

Enlivening the Archive: Glimpsing Embodied Consumption Practices in Probate Inventories of Household Possessions

Adrian B. Evans

Why not try it [ethnographic research] out in eighteenth-century France? Because eighteenth-century Frenchman cannot be interviewed, the sceptic will reply; and to drive the point home, he will add that archives can never serve as a substitute for field work. True, but the archives from the Old Regime are exceptionally rich, and one can always put new questions to old material.¹

This is a paper about historical texts but also about lived practices. More specifically, it is an appeal for historical geographers and historians to renew their relationship with archival texts and to view them not as mere representations of the past but as forensic evidence of history in the making. Throughout the paper I use the example of one particular historical documentary source, namely probate inventories (as we shall see later these are lists of the chattels, or moveable goods, of recently deceased individuals), to argue that historical texts do not only reflect but also bear material witness to past practices. In particular, I argue that the language employed within historical texts is teeming with life. Ways of writing reflect ways of speaking and ways of speaking are both embedded within everyday practical copings with the material world (discourse) and are capable of intervening with that world (performativity).²

Furthermore, and in relation to the specific case of probate inventories, I argue that these documents contain information about past domestic objects and spaces, which also bear the traces of embodied existence. Probate inventories survive in their thousands and whilst the descriptive content of an individual inventory can be quite sparse, when taken together in large numbers and simultaneously scrutinised for the micro details that they contain (e.g. object descriptions, object classifications, object groupings, object locations, room descriptions) they can help us to paint a reasonably detailed picture of domestic spaces and domestic objects.³ But more than this, they can help us to catch a glimpse of something much more dynamic and much more elusive: a moving image of domestic activities, processes and performances. Indeed, as we

Adrian B. Evans is at the Cardiff School of City and Regional Planning, Cardiff, Wales. *Historical Geography* Volume 36 (2008): 40-72. ©2008, Historical Geography Specialty Group, Association of American Geographers.

shall see throughout the course of the paper, if approached in a certain fashion, inventories can provide us with insights into the practical, materially-situated meanings of objects; the ways in which past objects functioned to “configure” their users; and the performative ambience/ethos of different living spaces.

At this stage a word of caution is required, for unlike the artificially neat, finite and knowable world of representations the world of embodied practices is “messy” (Law), “excessive” (Dewsbury et al.) and ultimately unknowable in any final sense.⁴ As such, the central question addressed in this paper is: to what extent is it even possible to use probate inventories of the domestic interior to gain insights into past embodied practices? What follows is therefore largely methodological. I propose a particular theoretically-informed way of approaching probate inventories, which I believe helps, at least in some small way, to make them come to life and to yield information about embodied dwelling and consumption practices in eighteenth-century England. What I offer is not a grand methodological template for how to do historical geographies of embodied practice but something much more modest. I provide the reader with a detailed case study of how one might use one particular set of theoretical insights (namely those that highlight the importance of embodiment, process and performativity and which following Nigel Thrift have been grouped together under the label non-representational theories of practice) in conjunction with one particular source material (namely probate inventories of the domestic interior) to shed light on early modern consumption practices.⁵

I argue that non-representational theories of practice can help us to enliven probate inventories, and ultimately accounts of past consumption practices, in at least three ways. First, they help to rid us of many of the representationalist understandings that have framed previous historical accounts of consumption (e.g. the notion that there is a separation between minds and bodies, the notion that human actions are led primarily by conscious thoughts, the notion of language as a passive medium of reflection, the notion of objects and spaces as passive backdrops to action rather than integral parts of performances). Second, they offer us a way of achieving a more equal balance between theory and empiricism. Non-representational theories do not provide us with an overarching theoretical framework with which to interpret probate inventories, but rather they offer us a productive way of being almost obsessively attentive to the micro-empirical details within inventories and the various lived contexts through which these documents came into being.⁶ Third, these theories help to open up new possibilities for handling the information contained within inventories. In particular, they permit us to be attentive to the linguistic content of inventories in new ways and they enable us to enliven the consumer objects and dwelling spaces that are described within these documents.

As I have already stated, this is primarily a methodological paper, and the empirical examples that I develop have been specifically selected to illustrate the types of insights into past embodied practices that can be generated when probate inventories

are viewed through the lens of non-representational theories of practice. As such, I would not claim that this paper provides readers with a comprehensive, or even a coherent, account of early modern domestic consumption practices. However, I hope that it provides readers with a flavour for at least some of the more implicit/embodied aspects of eighteenth-century English material culture.⁷ Eighteenth-century England is a particularly interesting place and time to explore embodied consumption practices. McKendrick et al. contend that modern consumption emerged during this period, as new commercial and industrial wealth increased social mobility and allowed middle orders to emulate the consumption of elites, who in turn sought novel products as a means of differentiation.⁸ There was also an enormous increase in both the quantity and variety of foreign goods entering England at this time. Foreign imports included items such as mahogany, silk, tea, coffee, sugar, tobacco, lemons and chinaware, to mention but a few.⁹ Finally, at the same time that the world of objects and embodied consumption practices was being transformed, equally far-reaching changes were occurring with the layout and function of domestic spaces. In particular, there is evidence to suggest that within many (but not all) homes, domestic spaces were becoming increasingly specialised and rooms such as parlours were beginning to function as front-stage arenas of sociability and display.¹⁰

The remainder of the paper is arranged as follows. First, I take a more in-depth look at probate inventories of the domestic interior and I explore the latent potential of these documents to shed light on past embodied consumption practices. Second, I discuss (initially in a quite general way) how different non-representational theories might help us to see beyond some of the representationalist assumptions of previous historical work and open up new opportunities for engaging with past practices. Finally, I work through a range of detailed empirical examples to illustrate how these theories might help us to use the contents of probate inventories in new ways. In particular, I examine how these theories might allow us to enliven the linguistic contents of inventories as well as the objects and the spaces which they describe.

Probate Inventories

Probate inventories are valuations of a recently deceased individual's movable property or "chattels."¹¹ They tended to be carried out by non-specialists, often neighbours or friends of the deceased, and they were recorded *in situ*, in the home of the deceased. They were usually compiled quite soon after the person had died to ensure that none of their possessions were stolen before the reading of their will. They survive in very large numbers throughout England during the time period c.1540-c.1730 and they cover a wide range of different social groups, except for labourers and the very poorest, for whom only a few survive. Individual inventories vary considerably, both in the level of descriptive information they contain and in the ways in which

Figure 1: Extract from a probate inventory of the Bristol butcher Thomas Rudge (1739) with associated transliteration. (Source: Bristol Records Office, Probate Inventory (5-30).)



Item Description	£	s	d
A true and perfect Inven[try] of all and singular the Goods Chartles Rights and Credits of Thomas Rudge Late of the City of Bristol Butcher deceased which since His death have come to the hands poss[ession] or knowledge Of Anthony Farnam his principal creditor and Adm[istrator] taken and appraised this 31 st day of October 1739 by Joseph Williams Appraiser In the First Story Forward			
A Bed mat Cord & old Furniture		12	6
An old flock Bed & Bolster an old Rug		8	6
An old Quilt		4	
Six old broken chairs		5	
2 old broken Boxes and an old Trunk		1	3
First Story Backward			
Halfhead Bedstead mat Cord 2 very old flock beds		10	
Second Story forward			
A sackingrod & blew furniture		16	
a Flock & feather bed bolster & Pillow		10	
a Rugg & an old Blanket		6	
2 old Sheets		3	3
a Chest of Drawers		7	6

that information is ordered. However, a typical inventory might include information about the deceased (e.g. place of residence, occupation); information about the types of consumer goods they possessed (e.g. bedding, linen, fire goods, cooking pots, furniture, pewter etc.); approximate valuations of these goods; and information about production (e.g. lists of shop stocks, crops grown, livestock, agricultural goods). Furthermore, in many (but certainly not all) probate inventories the lists of household possessions are appraised on a room-by-room basis, which enables us to gain very valuable insights into the character and layouts of different domestic spaces.

Figure 1 depicts an extract from the probate inventory of Thomas Rudge, a butcher from the city of Bristol, who had died sometime shortly before 3 October 1739. As one can see, the inventory begins with a short description of what it contains (goods, chattels, rights and credits). It then offers some information about Thomas (where he lived and his occupation), the creditor and the appraiser. Then there is a list of Thomas's possessions with their associated valuations, for example "an old quilt" for four shillings and "six old broaken chairs" for five shillings. As one can see, each inventory contains a great deal of useful quantitative information and, given the sheer numbers in which these documents survive, it is hardly surprising that researchers have tended to use them in a quantitative fashion to address economic and social issues. For example, historians of America have used them to assess changes in living standards in colonial America whilst English researchers have used them to examine the social and geographical shapes of the market for different consumer goods.¹² Carole Shammas has even used data from probate inventories in econometric models.¹³

Despite their great value in this regard, probate inventories are not without their difficulties.¹⁴ First, they do not record real estate or spending on perishable items and non-material goods (such as entertainment). Second, they neglect fixed furnishings, which has led Garrard to suggest that they undervalue halls.¹⁵ Third, they present values that the goods would obtain if sold and not original purchase prices.¹⁶ Fourth, they provide only a "snapshot" of ownership, neglecting the dynamics of purchasing patterns. Fifth, as they are taken after an individual's death, they cannot shed light on the relationship between consumptive practices and the life cycle stage of consumers.¹⁷ Finally, they systematically underrepresent the lowest status groups, such as peasants and labourers.

In addition to the valuable quantitative economic and social information that they contain, inventories also contain a wealth of more qualitative cultural information. For example, Overton et al. state: "Probate inventories...have an enduring fascination because of the unique window they open into the everyday life of people and households; they abound with descriptions that can be comic, tragic, poignant and perplexing."¹⁸ Furthermore, Glennie states:

That many analyses of inventories tabulate the changing ownership of consumer goods has led some commentators to deride inventories as incapable of revealing anything of goods' meanings and uses....[S]uch derision ignores the contextual information that inventories provide. First, they show the material combinations in which items appeared....Second, the positions of items within houses hint at the conduct of everyday domestic activities. Third, the ways in which items are described may themselves be revealing about how both owners and appraisers viewed them.¹⁹

With these ideas in mind, if we return to the extract from Thomas Rudge's inventory (Figure 1), we can also begin to use this document to make some tentative speculations about Thomas's everyday domestic life. For example, we can speculate that his upper story rooms were predominantly used for sleeping and storage. We can also begin to wonder whether the "six old broken chairs" located in the "first story forward" were simply stored away out of sight in this room or whether they were used for sitting and socialising (either with other household members or with guests). Furthermore, we can ponder as to why the appraiser (Joseph Williams) described so many items as "old," "very old" or "broken." This might have reflected the actual condition of the objects, or it might have reflected Joseph's need to justify his (under)valuations (see Orlin's work). We might also ask whether a different appraiser would have bothered to use these descriptive terms and thus question what Joseph actually meant by "old" (e.g. worn, damaged or simply out of fashion).²⁰

From the above, it is clear to see that probate inventories can yield useful information about the cultural dimensions of consumption. However, despite the value of inventories in this regard, it is perhaps fair to say that, when attempting to uncover the cultural meanings of past consumption practices, researchers have tended to draw upon literary source materials, such as books, plays and social commentaries.²¹ Undoubtedly, such literary sources can provide us with a wealth of useful information about early modern consumption and can help to enliven our accounts of the past; however they also suffer from some serious shortcomings. In particular, they tend to focus on the consumption habits of elite groups, and they are often unduly affected by the bias of their authors.²² In the context of these problems with literary sources, one can see that there is a real need for further studies (in the vein of Glennie and Overton et al.), which use probate inventories in an innovative fashion to shed light on past practices.²³ Throughout the remainder of this paper I take some small steps in this direction by exploring how the insights generated by different non-representational theories of practice might help us to enliven the contents of inventories and to shed light not just on the cultural meanings of commodities but also on embodied consumption practices.

Non-Representational Theories of Practice

Recently, social scientists, and most notably geographers, have become increasingly interested in diverse notions of practice, performativity and materiality, all of which challenge traditional representationalist ideas.²⁴ In particular, researchers have begun to draw on the works of theorists such as Heidegger, Deleuze and Guattari, Bourdieu, De Certeau, Latour and Law in their attempts to develop accounts that are sensitive to the materially embedded and relational nature of our everyday lives.²⁵ In contrast to previous forms of theorising, these theories of practice and performativity do not provide researchers with an overarching framework through which to interpret their results. Rather, they function more as a “tool box” of conceptual resources that are modest and flexible enough to be adapted to different empirical situations.²⁶ Despite the label “non-representational” it is vital to point out that these theories are not always or only about a simple privileging of what people do over what people say, or of actions over texts. For although there is a strong current within non-representational theory which quite admirably attempts to journey to the “somewheres words can’t take you” and to explore “forms of bodily awareness or understanding that are not linguistic in nature and in fact deny adequate linguistic characterisation,” there is an equally strong current which emphasises the radical interconnections between language use and practice.²⁷ As Deleuze and Guattari state:

An assemblage of enunciation does not speak ‘of’ things; it speaks on the same level as states of things and states of content....[A] segment of one always forms a relay with a segment of the other, slips into, introduces itself into the other. We constantly pass from order-words to the silent order of things, as Foucault puts it, and vice versa.²⁸

Furthermore, Dewsbury et al. have made it clear that non-representational theory is not about a simple rejection of representation but instead a rejection of those approaches which view representations as mere “mirrors of reality.”²⁹ As we shall see later, it is this second current that enables us to make tentative connections between the use of language within probate inventories and past embodied practices.³⁰

Despite the enormous diversity within different non-representational approaches, it is possible to identify a number of reoccurring themes: First, non-representational approaches stand in opposition to a particular Platonic-Cartesian (representationalist) view of reality, which seems to dominate much of Western thought (both academic and commonsensical). In particular, they stand in opposition to the view that it is possible for our texts, images, maps, videos (and numerous other ways of knowing and means of communication) to mirror or re-present reality. This is partly because non-representational theorists emphasise the excessive, dynamic and emergent properties of reality (i.e. those which exceed capture) and partly because they view rep-

resentations not as types of information or means of communication but as ways of intervening with the world.

Second, non-representational theories encourage researchers to understand human actions and thoughts in terms of physical embodiment (being-in-the-world), rather than in terms of abstract calculation (Cartesian *cogito*). In direct contrast to the Cartesian contention that “I think, therefore I am” (which privileges the abstract mind as the foundation of reality), non-representational theorists have followed Kierkegaard’s contention that “I am, therefore I think.” In other words, they have sought to explore how thoughts and the very capacity for thinking (and talking/communicating) in certain ways emerges from within real world environments.³¹ It is for this very reason that Wittgenstein contends that if a lion were able to speak we would not be able to understand what it was saying and it is also for this very reason that the latest attempts to develop artificial intelligence have concentrated on developing machines that have the capacity to interact with, respond to and learn from their environments rather than machines which are able to intelligently manipulate and make inferences from vast information databases.³² It would seem that intelligence and the ability to think are radically situated. Following on from this, many theorists have contended that human actions are not solely driven by cognitive-rational decisions but result from much more instinctual and embodied notions of how to go on within a given situation (as in Bourdieu’s notion of “disinterested action,” Hutchin’s notion of “distributed cognition” and Connolly’s notion of the importance of the “half-second delay”).³³ As we shall see, these alternative materially-grounded ways of understanding thoughts and actions will have a significant bearing on how we interpret the contents of probate inventories.

Third, non-representational theories prioritise relationships and processes over and above bounded entities and static forms. This can be summed up in Bergson’s contention that “form is only a snapshot view of a transition.”³⁴ The author Michel Tournier also captures what is meant here in his novel “Friday” (a re-interpretation of the Robinson Crusoe story), when he describes how the apparent stillness of Friday’s leg is actually the result of the interplay of several different forces: “During several seconds my hands learn that Friday’s motionless stance is not that of a stone or tree stump, but the quivering outcome, constantly varied and readjusted, of a series of actions and reactions, the play of all his muscles.”³⁵ However, more than this, focusing on relationships and processes can have some very radical and unsettling implications for how we understand the world.

The philosophers Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have devoted much of their intellectual endeavours to trying to understand how we might truly begin to think in terms of relationships (from the middle) rather than in terms of static entities. For example, in contrast to the static notion of “being” they have developed the relational and dynamic concept of “becoming.”³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari illustrate this notion of becoming in a variety of different ways; however, one of the most powerful examples they develop concerns the evolution of wasps and orchids. They contend that in some ways

it makes little sense to view wasps and orchids as separate “beings,” as they are intimately connected and indeed co-evolve together. Certain orchids depend upon certain wasps in order to reproduce and their colour, smell, shape and design can all embody this interconnectivity. In short, there is a “becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp”; it is the relationships between wasps and orchids that determine their forms and not vice versa. As we shall see later, this privileging of relationships will have a dramatic impact upon how we understand human-object relationships and in turn upon the types of information that objects (and to a lesser extent object descriptions) can yield about past embodied practices.

Fourth, non-representational approaches embrace the concept of “performativity” or the notion that realities are “enacted” rather than discovered.³⁷ The term “performative” was originally coined by linguists who wanted to highlight, not what linguistic utterances meant (signification), but what they functioned to do.³⁸ More recently, Deleuze and Guattari have developed the concept of “order words” and they contend that the primary function of language rests not its ability to display information or to communicate but rather in its ability to “order” the material world.³⁹ A very good example of how language (or more specifically, an assemblage of enunciation, which is intimately connected to a material assemblage) can function to order or enact a certain reality involves the pronouncement of the words “I do” during a wedding ceremony. As Massumi states:

Say ‘I do’ and your life will never be the same. Your legal, social, and familial status instantly changes, along with your entire sexual, psychological and financial economy. You have been pronounced man and wife you may file a joint tax return. ‘I do’ is a connector: it binds two bodies into a new network of power relations, in a kind of leap of place. Before you open your mouth you are one thing. By the time you close it you have landed in another world. Nothing touched you, yet you have been transformed.⁴⁰

Once again, it is clear that attempting to view the written contents of historical texts, not in terms of what they signified, but in terms of how they were embedded within a certain material context and how they functioned to alter and animate that context, will have a significant impact upon the types of histories we can write. Before ending this discussion of performativity, it is important to point out that many theorists, especially those from within “Science and Technology Studies,” have further developed this concept by considering the ways in which not only language but also material practices and technologies can enact different realities. For example, Annemarie Mol highlights how the disease atherosclerosis (a thickening of the arteries) is enacted (literally made real) in different ways in different hospital settings (see also the work of John Law and Bruno Latour).⁴¹

Hence, one can see that non-representational theories have many fresh insights

to offer historical geographers and historians who are interested in past practices. Furthermore, whilst many of these theories have only been developed in relatively recent times, I believe that one is justified in applying them to the past. This is because, first, unlike traditional forms of grand theorising they encourage an almost obsessive attentiveness to the empirical detail of past texts and the contexts in which they were produced. Second, whilst historians have not tended to explicitly draw on these conceptual resources, many (especially within cultural history and histories of consumption) have successfully adopted elements of compatible approaches.⁴² Furthermore, numerous historical geographers have also usefully employed non-representational concepts in their work. For example, both Sarah Cant and Simon Naylor have illustrated the importance of being attentive to embodied, location-specific practices when writing historical geographies of science whilst Peter Merriman, Elizabeth Gagen, Hayden Lorimer and Caitlin DeSilvey have shown the types of benefits that might arise from exploring more-than-representation themes in their work.⁴³ Third, there is some evidence to suggest that theories that emphasise the non-rationalised and embodied aspects of human actions are particularly appropriate when attempting to understand eighteenth-century consumption, as Glennie and Thrift state:

We find it difficult to believe that 18th century consumers had a complete intellectual framework through which they articulated their motives and which they deployed when encountering commodities, other consumers and consumption sites...We contend that, then as now, people's interpretation of objects and identities involved practical, embodied knowledges rather than the sorts of explicit, intellectualised understandings central to most contemporary accounts of consumption.⁴⁴

In the remainder of the paper I examine how insights gained from non-representational theories of practice (especially those regarding language use, representation, embodiment, process and performativity) might open up new possibilities for how we use and interpret probate inventories. In particular, I develop a series of empirical examples, which show how these concepts can help us to enliven both the linguistic contents of probate inventories and the objects and spaces that are described within them.

Enlivening Language

[E]very voice, every way of speaking, embodies a different evaluative stance, a different way of being or position in the world.⁴⁵

I believe that non-representational theories of practice can help us to enliven the language content of probate inventories in at least three ways. First, they help us to view language use as something that can embody an immediate sensual coping with the

world (language as tool) rather than something that only involves a cold description of the world (language as text). This enables us to make important links between the commodity descriptions contained within inventories and embodied consumption practices.

For example, looking at Table 1, which depicts differences in the ways in which appraisers described and classified sugar and tobacco goods in shop inventories in West Suffolk (1660-1690) and East Sussex (1710-1740), I would argue that these types of descriptions reflected the appraiser's immediate practical/sensual ways of engaging with these goods rather than more intellectualised forms of understanding (such as those which might be found in literary source materials). Appraisers identified different types of sugar and tobacco by reference to sensual phenomena (e.g. colour, texture, shape, appearance and quality), by reference to varieties (e.g. loaf sugar and shag tobacco), by reference to the extent to which they had been processed (e.g. single and double refined sugars and cut or dried tobaccos) and, in the case of tobacco, by reference to its origin. I would argue that these different ways of describing and classifying these goods help us to catch a glimpse of the types of processes which might have been occurring in that emergent and experimental space in-between subjects and objects. When, for example, an appraiser from West Suffolk describes a particular type of sugar as "double refined," I believe that this description does not *only* reflect the properties of the product in front of him/her, nor does it *only* reflect the cultural knowledge of the appraiser (their ability to make a distinction between ordinary sugar, single refined sugar and double refined sugar). Instead, it is indicative of that specific sensual encounter/event between subject and object, which incorporates all of the aforementioned characteristics.

Furthermore, these descriptions are indicative of a whole micro-history of a given appraisers' embodied encounters and experiences with these types of products. For example, if we compare the types of vocabularies that were used to describe sugar and tobacco products, we can see that whereas different grades of sugar were identified by particular physical properties (e.g. "coarse," "fine," "powder," "brown," "white") different types of tobacco were often labelled by reference to their overall quality (e.g. "ordinary," "of a better sort," "best"). I would contend that these linguistic differences might have arisen from differences in the practical embodied ways in which these goods were encountered and consumed. Sugar was seldom consumed on its own, but was added to hot drinks and a variety of different foodstuffs, hence differences in the quality of sugar products would have diminished during preparation. In contrast, tobacco was inhaled directly into the body, which made the relationship between the appearance of different types of tobacco and their quality more apparent.

Second, non-representational theories of practice can allow us to highlight the intimate connections between the content and style of language use within inventories and the materially situated embodied knowledges of inventory appraisers. Figure 2 contains extracts from the probate inventories of Philip and Jane Sampson who both

Table 1. Regional differences in the terminologies used to describe sugar and tobacco products in shop inventories. (Sources: East Sussex Records Office, Lewes, Probate Inventories (45-3197A); West Suffolk Records Office, Bury St Edmunds, Probate Inventories (4/3-53/24).)

SUGAR	West Suffolk (1660-1690) N=43	East Sussex (1710-1740) N=54	TOBACCO	West Suffolk (1660-1690) N=43	East Sussex (1710-1740) N=54
Not Labelled	5	5	Not Labelled	1	3
Colour (white/brown)	2	1	Quality (best/ordinary)	5	0
Texture (fine/coarse)	6	0	Processing (cut/dried)	4	1
Lump	3	3	Scented	1	0
Loaf	5	6	Shag	2	0
Refined	3	0	Roll	0	0
Origin	0	0	Origin	3	3

worked as bakers at the same premises in the city of Bristol (they were probably husband and wife). The fact that Jane died less than one year after Philip and the fact that their possessions were appraised by different appraisers enables us to make some interesting contentions about both practices of inventory appraisal and about the embodied knowledges of inventory appraisers. Looking at Figure 2, it is possible to see some interesting differences between Philip and Jane's inventories. For example, Jane's appraisers had moved around the property in a different order from Philip's appraisers. Furthermore there is evidence to suggest that Philip's appraisers had done a somewhat more thorough job than Jane's, as they had grouped fewer items together within each valuation. In part, these differences might reflect changes in the material contents of the Sampsons' dining room after Philip's death; however, it is also clear that they reflect differences in the embodied knowledges and valuation techniques of the appraisers.

In particular, I believe that small differences in things such as the ways in which appraisers moved around properties; the types of objects that different appraisers were likely to notice and record; the ways in which appraisers grouped different goods together (e.g. books were often appraised together with linen items and tea was occasionally appraised together with drugs); and the ways in which appraisers described commodities (both quantitative and qualitative differences) can reveal aspects of the appraiser's character and their own intimate (often non-articulated) relationships with the material world. For example, looking at the extracts above we might wonder

Figure 2. Extracts from the inventories of Philip and Jane Sampson. (Source: Bristol Records Office, Probate Inventories (Philip Sampson 14-10; Jane Sampson 14-13).)

Extract from the probate inventory of Philip Sampson (Bristol, baker, 1716) appraised by William Ford & Joseph Freeman
<p><i>Dining Room</i> [the sixth room to be appraised] one Oval Table 7 cane Chayrs 6 other chayrs and a little tea table (3 18 0) More a clock & a looking Glass (6 0 0) More a case of Drawes a little Tabel with a Little looking glass (2 0 0) More window curtains (0 10 0)</p>
Extract from the probate inventory of Jane Sampson (Bristol, baker, 1717) appraised by Thomas Castle and James Baker
<p><i>Dining Room</i> [the second room to be appraised] eight cane chayrs and 6 other chairs one oval table one clock and case one large looking glass one Brass Fender and sundry other things there (9 12 0)</p>

whether the “little tea table” that was noted by Philip’s appraisers had been removed from the dining room by the time that Jane’s appraisers were making their valuations, or whether it was still there but remained unnoticed, perhaps unrecognised as a table for tea, and grouped together with other items in the category “sundry other things.” Similarly, we might wonder what was so significant about a chair being made of cane or a table having an oval shape that both sets of appraisers felt it necessary to comment on these seemingly mundane characteristics.

Similarly, if we turn our attention to Table 2, which shows descriptions and valuations of sugar stocks in the probate inventories of John Whitting and Richard Parsons, we can see that although these shopkeepers owned a materially similar range of different sugar products (both owned 3, 4 and 5d grades of sugar), the ways in which these goods had been described by the appraisers varied significantly. There could be a number of possible explanations for these differences. One possibility might be that John Whitting’s appraisers were more knowledgeable (or perhaps just more willingly verbose) than Richard Parsons’s. Indeed, the fact that John’s appraisers were able to differentiate between sugar types on grounds of colour, quality and degree of refinement, whereas Richard’s appraisers limited their descriptions to cost differences between sugar types might be indicative of an unequal distribution of commodity knowledges. Alternatively, it is also possible that the containers in which the goods were stored had been labelled differently, in which case the descriptions eventually recorded in the inventory would reflect both the appraisers’ situated embodied knowledges and those of the person who originally labelled the goods (as well as potentially numerous other actors, such as the shopkeeper). Despite this inherent uncertainty and despite the ulti-

Table 2. Descriptions and valuations of sugar stocks in the probate inventories of John Whitting and Richard Parsons. (Sources: East Sussex Records Office, Lewes, Probate Inventory (Richard Parsons 1670); West Suffolk Records Office, Bury St Edmunds, Probate Inventory (John Whitting 1670).)

1686 John Whitting (grocer from West Suffolk) with £23 of foreign groceries in stock		
	<i>Price (d/lb)</i>	<i>Value (l-s-d)</i>
Brown sugar (143lb)	3	1-13-0
Brown white sugar (39lb)	4	0-12-0
Best white sugar (4lb)	5	0-1-9
Single refined loaf sugar (27lb)	6	0-13-6
Double refined loaf sugar (12lb)	10	0-10-0
1724 Richard Parsons (tailor from East Sussex) with £15 of foreign groceries in stock		
	<i>Price (d/lb)</i>	<i>Value (l-s-d)</i>
280lb sugar at 301 per hundred	3	3-15-0
56.5lb sugar at 361 per hundred	4	0-18-2
100lb sugar at 461 per hundred	5	2-1-1.5
15lb sugar at 621 per hundred	7	0-8-4

mately speculative nature of this approach, one can see that it is still possible to make tentative links between the language used in inventories and embodied commodity knowledges.

Third, non-representational theories of practice enable us to focus on what the descriptions found in inventories and other similar documents might have actually functioned to do (performativity). For example, we can address issues such as how contemporaneous commodity descriptions might have intervened with the physicality of commodities. Figure 3 shows the range of teas sold at a London tea dealer in 1799. This particular list had been sent to George Phillips, a grocer and tea dealer from Bristol, presumably to encourage him to purchase their wares. Following the insights of authors such as Law and Singleton, I would argue that these ways of describing and categorising different types of teas both dovetailed with real material differences between teas and helped to create and sustain new material distinctions.⁴⁶ In other words, these descriptions functioned to highlight certain physical properties of teas (selected from the excessive range of possible potentially distinguishing attributes) and to make them socially, economically and materially significant. As Droit states:

And yet, the fact of not knowing its name makes the food seem somehow abnormal....It would be too much to say that knowing the name changes

Figure 3: The range of teas sold at 'Hamman and Mawley', Bow lane, Cheapside (18 September 1799). (Source: Bristol Records Office, Probate Inventory. This document can be found together with the inventory for the Bristol Grocer George Phillips.)

Common Bohea (27-29 d/lb), Good Bohea (30-32 d/lb), Congou-leaf kind (33-36 d/lb), Congou leaf (40-42 d/lb), Ordinary Congou (44-46 d/lb), Middling Congou (48-50 d/lb), Good Congou (51-52 d/lb), Fine Congou (54-56 d/lb), Superfine Congou Souchong flavour (58-60 d/lb), Souchong (48-50 d/lb), Good Souchong (52-54 d/lb), Better Souchong (56-58 d/lb), Fine Souchong full flavour (60-64 d/lb), Superfine Souchong full flavour (66-84 d/lb), Pekoe (72-90 d/lb), Common Green (54-55 d/lb), Best Green (56 d/lb), Fine Singlo (37-58-60 d/lb), Superfine Singlo (62-64 d/lb), Bloom (58-60 d/lb), Good Bloom (62-64 d/lb), Hyson-kind Bloom (66 d/lb), Hyson (66-68 d/lb), Good Hyson (69-72 d/lb), Much better Hyson (75-78 d/lb), Fine Hyson (81-84-86 d/lb), Super Fine Hyson (90-105 d/lb), Curious Hyson cowslip flavour (120-126 d/lb), Gunpowder tea (126-132 d/lb)

the taste. But it definitely does alter our attitude towards the taste, our way of considering it.⁴⁷

Whilst the list depicted in Figure 3 contains far finer levels of product differentiation than would normally appear in a household or even a small shop inventory (indeed one wonders how many people would actually be able to distinguish between a “fine souchong with a full flavour” and a “superfine Souchong with a full flavour”) I believe that the above argument can still be applied to the blunter product categorisations contained in inventories; for example, I would contend that even making quite simple distinctions between, for example, ordinary and refined sugars would have intervened with the materiality of these products (see Table 1).

Enlivening Objects

To a large extent, however, the conduct and instinctual life of the child are forced even without words into the same mould and in the same direction by the fact that a particular use of knife and fork, for example, is completely established in the adult world—that is, by the example of the environment⁴⁸

I believe that non-representational theories of practice can help us to enliven the objects described within probate inventories in at least three ways. First, as I have already discussed, non-representational theories emphasise the embodied aspects of

everyday practices rather than the more cognitive-rationalised dimensions. As such, they help to highlight the intimate connections between objects and subjects and between the materiality of consumer goods and their associated embodied meanings (this approach to subject-object relations is also apparent within material culture studies, phenomenological accounts of consumption and actor network theory). Moreover, they highlight the fact that the cultural meanings of commodities and consumption practices are not only derived from abstract ideas about aesthetics, or intellectualised notions about the correct way to act/consume, or inner symbolic-mental reflections, or spectacular flights of fantasy, but also from more mundane, day-to-day embodied interactions with different objects. Unfortunately, it is not possible to use inventories to gain detailed insights into these hands-on encounters and experiments with consumer goods. However, when used in large numbers, inventories can reveal a wealth of “material” information about the novelty, rarity, expense and social distribution of different consumer goods, which can in turn provide us with the faintest glimpses of the types of situated material-embodied meanings that these goods might have possessed.

For example, it is possible to use simple empirical information about changes in the percentage occurrence of consumer objects over time to gain insights into how novel certain objects would have been in certain locations. Looking at Table 3, one can see that, apart from the odd teapot or tea table there were few hot drink utensils recorded in Suffolk homes in 1714-15, however by 1740-45 there had been substantial increases in the occurrences of teakettles (15%) coffee pots (13%) and chinaware (11%). As such, these items would have been fairly novel to Suffolk consumers (at least in a domestic setting) and I believe that this in turn would have affected both the cultural meanings of these objects and the practices through which they were used. In particular, the very fact that these items were novel would have significantly contributed to their desirability.⁴⁹ Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that novelty could be associated with initial uncertainty and diversity in the practices through which objects were consumed before accepted ways of consumption became established. As Breen states:

In 1794 a historian living in East Hampton, New York, interviewed a seventy-eight-year-old woman. ‘Mrs Millier,’ he discovered, ‘remembers well when they first began to drink tea on the east end of Long Island.’ She explained that none of the local farmers knew what to do with the dry leaves: ‘One family boiled it in a pot and ate it like samp-porridge. Another spread leaves on his bread and butter, and bragged of his having ate half a pound at a meal....’⁵⁰

In addition to novelty, one can also use simple information about social differences in the ownership of commodities to shed light on their situated meanings. For example, looking at Table 4, we can see that whilst the ownership of items such as spice

Table 3: Changes in the percentage occurrence of certain foreign and luxury commodities in Suffolk (1714-45). (Source: Suffolk Records Office, Ipswich, Probate Inventories (FE1/10-FE1/28).)

Suffolk 1714-45	% Occurrence	% Occurrence	% Occurrence
	1714-1715 (n=128)	1730-32 (n=133)	1740-45 (n=132)
Tea kettles	0	4	15
Tea pots	1	3	5
Tea tables	1	5	7
Coffee pots	0	5	13
Chinaware	0	5	11
Corner cupboards	0	11	25
Spice boxes	19	26	31
Pepper boxes	2	8	11
Cane work	10	14	11
Turkey work	2	1	0
Scriptors/Escritorio	0	2	8
Oval tables	20	24	25
Couches	8	12	17

Table 4: Variations in the percentage occurrence of certain foreign and luxury commodities by occupational status in Suffolk (1714-45). (Source: Suffolk Records Office, Ipswich, Probate Inventories (FE1/10-FE1/28).)

Suffolk (1714-45) % Ownership	Trades	Farmers	Widows	Mariners
Number of Inventories	71	161	44	15
Tea kettles	14	4	2	0
Tea chests	4	0	0	0
Coffee pots	14	1	9	7
Chinaware	13	2	5	0
Spice boxes/drawers	30	27	25	0
Deal furniture	10	6	2	0
Walnut furniture	1	0	0	0
Mahogany furniture	1	0	2	0
Cane work	21	6	18	20
Oval tables	41	19	25	20

boxes was evenly distributed across different occupational groups in Suffolk at this time, the ownership of items such as tea kettles, coffee pots and chinaware differed considerably between trades people and other groups such as farmers. As such, these latter items would have possessed different social-cultural significances from spice boxes, as they had greater potential to function as symbolic markers of wealth and social status (see for example the work of Veblen and Bourdieu).⁵¹

Second, non-representational approaches highlight the importance of considering the relationships and interconnections between different objects. Indeed, as we have already seen, they radically privilege relationships, networks and processes, over individual bounded entities and static forms. This approach chimes well with certain historians of consumption who have contended that we should pay attention to the networks of associations between objects (rather than the nature of any specific object) if we want to understand consumptive experiences.⁵² For example, consuming tea from an earthenware mug would have fostered a totally different experience from consuming tea from fine bone china, whilst seated on a cane chair adjacent to a mahogany tea table.

Table 5 illustrates some of the positive and negative associations between a range of different household goods in Suffolk (1740-45). By using this material information it is possible to gain some, albeit limited, insights into early modern consumption practices. In particular, we can see that the consumption of luxury items tended to occur in packages. People who were consuming luxury items such as tea and coffee were also more likely to possess other novel/fashionable goods such as oval tables and cane chairs, civilising goods (such as knives and forks and table linen), and more traditional luxury goods (such as pictures and looking glasses). Furthermore, we can see that there appears to be some incompatibility between beer consumption and tea consumption. This fits in well with Camporesi's contention that the consumption of heavy meats, strong spices and beer was indicative of a traditional medieval culinary appetite, whereas the consumption of exotic foods, fine sauces and the use of light ceramics reflected the needs of an enlightened palate.⁵³ It also fits in well with Schivelbusch's contention that puritan reformers embraced hot drinks, such as tea and coffee, as alternatives to alcohol.⁵⁴

Third, non-representational theories of practice encourage us to view objects as active participants in practices rather than passive, lifeless entities. In particular, they draw attention to how the material forms of objects can embody/materialise certain social relations and they highlight the ways in which material objects can function to "configure" their users without the need for words.⁵⁵

As Figure 4 illustrates, we should never take the material designs of objects for granted, as there are always alternative forms from those with which we are accustomed; furthermore, this notion is far from trivial, as each form can encapsulate and promote a certain way of acting. In short, there is a cultural politics of the material and a material politics of the cultural. Elizabeth Shove et al. provide an excellent contemporary

Table 5: Probability matrix illustrating the positive and negative associations between different pairs of commodities in Suffolk (1740-45). (Source: Suffolk Records Office, Ipswich, Probate Inventories (FE1/10-FE1/28). Figures were calculated by taking the actual probability of item A and item B occurring together and subtracting the predicted probability $[\text{Pr}(A \text{ and } B) = \text{Pr}(A) * \text{Pr}(B)]$ of this event. All figures are recorded as percentages.)

	Tea	Coffee	China/Delft	Pepper	Oval Tables	Cane Chairs	Beer	Knives, Forks	Table Linen	Pictures
Coffee	+6									
China/Delft	+8	+6								
Pepper	+2	+1	+1							
Oval Tables	+4	+2	+4	-1						
Cane Chairs	+5	+1	+3	0	+2					
Beer	-1	-1	-1	-2	+2	+2				
Knives, Forks	+3	+3	+1	0	+1	+1	0			
Table Linen	+4	+1	+4	+2	0	0	-4	0		
Pictures	+5	+2	+4	0	0	+3	0	+2	+2	
Looking Glass	+8	+5	+6	+5	+3	+5	-1	+2	+4	+6

example of the benefits that might accrue if one adopts this approach for interrogating material cultures. In particular, they illustrate how the design of contemporary kitchens reflects both tensions and compatibilities between *having* (owning certain material possessions, such as cookers, dishwashers, freezers) and *doing* (being able to carry out certain activities).⁵⁶

I believe that these theoretical insights enable us to make tentative links between the object descriptions contained within inventories and embodied actions, gestures and consumption practices. Moreover, they encourage us to ask, not about the meanings of consumer objects, but rather about what these objects might have functioned to do. For example, all the objects listed in Table 6 would have performed particular functions associated with the consumption of tea, including boiling water, brewing tea, serving tea and storing tea. If we are attentive to these functional differences, it is possible to make some contentions about the ways in which practices of tea consumption might have differed between different socio-economic groups. In particular, based on the equipment present, there is evidence to support the contention that some of the wealthiest trades people in Suffolk were buying tea in large enough quantities to warrant storage (as indicated by the presence of tea chests) and that they were consuming tea in association with rituals of sociability and display

Masochists' Coffee Pot



Cure for Alcoholics

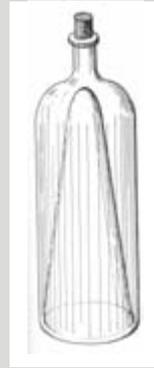


Figure 4: A masochists' coffee pot and a cure for alcoholics. The deceptive litre-sized bottle (right) holds barely a tumblerful. Taken from Carelman's catalogue of extraordinary objects. (Source: Jacques Carelman, *Le Catalogue d'objets introuvables* (Paris: Le Cherche midi, 1997). These images are reproduced with kind permission from the publisher Le Cherche midi, 23, rue du Cherche-Midi 75006, Paris. Copyright lies with cherche midi éditeur 1997.)

Table 6. Variations in the percentage occurrence of objects related to tea consumption by wealth and occupation in Suffolk (1714-45). (Source: Suffolk Records Office, Ipswich, Probate Inventories (FE1/10-FE1/28).)

Suffolk (1714-45)	Trades £0-50	Trades £50-150	Trades Over £150	Farmers £0-50	Farmers £50-150	Farmers Over £150
Number of Inventories	25	22	24	19	56	86
Tea kettles	4	9	29	0	0	8
Teacups/dishes	0	0	8	0	0	1
Teapots	0	0	13	0	0	2
Tea trays	0	5	17	0	0	5
Tea tables	0	5	17	0	0	6
Tea chests	0	0	13	0	0	0
Chinaware	4	5	29	0	0	5

(as indicated by the presence of specialist tea cups, teapots and tea tables). In contrast, it is likely that the experience of tea consumption would have been very different for those few lower-wealth trades people who were consuming tea at home in Suffolk, because they simply did not appear to possess the types of *equipment* that would have enabled them to consume tea in the same fashion as their wealthier counterparts.

Of course, one must be very cautious when attempting to use inventories to identify and draw inferences from the presence and absence of isolated objects. For example, Orlin identifies numerous reasons why certain objects might not have been inventoried, including the fact that legacies might be excluded, goods belonging to a man's wife before marriage would be exempt, and fixtures and fittings would not be recorded, as they were seen as belonging to the house rather than its owner or occupant. However, given a degree of caution and proper attention to the limitations of this methodology, I see no reason why it cannot be legitimately pursued to yield interesting and potentially insightful results.⁵⁷

Enlivening Spaces

Human children, like the young of many species, grow up in environments furnished by the work of previous generations, and as they do so they come literally to carry the forms of their dwelling in their bodies—in specific skills, sensibilities and dispositions.⁵⁸

I believe that non-representational theories of practices can help us to enliven the spaces described within probate inventories in at least two ways. First, they highlight the intimate connections between spaces and performances, and they help us to view spaces as active contributors to practices rather than as passive backgrounds. Many previous authors have drawn attention to the ways in which practices and spaces intertwine. Most notably, Foucault has highlighted the intimate connections between the layout of spaces and discourses of surveillance and control and Goffman has highlighted the modern day Western tendency to separate backstage spaces, where unsightly private activities (such as washing, going to the toilet and preparing food) are performed, from front stage spaces, which are often used for polite sociability and display.⁵⁹ More recently, authors adopting more explicitly non-representational approaches, such as Varela and Miller et al., have highlighted the intimate connections between the atmospheres/ambiences of spaces and non-explicit understandings of identity.⁶⁰ As Varela states:

We have a readiness-for-action proper to every specific lived situation. Moreover we are constantly moving from one readiness-for-action to another.... I call such readiness for action a micro-identity and its corresponding lived situation a micro-world.⁶¹

Keeping within the spirit of these ideas, I believe that it is possible to use the ostensibly static information about domestic spaces contained within inventories to shed light on domestic activities and to begin to glimpse some elements of the performative ambience/ethos of different living spaces. For example, it is possible to paint a detailed picture of the character of halls in early eighteenth-century Suffolk based on information from surviving probate inventories (see Table 7). By 1714-15 only 54% of the inventoried houses in Suffolk contained halls, however when these rooms were present they often functioned as central arenas for a multitude of daytime activities. Halls in Suffolk at this time were far more likely to contain a fire (84%) and had, on average, far better seating facilities than parlours (the ratio of seats in the room to total number of beds in the house was 2.4 compared to 1.7 in parlours). Indeed, they were often the only rooms in which entire families could sit comfortably together to socialise and converse. Furthermore, the vast majority of halls contained cooking facilities (79%) and in many Suffolk dwellings they functioned as the main food preparation areas, whilst kitchens tended to function as mere storage spaces. Most halls also functioned as dining areas (79%). Dining in the same room in which food was prepared and cooked, and in which most of the crockery was stored, would have been very convenient, furthermore one might not have been burdened by some of the formal rituals of politeness and etiquette that were operating in front stage regions such as parlours.

Despite their active, practical natures, Suffolk halls were often luxurious spaces. In 1714, 60% of halls contained at least one "luxury" item compared to only 51% of parlours. Far from being consciously segregated, luxury objects (and the expressive performances of which they formed a part) and everyday mundane practices appeared to co-exist and to be intimately connected within halls. Thus one can see how it is possible, at least in some small way, to use the static descriptions of the room contents listed in probate inventories to begin to speculate about everyday domestic practices. Furthermore, it is also possible to use this method to explore socio-demographic, regional and temporal variations in the nature of domestic practices. However, at this point some notes of caution are required, for this method of speculating about practices by observing the contents of rooms can (as Orlin has exhaustively illustrated) have several pitfalls.⁶² For example, objects (especially smaller objects such as chairs) might have been transferred from room to room as occasion demanded. The location of objects might also have reflected where they were stored rather than where they were used. Finally, furniture might have been relocated for the very purpose of having an inventory taken.

Despite these difficulties and the inherent uncertainties associated with predicting the location of domestic practices at the level of single inventories, I maintain that it is possible to build up a convincing picture of the nature of domestic spaces, especially if one attempts these types of close readings across a range of different inventories. One potentially more serious critique of the method outlined above relates to the fact that I am considering halls in isolation from the overall distribution of activities

Table 7. The character of halls in Suffolk (1714-15). (Source: Suffolk Records Office, Ipswich, Probate Inventories (FE1/10-FE1/28).)

Suffolk Halls	1714-15 N=19	Luxury Goods Present in Suffolk Halls	1714-15 N=48
Average Value of Room Contents £	4.7	Any Luxury Good %	60
Number of Seats in the room/Total number of beds in house	2.4	Hangings %	2
Fire %	84	Looking Glasses %	2
Candles %	37	China %	0
<i>Activities:</i>		Comfort Goods %	8
Sleeping %	5	Books %	23
Cooking %	79	Weapons %	23
Dining %	79	Clocks %	21
Tea (any evidence) %	0		
Desk working %	5		
Bodily functions %	0		
Single functional %	21		
Multi-functional %	79		

within the houses that they were located and furthermore that I am grouping together several different hall types within an, albeit appraiser defined, single average category.⁶³

Second, adopting a non-representational approach enables us to view domestic spaces as the emergent outcomes of a myriad of different everyday domestic practices, rather than environments that were consciously planned or designed in advanced. As Ingold states: “[T]he forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings.”⁶⁴ For example, one of the most frequently discussed changes in the domestic environment in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England concerns the development of parlours as front stage spaces of polite sociability.⁶⁵ Representational approaches tend to explain the origin of these types of parlours by reference to larger scale shifts in ideology (e.g. relating to changing gender roles or emerging notions of civility). However, adopting a non-representational approach enables us to view these new types of parlours as the culmination of a series of more minor practical-material adjustments to earlier domestic spaces. Indeed, it is possible to contend that these new types of parlours emerged from ordinary sleeping parlours/chambers due to a series of minor socio-material changes, such as the removal of beds, the addition of comfortable seats and the growth in the consumption of tea.

The crucial point is that for each minor change in materiality there would have been an associated alteration in everyday embodied dwelling practices (i.e. beds, cushions, teacups and expensive coverings would have all functioned to configure the actions of their users without the need for words). Hence, one can see that it is possible to generate fresh insights into the changing nature of domestic spaces by viewing them as dynamic arenas in which and through which everyday domestic practices were worked out via a series of practical negotiations with the material world, rather than viewing them as static backgrounds or the end results of a detached Cartesian mind.

As a result of applying these two interrelated strategies for enlivening the descriptions of domestic spaces present in inventories, it is also possible to gain further insights into specific domestic consumption practices (such as the consumption of tea) by examining differences in the domestic spatial locations of objects associated with these practices. This is because, when viewed in this fashion, the location of consumer objects within the home provides us with some insights into how individual practices of consumption interacted with the network of pre-established domestic practices of sleeping, cooking, meeting, dining, displaying, socialising and entertaining, etc. Thus, for example, we can use this method to examine social differences in the domestic consumption of tea or to examine how different domestic consumption practices evolved over time.⁶⁶

Conclusion

Throughout the course of this paper I have attempted to examine the extent to which it is possible to use the information contained within probate inventories to shed light on embodied consumption practices. More specifically, I have used a range of conceptual insights gained from non-representational theories of practice as tools to enliven the information contained within inventories. I hope that my research has shown that whilst attempting to explore past embodied practices presents historical geographers with a series of new challenges, it also opens up new opportunities.

On the one hand, adopting a non-representational approach and attempting to take issues of embodiment, process and performativity seriously can frustrate our attempts to know the past. For, whilst I strongly believe that certain aspects of certain embodied practices leave their trace in the archival record, it is clear that many do not. Furthermore, from a theoretical perspective it is also clear that we can never know embodied practices with the same level of closure and finitude as we hoped to know cognitive/rational ones, as they are much more context-dependent, environmentally distributed, dynamic and creative (for example, De Certeau believes that embodied practices are elusive and intangible, and Deleuze and Guattari describe the analysis of practices as “looking for a phantom”).⁶⁷ Indeed, despite all my efforts, it is fair to say that I have only been able to provide readers with the faintest glimpses of the nature of eighteenth century embodied consumption practices.

On the other hand, adopting a non-representational approach to historical research can provide us with a range of fresh insights into the past. First, adopting a non-representational approach provides us with a way of challenging, and indeed moving beyond, certain representationalist assumptions about the world and our place within it that have become so commonplace within Western thought that they are frequently regarded as commonsensical and intuitive (e.g. the notion that there is a separation between minds and bodies; the notion that human actions are led primarily by conscious thoughts; the notion of language as a passive medium of reflection; the notion of objects and spaces as passive backdrops to action rather than integral parts of performances). Whilst these might sound like highly abstract notions which should have little bearing on empirically-led historical research, it is important to point out that these representationalist assumptions often provide the non-examined starting point for academic accounts of the past and they help to shape how one might utilise the archive and what it is possible to think and write. Indeed, one could argue that the problem with many ostensibly empirically-led historical accounts is not that they are under-theorised (simplistically descriptive) but precisely that they are over-theorised; heavily reliant on a set of commonsensical assumptions about the world that blind them towards other possibilities. In making this contention I do not seek to devalue these accounts, rather I simply want to illustrate that there is always another way; an alternative fusing

of concept and archive that opens up new possibilities for knowing (or if you are more radically inclined “enacting”) the past. As Darnton states: “One can always put new questions to old material.”⁶⁸

Second, adopting a non-representational approach opens up new ways of looking at the world and new ways of being attentive to language, thought, identity, objects and spaces, all of which enables us to *enliven* the contents of historical documents. For example, in the case of probate inventories, we have seen how it is possible to use a range of conceptual insights derived from non-representational theories to enliven the linguistic content of inventories and to enliven the objects and spaces, which are described within these documents. In particular, we have seen how ideas about the material embeddedness of language can help us to shed light on the sensual commodity knowledges of early modern inventory appraisers. We have also seen that by re-imagining subject-object relations, it is possible to use the information contained within probate inventories to gain insights into the materially situated meanings of commodities and to begin to understand how different objects might have functioned within early modern consumption practices. Furthermore, we have seen how it is possible to enliven the spaces described within probate inventories and how it is possible to use seemingly static information about the material make-up of early modern homes to shed light on everyday dynamic domestic practices.

Finally, despite my attempts to draw more general conclusions from this particular piece of research, it is vital to note that this paper does not offer a grand template for how one should do non-representational histories (indeed, such a thing does not exist). Instead, it offers the reader a detailed empirically-driven case study of how we can use the information contained within probate inventories in an innovative theoretically-informed fashion to catch the faintest glimpses of past embodied consumption practices. In other words, non-representational theories do not provide us with an overarching theoretical framework through which we can understand probate inventories (or other archival documents) but rather they provide us with a series of different conceptual tools that can help us to make static documents move and to make dead histories come to life.⁶⁹

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support that I have received from the following people and organisations. Firstly, I would like to thank the ESRC for supporting this research (ESRC Post Doctoral Fellowship Grant T02627). Secondly, I would like to thank my old PhD supervisor Dr. Paul Glennie for all his help with my research. Thirdly, I would like to thank the archivists at Suffolk and Bristol records offices and I would like to thank Bristol’s Museums, Galleries and Archives for granting me permission to use the extract from Thomas Rudge’s inventory (Figure 1). Fourthly, I would

like to thank Dr. Carl Griffin for both coming up with the suggestion that we should co-organise a conference session on this topic and for all the hard work he has put into editing this special issue. Finally, I would like to thank the two anonymous referees who reviewed the original version of this paper for all their very insightful and helpful comments.

Notes

1. Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985): 4.
2. See for example: Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972); John Shotter, *Cultural Politics of Everyday Life* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1993); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: The Athlone Press, 1988)
3. See for example Carole Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 1988); Lorna Scammell, "Consumer behaviour in the North East of England, 1670-1730," Internet paper available at <http://seastorm.ncl.ac.uk/invs/paper1.html> (2000); John Styles, "Manufacture, consumption and design in eighteenth century England," in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993): 527-554.
4. John Law, *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* (London: Routledge, 2004). John-David Dewsbury, Paul Harrison, Mitch Rose, and John Wylie, "Enacting Geographies," *Geoforum* 33 (2002): 437-440.
5. Nigel Thrift, *Spatial Formations* (London: Sage, 1996).
6. However, Laurier and Philo argue that whilst many non-representational theorists claim to be interested in a radical engagement with everyday lived realities, in the final reckoning, they often fall short of this aim and turn to abstract philosophising, see Eric Laurier and Chris Philo, "Possible geographies: a passing encounter in a café," *Area* 38 (2006): 353-63. Hopefully, this account does not succumb to this potential danger.
7. For a more detailed account of embodied consumption practices in eighteenth-century England, see Adrian B Evans, "Consumption and the exotic in early modern England: A socio-material investigation of the retail, domestic ownership and use of exotic goods in Suffolk and Bristol" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Bristol, 2001).
8. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and John Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialisation of Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Hutchinson, 1982).
9. For historical accounts of the rising consumption of foreign goods, see James Walvin, *Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800* (London: Macmillan, 1997); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); Piero Camporesi, *Exotic Brew: The Art of Living in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).
10. Frank E. Brown, "Continuity and Change in the Urban House: Developments in Domestic Space Organisation in Seventeenth-century London," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28 (1986): 558-90; Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America:*

Persons, Houses, Cities (New York: Vantage, 1993)

11. John S. Moore, "Probate inventories: problems and prospects," in Philip Riden, ed., *Probate Records and the Local Community* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1980): 16-70; Mark Overton, "Probate Inventories and the Reconstruction of Agricultural Landscapes," in Michael Reed, ed., *Reconstructing Past Landscapes* (London: Croom Helm, 1984): 70-96.
12. For examples of American work on the changing standard of living, see: Lorena S. Walsh, "Consumer Behavior, Diet and the Standard of Living in Late-Colonial and Early-Antebellum America 1770-1840," in Robert E. Gallman and Joseph J. Wallis, eds., *American Economic Growth and Standards of Living Before the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993): 217-61; Lois G. Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "The Standard of Living in the Colonial Chesapeake," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser 45:1 (1988): 135-59; Gloria L. Main, "The Standard of Living in Southern New England, 1640-1773," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 45:1 (1988): 124-34. For research on the social and geographical shapes of the market for different consumer goods in England, see: Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture*; Lorna Scammell, "Consumer Behaviour in the North East of England"; Peter King, "Pauper Inventories and the Material Lives of the Poor in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," in Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela Sharpe, eds., *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (London: Macmillan, 1997): 155-91.
13. Carole Shammas, "The Determinants of Personal Wealth in Seventeenth-century England and America," *Journal of Economic History* 37 (1977): 513-531.
14. Paul Glennie "Consumption within Historical Studies," in Daniel Miller, ed., *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies* (London: Routledge, 1995): 163-202; Lena Orlin, "Fictions of the Early Modern English Probate Inventory," in Henry Turner, ed., *The Culture of Capital. Property, Cities, and Knowledge in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2002): 51-83.
15. Rachel P. Garrard, "English Probate Inventories and Their Use in Studying the Significance of the Domestic Interior, 1570-1700," *A. A. G. Bijdragen* 23 (1980): 55-81.
16. Jan De Vries, "Between Purchasing Power and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe," in Brewer and Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*: 85-132; Carole Shammas, "Changes in English and Anglo-American Consumption from 1550-1800," in Brewer and Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*: 177-205.
17. Shammas, "The Determinants of Personal Wealth," 513-31.
18. Mark Overton, Jane Whittle, Darron Dean and Andrew Hann, *Production and Consumption in English Households 1600-1750* (London: Routledge, 2004): 13.
19. Glennie, "Consumption within Historical Studies," 171.
20. Orlin, "Fictions of the Early Modern English Probate Inventory," 51-83.
21. See for example Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (London: Routledge, 1987); Walvin, *Fruits of Empire*; Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise*; Camporesi, *Exotic Brew*.
22. Daniel Roche, *The People of Paris: An Essay in Popular Culture in the 18th Century* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987). However, for an innovative treatment of literary texts one can turn to the work of Catherine Richardson; see *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006). Richardson's aim is to

reconstruct contemporary perceptions of household (especially in terms of the moral and social significances of household objects and settings) as a way of finding out about the context in which (and through which) domestic tragedies of the 1590s and 1600s (such as Arden of Faversham) were watched. Thus, rather than using plays to shed light on the meaning of domestic practices, she approaches the issue from the other direction and contends that if we really want to understand the contemporaneous significance of plays we must be attentive to the spatial and material imaginations of audiences. As such, she draws on a range of sources, such as household manuals, ecclesiastical court depositions and testamentary evidence to provide insights into the relationship between space and behaviour and between the material and interpersonal aspects of the household. Furthermore, she sheds important light on contemporary perceptions of status, lifecycle and gender within the household. Whilst the methodology that Richardson adopts is markedly different from the one outlined in this current paper (especially in terms of her focus on the meaningful and the moral dimensions of consumption and domestic space) there are some interesting similarities, most notably Richardson also focuses attention on the sensory perception and affect of objects.

23. Glennie, "Consumption within Historical Studies," 163-202; Overton et al., *Production and Consumption in English Households*.
24. See for example Thrift, *Spatial Formations*; Sarah Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies. Natures, Cultures and Spaces* (London: Sage, 2002); John-David Dewsbury, "Performativity and the Event: Enacting a Philosophy of Difference," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18:4 (2000): 473-496; Derek McCormack, "Diagramming Power in Practice and Performance," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23:1 (2005): 119-47; John Wylie, "Becoming-icy: Scott and Amundsen's Polar Voyages, 1910-1913," *Cultural Geographies* 9:3 (2002): 249-66; Mitch Rose, "Seductions of Resistance: Power, Politics and a Performative Style of Systems," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20:4 (2002): 383-400; Paul Harrison, "Making Sense: Embodiment and the Sensibilities of the Everyday," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18 (2000): 497-517.
25. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*; Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press, 1984); Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993); Law, *After Method*.
26. For the notion of theoretical concepts as tools, see Thrift, *Spatial Formations*. Alan Warde provides a very good summary of the interconnections between consumption and theories of practice within a sociological context see: "Consumption and Theories of Practice," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5 (2005): 131-53. However, despite numerous similarities, it is important to point out that Warde draws on a different range of authors and arrives at a different set of conclusions from those presented in this paper. In particular, the approach to practice that I adopt is more attentive to the radically embodied nature of everyday practices than Warde's. Furthermore, I tend to focus on consumption more broadly as "material culture" (which highlights the inbetweenness of subject-object relations) rather than consumption as "appropriation." Finally, I view practices not as scaled down versions of societies perpetuating and guiding routines, but rather as spaces of inventiveness and interaction, where things are indeed repeated but always in slightly dif-

ferent ways from before.

27. Nigel Thrift, "Summoning Life," in Paul Cloke, Philip Crang and Mark Goodwin, ed., *Envisioning Human Geographies* (London: Arnold, 2004): 81-103, 90; Richard Shusterman, *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000): 128.
28. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 87.
29. Dewsbury et al., "Enacting Geographies," 437-40.
30. Laurier and Philo make a similar distinction by identifying two different strands of non-representational theory, one of which is resistant to the prioritising of representation within human geography and one of which makes claims about the sheer impossibility of representation per se. However, both the strands of NRT that I discuss can perhaps be located within Laurier and Philo's second category. On the one hand, those theorists with an interest in action rather than language often claim that it would not be possible for language to adequately represent what they are attending to. On the other hand many of those theorists with an interest in the radical interconnectivity of language and practice would also critique the notion of "representation" as it currently stands, opting instead for a focus on how language intervenes with, rather than mirrors, the world. Laurier and Philo's account is very sophisticated as it manages to incorporate both the tool-text nature of language and both the expressive and non-representational character of practices. However, by focusing their attention on the mimetic and aporetic senses of language they (at least in this particular paper) neglect the performative force of language. See Laurier and Philo, "Possible Geographies," 353-63.
31. See also Heidegger's valorisation of "dwelling" over "building" and the "ready-to-hand" over the "presence-at-hand" in *Being and Time*, and Deleuze and Guattari's explanation of how the material and the immaterial are folded together ("one step for thought, one step for life") in Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.
32. Andy Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body and World Together Again* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997).
33. Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*; Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996); William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
34. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (New York: Dover Publications, 1998): 302.
35. Michel Tournier, *Friday* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997): 207.
36. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.
37. Performativity is a specific linguistic and philosophical concept which differs significantly from the more general term "performance"; see Dewsbury, "Performativity and the event," 473-96.
38. John L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962); Oswald Ducrot, *Dire et ne pas Dire: Principes de Sémantique Linguistique* (Paris: Hermann, 1972).
39. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.
40. Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge: MIT, 1999): 28.
41. Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*; John Law, ed., *A Sociology*

of *Monsters* (London: Routledge, 1991).

42. See for example Timothy H. Breen, "'Baubles of Britain': The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 119 (1988): 73-104; Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, two volumes 1978, 1982).
43. Sarah Cant, "British Speleologies: Geographies of Science, Personality and Practice, 1935-1953," *Journal of Historical Geography* 32 (2006): 775-95; Simon Naylor, "The Field, the Museum, and the Lecture Hall: The Spaces of Natural History in Victorian Cornwall," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 27 (2002): 494-513; Peter Merriman, "Materiality, Subjectification, and Government: The Geographies of Britain's Motorway Code," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23 (2005): 235-50; Elizabeth Gagen, "Making America Flesh: Physicality and Nationhood in Early Twentieth-century Physical Education Reform," *Cultural Geographies* 11 (2004): 417-42; Hayden Lorimer, "Telling Small Stories: Spaces of Knowledge and the Practice of Geography," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28 (2003): 197-217; Caitlin DeSilvey, "Salvage Memory: Constellating Material Histories on a Hardscrabble Homestead," *Cultural Geographies* 14:3 (2007): 401-24.
44. Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, "Consumers, Identities, and Consumption Spaces in Early-Modern England," *Environment and Planning A* 28 (1995): 25-45, 39.
45. Shotter, *Cultural Politics*, 15.
46. John Law and Vicky Singleton, "Object Lessons," *Organization* 12:3 (2005): 331-55.
47. Roger-Pol Droit, *101 Experiments in the Philosophy of Everyday Life*, translated by Stephen Romer (London: Faber and Faber, 2002): 64.
48. Elias, *The Civilising Process*, 128.
49. On the importance of novelty, see McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society*; Michael Snodin and John Styles, *Design & the Decorative Arts: Britain 1500-1900* (London: V&A Publications, 2001).
50. Breen, "Baubles of Britain," 84.
51. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1925); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1984).
52. Glennie, "Consumption within Historical Studies," 163-202.
53. Camporesi, *Exotic Brew*.
54. Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise*.
55. See Bruno Latour, "Technology Is Society Made Durable," in Law, *A Sociology of Monsters* (London: Routledge, 1991): 103-31; Michel Callon, "Techno-economic Networks and Irreversibility," in Law, *A Sociology of Monsters*, 132-62.
56. Elizabeth Shove, Matthew Watson, Martin Hand and Jack Ingram, *The Design of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).
57. Lena Orlin provides a very detailed critique of the use of probate inventories for researching past consumption and domestic spaces, see Orlin, "Fictions of the Early Modern English Probate Inventory," 51-83. I believe that this current paper avoids some of the major pitfalls that Orlin outlines. In particular, I believe that I avoid some of the problems associated with more statistical/quantitative approaches to inventories (e.g. those that make socio-economic generalisations based on inventory valuations or the number of rooms in a given house) as my approach is precisely about trying to creatively exploit the very sub-

jective (or better still inter-subjective, inter subject-object) nature of inventories and inventory appraisal. Furthermore, I believe that, for the most part, my methods focus attention on groups of goods, the interconnections between goods and how these broad patterns are repeated across different inventories rather than on individual objects, as such they are fairly robust and less likely to be unduly influenced by the types of noise that Orlin so exhaustively describes. Finally, I believe that one should not be afraid to make informed speculations about past practices and material cultures, so long as pro-per qualifications are made explicit.

58. Tim Ingold, "Building, Dwelling, Living: How Animals and People Make Themselves at Home in the World," in Marilyn Strathern, ed., *Shifting Contexts: Transformations in Anthropological Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1995): 77.
59. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1991); Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1990).
60. Francisco Varela, *Ethical Know-How: Action, Wisdom and Cognition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Daniel Miller, Peter Jackson, Nigel Thrift, Beverley Holbrook and Michael Rowlands, *Shopping, Place and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1998).
61. Varela, *Ethical Know-How*, 10.
62. Orlin, "Fictions of the Early Modern English Probate Inventory," 51-83.
63. Unfortunately, it would not have been possible to carry out this type of more contextualised analysis within the constraints of this paper, however for a more detailed approach along these lines, see Evans, "Consumption and the Exotic in Early Modern England."
64. Ingold, "Building, Dwelling, Living," 76.
65. Francis M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900* (London: Fontana Press, 1988); Brown, "Continuity and Change in the Urban House," 558-90.
66. Evans, "Consumption and the Exotic."
67. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. There are also a whole range of socio-political issues concerning the types of information that are deemed worthy of collecting and archiving, for example it could be argued that many forms of state-sanctioned data collection are driven by a desire to categorise and discipline subjects, see Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*; Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, translated by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
68. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, 4.
69. It is also important to note that there are a variety of other ways in which one can enliven the content of probate inventories, including; cross-referencing with other texts; adopting alternative theoretical approaches; and even being attentive to the micro-empirical details of inventories in a representational way can yield useful insights.