

Ideology, Power, and Capitalism: The Historical Archaeology of Consumption

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Since the 1980s, many thinkers have tackled the complications of consumption and crafted a sophisticated interdisciplinary scholarship on the marketing, acquisition, and symbolism of material goods in capitalist societies (e.g., Agnew 1993; Appadurai 1986; Bourdieu 1984; Campbell 1987; Miller 1987, 1995a). It would seem appropriate for archaeologists to lead this charge: armed with the tangible evidence of everyday materialism in a vast range of social and historical contexts, archaeology is distinctively positioned to confront the multivalent meaning of goods, probe the ideological roots of material symbolism, and emphasize that even the most commonplace objects provide insight into meaningful social struggles. Yet archaeologists have been relatively slow to embrace consumption as an appropriate research focus.

Much of the archaeological reluctance to tackle consumption reflects longstanding disdain of mass materialism (cf. Horowitz 1985). By the mid-nineteenth century, for instance, Thoreau's (1854) assessment of American life characterized it as "unconscious despair" fueled by ever-increasing, dissatisfying labor. For Thoreau, such labor became necessary simply to secure seemingly essential goods that ultimately provided no genuine gratification. Perhaps the most intriguing and influential of these moralistic commentaries came from Thorstein Veblen (1899), whose distaste for vacuous materialism was the predominant scholarly view of consumption into the 1970s. Veblen argued that a newly rich Victorian "leisure class" manufactured an illusory sense of self-importance and distinction through their consumption of superficial material goods. Veblen acknowledged that materialism had a social purpose and was not simply an economic act, however, he argued that consumption's fundamental social purpose was hierarchical status competition in which goods publicly displayed status and identity.

In the subsequent century many of these sentiments remained remarkably resilient. Stuart Ewen's (1988) incisive assessment of contemporary consumer culture nearly a century after Veblen is no more optimistic. Ewen despairs that consumers invest powerful desires and values into goods, even though they are left perpetually unfulfilled by their pursuit of insubstantial things. In a similar vein, Juliet Schor (2000) laments that Americans "want so much more than they need": we are dissatisfied with our material lives, Schor argues, yet we are unable to transform this private discontent into

a public discourse critical of objective inequalities. These critics share with their predecessors an apprehension of consumption's defamiliarizing instability: for Veblen and many Victorians, for instance, consumption was a demasculinizing assault on patriarchy that risked eroding women's subordination, not simply an exercise in bourgeois emulation. Observers then and now often have been unnerved by the dynamic, potentially transformative nature of material consumption, handicapped by their inability to fathom the social meaning of consumption, and bogged down in distinguishing between genuine needs and inauthentic wants.

In the 1960s, scholars in newly emerging academic niches laid a substantial groundwork to rethink scholarly visions of everyday life and, by extension, consumption. Social histories from the "bottom up," such as E. P. Thompson's (1963) examination of British working-class life, embraced the idea that everyday life took shape through self-conscious will and might reveal something beyond mere subjugation. *Annales* school historians such as Fernand Braudel (1973) championed a sweeping analysis of everyday life that avoided focusing on major events and instead paid close attention to long spans of time and prosaic material culture. Henry Glassie's (1975) research on vernacular architecture and folk objects stressed long-term cultural continuities in the face of radical social change. Such research stressed the importance of everyday material life as a mechanism to understand broad social collectives, and it was part of an ambitious interdisciplinary scholarship to illuminate the genuine impact of a vast range of relatively unknown individuals and social groups. Both of these impulses have had significant effects in archaeology.

By the 1980s, a series of sophisticated studies appeared that attempted to offset the predominant scholarly emphasis on producers, supply-side economics, and the elite. Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood's (1978) *The World of Goods* was the first sustained anthropological study of consumption that examined the social meaning of materialism outside economically based perspectives. Douglas and Isherwood pushed beyond Veblen's influential assumption that consumption was simply instinctive and driven by emulation, competitive display, and economic rationality. Douglas and Isherwood instead assumed that consumption was a social, contextually distinctive process in which goods functioned as symbolic category systems linked to collective values rather than atomized individual decisions. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) followed with an exhaustive analysis of French consumer patterns. He retained an appreciation for the limits imposed by structures such as class and status, but he argued that such structures do not determine human agency. Bourdieu argued that material "taste" is acquired by education and social influences and serves to legitimize social differences. He stressed that even the most prosaic goods naturalized systems of difference, defining consumption as a symbolic process that established social distinctions and did not simply reflect existing economically determined differences.

In subsequent years, the literature has rapidly expanded, and consumer scholars hail from numerous disciplinary niches with quite distinct ways of defining and assessing consumption. However, most of these researchers share common interests in compensating for longstanding scholarly disinterest in consumption and confronting the political impact of material consumption. The former effort to push beyond an economic production focus and represent consumers' agency seems settled: there are few, if any, scholars who would argue that consumers were powerless in the face of widespread

material and social changes. The genuine social impact of everyday consumption, however, is a complicated issue, and various scholars have cast the "politics" of consumption in a vast range of forms. How various scholars see consumption's "politics" – if they accord it the status of politics at all – depends on their visions of ideology, resistance, power, desire, identity, and consumption itself.

This vast corpus of consumer scholarship has not yet had a significant influence on archaeology, and archaeology has had very little impact on interdisciplinary consumer scholarship. This seems unusual because archaeology is distinctively positioned to confront the multivalent meaning of goods, probe the ideological roots of material symbolism, and emphasize that even the most commonplace objects provide insight into meaningful social struggles. An archaeology of consumption should represent a complex range of politicized consumption patterns that variously reproduce, negotiate, and resist dominant ideology and structural inequalities. Ultimately this scholarship can destabilize stock archaeological research topics, document the historical contours of capitalist materialism, and illuminate the deep-seated contradictions of contemporary consumer culture.

Capitalism and Consumption

An archaeology of consumption could be conducted in any material context: consumption is a social practice through which people simultaneously construct understandings of themselves and are positioned within the world, and this process certainly applies to prehistoric and pre-capitalist contexts. Many complex societies clearly had mass manufacture and consumption, a vast range of societies can make a claim to using goods to fashion individual and social identity, and the identity formation issues stressed by consumption scholarship certainly are relevant to prehistorians. Most analyses of consumption, however, have examined the period since the early eighteenth century, highlighting commodity consumption and the global structural shifts associated with capitalism. Much of this scholarship has focused on the twentieth-century emergence of a mass consumer culture. In a "consumer culture," Jean-Christophe Agnew (1993) argues, social identity is shaped by commodity consumption rather than discourses such as religion or nationalism, and states themselves have become committed to safeguarding consumer privilege as a consequential citizen right. The archaeological interest in capitalism and consumption's material dimensions may have its most profound implications in historical archaeology, which examines the period since European colonization and is consciously focused on the roots of contemporary society. Historical archaeology is most clearly established in the United States, but it has a foothold throughout much of the world.

Since the 1990s some historical archaeologists have ventured that the discipline's appropriate focus should be capitalism (e.g., Delle 1998; Delle, Mrozowski, and Paynter 2000; Leone 1995; Orser 1996; Paynter 1988), and most have at least conceded that capitalism has some impact on the material record. Capitalism has been defined in a wide range of ways by consumption scholars, and various thinkers accord it divergent roles in material transformations. Chandra Mukerji (1983), for instance, traces modern mass consumption to fifteenth-century Europe, arguing that non-utilitarian consumption existed prior to capitalism's emergence and concluding that modern consumption

actually preceded capitalism. Colin Campbell (1987) instead looks to the eighteenth century for consumer society's origins and links it to sociocultural shifts rather than capitalist economic processes. Like Campbell, Neil McKendrick (McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb 1982) also looks to the eighteenth century; however, he attributes consumer society's emergence to astute marketing and production reorganization by capitalists like Josiah Wedgwood. Rather than focus on capitalism, Arjun Appadurai (1986) instead suggests that consumer research's focus should be modernity and the relations between systemic and local contexts. Appadurai shifts consumer research's emphasis to how a given object can be commodified in various ways over time and from one context to the next.

Most researchers have developed a complex vision of consumption that routinely melds capitalism, Westernization, and materialism into a more-or-less synonymous phenomenon implicated in the interests of various states and capitalists as well as distinct local experiences and identities. Daniel Miller (1997:7) argues that modern consumer research's focus is primarily on the shift of power from production to consumption, a transformation that was not determined by capitalism or states. Capitalism may provide a flexible framework for consumption research, but Miller (1997:16–17) argues that scholars have paid too little attention to its myriad local variants and have instead fallen back on a monolithic model of capitalism. Miller's (1997) own ethnography of consumption in contemporary Trinidad focuses on the everyday experience of consumers negotiating the production and marketing system that provides commodities. Miller pushes beyond market acquisition alone to probe manufacturing, marketing, retailing, and shopping as coeval processes, and he stresses that consumers' everyday material patterns and meanings often differ considerably from those of mass producers. Miller questions the degree to which places like Trinidad are assumed to be peripheral to or structured by worldwide capitalism, instead suggesting that "local" capitalism can take on a very distinct contextual form quite unlike the dominant economic model of capitalism.

Many archaeologists have likewise probed the complex relations between local and systemic contexts, examining links between communities and global producers. Charles Orser's (1996) archaeology of the modern world, for instance, assesses colonization and capitalism by ranging across sociocultural contexts from Brazil to Ireland to the United States. Neil Silberman (1989) emphasizes that Ottoman pipes reflect connections between the Ottoman world, Native Americans, and English colonizers, and Uzi Baram (2000) likewise sees an "archaeology of entanglement" between European commodities and the Ottoman world where those goods were consumed and assumed quite distinct meanings. Aron Crowell (1997) probes the development of worldwide capitalism by archaeologically examining trade between colonizers and indigenous peoples in Alaska. Matthew Johnson's (1996) analysis of agrarian capitalism in Britain advocates a global archaeology of capitalism that reaches back to examine medieval antecedents of capitalism, discarding simplistic divisions between capitalism and pre-capitalist formations. Clearly, archaeologists define consumption so broadly that archaeologies of consumption weave together processes of production, exchange, and acquisition across a vast range of social systems and historical periods. When consumption studies meld production and acquisition along with use and social symbolism, layering that with subjectivity construction and power relations over vast spans of time, there is relatively little left "outside" consumption, and many scholars wish to define consumption this ambitiously. Søren Askegaard and A. Fuat Firat (1997), for instance, offer the

solution of simply collapsing the dualism of production and consumption into a single seamless process. They argue for jettisoning the modernist dichotomy of production and consumption realms so scholars can study "consumption as production." This sentiment may reflect that in contemporary consumer culture goods are, as Orwell put it, "the air that we breathe," but this definition of an all-encompassing consumption is somewhat problematic to project onto even the recent past. If consumption does indeed monolithically blanket the social world and is essentially indistinguishable from production, then consumer scholarship's purpose risks being reduced to documenting myriad local contexts and continually defining ethnic, class, and social variables within largely unexamined structural conditions.

Historical archaeology usually illuminates capitalism and consumer identity from the standpoint of local, household-based commodity patterns, illustrating the quantity, variety, and range of goods acquired, used, and discarded by a particular group of consumers. Most archaeologists at least implicitly interpret these assemblages as reflections of a specific facet of identity, such as a household's cultural affiliations or social standing. This tendency to see objects simply as reflections of some "real" identity has been one of the central hurdles to a rigorous archaeology of consumption: i.e., objects are interpreted as expressions of an identity that preceded consumption and is merely "accented" by the process of acquiring and giving meaning to material things. This is significant, because when consumption is viewed as a "reflection" it becomes less an active and meaningful negotiation of personal and social subjectivity than a recurring patterned expression of an essential identity.

Various forms of culture history have had a significant influence on historical archaeologists' tendency to see culture as the steadfastly embedded core of identity and the discipline's appropriate focus. James Deetz's (1977) *In Small Things Forgotten* provides the most influential example of this perspective. Deetz examined colonial American material culture as patterned expressions of deep-seated cultural mindsets, a structuralist interpretation most articulately championed in material culture studies by Henry Glassie (1975). Anne Yentsch's (1994) study of colonial Chesapeake English slaveholders and enslaved Africans provides a similar analysis of material patterns reflecting distinct cultural identities. Yentsch focuses on local, contextually distinct expressions of cultural mindsets that are connected to broader systems but best understood from local perspectives.

Any archaeology focused on cultural tradition in its most inflexible sense risks posing culture as an appropriate mechanism to explain material patterns, rather than the subject that needs to be explained itself (cf. Barrett 2001:157). Archaeologists examining African heritage, for instance, have tended to at least implicitly look at material objects as expressions (conscious or unrecognized) of an African cultural identity. Most of this research has focused on aesthetic motifs and material goods known as "Africanisms"; objects that either have clear connections to African cultural practice or show significant commonalities among New World diaspora (e.g., Ferguson 1992). Warren Perry and Robert Paynter (1999) applaud such research but warn that it hazards assuming an unreasonably monolithic African culture and often lacks a sophisticated understanding of African cultural and material diversity. When Africanisms' studies do examine commodity consumption, they often stress unique cultural meanings that were invested in mass-produced goods. Laurie Wilkie's (2000) examination of enslaved Bahamians, for

example, argues for an African “cultural sensibility” that incorporated mass-produced goods and used them in “uniquely African ways.” Such analyses attempt to preserve cultural identity despite the appearance of commodity homogenization: these “authentic” identities appear as the inverse of the “inauthentic” meanings presented in commodities and consumption. Paul Gilroy (2000:107) believes that widespread efforts to recover such stable and authentic identities reflect a commonplace anxiety many people feel in the face of globalization. Yet archaeologists pursuing such enduring identities risk projecting onto the past their own deep-seated desires for identity stability, and this scholarship generally evades how those archaeologically validated identities subsequently function in contemporary ethnic and disciplinary politics.

Historical archaeologists may stress the persistence of cultural identities to temper the appearance of capitalist homogenization suggested by mass consumption. Commodity consumption is indeed bound to have some genuine homogenizing effect, but the form and meaning of that “homogenization” vary significantly from one place and time to another. Some thinkers certainly view such homogenization apprehensively. The “McDonaldization” thesis, for example, proposes that mass corporations have materially and socially reorganized almost all elements of contemporary production and consumption into what Weber called a rationalized society (Ritzer 1993). This critique resonates with anthropologists’ longstanding misgivings about Westernization: producers like McDonald’s pose significant economic and cultural threats to a vast range of local contexts. Daniel Miller (1995b:268), however, suggests that the social differentiation and diversity within capitalist societies ensures that various social groups will have heterogeneous experiences, even under quite comparable conditions. For instance, Andrew Heinze’s (2000) account of Jewish immigrant consumption notes that women assumed the role of household consumer in America. Jewish women frequented the same stores and purchased most of the same goods as their neighbors, yet turn-of-the-century Jewish women assumed significant family importance based on their role as material arbiters securing high-quality, inexpensive, and stylish goods. Rather than see consumption as a homogenizing threat to traditional culture or women’s agency, Jewish immigrants instead embraced it.

Archaeologists’ tendency to view identity in rather self-contained, historically “authentic” packages certainly did not emerge from archaeology: many contemporary people are attracted to a pleasant positivism that demonstrates clear ethnic distinctions, deep-seated identities, and cultural resilience in the face of often-overwhelming inequality. In most contemporary theory, however, the notion of an “authentic” identity has either been significantly destabilized or rejected altogether. Don Slater (1997:83) argues that the contemporary world is a pluralized “post-traditional” society in which selfhood is neither assigned nor unambiguous. He suggests that contemporary social life is mediated by commercialization, media, and commerce that make possible a vast range of fluid identity options. Many theorists focus on how consumers actively “produce” meaning from goods and discourses circulating in contemporary space; this shifts the most significant social construction of material meanings from producers and ideologues to consumers. For instance, the subculture studies most closely associated with Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (e.g., Cohen 1993; Hebdige 1979) examine how subcultures manipulate dominant symbolism in consumer goods and discourses as a form of resistance that expresses the contradictions in the

“parent” culture. Subcultural consumers constantly appropriate material and popular symbols and reconstruct their dominant meanings through bricolage, a process that constructs an oppositional identity negotiating structural contradictions such as class inequality. In a similar form, post-subculturalists (e.g., Bennett 1999; Redhead 1997) have focused on consumers’ distinctive material tactics and social values. Post-subculturalists, however, reject the notion of a clearly defined mainstream culture or structural conditions against which consumption patterns are hegemonically positioned, instead focusing on quite dynamic individuality and subjective lived experiences. Jean Baudrillard (1988) champions perhaps the most radical vision of consumption and social reality in general, arguing that we consume signs that refer to realities that do not themselves exist. Fredric Jameson (1984) suggests that the unique autonomous self no longer exists, and, in fact, that bourgeois individual may never have existed.

In contemporary life, the boundaries that social factions draw between authentic and fake, or periphery and mainstream are ambiguous and utterly dynamic, and contrast radically with the inflexible identity categories social scientists routinely reproduce. Such thinking can productively destabilize inflexible identity frameworks, but it examines radical sociocultural hybridity that is not a particularly apt archaeological analog: identity formation in postwar consumer culture clearly is historically distinct and cannot be transferred wholesale to every context. Stuart Hall (1993) argues that in the contemporary world marginality has become celebrated and is now viewed as the representative experience. Hall cautions that even in the face of infinitely dispersed marginal identities groups still must sociopolitically articulate across lines of difference. Terry Eagleton (1991:38–39) concludes that by rejecting all but the most provisional forms of subjectivity, many theorists fail to distinguish between qualitatively different forms of social subjectivity and, by extension, their political claims. African heritage, for instance, may be materialized in a vast range of ways, but this subjectivity is itself actively fashioned by consumers – and archaeologists – in specific social, political, and material conditions. The archaeological objective should be to examine how African, Black, White, middle class, and similar identity taxonomies have been constructed by various social groups over time, the ways in which apparently distinct categories are entangled in each other, and how archaeology itself can identify the historical discontinuities in such identities. The presence of objects associated with African traditions is a powerful and important testament to African-American agency, but it is also significant that African Americans became producers, marketers, shoppers, and consumers in a society in which all public rights were denied to people of color. It might seem uplifting to paint a marginalized African subject vigilantly maintaining oppositional identity, but identifying African-American agency in White consumer space may well have a more radical effect on how archaeologists define and interpret difference across the color line: focusing on how African Americans negotiated White public spaces should nuance essentialized notions of cultural continuity by confronting the impression of anti-Black racial ideology and the continuities between White and Black materialism. Any archaeology that examines consumption as uncomplicated patterning of well-established identities or domination alone risks diminishing individual agency, minimizing the distinct factors shaping any given consumption context, and ignoring the complexities of power altogether. Concepts such as culture and ethnicity still have interpretive power, but a focus on consumption should problematize such identities

and their construction; this is quite different from explaining consumption patterns based on their agreement with existing identity categories.

Ideology, Politics, and Consumption

Working classes and subordinated groups have often identified consumer privileges as one of Western society's most significant citizen "rights" (e.g., Edsforth 1987). T. H. Breen (1993:501), for instance, reaches the stunning conclusion that the American Revolution was defined "around participation in a newly established consumer marketplace," rather than the conventional notion that Americans thirsted for individual and national freedoms. Instead, Breen argues that American colonists saw themselves as participants in an expanding British trade empire, and when the Crown restricted Americans' consumer privileges colonists responded in ways that had profound political and social effects. After the Revolution, however, Americans continued to purchase English goods, underscoring that the Revolution may not have been a radical shift in Americans' cultural identity.

Shopping for, and possessing goods can be a significant privilege for many citizens; however, shopping and material desire demand some implication in wage labor and a cash economy, as well as at least provisional acceptance of a consumer discipline that accepts stunning inequalities. If Westerners have been participants in a consumer revolution, the degree of inequality in the contemporary world suggests it was decidedly conservative. In his examination of American society between the world wars, Warren Susman (1984) reached the conclusion that, in the 1920s, to be "American" was to be a consumer. For Susman, Americans' most deeply held values by the 1930s were no longer God, country, region, or similar monoliths; instead, what Americans shared was a society in which their individual materialism, the state's dedication to support and "protect" consumer privileges, and access to consumer space were our most deeply held "rights" (Agnew 1993). Susman concluded that this was a true consumer "culture" in which our commonly held social values and state interests revolved around material consumption.

Many consumers feel empowered by contemplating, acquiring, and possessing goods; consumers' ability to actually change structural conditions or eliminate inequalities, however, has historically been very limited, and such structural change is not normally considered a goal of material consumption. The significance of consumption in many peoples' lives reflects that it has a genuine impact on how people see themselves and their society and perhaps even how they articulate their politics. However, it is worth being critical of the empowering aspects of material consumption and probing precisely how goods meaningfully negotiate ideology and actually reproduce dominant structural conditions.

The notion of ideology appears in a vast range of consumption and archaeological studies alike: ideology is variously cast as a belief system, a seamless social medium, a body of socially interested misrepresentations, a discourse of power, or the uneasy marriage of reality and representation, among many other definitions. Some thinkers have lobbied for the dissolution of an idealistic sense of ideology; leery of ideology's deterministic capacity, Michel Foucault (1972) champions a broad definition of dis-

course embedded in diffuse power relations. In contrast, Louis Althusser (1971) embraces the problematic extreme that everything is ideological. Terry Eagleton (1991:8) concludes that it is not essential to settle on a definition of ideology that can be applied to any context; instead, the notion of ideology provides us with a powerful concept to assess socially consequential power struggles. Archaeologists' interest in the ideological dimension of commodities seems to revolve around how objects can display, mask, negotiate, or evade such power struggles.

In historical archaeology the concept of ideology has been most articulately championed by Mark Leone (1984), whose formulation of ideology borrows most from Althusser (1971). For Althusser, ideology is lived relations that give human subjects coherence, though that coherence is an illusion produced by structures that exist outside our everyday "practical" consciousness (Eagleton 1991:140-142). Leone's formulation of ideology adopts Althusser's concept of "ideological state apparatuses" and combines it with Jürgen Habermas's (1976) notion of ideology as intentionally distorted communication. For Leone, ideology is a dominant class-interested discourse that finds its way into various everyday behaviors and beliefs that the masses internalize without critical self-reflection. There are some genuine problems with defining precisely what constitutes such "internalization": e.g., does consumption of a fork, which is part of a well-defined disciplinary ideology, imply the consumption of those dominant ideas, or does it necessarily reflect a consistent elite discourse that underlies those objects? Rather than focus on the construction of dominant ideologies, as Leone does, many archaeologists are most interested in how they can identify meaningful ideological "breakdowns"; tensions with ideologies, and resistance to them. Leone's assessment of capitalist ideologies does not disavow resistance, but he tends to see such resistance being somehow reincorporated.

Analyses of consumption and ideology alike often wrestle with the notion of resistance. Michel de Certeau (1984), for instance, suggested that the sort of situational subversion typical in consumer space is a "tactics": i.e., it has no long-run strategic goals, or it does not articulate a particular political plan to move from evading experienced injustices to eradicating the conditions that permit and reproduce them. Consumer tactics can have concrete political effects through their repetition by numerous people, but de Certeau frames consumption as the commonplace, situational empowerment within everyday experience. It may be tempting to celebrate consumers who appropriate goods and symbolically turn them against the producer elite, but consumption commonly takes prosaic forms that negotiate lived inequalities and place consumers on a fluid terrain both within and outside ideologies. For example, Erica Carter (1984) argues that postwar West German women were both agents and objects in consumer space. She paints a complex picture of women's consumption that muddies the facile distinction between domination and resistance: on the one hand, material patterns were profoundly structured by consumer culture's economic structures and ideological conventions; but on the other hand, those structuring mechanisms never dictated women's everyday material consumption patterns, and women were made both subjects and citizens by consumer disciplines. John Fiske (1989) argues that shopping is empowering to women because it opens up public space, provides a legitimate public identity, and allows women to access what are otherwise considered exclusively masculine pleasures. However, Fiske recognizes that shopping does not

upset patriarchal ideology that assumes such public privileges and pleasures should be more accessible to men.

In historical archaeology, the dispute over ideology has usually centered on its deterministic efficacy, or, more specifically, on the tension between human agency and structural dominance. Martin Hall (1992), for instance, levels the charge of determinism at Leone and favors instead dissecting power struggles as "discourses," a move championed by Foucault. Hall sees meaning and identity being formed in discourses that have patterned regularities but are still quite diffuse, shaped by complex power relations, and not always especially well controlled by the elite. John Barrett (2001) argues a similar case by advocating Anthony Giddens's (1984) notion of structuration, which argues that agency and structure are inseparable phenomena that conjointly form social space. For Barrett, power is materialized in a vast range of ways that express various struggles in a diverse range of ideological forms. Ian Hodder (1986:67-73) pins the shortcomings of ideology on Marxism and what he concludes is its assumption of class determinism. He prefers to pose ideology as simply one dimension of symbolic systems that is generated and experienced in contextually distinct forms.

Hall, Barrett, and Hodder alike argue much of this case articulately and persuasively. Yet some archaeologists seem eager to junk the concept of ideology altogether and substitute an utterly fluid, agent-centered vision of social life. Laurie Wilkie and Kevin Bartoy (2000), for instance, accuse Leone of ideological determinism in which people succumb to a "false consciousness." Even Althusser's quite deterministic notion of ideology does not argue that people have a "false" consciousness of reality: Althusser's conclusion is that a dominant ideological discourse provides a coherent vision of subjectivity in the first place, producing social subjects and enabling certain forms of agency, rather than simply repressively controlling subjects. Yet many of the archaeological critiques of ideology reduce it to its most deterministic and repressive caricature as elite falsehoods uniformly projected onto the masses, often mechanically invoking the "dominant ideology thesis" that suggests a unified ideology bonds society (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turn 1980). In the place of ideology, Wilkie and Bartoy instead champion an experiential archaeology revolving around individual consciousness, ambiguous structures, and continual semiotic discontinuity. Dennis Pogue's study of emergent consumption in the Chesapeake (2001:50-51) sounds a similar lament that studying ideology "reduces all behaviors to issues of power" and inevitably ignores common folks' agency in favor of a focus on what he dubs the "capitalist conspiracy." Simplistic divisions between capitalist elite and the masses or the implication that ideology provides a universal signifying system generally are rhetorical maneuvers; critics use these caricatures to launch transparent attacks on whatever forms of determinism they choose to evade, which has often meant stressing individual decision-making and everyday resistance over ideology and structural domination. Historical archaeologists have often dismantled ideology and then lapsed into explaining consumption as a natural outgrowth of economic and production shifts: Pogue, for instance, attributes eighteenth-century materialism to population growth and the emergence of socially competitive gentry who used goods in status hierarchies like those Veblen modeled.

Most archaeologists are uneasy with the suggestion that a single coherent body of elite values and practices could actually repress the masses, who certainly retain some

measure of autonomy in even the most repressive circumstances. Ross Jamieson's (2000) analysis of household consumption in colonial Ecuador notes that most accounts of Spanish colonial life assume that powerful Spanish colonizers simply imposed changes on indigenous peoples. However, Jamieson argues for a quite dynamic relationship between colonizers and colonized in Ecuador, which is reflected in diverse consumption patterns among urban and rural, elite and impoverished, that incorporated local and colonial objects alike.

Dominant ideological discourses clearly have vast ambiguity in any lived circumstance, and resistance and experience are themselves shaped by ideology, which is itself dynamic, uncoordinated, and unevenly articulated. Consequently, it is infeasible to argue that people simply "see through" ideological misrepresentation or alternatively are "taken in" by it. Most consumer ideology is contested in some fashion and with some genuine measure of personal efficacy, but personally empowering consumption does not necessarily work significant structural change. Desire and the hopes consumers invest in goods are key to consumption's genuine transformative potential; however, consumption usually expresses a quite personal "politics" that imagines individual and situationally distinct social possibilities, which may subsequently lead to structural change, reproduce existing conditions, or work wholly meaningful personal changes with ambiguous social and structural effects.

To assess something as dynamic and ambiguous as a consumer "politics," it is necessary to examine both desire and ideology and assess how and why certain consumers invest specific ambitions into consumption and particular objects. Historical archaeology's standard approach to desire has been to examine how consumers use material goods to display their hierarchical social position or pose the social identity to which they aspire. This idea was most clearly articulated by Veblen (1899), and in a similar form Weber (1958) argued for the presence of social status groups that distinguished themselves from others by unique consumption patterns. Bourdieu (1984) has argued for comparable class-distinguishing processes in contemporary material consumption.

Veblen's perspective has been most clearly embraced by Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb (1982), who argue that the emulation of upper-class style by the masses was central to why English consumer society unleashed unprecedented materialism throughout the Empire. Emulation is infeasible in its most mechanical caricature as poor people instrumentally parroting the elite, but it is not without some genuine interpretive power. Paul Shackel's (1993:162) analysis of colonial Chesapeake consumption accepts that cross-class emulation was commonplace; however, he argues that such emulation masked a complex range of conflicts and class-specific interests. Many consumers at least provisionally reproduced ideals that were circulated in discourses such as etiquette books and advertising. Shackel focuses on the former, and Roland Marchand (1985) is among the many scholars who have examined the latter. There is clear evidence that many middling or impoverished consumers were swayed by consumer goods and consumption patterns they literally saw displayed in public space: African-American and European immigrant domestics, for example, often were introduced to particular goods through their labor in White genteel homes, and department store display windows were productive theaters for many working-class urbanites (cf. Abelson 1989). But this sort of emulation is a rather piecemeal and highly

individualistic reproduction of ideals that were themselves ambiguous, dynamic, and dispersed. Such emulation does not "imitate" a coherent set of dictates (or an elite class) as much as it reproduces an equivocal ideal that did not exist in objective reality: i.e., consumers negotiated various threads of material discourses and particular experiences in public space that produced a quite diverse range of consumption patterns loosely linked back to dominant disciplinary ideals.

Historical archaeologists still tend to share Veblen's presumption that commodities' central meanings are dependent on what goods "communicate" to society through their display. Historical archaeologists usually have ended up reducing goods' "communicative" use value to their instrumental capacity to display "cost status": i.e., costly and stylish goods are consumed with the fundamental intention of publicly communicating (and perhaps improving or masking) the consumer's socioeconomic standing. Methodologically, most of this work in American historical archaeology has focused on ceramic pricing research conducted by George Miller (1991). Miller's assessments of Staffordshire price-fixing agreements provide a quantitative mechanism to evaluate the wholesale value of a ceramic assemblage. Usually these studies are directed toward some measure of status reflected in an assemblage's economic value, though "status" has been relatively poorly defined. Suzanne Spencer-Wood (1987), for example, provides one of the most systematic status analyses based on ceramic scaling, concluding that higher-status consumers demonstrated their social standing through tea and coffee vessel consumption; lower-status households, in contrast, tended to purchase cheaper wares in similar decorative types. A flood of studies have probed the diversity of consumption patterns and related them to other documentary measures of affluence and social status. However, the mechanisms spurring consumption pass largely unexamined, and they seem to assume economically rational consumers who instrumentally buy things to display their legitimate right to (or desire for) socioeconomic privilege.

This vision of materialism concedes consumers relatively little consequential impression over the meaning of material goods; it implies that middling consumers will generally purchase whatever the marketplace provides or dominant social tastes dictate; and it tends to pose consumption as a rather logical goal-oriented social activity. Reacting to such visions of economically rational consumers, Colin Campbell (1987) argues that modern consumption (i.e., since the first quarter of the eighteenth century) is instead rooted in individual desire that is focused less on displaying meaning to society than personally imagining how goods can reconceive the individual and society. For Campbell, the most critical moments in consumer experience fall between manufacture and acquisition; in the consumer musing over how acquiring and possessing a particular good will gratify them. Consumers imaginatively invest various sentiments into goods, but this imagination is tempered by discipline that suppresses or postpones some pleasures while it allows itself others. The apparent tension between a puritanical discipline and a romantic hedonism is not so much a contradiction for Campbell as it is a productive and inseparable amalgam. Stressing the broad implications of such desire, George Yudice (2001:229) emphasizes that there is a significant social dimension to consumer desire. Yudice concludes that consumers fantasize about material fulfillment of desires and project this onto social space as a mechanism to collectively negotiate what constitutes a "need" or "satisfaction," both of which are fluid and vary from one group to another.

Methodologically, it may seem somewhat daunting to divine such individualistic desires in commodities, but the key lies in examining how ideology, power, and social position encourage particular forms of desire in certain contexts. Paul Mullins (1999, 2001) has argued that objects that do not symbolically "fit" within an assemblage or a material system often offer the most possibilities for consumer imagination, because they provide equivocal aesthetic and material cues that a consumer can interpret in a variety of forms. Novel objects may feature exotic styles or ambiguous functions, but in some form they pose distinctions to other goods in the same assemblage or the goods available in a given time and place. Novel material style could have a wide range of meanings, and that meaning might well differ from one person to the next: a novel object could distinguish the consumer from others, homogenize them within the guise of individual symbolic manipulation, or provide the symbolic means to rethink and even critique their social conditions.

Paul Willis (1990) sounds a similar thesis, arguing that "commerce and consumerism have helped to release a profane explosion of everyday symbolic life and activity" because commodities are intended for exchange that attempts to address desires and needs; consequently, commodities generally are relevant to what he calls "socially necessary symbolic work." Willis suggests that this "work" in consumption and every facet of everyday life has contextually distinctive dynamics in which "symbols and practices are selected, reselected, highlighted and recomposed to resonate further appropriated and particularized meanings." Willis argues against seeing such symbolic potential strictly defined by either the thing's properties or dominant aesthetic meanings; instead, he argues that analysis should focus on everyday social relations. This is a process akin to what Daniel Miller (1987) calls "recontextualization." Miller (1987:174-176) frames recontextualization as the creative manipulation of the symbolism of mass-produced goods, a process in which consumers define the meaning of commodities in ways that are perceived to positively contribute to or reproduce personal and social identity. Miller argues that particular goods have distinct possibilities in certain consumers' hands. The challenge is moving from the realm of imaginative individuals to collectives whose agency has some impact on dominant structural relations: this need not be structurally revolutionary change as much as it should suggest ways that collectives rethought social contradiction, which may or may not lead to structural change.

A Social Archaeology of Consumption

Daniel Miller has gone so far as to argue that consumption is the "vanguard to history," a pronouncement he believes is warranted by consumption's global socioeconomic transformations and the stampede of scholars who have examined consumption. Archaeology has always been focused on the material evidence of consumption, so it seems unusual that archaeologists are not in the midst of this interdisciplinary turn to consumption research. However, the distance that archaeologists need to traverse to do a social archaeology of consumption is not particularly great: archaeologists clearly have conducted an extensive amount of research on a vast range of consumption patterns, the ways in which material culture shapes and mirrors identity, and the historical continuities between contemporary and past consumer societies. It also

would appear that archaeology has a great deal to offer consumption scholarship: consumption research often relies on impressionistic data analysis that falls well below archaeological expectations of methodological rigor; objects are routinely examined through mechanical typological frameworks; and consumption patterns usually are defined based on textual evidence rather than concrete assemblages. Consequently, despite the overwhelming turn to consumption, it seems that few scholars have wrestled with how systematic object analysis might provide fresh insight into how things structure and encourage various forms of desire and identity formation.

Archaeology's insular methodologies and narrative forms likely have discouraged interdisciplinary scholars from using archaeological data and insights. Historical archaeologists, for instance, have marshaled a stunning inventory of household consumption data, but most of this analysis has focused on prefabricated patterns rather than the complicated entanglements between social groups. In historical archaeology the reluctance to embrace consumption theory seems to revolve around the identity fluidity painted by most consumer theorists. Accepting that identity is dynamic, fluid, and situational, ensnaring it in a vast range of local capitalist experiences, and then confronting its tense relationship with ideology could potentially transform some of historical archaeology's most cherished assumptions about the stability of culture and identity. A social archaeology of consumption also will inevitably stress that the key characteristics of historical contexts – mass consumption, identity fluidity and factionalism, and the roots of material inequality – extend well into the prehistoric past, illuminating the continuities between past and present and productively eroding historical archaeology's own insularity.

An archaeology of capitalist consumption should be utterly dynamic and confront the tense confluence of ideology, power, and desire, and this shift likely will impact how we interpret all commonplace things. The historic and prehistoric past have not been inhabited by consumers just like ourselves, so even if we accept consumption's long-term identity fluidity and social complexity archaeologists still should resist peopling the past with self-empowered shoppers. Archaeology offers a critical mechanism to assess the politics of consumption across time and space, and it certainly reveals both significant similarities and profound differences between consumers in the past and present.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The most wide-ranging interdisciplinary review of consumption scholarship is Daniel Miller's edited *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Campbell (1987) is a fascinating and imaginative examination of the roots of contemporary consumption. Agnew (1993) is a brilliant exposition of consumer culture historiography. Susman (1984) rethinks most of modern American society by placing consumption at the heart of the American Dream. Horowitz (1985) provides a thoughtful intellectual history of Americans' ambivalence toward goods. For a more sober vision of consumer culture, see Ewen (1988). Jean Baudrillard has had a significant impact on the most radical theories of consumption; see his essays in Baudrillard (1988). Bourdieu (1984) is a thorough study of French consumption patterns. Researchers examining subcultures have stressed the political potential of goods, such as

Dick Hebdige's succinct and insightful *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). Among the vast range of studies on ideology, Eagleton (1991) is especially thorough, critical, and clever. Orser (1996) outlines American historical archaeology's turn toward capitalism, colonization, and cultural complexity in the past decade. Leone (1995) summarizes his application of Frankfurt School critical theory to archaeological interpretation.

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