CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Approaching the Genteel Revolution

METHOD AND THEORY

At its broadest, this study is a cultural history of everyday life, with the anthropological goal of reconstructing past lifeways surrounding the notion of gentility and selective refinement. Its heart, however, is the heart of historical archaeology: the use of material culture to uncover voids in the shared histories we tell and know. Multisourced, multitextured understanding is a hallmark of this subdiscipline. This study of eighteenth-century consumerism integrates methods of historical and material ethnographies. The former involves the critical assessment and combination of (usually fragmented) documentary, material, visual, and ethnographic histories to relate past social conditions to present ones. The latter systematically thinks through things. Ideally, material ethnography pursues an interpretive balance, neither displacing people by "substituting artifacts for social relations" nor displacing material culture as mere semiotic reflection (Tilley, 1996: 5; see also Stahl, 2010; St. George, 2010). In this case study of colonial New England and middling sorts' genteel practices, ethnographic methods serve a social archaeology. What distinguishes a "social" approach is the exploration not only of the structures of social life (such as class hierarchies or economic configurations), but also of past experiences of "being in the world." Social archaeology integrates identity, emotion, understanding, and expression at a contextual confluence of time, space, and materiality (Preucel and Meskell, 2004: 3).

When I use the term "practice," I have in mind Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory, an explanatory/descriptive scheme of cultural reproduction and change (Bourdieu, 1977, 1996). This epistemology centers "embodied practice of everyday life as a site of culture making," acknowledging firm cultural rules but stressing "strategic and improvisational action over rule-driven behavior"

(Stahl, 2002: 827–829). In this way, practice theory connects individuals to social structures across micro-, meso-, and macroscales. Social meaning is endlessly reworked via objects, spaces, and physical actions, creating shared cultural values through everyday life. Key concepts within practice theory include "habitus," rules of expectations, values, identities, and power that organize social relations; and "doxa," the taken-for-granted aspects of life. Archaeological methods are exceptionally well suited to recovering patterned material residues of the practices of everyday life. In the realm of consumerism and identity, practices of taste are especially significant.

Theoretical mindfulness helps to deconstruct values of the past even when they are part of modern America's cultural heritage. With practice theory in mind, for example, one cannot broach early modern consumerism as a universal. Instead, one must probe deeply into local and circumstantial inflections that, in aggregate, naturalized shared values and supported long-term culture stasis and/or change. Methods of documentary archaeology, archaeological biography, and historical and material ethnography elaborate the "processes that make and transform particular worlds – processes that reciprocally shape subjects and contexts" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: 31). Descriptive narrative becomes an interpretive tool, and the elucidation of particular archaeological finds leads to insight at multiple scales.

HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO GENTILITY

Thornstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (2001 [1899]) is the classic, caustic vision of competitive conspicuous consumption – "emulation" – as the central disease of our industrial society. His perspective is so foundational to consumer studies that economists term emulation, or "bandwagon-ism," the "Veblen effect" (Agnew, 1994: 24). Mary Douglas and Baron's Isherwood's influential *The World of Goods* (1979) rejected Veblen's idea that consumerism was a true human universal, but they maintained that it was shaped by shared values, not individual decisions or agency. As a result, these foundational studies considered the acquisition of new commodities and adoption of new fashions innovation among elites but emulation among the middle and other lower ranks. The "consumer emulation thesis" is grounded in these classic social studies and has become a master narrative of American history, one challenged by this volume.

Historians and historical archaeologists also have widely asserted, both explicitly and implicitly, that the "motor" driving increased refinement in colonial Britain and British America was the emulation of ruling ranks' consumer tastes by lower-ranked individuals (Shackel, 1993: 162; Mullins, 2011: 42–45; Pogue, 2001: 51–53; for examples, see Bushman, 1993; Carson, 1994; Martin, 1994;

McKendrick, 1982; Bodley, 2012: 121–122; for an early dissenting view see Campbell, 1987, 1993). In this paradigm, "competitive emulative acquisition" is understood as deterministic – in that it creates economic realities and social personae – and directed by the uppermost social stratum (the wealthy and politically powerful "elite") (Pennell, 1999: 550).

In perhaps the most influential study of American gentrification, *The Refinement of America*, Richard Bushman (1993) marginalizes non-elite consumption. According to Bushman (1993: xv, 402–406), gentility diffused through society from elite to laboring sorts, European to American cities, and urban centers to rural outposts, not becoming entrenched until its formulation as bourgeois respectability in the mid-nineteenth century. In his center–periphery model, Bushman flatly dismisses the significance of refinement, or "vernacular gentility," among colonial middling sorts, stating:

> Gentility flecked lives without coloring them. . . . [They] might look on with envy, awe, or hatred, they might imitate and borrow, but they were onlookers, thought to be presumptuous if they assumed the manners or showed the possessions of a gentleman. . . . Not until the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth did the middle class . . . come to believe that they should live a genteel life. (Bushman, 1993: xii–xiii)

I believe Bushman is mistaken, and his stance is elitist. Rather than critiquing a hierarchical theory of emulation prevalent since the eighteenth century, he reproduces it (Haulman, 2011: 14, 108); but he is not alone. Carole Shammas concludes her study of expanding preindustrial consumerism in England and America:

> The single most surprising aspect of the spread of new consumer commodities during the early modern period is that it occurred among a broad spectrum of people . . . Paradoxically, the individual who drank tea in a teacup, wore a printed cotton gown, and put linen on the bed could be the same person who ingested too few calories to work all day and lived in a one-room house. (Shammas, 1990: 299)

Her observation, while insightful, is not productive. This model of society is top-down, positing that, because on-the-ground material patterns do not uphold a priori organizational models, they are enigmatic and, ultimately, inconsequential.

By broaching the refinement of English consumers society from the ground up, John Styles comes to a different conclusion in *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-century England*. He writes:

> The everyday fashion worn by ordinary people amounted to more than just an effort to emulate the taste of the rich. . . . We should beware of reproducing eighteenth-century snobberies by portraying such behavior as an attempt at emulation that inevitably misfired. . . . The cut and decoration of the clothes donned . . . may have descended from the *beau monde* by a process that can be termed emulative, but the same cannot be said of the uses to which the clothes were put or the ways they were understood. (Styles, 2007: 323)

Or, I add, the practical cultural legacies of these choices, which leave emulation little purchase. If one accepts that new/genteel/refined/tasteful consumerism was, in part, defined outside elite social circles, the surprising paradox that troubles Shammas dissolves. We are left to investigate contextual innovations and partial adoptions in their developmental contexts, in fashionable dress and all other realms of daily life.

Describing non-elites' participation in the new refinements of the eighteenth century as illogical, paradoxical, marginal, and/or epiphenomenal stymies critical assessment of non-elite consumerisms. In effect, it reproduces historical biases we should question. It ignores archaeological evidence and period sources that describe middling and lower sorts' evaluation, selection, negotiation, and appropriation of genteel values and practices fully a century earlier than Bushman claims. It ignores the simultaneous adoption of genteel practices among different sorts of people and the bottom-up critiques of elite gentilities that existed from their inception (Shackel, 1993: 162–165; St. George, 1993). This perspective is undermined by several histories of consumerism centralizing choice and agency, which have been populating the literature over the past twenty years and contradict the emulation paradigm (Campbell, 1993; Goodwin, 1999; Hunter, 2001; Richards, 1999; Smith, 2002; Weatherill, 1996; Mullin, 2010; Haulman, 2011).

Historical archaeologies of early modern consumerism should take note, repositioning discussion of the eighteenth century not only to acknowledge, but also to integrate this emerging consensus. By moving conversations from sartorial fashion and the acquisition of luxury goods to more inclusive reconstructions of daily life (which assess new and old-fashioned consumer behaviors holistically), archaeologists have crucial perspectives to contribute across multiple scales.

At the mesoscale, studies of Newport's eighteenth-century social fabric have focused on liberal, white, elite citizens as the agents of social change (Crane, 1985; James, 2000; Skemp, 1974; Withey, 1984). The earliest of these, Skemp (1974: 2), offers the oversimplified assertion that "the petite bourgeoisie [middling sort] . . . only desired to emulate that [elite merchant] class, and the more audacious among them no doubt harbored desires of becoming part of it. Their values and goals were identical with those of the merchants." Studies focusing on Newport's women provide a more inclusive view, though not a new perspective on gentility (Crane, 1998). In her valuable study of women's economies in post-1750 Newport, Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor (2009) finds affiliation, collaboration, and comprehension across status, gender, and racial categories. She (2009: 11) does a more nuanced job than others of revealing the complex "net of interconnected economic life" in urban ports, which belies any linear model of these merchant economies. She does not problematize gentility itself, however, instead parsing it as a proxy for social status (Hartigan-O'Connor, 2009: 188).

With this literature in mind, I approach refinement in colonial New England from a novel vantage point, moving from the middle-out and ground-up to reconstruct archaeologically recovered, richly contextualized daily practices. This inquiry begins earlier in the eighteenth century than most studies. Its central subject is a middling individual, Newport widow and shopkeeper Elizabeth Pratt. From reconstructions of her daily life, I move outward to broach gentility as a structuring cultural logic of consumer and other practices, as well as social relations internal and external to her household. I take seriously the notion that non-elites were something more than pale and partial imitations of their wealthier neighbors.

Archaeological, historical, and material cultural studies of a variety of British and British American contexts suggest that gentility was, in fact, rarely practiced as complete, even within society's upper echelon (see, for example, Andresen, 1982; Bedell, 2001; Bedell et al., 2001; Beranek, 2004, 2009; Chan, 2007; Goodwin, 1994; Harrington, 1989; Herman, 1984; Johnson, 1996; Lockridge, 1997; Pendery, 1992; Pogue, 2001; Richards, 1999; Smith-Rosenberg, 2000; Smith, 2002; Stone, 1988; Wahrman, 1995; Weatherill, 1996). Contrary to Bushman's assertion of a top-down, center-out diffusion of emulative vernacular gentility, fine grained historical and archaeological studies also show that non-elite consumers in a variety of locales adopted new refinements alongside, earlier than, or with proportionally more investment than, their elite neighbors. With these bottom-up studies in mind, I am not surprised by the paradox of refined porcelain tea wares and substantial parasite remains coexisting in Elizabeth Pratt's middling privy. A social archaeology of daily life allows one to define and understand the dynamic economic structures, market relations, cultural values, and hierarchical forms of affiliation and social distinction that underlay the material creation of gentility through partible refinements.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO GENTILITY

The adjective "Georgian" is widely used today, but it was not used in the eighteenth century. Now, for most scholars, it refers either to an architectural style or the period of the English Kings George (I, II, and III), from 1714 to 1775. Ever since the structural humanist James Deetz connected material culture and worldview in *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* in 1977, however, historical archaeologists have used the term differently. For us, "Georgian" describes the Georgian Period (the early eighteenth century through the American Revolution) and the myriad aesthetic, embodied, material, and intellectual expressions of a "Georgian Order" (i.e., ethos, worldview, mind-set, paradigm). Eighteenth-century discourses that reified this ideal are recognized through patterned, rule-driven expressions of balance, containment, segmentation, proportion, discipline, refinement, and

order. Period rhetoric explicitly connected the physical and ideological aspects of these values and proposed their desirability (and difficulty); for example, in the statement "Behaviour is like Architecture, the Symmetry of the whole pleases us so much, that, We examine not into its Parts, which if we did, we should find much Nicety required in forming such a Structure" (Forrester, 1734: 25).

Archaeologists have defined vernacular expressions of the Georgian Order primarily through fine-grained studies of merchant and planter elites in New England and the Mid Atlantic colonies (see, for example, Chan, 2007; Deetz, 1996; Goodwin, 1999; Leone, 2005; Martin, 2008; Yentsch, 1994). They have specifically traced the adoption of Georgian-style refined ceramics and other consumer goods (see, for example, Miller, 1991; Smith, 1739; Martin, 1994, 1996, 2008; Baugher and Venables, 1987). Archaeology of the Consumer Revolution and the Georgian Period has, in fact, long forwarded a field-defining mission: to track and explain the entrenchment of capitalism across the globe (Hicks, 2004; Deagan, 1987b; Orser, 2013).

Mark Leone (1988) famously called the Georgian Order the "order of merchant capitalism," in which a few individuals dominated society by managing access to goods/resources via a system of economic exchange. He and other critical archaeologists in the "Annapolis School" stretch this dominant ideology thesis on a Marxist framework. They posit that the Georgian Order naturalized Enlightenment values of a ruling masculine merchant class and disciplined the bodies, schedules, and aesthetics of those working below/for them (including women and slaves) (Leone and Potter, 1988; Leone et al., 2005; Leone, 1984, 1999, 2005; Matthews, 2002, 2010; Little, 1988; Shackel, 1993; Orser, 1996); a process that produced a new kind of capitalist individual who defined personhood not through family and community networks but through consumable things and labor relations (Matthews, 2010: 2–3, 57–84). Proponents of this dominant ideology thesis use materializations of the Georgian Order to index the penetration of a capitalist "ideology of the individual," which is a "false consciousness" in the Marxist sense (Mrozowski, 2006: 8). In this context, emulation seems a convincing explanation of the spread of a dominant ideology/Georgian ethos as both symptom and sign of penetrating capitalist systems, but there is more to the story.

Although Deetz read colonial Americans' material practices of the Georgian Order as Anglophilia, and critical theorists read them as "cultural manifestations of capitalism," Stephen Mrozowski (2006: 59) argues for a more "nuanced view." Mrozowski privileges space and environment in his archaeological study of two middling Newport households of the mid- to late eighteenth century. He describes selective adoption of gentility by both the Tates (a household led by a blacksmith) and the Browns (a household led by a petty merchant), providing important comparative case studies to my work on Elizabeth Pratt and her household.

Mrozowski (2006: 145) concludes that "etiquette and gentility were part of an emerging middle-class cultural consciousness." Unlike Mrozowski, I reserve the term "class" for nineteenth-century, postindustrial social collectives; the eighteenth-century hierarchy was fluidly organized into "sorts." And I do not think the middling sorts had special ownership of either etiquette or gentility in the eighteenth century. I strongly agree, however, that middling sorts' selective genteel practices were broadly valued and that they meaningfully shaped social structures of status and control.

Mrozowski studies capitalism, class relations, and merchants' ideological dominance (Mullins, 2007: 572), but my goals are different. I do not seek to understand the rationalization of status-based inequality but, rather, a powerful framework of consumerism and social life – gentility – that transformed American values and identities in the long term. Through the lens of gentility, I offer a rethinking of the Georgian Order and the Georgian Period, the formation of a consumer society, and the eighteenth-century foundations of the American middle class. The reassessment begins with, and seeks to explain, preoccupations of daily life. These practices inspire an understanding of the Georgian ethos of gentility not as a cohesive discourse but as a fluid set of principles and practices that was partible and strategic, in part because middling consumers adopted them as such.

Able syntheses of historical archaeological approaches to eighteenth-century consumerism may be found elsewhere (Mullins, 2004, 2011; Matthews, 2010; Johnson, 1996; Hodge, 2012; Pogue, 2001; Wurst and Fitts, 1999; Wurst and McGuire, 1999; Mrozowski, 2006). My study challenges significant portions of this literature: emulation as an explanatory principal (explicit or implicit); merchant capitalism as an explanatory foundation; ineluctable consumer desire as an explanatory mechanism; and social division (rather than affiliation) as an explanatory goal. In his recent overview of historical archaeologies of consumerism, Paul Mullins (2011: 44) finds that "few if any analyses have delivered conclusive case studies of the concrete mechanics of mass emulation or precise definitions of what constitutes emulation." Further, the study of dominant structures of capitalism remains a homogenizing approach, even in Mrozowski's study of colonial Newport. It produces a top-heavy view of eighteenth-century merchants, manufacturers, and elites as culture's agents, while obscuring middling and lower sorts as subjects (Mullins, 2011: 42; Wilkie and Bartoy, 2000: 748). Centering middling consumption and consumers rebalances our understanding, producing the more nuanced view Mrozowski champions. Gentility is cast as something more than a tool of oppression.

Georgian practices *did* support each other in a highly visible and effective way, permitting new structuring practices for relating to, and controlling, the world. But Georgian values did not arrive as a totalizing force, nor were they adopted as such (Johnson, 1996). Shifts in eighteenth-century British and Anglo-American cultural and social norms, described by terms such as the Consumer Revolution, the

Enlightenment, the scientific revolution, privatization, and so on, were not holistic. They occurred piecemeal and selectively, reflecting local understandings, needs, and historical contexts. I suggest that the Genteel Revolution – one of these processes – united peoples' values through widespread, but highly selective, adoption of refined Georgian practices. Material residues of diverse historical agents reveal the daily workings of broadscale social structures and values. Documents powerfully illuminate this process, but archaeology provides a perspective on partible refinements produced outside of, and therefore not fully captured in, any text.

The Interdisciplinary Archive

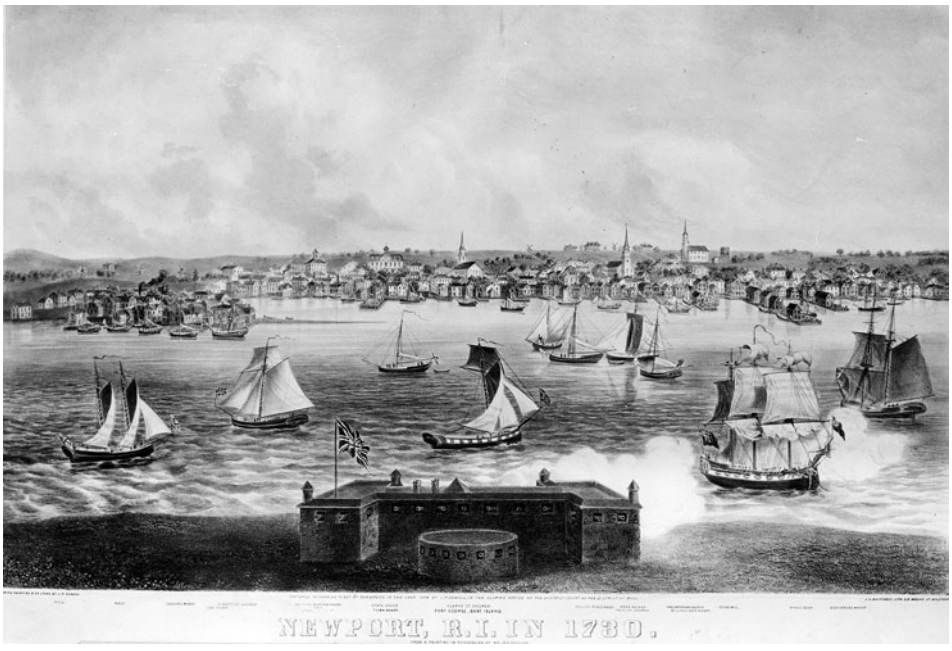
INTRODUCTION

Scholars create archives as much as we use them, selectively assembling residual points of view, reading/interpreting them "against" and with the "grain" of their creators' own preoccupations (Stoler, 2009). In historical ethnographic research, interdisciplinary study situates fragmentary "stories of ordinary people" (derived from documentary and material remnants) within "wider worlds of power and meaning" (construed from primary textual, visual, and oral sources and secondary histories) (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: 17). The approach is well suited to the diachronic, multiscalar study of personal identities and social transformations demanded by domestic archaeological assemblages. However, it requires the integration of a wide variety of resources, each with its own history, strengths, and limitations. Newport's colonial archive presents peculiar opportunities and challenges, which have shaped my approach.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Newport was the economic and social capital of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations during the colonial period (Figs. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3). This port town was cosmopolitan, replete with goods, both foreign and domestic, and an early adopter of Enlightenment ideals (Carp, 2007: 20). It was a fashionable destination for the well-to-do from throughout the British colonies. It was also a more religiously pluralistic community than rival ports such as Boston, Massachusetts, and Portsmouth, New Hampshire (Crane, 1985: 61).

The circa 1697 Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House at 17 Broadway is the oldest extant house in Newport. Now owned by the Newport Historical Society and operated as a house museum, the property did not reach its current configuration until the end of the eighteenth century. Earlier, it was four separate properties,



1.1 Lithograph View of Newport, circa 1740
John Perry Newell's 1866 lithograph View of Newport, R.I. in 1730. Courtesy Newport Historical Society.

including a 0.04 acre lot referred to as the "Wood Lot" after its first documented owner, glazier William Wood. Wood owned this small parcel by 1723, when he sold it to widow/shopkeeper Elizabeth Pratt, who owned the property from 1723 to circa 1749.

A more detailed presentation of archaeological data from the Wood Lot is available elsewhere (Hodge, 2007). Archaeologists (including myself) excavated the site between 2001 and 2004 and recovered thousands of artifacts from dozens of individual architectural features, trash deposits, and soil strata (Figs. 1.4, 1.5) (Appendix A). To make sense of this complex cultural assemblage, I evaluated the presence/absence of well-dated ceramic wares in individual features. These wares include: white salt-glazed stoneware, introduced circa 1720; Astbury-type ware, introduced 1725; refined agateware, introduced 1740; Philadelphia-type redwares, shipped to New England during the early eighteenth century but popularized circa 1750, with clouded footed bowls as an important temporal marker (Pendery, 1985: 113; Steen, 1999); creamware, introduced 1762 and in the Newport market by 1768 (Hodge, 2006); and pearlware, introduced circa 1775 and popularized in the 1780s (Miller et al., 2000). Decoration and vessel form refined these dates for individual contexts. I also analyzed English tobacco pipe chronologies to date Wood Lot deposits.

1.2 Map of Rhode Island Showing Newport, Providence, Bristol, and Cranston