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*Title:* *Inspid or intrepid luxury: the material culture of the long eighteenth century viewed through documents relating to English retail history*

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### *Preamble*

Luxury is a useful yardstick with which to measure a people's or a period's aspirations and yearnings. This paper represents our effort of probing into such aspirations, starting with a corpus designed to look at goods below the luxury mark. We seek to identify evidence of shifts in two directions: of luxuries that became more part of the everyday over time and of types of goods that underwent stratification (an expansion in range and variation) for some to be promoted into the category of luxury. This subsection of luxury goods will be summarily called 'small luxuries'.

The terms *insipid*<sup>1</sup> and *intrepid*<sup>2</sup> relate to the sensory appeal or impact of small luxuries. They pitch flavourlessness and a restrained appeal to the senses against boldness and a strong appeal (right in your face) at extreme ends of the spectrum of the *sense-scapes* created by material objects.

The conceptual bases for this paper can be found in sensory history, joined by Crowley's thesis regarding 'comfort'. By aligning the analysis of the information base, the primary sources relating to goods and materials that, ostensibly, were not placed in the category of luxury, with the tenements of sensory history in general and Crowley's 'comfort' in particular, new insights are gained for the study of retail and consumption history, of the material culture of the eighteenth century and senses and their role in historical investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, see 'insipid' (= 1. Without taste, tasteless; also, having only a very slight taste; without perceptible flavour or flavour sufficient to gratify the palate. **1620** VENNERS *Via Recta* vii. 109 There are also some Apples that are insipid, or without taste. **1626** BACON *Sylva* §632 There be Plants that haue their Roots very Hot and Aromaticall; And their Seeds rather Insipide; As Ginger. **1756** C. LUCAS *Ess. Waters* I. 82 No water can be pure that is not quite insipid. **1774** GOLDSM. *Nat. Hist.* (1776) IV. 23 The tame rabbits are larger than the wild ones..but their flesh is not so good, being more insipid and softer. **2. fig.** Wanting the qualities which excite interest or emotion; uninteresting, lifeless, dull, flat. (In many early quotations it is doubtful whether the sense meant was 2 or 3.) **16..** EVELYN *Diary* 18 Aug. 1649, In ye coach..went Mrs. Barlow, the King's mistress and mother to ye Duke of Monmouth, a browne, beautifull, bold, but insipid creature. **1710-11** SWIFT *Lett.* (1767) III. 89 This was an insipid snowy day, no walking day. **1723** ORMOND *ibid.* II. 33, I am still such an insipid correspondent. **1753** HOGARTH *Anal. Beauty* vi. 36 How soon does a face that wants expression, grow insipid, tho' it be ever so pretty. **3.** Devoid of taste, intelligence, or judgement; stupid, foolish, dull. *Obs.* **1651** BAXTER *Inf. Bapt.* 185, I am sorry..that you should glory in such insipide arguing. **1662** PEPYS *Diary* 29 Sept., 'Midsummer Night's Dream'..is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw. **1665** *Ibid.* 15 Jan., To church, where a most insipid young coxcomb preached. **1688** LD. DELAMERE *Wks.* (1694) 20 Words and Phrases with~out Sense Tickle the Ears of insipid people. **1784** COWPER *Task* III. 642 Without it [elegance], all is gothic as the scene To which th' insipid citizen resorts. **B.** as *n.* An insipid person or thing; one who is deficient in sense, spirit, or taste. *Obs.* **a1700** B. E. *Dict. Cant. Crew, Insipids*, Block-heads. **1727** DE FOE *Syst. Magic* I. iv. (1840) 114 Whether the flights of their insipids are ecstasies of the adored, or of the horrid. **1781** P. KING *Mod. Lond. Spy* 24 It was therefore agreed to class me as an insipid).

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, see 'intrepid' (= Of persons and personal qualities: Fearless; undaunted; daring; brave. **1697** DRYDEN *Virg. Aeneid* Ded. (R.), That quality [valour], which signifies no more than an intrepid courage. *Ibid.*, *Georg.* IV. 122 The two contending Princes..Intrepid thro' the midst of Danger go. **1738** GLOVER *Leonidas* I. 214 Three hundred more compleat th' intrepid band. **1766** GOLDSM. *Vic. W.* xxviii, 'Where, sir, is your fortitude?' returned my son with an intrepid voice. Intrepidly = In an intrepid manner; fearlessly, boldly); 'intrepidity' (= The quality of being intrepid; fearlessness; firmness of mind in the presence of danger; courage, boldness.).

Two caveats need to be made. First, the discussion is limited to findings based on a selection of sources, which mainly relate to English retail history. This limits the scope of the investigation. It is evident that a broader source base would allow even greater insights into the nature of small luxury. On the other hand, the consumer's side of luxury material culture has already received considerable attention.<sup>3</sup> As historians of retail activity in early modern England, our concern lies with the specific junction between production and consumption. As so often, too categorical a split between the three is unhelpful, and there will be overlap between the different fields. The second caveat relates to the definition of 'material culture'. In this paper it extends to materials that would not normally be classed as 'objects', such as liquids, un-countable or bulk materials, to embrace a wider range of *rei*, all of which contributed to the tactile, olfactory, visual and taste experience of life in the long eighteenth century.

## *1. Introduction*

### *1.1. 'small luxuries'*

What are 'small luxuries'? The corpus deliberately excludes jewellery, scientific instruments, musical instruments, and expensive books. Nevertheless, some instances have made it into the database. Overall, the corpus favours goods that were relatively accessible to more than just a few, and which were on the other hand not tools or utensils of everyday use and functionality, even though this category is less clear cut than might be thought. In the context of eighteenth-century material culture and its artefacts, they were also for the most part relatively ephemeral, which has direct repercussions on survival and documentary evidence. It makes their investigation challenging.

Examples of small luxuries are wallpaper, prints, the toothpick case, ribbon jelly and the counterpane.<sup>4</sup> By taking sensory information as the starting point for analyzing goods and commodities the research engages with the necessity-luxury continuum. The research does not challenge the critical tenets of current knowledge. On the contrary, historians' understanding of an overall trend towards greater consumption of such goods will be informed by brining sensory impact into the debate.

Upper range luxury will not be considered here. It has a long pedigree and at some point, though not within this paper, a comparison with such luxuries and, where possible, some integration of findings will be helpful and necessary.

### *1.2. The long eighteenth century*

The construct of the 'long eighteenth century', usually 1660-c1820, aims to bridge the ontological gap between early modern and modern. One reason for this is that the 'Enlightenment', largely coterminous with the eighteenth century proper (1701-1800), as a set of ideas and cultural developments, has been both persuasive and problematic. It has been persuasive in performing the role of bridge between early- and modern; problematic because the penumbra of 'enlightenment thought' and ideals is difficult to assess. In many cases it is more appropriate to take a more generous time frame,

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<sup>3</sup> For example Maxine Berg, various publications.

<sup>4</sup> The last three will be discussed in greater detail in Cox/Dannehl 'Small luxuries: a window on to eighteenth century consumption', Social History Society Conference 2009 – Sunday 5 April.

though not necessarily the one hundred and sixty years from the Restoration into the nineteenth century.

### *1.3. Retail history, consumption and material culture*

The three fields, retail history, consumption history and material culture studies, though as academic fields often unrelated, have a common element: the goods and commodities that were retailed, consumed and in either stage formed the material culture of the people who sold, bought and used (consumed) them. It needs to be remembered, too, that for the early-modern period, including the eighteenth century, any strict division between maker/producer and retailer is often fraught with problems. Makers (craftspeople) were often also retailers to the end consumer (as well as to the trade). It is equally problematic to distinguish too categorically between wholesale (to the trade) and retail (to the end consumer) activity. In consequence, any work on retail and commodities frequently delves into the other two fields.

The corpus is focused on retail history rather than consumers. The sources relate to the point where goods' availability and accessibility (beyond monetary value and accessibility) can become 'luxuries' or 'ordinary items of consumption'/staples. This is not an argument for claiming all-powerful role for broker or retailer as the one who decides. Rather, maker/retailer and consumer were all involved in the process of making and elaborating the goods that formed their material setting. The expectation with regard to primary evidence relating to retailing is that for *small luxuries* retail strategies had to accommodate the fact that their appeal had to be managed within the parameters of luxury (emotionally attractive and potentially morally bad) on one end of the scale and functionality (morally good but potentially emotionally unattractive) on the other.

The role of the various facets of the retail trade, which largely determined what goods were available and to whom, and the spectrum of these goods allow us to trace the engagement with the objects and materials that made life prettier and that allowed those who grappled with them the opportunity to gain a sense of control over their surroundings. The compromise between means and aspiration was inherent in all objects and materials. Compromise in turn challenged the boundaries between mundane and luxury and led to changes in the way early modern consumers used material goods to communicate what was a largely unchanged message about themselves.

## *2. The conceptual bases*

### *2.1. Sensory History*

The conceptual base for this research is sensory history, a relatively new field but one that has long roots.<sup>5</sup> A key postulate of sensory history is that the impact of the world upon the senses has changed over time. Smith and other historians of the senses warn repeatedly to beware of the fallacy of assuming that merely because physiological

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Smith, Mark M., *Sensory history*; Paterson, Mark, *The senses of touch. Haptics, affects and technologies*; Classen, Constance (ed.), *The book of touch*; Howes, David (ed.) *Empire of the senses. The sensual culture reader*; Edwards, Elizabeth and Kaushik Bhaumik (eds), *Visual sense. A cultural reader*. Introductions stress the long history of investigation into the senses from Antiquity.

changes in the human body have been slight over the last ten thousand years, that the same is true for the effect of sensory transmission.<sup>6</sup> Sensory history is not concerned with biological functions but with the culturally conditioned impression made by the information transmitted to the brain by these senses.<sup>7</sup> Culture changes over time as studies of historical societies never fail to show. Culturally conditioned perception has been subject to variation.

The literature that has focused specifically on the different senses in their historical context, on how and what people saw, heard, smelled, felt, indicates that the assessment of change is difficult, because data are rarely comparable and there is no yardstick or scale against which to measure, which tends to mean that the researcher tacitly take their own experience as a more or less helpful standard.

Sensory perceptions, that is the impact of external influences registered by the sensory apparatus, is not available other than in the form of interpretation. Only very basic responses such as the pores of the skin closing or widening in response to changes in temperature or pupils closing or widening in response to changes in the degree of brightness, would take place automatically. These tend not to be responses of the level that is culturally interesting – though responsiveness to heat and cold and related perceptions of what is hot or cold may be. In all higher-order sensory perception, the cultural filter is ever-present and responses help us to see the shape of this filter.

The Cartesian conception distinguishes real matter and our perception thereof. The material world cannot be known to humans because human perception intervenes between the organ of sense to perceive it and the judgement of the perceived. The perception of matter is entirely subjective and influenced by previous sensory experience of encounters with it. Put another way, the world of material objects and matter is not a plain reality but a reality that is embroidered and influenced by what our organs of perception will be capable of perceiving and interpreting.

The five senses are traditionally sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. In Western culture, these five are not equal but follow a hierarchy of esteem, as Smith and Paterson. Sight, from classical tradition, is seen as the purest and touch the most animal like and basest. There is room for arguing that the strict enforcement of this hierarchy is part of the modernity project that gripped Western civilisation at some point after Antiquity and that has slowly, incrementally influenced self-conscious ideas about culture.

One final point about the senses and the challenge they present to researchers is that they act together. To study a single sense in isolation may give focus the investigation; the price paid is that it distorts what can be learned. Slippage, substitution of one sense for another and the combination of different senses all occur, particularly when sensory information enters the written record. An example will illustrate the point: a fragrance is extremely difficult to describe; the writer may therefore resort to liking it to a flower that has a similar smell. The flower may also evoke stimuli of colours and therefore

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<sup>6</sup> This holds despite medical statistics, which suggest that the 20/21 century West has higher rates of hearing loss in young people and higher rates of allergies blocking noses and blurring vision. The findings relate to pathology, not the acuity of the functioning sense in a 21<sup>st</sup> century person.

<sup>7</sup> Comparisons between different cultures for a given point in time (usually of societies available for investigation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century/synchronic) show this well.

link a smell to a visual experience. Most intriguingly of all, perhaps, the dichotomy between taste, smell and touch is a troublingly artificial one. Smell is very closely linked to taste, and taste closely related to texture, an appeal to the sense of touch (albeit with the tongue).

## 2.2. The *Invention of Comfort*<sup>8</sup>

Senses excite emotion(s), and this may well be the next level of interpretation open for material culture studies. One such emotion is the sense of being at ease and in comfort. In his *Invention of comfort* Crowley identified comfort as a driver in eighteenth century material culture, and indeed, through his discussion develops the concept in such a way as to make it useful for other approaches to eighteenth century developments in consumption. Comfort as argued by Crowley was an intermediary between luxury and need, making acceptable the pursuit and enjoyment of material goods that facilitated comfort. The concept also defines an interesting state of sensory satisfaction and stability. The person who achieved comfort was a person who had achieved an ideal in terms of the amount of sensory information entering their system.

## 3. The information base<sup>9</sup>

In this paper we pursue a document-based approach to historical material culture. Artefacts will not be considered. The documents do not include tracts or philosophical treatises, and include only a very limited amount of contemporary personal reflection from diarists. The bulk of the documents recorded ownership and/or possession, promotion or virtual distribution and actual distribution.

With its broad sweep across the materials, stuffs and things that were the subject of wholesale and retail in eighteenth-century England the *Dictionary of traded goods and commodities* permits insight into the nuances of material culture from a perspective that is different from the more common angles of consumption or production, and instead from the frequently elusive stage between the two: distribution and retail. As an extended glossary that seeks to list, explain and contextualise the goods and commodities that were in circulation in wholesale, retail and cognate forms of exchange between circa 1550-1820, the *Dictionary's* source materials reflect a range of view points. The sources are diaries, John Houghton, *Letters on Husbandry & Trade* (ed. R. Bradley, 1727, originally a series of weekly letters), probate inventories, newspaper advertisement, patents, rate books, cookery and medicinal recipes, statutes and trade cards. These datasets make it possible to look across a range, if not the complete range, of small luxuries, as well as a more focused investigation into a specific item or category.

The corpus was constructed by digitizing above 6,000 primary texts taken from nine source types. The samples from these source types were selected to provide a multiplicity of perspectives on trade and material culture, of trading terms and to provide appropriate data on contextual information.<sup>15</sup> They include some in the form

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<sup>8</sup> Crowley, John E., *Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain and Early America*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, ISBN: 9780801875168.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the database and the corpus approach see Cox/Dannehl, 'History and the corpus approach: the computer-aided construction of a dictionary of historic terms', *International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing* 1 (1) 2007, 5–18, DOI: 10.3366/E1753854808000062, © Edinburgh University Press and the Association for History and Computing 2008.

of citations; a methodology used in many dictionaries like the OED, others in the form of fully transcribed texts. Excluded are sources that focus on a particular group of commodities, such as *The merchant's ware-house laid open* (descriptions of linen and cotton textiles), or *Pemberton's Dispensatory* (official recipes of drugs).

The sources chosen are of very different types. Houghton's *Husbandry and trade* offers a cursive text informative on some topics, but is silent on others. The source is also date-specific giving a vignette in the centre of the period. The collection of about 1,500 probate inventories of trades people spans almost the whole period, providing data on production, distribution and use in many areas of England and for over 100 trades. The collections of newspaper advertisements and of trade cards are focused largely on distribution and are most informative about the second half of the eighteenth century, which is poorly covered by probate. The short titles of patents with their patentees cover the whole period but are of most value on production, whereas the collection of recipes though narrowly focused on a small range of products, informs like no other source on use. A small set of extracts from domestic diaries complement the recipes by covering a broader spectrum of concerns. Finally two sets of official documents, a series of *Customs Rate Books* and extracts from the pertinent *Statutes of the Realm* reveal governmental attitudes. In addition the project has had access to, and used extensively, the Gloucester coastal port books produced in digital format, as well as other sources not systematically collated and digitised.

Source Type	Included as
John Houghton's <i>Letters on Husbandry and Trade</i> , 1682–1702	extracts
Probate inventories providing data on 100 trades, 1538–1809 mainly Midlands, north-west England, Sussex, Hampshire and London	full text where possible
Advertisements from provincial newspapers, 1706–1790 mainly from the Midlands, Manchester, Sussex and Norwich; a few from London	full text
Trade cards and bill heads, 1685–c1825, mainly London but some from the Midlands and from Sussex	full text, no visuals
Patents of invention 1623–1800	short titles
Culinary, industrial and medicinal recipes, c1650–c1800 Diaries and personal papers, 1584–1790, mainly from north-west England, Sussex and London, with observations from foreign visitors	full text extracts
<i>Customs Books of Rates</i> 1582, (1643, 1654, 1657, 1660), 1784	full text
<i>Statutes of the Realm</i> , 1328–1800	extracts

### 3.2. *The limitations of the corpus*

The key limitation of the corpus stems from the limited number of different source types and the absence of an equivalent corpus selected for luxury goods. The selection of specimen of each source type cannot be anything but indicative of trends. Any quantification based on occurrence in the corpus, as well as any conclusions to be drawn with regard to 'insipid or intrepid luxury' must consequently be understood strictly in the context of the corpus. There are, however, challenges that can be expected regardless of any bias present in the data. They are closely related to the

information that can be gleaned from the material and they will therefore form part of the discussion section.

#### 4. Discussion

The discussion will deal with aspects of four senses: seeing, touching, smelling and tasting in the context of trade and retail.<sup>10</sup>

##### 4.1. Visual sense through colour<sup>11</sup>

From the corpus some 300 commodities and traded objects can be identified, in which a colour descriptor was an integral part of the label or name. 75 include *white*, and nearly as many *black*, with *red* in third position at 60. *Green*, *blue*, *brown*, and *yellow* each number about thirty, while other colourations, like *grey* barely, reach double figures. There were, of course, many other objects and commodities to which colour descriptors were attached without forming an integral part of the whole name.

In each case, there are colour-commodity combinations that are still used today, for example *brown* paper, *red* cabbage and *white* sugar, but there are also many others for which meaning can only be recovered with difficulty, even when they appear superficially obvious, like *green* chair, *white* comb or *yellow* starch.

A closer investigation reveals that although colour mattered, it was also rather elusive in documents relating to trade. The documentary evidence shows that it was rarely mentioned for its own sake. Even in advertisements, terms like *new*, *fashionable*, *elegant*, and *genteel* appear with greater frequency than terms indicating colour, perhaps suggesting that they were regarded as more effective for promoting sales. On the other hand, retailers were evidently conscious of colour and sensitive to what was in fashion and what was going out of date, even though such knowledge may have been aural rather than the matter deemed essential when compiling information in writing. Entries like ‘Seuerall remnants of old fashioned Stuffles’ valued at 10 shillings is as near as we may ever get to some fabrics dyed in colours, or patterns, that no longer attracted customers.<sup>12</sup>

Evidence of colour returns in the form of how the trade avoided waste. Rather than leave out-of-date stock mouldering on the shelf, a shopkeeper might look at a copy of *The Whole Art of Dying* and follow the directions on how to re-dye ‘stuffs of faded or old Fashioned Colours Black or darker than their former Colours’.<sup>13</sup> After all, black was *de rigueur* for mourning and no fabric need to be wasted, as John and Henry Parker,

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<sup>10</sup> Section 4.4. Auditory (hearing) and 4.3 (taste) are to receive full treatment in the future.

<sup>11</sup> Based on Cox/Dannehl, *Color Paper*, 2007 (forthcoming autumn 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Probate inventory of Benjamin Marshall, mercer of Lincoln, dated 1665 (Lincolnshire Archives, L.C.C. Admon. 1667/131).

<sup>13</sup> Anon, *The Art of Dying in Two Parts* (Shotton, Stratford-upon-Avon: the Tapestry Studio, not dated [1913]), 272. This is a new edition of the eighteenth-century original entitled *The Whole Art of Dyeing in two Parts. The First being an Experimental Discovery of All the most Useful Secrets in Dying Silk, Wool, Linnen and the Manufactures thereof, as Practised in England, France, Spain, Holland and Germany. To which is Added, A Discourse of Pot and Weyd Ashes, as well as Several other Foreign Ingredients used in Dying. Written Originally in the German Language. The Second Part is a General Instruction for the Dying of Wools and Woollen Manufactures of all Colours; for the Culture of the Drugs used in the Tinctorial Art, as also for the Dying of Hats; Published by the especial Command of the present French King in that Language, and Illustrated with Several Philosophical and Practical Annotations by the German Translator. Both which are Faithfully rendred into English from their Respective Originals* (London: printed for William Pearson, and sold by J. Nutt, 1705).

Silk-dyers in Digbeth, Birmingham, understood only too well. In 1790 they informed 'the Public that they Dye Silks, Cloth &c Black, during the General Mourning, with the greatest Expedition'. They added that silks were 'cleaned and Dyed of all Colours as usual', a rare announcement to spell out the practice of re-dyeing.<sup>14</sup>

Tradespeople concerned with chemical substances were much more likely to use colour descriptors in their writings than drapers and haberdashers. Even though the colours themselves may have been removed from reality and of no aesthetic purpose, for chemists and industrialists colour was an essential identifier in a period when the nomenclature of chemical substances was problematic. Contemporaries struggled valiantly to develop methods of reliable (scientific) identification and classification.<sup>15</sup> Agreeing upon acceptable names was an issue as much for merchants and retailers as for scientists; elucidating the inconsistent and varied names given remains a challenge to historians.

Adding colour descriptors to substances was not done for aesthetic reasons but because it was the most useful way of differentiating substances not otherwise easily differentiated. Distinguishing the various forms of copperas is a case in point. Long before its chemical structures were understood or the term *sulphate* developed, the label copperas was attached to three important raw materials. These were differentiated by colour; *blue* copperas, now known as copper sulphate, *green* copperas (ferrous sulphate), and *white* copperas (zinc sulphate). These were also known respectively as blue, green, and white *vitriol*. Arsenic was another product, three forms of which were similarly distinguished. *Red* arsenic, popularly known as *ratsbane*, but also as both *sandarac* and *realgar* in trade, was largely used (as its name suggests) for poisoning rats, but the yellow and the white, though equally toxic, were more important respectively as a pigment and as an aid to dyeing silks red. Other examples of this way of using colour labels include black, red, and white *lead*, black, white, and grey *iron*, red, silver, and white *sand*, and blue, and green *bice*. In each case the colour served as an indicator of other more significant chemical differences than still unexplained.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Advertisement in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, issue dated 27 September 1790.

<sup>15</sup> The development of techniques of classification in this respect date to the eighteenth century. Botanists were offered a comprehensive system of classifying plants by Carl Linnaeus in the 1730s (Carl Linnaeus, *Genera Plantarum Eorumque Characteres Naturales Secundum Natorum*, (Luguni Batavorum, 1737). Although the methodology was in place, newly discovered plants from the New World were only slowly incorporated. This was in part because it was the products rather than the plants themselves that first arrived in Europe and they were less easily identified according to Linnaeus' system.) but chemists and the manufacturers that depended upon them had to wait another fifty years for Antoine Lavoisier's *Methods of Chemical Nomenclature* in the 1780s (Antoine Lavoisier, *Méthode de Nomenclature Chimique proposée par MM.de Morveau, Lavoisier, Berthoilet & de Fourcroy; on y a joint un nouveau système de caractères chimiques, adaptés à cette Nomenclature; par MM. Hassenfratz & Adet ...*, (Paris: Chez Cuchet Libraire ..., 1787)).

<sup>16</sup> The absence of or the shortcomings of a developing scientific classification system did not preclude the effective use of these substances. In fact, the use of colour gradations that were clearly recognized at the time could make industrial processes more efficient. Hardening steel, for example, though an ancient art, was not well understood scientifically. Towards the start of the period, the actual process was best described in Porta's *Natural Magick* published in 1589 (Giambattista della Porta, *Natural Magick by John Baptista Porta, a Neapolitane; in twenty books ... wherein are Set Forth all the Riches and Delights of the Natural Sciences*, (London: printed for Thomas Young and Samuel Speed, 1658). Book XIII is on tempering steel. *Natural Magic* was originally published in Latin in 1589 as *Magiae Natvralis Libri XX*.) Its very name suggests hardening was still seen as belonging to alchemy rather than to science in the modern sense. But the actual sequence of colours that appeared when quenching steel and their relation to hardness was first described accurately by another Italian, Vanoccio Biringuccio, a decade or two earlier. He explained how the colour changed as the metal cooled from white, called silver, at its hottest, through yellow, called gold, to a bluish purple, called violet and finally to ashen grey; all splendidly descriptive labels evocating heraldry more than chemistry. Over a century later in 1664, and still on the basis of colours, Robert Boyle suggested practical applications; the steel tempered to yellow was suitable for making edge tools such as axes, while the softer blue could be used for springs. (

Some manufactured items, particularly those that involved chemical processes, were also differentiated by colour and this practice may afford useful clues to the content or process involved. Soap was defined as hard or soft, Bristol, Crown, or London, but also as white, black, yellow, red, green, or blue. Each had different properties, or was based on different ingredients. *White* soft soap was the best quality, made from the purest ingredients carefully boiled and taken from the top layer of the vat. It was the only soap designated by colour that was suitable for use in the textile industry. *Black* soap, a soft soap otherwise known as *Bristol soap*, and the hard Bristol *grey* soap, on the other hand, were made from the lower layers where the impurities collected.<sup>17</sup> Like the black, *yellow* soap was of low value. Mostly the colour came from the use of cheap raw materials like tallow or train oil, often imperfectly purified, but the addition of rosin in order to increase the detergent properties of the soap, would coincidentally have intensified the colour. *Red*, *green*, and *blue* soaps were all produced by the addition of a colorant, respectively of iron oxide, copper sulphate, and indigo or blue.<sup>18</sup> The two metal salts may also have had a mildly abrasive effect, though they may have reduced foaming capacity and rendered such soaps unsuitable for the textile trade. Using *blue* soap in the household wash would have given an ephemeral bluish tint to white fabrics, though there is no evidence of this in practice. Although our understanding of the manufacture and the use of soaps is limited as yet, it is clear that a wide range was produced, that different soaps had different characteristics, and that the quality of a particular soap was often defined by a colour descriptor. In the case of soap, however, the use of colour descriptors was one of descriptive convenience rather than an imperfect understanding of chemistry, and in this they were distinct from most chemicals.

Importers of products from the New World had slightly different problems with nomenclature, though knowing precisely and accurately what a commodity was remained at the core of their dilemma. Often traders at an outpost were confronted with new potentially useful products, but they had to rely on their own limited knowledge to identify them and that of the local suppliers for their names. Many native names were difficult for Europeans, for example, *Mechoacan* or *Tlilxochitl*. The former now called *Ipomaea jalapa* by botanists was a useful drug but it was rarely found in the shops, while the latter was known almost from the arrival of Europeans in the Americas as *Vanilla*.<sup>19</sup>

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Charles Singer, Eric John Holmyard. Alfred Robert Hall and Trevor Illtyd Williams, eds., *A History of Technology, volume 3: From the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution, c.1500–c.1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 35-37.)

<sup>17</sup> John A. Hunt, "A Short History of Soap", in *The Pharmaceutical Society* 263/7076, Christmas Miscellany, (1999), 985-89. This is reproduced at:

<http://www.pjonline.com/Editorial/19991218/articles/soap.html>, last accessed 20 October 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Abraham Rees, *Rees's Manufacturing Industry, a Selection from The Cyclopaedia; or Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and Literature*, edited by Neil Cossons (Newton Abbot: David and Charles Reprints, 1819–20, abridged edition 1972), V/14; John Houghton, *Husbandry and Trade Improv'd: being a Collection of many Valuable Materials relating to Corn, Cattle, Coals, Hops, &c. with a Compleat Catalogue of several Sorts of Earths, and their Proper Product; the best Sorts of Manure for each; with the Art of Draining and Flooding of Lands; as also Full and Exact Histories of Trades, as Malting, Brewing &c, the Description and Structure of Instruments for Husbandry, and Carriages, with the Manner of their Improvement; An Account of the Rivers of England &c. and how far they may be Made Navigable; of Weights and Measures, of Woods, Cordage, and Metals; of Building and Stowage, the Vegetation of Plants, &c. with Many other Useful Particulars Communicated by Several Eminent Members of the Royal Society, to the Collector*, new Revised, Corrected and Published, with a Preface and Useful Indexes by Richard Bradley, in three volumes (London: printed for Woodman and Lyon, 1727), I/352, Letter 134, dated 22 February 1694/5.

<sup>19</sup> John Frampton, *Joyfull Newes out of the Newe Founde Worlde, Written in Spanish by Nicholas Monardes, Physician of Seville, and Englished by John Frampton Merchant, anno 1577*, with an Introduction by Stephen Gaselle, two volumes (New York, Ams Press, in the Tudor Translations, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, IX and X, the series edited by Charles Whibley, 1577, new edition, 1967), IX/54-67.

Rather than struggle with native labels, it was often simpler to transfer a name from one known commodity to a newly discovered one that appeared to have the same properties. This is what happened to *Brazil*. The name originally meant red, and was applied as Brazil wood to an East Indian species, *Caesalpinia sappan*, used by dyers to produce reds. The name was transferred to South American species like *Caesalpinia braziliensis* and *Caesalpinia echinata* that could be used in the same way, and then to the area of South America in which these were found. The only English name given to the East Indian species *Dalbergia latifolia* was *blackwood*, which it had to share with several other species at various times. All gave a black or blackish wood like ebony, although one from the New World was alternatively called logwood and yielded a black dye. In the same way a whole range of timber species were simply called *redwoods* or *yellow woods*, either because their woods were nicely coloured or because they gave a dye of that colour.

This empirical approach to nomenclature was inevitable until the Linnaean classification was established and the botanical species available from the New World studied under a new paradigm. Until then the use of color as an indicator was, for the purposes of commerce and industry, as good a way as any, even if it could, and did, sometimes lead to confusion. For these groups of traders, the chemists, the industrialists, and the importers, the problem would be resolved by new systems of identification and classification. In the final analysis, to look for colour in relation to *small luxuries* through the eyes of tradespeople is to find it strangely muted and elusive, though not absent since it was required and duly used for specific purposes.

#### 4.2. *Haptic sense (touch) through objects in use*<sup>20</sup>

The evidence in trade records is limited but undeniably there. Terminology includes: *coarse, small as a bean, rough, in paste*. All appear in the Books of Rates, but slippage is notable when a imported commodity is classed as *dried, unrefined* or *undressed* – technical terms that relate to a state of unfinished production processes (and a condition that mattered to the taxation a commodity would incur).<sup>21</sup> At the same time, they suggest a system of classification that sought to include all the senses in order to gain surety about a commodity. In the context of a period that in other regards appears to seek modernity through losing its senses and prioritising the visual, this must make us think.

Human organs of perception know space through its markers, and the objects that indicate to them, visually and tactilely, that this is where a certain area or space ends or starts. The object, particularly the manufactured, deliberately produced object, pertains to the arsenal of devices human beings have devised to divide and structure physical space, and as such objects are as important as the more abstract devices, which structure temporal and conceptual space.

Studies of cognitive mapping tell us about people's ability to learn about their environments and the relationship between the cognitive map and their behaviour. For instance, cognitive mapping allows us to predict spatial behaviour (in other words, it

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<sup>20</sup> This section is based on a conference paper delivered 2008 (Dannehl, 2008, ESSH Conference Lisbon).

<sup>21</sup> For example: Cushen-cloths, course and Fox skins, black, undressed, respectively, 1660 and 1784 respectively.

allows them to retrieve spatial behaviour that can no longer be observed) because spatial behaviour is based on the cognitive map that a user has of his or her environment. Without an internal, personal map of our environment, based on external information and (internal) experience gained about environment(s) and space, we would not be able to perform the manifold spatial actions that our daily lives require.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, Kitchin and Blade do not appear to think of space as something that is constructed, but rather analyse it as a given with the user negotiating it but not with the effect of shaping the space in turn. The cognitive map is something the user acquires and constructs.

Just as activity is engraved into the landscape<sup>23</sup> it is, though far more ephemeral, graven into the maps of dwellings. And just as there is a time-space aspect to historical geography, there is a time-space aspect to the micro-geography of everyday activities. A person's sense of being is shaped by what that person does, by the exceptional and heroic feat as much as by the string of repeatedly performed small acts and ways of doing things.

What did people do with the objects they handled? Heidegger distinguishes between 'bauen' (to build/construct) and 'wohnen' (to dwell), effectively building a space for the action of dwelling.<sup>24</sup> What is not stressed is that this creation is an ongoing, continual process – brought about through activity and movement. The 'dwelling' once made is confirmed and maintained through actions. The use and 'living in' are for the most part unmapped, ephemeral actions – the small incidents of active engagement with objects and space. It is helpful to a third form: to inhabit. We know that in particular cases where a person has no control over the interior architecture (for example, in a prison context, or in hospital, but also though to a lesser extent in hotels, or when visiting or at work) the person has the perception of not truly living and existing moves into the place of living when surrounded by 'untouchable' and 'unmoveable' artefacts that effectively have the nature of fixtures. On the other hand, ownership is no guarantee for empowerment since many possessions are not used by owners but by users, and many objects of everyday activities empowered users rather than owners.<sup>25</sup> They empower them through the acts of creating and influencing their environment. This mostly private environment contrasts with environments created by non-users that were imposed upon users (work places in factory style, for example), which victimised users precisely because the building block element was removed from the human-object relationship.<sup>26</sup>

In all these scenarios the objects act as building blocks. Whatever a given setting may have been, looked like and however it functioned – it was built by the users within it

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<sup>22</sup> Rob Kitchin and Mark Blades, *The cognition of geographic space*, (London, New York: I.B.Tauris, 2002). The authors go on to detailed models and approaches to the field, which go well beyond the requirements of an outsider.

<sup>23</sup> See for example Susanne Wade Martins, *Farmers, landlords and landscapes. Rural Britain, 1720 to 1870* (Macclesfield: Windgather Press 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Discussed in Tim Dant, *Material culture in the social world. Values, activities, lifestyles*, (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999), pp. 61-2.

<sup>25</sup> One example from the early eighteenth century illustrates the status of workmen's tools. A court case sought to arbitrate the obligation of the mould maker, based on the question whether he or the foundry owner owned the master moulds (Shropshire).

<sup>26</sup> The ways in which empowerment worked may have been subtle. It seems unlikely that users (as opposed to owners) were always the hapless victims of their material possessions and, overwhelmed by need, greed and desire. At times, the experience of users might have been one of empowerment and control even for those who used objects owned by others, as would have been the case in many servant-master constellations.

and through the actions these users carried out. The ‘building blocks’ model is also in keeping with arguments about extending the material world through making new objects and developing new patterns and routines around them and with them. For instance, concepts such as ‘home’ and ‘kitchen’ did not exist outright but had to be constructed as real physical spaces that surrounded human beings, bounded them, and that gave their actions focus and support. From arranging and customising, fitting to their needs, removing and discarding, and generally manipulating objects, in short, from this adaptable type of architecture users can potentially derive a sense of control and empowerment.<sup>27</sup>

The kitchen environment was sufficiently conspicuous and deemed sufficiently important to impinge on visitors’ perceptions with regard to English standards of hygiene and cleanliness. César de Saussure’s comment is an indication that foreigners noted the English for having high standards in this respect: ‘The amount of water English people employ is inconceivable, especially for the cleansing of their houses’ and although ‘they are not slaves to cleanliness, like the Dutch, still they are remarkable for this virtue. [...] well-kept houses are washed twice in the seven days [...] and even every morning most kitchens, staircase, and entrance are scrubbed. All furniture, and especially all kitchen utensils, are kept with the greatest cleanliness.’ (1720s). The impeccably maintained kitchen and its utensils were part, and a socially significant part at that, of that ‘pride in better material conditions’<sup>28</sup> that led contemporaries from all social layers to invest in material possessions.

The authors of *The complete servant* published in 1825, addressing users rather than owners, stress that cleanliness ‘must be considered as the *first and leading principle* of the kitchen-maid, as well as of the head cook and all other persons in any way employed in the business of the kitchen.’<sup>29</sup> With the cook, the authors insist, ‘it becomes a CARDINAL VIRTUE’<sup>30</sup>. The ‘boilers, saucepans, and other vessels, to be used for culinary purposes, must be kept perfectly clean and well tinned. BLOCK TIN sauce pans, &c. are safest, and perhaps best for these purposes. When washed they should be dried by the fire before they are put away; and they should always be wiped out again, with a clean dry cloth, immediately before they are used. This is to be done chiefly to prevent rust, and its baleful effects.’<sup>31</sup> And in preparing soups ‘the first care of the Cook will be to see that the stew-pan to be used is well tinned, scalded, and wiped out perfectly clean and dry.’<sup>32</sup> The cook’s maxims are listed, and amongst them: ‘Never use any boiling or stewing utensil, pot or pan, spit, cookhold, spoon, ladle, or skewer, sieve, tammy or pudding cloth, jelly bag, net, tape, or other kitchen article, that have not been well scalded or washed with boiling water, and thoroughly dried.’<sup>33</sup> Scalding, washing, drying each require haptic engagement with objects. If touch is involved in the activity of cleaning, different senses are engaged with the appreciation of its result. The state of being clean, with cleanliness a trope that gained in importance

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<sup>27</sup> Not only objects with such evident three-dimensional features such as furniture and sets of china perform the function of building blocks. The concept of building block also applies to garments and other fabrics, and items of personal adornment like combs or ribbons.

<sup>28</sup> See Roy Porter *English society in the eighteenth century* 1982, p. 239.

<sup>29</sup> Samuel and Sarah Adams *The complete servant* 2000, p. 79, authors’ italics. The authors had themselves passed through the ranks of service in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel and Sarah Adams *The complete servant* 2000, p. 65, authors’ capitals.

<sup>31</sup> Samuel and Sarah Adams *The complete servant* 2000, p. 66, authors’ capitals.

<sup>32</sup> Samuel and Sarah Adams *The complete servant* 2000, p. 69.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel and Sarah Adams *The complete servant* 2000, p. 77.

in the eighteenth century, appeals to more than one sense, namely vision, touch, taste and smell.

But were these objects small luxuries? It may be stretching the argument somewhat, but there is evidence to suggest that even with kitchen and cooking utensils there was a scale;<sup>34</sup> the make, and equally importantly, the size of a given set of utensils for utensils that could be sold in assortments could mean that a given object became a small luxury. Not least in price. It is equally expedient temporarily to dispense with the dichotomies of functional versus ornamental to assume the perspective of treating all objects as functional in some way. The materiality of manufactured objects, and their ability to provide the physical matter with which and through which to construct the lived or built environment per force demands some degree of haptic engagement. Whether domestic arrangements or public displays, whether temporary and ephemeral or durable like the pyramids, made their sensory impact.<sup>35</sup> The smaller the object, the more likely it would be touched and manipulated, the more its chance of contributing to the dynamic architecture of everyday action and activity.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4.3. Taste and smell through flavours

There is taste and there is taste. Taste in the sense of fine or good taste in matters cultural, mainly expressed through one's correct form of appreciation of life's amenities and acquired through exposure to the right cultured habitat,<sup>37</sup> is a quintessentially eighteenth century concept with an intricate root and branch system. It held the affected sectors of society in a sufficiently firm grip to cope with the sense of ever-accelerating change and transformation. As John Styles has shown for politeness and luxury: 'For defenders of luxury, the code of manners known as politeness represented an important means by which the civilising influence of commerce could polish taste and improve behaviour. [...] politeness aimed to create people of decorum, taste and refinement who could be agreeable in the correct way.'<sup>38</sup> Politeness in turn 'did not require its followers to be genteel by birth, merely that when in company they behave in a genteel manner' and he concludes that 'it was widely believed that lack of emulation among the common people led to economic and social stagnation'.<sup>39</sup> Parallel to the better-known concerns over a mixing and blending of people of different social rank made indistinguishable because the signs had bowed to inflationary use from

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<sup>34</sup> See Stone & Co's advertisement (The Times newspaper 4 January 1788, p 4 col 3 discussed in detail in K Dannehl, Eighteenth century metal cooking vessels – a reflexive study, unpublished PhD, Wolverhampton 2005 and K Dannehl, 'To families furnishing kitchens' in D. Hussey and M. Ponsoyby (eds), *Buying for the home*, Ashgate, 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Other, less concrete, more abstract, 'building blocks' exist, but this study is concerned with the material side of human productions. It looks in detail at the 'building blocks' and locates, describes and analyses them within the different contexts.

<sup>36</sup> This extends the meaning of the term architecture, which commonly denotes the con-structural side to material productions. The word derives from the Greek words for 'chief' and 'building' and as such it relates to overarching construction. Its connotations are structure, material structures in a literal sense, which determine and are determined by human activity and actions. It includes the 'art or science of building or constructing edifices of any kind for human use'. In this wide application, *architecture* is divided into *civil*, *ecclesiastical*, *naval*, *military*, which deal respectively with houses and other buildings (such as bridges) of ordinary utility, churches, ships, and fortifications. In some quarters it is regarded solely as a fine art. In both an abstract and a concrete sense, the term can be used to refer to a construction or structure generally. Based on the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oxford UP 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitat and cultural capital, set out in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (translated Richard Nice) 1984.

<sup>38</sup> John Styles, *The dress of the people, everyday fashion in eighteenth-century England*, Yale, 2008, 181.

<sup>39</sup> John Styles, *The dress of the people, everyday fashion in eighteenth-century England*, Yale, 2008, 188.

copying ones betters, there existed the view that emulation was a desirable phenomenon and a commendable endeavour that benefited society.

Eighteenth-century society and its hopes of redemption through close control of good taste are ultimately inseparable from the taste that prompts aural appreciation of – mainly ingestible – matters in a more immediate and direct sense. *Almonds, bitter; bacon, salted; Butter from Ireland, salted* all aim to define a product through its flavour or taste. And what about *Citron-water; Sweet Wood; and Succades Wet or Dry?*<sup>40</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

With regard to the retail of *small luxuries* three considerations arise. 1. Eighteenth-century materialism for the middling sort was not solely focused on the ownership and possession of particular types of goods, and we hope to demonstrate that yet more can be learned from an approach that looks at how such materialism engaged with range. 2. The trend in production towards batch production of standardized goods for people accepting to buy ‘from the peg’ or shelf is persuasive but not without problems. Any discussion of production needs to take into account the consumer’s end and human need for customization, even if it was very small in scale, at which point the retailer (middle-person) and the end consumer engage with the physical and consequently sensory properties of the item. 3. The acknowledgement that the time frame, the long eighteenth century, is helpful because of the increase in printed matter, including promotional materials, which in turn helps to gain access to a key area where sensory appeal would have entered a record (albeit a very biased record recording fiction rather than fact). Given how little the physiological makeup of humanity has changed, it is reasonably safe to assume that sensory appeal has always been promoted, albeit in more ephemeral media.

### 5.1. The sensory qualities of ‘small luxuries’

There will still always be *Luxury* and its definition will always defy precision. Insuperior or intrepid luxury has been an endeavour to get to grips with *small luxuries* and their specific traits. Foremost, it is the attempt to form an understanding of the sensory impact that *small luxuries*, and by extrapolation, luxury and other objects would have had.

So far, analysis of the corpus confirms what historians of sensory history have noted; the privileged status of sight, based on the occurrence of markers of visual impact. The bias towards visual clues is in keeping with Smith’s and Paterson’s discussion of a growing preference towards the highest sense, vision, by ‘moderns’. It may therefore reflect preferences for not touching, tasting or smelling, which show in other areas of eighteenth century culture. More seriously, this feature is almost certainly a reflection of researchers’ bias for descriptions that include ‘visual clues’. Since the corpus was collated to inform the understanding of goods and commodities that were, for the most part, not available as artefacts, help with visualisation may have attracted and favoured inclusion in the corpus. Trained to be visual and non-touching investigators, historians perpetuated the bias. It is likely therefore that selecting usable evidence, materials that

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In Dictionary Project Archive, Ratebooks, 1784.

included visual clues were favoured over those that did not. As an aside: it may well be worth considering if at a time when so many things (shopping, selling, learning are only a few) become virtual and visual (with the added luxury of audio) that touch will become the new and ultimate luxury.

The documents that permit insight into the process and workings of retailing and distribution are relatively quiet when it comes to sensory information. How else do we interpret this bias?

Despite the relative dearth in pure clues, the corpus shows some evidence of the phenomenon of blending and substitution of the senses and a resulting slippage in terminology. A flowered wallpaper and rose copper are primarily visual clues; a Lavender wash ball mostly an olfactory one, and yet the evocation to one trait cannot quite avoid the appeal to a more comprehensive sensory experience of roses, flowers and lavender. In the context of selling and buying (and retailers were middlemen who bought) sight, touch, smell and taste were all-important sensory verifiers and devices to establish truth, trust or at least satisfaction.

### *5.2. Problem and promise of sensory history*

Ideally, it would be possible to retrieve the total experience of Material culture and to get information on an item's impact on various senses and rebuild the total matrix of impact from each piece, including the effect that combinations of sensory impact may have had. The benefit of investigating and retrieving the impact of material culture on senses would be the insights gained to help with fleshing out terms such as luxury, everyday, comfort, which are otherwise in danger of becoming abstract categories. Since all of these concepts denote points on a scale and determine which way the balance tips, information on sensory impact makes them useful for understanding lived experience.<sup>41</sup>

How useful is the evidence that is available? Where a description incorporates information about the sensory value of an object, the decision to describe is conscious but the decision to make sensory information part of the description is sub-conscious. Sensory history based on documents that were not produced to illuminate sensory experience, but in which sensory information is incidental, will always be incomplete.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> A comment on the use of artefacts in studying the potential sensory impact of a given object (provided an artefact exists) and the use of replicas for re-enactment, again with the aim of studying potential sensory impact. Neither approach is without merit, but both are problematic when it comes to assessing the object's potential impact on a person from a previous age. The approach would reveal interesting and reliable information about the impact of an old/like-old object on sample a present-day probands (guinea-pig), which, given appropriate sampling techniques, would be representative of present-day sensory sensibilities with regard to these objects. However, findings would not therefore be representative of what, for example, a group of eighteenth-century probands' responses would have been. The approach is nevertheless a valuable form of investigation, and one that is financially rewarding as museums have shown. The challenge presented by objects where no artefact equivalent or approximation can be identified leads to compromise, and in every case, present day sensory response must not be assumed to be the same as past responses were.

<sup>42</sup> Although potentially more incomplete than if based on texts written for the express purpose of describing sensory impressions, the findings are perhaps less biased by the author's views regarding the sensory experience described. A rock and a hard place come to mind; a metaphor, incidentally, which is entirely sensory.

Another challenge of investigating past sensory experience based on document evidence is the problem of how it may have been expressed. Would we recognise such information? Would we know how to interpret it? The struggle for indicators of activity and the muted colour palette in the discussion sections suggest that, at least for certain contexts, it is very difficult to retrieve information. Could it be gained from other types of source materials? Is an object in the various stages of their life cycle, for example, the object for sale versus the possession, the same in terms of its sensory impact?<sup>43</sup> A fair proportion of sensory impact is not an objective impact but a subjective perception.

As a perspective that gives consideration to sensory involvement to capture material culture and material contexts of theatres of activity private and public, sensory qualities are an important aspect of material culture. There are two reasons for wanting to include the senses in our research: firstly for providing a better understanding of the effect of goods and materials beyond the more standard ones: value, status, comfort, security, and aesthetic. Secondly, for the impact they had on the senses, and which senses in particular. It is in this context important that goods at the point of retail are not in the same way accessible to the senses as are those goods that are in ones possession.<sup>44</sup>

### 5.3. A 'luxury sense'?

Whether an object was flavourless and wanting the qualities that excite interest or emotion, or daring and brave, every user or owner was a participant, without choice, when it came to the sensory landscape. Some may have chosen to engage more actively, or pro-actively, but however reluctant one's participation, the appeal to and the impact upon the senses upon a living organism can never be entirely avoided.

This is even less so the case with 'small luxuries'. Those with ambitions to being pro-active would not only have to learn and to spend. Where the medium consisted of the items of material culture, these physical messengers had to evolve and change to maintain the message. In turn, every the deployment of objects and materials had repercussions for the values, cultural and economic, that could and would be attached to them. Under such (sensitive) conditions 'throwaway society' could develop; a society whose participants habitually rid themselves of sensory information (material objects) in order to acquire new sources of such information because only the new sensory information, new objects capable of making fresh appeals to the sensory system, has become desirable. Throwaway society, when it became manifest, very likely evolved along the lengthy road of incremental compromises over small luxuries.

Hidden behind all this is a concern with how culture's declensions operate. Much of our understanding of past culture is based on events, ideas and material remains, much less of it takes into account influences that such context exerted upon human development.

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<sup>43</sup> Further research is needed here. The way authors of documents of differing genres refer to objects strongly suggests this.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. the eighteenth-century shopkeeper's plight of window-shoppers desiring to tumble (handle) the wares – consumer pressure ostensibly to verify quality but in reality to gain access to sensory information normally reserved for possessions. Possession, on the other hand, should not automatically be equated with ownership – owners may not have been users.