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THE
PRACTICES
OF THE
ENLIGHTENMENT



Aesthetics,
Authorship,
and the
Public

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INTRODUCTION

Aesthetics, authorship and the public, the three foci of this book, were sites of serious concern and change during the Enlightenment: taste, rather than an acquired ability and a marker of social distinction, became a universal faculty evincing a distinctly human mode of experiencing pleasure. A rule-oriented poetics gave way to an emphasis on unprecedented innovation and creativity, and art became the exclusive domain of original genius. As the print market, especially of literature written in the vernacular, exponentially increased during the second half of the eighteenth century, not only the economic and legal situation of writers but also the relationship between writer and biographical persona underwent great transformations and showed a heightened awareness of a publication's appeal to different kinds of audiences. Together with the birth of the celebrity author such as Rousseau or Goethe, the eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of the concept of an active, critical public.

The guiding thread of this study lies in the claim that the Enlightenment—if understood not just as a historical period but as a distinct ethos—was deeply committed to specific practices, such as those called for by the following maxims: Think for yourself! Put yourself in the position of everybody else! Think consistently! Whereas the call to emancipate oneself from the ingrained habit of relying on prejudice and authority from Immanuel Kant's prize-winning essay is quite well known, it might seem surprising to find that Kant articulates these maxims in the context of discussing how we come to attribute universal validity to aesthetic

judgments, which are, after all, based on a subjective feeling. Indeed, it is probably less commonly known how the claim of the universal validity of aesthetic judgments—an utterly novel, radical departure from traditional discourses on art and aesthetics—is related to the opposition to prejudice and authority and a trust in the human capacity for radical innovation and originality. This study will attempt to unfold those connections. I hope to show how a new concept of aesthetic experience and creativity crucially shapes concepts of authorship and I shall examine new ways of constructing audiences and publics.

The practices of the Enlightenment are actualized by the way in which people receive and produce texts and artifacts, how they communicate and reflect on themselves as individuals as well as communities. Wondering about where such practices are articulated, maintained, and promoted, one might think of a whole spectrum of cultural domains, ranging from pedagogy and didactics to the realm of wisdom literature, including religious liturgy and spiritual exercises. All of these could be seen as domains that consider it their mission to pass on habits of thought, attitudes, and specific behaviors. Certainly the eighteenth century was the century of pedagogy and didactics, a century marked by a tremendous increase in literacy, increasingly compulsory school attendance, a century that paid much attention to the importance of childhood and the practices of parenting. And yet, for this study, the fields of pedagogy and didactics are not of major relevance. Instead I shall be turning to religious practices, on the one hand, and the study of nature, on the other hand, as the domains that provide both a background and a foil for those new habits of independent thought that are at the core of this book. For I hope to show that, in spite of the radical novelty of the conceptual implications of these Enlightenment practices, they have their formative predecessors in these rather unexpected and, until now, less examined discursive sites.

My study is divided into three subsequent parts focusing on the crucial transformations in eighteenth-century aesthetics, models of authorship, and audiences or publics. In part 1, “The Birth of Aesthetics, the Ends of Teleology, and the Rise of the Genius,” I isolate three important aspects of eighteenth-century aesthetics, each of which ushered in a major change: first, there is the new kind of contemplative, absorbed subjectivity with universal claims that eventually replaces the traditional model of an appreciative audience of connoisseurs; second, there is an increasingly critical awareness of models of purposiveness and final ends; and third,

there is the radical reconceptualization of artistic production in analogy to the creative forces of nature itself. The goal of this part of my study is to bring together several disparate and until now often overlooked cultural domains, practices, and approaches to the study of nature that created the conditions enabling the emergence of the new aesthetic subjectivity as well as a new model of original creativity. I analyze Pietist meditational practices, the concept of instinct and the absence of instinct across various discourses, and the concept of original genius as it reorganizes the relationship between art and nature.

In part 2, “Confessional Discourse, Autobiography, and Authorship,” I investigate the popularization of confessional discourse in the seventeenth century and the resurgence of autobiographical writing in the eighteenth century. I trace how Pietism gave important impulses to the Enlightenment critique of religion by cultivating and sanctioning subjective experience. I show how Rousseau’s “Professions of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar” transforms the religious genre of the credo into an altogether different and secular speech situation: the exchange of intimate confidences between two friends. Similarly, in the “Confessions of a Beautiful Soul,” Goethe cites the spiritual autobiography in order to analyze its pathological potential. Both authors use the respective literary setting to degrammatize a nonliterary religious genre. Finally, I analyze how Rousseau’s and Goethe’s understanding of religion informs their respective approaches to the autobiographical genre and their understanding of authorship in their autobiographies. Neither Rousseau’s *Confessions* nor Goethe’s *Poetry and Truth* attempts to model exemplary spiritual lives; instead, they are biographies of a unique individual and his creative achievement as an author and discourse innovator.

Part 3, “Public Spheres: Imagined Communities and Live Audiences,” focuses on how eighteenth-century writers and philosophers discussed the nature and role of audiences and a general public. Although a good amount of attention has been given to the transformation of the republic of letters, and especially the gradual introduction of the vernacular and its consequences for the Enlightenment concept of the public sphere, the role religion played in the same context has gone largely unnoticed. Throughout the seventeenth and well into the eighteenth century, censorship and regulations suppressing public gatherings were motivated by the fear of sectarian violence; the public posed a threat not to the state, but to the kind of religious coexistence that was ordained by the Westphalian

Peace Treaties at the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648. It was within this climate that Pietist circles pioneered the Bible study group as a forum for debate that was open to all. I trace how, in the eighteenth century, dissension over religious issues fueled the imagination of a critical public audience, showing how to activate wider and more lively public involvement. By mid-century, in the context of the Seven Years' War, there is an added dimension to this debate regarding the imagined community of patriots willing to die for their fatherland. In discourses on the nature and structure of a public sphere, references to religious communities may mark an ideal of universal, egalitarian involvement but also reassert authoritarian orthodoxy; in most instances, however, they call up the model of an audience that extends beyond the isolated, quiet reader of printed matter to a live audience and active community. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, whether it is in Herder's notion of the "Public of Literature" or Kant's interpretation of the *sensus communis*, the unifying ideal of one distinct imagined community is either left deliberately open and vague or is given up altogether in view of a set of imagined universal practices.

A universalist approach to aesthetics, radical creativity, and an active, critical public: all these Enlightenment concepts with their adjoining practices have found ample scholarly attention, especially by historians of book culture, media, and literacy but also by scholars of eighteenth-century literature and society, differing according to geographical focus and disciplinary specialization.¹ Martha Woodmansee has studied the social, historical and primarily economic contexts for the emergence of such new concepts as the original genius as the prototype of the poet and artist and disinterested interest as the key marker of aesthetic experience. She has argued that the concept of original genius must be understood in direct correlation to efforts to secure copyright for authors. Along similar lines, she has made the case that the claim that aesthetic experience is based on a radically different kind of pleasure, not the interested pleasure of the agreeable but the disinterested interest derived from the free play of the human faculties, that this ultimately humanist claim must be understood as the reaction of writers and artists who envied the populist writers of entertainment fiction for their success with large audiences of readers.² Although my study also pays particular attention to the concepts of "disinterested interest" and "original genius," I am not interested in reducing them to mere symptoms of the politics and economics of the publishing market. Rather, I want to consider them crucial components of

Enlightenment philosophy. Granted, this is an aspect of Enlightenment philosophy that remains invisible as long as the Enlightenment is defined primarily in view of the militantly empiricist and materialist Enlightenment of the *philosophes*. However, as I hope to show with this book, this aspect of the Enlightenment, which is based on positing a fundamental difference between animals and the human being, can be found in writers ranging from Shaftesbury and Rousseau to Herder, Lessing, Goethe, and Kant. It amounts to a philosophical anthropology, which defines the human being in contrast to animals as lacking in instinct, a deficiency that provides the condition of the possibility of human freedom, rationality, error, sexuality, history, language and creativity. This neo-humanist assumption puts the speaking biped into a curious position vis-à-vis the order of nature, on the one hand, and the order of creation, on the other hand, which, of course, has profound implications for the role of religion. And it is primarily in the domain of aesthetics that these writers negotiate this polyvalent aspect of human freedom.

All of the aforementioned writers, namely Shaftesbury, Rousseau, Lessing, Herder, Kant and Goethe, have taken a more or less conscious distance from orthodoxy and doctrinal rigor, though none of them would fit into the mold of the militant anticlericalism à la Voltaire. Moreover, they are all aware of the extent to which their philosophical anthropology goes against the grain of Christian beliefs, especially the doctrine of original sin but also the belief that the order of nature as a meaningful whole with all its elements is the product of divine creation, stable and not capable of producing change on its own. And yet, these very same writers did not at all assume the Enlightenment should or would be able to abolish religion per se. Quite to the contrary, they were all, though in different ways, engaged with sustained, ongoing reflections about the nature and role of religion in human society. Indeed, the reflection on the role of religion plays a crucial role both in Rousseau's *Émile* and in the *Confessions* (in its take on Augustine's autobiography) and in Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Poetry and Truth) where religion is transformed into a cultural resource for the creative writer and cultural innovator, providing him with models and norms that stand above current fashions and trends. Lessing not only wrote one of the most enduring plays about the conflict between religions, advocating religious tolerance, but he also used his position as head librarian of the Duke of Saxony to be exempted from the restrictions of censorship in order to publish widely on theological

controversies, showing that what might be considered today's Christian orthodoxy might very well have been yesterday's heresy, and inciting one of the most famous public debates with his publication of the "Fragments of an Unknown Author," a tract that claims that the gospels need to be read as documents produced by "merely" human historians. Even in the reflection on the nature of the public and how to encourage open, free exchange and debate both religion and the church are important institutions and points of reference. Kant in his "What Is Enlightenment?" insists that even church institutions must be committed to open debate that would produce reform, though they might restrict what their ministers can say while they are speaking from the pulpit. And there is Herder's invocation of the "public of literature" as an "invisible church," which is to be preferred in its critical potential over a live public. For the latter only too easily falls prey to the seductions of demagoguery. Ultimately, it is the focus on various aspects of religion as they are involved in the articulation of what is important for Enlightenment aesthetics, the concept of authorship, especially in the realm of autobiography, i.e., in relationship to the genre of the confession, and in the articulation and mise-en-scène of critical debate by an enlightened public, that unites the three parts of this book.

Whereas the majority of studies of the Enlightenment published in North America favor the French *philosophes*, empiricism, and antireligious sentiment, the choice of writers and individual texts analyzed and discussed in this study is meant to highlight a different aspect of the Enlightenment. It is my goal to show that neither a radical empiricism nor a radical antireligious position can account for all the important elements of the Enlightenment. Instead, I want to call attention to a certain "neo-humanist strand," which was to have a crucial impact in the realm of aesthetics and philosophical anthropology as well as the emergence of a philosophy of history. Apart from contributing to the scholarship of individual writers such as Shaftesbury, Rousseau, Lessing, Herder, Kant, and Goethe, my study aims to contribute to the broader intellectual history of the eighteenth century as well as to the ongoing discussion about religion and secularization. Though most of the writers included in this study are well known and some of their texts belong to a well-established canon of the eighteenth century, I also include analyses of lesser known texts and very little known writers. In that sense, my contribution to the intellectual history of the eighteenth century consists in offering new readings

of some canonical texts and suggesting new contexts and debates within which to read those, as well as by making an argument for until now undiscovered texts that should be read carefully in light of some of the questions that move the student of the eighteenth century.

Of course, my attempt to intervene in the primarily French-focused approach to the Enlightenment is based on the work of other scholars. With regard to the study of nature in the eighteenth century there has been important work in the history of science and knowledge production that has paid much attention to the heterogeneity among the practitioners of eighteenth-century natural science, the fact that there was not just one institutionalized, professionalized practice but many diverse communities, composed of more or less academically trained philosophers or naturalists including laypeople and amateurs, respecting different protocols in the observation and interpretation of nature, within diverse paradigms and considering themselves part of different subdisciplines ranging from anatomy, zoology, and botany to physiology and natural history or history of nature.³ Traditionally the eighteenth-century study of nature has been considered primarily a classificatory enterprise, which eventually was to be replaced by the emerging life sciences of the nineteenth century. This model was supported by Foucault's influential argument in *The Order of Things* about the epistemic break between the representational, spatial paradigm undergirding the classificatory approach to plant and animal life forms and the new *epistémé* of the nineteenth century that was open to the dimension of time and thus ushered in the possibility of turning to such conceptual entities as life, history, and labor. But more recent studies have questioned this schematic divide.

Both Peter Hanns Reill and James Larson have shown that the Enlightenment cannot be reduced to a purely mechanistic, antireligious rationalism or empiricism. Reill has called attention to the fact that already by the mid-eighteenth century there was a sufficiently skeptical approach to earlier assumptions that all of nature could be studied according to a Newtonian paradigm based on principles or that all of nature would be explicable in terms of materialist, mechanical principles. Instead, a range of diverse eighteenth-century naturalists such as Albrecht von Haller, Buffon, and Hans Blumenbach postulated a shaping, creative force within living nature, which required its own epistemological adjustments on the side of the observer and student of nature.⁴ Whereas Peter Hanns Reill's study of eighteenth-century vitalism emphasizes how diverse naturalists

prepared the grounds for the emergence of new humanist fields of inquiry, especially in the domain of history,⁵ James Larson presents Kant's discussion of teleology as a response to the difficulties encountered by eighteenth-century naturalists who tried to reconcile their observations of generative processes in living natural phenomena with their respective teleological accounts of the order of nature.⁶ According to Larson, without the diverse metaphysical, and in some cases religious, models of a purposive order of nature, Haller, Buffon, and Linnaeus would not have been able to carry out their diverse research into various aspects of living forms, be it the formation of organs, the change of species over time, or the classification of the manifold forms distributed over the globe. And yet Larson also shows that these very same metaphysical assumptions also hindered these three great scientists in some of their observations.⁷ To the extent that my research is primarily based on literary and philosophical rather than naturalist texts, this book, especially the first part, offers a complementary study to the work by Larson and Reill, in that I trace a concern with nature as a creative, shaping force that must not be written off as proto-Romantic, or counter-Enlightenment, but that instead provides some of the discursive foci and practices to which Kant's third critique would deliver a defining conclusion.

Just as these recent developments in the history of science and knowledge production can be seen as productive and critical responses to Foucault's early work, especially to *The Order of Things*, Foucault's "What Is an Author?" has also become the impetus of much work on the history of the concept and practices of authorship during the eighteenth century. In this essay Foucault argues that it was during the eighteenth century that the author function, the understanding of how the identity of the writer of a published text as it is evinced in the thoughts, shape, argument, and style of the text and the concrete historical person should or should not be conceived as a tight unit, has changed both in the literary arts and in the natural sciences in the sense that the two different author functions traded places. Whereas the naturalist used to be recognized as a name and authority and closely connected with specific texts, in poetry and literature, traditionally not much used to be known about the composer of individual works. The case of Shakespeare provides a famous example for this. According to Foucault, however, things radically changed in the eighteenth century. The increasing formalization of scientific methods together with the standardization of publication venues and styles in the

study of nature decoupled the writer/scholar/naturalist from the individual persona, whereas for the literary arts the biographical persona gained in importance.⁸ In spite of its elegance, scholars such as Roger Chartier have shown that upon closer look Foucault's thesis does not hold up. Throughout the eighteenth century there were celebrity authors among naturalists as well as in the realm of literature, poetry, and philosophy, moreover, the eighteenth century also witnessed many complex uses of anonymous publication strategies.⁹

In light of such questions, namely how during the eighteenth century the concept of authorship was transformed and challenged, my study focuses primarily on the literary domain, the realm that supposedly produced the newly established tight nexus between the identity of a distinctly recognizable historical persona and the writer of a specific published text. I do so by studying the two famous autobiographies of Rousseau and Goethe as biographies of the author. In each case we are dealing with an extreme and an exceptional case of addressing the concept of authorship, not a typical, nor an exemplary one. For both writers use their autobiographies to make a case for their utter uniqueness, however in fascinatingly different terms. In Rousseau's case we are dealing with a confessional account about the experience of becoming a published writer, the exposure to various kinds of real and imagined audiences, publics, and crowds. In Goethe's we are dealing with an altogether different model of authorship, no longer the producer of a published work with certain claims to originality and uniqueness but rather the author as discourse innovator.

The last and third part of my book, the part devoted to the Enlightenment ideal of a critical public, can be considered a contribution to the debates and studies inspired by Jürgen Habermas's by now classic *Transformation of the Public Sphere*. First published in German in 1962 and in English only in 1989, this book might owe its staying power to some of its fundamental ambiguities. For "the bourgeois public sphere" ("bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit"), whose emergence Habermas describes with references to England, France, and Germany in the eighteenth century, holds a dual status in Habermas's book. On the one hand, it is supposed to have been an actually extant form of communication, debate, and public gathering and exchange among private people that was independent of the state and government agencies, not defined by specific interests or allegiances, though informed by the ideals of intimate communication practices

within the family and enabled and sustained by the capitalist mechanisms of the print market and a repertory theater independent of the court. On the other hand, as an example of critical rational exchange coupled with all-inclusiveness, it is certainly an important ideal for modern democracies. However, it is also just that—an ideal—to the extent that it will be exclusive in terms of educational level, economic and social status, and gender whenever it comes to its concrete instantiations. This second aspect has led many critics to focus on one or the other group that was excluded by Habermas's account of the emergence of the public sphere. For instance, Joan Landes made the argument that the Enlightenment public was essentially exclusionary when it came to women.¹⁰ Keith Baker, however, countered her criticism by pointing out that though women might have been *de facto* much less part of a prerevolutionary French public, this was not a principled concern of all Enlightenment proponents of a critical public but rather the quite specific position of Rousseau's concept of a public, which in any case needs to be understood as a special case or even an outlier with regard to the Enlightenment conceptualization of the public. For Rousseau's concept of the *volonté générale* is exactly a democratic concept that is not based on deliberation and open dissent, as Rousseau also is the proponent of a model of a citizen's virtue that necessitates the exclusion of women from freely circulating in public.¹¹ Already just this one example in the exchange over whether Habermas's model and account of the public sphere needs to be criticized for being blind to the issue of gender draws attention to the ambiguity between the degree to which his model of the bourgeois public sphere stands in for a normative ideal or whether it represents a descriptive account that can lay claim to historical accuracy.

One way to address this ambiguity of Habermas's concept of the public sphere has been to suggest that there were many distinct publics, which indeed can be studied in their historical specificity to a much greater degree. This then would entail the switch from "the public" to "a public," which is not much more than just a specific audience, as it lacks any of the normative connotations. There have been a good number of historical studies devoted to specific communities and the practices that shaped the actual contours of eighteenth-century publics. Most important in this respect have been studies focused on salon culture and its relationship to the Enlightenment as well as studies concerned with the communication and publication strategies of the different institutions of the world

of learning and the production of knowledge as well as the secret societies and lodges of freemasonry. One important result of these studies has been to point out that the sharp distinction between the ancient regime and a new modern bourgeois public sphere that Habermas's programmatic study proposes does not hold. The most comprehensive overview that has come to my attention is provided by Van Horn Melton's detailed historical study of *The Rise of the Public*, which devotes separate chapters to all of these institutions, also differentiating between England, Germany, and France. As Van Horn Melton (among others) points out, Habermas's term *public sphere* leaves the implied, concrete, or actual audience and public without contours as it stays away from such concepts as "the nation" which would give the public a far more space- and time-bound definition.¹² It took the demoralizing understanding of the transformations of the concept of the nation by the anthropologist Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* to infuse the discussion of eighteenth-century publics with new energy and to pay attention to the different identities of Enlightenment publics, which in this respect have been studied more closely with regard to their specific institutional and medial affiliations as well as their linguistic boundaries. And yet, although there are certainly many different publics in the Enlightenment, as there are many different audiences and different kinds of crowds, what alone gives the concept of the public any political relevance and force is if it is used with the definite article: "the public" instead of "a public." As Michael Warner persuasively argued, "the public" is always a discursive construct that postulates and produces an interrelationship between texts and their audiences, which has to be both open and open-ended, but also bound to a specific present and its future. The appeal to "the public" is one that always includes strangers, always extends beyond the concrete boundaries of a territory as well as the membership criteria required by a specific institution.¹³

My discussion of the concept of the public in Enlightenment discourse focuses on both its normative dimension and the fact that it is a discursive construct—moreover, a discursive construct that always entails a specific relationship to media and media technologies. As in the first and second part of this book, the third part provides new readings of canonical, well-known texts, in this case especially Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" but its dominant concern lies with bringing attention to neglected or overlooked texts, which might differentiate and complicate our understanding of the various facets of the concept of the public. Already Habermas

characterizes the Enlightenment public with regard to the face-to-face interaction of private citizens gathering in coffee houses, taverns, and theaters, on the one hand, and the importance of newspapers, increasing literacy, and the new genres of a bourgeois sentimental literature, on the other hand. But, and this is an important lesson to be learned from Herder's until now fairly understudied essay about the modern public, what matters about the modern public as opposed to the public of the ancients is print culture. Now it is not that print culture has to be seen as the opposite to live gatherings; rather, print culture can activate a live audience much faster and wider than the written culture of scribes. It is Herder's reflection on the different ways in which a real audience and a virtual audience are interconnected, how one can activate and mobilize the other, a phenomenon that we have seen throughout history, even quite recently, be it in 1989 or during the Arab Spring, that deserves our attention.

If the study of the Enlightenment has seen one important thematic shift during the past two decades, it is a shift that involves the relative importance of religion. Instead of positing the Enlightenment as an ethos that is by definition atheist or at least deist, certainly anticlerical and anti-orthodox, recent research has shown how much the Enlightenment, if defined as a distinct set of evolving practices, was being shaped even from within by changing religious practices and theological concerns. Thus Martin Gierl in his *Pietismus und Aufklärung* examines one aspect of the history of theological debate in the very early eighteenth century, the one dealing with the radical piety movement from the perspective of Lutheran theologians who attempted to classify the Pietist movement as a sect and thereby exclude it from the Lutheran church.¹⁴ Gierl does not just focus on what was being argued from the side of Lutheran orthodoxy; he pays particular attention to the style and manner of argument, to the nature and venues of the exchange, and the concern with style, form, and format of the debate. His attention to the "how," not just the "what," of these theological debates reveals the emergence of a new culture of debate marked by a conscious attention to fairness, civility, and more inclusive accessibility and participation. He shows that the emergence of an Enlightenment ethos of debate was produced neither by the guardians of orthodoxy nor by the pietist innovators' defense, but in the actual scholarly debates and struggles. Similarly, in his *The Enlightenment Bible*, Jonathan Sheehan examines the different phases of historical and philological Bible scholarship and commentary, interspersed by new translations of the Bible into

the vernacular and fueled by the vivid exchange of scholarship between England and Germany. Comparable to the surprising results of intensified theological debate in reaction to the formation of the pietist movement, namely the emergence of a more open, fairer, and more rational format of scholarly debate within the discipline of Lutheran theology as shown by Martin Gierl, Sheehan's attention to the detailed engagement with the biblical text and its possible variants and corruptions (whether through philological and historical commentary and editions or in the various attempts to offer better translations) reveals also an unintended, secularizing outcome. For all of these scholarly endeavors, ultimately, by the end of the eighteenth century resulted in the return to two far more traditional Bible translations, the one of Luther and the King James Bible, which at that time, once this return to them was ushered in, no longer merely served as the official access to a sacred text but rather turned them into "classics" as they moved from the exclusive domain of religion to the domain of literary culture and acquired the status of national treasures.¹⁵ Both Gierl and Sheehan trace the Enlightenment with its distinct ethos within religious and theological circles and show that at the level of transformations in the realm of discursive techniques and conventions, in terms of models of communication and textual authority, as well as in terms of the dissemination of texts, both the topic and the institutions of religion played a distinctive role, one that ushered in results that have been traditionally associated with a far more stridently open antireligious outlook, such as the later Voltaire's and the French materialists'.

This book also attributes to religious practices and institutions an active role in the production of Enlightenment practices. Indeed, as Talal Asad in his *Formations of the Secular* has persuasively argued, both the religious and the secular are being defined and transformed in relation to each other in different contexts and with different stakes attached to it.¹⁶ However, I do not follow or support the line of argument that the secular and any kind of secularism is necessarily a form of Christianity, which for Gil Anidjar is the equivalent of the concept of a globalized and globalizing religion.¹⁷ Quite to the contrary, I hope to show that in different contexts as well as with different goals and intentions during the Enlightenment we can witness the emergence of a secular humanism in the form of a commitment to a distinctly human capacity for nonself-interested behavior as well as a distinctly human capacity for innovation. This kind of humanism was not a self-ascribed term during the eighteenth century, nor

was it necessarily aware of itself as anti-Christian, though it represented a serious attack on one of the fundamental elements of Christian dogma, namely the doctrine of original sin. It was articulated in eighteenth-century moral philosophy but also—and this is of particular interest to my argument—most originally in eighteenth-century aesthetics, in a commitment to the universality of aesthetic experience. Furthermore, this kind of secular humanism develops alongside an understanding of human language as a world making tool and the concept of literary authorship as radical innovation. It can also be traced in the late Herder's account of what sets the modern public apart from the ancient public, namely the "invisible church" of literature. In *The Practices of the Enlightenment: Aesthetics, Authorship, and the Public* I investigate some of the fundamental transformations that were to assign a central role to aesthetics and artistic creativity in making the human being self-directed, critical, and responsible, a conscious participant of the Enlightenment. In other words, this book tries to situate the immensely civilizing, in fact, humanizing, power attributed to imaginative literature and aesthetics within the project of the Enlightenment.