

# Approaching the archaeology of value: a view from the modern world

By PENNY CROOK

*SUMMARY: The abundance of goods in the modern world has a tendency to prejudice interpretation of their value, but the way people value their goods is complex, relative and changeable — scarcity is just one factor. There is a long history of value theorization across the social sciences, but archaeological considerations of value remain uncommon and focused on prestige goods. In this paper, I review alternative conceptions of value through the lens of the modern world, with an example of Spode creamware used by a governor in the early decades of colonial Sydney. I argue that the process of devaluation, through discard and waste, offers a unique archaeological understanding of the shifting values people of the modern world placed on commodities.*

## INTRODUCTION: THE VALUE OF GOODS IN THE MODERN WORLD

In 1868, while dissecting the peculiarities of an early trading post, *The Exchange and Mart* — a weekly journal in which anonymous gentlemen and ladies could offer their unwanted goods in exchange for more desirable ones — an astute author wrote in Charles Dickens’s journal *All the Year Round*:

It is a fact, concerning the soundness of which there can be no doubt, that we all keep by us, among our possessions, a considerable number of objects which we do not want, for which we have no possible use, which are very much in our way, and which we would be exceedingly glad to be rid of ... Some people ... have been so encumbered in this way with large accumulations of rubbish ... that they have even been heard, after a day spent in futile attempts to deal with these unvalued possessions, to express, in the bitterness of their

souls, a longing for a ‘judicious fire’ to break out in the house.<sup>1</sup>

He or she notes objects of ‘some — occasionally of great — intrinsic value’, such as wedding gifts ‘which we don’t in the slightest degree appreciate, and secretly yearn to be delivered from’, and lists several items materially unsuitable for burning in that ‘judicious’ fire:

Metallic rubbish, earthen ware rubbish, bone and ivory rubbish, old door handles, disabled locks, bunches of obsolete keys, superseded door knockers, ancient jam pots, broken china figures, plaster casts without noses, empty ink jars, medicine bottles half full of mixture which was to be taken three times a day and wasn’t, worn-out tooth brush handles, knobs that have come off everything that could have a knob, handles of everything that could have a handle — handles of parasols, of button hooks, of butter knives, of paper knives, of water jugs, of tea pots.<sup>2</sup>

This Dickensian commentary exposes a range of challenges to the way archaeologists analyse, interpret or imagine the value of ‘modern’ goods to those who bought, received or managed them. Not all goods were purchased by the owner, some purchases were regretted (‘unmentionables ... much more violent in colour than it looked in the tailor’s pattern-book’)<sup>3</sup> and others were gifted to varying degrees of appreciation. Befitting for their time, the author clearly conceived of value in functional and monetary terms, but we know from theoretical developments in the following century that utility is just one consideration when measuring the importance of goods. Despite declarations of being ‘unvalued’, the continued presence and management of things not in use in the household suggests some purpose, perhaps sentimental or a social debt, or a *chance* for utility in the future.

What might archaeologists make of this assemblage of broken and unwanted things gathered for the Dickensian pyre? We use commodities as evidence to understand the daily lives of people, or uncover and reconstruct life experiences, but we require some understanding of the importance bestowed upon them by those who used them. A study of value can inform functional or technological studies by considering the resources we are willing to expend in the making, promoting, transporting, curation, use and transfer of possessions. In this way, understanding how people value goods accents and unifies different phases of the object lifecycle<sup>4</sup> — from acquisition to disposal by fire, exchange or otherwise.

Within archaeological discourse explicit interrogations of the broader conceptions of value are uncommon, but can be found if you look hard enough. An important arena of debate is the contemporary valuation of archaeological sites and collections for the purpose of heritage management.<sup>5</sup> These valuations often follow scripted formats and regulated criteria to ensure transparent and fair assessments across diverse data-sets, aiding critical management decisions about which fabric can be removed or altered. These assessments and their consequent decisions reflect the values of present-day communities, not necessarily the people who built, owned or altered them.

Value has also been explored with respect to prestige and trade in ancient economies;<sup>6</sup> ceremonial gift-giving in New World societies thrust into the colonial spotlight; and under the ‘haunts’ (to borrow Orser’s term)<sup>7</sup> of capitalism, ethnicity and identity construction in modern world studies. Counterintuitively, the post-industrial era of increasingly mass-produced and less durable objects is an excellent place to examine the complex ways in which people value things. Notwithstanding Dickensian disdain for so much rubbish, we cannot presume that things meant more to people when fewer things were made, more time and effort was

expended in their creation and fewer ‘middle-men’ impeded the exchange between maker and user. It is true that some of the most profound understandings of value are observed in communities reliant on ceremonial exchange rather than shopping trolleys, but the short story is we have *more data* from the modern world. The quantitative increase of domestic goods brought more everyday items to the reach of ‘ordinary’ folk, and the more stuff consumed, the more stuff was left behind on house lots and, later, municipal rubbish dumps.

In previous research I have explored the concepts of consumption for the purposes of analysing and interpreting historical archaeological assemblages from 19th-century Sydney and London.<sup>8</sup> I examined the *price* of consumer goods and the range of their desirable characteristics such as newness, variety and, importantly, *quality* — and developed procedures to evaluate its physical attributes in archaeological assemblages. I wanted to explore how these expensive/inexpensive and high-/low-quality items were *valued* by the people who bought and used them, and how significant these desirable qualities were.

This paper presents a renewed and more extensive exploration of the concept of *value* and its many definitions. I begin with a selection of theoretical contributions and case studies by 19th- and 20th-century economists, sociologists and anthropologists concerning the ways in which people value their material possessions, returning to original sources wherever possible. I evaluate whether or not archaeologists can identify and quantify the material dimensions of these approaches before introducing explicit archaeological discussions of value. In this I acknowledge that I fall short of Daniel Miller’s efforts ‘to understand what value is by seeing what value does’,<sup>9</sup> as many archaeologists touch on the many dimensions of value without ever using the word. I then argue for the benefits of theorizing *devaluation* in archaeological studies of material culture. I conclude with a modern case study of a single creamware vessel from the site of First Government House, Sydney, subjected to different approaches to value theory, archaeological and non-archaeological alike.

## VALUE 1,2,3

Despite centuries of discourse, the definition and use of the word *value* continues to spark confusion. In everyday discourse *value* has a range of meanings: it can describe the importance or worth of commodities, natural resources, people, activities or processes. Trading stocks have high and low values, precious jewels are ‘valuables’, water is valuable for sustaining life, public parklands are valued by the community and a diligent worker may be ‘a valued employee’. *Value* is also used to describe principles

or standards of behaviour, for example ‘family values’, ‘Australian values’ or the Protestant work ethic. This multiplicity tends to confuse debate, as *values* play a distinct role in *valuing* things, and some things are so *valuable* they cannot be readily *valued* in economic terms.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* clusters 21 distinguishable uses of the word *value* into two primary definitions:

- I. Worth or quality as measured by a standard of equivalence.
- II. Worth based on esteem; quality viewed in terms of importance, usefulness, desirability, etc.<sup>10</sup>

I is the measurable side to *value* — the valuation of property for sale or a work of art for insurance — and it has the closest approximation to economic value. In market economies, the standard of equivalence is currency and the *value* of many commodities is measured by its price. While the study of fluctuating prices is fruitful in the long term, it is a fleeting measure of *value* definition II: the way in which commodities (objects *produced* for exchange) are held in esteem, used and desired irrespective of whether their worthiness can be measured. It is these ‘immeasurable’ facets of value that resonate with archaeological analyses of the modern world, but many of us (myself included) remain preoccupied with quantifiable analyses.

The third widely understood definition of value, grouped by the OED under II is often given in the collective form as ‘values’:

- [II.] 6d. The principles or moral standards held by a person or social group.<sup>11</sup>

This is the primary subject of the philosophical axiology and is of relevance to archaeology to the extent that we are interested in understanding the development of ‘Christian values’ and ‘middle-class values’ as reflected in material culture.

As others have done before, I will clarify some of these definitions of *value*, but will refer to each primary conception of *value* as V<sub>1</sub> (measure), V<sub>2</sub> (esteem) and V<sub>3</sub> (moral).<sup>12</sup>

### CONSIDERATIONS OF VALUE IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Within the broad pillars of measurement and esteem as set out in *OED*, *value* has collected the disciplinary dust of meaning in a number of fields. As Daniel Miller observed, ‘we are hardly short of theories of value’.<sup>13</sup> I focus on economics, sociology, anthropology and, to a lesser degree, psychology — four often

overlapping fields concerned with the value of commodities and the material world. My interest will remain in the material impact of the cognitive and emotional processes of valuation, and the impact of material things on the process of valuation (V<sub>1</sub> & V<sub>2</sub>). Consequently, I will omit discussion of the philosophical field of axiology that focuses on moral values (V<sub>3</sub>), despite its insights into measurability.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, this is not the first (or last) overview of value in the social sciences.<sup>15</sup>

This discussion is informed by, but will not directly address, the robust, pan-archaeological discourse on the co-dependent relationship between people and things.<sup>16</sup> Ian Hodder calls it ‘entanglement’ and sees as its defining aspect ‘that humans get caught in a double bind, depending on things that depend on humans’.<sup>17</sup> While many themes overlap with those discussed under the gamut of consumption in the modern world where the entanglement of people and their goods is difficult to overlook, this independent tranche of theory development is outside the scope of this paper.

### EXCHANGING UTILITY

The conception of value with the farthest reach in the social sciences is an economic one: *exchange value*, that is the value of a commodity in the market, usually measured in equivalent units such as currency (V<sub>1</sub>). Exchange value is understood in terms of cost–benefit analysis: a trade-off between price and utility. ‘Value for money’ means getting more for less, whether the ‘more’ is measured in quantitative, qualitative or functional terms, and irrespective of whether the product cost a day’s or a year’s worth of wages. In economic theory, this is understood as a process of utility maximization and cost minimization, or specifically the formula:

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{If } B(x) > C(x) \text{ Buy } x \\ & \text{Where : } B = \text{Benefit}; C = \text{Cost}; \\ & \text{and } x = \text{The commodity} \end{aligned}$$

This can be seen in reverse: if a consumer purchased *x* the benefit, or perceived benefit, must have outweighed the cost — that is, we can conclude it was worth it.

As discussed elsewhere,<sup>18</sup> such economic principles operate best at the aggregate, market-wide level, hence it cannot be assumed that every purchase will satisfy this equation, nor will every consumer consciously calculate the benefits in terms of cost. In fact, the appraisal of value for many commodities (particularly repeat purchases such as groceries) is often accomplished in a matter of milliseconds.

There has been some debate about more comprehensive theories of exchange value in the history of economics. There are two schools of thought: the

*labour theory of value* and *utility theory*. The former, first articulated by Adam Smith<sup>19</sup> and David Ricardo<sup>20</sup> and later adopted by Karl Marx,<sup>21</sup> holds that the true exchange value of a commodity is (or tends to be) commensurate with its production input (including wages, raw material and capital): that is, a product is worth what it cost to make it. The utility thesis argues that exchange value is determined by the commodity's usefulness to the consumer, not how cheaply a manufacturer was able to produce it: that is, a commodity is only worth what a consumer is willing to pay for it. This proposition alone is insufficient for understanding utility — in fact, it tends to prejudice rarity. Some of the most abundant resources, such as water, are acquired free or for very low cost (depending on your local geography), but, being essential for maintaining human life, have high utility and consequently *value*. This is the origin of *paradox of value*, which has puzzled scholars from Plato to Adam Smith.<sup>22</sup>

Consider a person who has crossed a desert and been without water for several days. They may pay a week's wages for a single glass of water (usually free) to quench their thirst. They may even pay the same for a second glass, but would they pay the same for a third? Probably not, and in everyday economic exchanges a consumer will be less inclined to purchase additional quantities of a commodity beyond a certain point. Thus, the true worth of a product is revealed by the satisfaction gained when the last additional (or marginal) unit of the commodity is consumed (i.e. the second glass of water). This is known as *marginal utility theory*<sup>23</sup> and is, arguably, one of the first theorems to evaluate consumption in the long term<sup>24</sup> and demonstrates the complexities of using price as a measurement of *value* even for primary commodities.

## SENDING SIGNALS

Despite the consumer-centric element of marginal utility and other theories, the Neoclassical era of economics is widely acknowledged as closing the door on the more nuanced accounts of consumer motivation raised by the likes of Adam Smith.<sup>25</sup> Economists are often criticized for examining consumption in abstract, asocial contexts and assuming all purchase decisions are rational and follow set logical sequences.<sup>26</sup> This is achieved by establishing a series of assumptions and setting many variables (such as taste) as a constant to reveal the most typical responses to key phenomena, for example a rise in prices or fall in wages. Economists do not need to know why demand changes for each individual purchase, only that it does in a majority of cases. They describe the effects of consumption; they do not explain its causes.

In economic terms, the 'black box' approach to understanding *utility* is appropriate, but it is

unsatisfactory to those who fall on the sociological side of political economy.<sup>27</sup> Thorstein Veblen<sup>28</sup> was a vocal critic of the (Neo)classically postulated 'economic man', an individual dissociated from their group or community and '(habitual) control exercised by canons of conduct imposed by the group's scheme of life'.<sup>29</sup> Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*<sup>30</sup> was the first to account for consumption patterns that sit outside the economic rationalist perspective. Veblen coined the phrase 'conspicuous consumption' to refer to the competitive possession and display of high-quality, often-ornamental goods surplus to the needs of daily subsistence, that is:

So soon as the possession of property becomes the basis of popular esteem ... an individual should possess as large a portion of goods as others with whom he is accustomed to class himself; and it is extremely gratifying to possess something more than others.<sup>31</sup>

People of all classes learned to 'cultivate tastes ... to discriminate with some nicety between the noble and the ignoble in consumable goods' as befit their class and social group.<sup>32</sup> Veblen saw the practice as an extension of the non-productive labours of the 'leisure classes': hunting game, learning archaic languages and developing elaborate codes of conduct and so on. Just as the freedom to indulge in leisurely pursuits was both a privilege of the wealthy and an indicator of their status, only the wealthy could afford to consume non-essential goods and their possession thus inferred a mark of wealth.

For the lower middle classes, who had insufficient wealth and little inclination to lead a life of full-time leisure, but rather earned their living through non-labouring professions, the role of conspicuous consumption was *more* important than traditional social distinctions of class. It was also more important in large urban centres than in tightly knit rural villages, as 'many persons' in crowded towns and cities had 'no other means of judging ... reputation than the display of goods'.<sup>33</sup>

While Veblen considered status display as the most significant goal of consumption, he did recognize that there were other incentives and 'consumer wants': those for physical comfort and the 'so-called higher wants: spiritual, aesthetic, intellectual, or what not'.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, contemporary sociologists bemoan the influence of Veblen's work in reducing the many facets of consumerism to a measure of social stratification and a fickle process of envy-driven emulation.<sup>35</sup> The satirical nature of the *Leisure Classes* and Veblen's sardonic humour is often overlooked,<sup>36</sup> but the work is remarkable for its insightful account of the manipulation of goods by the middling and upper classes in the late-19th century.

German sociologist Georg Simmel has also been criticized for conceiving the transfer of style as an emulatory, top-down system, but he is otherwise acknowledged as making a more comprehensive argument about the relationship between the individual and the social group in the sphere of consumption: the need to unify and differentiate.<sup>37</sup> Simmel was not deterred by the quantitative increase in material goods.<sup>38</sup> The dynamism of fashion delivered by a range of mass-produced commodities provided the perfect platform for social actors to signal their identification with other members of a social group, while still maintaining the capacity to express their individual identity.<sup>39</sup>

Simmel's theories of value in *The Philosophy of Money*,<sup>40</sup> first published in 1900, were overlooked in English-speaking scholarship until the late-20th century.<sup>41</sup> Counter to prevailing Marxist labour theories of value, Simmel's subjective and relativist theory of value was more closely aligned with marginal utility theorists.<sup>42</sup> Simmel wrote in 1898 of his 'difficulties' with:

... the concept of value [which] seems to me to not only contain the same kind of regressus in infinitum as does that of causality but also contains a *circulus vitiosus* because, if one follows through the connections far enough, one always finds that the value of A is based on that of B or that of B is only based on that of A ...<sup>43</sup>

Simmel found value to be present and sometimes enhanced when an object was *not* in use or when possessions are lost: 'the mere withholding of a desired object often endows it with a value quite disproportionate to any possible enjoyment that it could yield'.<sup>44</sup> He struggled to reconcile (empirical) exchange value with individual (moral) values<sup>45</sup> ( $V_3$ ) and the 'polarity of gift and commodity'.<sup>46</sup> Simmel pondered whether value preceded the determination of exchange value, or whether value could only be conceived if the parameters of exchange (real or imagined) had been defined — the first direct acknowledgement of the reflexivity of the process of value construction.

## HABITS

Twentieth-century French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu grappled with similar reflexive processes to outline the mechanisms through which the 'language of taste' was created and reproduced in different social classes. His major work on the subject, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*<sup>47</sup> demonstrates class-based preferences for art, music, furnishings, entertainment and clothing in a unique survey of 1217 people living in suburbs of

Paris, Lille and 'a small provincial town' in the 1960s.<sup>48</sup>

In this work he deployed and refined his definition of *habitus*: a system of habits or dispositions (or intuitions) which govern an agent's (i.e. an individual's) social interaction with others. These dispositions are learned through social interaction and used by agents in different fields of social interaction, hence Bourdieu described habitus as a 'structured and structuring structure';<sup>49</sup> it is society internalized.<sup>50</sup> According to Bourdieu, the structure of this learning process is established in the earliest years of an individual's life and has a significant impact on consumer practice.<sup>51</sup>

... nothing, perhaps, more directly depends on early learning, especially the learning which takes place without any express intention to teach, than the dispositions and knowledge that are invested in clothing, furnishing and cooking or more precisely, in the way clothes, furniture and food are bought.<sup>52</sup>

While the focus of Bourdieu's study was aesthetic taste, he was fundamentally interested in *choice*<sup>53</sup> and how individual decision-making is influenced (and seemingly determined) by upbringing. He explored the symbolic and non-utilitarian functions of goods alongside the nexus of the relationship between the material and social worlds. The conundrum of how different individuals could view the *same* object and interpret its meaning very differently was resolved by clarifying that people do not 'read objects' directly, but rather read how others behave while using, wearing or interacting with goods. Writing of the complexity of conducting the questionnaire, he observed the duality of meaning (and by extension value) of words such as *soigné* — 'neat, trim, careful, well-groomed, well-kept' — which expressed the 'taste for a job well done' in one group and 'up-tight' rigour in another.<sup>54</sup> This is extended to the language of goods:

Objectively and subjectively aesthetic stances adopted in matters like cosmetics, clothing or home decoration are opportunities to experience or assert one's position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept.<sup>55</sup>

This is the Veblenian view, and it is certainly true that observation of these stances are signs and symbols of class association, but note by Bourdieu's very definition of habitus these stances, these tastes, are *intuitive*. These goods may be consciously adopted (i.e. selected, paid for and valued), but the desire for them feels natural and right. I argue that the way in which we *value* goods ( $V_2$ ) is part of the habitus and learned in the same apparently effortless way.

## SOCIALIZING THINGS

Mary Douglas was the first to apply an anthropological, total-culture perspective (developed for the study of exchange in non-Western cultures) to the subject of consumption in modern Britain. In *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*,<sup>56</sup> Douglas and co-author economist Baron Isherwood outlined the ritualistic elements of modern consumption and critiqued the isolated, economic approach of individual decision-making. Much of the force of Douglas and Isherwood's anthropology of consumption was to overthrow the general belief that non-essential needs were luxurious, false, wanton and elitist. Goods purchased over and above the most basic needs of food, clothing and shelter had been (and in some circles continue to be) seen as corrupting forces, innately promoting inequality and injustice. By putting goods back into the social process, Douglas and Isherwood recognized that at all levels of society, despite being affected by different means of access to different classes of goods, the same principles of exclusion and inclusion are present. From this we might conclude that, while goods are a component of cohesion in large groups such as social classes, their more important operation is within each class.

They argued for a collective and culturally significant construction of value, operating within the technological complexities of the modern market:

Nothing has value by itself: what is the good of one shoe without the other? A comb for a bald head? Since value is conferred by human judgments, each thing's value depends on its place in a series of complementary other objects. Instead of taking one object at a time, and finding a piece of information that it communicates, as if it were a label indicating a thing, the anthropological approach captures the whole meaning space in which objects, once purchased, are used.<sup>57</sup>

Their work informed several key texts that celebrated the role of consumption as creative self-expression. Chief among these is Arjun Appadurai's review of Marxist and Simmelian theories of value — the 'difficult realm'<sup>58</sup> — in 'Commodities and the politics of value'.<sup>59</sup> Appadurai argued that turning attention to the 'things themselves', tracing their trajectories of their exchange and use,<sup>60</sup> corrected the tendency to 'excessively sociologize transactions in things'.<sup>61</sup> While *transactions* with respect to economic exchange are a measure of value ( $V_1$ ), 'intra-cultural exchange' and gift exchanges generate value ( $V_2$ ) and can be read as a measure ( $V_1$ ). Thus value is created and measured in use and exchange.

## CULTIVATION

The nexus of the relationship between public and private psyches of consumption has been addressed by

scholars in other fields. Reporting on an in-depth study of cherished objects in the homes of 82 families living in Chicago in 1977, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and sociologist Eugene Rochberg-Halton (now known as Eugene Halton) utilized Halton's concept of *cultivation*,<sup>62</sup> a model for how consumers construct valuations of objects (and tasks):

When someone invests psychic energy in an object — a thing, another person, or an idea — that object becomes 'charged' with the energy of the agent. For example, if a person works at a task, a certain amount of his or her attention is invested in that task, thus that invested energy is 'lost' because the agent was unable to use that attention for other purposes.<sup>63</sup>

The time taken researching, selecting, negotiating, collecting and then curating and maintaining objects requires the forfeiture of both time and energy that may have been invested in other life experiences. Thus the physical product of that investment becomes 'charged' with a person's own life energy. This in turn consolidates a sense of ownership or connection which is traditionally seen to be the result of the skill and energy that a craftsman invests in an object. Thus, we can feel as passionately about ideas and objects as we do about other people, pets and elements of the living world (although, of course, the dynamism of interactions between people and living elements cannot be replicated in objects). The attachment is subjective and individualized — a personal investment — independent of both the material conditions of the object, and any projected significance of the object as intended by the manufacturer:

In the context of this study the concept [cultivation] accounts for the vast differences in the range of meanings that people derived from the objects with which they interacted. The same culturally legitimized object might provide only fleeting comfort to one person, whereas to another it signified complex emotional and cognitive ties to other people and ideas.<sup>64</sup>

This is a reflexive and compounding process. The more an object is valued, the more care is invested in its curation, thus the higher the 'charge' of energy and therefore, the higher its value. More recent studies in psychology support these layers of meaning, or rather the *appearance* of them. The 'mere exposure effect', in which repeated exposure (even through subliminal messaging) to a word or image gives an individual a sense not just of familiarity but positivity or favourability.<sup>65</sup> It may be that exposure to an object through use or subliminal awareness builds a cognitive chain of association regardless of whether each investment of energy was necessarily 'positive' or imbued with meaning.

## VALUE AS ACTION

Anthropologist David Graeber draws on a linguistic or structuralist view that ‘value is simply meaning: giving value to something is a matter of defining it by placing in some broader set of conceptual categories’.<sup>66</sup> Exploring traditional anthropological studies of gift-giving and studies of Western, free-market exchange (such as Douglas and Isherwood’s), Graeber undertook an extensive review of the concept of value in *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (2001). While primarily concerned with higher-order theories of value ( $V_3$ ) — how the bourgeoisie came to value individualism, hard work and charity, for example — rather than the role material culture played in shaping and maintaining those values, he did explore exchange values. He set out the incongruence of economic notions of ‘maximizing individuals’ in non-Western contexts such as the Iroquoian *wampum* exchange and the Kwakiutl potlatch ceremonies wherein prestige comes from giving away — and in certain cases of the potlatch destroying ceremonially<sup>67</sup> — the fruits of one’s labours rather than wearing or conspicuously displaying them.

For Graeber, the problem returned to the dilemma of socialization and internalization,<sup>68</sup> and the solution lies in shifting the debate to one of *action* rather than *desire*.<sup>69</sup> In this instance, action is a measure of value ( $V_1$ ).

## COMPLEX RESOLUTIONS

Other contemporary studies of modern material culture have explored the operation of consumer values. Anthropologist Daniel Miller<sup>70</sup> looked beyond the ‘vulgarity’ and disdain for mass consumption to explore cross-cultural interactions of people and their things. In a significant body of work<sup>71</sup> Miller makes clear the need to understand the system of things — a ‘single pot is meaningless’<sup>72</sup> — as Simmel and Douglas and Isherwood had argued. Miller also describes a phenomenon he calls the *humility of things*:

The surprising conclusion is that objects are important, not because they are evident and physically constrain or enable, but quite the opposite. It is often precisely because we do not *see* them. The less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectations, by setting the scene and ensuring appropriate behaviour, without being open to challenge. They determine what takes place to the extent that we are unconscious of their capacity to do so.<sup>73</sup>

Miller<sup>74</sup> demonstrated both the ritualistic dimension of shopping and the internalization of social relationships enacted during the activity (much like Bourdieu’s habitus: ‘society internalized’). He

challenges the typical view of shopping as an individualistic experience, showing that even the most repetitive and apparently least complex retail experience of weekly grocery selection reveals a subconscious re-enactment of social exchanges and filial bonding. The household care-provider (usually the mother) makes decisions to enhance the welfare of her family and imagines scenarios of appreciation and ‘valorization’ in response to her hard work.<sup>75</sup>

In a study of residents in council housing in London, Miller’s collaborator Alison Clarke demonstrates a similarly complex process of psychological projection in which decorating choices are made based on perceived responses by ‘imagined others’:

... there is extraordinary disparity between the amount of attention paid to how a place should look, as if it is firmly within the public domain, as against all evidence which indicates to the contrary that they are very rarely exposed to the view of an outsider.<sup>76</sup>

Throughout the three-year study of identical council flats in North London, one resident spoke of procrastinated plans to convert the roof space to a loft such that ‘the “would-be” loft has become the most important, if conceptual, space in the home’.<sup>77</sup> These ‘imaginary performances’ must be taken in the context of the late-20th-century culture of DIY renovation and self-improvement, but do pose interesting questions about the complexities of valuation and *inconspicuous* consumption in the domestic sphere.<sup>78</sup>

More recently, Miller searched for ‘what value is by observing what value does’ and how the word is used colloquially.<sup>79</sup> Speaking of the UK department store John Lewis, known for its ‘quality’ and ‘value’:

... it is clear from shoppers that John Lewis does not excel at anything — it is neither the cheapest, nor the most stylish nor the finest. What the words quality and value seem to mean is rather the point of intersection between (at least) three other properties, that of function, that of design and that of price. John Lewis objectified the sense of good value.

A quality object at John Lewis is something that is seen as embodying the same **complex resolution of competing factors** that a shopper must enact to feel that they have carried out this task sensibly and obtained **value** as a result.<sup>80</sup>

This phrasing of the ‘complex resolution of competing factors’ is salient. One, the multiple concerns are oppositional: predictions of utility and social acceptance, for example, may be set against opportunity cost, ease of maintenance and transport; predictors of disutility and so on. There are likely to be many factors to consider — as per Veblen’s ‘what

not' wants — and an outsider may only be able to guess one or two. The individual themselves may not even be aware of the all the factors they weigh up. Two, for value to be realized, there must be a resolution of some kind — a scenario, a choice at a given time and place — for value to be measured. This draws us back to utility theory in its broader sense and Simmel's dilemma of whether exchange precedes value.

### THE DIFFICULT REALM OF VALUE THEORY

Noting Simmel's struggles with definition, Appadurai rightly described the field of value studies as a 'difficult realm'.<sup>81</sup> My account of a selection of these studies up to this point demonstrates that there are several ways to approach the study of value in the social sciences. I have focused on those meditations most relevant to material-culture studies. Some directly interact with material goods; others are concerned with broader themes. They range from individual meditations (cultivation) to habitual exchanges, rational aggregations of utility to ceremonial gift giving; from trivial pleasures to self-serving status displays. Unsurprisingly, *none* cancels the others out.<sup>82</sup> The use of goods for status display or cultural capital is recognized as a legitimate factor of utility. Aggregation is an essential feature of utilitarianism, the rationalizing balance of costs and benefits. We can presume, in general terms, the reverse of cost-benefit analysis, that is if a commodity was purchased it must have been 'worth it' ( $V_2$ ) but, in the absence of accurate data about cost, we do not *how much* it was 'worth' ( $V_1$ ). As Miller noted, the process of valuation is a 'complex resolution of competing factors', and those factors are many. As goods satisfy a number of wants, we can sometimes only guess *which* wants have been satisfied.

An important distinction in these studies presented herein is the 'specialness' or 'ordinariness' of the objects. Csikszentmihalyi and Halton asked their study participants about the ten *most special* things in their home, not the ten *least special* or most loathed, or the ten middling objects that are not loved, not loathed and likely not thought of very much. Are these goods without value? And what of the most humble goods, those we do not notice: can we value something we are not aware of? To draw a parallel with the other side of 'value' thinking in archaeology, heritage management, it is so often the case that the important sites and collections are noticed or under-valued until they are threatened with destruction. It is that impending crisis that motivates individuals or community groups to act. This is the threshold of the 'complex resolution': a transaction or transition of some kind to trigger to the valuation process. Like the intersection of supply and

demand, there is a point in time where values will be measured according to action (as per Graeber).

Sociologists can ask questions about value directly and hope for insightful answers. Anthropologists can observe these decisions directly while embedded in communities both 'alien' and familiar. Archaeologists observe the material culture that remains behind after these decisions were made and the goods consumed, but as James Deetz put it:

No one has ever dug up a political system, a language, a set of religious beliefs, or a people's attitude toward their ancestors. Yet such things as political and religious behaviour, language, and social interaction affect what the archaeologist does recover.<sup>83</sup>

Three key challenges come into play when we bring sociological, anthropological and psychological reflections on valuation to the archaeological table: time, context and materiality. The value of an individual object changes between people and social groups, in different domains and over time owing to social differences and material limitations or transformations. To reconstruct value from material cultures past, we need some control of the material and temporal context.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO VALUE

Traditionally, value has been addressed in archaeology in relation to the functional use of objects, broadly parallel with the utility arguments of economists. Allowance was made for non-utilitarian uses of goods with implicit, higher order values. Binford's functional tier system, for example, included the categories of *technomic* or utilitarian (e.g. a candle to light a room), *sociotechnic* or social use (e.g. candles at a dinner party or on a birthday cake) and *ideotechnic* or ideological and religious use (e.g. a votive candle).<sup>84</sup> The acknowledgement of 'ideological' values was nevertheless subsumed by a focus on function that could be empirically demonstrated (and measured) in the archaeological record.<sup>85</sup>

Colin Renfrew<sup>86</sup> concurred with Binford's aversion to 'psychological preferences', but did note that value could be both *emic* (internal) and *etic* (external): something that acts upon on the material world in an observable way. Setting aside Marx's labour theory of value, but drawing attention to his 'fetishism of commodities', Renfrew set out an archaeologically informed definition of value:

In general, value is a property that is assigned [by an individual or by a group] to an object in a manner that arises from the social context in question, and it is to some, usually significant,

extent arbitrary. It is never a property inherent within an object or material in the manner of such physical and measurable properties as hardness, density, refractive index, and so on. It cannot be measured outside a social context. We speak of value as if it were inherent within that object or commodity, and in doing so we create a metaphor, or mask a reality.<sup>87</sup>

Renfrew ascribed ‘sentimental value’ to scenarios in which an individual accords an object — such as a grandmother’s brooch — high esteem that is not ‘widely shared’ and not related to its ‘raw material or workmanship’.<sup>88</sup> With regard to prestige goods, he advocated the use of Appadurai’s<sup>89</sup> term *prime value* to refer to high-status goods that *appear* to have intrinsic, unchanging value (having clearly established that goods do not have intrinsic value).

He examined grave goods from a Copper Age necropolis in Varna, Bulgaria, and made the case that gold was a highly valued material (economically and in terms of esteem:  $V_1$  and  $V_2$ ) by examining the distribution, form, function, mass and — interestingly, in the context of Daniel Miller’s *system* of objects — the propensity for ‘lower value’ materials such as gold-leaf to be crafted to imitate solid gold.<sup>90</sup> He notes the persistent physical qualities of its bright sheen and resistance to oxidization giving it ‘inherently attractive’ qualities,<sup>91</sup> and argued that this was the basis for the emergence of gold as material with prime value, a privilege it still holds today.<sup>92</sup>

It is within this sphere of prestige goods that most explicit consideration of value in archaeology has played out. Douglass Bailey and Steve Mills produced a diverse volume of papers concerned with the ‘archaeology of value’ in which *value* was seen to be interchangeable with prestige and wealth and Munn’s conception of fame.<sup>93</sup> Classical archaeologists have been drawn to modern economic thinking — Marxian labour theory and Neoclassical utility theories — to examine market economics in the Mediterranean with respect to grave goods,<sup>94</sup> locally constructed meanings of imported goods<sup>95</sup> and a range of other material goods.<sup>96</sup>

Historical archaeology has followed a similar path to the broader archaeological field with respect to an early adoption of ‘economic’ definitions of value, followed by a post-processualist pursuit for the ‘recovery of meaning’ in the 1990s and a growth in explicit discussion of value in the past decade as part of broader debates on colonialism and consumption. The chief contrast with classical archaeologies is the traditional focus on ordinary and commonplace, rather than elite, goods.

Contributions to early, seminal works such as *Consumer Choice in Historical Archaeology*<sup>97</sup> adopted the value-as-price ( $V_1$ ) definition in detailed explorations of ceramic assemblages and probate records. George Miller’s ceramic index<sup>98</sup> explicitly

established a relative index of value in the sense of price ( $V_1$ ). Examining models of consumer-decision-making, Susan Henry<sup>99</sup> referred to *values* of peers and reference groups ( $V_3$ ), but not the process of valuation.

More recently, Paul Mullins<sup>100</sup> has looked at status, desire and emulation in America, developing an ‘archaeology of consumption’. Drawing on oral history of early-20th-century African-American residents in Annapolis, Maryland, he examined mismatched ceramics in late-19th- and early-20th-century Annapolitan assemblages, speculating they were the everyday rather than ‘Sunday best’ wares.<sup>101</sup> His 2011 work *Archaeology of Consumer Culture* provides a comprehensive and engaging synthesis of consumption studies and discusses exchange value ( $V_1$ ) with respect to George Miller’s ceramic indices<sup>102</sup> and the multivariance of ‘meaning’<sup>103</sup> ( $V_3$ ) but not the processes of value- (or meaning-) making ( $V_2$ ).

Historical archaeological studies of global capitalism unsurprisingly address matters of value. Sarah Croucher,<sup>104</sup> for example, explored exchange values ( $V_1$ ) and commoditization processes in 19th-century Zanzibar in a study of mass-produced imported ceramics and oral recollections of their use in the 20th century. In a broad analysis of globalization and capitalism, Audrey Horning and Eric Schweickart<sup>105</sup> enlist the biographical approach to consider the value that 17th-century merchant Captain William Goodson might have placed on a piece of colonoware vessel found in his London home:

What value might Goodson have placed on the object and its acquisition? Was it an intentional purchase or merely the retention of a vessel used within Goodson’s Caribbean residence, linked to the work of a domestic servant? Why retain the vessel and carry it across the Atlantic? Was it a reminder of place and cuisine, or a symbol of hegemony? Or an unremarkable everyday object of so little value that it escaped attention in the packing up of the household effects?<sup>106</sup>

These considerations make no explicit reference to cost of the vessel ( $V_1$ ), but the ‘informed imagining’ of its value ( $V_2$ ) is based on knowledge of the material’s provenance and the owner’s life history.

While there is great appreciation of several key anthropological and sociological theories in this and other examples of archaeology, the fundamental assumptions of economic rationality are the dominant theorem in the identification and analysis of artefacts. Setting aside the problem of whether we can confidently estimate price,<sup>107</sup> it is assumed that if an item was costly it must have been *more* highly valued by its owners, and this in turn bears the implicit assumption that each item of material culture was at one

point *chosen* for purchase and therefore chosen for a reason. Yet, as Dickens's colleague reminds us, some goods were acquired without consent and some reasons regretted almost immediately.

The archaeological record captures more material attributes of *use* than acquisition. As Shanks has noted, an 'artefact wears in its use and consumption'<sup>108</sup> and the study of this wear and tear offers some insights to potential uses and related values. For example, Dorothy Griffiths examined knife, fork and spoon marks, and other evidence of abrasion, on ceramic vessels, identifying plates that had been used at the table and those unmarked on the surface but worn on the foot-ring and rim from being put on display.<sup>109</sup> If value is measured by utility, how do we compare a well-worn plate to a decorative piece? If we presume an item reserved for display is held in higher esteem than a functional object, this presents a curious paradox for utility theory: the less an item is used, the higher its value.<sup>110</sup>

High-value goods will be well cared for and maintained (thus adding to their value, as per *cultivation*), possibly reserved for special occasions (reducing chance of breakage) and exchanged with care or for advantage. Csikszentmihalyi and Halton explored the 'psychological value of china and other easily broken objects such as glass':

Given a number of fragile objects, the majority of them are soon bound to be broken. To preserve a breakable object from its destiny one must pay at least some attention to it, care for it, buffet it from the long arm of chance. Thus a china cup preserved over a generation is a victory of human purpose over chaos, an accomplishment to be quietly cherished, something to be 'kind of proud' of.<sup>111</sup>

In most situations, high-value goods should not be easily lost or readily discarded into the archaeological record unless their state (and thus their value) is significantly altered. This is where the uniqueness of an archaeological approach to value comes into play.

#### AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL THEORY OF DEVALUE?

The utility of goods tends to decline over time, particularly in complex and composite goods with moving parts, but repairs can restore functionality.<sup>112</sup> Sentimentality tends to increase over time and, in fact, repairs can add to the attachment to goods (and also the measurable value in the case of *Kintsugi* gold-leaven repairs to broken porcelain).<sup>113</sup> Sentiment grows from use and from exchange, gifting or ceremonial deposition. In the modern world there are examples of civic ceremonial caches that mark a transformation of value of a different kind. English potter Enoch Woods deposited a range of second-grade

ceramics around the footings of the Burslem meat market following the ceremonial laying of the foundation stone in 1835 and 1836.<sup>114</sup> Together with the deposition of custom-made commemorative vessels, the ceramic wasters were transformed from unprofitable commercial stock to a public display of civic good.

The majority of modern-world archaeology is comprised of this refuse: either through daily refuse in rubbish pits or underfloor accumulation, or episodic discard and 'clearances' in cesspits.<sup>115</sup> These comprise a mix of broken or unwanted durables, such as tablewares, and shorter-term consumables like bottles and clay pipes. As far as the utility thesis goes, discard is the ultimate measure of *devaluation*. The item no longer serves a purpose: functional, sentimental or otherwise. While it cannot be presumed that all value is lost (some lingering 'charge' may persist), there is insufficient esteem or desire to warrant repairs or find another use for the object.<sup>116</sup> For this reason it is preferable to refer to objects becoming *devalued* on disposal rather than becoming *valueless*.

The process to discard a good, now considered waste, would be made in the same culturally informed way as its acquisition.<sup>117</sup> It involves complex decision-making, cultural 'habits' (as per Bourdieu) and may be made in a matter of seconds. Like their acquisition, at the point of discard, objects briefly lose their humility. They have been noticed, they are in the foreground and they need to be dealt with. They have been devalued, deaccessioned, dis-'charged'.

There are known cultural traditions for 'household clearances' following a death in the family<sup>118</sup> or the Canadian *casser maison* ritual ('breaking the home'), which is carried out before elderly residents move into aged-care homes.<sup>119</sup> 'Decluttering' and home organization routines such as the KonMari method, pioneered by Marie Kondo, dictate that you discard any possession that does not 'spark joy'.<sup>120</sup> These contemporary practices may provide some reflection for archaeology, which preserves these discarded, joyless relics.

#### THE VALUE(S) OF 'BEST QUEENS WARE': AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ILLUSTRATION

I now consider how we might apply these approaches to value and devalue to the archaeological study of a modern world British classic — creamware — recovered from one of the most significant archaeological sites on the farthest reaches of the British empire: the site of First Government House, Sydney (FGH), built in 1788 and demolished in 1846 (see Figs 1 and 2).<sup>121</sup> FGH was excavated in the 1980s and early 1990s, revealing unparalleled evidence of the first decades of colonial settlement, and was preserved in the fabric of the Museum of Sydney, allowing

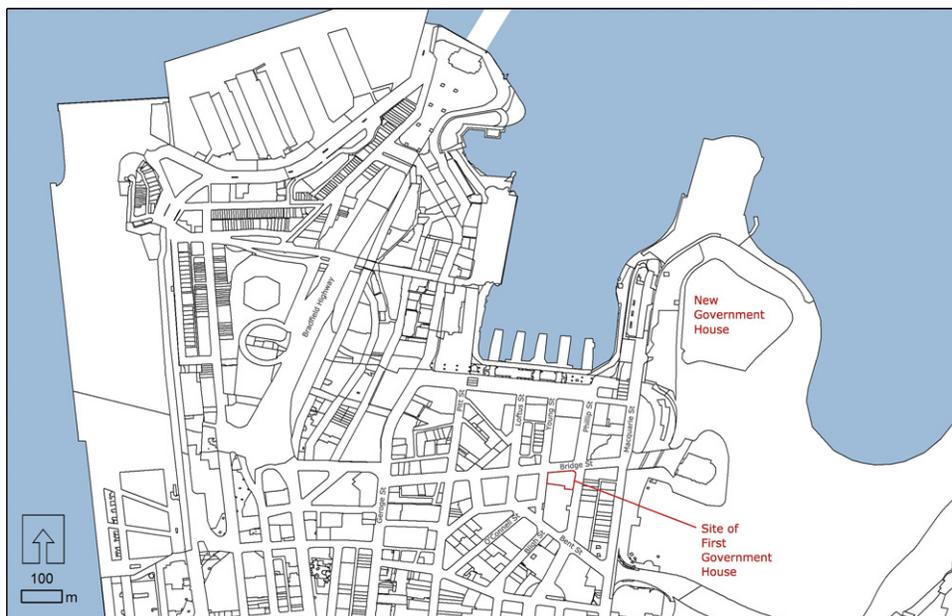


FIG. 1

Location of the site of First Government House, Sydney, Australia. (P. Crook after NSW Digital Cadastral Data Base © Department Finance, Services and Innovation 2018).

visitors to view and walk over the building's foundations. The site has been chosen here as one of the few documented urban archaeological sites in colonial Sydney with reliable historical evidence of occupancy, and it has some extraordinary historical invoices. I have chosen a colonial example, not simply because it is what I know best, but the experience of migration is an example of Miller's 'complex resolution': the goods selected before embarking on the six-month-odd — and often one-way — journey to the New World required careful consideration. The greatest competing factors were likely utility and durability, but ease of transport was as a significant consideration, and the fast-growing and slowly gentrifying colonial society, albeit small, still required some level of stratification.<sup>122</sup>

Creamware (also known as Queens Ware and Ivory Ware) was the 18th-century invention that transformed tablewares across the Anglophone world and appears on archaeological sites across the globe. Josiah Wedgwood, credited with perfecting the ware and taking it to market in innovative ways, himself questioned the driver for the esteem with which it was held at the time. Two years after the ware's introduction he wrote:

The demand for the s<sup>d</sup> Cream-colour, alias Queen's Ware, alias Ivory, still increases ... It is really amazing how rapidly the use has

spread almost [*sic*] over the whole globe, & how universally it is liked. How much of this general use & estimation is owing to the mode of its introduction, & how much to its real utility and beauty, are questions in which we may be a good deal interested for the Governm<sup>t</sup> of our future conduct.<sup>123</sup>

Despite Wedgwood's anxiety, many consumers and commentators credited its:

... excellent workmanship, its solidity ... its fine glaze impenetrable to acids, the beauty and convenience of its form, and the cheapness of its price.<sup>124</sup>

It may be that the latter played a significant role in the decision of naval officer Philip Gidley King (portrayed with his family in Fig. 3) to purchase an entire service of creamware from another innovative English potter, Josiah Spode, in preparation to become the third Governor of the Colony of New South Wales.<sup>125</sup> King knew the colony well, having arrived in 1788 aboard the First Fleet, and had been lieutenant-governor of Norfolk Island (a small, second colony 1,673 km north-east of Sydney Cove). On 6 August 1798, three months after receiving his dormant commission and not knowing it would be fourteen months before he would set sail (and two



FIG. 2

View of Government House, Sydney Cove, c. 1807, shortly after King's departure from the colony (watercolour drawing by John Eyre, courtesy Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, SV/31).

years before he would take up the post) 'Gov<sup>r</sup> King' placed an order with Spode's London warehouse.

King, with or without the advice of his wife Anna, selected two 24-person dinner services in 'Blue Line' (painted blue line on a creamware body) at £6 6s. each and a supplementary service of 'Best Queens Ware' at £4 4s. and additional serving wares, glassware, kitchenware and toilet-wares totalling 934 items and £36 14s. 8d. It is assumed all wares were for use at the Government House in Sydney Cove, but of course they may have been used at smaller government houses, such as the one in Parramatta.

During excavation of FGH, about 1400 fragments of creamware, representing a conservative minimum of 49 vessels, were recovered in association with the occupation of the House. At least 31 sherds of creamware are present in deposits confidently dated to Governors Phillip and Hunter (Phases 1 and 2). Six vessels were stamped 'SPODE',<sup>126</sup> which is a small number, but the service was supplied at time when vessels were not stamped consistently. While it cannot be *presumed* that all the remnant creamware belonged to the Kings, it is likely some portion of it is. For the purposes of this discussion, I am going to assume that the following piece, a near-complete

oval sauce tureen (YRP6089), was part of the Kings' service (see Fig. 4). The tureen is 185mm (7.5in) long, 109mm (4.3in) wide and stands 71mm (2.84in) high. It has a high foot ring and scroll handles and is impressed '3'. A base fragment from a larger tureen impressed 'SPODE' was recovered from the same deposit: the bottom layer of a brick privy or store demolished between 1818 and 1825. It was found in association with fragments from an Adam's 'Tendril' dinner service thought to have belong to Governor Macquarie who served from 1810 to 1821.<sup>127</sup> King served as Governor from 1800 to 1806.

Let me now review the various ways to *assess*<sup>128</sup> the valuation of this sauce tureen. It would have been made in August 1798 or shortly after (presuming the order was fulfilled by batch production) at the Spode factory, Church Street, Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire, England. It would have passed through many hands in the making (pugging, moulding, firing, glazing), not to mention design, management, quality checking, sales and distribution.

The tureen's first valuation, following Marx, is the cost of production or wholesale price ( $V_1$ ), which we presume was less than its retail *value* or sale price ( $V_2$ ) of approximately 1s.-2s., given the total price



FIG. 3

Philip Gidley and Anna Josepha King and family, painted by Robert Dighton in 1799 while awaiting their return to Sydney (ML 1244, Courtesy of Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales).



FIG. 4

Creamware sauce tureen (YRP6089) from the site of First Government House, Sydney, First Government House Archaeology Collection, Sydney Living Museums (Photo © Jamie North, 2017).

of £4 4s. for all 162 pieces.<sup>129</sup> In both cases these are equivalent values, measured by currency.

Next, we consider the value Governor and Mrs King placed on the service. We have good reason to speculate that the moderate price was part of the desirability of the service, and it may well have been a ‘back-up’ service. Whether it was purchased to supplement the Blue Line service, or perhaps retained for less formal occasions, we can only speculate. Given the Best Queens Ware was two-thirds the price of the Blue Line ( $V_1$ ), did it hold two-thirds the value ( $V_2$ ) to them? And why this tureen? It came with the service and likely there were few other options for vessel shape. Was it admired for its utility during large official dinners, or was it perhaps slightly useless and not put out much? What of its pair: the other sauce tureen sold to the Kings? Were they used together or was this a spare? Was this the ‘marginal’ unit: the unwanted one?

These are some of Miller’s ‘competing factors’ the Kings may have resolved at the point of purchase: price, functionality, durability, ‘decency’, appropriateness and so on ( $V_2$ ). The Kings may have admired its ‘excellent workmanship’ and fine glaze and been pleased to have some ‘Home’-plate rather than the oriental porcelain that was no longer in fashion. Would they have preferred one of Spode’s new Chinoiserie transfer-prints were they able to afford it, but knew this ‘would do’? Were they proud of its no-nonsense plainness?

How would these values change over time? Did this tureen humbly fall back into the background of Government House and was it perhaps stockpiled in a china store and not thought of again? Did the tureen or perhaps the full service become one of Csikszentmihalyi and Halton’s top ten ( $V_2$ )? It is certainly possible, but I would wager unlikely.

All these postulations of value (which irritatingly end with a question mark) hinge on whether we have the tendency to think of the tureen as *valuable* because it was once purchased, or *less valuable* because it was, ultimately, discarded. Either way, the question marks will remain and we can only speculate what the Kings were thinking. This is for a single, near-complete item of a well-known type, from a well-researched site for which, remarkably, archival records have preserved the date *and* cost of its purchase. Furthermore, that purchase was from a celebrated maker to a prominent colonial figure. And yet, these mental machinations of value can only be speculative. This poses a significant challenge for an ordinary sherd from poorly a documented site if we wish to reconstruct a credible story of its value.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The resistance of complex cultural meanings to the measures of empirical observation and testing is not unique to archaeology. Economists, historians,

anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists have struggled to articulate, theorize and record value, and they arguably have an easier task than archaeologists. Economists look at choices made, or rather their microeconomic effects at the aggregate scale. Sociologists and anthropologists can ask individual subjects about their choices or observe the decision-making process as it unfolds. Archaeologists are not afforded that opportunity: we have only the *result* of the decision — the purchased commodity, usually in pieces and often discarded many years after the choice was made. We then attempt to reconstruct the circumstances of that decision-making process.

Archaeologists are interested in the measurable, material impact of value. The question is: do we need an archaeological theory of value, or can we share a unified theory of value? Are the complex social–physiological responses to material culture a phenomenon of the late-20th century or do they apply to the earliest decades of the emerging modern world? Are they bound too tightly in the social worlds they describe to be general theory or applied to the age before mass communication? Applying these ideas to pre-industrial economies is possible and has been successfully done,<sup>130</sup> and with respect to the archaeology of the modern world, late-19th-century theorists had already begun to describe the patterns we now understand in a more complex light.<sup>131</sup> Any unifying theory of the value of goods must be socio-material and ‘entangled’. There must be a co-dependence of material properties and social boundaries, social conditions and material limits.

The success of archaeological pursuits of value will be in the timing, in the context and what we know of the material attributes themselves. It sometimes takes a perfect storm of deposition history, taphonomic stability, good preservation and, in the case of historical archaeological supporting archival documentation, to deliver convincing stories about the value of archaeological fragments. These stories inevitably must confront the process of *devaluation*, which has as much to say about worthiness and esteem of goods as the process of acquisition. Archaeology as a whole, and certainly historical archaeology, has a greater role to play in developing this dimension of the broader socio-cultural debate on value.

Like cultivation in the domestic sphere, archaeologists can choose to invest time and resources into understanding value, the process of value construction and the implications for the material world. Time and resources invested in value cannot be spent elsewhere, but I argue, like a good cost-benefit analysis, it will be worth it.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Anon. 1868, 33 (emphasis added).

<sup>2</sup> Anon. 1868, 33–4.

- <sup>3</sup> Anon. 1868, 34.
- <sup>4</sup> Kopytoff 1986.
- <sup>5</sup> e.g. Carver 1996; Pettigrew & Balachandran 2011; Samuels 2008.
- <sup>6</sup> Bailey & Mills 1998; Papadopoulos & Urton 2012; Voutsaki 1997; van Wijngaarden 1999a; 1999b.
- <sup>7</sup> Orser 1996.
- <sup>8</sup> Crook 2005; 2008; 2011.
- <sup>9</sup> Miller 2008; see below.
- <sup>10</sup> OED 2011.
- <sup>11</sup> OED 2011.
- <sup>12</sup> cf. Graeber's (2001, 1–2) three key definitions of value: sociological ( $V_3$ ), economic ( $V_1$  and  $V_2$ ) and linguistic ( $V_3$ ).
- <sup>13</sup> Miller 2008, 1122.
- <sup>14</sup> See Hirose & Olson 2015 for a recent summary.
- <sup>15</sup> For other accounts, see Graeber 2001; Papadopoulos & Urton 2012; Samuels 2008; Voutsaki 1997.
- <sup>16</sup> Hodder 2012; Olsen 2010; Olsen *et al.* 2012; Thomas 2015.
- <sup>17</sup> Hodder 2012, 88.
- <sup>18</sup> Crook 2008, 45–56.
- <sup>19</sup> Smith 1776, vol. 1, 35.
- <sup>20</sup> Ricardo 1817.
- <sup>21</sup> Marx 1899.
- <sup>22</sup> Ekelund & Hébert 2002, 202.
- <sup>23</sup> The origin of the theorem has been the subject of much debate, but it is typically attributed to three political economists working independently (legend has it) in the 1860s and 1870s: William Stanley Jevons (England, see also 1862; 1871; 1876), Carl Menger (Austria, 2007 [1871]) and Léon Walras (Switzerland, 2003). However, these principles are evident in a small number of texts published from the 1830s to the 1860s (Blaug 2001, 159; Streissler 1990) and, indeed, general utilitarian appreciation of value dates back to the mid-18th century (Ekelund & Hébert 2002). From an archaeological perspective, it remains of interest that these Neoclassical theories, which saw the consumer, not the producer, as sovereign of the free market, only gained wide acceptance a full generation or two after the benefits of mass consumption flooded market places across Europe.
- <sup>24</sup> Milton Friedman later developed the concept of a 'lifetime of consumption': that a consumer 'evens out' consumption over their lifetime (Douglas & Isherwood 1996, 29–30).
- <sup>25</sup> Smith's well-known maxim 'consumption is the sole end and purpose of production' (Smith 1776, 194).
- <sup>26</sup> Douglas & Isherwood 1996, 3; Frank 2000, 7; see also Graeber 2001.
- <sup>27</sup> This is the popular view of the development of the sociological approach to consumption. It certainly is true that the most comprehensive accounts of anti-economic consumption developed around the turn of the 20th century; however, appreciation of the social dimension of consumption is evident in many of 18th- and 19th-century economic and polemic treatises, including Smith and arguably Jevons.
- <sup>28</sup> Veblen is known as both sociologist and economist, as indeed nearly every political economist of the 19th century could be described prior to the clear delineation of the respective fields. Nevertheless, his key texts are more sociological than economic and have had a bigger impact on the former rather than latter disciplines. More recently, his impact on psychology has been acknowledged (Almeida 2014).
- <sup>29</sup> Veblen 1909, 629.
- <sup>30</sup> Veblen 1912 [1899].
- <sup>31</sup> Veblen 1912, 31.
- <sup>32</sup> Veblen 1912, 74.
- <sup>33</sup> Veblen 1912, 86.
- <sup>34</sup> Veblen 1912, 25.
- <sup>35</sup> Douglas & Isherwood 1996, xxi; Sassatelli 2007, 67–8.
- <sup>36</sup> Fine 1994; Hunt 1978, 731.
- <sup>37</sup> cf. Kamolnick 2001; Sassatelli 2007, 64–6.
- <sup>38</sup> Miller 1987, 69.
- <sup>39</sup> Simmel 1957 [1904].
- <sup>40</sup> Simmel 2011 [1907], trans. D. Frisby, T. Bottomore & K. Mengelberg.
- <sup>41</sup> Frisby 2011a, 5, 42.
- <sup>42</sup> Frisby 2011a, 27.
- <sup>43</sup> Private correspondence from Simmel to Rickert, quoted in Frisby 2011a, 27.
- <sup>44</sup> Simmel 2011, 69.
- <sup>45</sup> Frisby 2013, 82–4; Kamolnick 2001.
- <sup>46</sup> Miller 1987, 68–82.
- <sup>47</sup> Bourdieu 1984 [1979].
- <sup>48</sup> Bourdieu 1984, 503.
- <sup>49</sup> Bourdieu 1984, 171.
- <sup>50</sup> Bourdieu clarifies that 'society exists in two fashions. It exists in the objective world ... And it exists also in human brains, in individuals' (Bourdieu & Chartier 2015, 55).
- <sup>51</sup> For neuroscientific accounts, see Renfrew 2008, 2043.
- <sup>52</sup> Bourdieu 1984, 78.
- <sup>53</sup> Bourdieu & Chartier 2015, 42.
- <sup>54</sup> Bourdieu 1984, 194.
- <sup>55</sup> Bourdieu 1984, 194.
- <sup>56</sup> Douglas & Isherwood 1996 [1979].
- <sup>57</sup> Douglas & Isherwood 1996, xxii, see also 89.
- <sup>58</sup> Appadurai 1986a, 3.
- <sup>59</sup> Appadurai 1986a.
- <sup>60</sup> As per Kopytoff 1986, in the same volume.
- <sup>61</sup> Appadurai 1986a, 5 (emphasis added).
- <sup>62</sup> Rochberg-Halton 1979.
- <sup>63</sup> Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981, 19.
- <sup>64</sup> Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981, 8.
- <sup>65</sup> Kahneman 2011, 66–7.
- <sup>66</sup> Graeber 2001, 40.
- <sup>67</sup> Voutsaki 1997, 37–8.

- <sup>68</sup> cf. Miller 1987.
- <sup>69</sup> Graeber 2001, 45, see also 229 ff. for Graeber's call for a theory of *pleasure* rather than desire.
- <sup>70</sup> Miller 1987; see also 2010.
- <sup>71</sup> Miller 1987; 1995; 2001a; best summarized in 2010.
- <sup>72</sup> Miller 2010, 44.
- <sup>73</sup> Miller 2010, 43–4.
- <sup>74</sup> Miller 1998.
- <sup>75</sup> Miller 1998, 15–72.
- <sup>76</sup> Clarke 2001, 41.
- <sup>77</sup> Clarke 2001, 41.
- <sup>78</sup> M.L. Smith (2007) developed the idea of 'reflexive identity' to explain consumption patterns typically associated with 'conspicuous consumption' in the sphere of private and intimate goods such as pharmaceuticals and sanitary ware which were consumed out of the public gaze.
- <sup>79</sup> Miller 2008, 1123.
- <sup>80</sup> Miller 2008, 1129 (emphasis added).
- <sup>81</sup> Appadurai 1986a, 3.
- <sup>82</sup> An exception here is purpose-made burial goods: these are unlikely to be repurposed and therefore *revalued*.
- <sup>83</sup> Deetz 1967, 7.
- <sup>84</sup> Binford 1962; see also Deetz 1977, 50–1.
- <sup>85</sup> Although the objectivity of form vs function is a separate debate (e.g. Brooks 2005).
- <sup>86</sup> Renfrew 1986, 143.
- <sup>87</sup> Renfrew 1986, 158.
- <sup>88</sup> Renfrew 1986, 159.
- <sup>89</sup> Renfrew 1986, 34.
- <sup>90</sup> Renfrew 1986, 148–9.
- <sup>91</sup> Renfrew 1986, 149.
- <sup>92</sup> Renfrew 2008, 2044.
- <sup>93</sup> Bailey 1998; Knapp 2002.
- <sup>94</sup> Bevan 2007; Voutsaki 1997.
- <sup>95</sup> van Wijngaarden 1999a; 1999b.
- <sup>96</sup> Papadopoulos & Urton 2012.
- <sup>97</sup> Spencer-Wood 1987.
- <sup>98</sup> Miller 1980; 1991.
- <sup>99</sup> Henry 1991.
- <sup>100</sup> Mullins 2002, 2011.
- <sup>101</sup> Mullins 2002, 2011.
- <sup>102</sup> Mullins 2011, 17–24.
- <sup>103</sup> Mullins 2002, 28–31.
- <sup>104</sup> Croucher 2011.
- <sup>105</sup> Horning & Schweickart 2016, 40.
- <sup>106</sup> Horning & Schweickart 2016, 40.
- <sup>107</sup> Crook 2008.
- <sup>108</sup> Shanks 1998, 17.
- <sup>109</sup> Griffiths 1978.
- <sup>110</sup> An extraordinary example of this is the concealment of burial goods in a grave or tomb, which arguably enhances the value of those items to descendants, even though the goods are no longer in circulation (Voutsaki 1997, 43–4).
- <sup>111</sup> Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981, 83.
- <sup>112</sup> Jervis & Kyle 2012; Martin 2012.
- <sup>113</sup> Keulemans 2016.
- <sup>114</sup> Banks 2001; Crook 2008, 209–11.
- <sup>115</sup> Crook & Murray 2004; Jeffries 2006; Pearce 2000.
- <sup>116</sup> Of course, waste can be *revalued* and repurposed as useful material (Miller 2012; Reno 2009).
- <sup>117</sup> Buchli 2002; Jervis 2014, 111–16; Rathje & Murphy 1993, 30–52; Smith 2011.
- <sup>118</sup> Pearce 2000.
- <sup>119</sup> Marcoux 2001.
- <sup>120</sup> Kondo 2014.
- <sup>121</sup> A new Government House had been built about 500m to the north-west and stands today overlooking the harbour. Other vice-regal houses were construction in various locations, including Parramatta: a building now known as 'Old Government House'. For further information on the history and archaeology of FGH, see Crook & Murray 2006; Proudfoot 1991.
- <sup>122</sup> For further discussion of consumption in colonial contexts see Crook in press; Crook 2015; Croucher & Weiss 2011; Murray & Crook in prep.
- <sup>123</sup> Wedgwood to Bentley, c. 8 Sept. 1767 in Meteyard 1865, vol. II, 56. See also Finer & Savage 1965, 58–9.
- <sup>124</sup> Faujas de Saint-Fond 1799, vol. II, 97.
- <sup>125</sup> Crook & Murray 2006, 38–48.
- <sup>126</sup> Crook & Murray 2006, 43.
- <sup>127</sup> Crook & Murray 2006, 48–9.
- <sup>128</sup> For the distinction between *assessing* value and 'understanding how value and demand are *created* in the first place', see Voutsaki 1999, 27.
- <sup>129</sup> This is based on comparison with dinner services from later trade catalogues that lists prices for individual items and the total set, e.g. a Band-and-Line sauce tureen (complete) in a 176-piece set which sold for £4 4s. 11d. was 1s. 9d. if sold individually (King & Co. 1880, 105). Clearly, this is very approximate measure.
- <sup>130</sup> For challenges on the conception of self, see Smith 2007, 432.
- <sup>131</sup> For example, Almeida (2014) describes Veblen's account of habitual consumption with reference to modern physiological practice (and in a fashion not dissimilar to Bourdieu's *habitus*).

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## SUMMARY IN FRENCH, ITALIAN, GERMAN AND SPANISH

## RÉSUMÉ

**Une approche de l'archéologie de valeurs : une vue depuis le Monde Moderne**

L'abondance de biens dans le monde moderne a tendance à influencer l'interprétation de la valeur de ceux-ci, mais la manière dont les gens accordent de l'importance à leurs biens est complexe, relative et variable — la rareté n'étant qu'un facteur. Alors que l'histoire de la théorisation de la valeur à travers les sciences sociales est longue, les considérations archéologiques de valeur quant à elles restent rares et plutôt ciblées sur les biens de prestige. Dans cet article, je revisite les conceptions alternatives de valeur à travers le prisme du monde moderne, en prenant comme exemple une poterie « Spode creamware » utilisée par un gouverneur dans les premières décennies de la Sydney coloniale. Je démontre que le processus de dévaluation, à travers l'abandon et le rebut, offre une compréhension archéologique unique des valeurs changeantes que les gens du monde moderne placent dans les objets.

## RIASSUNTO

**Affrontare l'archeologia degli oggetti di valore: un punto di vista dal mondo moderno**

Nel mondo moderno, la ricchezza di beni tende a condizionare l'interpretazione del loro valore, ma il modo in cui le persone valutano ciò che possiedono è complesso, relativo e variabile; la penuria è solo uno dei tanti fattori. Le scienze sociali vantano una lunga storia di teorizzazione sul valore dei beni di consumo, ma le considerazioni archeologiche rimangono poco frequenti e incentrate sui beni di prestigio. In questo articolo esamino idee alternative sul concetto di valore, considerandolo dal punto di vista del mondo moderno. È stato preso ad esempio un tipo di faïence noto come *Spode creamware*, utilizzato da un governatore nei primi decenni dell'era coloniale a Sydney. Sostengo qui come il processo di svalutazione che passa attraverso lo scarto e la formazione dei rifiuti offra, dal punto di vista archeologico, una possibilità di comprensione unica rispetto al mutevole valore che le persone attribuivano ai prodotti in epoca moderna.

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

**Sich der Archäologie durch den Wert nähern: ein Blick aus der modernen Welt**

Die Fülle von Gütern in der modernen Welt hat eine Tendenz die Auslegung ihres Wertes zu beeinträchtigen, aber die Art und Weise wie Menschen ihre Ware einschätzen ist komplex, relative und wechselhafte Knappheit ist nur ein Faktor. In den Sozialwissenschaften gibt es eine lange Geschichte der Wert Theoretisierung, aber archäologische Überlegungen des Wertes sind selten und konzentriert sich auf Prestige Waren. In dieser Studie überprüfe ich alternative Vorstellungen von Wert durch die Linse der modernen Welt, mit einem Beispiel von Spode ‚Creamware‘, das von einem Gouverneur in den ersten Jahrzehnten des kolonialen Sydney verwendet wurde. Ich argumentiere, dass der Prozess der Abwertung durch wegwerfen und Abfall, ein einzigartiges archäologisches Verständnis der wechselnden Werte bietet, das Menschen der modernen Welt auf Rohstoffe verlegt haben.

## RESUMEN

**Un acercamiento a la arqueología del ‘valor’: un punto de vista desde el mundo moderno**

La abundancia de bienes en el mundo moderno tiende a influir la interpretación que se le da a su valor, pero la forma en la que las personas valoran sus bienes es compleja, relativa y cambiante: la escasez es sólo un factor aquí. La teoría del valor en las ciencias sociales tiene una larga historia, pero el enfoque arqueológico sigue siendo escaso y centrado en los bienes de prestigio. Revisamos aquí las concepciones alternativas de valor vistas desde el mundo moderno y usando el ejemplo de la loza (*creamware*) de Spode utilizada por un gobernador en las primeras décadas de Sydney colonial. El proceso de *devaluación*, a través del descarte y el desperdicio, nos permite comprender arqueológicamente la calidad cambiante de los valores que las personas del mundo moderno atribuían a sus bienes materiales.

*Department of Archaeology & History, La Trobe University VIC 3086, Australia*  
[\[p.crook@latrobe.edu.au\]](mailto:p.crook@latrobe.edu.au)