portrays the fashionable woman’s day as entirely connected to the tables, from the morning’s dressing table – ‘where they had sufficient work until midday’ – to the guests at the laid dinner table. ‘After they had eaten, the coffee table appears, the visits commence, then the games table, the discourses are droll.’¹¹³

Dressing tables, coffee tables and games tables could be associated with pastimes and indolence, whereas other types of tables confirmed more duty-bound and normative ideals expected of women. Above all, tables for sewing and other needlework were associated with diligence and domestic virtues. Small, decorative writing tables for women were suitable for the widespread letter-writing culture but perhaps also reflect the era’s uncertain attitude to women’s education. The wealth of different tables that were designed in the eighteenth century for the female consumer met needs but also contributed to shape a changed role for women and in turn created new needs. Many specialised accoutrements were offered to go with the tables. They were not only marketed as ‘*kommoditeter*’ (*commodités*, for comfort) but as necessities and ranged from specially designed candleholders to powder compacts and artistic ink pots.

The book follows the women at some of these tables. Carl Eric Wadenstierna is likely to have spent a large part of his professional and private life at various tables,

112 Compare the modern, wide dresses, a style called a *robe volante*, of the 1730s, which refer to the same comfortable and easy lifestyle, even though the convention was to wear a rigid corset under the loose garment.

113 *Sedolärande Mercurius*, II, No. 23, 4 May 1731.

but when he commissioned the portraits of himself and his wives, he arranged for the women to be depicted at these items of furniture. In the suite of paintings that Pehr Hilleström created in conjunction with the Wadenstierna family's relocation to the Näs estate, the women are also the figures positioned at sewing tables, ironing tables and coffee tables. The decision to focus this study on the women at the tables, as examples of the eighteenth-century culture of comfort, has been a conscious way to limit the extensive material.

Although the first chapter, 'Carl Eric Wadenstierna and Näs Manor', places Wadenstierna himself centre stage, the chapter also has the key aim of providing a more general background to the home and life at Näs. Here, matters concerning the floor plan, functions and logistics of the building are discussed – which are of considerable significance for the aspects of comfort that the subsequent sections focus on. This introductory presentation of the manor and its surroundings also paints a general picture of family life, social life and guests at Näs, as well as of its interiors and collections of pictures and books, with the aim of providing the reader with a more cohesive background in preparation for the subsequent chapters' more specific and detailed themes, in which the interest is also directed at Wadenstierna's wives and daughters.

The second chapter, 'At the sewing table', uses Niclas Lafrensen's portrait of Wadenstierna's first wife, Jacobina Sophia Psilanderhielm, as a starting point. Based on the portrait, the discussion examines how the eighteenth-century female ideal was associated with conceptions of fashionable taste and consumption. Additionally, Pehr Hilleström's paintings at Näs, in which the motifs primarily centre on the production and care of textiles, become the subject of Wadenstierna's own positioning in the era's debate on luxury and comfort. Wadenstierna's second wife, Fredrica Carleson, was portrayed at a different type of table and is the point of departure for the third chapter, 'At the writing table'. The diminutive desk was an example of the era's desirable 'female furniture', which both encouraged and limited women's writing activities. The disposition of the rooms at Näs and the positioning of the family's various pieces of furniture for writing reflect the view on male and female roles and spheres in the home.

The fourth chapter, 'At the dressing table', highlights the table that perhaps most clearly connects the eighteenth-century image of women to the attitude to luxury, consumption and comfort. The art of portraiture repeatedly depicted women at dressing tables – yet, Wadenstierna's Näs lacked these portraits and what were normally classed as dressing tables. What did this absence signal and how was it compensated for? Does the lack of dressing tables in Swedish portraiture in general and at Wadenstierna's country house in particular tell us something about Swedish identity in the eighteenth century?

The fifth chapter, 'At the games tables', is based on one of the paintings by Pehr Hilleström that hung on the walls at Näs. A woman is dealing cards on the pull-out

leaf of a chest of drawers. This temporary arrangement shows how various games became a constantly recurring activity in everyday life and society in the eighteenth century. Upper-class homes were adapted, in terms of their floor plans and furniture, to the growing culture of playing games. There were several games tables at Näs, but the tables specially designated for different games were also associated with various forms of status, which also assigned men and women separate roles and spheres. Here, the chapter examines how the eighteenth century's visual culture expresses these shifting norms and values in general and how they relate to pictures and household items at Näs in particular.

The final chapter, 'At the coffee table', discusses the significance of coffee and tableware as established symbols of the elite's luxury consumption in relation to the aspects of comfort of the new luxury. The issue of how, where, when and by whom coffee (or tea) was drunk, was circumscribed by a series of social and cultural codes, especially important at a time when both the beverages and their vessels became increasingly widespread '*commodités*'.

Social life therefore largely took place at various types of tables. The residential rooms at Näs contained at least thirty-six different tables during the Gustavian era. In addition, there were various work tables in the kitchen wing, which are not mentioned in Wadenstierna's estate inventory.¹¹⁴ There is only scope to include a few of all these tables in this study. The dining room's three dining tables with double leaves and the sideboards fixed to the wall are not discussed here.¹¹⁵

The next chapter will now open the door to Carl Eric Wadenstierna's Näs – to the environment where he envisaged that his family and friends would gather. And in the subsequent chapters we make our way, together with the women in the family, between some of the manor's tables that symbolised and enabled the new age of comfort.

¹¹⁴ Riksarkivet, Näs Silverstolpeska arkivet, Personarkiven, vol. 60, Carl Eric Wadenstierna (1723–1787).

¹¹⁵ To mitigate this omission, readers can for example read about the dining table that author Mary Wollstonecraft sighs heavily about during her visit to Sweden in 1796; Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, 1796, Oxford 2009, 'Letter II'.