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‘Of fine shops and fine shows’: Rethinking Shopping for Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century England

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บทคัดย่อ

นักประวัติศาสตร์มีความเห็นตรงกันว่าอังกฤษในคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 18 มีลักษณะเป็นสังคมผู้บริโภคซึ่งให้ความสำคัญแก่การบริโภคในฐานะที่เป็นความอภิรมย์มากกว่าความจำเป็นพื้นฐานของชีวิต วัฒนธรรมการช้อปปิ้งได้รับการสำรวจและศึกษาอย่างกว้างขวางโดยนักประวัติศาสตร์วัฒนธรรมและนักประวัติศาสตร์ธุรกิจ นักประวัติศาสตร์เหล่านี้ได้นำเสนอข้อมูลว่าด้วยบทบาทของมโนทัศน์เรื่องความสุภาพในฐานะที่เป็นกรอบสำคัญในการกำหนดแบบแผนการช้อปปิ้งในคริสต์ศตวรรษดังกล่าว และมีบทบาทอย่างสำคัญในการทำให้การซื้อขายสินค้าเป็นกิจกรรมความบันเทิงในรูปแบบหนึ่งขึ้นมา ข้อเสนอว่าด้วยการช้อปปิ้งเพื่อความบันเทิงนับเป็นข้อเสนอหลักในงานประวัติศาสตร์นิพนธ์ตลอดมา บทความนี้ประสงค์จะทบทวนข้อเสนอดังกล่าวโดยใช้วิธีวิทยาการตีความทางชาติพันธุ์วรรณนา บทความศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างการช้อปปิ้งกับมโนทัศน์เรื่องความสุภาพ วิเคราะห์ความหมายทางวัฒนธรรมของถนนช้อปปิ้งและบทบาทของพิธีกรรมการช้อปปิ้งในการสร้างตัวตนของสุภาพชนทั้งเจ้าของร้านค้าและลูกค้า เนื่องจากความเป็นสุภาพชนมักถูกสังเกต ศึกษาและประเมินค่าโดยบุคคลในย่านธุรกิจการค้าด้วยกันเอง บทความนี้จึงเสนอว่าการช้อปปิ้งมีความสำคัญแก่สุภาพชนในสังคมอังกฤษสมัยคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 18 ในฐานะเป็นโรงเรียนชีวิตสำหรับเรียนรู้และพัฒนาพฤติกรรมอันสุภาพของตนเอง การช้อปปิ้งมีนัยความหมายทางวัฒนธรรมที่มากกว่าการเป็นกิจกรรมความบันเทิงยามว่างเท่านั้น

Abstract

It has long been accepted that eighteenth-century England witnessed the birth of a consumer society in which the mode of consumption was changed from necessity to decency of life. Shopping culture in this period has beed explored by cultural historians and historians of retailing. They are correct when they discovered that polite culture framed eighteenth-century shopping procedure. It rendered the process of good acquisition a pleasurable activity. Thus emerged the concept of shopping for pleasure in eighteenth-century historiography. This article aims to revisit this established view. Using interpretive ethnography, it re-examines the relationship between shopping and politeness. The article analyses the cultural meanings of shopping streets and the role of shopping rituals in fashioning both the shopkeeper's and the customer's polite personality. Since one's politeness was observed, studied and evaluated by other polite shoppers, eighteenth-century shopping could be considered, the article argues, as the living school suitable for training and developing one's polite behaviour. Shopping was far more significant than being a pleasurable activity.

'It was pretty late in a summer evening when we reached the town, [...] As we passed through' the greatest streets [...],' thus comments John Cleland's Fanny Hill on her first arrival in London, 'the noise of the coaches, the hurry, the crowds of foot passengers, in short, the new scenery of the shops and houses at once pleased and amazed me.'[1] It is evident from the passage that the brilliance of shops and the crowds of shoppers are most strikingly attractive to Fanny as she first encounters London. Like Fanny, the young Scottish James Boswell was impressed by 'the glare of shops and signs' upon his entering the city and driving through the Fleet Street, one of the famous shopping streets of eighteenth-century London. He recorded his impression of the street in his *London Journal* that '[t]he noise, the crowd, the glare of shops and signs agreeably confused me.'[2] That both Fanny and Boswell were struck by shops and shoppers was not uncommon for eighteenth-century contemporaries. Rather, it represents a certain characteristic of the period: a consumer society.[3]

Thanks to Neil McKendrick's pathbreaking and seminal work in *The Birth of a Consumer Society,*[4] the subject of consumption has been established in eighteenth-century studies. McKendrick ar-

1 John Cleland, *Fanny Hill or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, ed. Peter Wagner (London, 1985), p. 42.

2 James Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal*, 1762-1763, ed. Frederick A. Pottle (London, 21952), entry for 19 Nov. 1762, p. 44.

3 P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit* (London/New York, 1967); Christopher Hill, *Reformation to Industrial Revolution: A Social and Economic History of Britain* (London, 1967); Neil McKendrick/ John Brewer/J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1982).

4 Neil McKendrick, Commercialization and the Economy, in: idem/John Brewer/John H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1982), pp. 9-194.

gues that the late eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of a consumer society in England. Building on Thorstein Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption, he contends that the middling sorts were willing to purchase much more goods previously a characteristic of superior aristocracy because they sought to imitate an aristocratic lifestyle and to emulate their acknowledged social superiors.[5] Consumption was, then, for McKendrick a rational act of English middling sorts to express their desires and desirability to compete socially with their superior aristocratic classes. McKendrick's idea of social emulation as motive to consume has been critically rejected in favour of consumption for pleasure by some historians, stressing that some decent goods, like coffee, tea and sugar, were likely expected to be desired for their own sake rather than for any social and cultural prestige possibly ascribed to them.[6]

5 Ibid.; Neil McKendrick, 'Die Ursprünge der Konsumgesellschaft: Luxus, Neid und soziale Nachahmung in der englischen Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts', in Hannes Siegrist/Hartmut Kaelble/Jürgen Kocka (eds.), *Europäische Konsumgeschichte: Zur Gesellschafts- und Kulturgeschichte des Konsums* (18. bis 20. Jahrhundert) (Frankfurt/New York, 1997), pp. 75-107; cf. John Brewer, 'Was können wir aus der Geschichte der frühen Neuzeit für die moderne Konsumgeschichte lernen?', in Siegrist/Kaelbe/Kocka (eds.), *Europäische Konsumgeschichte*, pp. 51-74.

6 Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, 1987); idem, 'Understanding traditional and modern patterns of consumption in eighteenth-century England: a character-action approach', in John Brewer/Roy Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London/New York, 1993), pp. 40-57; Stana Nenadic, 'Romanticism and the urge to consume in the first half of the 19th century', in Maxine Berg/H. Clifford (eds.), *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 208-227; idem, 'Middle Rank Consumers and Domestic Culture in Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1720-1840', *Past and Present*, 145 (1994), pp. 122-156. For a detailed discussion of the consumption of coffee, tea and sugar in early modern history, see Sydney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1985).

Regarding the subject of eighteenth-century retailing itself, shopping for pleasure has been emphasised by new source-based research pursued by recent scholars such as Claire Walsh, Helen Berry, Nancy Cox and Erin Mackie. Their studies suggest that shopping, rather than an emulative action, was a favourite leisure activity of Georgian middling sorts due to shopkeepers' fashionable shop decorations and polite services.[7] These research findings have not only challenged McKendrick's emulative consumption model, but also called into question the conventional assumption that shopping for pleasure did not exist prior to the arrival of department stores in the early nineteenth century.[8] An essay composed by the fictional narrator, a Mrs. Phoebe Crackenthorpe, in The Female Tatler (1709), in which she recounts her shopping trip at Ludgate-Hill in one afternoon, provides us an insight into this aspect:

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7 Claire Walsh, 'Shop Design and the Display of Goods in Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of Design History*, 8 (1995), pp. 157-176; idem, 'The newness of the department store: a view from the eighteenth century', in Geoffrey Crossick/Serge Jaumain (eds.), *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1959* (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 46-71; idem, 'Shops, Shopping, and the Art of Decision Making in Eighteenth-Century England', in John Styles/Amanda Vickery (eds.), *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America 1700-1830* (London/New Haven, 2006), pp. 151-177; Helen Berry, 'Polite Consumption: Shopping in Eighteenth-Century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (2002), pp. 375-394; Nancy Cox, *The Complete Tradesman: A Study of Retailing*, 1550-1820 (Aldershot, 2000); Erin Mackie, *Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator* (Baltimore/London, 1997).

8 Representatives of this traditional presumption are for examples, Dorothy Davis, *A History of Shopping* (London/Toronto, 1966); Hoh-Cheung Mui/Lorna H. Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth-Century England* (Montreal/London, 1989); Michael Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton, 1981); David Chaney, 'The department store as a cultural form', *Theory, Culture and Society,* 1 (1983), pp. 22-31.

> *This afternoon, some ladies, having an opinion of my fancy in clothes, desir'd me to accompany 'em to Ludgate-Hill, which I take to be as agreeable an amusement as a lady can pass away three or four hours in; the shops are perfect gilded theatres. The variety of wrought silks, so many changes of fine scenes; and the mercers are the performers in the opera, [...] They are the sweetest, fairest, nicest dish'd out creatures, and by their elegant address and soft speeches, you would guess 'em to be Italians [i.e. effeminate sodomites].*[9]

Mrs. Crackenthorpe considers shopping as a form of enjoyable leisure. It seems that shopping as pleasurable entertainment was essentially actualised in the eighteenth century through the staging of the commodity and the refinement of salesmanship – "the variety of wrought silks, so many changes of fine scenes," and "the mercers are the performers in the opera, [...] They are the sweetest, fairest, nicest dish'd out creatures," respectively. Without doubt, eighteenth-century shops and shopkeepers had these characters – Walsh's and Berry's evidence for London retailing activity are excellent indeed – but did the staging of commodity and the theatricality of polite sale service merely serve to realise and enhance pleasurable shopping activity? Didn't they carry with them any cultural meanings which contemporaries valorised? Can

9 *The Female Tatler*, no. 9, 25-27 July 1709, in *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from THE TATLER and THE SPECTATOR*, ed. Erin Mackie (Boston/New York, 1998), pp. 292-293.

we then 'read' shopping in order to gain insight into mentality of eighteenth-century middling sorts who regarded themselves as 'polite and commercial people'?[10]

I will try to answer these questions by adopting Clifford Geertz's interpretive ethnography. It assumes that every human behaviour signifies a certain meaning which people use to communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.[11] Thus, I will study the way eighteenth-century middling sorts made sense of the world, organised reality in their minds and expressed it in their behaviour. I will place shopping streets, shops, shopkeeping and ritualised shopping activity in the context of polite society, and try to decode their cultural meanings. Not least to mention, I consciously adopt Geertzian *interpretive* approach in order to make my paper, as far as its methodology is concerned, contrastive to Helen Berry's article on the same topic, in which she intended to approach shopping in Georgian England through *descriptive* ethnography.[12]

By eighteenth-century politeness contemporaries meant a series of social and cultural values which aimed at harmonising members of society through material elegance and refined manners. The notion valorised complaisance, civility, decorum, integrity, sociability, good-breeding, fashionability, elegance, comfortability, and correct presentation of one's own refined taste in order to

10 William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, ed. Edward Christian/ John Taylor Coleridge, 4 vols. (London, 1803-1825), here vol. 3: 'Of private wrongs', p. 326.

11 Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in *idem, The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 271994), pp. 3-30.

12 See Berry, 'Polite Consumption'.

please others. In short, 'refined yet sociable gentility', as Lawrence E. Klein precisely noted, expressed the gist of Georgian politeness.[13]

I must, not least, confess at this point that by writing this essay, I am very much indebted to two precedent works by Walsh and Berry in terms of their reconstruction of eighteenth-century retailing landscape. Therefore, I claim by no means that hitherto unknown facts have been discovered here. Although some of the primary sources used here are familiar to historians of the subject, I try to 'read' them in search of 'cultural meanings' of polite shopping. Thus, it is the methodology that differs me from other historians of the field. As it will emerge, shopping was more than a pleasurable activity. Rather, it was – what I coin – a living school for politeness.

* * * *

To which extent can we consider shopping streets as polite place? In eighteenth century London the main shopping areas were located around Fleet Street, Bond Street, Oxford Street, Regent Street, Strand, Cheapside and Cornhill.[14] Their physicality was highly appraised by foreign travellers in regard to their cleanliness, elegance and magnificence. A young French protestant from

13 Lawrence E. Klein, 'Politeness for Plebs: Consumption and social identity in early eighteenth-century England', in Ann Bermingham/John Brewer (eds.), *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text* (London/New York, 1995), p. 365. See also *idem, Shaftesbury and the culture of politeness: Moral discourse and cultural politics in early eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1994); John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth-Century* (London, 1997), esp. pp. 96-108.

14 P. D. Glennie/N. J. Thrift, 'Consumers, identities, and consumption spaces in early-modern England', *Environment and Planning A,* 28 (1996), p. 29.

Switzerland, César de Saussure, characterised the Strand, Fleet Street, Cheapside and Cornhill as 'the finest in Europe', once he visited London in the 1720s.[15] The refinement of the physicality of London's shopping streets was intensively rendered during the early years of the reign of George III in the 1760s. Many projects were released, providing for broadening pavements, street-paving with Scotch granite, street-lightening with rapeseed-oil lamps, and other adornments.[16] Moreover, there was regular street-cleaning in London, whereby retailing and political areas evidently received priority while other parts of the city were only irregularly cleaned up.[17] According to the discourse of eighteenth-century politeness, Londoners might have perceived them, at least with reference to

15 César de Sassure, *A Foreign View of England in 1725–1729: The Letters of Monsieur César de Saussure to His Family*, trans. and ed. Madame Van Muyden (London, 1902), quoted in Berry, 'Polite Consumption', p. 382.

16 Johanna Schopenhauer, *A Lady Travels: Journeys in England and Scotland from the Diaries of Johanna Schopenhauer*, trans. and ed. Ruth Michaelis-Jena/Willy Merson (London, 1988), pp. 136f.: 'On the fine natural stone of London's pavements one gets about remarkably well, [...] In the main streets the pavements are wide enough to allow six, eight or even more people to walk abreast comfortably. In the narrow crooked lanes of the actual City it is certainly not quite so easy, as the footpaths there have to be less wide. [...] [T]his quarter, [...] where [...] fashion and luxury really have no place. The splendid shops [...] are mostly to be found on those broad streets which somehow hold the balance between the hard-working City and that more elegant part of London which is given over to the pleasures of life.' For scholarly work on eighteenth-century modern landscape with special reference to London, see Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680-1780* (New York/London, 1998), pp.75-77; Dan Cruickshank/ Neil Burton, *Life in Georgian City* (London, 1990), pp. 13-17; Paul Langford, 'The Uses of Eighteenth-Century Politeness', *Transaction of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (2002), pp. 324-325.

17 See Penelope J. Cornfield, 'Walking the City Streets: The Urban Odyssey in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Urban History*, 16 (1990), pp. 148-150; Rosemary Sweet, *The English Town, 1680–1840: Government, Society and Culture* (Harlow, 1999), p. 241.

their refined physicality, as one of 'polite' venues, along with other polite places such as assemblies, pleasure gardens and coffee houses.

The polite physicality of shopping pavement played a key role in enhancing polite ramble, whereby 'comfortability' and 'gentleman-like ease' formed its pivotal characteristics. As Jon Stobart remarked, the physical mobility of the middling sorts in urban areas had been considerably restricted on account of the poor condition of the unpaved streets which had been usually muddy.[18] Walking was a risky business. Attempts to overcome this obstacle were manifested in material artefact of early eighteenth century's footwear. Pattens, clogs, and other devices were designed to keep feet above the dirty and wet ground level.[19] It would have been uneasy for contemporaries to ramble through dirty, and therefore impolite, streets with high-heeled footwear which highly likely caused wearers feel stiff in their legs soon. To this observation, we might not be able to define shopping prior to the enactment of street improvements in the second half of the century as 'polite activity'. However, these 'impolite' characteristics gradually disappeared as the refined pavement came into being. Pattens and clogs were now redundant thanks to the cleanliness of shopping streets.[20] Consequently, the late eighteenth-century footwear fashion experienced a new style towards low heels,

18 Jon Stobart, 'Shopping Streets as Social Space: Leisure, Consumerism and Improvement in an Eighteenth-Century Country Town', *Urban History*, 25 (1998), pp. 3–21; *idem,* 'Culture Versus Commerce: Societies and Spaces for Elites in Eighteenth-Century Liverpool', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 28 (2002), pp. 471-485.

19 Peter McNeil/Giorgio Riello, 'The Art and Science of Walking: Gender, Space, and the Fashionable Body in the Long Eighteenth-Century', *Fashion Theory*, 9 (2005), p. 179.

20 *Ibid.*

providing greater comfortability.[21] This change in footwear design could have helped middling sorts perform their walking in a more elegant manner. The pedal comfortability and the elegance of streets literally made shopping a polite activity for eighteenth-century people. In this context, we might agree with Paul Langford when he claimed that elegantly prettifying the streets rendered shopping venues become boundaries of 'polite zone' for 'a polite and commercial people'.[22]

Entering this 'polite zone' of shopping activity, one was expected to follow some codes of polite manner and social practices, not different from frequenting assembly rooms, parading in pleasure gardens, conversing in coffee houses or dancing at balls. Obviously, crossing the threshold of shopping streets, ladies and gentlemen had to dress themselves in a polite style, say, elegantly and fashionably. In the 1770s, shopkeepers' testimonies at Old Bailey, London's Central Criminal Court, showed that visitors frequenting their shops seemed, for instance, 'by his dress and manner [to be] the gentleman', or 'his dress, person, and appearance were so good'.[23] One Old Bailey case in 1736 provided insightful information on cultural meanings of well-dressing. A certain shopkeeper Thomas Wiseham, testified to the court how the prisoner Avis Nutton came into his shop and stole his borders:

21 This could have been one reason for clarifying why genteel women, particularly in the late eighteenth century, enjoyed walking the city in an enormous scale. See Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (London/New Haven, 1998), p. 250.

22 Langford, 'The Uses of Eighteenth-Century Politeness', p. 325.

23 Old Bailey Proceedings online <www.oldbaileyonline.org> (hereafter OBP), 8 Sept. 1773, William Williamson (t17730908-7); OBP, 16 Sept. 1778, John Frederick Ludovick Gabelhousan (t17780916-75).

> *[She] asked me for a little Beer. As she appeared well dress, I [...] went down myself to draw her some Beer; she [...] drank the Beer and I asked her if she would have any more she curt'sied and said, if I pleased she would. I went down again, and gave her Beer the second time, which she drank, and then went out of the Shop as fast as she could, without buying anything, but before she went, she told me if I thought she had robbed me I might search her. I told her she appeared to me to be another sort of a Woman. As soon as she was gone I missed the Borders.*[24]

Appropriateness of garb had interesting connotations. Dressing fashionably made it easier to deceive the shopkeeper, whereby elegant dress forged and fabricated creditworthiness of the thief-cum-customer.[25] Wiseham failed to identify Nutton as a shoplifter in time, since he took for granted tasteful attire as signifier for a trustful customer rather than a wicked thief. This, in turn, implies that dressing politely was one normal code of manner for entering shopping arena. Like attending other polite activities, shopping was a social round, an activity for which participants had to dress appropriately.

Furthermore, mundane shopping arena of the eighteenth century was transformed into a polite realm by a set of polite

24 OBP, 21 July 1736, Avis Nutton (t17360721-3).

25 Cf. Tammy Whitlock, *Crime, Gender and Consumer Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 134, 183; John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven/London, 2007), p.52.

social manners, performed by polite pedestrians. Johanna Schopenhauer impressively recorded that 'the custom of the English, when they meet people, always to give way to those on their right, greatly eases walking about and does away with much pushing and jostling', and went on to gender aspect that:

> *Ladies [...] are always permitted to walk along the house side of the pavements, [...]. To begin with, a strange lady finds it odd when he who guides her through London, lets go of her arm the moment they have crossed the street, and passes behind her to change sides. Quite soon, however, one becomes convinced of the usefulness of this national courtesy.*[26]

The etiquette of 'giving/taking the wall' was based on the core values of politeness, namely making oneself be 'open' and 'agreeable' to everyone.[27] The polite physicality of shopping streets made themselves open and agreeable to fashionable shoppers who customarily behaved themselves politely to one another.

26 Shopenhauer, A Lady Travels, p. 137.

27 One eighteenth-century conduct book explained that '[p]oliteness is a system of behaviour polished by good breeding, and disposes us on all occasions to render ourselves agreeable. It does not constitute merit, it shews it to advantage, as it equally regulates that manner of speaking, and acting, which convey[s] grace and command[s] respect.', quoted in Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination,* p. 102. Cf. Joseph Addison on different manners in country and city in *The Spectator*, ed. Donald Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1965), no. 119, 17 July 1711, p.486-487: 'Several obliging deferencies, condescensions and submissions, [...] were first of all brought up among politer part of mankind who lived in courts and cities, and distinguished themselves from the rustick part of the species [...] by such a mutual complaisance and intercourse of civilities. [...] [T]herefore [...] a certain openness of behaviour [is] the height of good breeding.'

Significantly, these contributed to constructing shopping street as one of polite venues in the eighteenth century.

It is clear, as Peter Borsay argued in his influential work on culture and society in eighteenth-century English provincial towns, that recreation was of minor importance to the participants in polite activities, such as theatre-going, dancing, and walking, when compared with the opportunities these pastimes provided for undiluted socialising and personal display. Borsay contended that the socialising function was exclusively concentrated in dancing at assemblies and parading in pleasure gardens.[28] Being excluded from Borsay's seminal work, the socialising function of eighteenth-century shopping has been ignored by most historians. Yet, I propose that experiences in polite shopping streets had much to do with socialisation, too. At the centre of socialising process stood a principle, according to Borsay, that 'the company were propelled into contact with each other to gossip and flirt, to see and be seen.'[29] For eighteenth-century shopping streets were occupied by fashionably dressed people comporting themselves in a genteel manner, it was in this circumstance a good opportunity for shoppers to study current fashion and correct polite manners. Jane Austen regarded her shopping expedition in Bath as 'learning what was mostly worn and buying clothes of the latest fashion.'[30] For Edward Ward, the author of the *London Spy*, a stroll in the Royal Exchange in 1698, a commercial institution of late-seventeenth-century London, was an ideal example to study the citizens

28 Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 151-172.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

30 Quoted in John Towner, *An Historical Geography of Recreation and Tourism in the Western World, 1540-1940* (Chichester, 1996), p. 83.

who were for him 'the best living library to instruct mankind that ever you met with.'[31] According to Samuel Johnson, 'the full tide of human existence' could be found at Charing-cross.[32] This was summarily a discourse of 'learning' and 'socialising' inherent in experience won by 'seeing' and 'gazing into' other polite company. Shopping streets were perceived as a 'living library' providing information on fashionability and correct polite manners.

While one was seeing the others, he or she was being seen, too. Yet, what was then the object of scrutiny? The answer to this question is manifested in James Gillray's caricature from the year 1796, in which he satirically allegorises 'Politesse du Grande Monde' in Bond Street. In this satirical print, nothing is more ostentatious than the inverted cosmos in regard to polite walking-manners and gender aspect. Five fashionable ladies are walking *literally* 'on' the shopping Bond Street, whereas the pavement is taken up by gentlemen. Instead of surrendering the wall to the ladies, Gillray's gentlemen take it shamelessly, forcing the 'fair sex' to walk on the street. This impolite behaviour is, in turn, directly observed by one lady holding a spyglass in her hand. Similar appraisal could be found earlier, as Samuel Johnson recounted it to James Boswell:

> In the last Age, when my mother lived in London, there were two sets of people, those who gave the wall, and those who took it; the peaceable and the

31 Edward Ward, *The London Spy: The Vanities and Vices of the Town Exposed to View,* ed. Arthur L. Hayward (London, 1927), p. 125.

32 James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Claude Rawson (New York, 1992), p. 608.

> quarrelsome. When I returned to Lichfield, after having been in London, my mother asked me, whether I was one of those who gave the wall, or those who took it. Now it is fixed that every man keeps to the right; or, if one is taking the wall, another yields it; and it is never a dispute.[33]

Upon his walking the city of London, Johnson must have certainly gazed into other company; otherwise he would not have been able to make a comment as appeared in the last sentence. Johnson himself was an observer. Gillray's satirical print and Johnson's anecdote suggest that in eighteenth-century shopping streets, social manners of the passers-by were usually on trial; they were the very object of scrutiny. Since one's politeness was observed, studied and evaluated by other polite passers-by, eighteenth-century shopping streets could be considered, I argue, as the living school suitable for training and developing one's polite behaviour, like other polite recreational venues.

* * * *

Just as the shopping street had a cultural connotation, so did the shop itself. The conventional assumption that eighteenth-century shopkeepers wasted no capital in fitting up their shops to entice customers has been successfully rejected in recent historiography. Jon Stobart and Neil McKendrick have shown that their Richard Lindsey and Nicholas Blithe, two candle-makers from

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 80f.

Coventry, as well as the famous Josiah Wedgwood possessed a 'glass room', furnished up with a tea table, upholstered chairs, and a mirror, in order to dazzle their customers and to convince them of the attractiveness of their products. Likewise, Claire Walsh has shown how Martha Braithwaite, a goldsmith in London, used two enormous glass-fronted cupboards to provide her customers the impressive visual focus for the plates sold in her shop.[34] Still, as it will emerge in this section, most eighteenth-century shops decorated in an elegant style had a wider cultural significance than these historians have admitted.

To understand the cultural meanings of shop fitting, I propose that we should consider it in the light of modern consumption pattern emerging at the end of the seventeen century as well as the polite culture of eighteenth-century England, as contemporaries did not separate commerce from politeness when they appeared to describe themselves.[35]

The eighteenth century witnessed a revolution in the way that Britons bought and sold the goods of everyday life. Goods become valuable for their novelty and

34 Neil McKendrick, 'Josiah Wedgwood and the Commercialization of the Potteries', in idem/Brewer/Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society,* pp. 100-145; Jon Stobart, 'Leisure and Shopping in the Small Towns of Georgian England: A Regional Approach', *Journal of Urban History*, 31 (2005), pp. 479-503; idem/Andrew Hann, 'Sites of Consumption: The Display of Goods in Provincial Shops in Eighteenth-Century England', *Cultural and Social History*, 2 (2005), pp. 165-187; for Claire Walsh's excellent research, see footnote no. 7 above. Though Walsh has also emphasized attempts of eighteenth-century retailers to create the pleasurable shopping environment through fitting up shop, her main argument seems to me that the pleasurable shopping ambience ultimately served to keep customers in the shop as long as possible which, in turn, increased the purchasing opportunities.
35 Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 1-7; Klein, 'Politeness for plebes'.

fashionability.[36] As Chandra Mukerji noted, at the end of the seventeenth century 'people faced choices in their purchases and had to develop some norms to limit and guide accumulation.'[37] In this context, Daniel Defoe recommended a tradesman that he 'extend his knowledge in every kind of goods, [...] he may have the requisite judgement; for otherwise he will not only lose the customers for want of proper goods, but he will very much lose by the goods which he lays in for sale, there being no demand for them.'[38] At the same time, 'polite' customers had to learn to restrain their indulgence of consuming passions to avoid becoming fashion victims, as it was not viable to always be in the latest trend which changed rapidly.[39] To elude the enslavement to the fashion market, Joseph Addison, the ideologue of politeness, presented the acquisition of imaginative objects in contrast to acquisition of property in his essay series 'The Pleasures of the Imagination' (1712), in which he theorises about how the visual faculty could gratify material desire of the 'man of polite imagination': 'Our sight may be considered as a more delicate [...] kind of touch that spreads itself over an infinite multitude of bodies. [...] It gives him, indeed, a kind of property in everything he sees.' The gaze of the polite shopping enthusiasts

36 Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington, 1988), pp. 19-21, 31-43; Neil McKendrick, 'Introduction: The Birth of a Consumer Society', in *idem*/Brewer/Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, p. 1: 'Where once material possessions were prized for their durability, they were now increasingly prized for their fashionability'.

37 Chandra Mukerji, *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism* (New York, 1983), pp. 8f.

38 Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (London, 1738), p. 77.

39 That the indulgence of consuming passions may mean enslavement to the fashion market was reflected in Fanny Hill's reminiscence of her first stroll through the streets of London that '[e]very sign or shop was a gazing-trap.'; see Cleland, *Fanny Hill,* p. 44. Cf. Mackie, *Market à la Mode*, pp. 47-54, 71-91

fed on images of things.[40] In this cultural circumstance, it is small wonder that the retail shop was expected to be designed for the display of information that was predominantly visual, given the fact that for contemporaries looking was a means for possession as well as knowledge. (I will turn back to this aspect at the end of this section.)

Yet, why were eighteenth-century shopkeepers so enthusiastic about displaying their goods in a theatrical manner, such as fashionable goods being shown in glazed shop windows, as some historians remarked?[41] In relation to shop decoration and the display of goods, we should bear in mind that politeness and refinement had little value unless they were put on display, to be shown to others. As a popular manual from the last decades of the century put it, '[t]o render us respectable in a social light, the accomplishments of the mind must be heightened and set off to advantage by proper ornament of the body, and the attractive graces of deportment and behaviour.'[42] As politeness concerned both the personal refinement and the techniques for displaying it to the greatest effect, so it was as much concerned with the spectators as with the actors. The displaying aspect of politeness formed, I argue, a cultural condition for eighteenth-century shopkeepers to furnish their shops in a theatrical manner. In this context, a retailer decorated his outlet to represent his refined taste to his customers, along with providing them the information of goods and 'new arrivals'.

40 *The Spectator*, no. 411, 21 June 1712. Cf. William Walker, 'Ideology and Addison's Essays on the Pleasures of the Imagination', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 24 (2000), pp. 65-84.

41 See, for example, Walsh, 'Shops, Shopping', p. 153.

42 Quoted in Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 107.

Let us begin with the forefront of the shop. Eighteenth-century tradesmen knew exactly what methods they adopted to attract customers' attention. First and foremost, as glazed sash windows became widespread in the seventeenth century, they were quickly taken up by some shopkeepers.[43] The shopkeepers elegantly trimmed the window by covering each pane of their shop windows with their most precious products. For instance, a contemporary recorded that the booksellers exposed 'copies of the most expensive works' in their windows, whereas the goldsmiths and jewellers 'indulge the publick with view of diamonds, pearls, rubies, emeralds, gold, and silver, in most fascinating quantities.' 'But,' as the story goes, 'the Watch-makers and Glassmen eclipse all competitors in the display of fanciful clocks set in alabastor, or molu, gold and silver, and the richest cut glass lighted by patent lamps at night.'[44] Even the shopkeepers selling mundane objects of much less value, like candle-makers, did know exactly 'how to show off their wares prettily.'[45]

What is significant to our purpose is word choice or discourse which contemporaries used to describe window display, an aspect that has gained less attention by historians of the field. The products shown in shop fronts were characterised as 'the most expensive', 'those of the best', 'most fascinating', being placed together 'prettily' by each shopkeeper. Such wording reflects retailer's response to two cultural developments of the eighteenth

43 Walsh, 'Shops, Shopping', pp. 152f.; *idem,* 'Shop Design', p. 159f.; For a fuller discussion of shop windows, see Cox, *The Complete Tradesman*, pp. 77-83; Nancy Cox/Karin Dannehl, *Perceptions of Retailing in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 154-160.
44 James Peller Malcolm, *Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London during the Eighteenth-Century*, 2 vols., (London, 21810), vol. 2, pp. 402-403.
45 Schopenhauer, *A Lady Travels*, p. 138.

century. Firstly, by allowing only items, which were 'those of the best', to be shown in the shop front, the shopkeepers were not merely stimulating their clients' consuming passion, but were also providing them guidance on what sort of products were now fashionable and worthwhile for them to buy in the bourgeoning market of luxury goods.[46] This was a response to the emergence of a consumer society, in which people faced numerous choices in their purchases and would have needed guidance from shopkeepers. Secondly, this careful selection of 'the most expensive works' certainly represented the shopkeepers' refined taste and showed how fashionable they and their shops were. Taste directed the production of the display window. More interestingly, contemporaries usually praised a shop front for its 'prettiness'. J. P. Malcolm noted in 1810 that 'the shopkeeper prides himself on the neatness of his shop-front.'[47] Clearly, the message that shopkeepers wished to transmit through display window was 'being neat'. As Amanda Vickery has convincingly argued, 'neat but not gaudy' was the keystone of what contemporaries called politeness.[48] Thus, eighteenth-century shopkeepers expressed their politeness through their shop front. The display window was therefore purposeful (guiding and attracting customers) as well as symbolic (representing a shopkeeper's politeness). Being thus produced, shop front served as an instrument of action and of thought. It was, in this

46 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 140: 'Booksellers, too, provide something new each day, whether books just off the press, beautiful bibliophile editions of older writers or precious engravings, [...] The so-called stationers, who deal in the multitude of things required for writing or drawing, show a thousand new articles daily'

47 Malcolm, *Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London*, vol. 2, p. 402.

48 Amanda Vickery, '"Neat and Not Too Showey": Words and Wallpaper in Regency England', in *idem*/John Styles (eds.), *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America 1700-1830* (New Haven/London, 2006), pp. 201-222.

light, a site in which shopkeepers conjoined everyday practices (commerce) and ideology of the time (politeness).[49]

In addition to display window, interior design of the shop was a crucial platform for the shopkeeper to perform their politeness. As the century wore on, more and more shops had many fittings and better facilities that those who came in could shop in comfort. In his *Complete English Tradesman*, Daniel Defoe contended that '[i]t is a modern custom, and wholly unknown to our ancestors, to have tradesmen lay out two-thirds of their fortune in fitting up their shops,' such as 'painting and gilding, fine shelves, shutters, boxes, glass-doors, sashes, and the like.'[50] To provide a concrete example of what had been going on in London, he described the fittings of a pasty's cook shop that had cost £300 in 1710. The fittings included sash-windows (all of looking-glass plates), galley-tiles in panels, branches of candlesticks, glass lanterns, and six fine large silver salvers to serve sweet-meat.[51] Even allowing for some exaggeration, the fittings were not significantly different from those listed in some contemporary inventories of London retailers.[52] In addition, a cursory reading of shoplifting cases brought to the Old Bailey during 1700-1800 shows that numerous shops possessed 'show glass' or glass-fronted cupboard

49 For a classic example of the discussion of the relationship between space, ideology, and human practices, consult Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, 1991), esp. ch. 1.

50 Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, p. 269. Defoe's detailed discussion of 'fine shop and fine shew' can be found in chapter 22 of his *Complete English Tradesman*.

51 *Ibid*, pp. 271f.

52 Claire Walsh's reference to the inventory of William Monsford, a draper who died in 1721, shows that he had in his shop a 'pier glasse and 3 glass sconces, 4 leather stools, 2 chairs and cushions, a silk curtain and 10 indian pictures. See Walsh, 'Shop Design', p. 167.

in which goods were neatly put to display at best.[53] Lastly, visual sources from the late eighteenth century, like Rudolf Ackermann's *Repository of Arts, Literature, Fashions, Manufactures & c. (1809-1828),* offer us an insight into how a standard model for a showroom could be. Consider an illustration of Josiah Wedgwood's porcelain showroom in London, for instance. The spacious exhibition room was furnished with elegant stools, chairs, tables, glass-fronted cupboards, and looking-glasses as well as artificial lighting from lanterns, candles, and wall lights, all providing for both pleasurable goods inspection and comfortable seating-accommodation under dramatic ambience.[54] Thus designed, it was suggestive of a shop having to do more than just to sell its stock.

This does not mean, however, that excessive decoration was justifiable. 'I should not except so much against it,' argued the Puritan Daniel Defoe, 'if it was not carried on to such an excess.' Defoe did not condemned fine shop per se. Rather, it was a too showy one which he called 'gay shop' that became the object of his condemnation. This is because Defoe believed that a great expense of painting and gilding a shop could unnecessarily reduce the stock of shopkeeper which he could have appropriately spent for suppling goods for his fashionable customers. Also interestingly, Defoe compared 'gay shop' to 'French humour'. According to him, 'the French are eminent for making a fine outside, when perhaps within they want necessaries; and indeed a gay shop and a mean stock is something like one of those people with his laced ruffles

53 This is based on my own cursory reading of around 100 shoplifting cases at the Old Bailey between 1700-1800. My searching criteria were as follow: OBP>Theft>Shoplifting>Keyword(s): 'show glass'.

54 For writing about the dramatic effect caused by shop fittings and artificial lightening, I heavily reply on Walsh, 'The newness of the department store', pp. 60-62.

without a shirt.'[55] As Michèle Cohen has noted, in the eighteenth century 'frenchness' connoted effeminacy and impoliteness thanks to its over-emphasis on luxury and lacking in self-restrain.[56] Thus, the reason of Defoe's condemnation of 'gay shop' as a 'French humour' was that it tended to be too showy, and therefore 'impolite'. In fact, Defoe preferred having shop furnished up 'decently'. By decent shop he meant 'the well-fill'd presses and shelves, and the great choice of rich and fashionable goods,' instead of creating needless expenses of painting and gilding. Good choice of wares would bring shop into reputation. Finally, he contended that 'decency in all outward appearances, whether in habit or in fitting up a shop, is an infallible sign of a right head and a sound judgment.' In other words, a decent shop suggested 'a right head' in case of a shopkeeper who was clever enough to avoid creating gay show of shelves, but to fill them up to display his customers that he had good credit and connections with suppliers. It was a sign of 'a sound judgment'[57] in case of a retailer who possessed refined taste, preferring decency to luxury in fitting up his shop. In short, it was a sign of shopkeeper's reputation and politeness.

To what extent can we marry decent appearance of shops with broader polite culture of eighteenth-century England? Firstly, it was polite culture itself that was the cultural motor of shopkeeper's meticulous selection of display fittings and furnishings. Besides their representative function, well-filled shelves and cupboards

55 Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, pp. 270, 275.

56 Michèle Cohen, 'Manliness, effeminacy and the French: gender and the construction of national character in eighteenth-century England', in *idem*/Tim Hitchcock (eds.), *English Masculinities 1660-1800* (Harlow, 1999), pp. 44-61; *idem, Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1996).

57 Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, pp. 273f.

being set in a spacious show room was a production of space corresponded to the imaginary consumption, as theorized by Joseph Addison, which I have mentioned at the beginning of this section. In the process against possessive individualism,[58] Addison proposed that the sight gave the polite customer 'a kind of Property in everything he sees.'[59] The pleasures of the imagination were enjoyed as the pleasures of property. The 'man of Polite imagination' was visually aroused by 'what is Great, Uncommon, or Beautiful.' By greatness Addison meant 'the Largeness of a whole View, considered as one entire Piece. [...] If there be a Beauty or Uncommonness joyned with this this Grandeur [...], the Pleasures still grows upon us, as it arises from more than a single Principle.'[60] It was highly likely this aesthetic ideal that the shopkeeper kept in mind when he fitted up his shop, providing his customers agreeable view of greatness, novelty, and beauty in the world of goods. Consider Mr Blader's porcelain show room as an example for how well-designed shop would have satisfied the imagination of polite customers (fig.4). An Addisonian polite shopper visiting the exhibition rooms would be pleasingly astonished at unbound view of long show rooms one after another, connected by glass doors, providing 'the largeness of whole view' of all rooms in the upper floor. Sizeable glass-fronted showcases could offer the customer pleasurable views of goods shown in them. In addition, novel fashionable products, such as chandeliers, chinaware, and glassware,

58 See Lawrence E. Klein, 'The Political Significance of 'Politeness' in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain', in Gordon Schochet (ed.), *Politics, Politeness, and Patriotism* (Washington, D.C., 1993), pp. 73–108; *idem,* 'Property and Politeness in the Early Eighteenth-century Whig Moralists: The Case of the Spectator', in John Brewer/Susan Staves (eds.), *Early Modern Conceptions of Property* (London, 1995), pp. 221–233.

59 *The Spectator*, no. 411, 21 June 1712.

60 *The Spectator*, no. 412, 23 June 1712.

are agreeably presented in most fascinating quantities to gratify the customer's curiosity, not mention to the beauty of such fashionable goods which could, in Addison's words, 'immediately diffuses a secret Satisfaction and Complacency thro' the Imagination.'[61] Thus designed, eighteenth-century shop was a response to polite visual culture of the time.

Secondly, the aesthetic shop design would have reminded polite customers of the gorgeous interior decoration of other polite venues, such as country houses, assembly rooms, and theatres. (Remember that eighteenth-century decent shops were, for instance, furnished up with tea tables, upholstered chairs, looking-glasses, and lanterns – similar to the atmosphere of the theatres.) Just as in the eighteenth century visiting such public places was perceived by contemporaries as an expression of social status,[62] so browsing around a fashionable shop could be an utterance of fashioning and asserting social position for both shopkeepers and shoppers. Some shopkeepers went even further when they categorised their visitors into the welcomed customers and the suspected shoplifters,

61 My analysis of the effect of well-designed shop on the satisfaction of the imagination of polite shoppers is based on Joseph Addison's essay series 'The Pleasures of the Imagination' publish in The Spectator, no. 411-414. In fact, greatness, novelty, and beauty were leading aesthetic principles for eighteenth-century polite people. Francis Place's autobiography is one example. Proudly reminiscing about the opening day (April 8th, 1801) of his new tailor's shop at Charing Cross in London, Place recorded that his shop had a frontage 'as elegant as the place would permit. Each of the panes of glass in the shop front cost me three pounds, and two in the door four pounds each. [...] such shop fronts were then uncommon, I think mine were the largest plate glass windows in London if indeed they were not the first.' In this passage, three key elements of his shopfront were emphasized as causes for Place's pride: elegance, uncommonness, and greatness. See Francis Place, *The Autobiography of Francis Place* (1771-1854), ed. Mary Thale (Cambridge, 1972), p. 215.

62 See Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance*, chs. 3-4.

who were not deserved to appear in their shop.[63] As for the customers themselves, we have, for example, an anecdote published in The Female Tatler, representing the habits and personal display of some clients in an India house: 'I ever saw [...] a couple quality of Quakers. They move in, like disdainful duchesses [...], one of them vouchsafed us a bow, instead of a curtsey. Emilia and I were not a little pleased to remark [their] pride and singularity in dress, speech and behaviour [...]. Their clothes were costly [...], they showed themselves equally vain, and that they had taken as much pains to be particular as other ladies do to appear like the rest of the world.'[64] Even allowing for satirical tone of the narrator, it reminds us of ladies' performance at balls and in theatres, asserting their social status through personal display.

Thirdly, some historians suggested that the alluring ambience of eighteenth-century shops ultimately served to keep customers within as long as possible which, in turn, increased the purchasing opportunity. Yet, this was not necessarily the case. As we have also been informed by recent historiography, there was for eighteenth-century shoppers no obligation to buy. (We will see this in a moment.) However, it was certain that prolonged shopping time would enlarge opportunity in which shopkeepers and their clients were pursuing polite dialogue, and, thus, socialising one another. Shrewd shoplifters took advantage of a long talk to keep shopkeepers busy and to wait for the right moment to steal. Ralph

63 See, for example, Daniel Defoe, *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders,* ed. G. A. Starr (Oxford, 1981), pp.269-270. For a confirmation of the authenticity of Defoe's fiction as a useful evidence for what might have been happening in eighteenth-century shops, see Cox/Dannehl, *Perceptions of Retailing in Early Modern England*, pp. 159-160.

64 The Female Tatler, no. 67, 7-9 Dec. 1709, in The *Commerce of Everyday Life*, p. 295.

Parker came, for instance, into John Hunt's cheese shop in March 1713, 'and tasted several cheeses, pretending to buy.' An accomplice with him confessed that he 'went in on purpose to amuse [the female shopkeeper] with Tasting and Talk, while he stole the Cheese.' In August 1726, Richard Stone, a textile shop-owner, testified at the Old Bailey Court how 'a pretty deal of Discourse' with two lady customers had cost him: 'Two Women came to the Shop, and ask'd for Black and White Three Quarter Mantua. They said they came from Reading, and I knowing several in that Town, it occasion'd a pretty deal of Discourse, and while we were talking, my Prentice came in with a Piece of Green Sattin in a Wrapper, [...] When the Women were gone, I ask'd him where he had put the Sattin, he said he laid it on the Counter; - We search'd for it, but could find nothing but the Wrapper.'[65] Upon visiting a shop, conversing with the shopkeeper was a norm. What I have been trying to argue is only that there was possibility that the eighteenth-century shop formed another polite venue for conversing and socialising. But how the socialisation could be enacted during the shopping expedition is going to be explored in the following section.

* * * *

Thanks to recent historiography of shopping practices in the eighteenth century, we have known that shopping then was neither as straightforward nor as familiar an activity as one might assume. Rather, it associated with sociability, display and the

65 OBP, 7 April 1714, Ralph Parker (t17140407-12); OBP, 31 Aug. 1726, Katherine Fitzpatrick (t17260831-22); also see OBP, 30 May 1759, Thomas Hoskins, William Lloyd (t17590530-13).

exercise of discerning taste.[66] What follows is a snapshot of the eighteenth-century shopping practice: When well-off and polite customers entered a shop, they would first have been cheerfully greeted by shop attendants and have been invited to take a seat at the counter. They could customarily ask for some drinks like beer or tea. Having taken refreshments, the customers would move to browse the shop. Here, they would first be accompanied by an apprentice who could provide a considerable knowledge of his stock and was usually skilful in the art of flattery and reassurance to urge the shoppers to consume; then they would be more intensively consulted by the shop-owner himself, upon which they could have exercised their discerning taste in selecting an item that was aesthetically pleasing and decorous. If the polite shoppers found an agreeable product, they would bargain for better price with the shop-owner; if not, they could leave the shop without purchasing and proceed with their shopping expedition, visiting shops one after another.[67] Shopping was then a ritualised pattern of behaviour. Yet, did this ritualised shopping practice say anything about 'a polite and commercial people' and the society they inhabited?

66 The most excellent essay on shopping practice in the eighteenth century is, by far, the work of Helen Berry, see Berry, 'Polite Consumption'; Also see Walsh, 'Shop Design'; *idem*, 'The newness of the department store'; *idem*, 'Shops, Shopping'; Stobart, 'Leisure and Shopping in the Small Towns'; *idem*/Hann, 'Sites of Consumption'; Glennie/Thrift, 'Consumers, identities, and consumption spaces'; Cox/Dannehl, Perceptions of Retailing in Early Modern England, ch. 7 and 8.

67 Examples of primary records on each step of the shopping process are as follows. For taking refreshments, see OBP, 10 Sept. 1783, Ann Pantoni, Hannah Green (t17830910-65); OBP, Sarah Thacker, 12 Jan 1785 (t17850112-69). For browsing and being consulted by apprentice and shopkeeper, see La Roche, *Sophie in London*, entry for 28. September 1786, pp. 237-238.

First and foremost, sociability was ubiquitous throughout the ritualised pattern of shopping behaviour. Conversation between shopper and retailer at the counter was a keystone of eighteenth-century shopping process, emphasising in turn the assumption that shopping could be regarded as a polite activity.[68] Yet, what kind of 'small talk' was being conducted at the very first step of shopping process? And what meanings did it carry with it in regard to polite culture? In July 1663 Samuel Pepys visited Mr. William Wotton's shoe shop. Pepys' diary entry tells us nothing about his purchase. Rather, it revolves around a notorious actor, Henry Harris, whose professional life currently attracted the City's dwellers.[69] Once again, in October 1663 Pepys 'called at Wotton's and tried some shoes, but he had none to fit me. He tells me that by the Duke of York's persuasion, Harris is come again to Sir W Davenant upon his terms that he demanded, which will make him very high and proud.'[70] In this regard, shop became a site where one could get to know not only the latest fashion, but also the latest news about town and its dwellers, not mention to topics what we might call 'talk of the town', as recorded in Pepys' diary.

That the eighteenth-century shop was a platform for communication reminds us of communicative character of coffee houses of the same period. As one certain contemporary rhetorically asked, 'where can young gentlemen, or shopkeepers more innocently and advantageously spend an hour or two in the evening, than at a coffee-house? Where they shall be sure to meet

68 See Berry, 'Polite Consumption'.

69 Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: A New and Complete Transcription*, ed. Robert Latham/W. Matthews, 11 vol. (London, 1970-1983), vol. 4, entry for 22 July 1663, p. 239.

70 *Ibid*, vol. 4, entry for 24 Oct. 1663, p. 347.

company, and, by the custom of the house, not such as at other places, stingy and reserved to themselves, but free and communicative?'[71] In regard to the communication and openness, shop did not significantly much differ from its counterpart. Like coffee houses, eighteenth-century shops linked people to the topicality of the city, and offered opportunity for human contact in which the shoppers could have intercourse with one another or with the shopkeeper, though we must not exaggerate this to a point that eighteenth-century shop was also a component of the 'public sphere' according to Jürgen Habermas' model of 'bourgeois society'.[72] Eighteenth-century shops seemed to be, therefore, not merely a site for business transaction, but also a site for sociability and everyday social intercourse. Indeed, social conversation was regarded as one of the foremost civilising influences. As William Hutton wrote in 1780 that '[m]an is evidently formed for society: the intercourse of one with another, like two blocks of marble in friction, reduces the rough prominences of behaviour, and gives a polish to the manners.'[73] Since politeness, as John Brewer noted, had its own special place, 'preferring settings which, if neither wholly private nor completely public, were unquestionably convivial',[74]

71 'Coffee-Houses Vindicated: In Answer to the Late Published Character of a Coffee-House', repr. in *The Harleian Miscellany, 6* (1745), p. 435, quoted in Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance*, p. 269.

72 See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Ma., 1989), esp. p. 25, where he defines the 'public sphere' as 'a forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion.'

73 William Hutton, *An History of Birmingham to the End of the Year 1780* (Birmingham, 1781), p. 259.

74 Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 102f.

eighteenth-century shops played a key role in producing the smooth emollience of polite personality.

Moreover, polite manners had to be exercised to please in company from both sides of the shop counter. However, sociability within shopping process could become object of criticism, when civility and complaisance went beyond the boundaries of appropriate politeness and threatened to instigate evil in trade. The caricature *A Morning Ramble*, or __ *The Milliners Shop* (1782) shows contemporary attitude towards sociability in the ritualised shopping practise, particularly when it crossed the line of decorum. Two fashionable gentlemen visit a milliner's shop whose beautiful shopkeepers are outstandingly overdressed with raised hair and laced head and are perhaps using their flirtatious charms to call the gentlemen's attentions. The gentleman on the counter is flirting by dint of seductive gaze with the woman behind the counter who replies to his flirtatiousness with timid endearing glance. His erotic intention is emphasised by the position of his left hand which he places between his thighs. The other gentleman standing at the counter is probably trying to seduce one of the female shop attendants into accompanying him to a ball, for he is offering her a 'Masquerade Ticket'. Not least are there four boxes put in the wall cupboard; each contains accoutrements essential to women's hats. Each box is differently labelled: (from top to bottom) 'feathers', 'love', 'coxcomb', and 'mode'. Interestingly, three of them are well locked, but the box 'love' is not, probably stressing its easier accessibility. This implies that love is also put on sale in the milliner's shop and gentlemen could acquire it during their 'morning ramble'. In fact, eighteenth-century milliner girls were notorious for using their charms to seduce male

customers into buying. Edward Ward, for instance, had to contend himself with 'the charming witches' of the milliner's shops of the New Exchange, not to pay 'a double price' to 'the prettiest of the women'.[75] The caricature, thus, does not satire the sociable shopping per se, but rather the social intercourse that might endanger commercial virtue. This criticism echoed Steele-Addisonian attitude towards trade business, in which commerce was not the cause of moral corruption, but had rather great contribution to the refinement of taste and manners.[76] Thus, in 1711 Joseph Addison enthusiastically welcomed the Royal-Exchange and its participants (both merchants and customers),[77] whereas Richard Steele condemned the young fops at the milliner's shops who were 'lolling upon the counters longer than they needed' and were 'straining for some ingenious Ribaldry to say to the young Woman who helps them on',[78] like the two men about town in the caricature recently discussed.

In short, conversing politely at the counter would certainly impart the communicative characteristic to the shops, providing the shoppers an opportunity to polish manners and to let themselves be informed of current issues in town. However, social commentators promptly raised their quizzical eyebrows towards the over-sociability in regard to gallantry and flirtatiousness. This suggests that eighteenth-century middling sorts know exactly how

75 Ward, The London Spy, p 162. For a comprehensive discussion of eighteen-century representation of female milliners and their prostitute connotation, see Cindy McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze: Prints of Women in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2004), ch. 2.

76 Klein, 'Property and Politeness'.

77 *The Spectator*, no. 69, 19 May 1711.

78 *The Spectator*, no. 155, 28 Aug. 1711.

they could profit from polite shopping and how they had to deal with over-sociable shopkeepers.

In addition, shopping in the eighteenth century meant visiting one shop after another without obligation to buy.[79] In his Complete English Tradesman Daniel Defoe mentioned a complaint letter sent to the Plain Dealer from one mercer in the first half of the century:

> *[M]any young ladies, [...] take a fancy to have business with me, [...] swim into my shop by shoals, not with the least intention to buy, but only to hear my silks rustle, and fill up their own leisure by putting me into full employment. So they tumble over my goods, and deafen me with a round of questions; till, having found nothing in my shop to their fancy [i.e. taste], as they call it, they toss themselves again into their coaches, and drive on the persecution, to the terror and disturbance of most of the honest shopkeepers from one end of the town to the other.*[80]

These shoppers entertained themselves from one fashionable shop to another without buying, usually causing 'the terror' for most of shopkeepers. Yet, the example of customers whose prima facie

79 Walsh, 'The newness of the department store', pp. 57-60; *idem*, 'Shop Design', p. 172; Glennie/Thrift, 'Consumers, identities, and consuption spaces', p. 35. Mackie, *Market à la Mode*, pp. 80-85; Cox/Dannehl, *Perceptions of Retailing in Early Modern England,* ch. 8.

80 Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, pp. 63-64.

behaviour contradicted the concept of politeness needs further interpretation. In the first place, it suggests that these non-buyers were enjoying the social occasion offered by the shops. A female shopkeeper sent a letter to Mr. Spectator in 1712, complaining about the idle ladies of fashion, who 'have nothing to do, employ themselves in tumbling over my Ware' in order to be 'cur'd of the Spleen, but I am not a Shilling the better for it.'[81] Defoe similarly claimed that he had heard that 'some ladies, [...] spent a whole afternoon in Ludgate-street [...] to look upon fine silks, and to rattle and banter the shopkeepers.'[82] That some ladies chose to entertain themselves by means of bantering with shopkeepers, or to divert their impolite spleen by visiting shops, was not arbitrariness. Eighteenth-century English shopkeepers were renowned for their polite and sociable manners; even foreign visitors praised them for their '*bonnes manières des magasins*'.[83] Once again, we see that eighteenth-century shoppers knew exactly how to benefit from the sociability that shop offered.

In the second place, the ladies' behaviour who were 'tumbling over my Ware' should not suggest the idea that eighteenth-century customers were annoying ones, putting the shopkeepers to all sorts of unnecessary trouble. Rather, this sort of irritating behaviour might be the mark of uncertainty of eighteenth-century shoppers. As I have noted in the previous section, the transition between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought with it a major redefinition of the commodity: things appeared to be esteem not so much for their continuity with the

81 *The Spectator*, no. 336, 26 March 1712.

82 Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, p. 61.

83 Langford, 'The Uses of Eighteenth-Century Politeness', p. 319.

past but for their novelty. Consequently, the harried consumer required a steady supply of information in order to make his decision. This might have been a significant clue to understand why 'many young ladies' had to 'tumble over my goods, and deafen me with a round of questions', as one mercer from Ludgate-street complained. Buying an unfashionable product would have signified one's own unrefined taste which was critically harmful to his reputation in polite society. Furthermore, as the manufactured goods in the eighteenth-century were of a non-standardized nature and of variable quality, the exercise of discerning taste in selecting an item was required for a successful shopping. This was especially the case, if the polite shopper had to deal with some fraudulent shopkeepers who tried to conceal the true quality of his goods. J. P. Malcolm remarked in 1810 that 'the doors of the Linen drapers are closed by draperies of new muslins and calicoes, some wags pretend indeed that the tradesman has a double motive in this proceeding – the darkening of his premises to prevent keen eyes from discovering coarse threads, and embellishing his shop.'[84] Bearing these facts in mind, we can better understand why eighteenth-century shoppers tended to tumble over goods and deafen the shopkeeper with a round of questions, although they would finally have left the shop without spending a penny.

In the third place, this unfamiliar shopping terrorism ('tumbling over my ware') could provide an opportunity for trialling one's ability to perform his politeness. To begin with, this peculiar behaviour of the fashionable shoppers was provocative in shopkeepers' eyes. No matter how infuriating the shoppers could be, 'a tradesman behind his counter must have no flesh and blood

84 Malcolm, *Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London*, vol. 2, p. 402.

about him; no passions, no resentment; he must never be angry; not so much as seem to be so', because 'it is his business to get money; to sell and please.'[85] Had the shopkeeper not reacted with 'courtesy, civility, and good manners', he would have been risking 'not only himself, but his shop', putting an 'ill name upon the general usage of customers in it.'[86] In this regard, dealing with the harried customers would be for the shopkeepers an ideal opportunity for presenting his self-control and his trained politeness. As for the opposite side of the counter, the shoppers' pesky behaviour was highly precarious to be considered as impolite. 'Rebecca, the distress'd' complained of 'Female Rakes' who were loitering in her china shop, pulling out everything but buying nothing. In her distress, Rebecca asked Mr. Spectator 'to admonish all such Day-Goblins, to make fewer Visits, or to be less troublesome when they come to one's Shop; and to convince 'em, that we honest Shop-keepers have something better to do, than to cure Folks of the Vapours *gratis.*' She judged this kind of shoppers to be 'nothing but to the Night-Goblins that take a Pleasure to overturn the Disposition of Plates and Dishes in the Kitchens of your housewifely [*sic*] Maids.'[87] In this context, the terrorist-like shopping behaviour was itself a kind of demonic possession, and thus undesirable. Although the shopkeeper could not directly express their annoyance to his irritating customers, it does not mean that he was not judging customers' behaviour at all. Rebecca's letter was an excellent example of how the shopkeepers might have reacted to and challenged the customer's behaviour, when it had crossed

85 Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, pp. 60-61.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

87 *The Spectator*, no. 336, 26 March 1712.

the polite boundaries. The shoppers' politeness was being on trial, now that they began browsing the shop.

With Rebecca's letter, we now come to the final discussion of the ritualised shopping practice: the presentation of polite self in everyday life. Here, James Boswell's reflection on a scene at Mr. Jefferys' sword shop in his *London Journal* provides us an excellent insight into this complex. To begin with, it is fairly accepted that during his London year (1762-1763) Boswell was obsessed with thoughts of making himself a gentleman.[88] Viewing politeness as central to his construction of a new self, Boswell ascribed refined externalities (such as genteel manners and appearance) to the definition of gentlemanliness. Shortly after his arrival in London, he could even perceive his newly 'composed genteel character' which differed from the 'rattling uncultivated one which, for some time past, I have been fond of.'[89] On the first day of December 1762, he determined to 'make a trial of the civility of my fellow-creatures, and what effect my external appearance and address would have.' Realising that he had left the most of his guineas at home, Boswell sought to present himself in a manner that would allow him to obtain a sword on credit at Mr. Jeffreys':

> *I [...] went to the shop of Mr. Jeffreys, sword-cutter to his Majesty, looked at a number of his swords, and at last picked out a very handsome one at five guineas.*

88 Philip Carter, 'James Boswell's Manliness', in Tim Hitchcock/Michèle Chohen (eds.), *English Masculinities 1660-1800* (Harlow, 1999), pp. 111-130; Susan Manning, 'Boswell's Pleasure, the Pleasures of Boswell', *British Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 20 (1997), pp. 17-32.

89 Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal*, entry for 21 Nov. 1762, p. 47.

> *"Mr. Jeffreys," said I, "I have not money here to pay for it. Will you trust me?" "Upon my word, Sir," said he, "you must excuse me. It is a thing we never do to a stranger." I bowed genteelly and said, "Indeed, Sir, I believe it is not right." However, I stood and looked at him, and he looked at me. "Come, Sir," cried he, "I will trust you." "Sir," said I, "if you had not trusted me, I should not have bought it from you."*[90]

Boswell could evidently acquire the sword by his creditworthiness. He had nothing but only his credibility ('Will you trust me?') to give Mr. Jeffreys in exchange for his desired item. Having scrutinised his customer's outward dress and deportment, Mr. Jeffreys eventually sold him the sword on credit ('Come, Sir, I will trust you'). This scene reminds us of the nature of early modern economy, as recent historiography has shown, that creditability formed the basis of business transactions.[91] Furthermore, it was the ritualized shopping behaviour that allowed the diarist to present his credibility (which was represented by outward dress and genteel deportment) to be judged by the shopkeeper. The polite browsing gave the shopkeeper time to assess the customers' credit through their outward attire and polite manners, especially when they were

90 *Ibid,* entry for 1 Dec. 1762, p. 67.

91 Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 68-101. Ian W. Archer, 'Social networks in Restoration London: the evidence from Samuel Pepys's diary', in Philip Withington (ed.), *Communities in Early Modern England: Networks, Place and Rhetoric* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 76-94.

unfamiliar to the shop. Thus could Mr. Jeffreys read Boswell's status, while he was 'look[ing] at a number of his swords'. The pivotal reading must have been done upon the mutual return of steady gaze ('I stood and looked at him, and he looked at me'), before Mr. Jeffreys made his decision.

But what is important for us here is the fact that on the following day Boswell returned to the shop to pay his bill, thanked Mr. Jeffreys, and said 'You paid me a very great compliment. I am much obliged to you.'[92] Bearing in mind that Boswell went to the shop on the previous day not only to buy a sword, but also 'to make a trial of [...] what effect my external appearance and address would have.' In other words, Boswell was willing to let his polite personality be evaluated. Remembering that he had been up to this day being obsessed with thoughts of fashioning his polite gentlemanliness, we might interpret that for him the scene at Mr. Jeffreys' did serve as excellent evidence for how successful his new polite self-had been developed. It is also worth noting that Boswell selected shop as the stage for performing his polite self, and chose shopkeeper as an arbitrator. This was by no means the matter of convenience. Rather, as I have noted above, English shopkeepers were renowned for their 'bonnes manières' and for their superb skill in reading and judging other people's taste and manners.[93] Perhaps it was this fact that Boswell had in mind, when he entered Mr. Jeffrey's shop. In this regard, shopping in an English shop seemed to be not only an acquisition of goods, but also a social and cultural training.

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92 Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal*, entry for 1 Dec. 1762, pp.67-68.

93 Cf. Berry, 'Polite Consumption', p. 388.

To people of the twenty-first century, eighteenth-century ritualised shopping activity might appear to be enigmatic, to avoid describing it as weird. As cultural historians attempt to reveal people's mentality, to show how they organised reality in their minds and expressed it in their behaviour, so what can we conclude about this perplexing shopping activity in the eighteenth century? Firstly, it was by no means natural behaviour. Rather, it was fashioned and, to some extent, ritualised, following specific codes of conduct.

Secondly, the close relation between commerce and politeness in Georgian shopping process reminds us of John Pocock's sophisticated remark that it was pre-eminently the functions of commerce to refine the passions and polish the manners.[94] In polite shopping boundaries, ones got to know the latest fashion, and got to know how to present themselves appropriately in front of other polite people to earn their peer recognition. It would have been, I argue, to contemporaries that going shopping was not much different from going to school, where ones are instructed both information and correct manners. The crucial point is that eighteenth-century shopping venue was a living school of politeness, albeit with neither real teachers nor actual pupils. Everyone developed his polite self by seeing and being seen, by 'reading' others' behaviour, and at a certain time by putting their genteel deportment to be assessed, hoping that they might leave this school with 'a great compliment', as our young Boswell had achieved. Politeness rendered eighteenth-century shopping a pleasurable

94 John G. A. Pocock, 'Authority and Property: The Question of Liberal Origins', in i*dem, Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the 18th Century* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 51-71.

activity, as historians have shown. Yet, shopping carried with it an instructive nature, too. It was a polite school for a polite people, an aspect that historians have not yet allowed themselves to observe.