

Michał Kobialka

University of Minnesota

ORCID: 0000-0002-6698-4140

Of British Representational Practices in the Age of Capitalism/Territorialism (1743–1776)

The theater/performance historiography of eighteenth-century studies has always been aligned with political contexts and transformations in the intellectual fabric of academe. Thus, for example, in the 1960s, when African nations were winning their freedom from the colonial powers, many researchers turned to the eighteenth century in order to reconstruct pre-colonial histories, so as to build national narratives as well as archives for the newly independent states. Germany's post-war historians emphasized the toleration, liberalism, and internationalism of the *Aufklärung* as a sort of antidote to Nazism, but, in the aftermath of the reunification of Germany in 1990, they were more skeptical about any notion that the states of eighteenth-century Germany shared the same culture and value system (and, thus, emphasized distinctive and fragmented Enlightenments in

different German regions). After September 11, attention was turned to the study of Muslim–Christian relations. In recent years, many scholars have embraced new materialism, environmental history, eco-criticism, performance as social practice, performative commons or collectivities, and trans-perspectives, evoking the idea of the mobility of identity, gender, or ethnicity.

Even though current eighteenth-century and Enlightenment studies draw attention not only to historiographic questions challenging traditional modes of periodization, but also to the methods by which we acquire and organize knowledge, to the extent to which accounts of the eighteenth century have been driven by the imperatives of the times, or to a tenacious negation of the Enlightenment's necropolitics, which were grounded in colonialism and the slave trade, this essay argues that one of the historiographic issues underplayed in these discourses is a different concept of history.¹ This different concept of history was produced in eighteenth-century Britain by the fundamental operation of mercantile society, its logic of exchange, and the predominance of trade within it. Following David Hume and Adam Smith, I wish to suggest that today we might need to reconsider the viability of the models of historiography advanced in nineteenth-century critical, dialectical, or materialist historiography, inspired by Leopold von Ranke's belief that every stage of history must be judged as an end in itself, G. W. F. Hegel's progressive movement on the world-historical stage, or Marxist historical materialism marked by a radical movement of thought toward a future liberated from the constraints of hegemonic or oppressive ideologies. In other words, the historiographic issue to be addressed is how the notion of history was altered by the embedding of commerce into the discursive field of eighteenth-century Britain; and how this historiographic trajectory was obscured (and, ultimately, eliminated) by the scientific or materialist notion of history that emerged in the nineteenth century and is still dominant today. Thus, as I contend in this essay, before knowing what history "says" of a society, we have to analyze how history functions within it. Let me ask: how are we to think about history and the ways of housing the past (the archive, the event, and the object) as well as about the experience of the past (time, space, matter), if every historiographic gesture, as noted in the Preamble,² is a process of assembling and activating what the past and present status quo controls by glossing over the contradictions that exist between multiple temporalities and spatialities housed in one and the same object or event?

I will address these two historiographic issues by investigating a multivalent process of cultural embedding that inserted trade into the discursive field of eighteenth-century Britain in general and in London in particular. I argue that,

¹ For a discussion of necropolitics, see Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham, nc: Duke University Press, 2019), chap. 1.

² See Michal Kobialka, "Theater/Performance Historiography: A Preamble," in this issue.

while trade and merchants had been recognizable tropes in literature and drama prior to the eighteenth century, the large-scale importation of trade, and the merchant figure, into theater/performance culture in the eighteenth century was part of the process of framing cognition in terms of commercial reality, supplanting the *Ecclesia universalis* and the sovereign ruler, which had framed cognition in earlier historico-political constellations in terms of theological dogma or the political program for the identification of new communities under the watchful eye of the monarch.

This project draws attention to how the operations of an emergent mercantile culture established standards of visibility and technologies of objectification for cultural formations. Also, it draws attention to how these cultural formations gave rise to new ways of viewing the world as constituted by capital, and thus accomplished the goal, which Smith defined in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776; generally referred to as *The Wealth of Nations*), of achieving “the perfect normalcy of bourgeois [mercantile] society”—both in the public space and in academic thought, which successfully occluded democracy’s nocturnal body fed by the colonial and slavery systems.³

I am intrigued by how the idea of the perfect normalcy of bourgeois mercantile society has molded human affairs. More than that, I would like to demonstrate its contingency and its historicity; its specificity and its permutations. One may wish to ask: in what ways did the institutionalization of an abstract notion of the market in London in the eighteenth century produce discourses on culture? In what ways were representational practices, operating within and without different structures—the daily press, the theater, trade manuals, playtexts, and in cultural institutions—through which new forms of personhood were normalized in eighteenth-century metropolitan London in service to a new mercantile economy? In what ways did the mutations and permutations of spatio-temporal fragments in the daily press, in the theater, trade manuals, or playtexts participate in the process of abstracting cultural and societal norms, which were now striated by the practices and operations of the emergent capitalism of the Industrial Revolution, informing what can be enunciated about the self’s contingent existence in print, in public, on stage, and, inevitably, in the archive?

I put forth that the abstractions of thought associated with philosophical reasoning in and about the Enlightenment devolve not from French, Dutch, or English thinkers as much as from the logic of exchange and the predominance of trade within it. Equally important, the emergent capitalism of the Industrial Revolution in eighteenth-century London depended on the dissemination of categories, subject-positions, and experiences that could no longer find their

³ Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel (London: Macmillan, 1978), 35.

equivalents in the types available in previous economic structures hitherto controlled by the sovereign State. That is to say, a new economic regime of endless capital accumulation and economic growth differentiated itself from those earlier structures no matter what the social, ecological, or political consequences were. This new economic operation required a distinct emphasis on the ways in which power operated to form an *everyday* understanding of social and economic relations and to orchestrate the ways in which people consented to and reproduced those relations of power—that is, the new economy required deliberate planning, which superseded inherited techniques and customary social relations. Further, the new mode of production at the time of the Industrial Revolution depended not only on economic processes, but also on proclaiming a new personality type, a new set of virtues, and new ways of viewing the world—and, to be more precise, on proclaiming new conditions allowing individuals to express themselves, in their daily lives, as subjects in a new cultural, political, and economic environment based on independence from state interference, the right to private property, and the open market.

I am concerned not with radical new philosophies, or the different temporal or spatial geographies of the Enlightenment, but with the historical specificity of the Industrial Revolution and British trade. Consequently, the Industrial Revolution should be depicted as a series of historical mutations, intensifications, accumulations, repetitions, or oscillations within mercantile culture. Thus, between 1707 and 1713, political thought becomes embedded in and engrossed with the conscious recognition of change in economic and social foundations as well as the political personality—that is, England was a trading nation; commerce was an aggressive, measurable field estimating every individual's contribution to the political good of the nation. The period between 1715 and 1738 was marked by a need to depict society as an economic mechanism in which the exchange of goods and division of labor operated to turn universal selfishness to universal benefit. And, finally, between 1743 and 1776, commerce, rather than the State or the Church, allowed human beings to create their own history as well as a new personality type to prove the perfect normalcy of bourgeois mercantile society, as Sohn-Rethel would have it.

To be more specific, let me briefly address the shifts that took place in Great Britain at the beginning of the eighteenth century within the space of representation delimited by a transition from a sovereign government to a mercantile state, whose new order was shaped by the financial revolution of the 1690s, the need to service the national debt after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, as well as by the British Union of 1707 and the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713.⁴ By the end of the Nine-Years'

⁴ For more information about the series of historical mutations discussed here, see Michal Kobińska, "Representational Practices and Real Abstractions in Early Eighteenth-Century London," in *Neoliberalism and Global Theatres*, eds. Lara D. Nielsen and Patricia Ybarra (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 161–175.

War of 1688–1697, political thought was imbued with the conscious recognition that England was a trading nation, whose national prosperity was an intelligible field of study. This intelligible field was made visible through institutions created at the time of England's financial revolution in the 1690s, like the Bank of England and the National Debt, which began the practice of small investors lending money to the State to support permanent armies and bureaucracies.⁵

Trade, debt, and credit entered the language of politics and debates about political stability and the relationship between patronage and militarism. Daniel Defoe, Joseph Addison, and Edward Hatton's writings presented the merchant as a member of a legitimate profession, a patriot, and a defender of the commercial interests and wealth of the British nation. They also dealt with the perceived importance of English trade and contributed to the representation of commercial interests within the national polity. Their comments about the significance of the merchant, and their profession, for the development and the well-being of the state in *Review*, *Spectator*, *Comes Commercii*, or the politics of trade following the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht, unequivocally illustrate that the period between 1707 and 1714 was marked by a cultural embedding of trade in the social, moral, and political reality of the British Union. This embedding of trade in the written culture of Great Britain, and of metropolitan London in particular, served to elevate the social status of trade, define merchant patriotism, and politicize trade (as evidenced by the parliamentary elections that coincided with the Treaty of Utrecht), in a manner hitherto unknown in the British cultural sphere.

The visual and sonorous effects of this cultural embedding of trade as a series of mutations, intensifications, and accumulations within the reality produced by commerce, trade, and early capitalist practices were seen on, and heard from, the theater stages of the trans-Atlantic British community (1715 and 1743) in the words spoken and the actions taken, for instance, in *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), *Polly* (1729) and *The London Merchant* (1731); as well as on the stages of the pan-Atlantic British Empire (1743 and 1776) in, for example, *The English Merchant* (1767), *The Nabob* (1772), and *The West Indian* (1771).

If, for Addison, London and the Royal Exchange were “a kind of *Emporium* for the Whole Earth”⁶ in the early decades of the eighteenth century, the post-1713 Treaty of Utrecht awarding an *asiento*, or contract, to British merchants to furnish the Spanish West-Indies with slaves from North-African slave factories, created a new geographic zone of impact, which now comprised the four corners of the North Atlantic (the coast of West Africa, the Caribbean islands, the North American colonies, and maritime Great Britain). They constituted trans-Atlantic

⁵ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 425–427.

⁶ Joseph Addison in *Spectator*, no. 69 (May 19, 1711), in *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 1:293.

circuits of commodity exchange and capital accumulation that, necessarily, were defined by new models of social formation and modes of production, as well as by a new understating of the concepts of time and space.

As early as 1739–1740, David Hume noted the spatial, rather than temporal, aspect of the emergent order of things. In his discussion “Of Contiguity and Distance in Space and Time,” he claimed that though distance, both in space and time, affects the strength of our imagination, “the consequence[s] of the removal in *space* are much inferior to those of a removal in *time*.” Moreover,

Twenty years are certainly but a small distance of time in comparison of what history and even the memory of some may inform them of, and yet I doubt if a thousand leagues, or even the greatest distance of place this globe can admit of, will so remarkably weaken our ideas, and diminish our passions. A *West-Indian* merchant will tell you, that he is not without concern about what passes in *Jamaica*; tho’ few extend their views so far into futurity, as to dread very remote accidents.⁷

Hume’s comments mark a shift from seeing London as the “*Emporium* for the Whole Earth” towards solidifying the notion of a trans-Atlantic (spatial) concept of the British nation by the 1730s. What “passes” in Jamaica, as the West-Indian merchant will tell you, can have an impact not only on passions but also, and more importantly, on both the prosaic and less prosaic actions which can occur in the trans-Atlantic market in metropolitan London.

This spatial experience of a factory, a plantation, a ship, or the trans-Atlantic commons, lets them slip away from the metaphysical and regulated temporality of the Church and the State, which both had hitherto structured narratives about factories, plantations, ships, or the trans-Atlantic commons, and had placed them along a spatial trajectory which untethered them from their moral responsibility for colonization and the slave trade by subordinating both to a mercantilist rationale and to profitable development.

Henri Lefebvre’s notion of spatial dialectics may be useful in explaining this spatial experience. According to Lefebvre, not only is space integrated into capitalism, but capitalism produces its own space. It does so “through and by means of urbanization, under the pressure of the world market; and, in accordance with the law of the reproducible and the repetitive, by abolishing spatial and temporal differences, by destroying nature and nature’s time.”⁸ Today (and I would argue that this was also the case in the eighteenth century though to a different extent), the saliency of the spatial in capitalism is visible in the displacement of manufacturing

⁷ David Hume, “Of Contiguity and Distance in Space and Time,” *A Treatise of Human Nature*, II:3:7; accessed September 2021, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4705/4705-h/4705-h.htm#link2H_4_0079.

⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 327.

by service industries (which restructured space around consumption, spectacle, and the image society), by globalization (which reformulated space as category, distancing productive space through outsourcing, creating uneven development between producing and consuming nations, all the while controlling migration of labor, or contributing to unemployment), and in the spatial phenomenon of financial markets no longer responding to temporalities of the transmission of data between a source and the stock market, but rather to spatial simultaneities of transnational financial markets.

Lefebvre concludes his discussion of the effects of the spatial in capitalism with a call for a different approach to the present global historical situation. “The appropriate method, however, is no longer that of Hegel, nor is it that of Marx, which was based on an analysis of historical time, of temporality.” We are obliged, continues Lefebvre, to accept that “there is a connection between space and the dialectic; in other words, there are spatial contradictions which imply and explain contradictions in historical time, though without being reducible to them.”⁹

Following Lefebvre’s comments, this constellation, known today as trans-Atlantic entrepôt capitalism, activated relationships of inclusion and exclusion, conjunction and disjunction, iteration and reiteration, as well as recurrence and repetition, which shaped the exchange of goods, the division of labor, as well as the production of new forms accommodating the new structures of necropolitical knowledge.

It was within the confines of this space that certain discourses were pacified and certain other discourses emerged and were integrated into existing practices in order to construct social and cultural models, as well as the corresponding modes of production, which supported the new commercial reality of British trans-Atlantic entrepôt capitalism. Here are some prime examples: the South Sea Bubble of 1720, John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon’s *Cato’s Letters* published in the *London Journal* between 1720 and 1723, Daniel Defoe’s *The Complete English Tradesman* (1726), Bernard Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), John Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* (1728) and its sequel, *Polly* (1729), George Lillo’s *The London Merchant* (1731), Henry St. John Bolingbroke’s *The Idea of a Patriot King* (1738), and William Keith’s *History of the British Plantations in America* (1738).

These objects move in and out of conceptual frames, accumulating in them a “present” which is modified by capital and its spaces-of-flows: the stock-exchange, credit, money subscriptions, conversations, the National Debt, and money zones. This “trans-” movement, controlled by the emergent logics, commodifies them in a particular way. These commodifications, in turn, entail not only the assignation of an exchange value—the success of *The London Merchant* or the lack of success of *Polly*—but also a capacity to appropriate and turn them into “real

⁹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 331. See “Theater/Performance Historiography: A Preamble” in this issue for a detailed discussion of Lefebvre’s spatial dialectics and the notion of contradiction in space and of space.

abstraction” viewed as a material force operative in the world shaping the relations of production and historically determining the mode of production in service of trans-Atlantic capitalism.¹⁰

When placed alongside the notion of the trans-Atlantic British community, which emerged and framed the construction of spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces in the period between 1715 and 1743, “trans-”, as in transglobal, reveals its historical contingency. The tensions between cultural artifacts (*Polly* and *The London Merchant*) and capital form (Hume), as well as between epistemology (Mandeville, Trenchard) and mode of accumulation (Keith), framed “trans-” as a component of a process of spatializing the economy at that time—that is, “trans-” was not part of the temporal economic model practiced by the territorialist states, but instead part of the process of internalizing capitalism as a spatial phenomenon.

If it is a dynamic force constructing political society and its history, commerce, like the Church and the State in the past, also shapes human personality—passions, imagination, intellect—which are now the only causes of labor. Following Hume’s arguments, how does this spatial and kinetic understanding of history impact the British representational practices of the day? What historiographic problems are revealed by this kind of history? Is it possible that this spatial and kinetic historiography, molding both theater and performance, were obfuscated the moment, in 1857, Marx’s concept of “real abstraction” turned those practices to a writing of history engendered by their modernist (emancipatory) or postmodern (rhetorical) historical imperatives?

In order to respond to these questions, consider the tension that existed in Great Britain, in the eighteenth century, between narrative history concerned with political and public life, as evidenced by the works of Edward Gibbon and William Robertson, and stadial history, a type of historiography isolated in the 1790s by Dugald Stewart, who termed it theoretical or conjectural history, prevalent among the historians and social scientists of the Scottish Enlightenment.

In that latter view of history, there were four stages of development—hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce—making up an account of economic and social development ancestral to Marx’s theory of history describing the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Western Europe. But this may be a reading of the theory of history that, to this day, is part of the unresolved tensions that simmered between von Ranke and Marx in the nineteenth century regarding the nature of historiography. Here, however, this theory of history unfolds as a discussion of a British commercial society attributed to Smith, who might have already developed

¹⁰ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. S. W. Ryazanskaya (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 206.

this theory in his lectures around 1750, as well as to Hume, Lord Kames, John Millar, and Lord Monboddo, writing from the late 1750s to late 1770s.¹¹

Hume's *History of England*, published between 1754 and 1762, admired for its objectivity and reasonableness, presented the history of England from the invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688. The fact that the narrative ended with the Glorious Revolution is not accidental. In an important way, the Glorious Revolution was a threshold marked by religious plurality (the Toleration Act of 1689), a broader framework for freedom of conscience and toleration, with the Parliament and its committees (perceived to be the guiding force in the government) setting clear limits on the crown's prerogatives, relative independence of the judiciary and courts, and by enabling the dominant aristocracy, gentry, and the mercantile class to wield a wider spectrum of political, military, imperial, and cultural influence.

Hume seems to suggest that the history of post-1688 England had to be written in a new way. That is to say, that in the past, one could decipher many familiar political and strategic factors that contributed to Britain's greatness. But none carried more weight with Hume now than her commerce. His reflection on commerce had a special place, and I would argue that his enquiry, which emphasized the benefits of trade (and government support for trade) for spreading prosperity and being the key to furthering the well-being, and happiness, of human beings, marked a shift from the narrative to stadial history. Now was the age of commerce and political economy in which it was commerce, rather than the State or the Church, that was a dynamic force shaping political society and history. In Part II of *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* (1752), Hume avers:

The greatness of the state, and the happiness of its subjects how independent soever they may be supposed in some respects, are commonly allowed to be inseparable with regard to commerce; and as private men receive greater security, in the possession of their trade and riches, from the power of the public, so the public becomes powerful in proportion to the opulence and extensive commerce of private men.¹²

If indeed "the greatness of the sovereign and the happiness of the state are, in great measure, united with regard to trade and manufactures,"¹³ we have moved beyond the processes of politicization of trade, as was the case in the post-1713 Treaty of Utrecht and of seeking balance between virtue and commerce under a patriot King after the South-Sea Bubble, towards political economy of Hume (1752), James

¹¹ William Zachs, *Without Regard to Good Manners: A Biography of Gilbert Stuart (1743–1786)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 12.

¹² David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* [1752], part II, essay 1, par. 4; accessed September 2021, https://www.econlib.org/library/LFbooks/Hume/hmmpL.html?chapter_num=29#book-reader. Subsequent references will be to this volume.

¹³ Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, II.1.12.

Steuart (1767), and Smith (1776), whose subject matter was the quest for human amelioration. Consequently, according to Hume, it was commerce that advanced political institutions as well as helping human beings create their second nature, or the personality type necessary for their success under the new conditions. “As the ambition of the sovereign must enrich on the luxury of individuals; so the luxury of individuals must diminish the force, and check the ambition of the sovereign.”¹⁴ This proviso was founded on history and experience, adds Hume. When a mercantile class acquires a share of prosperity and property previously held by the landed gentry, it lays the grounds for public liberty. They desire equal laws, which secure their property, “and preserve them from monarchical as well as aristocratic tyranny.”¹⁵

The rise of the merchants and prosperous citizens in the post-1688 environment led to a new type of history which was then shaped by trade and prosperity, which had made the House of Commons the constitution’s dominant arm.¹⁶ Equally important, in Hume’s view, was the fact that commerce was the main stimulus behind the advances being made in the liberal arts, science, literature, and sociability. Hume’s sociability was founded on the premise that self-interested exchange, based on a division of labor, was the first and the most essential social activity, exerting a positive moral influence on society, since—as he had affirmed in 1751—morality was something based chiefly on interaction, sensibility, and custom rather than reason or divine authority. He noted:

beside the improvements which [human beings] receive from knowledge and the liberal arts, . . . they must feel an increase in humanity, from the very habit of conversing together, and contributing to each other’s pleasure and entertainment. Thus *industry*, *knowledge* and *humanity*, are linked together by an indissoluble chain, and are found, from experience and reason, to be peculiar to the more polished, and, what are commonly denominated, the more luxurious ages.¹⁷

Not only were trade and the arts crucial in determining refinement, sociability, political conditions and society, as well as active history, but the more labor was employed beyond the need for subsistence, the more powerful and cultured was the state, as the excess could be used to support the army and navy, domestic services, and the colonies abroad. Inadvertently, “the greatness of the sovereign and the happiness of the state are, in great measure, united with regard to trade.”¹⁸ The

¹⁴ Hume, II.1.6.

¹⁵ Hume, II.11.16.

¹⁶ Hume, II.11.17.

¹⁷ Hume, II.11.5.

¹⁸ Hume, II.1.12, emphasis original.

same method of reasoning was applied to how foreign commerce augmented the power of the state and the happiness of its subjects. “A kingdom that has a large import and export must abound more with industry, and that employed upon delicacies and luxuries, than a kingdom which rests with its native commodities. It is, therefore, more powerful, as well as richer and happier.”¹⁹

Accordingly, wrote Hume, the poverty of the common people was an inevitable effect of absolute monarchy, whereas the development of civil society was something driven by liberty attended with particular accidents, that is, economic needs and desires, hence the market. Having a clear understanding of this process led people at this stage in the stadial history of human development to respect property and contracts. This was driven by enlightened self-interest, not too dissimilar to Adam Smith’s emphasis on justice and jurisprudence being primarily a mechanism for the protection of private property and commercial contracts. Smith’s recommendations with regard to the functioning of the government, as noted in the fifth book of *The Wealth of Nations*, were designed to ensure the freedom of an individual to pursue his/her own (socially beneficial) ends and merely require that the state should provide such services that facilitated the working of the system, while conforming to the constraints of human nature and the market mechanism.²⁰

“Everything in the world is purchased by labor; and our passions are the only causes of labor”, says Hume;²¹ labor is the author of values—thus, a human being is a product of economics, and culture is a product of economics, too, notes Smith in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*.²² Both explored commerce and its methods of providing and distributing goods necessary to life, raw materials and sensations on which passion, imagination, and intellect fed, and human personality constructed by configurations appropriate to that stage of cultural development—i.e., in the second half of the eighteenth century.

To sum up: if, indeed, commerce was a dynamic force contributing not just to the construction of political society but also to creating and transforming the nature, as well as action, of human beings, then it was commerce (at that stage of culture in Great Britain) that was shaping representational practices in the age of pan-Atlantic capitalism and territorialism, which would go on to become known as the British Colonial Empire. There are numerous examples of how commerce superseded the inherited techniques and customary social relations from the first half of the eighteenth century to proclaim a new personality type—and to be more precise, to proclaim new conditions allowing individuals to express themselves as

¹⁹ Hume, 11.1.14.

²⁰ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* [1776], 5th ed. (London: Methuen, 1904), bk. v, chap. 2, <https://www.econlib.org/library/Smith/smwn.html>.

²¹ Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, 11.1.11.

²² Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, bk. I, chap. 1.

subjects in a new economic, political, and cultural environment. Hume's *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* (Part II: 1752), Steuart's *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy* (1767), and Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) introduced the concept of political economy, which aimed at materializing the notion of the perfect normalcy of bourgeois mercantile society, justifying its colonial practices so perfectly encapsulated in the actions of the East India Company. The so-called associates, a term used to refer to a group of merchants who were involved in shipping, slaving, and contracting, built fortunes during the Seven Years War (1756–1763) by providing the British government with the resources necessary to wage war. After the war, they turned their attention to philanthropy and/or the idea of improvement and reform, as evidenced by the establishment of the Magdalene Houses for fallen women. The idea of improvement was not limited merely to philanthropy or reform. Recall, for example, that the British Museum, from its first Act of Parliament, was conceived in 1753 as belonging to neither Church nor king, freely open to the public and aiming to collect, archive, and classify Sir Hans Sloane's objects, reflecting his scientific interests as well as the Cotton and Harley manuscripts; and that the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce was established in 1754 to promote economic, scientific, and artistic progress by publicizing new techniques and granting monetary and honorary awards to inventors and artists of promise.

These representational practices rearticulated the social relations within the new conceptual topography dominated by commerce, its materialism, and its mode of being, including the connection between the metropolis and the plantations/the colonies or between the metropolis and the burgeoning Empire of British India that needed to be perceived. Nothing encapsulates this better than Lord Robert Clive's 1772 speech to the House of Commons in defense of his actions in Bengal prior to his leaving India in 1767.²³

What is important in this speech is that he cast the problem of corruption as a symptom (consequence?) of changes in the training of apprentices in England as well as an inability to read Indian culture.²⁴ That is to say, whereas in the past there were numerous manuals for apprentices in order to instill virtue in them through training (see, for example, Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (1726); Samuel Richardson, *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum* (1734/1735)), now, anyone, lack

²³ See *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, April 4, 1772, n.p.

²⁴ Lord Robert Clive is known for his association with and his attempts to reform the East India Company, both at home and in India. It is worth recalling that, at the time of Clive's speech, the Company was no longer a purely commercial venture with factories engaged in highly profitable trade at various locations on the Asian subcontinent, but, since Clive's victory over the Nawab of Bengal at Plassey in 1757 and the defeat of the Mughal emperor and the Wazir of Oudh at Buxar in 1764, it had also assumed the civil administration of Bengal. Consequently, the Company, now the virtual master of North India, by introducing Clive's policy of a "dual system of government" profited both by imposing British law and order and, as a territorial power, taxing Bengal. See "Clive, Robert Clive, Baron," in *Encyclopædia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information*, 11th edition, ed. Hugh Chisholm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 6: 532–536.

of training notwithstanding, might believe that nothing could hinder their desire to be successful. Consequently, Clive firmly established that the roots of corruption lay not in the operation of the East India Company, but in the excessive desires of young metropolitan men and, thus, their predilection for luxury was a preexisting metropolitan problem:

Now-a-days every youth possessed of any interest endeavours to go out as a writer to the company. No matter how ill qualified he is by education; writing and cyphering are thought sufficient. The same talents which were deemed necessary when the company was only a trading body, are required now that they have become sovereigns of an empire as large as all Europe. . . . They receive their lessons from friends and relatives. . . . See what a fortune has been made by this Lord, and that Lord, by Mr. such-a-one and such-a-one; what hinders you to be successful? Thus are their passions enflamed, and their principles corrupted, before they leave their native country.²⁵

Equally important, a lack of understanding regarding a different culture, which was contrary to what Hatton argued in *Comes Commercii* (1699), was supposed to be a hallmark of a good merchant, yet it led many to misreading a common and prevailing Indian custom known as a private credit arrangement:

Human nature is frail, and the desire of wealth is as strong a passion as ambition. Where then is the wonder that men should sink under the temptations to which they are here exposed? Flesh and blood cannot resist them. An Indian comes to you with his bag of sliver, and entreats you to accept it as a present. If your virtue be proof against this trial, he comes next day with the same bag filled with gold. Should your stoicism still continue, he returns with it stuffed with diamonds; and if, for fear of detection, you refuse even this temptation, he displays his bales of merchandise, a trap into which a trader readily falls.²⁶

The problems of the poor education of traders (turned into speculators and stockjobbers), the British cultural immaturity, as well as the uncontrolled desire for luxury and excessive consumption in London Society—contrary to what Hume, Steuart, and Smith would argue in their volumes on sociability and political economy—haunted metropolitan life and received special treatment in the metropolitan theater culture. Accordingly, Arthur Murphy's *The Apprentice* (1756), George Coleman's *The English Merchant* (1767) and *The Man of Business* (1774), Richard Cumberland's *The West Indian* (1771), and Samuel Foote's *The Nabob* (1772) are often read as ethnographic gestures sketching a series of cultural

²⁵ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, April 4, 1772, n.p.

²⁶ *Gazetteer*.

anxieties describing Britain's irreversible descent into vice or else a lack of resistance to social decay.

However, if *The Apprentice*, *The English Merchant*, *The Man of Business*, *The West Indian*, and *The Nabob* are considered as a *Denkbild* (a Benjaminian thought-image), in the context of my discussion of commerce as a dynamic force contributing to the construction of political society, transforming human nature, and shaping an active history of the nation and of the colonial Empire, these plays are examples of cultural real abstractions. Viewed as such, they are a source of critical insight materializing tensions within this commercial/historical constellation, which escape the formal style of ethnographic interpretation.

If such a suggestion is tenable, the character of, for example, Matthew Mite (*The Nabob*) must be seen in a different light. Mite's wealth, his desire to marry Sophy, his consultations with other traders, and his attempt to gain access to the Antiquarian Society are not a reflection of a nabob's lack of political and historical legitimacy. On the contrary, Mite is an example of a new personality type which reveals a conflict between the past, controlled by the Church and the State, and the present moment controlled by commerce; between an almost protectionist investment in the slow acquisition of wealth through industry and agrarian labor at home and new cycles of rapid accumulation of wealth through trans-Atlantic (and now global) *entrepôt* capitalism; between the financial decay of the aristocracy and the rapid accumulation of wealth by the commercial classes, who were profiting from the establishment of the British Empire in India and its colonial trade. Nothing encapsulates this class conflict and the anxiety of British aristocracy more than Thomas Oldham's speech to Mite:

Your riches (which perhaps are only too ideal) by introducing a general spirit of dissipation, have extinguished labour and industry, the slow, but sure source of national wealth.²⁷

A careful analysis of the playtext yields useful insights into the shift that took place in the eighteenth-century framing cognition in terms of commercial reality—here the construction of a new personality type as a consequence of the establishment of the British Empire in India. *The Nabob* opens and closes in the house of Sir John Oldham, a representative of the landed gentry, whose economic situation is now historically and economically unviable. The two scenes in act II take place in Mathew Mite's house and see Mite negotiating with a series of minions, including a waiter from a gaming house, a flower girl, and Mrs. Match'em, a procuress. Once Mite's private matters are resolved, he enters an adjoining room where he engages in transactions first with the Christian Club, regarding the

²⁷ Samuel Foote, *Nabob* (Dublin: printed by W. Kidd, 1778), act v, 52.

purchase of a seat in Parliament, and then with Thomas Oldham, regarding the extortion of a matrimonial alliance with the Oldham family. The self-styled divan, reminiscent of Mughal council meetings, in act II is an example par excellence of a now permanent new site of accumulation, one which has replaced the earlier models promoted by the Church and the State. Although the Oldhams may feel anxiety about the new mechanism deployed, as evidenced by the closing minutes of the play where Sophy will marry a member of her class, the new system is here to stay. A movement in this play of history from land to commerce is brought to a standstill revealing the tensions between two different methods of providing and distributing goods necessary to life, shaped by passion, imagination, and intellect to construct personality configurations appropriate to that stage of cultural development. The aristocracy may linger (and it will), however, as Hume so poignantly expressed at that time: “everything in the world is purchased by labour; and our passions are the only causes of labour.”²⁸

Thus, what needs to be taken into account (in this pre-von Rankean/Hegelian and pre-Marxist historical materialism) is the unequivocal understanding of commerce as a dynamic force in kinetic history. The new synthesis of capitalism/territorialism and history brought into being by mercantilism in the period between 1743 and 1776 created not only a new world order but also a new concept of history, one constructed upon spatial, rather than temporal, configurations and, to paraphrase Hume, appropriate to a culture in service of capital and its cycle of accumulation. This concept of history obscured how economic measures subordinated colonization and slave labor to the new, spatial constellation of mercantilism and democracy; moreover, the concept was in turn obscured in the nineteenth century by the introduction of a trustworthy reconstruction of the past—“wie es eigentlich gewesen”—based on the practice of building a historiographic narrative on the basis of evidence of (State/Church) public documents, as well as new theories of social development, giving a conscious and rational/material shape to self-determining members of human society, or class consciousness, defining its relationship to the means of production. This concept of history in service of capital, and its cycles of accumulation, was glossed over by critical, dialectical, and materialist historiography (and continues to be glossed over today by new materialism and its anti-gravitational, neoliberal imagery). Thus, the purpose of this project is to retrieve a different trajectory for understanding the relationship between capital and history, to draw attention to the violence of the necropolitical principle in those histories, in order to present them as a problem for historiography in general and for eighteenth-century studies in particular. Have you recently read act I scene 2 of Richard Cumberland’s 1771 comedy, *The West*

²⁸ Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, II.1.11.

Indian? If not, I urge you to do so—it is an example par excellence of nocturnal British representational practices in the Age of Capitalism:

Enter a SAILOR, ushering in several BLACK SERVANTS, carrying Portmanteaus, Trunks, etc.

Sail. ‘Save your honour! is your name Stockwell, pray?’

Stock. It is.

Sail. Part of my master Belcour’s baggage, an’t please you: there’s another cargo not far a-stern of us; and the coxswain has got charge of the dumb creatures.

Stock. Pr’ythee, friend, what dumb creatures do you speak of; has Mr. Belcour brought over a collection of wild beasts?

Sail. No, lord love him; no, not he; let me see; there’s two green monkeys, a pair of grey parrots; a Jamaica sow and pigs, and a mangrove dog; that’s all.

Stock. Is that all?

Sail. Yes, your honour; Yes, that’s all; bless his heart, ‘a might have brought over the whole island if he would: a didn’t leave a dry eye in it.

Stock. Indeed! Stukely, show them where to bestow their baggage. Follow that gentleman.

Sail. Come, bear a hand, my lads, bear a hand. [*Exit with STUKELY and SERVANTS.*]²⁹

“Is that all?” The silence about and the failure to name “several BLACK SERVANTS” were not accidental in a culture under the sign of pan-Atlantic British capitalism and territorialism in the eighteenth century. How did this spatial and kinetic understanding of history impact British representational practices of the day and how were they collected and archived? How did history function in the British society at that time? What was lost when this spatial and kinetic historiography—molding theater, performance, and the archive—had been obfuscated by the writing of history that was engendered by its modernist (foundationalist) or postmodern (rhetorical) historical imperatives and by its concept of the archive preserved for “a trustworthy reconstruction of the past,” as von Ranke would have it? As these examples unequivocally show, Hume’s promotion of a particular kind of kinetic history was rife with silences that occluded the new synthesis of capitalism/territorialism and history. A life possessed and controlled by another person looks exactly like a shadow. This shadow, and later its residues, established themselves anew as a founding inadequacy in Marxist historical materialism as well as in uses of categories such as “labor,” “value,” or “division of labor.” This historiography, however, rather than focusing on a strong sense of justice—in the form of political reordering or change, and economic redistribution, or casting glances backwards to a catastrophe while defining itself genealogically in terms of

²⁹ Richard Cumberland, *The West Indian* (London: printed for C. Dilly, in the Poultry, 1792), act 1, sc. 1.

fidelity to future justice—activates what the past and present status quo controls by glossing over the contradictions between multiple temporalities, spatialities, and materialities housed in one and the same object, event, or history.



Bibliography

- Armitage, David. *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Arrighi, Giovanni. *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*. London: Verso, 1994.
- Baucom, Ian. *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Bolingbroke, Henry St. John. *The Idea of a Patriot King*. London, 1740. Electronic reproduction (Eighteenth century collections online). Farmington Hills, MA: Thomson Gale, 2003.
- Bond, Donald, ed. *The Spectator*. 5 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987 [1965].
- “Clive, Robert Clive, Baron.” In *Encyclopædia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information*. 11th edition, edited by Hugh Chisholm, 6: 532–536. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911. <https://archive.org/details/encyclopaedia-brito6chisrich/page/532/mode/2up>.
- Cumberland, Richard. *The West Indian: A Comedy*. London: printed for C. Dilly, in the Poultry, 1792.
- Certeau, Michel de. *The Writing of History*. Translated by Tom Conley. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Translated by Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Foote, Samuel. *Nabob*. Dublin: printed by W. Kidd, 1778.
- Hatton, Edward. *Comes Commercii*. London: printed by J. H. for Chr. Coningsby; J. Nicholson; and D. Midwinter, 1706.
- Helton, Laura, Justin Leroy, Max A Mishler, Samantha Seely, and Shauna Sweeney. “The Question of Recovery: An Introduction.” *Social Text* 33, no. 4 (2015): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-3315766>.
- Hume, David. *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*. Edited by Eugene F. Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987 [1742; 1752]. <http://www.econlib.org/library/LFBooks/Hume/hmmPL24.html>.
- Keith, William. *The History of the British Plantations in America*. London: printed by S. Richardson, 1738.
- Kobialka, Michal. “Representational Practices and Real Abstractions in Early Eighteenth-Century London.” In *Neoliberalism and Global Theatres: Performance*

- Permutations*, edited by Lara D. Nielsen and Patricia Ybarra, 161–175. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Koselleck, Reinhart. *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Translated by Keith Tribe. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
- Linebaugh, Peter and Marcus Rediker. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000.
- Liotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Foreword by Fredric Jameson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Marx, Karl. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Translated by S. W. Ryazanskaya. New York: International Publishers, 1970.
- Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Translated by Steven Corcoran. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019.
- O’Quinn, Daniel. *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- Pocock, J. G. A. *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.
- Rediker, Marcus. *The Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2014.
- Richardson, Samuel. *Apprentice’s Vade Mecum (1734) and A Seasonable Examination of Playhouses (1735)*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1974.
- Sohn-Rethel, Alfred. *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*. Translated by Martin Sohn-Rethel. London: Macmillan, 1978.
- Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Edited by Edwin Cannan. 5th edition. London: Methuen, 1904. <https://www.econlib.org/library/Smith/smwn.html>.
- Trenchard, John, and Thomas Gordon. *Cato’s Letters*. 4 vols. Berwick, 1754 [1720]. Electronic reproduction (Eighteenth century collections online). Farmington Hills, MA: Thomson Gale, 2003.

Abstract

Of British Representational Practices in the Age of Capitalism/Territorialism (1743–1776)

The issue addressed in this essay is how the notion of history was altered by the embedding of commerce into the discursive field of eighteenth-century Britain. Even though current eighteenth-century, and Enlightenment, studies draw attention to historiographic questions challenging traditional modes of periodization, the methods by which we acquire and organize knowledge, or the extent to which accounts of the eighteenth century have been driven by the imperatives of the times, this project argues that one historiographic issue that has been significantly underplayed is a different concept of history produced in

eighteenth-century Britain by the fundamental operation of mercantile society, its logic of exchange, and the predominance of trade within it. David Hume and Adam Smith's historiographic trajectory was obscured (and, ultimately, eliminated) by the scientific or materialist notion of history advanced in nineteenth-century historiography.

Keywords

commerce, history, archive, historiography, David Hume, Adam Smith, *Nabob*

Abstrakt

O brytyjskich praktykach przedstawieniowych w epoce kapitalizmu/terytorializmu (1748-1776)

Przedmiotem refleksji w artykule jest zmiana rozumienia pojęcia historii, którą spowodowało włączenie handlu w pole dyskursywne w osiemnastowiecznej Wielkiej Brytanii. Choć we współczesnych badaniach nad XVIII wiekiem i oświeceniem stawia się historiograficzne pytania o zasadność tradycyjnych sposobów periodyzacji, o metody, za pomocą których zdobywamy i organizujemy wiedzę, a także o wpływ, jaki na relacje o XVIII wieku miały sposoby myślenia dominujące w różnych czasach, autor dowodzi, że jedną z kwestii historiograficznych, która pozostaje znacząco niedoceniona, jest nowa koncepcja historii wytworzona w osiemnastowiecznej Wielkiej Brytanii. Koncepcja ta powstała w ścisłym związku z zasadami funkcjonowania społeczeństwa kupieckiego i charakterystyczną dla merkantylizmu logiką wymiany i dominacją handlu. Historiograficzna trajektoria Davida Hume'a i Adama Smitha została jednak przesłonięta (i ostatecznie wyeliminowana) przez naukową i materialistyczną koncepcję historii, która rozwinęła się w dziewiętnastowiecznej historiografii.

Słowa kluczowe

handel, historia, archiwum, historiografia, David Hume, Adam Smith, *Nabob*

MICHAL KOBIALKA

Professor of Theatre in the Department of Theatre Arts & Dance at the University of Minnesota. His research interests focus on medieval, eighteenth-century, and contemporary European theater, as well as theater historiography.
