# De fatsoenering van het bestaan

Nijboer, Harm Tjeerd

# Summary

## The fashioning of daily life
**Consumption in Leeuwarden during the Dutch Golden Age**

Over the last two decades many historians have expressed the view that during the early modern period the habits and attitudes of western consumers have been subject to structural transformations. The historiography of this early modern 'consumer (r)evolution' is nevertheless still characterized by many disputes on how and when these changes took place and there is even no agreement as to what actually changed. Getting a better grip on these transformations requires first and foremost better data on consumption practices in the early modern period. Reliable data series revealing long-term trends in patterns of consumption, for instance, are still rare and those that are available are at best quirky. But gaining better insight in the early modern 'consumer (r)evolution' requires more than empirical investigation alone. On a conceptual level historians have hardly made a distinction between consumption and other uses of goods. However, to understand pre-modern patterns of consumption it is extremely important to distinguish consumption (using up a product) from stockpiling (saving a good for later use) and hoarding (saving a good as an asset). In pre-modern households goods made of durable and refundable materials like copper, pewter, silver and gold did not only serve as utilities but as deposits as well. In this study it is shown that this depository function of household goods steadily declined in Leeuwarden during the seventeenth century.

For this study two data sets were compiled using probate inventories from the municipal archives of Leeuwarden. The first data set contains data on the value of goods possessed by 228 Leeuwarden households from between 1582 and 1707. The data set is divided over three occupational subgroups: 1) brewers and bakers, 2) shoemakers and tailors and 3) merchants and shopkeepers. Brewers and bakers who were of similar wealth and whose crafts had a similar structure were merged into one subgroup to obtain sufficient sample size. Shoemakers and tailors were merged into one subgroup on the same grounds, while shopkeepers and merchants were joined in one group for the practical reason that wholesale and retailing were no distinct branches in seventeenth-century Leeuwarden. Analysis of the data set, however, showed no distinct patterns for any of the three subgroups. A second data set on the number of goods possessed by households was therefore

confined to one occupational group only: the Leeuwarden bakers. This data set is based on 88 appraised and non-appraised inventories from between 1559 and 1707.

The data were analyzed using regression analysis with the year the inventory was drawn up as independent variable. A significant decline in the possession of goods made of pewter, copper and brass could be observed, especially when the value of these goods was taken relatively to the value of the total bundle of goods represented in the fist data set. The possession of fine ceramics on the other hand showed a clear tendency of increase. It could also be shown that the Leeuwarden bakers owned a growing number of paintings and prints during the seventeenth century. These trends were clearly interrelated and further analysis, using polynomial regression as a heuristic, pointed out that these trends manifested themselves most distinctively in the period between roughly 1610 and 1660.

The inhabitants of Leeuwarden were clearly involved in a process of replacing sturdy refundable objects by fancier objects without scrap value. I have called this process a 'fashioning process' (fatsoeneringsproces). In this context fashion is defined as the surplus value of a commodity derived from style, design, marketing and workmanship as opposed to the (refundable) value of the raw materials the good is composed of. This definition builds upon the archaic meaning of the English 'fashion', which it has in common with the etymologically related Dutch 'fatsoen' and French 'façon'. When sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers wrote about 'fashion', 'fatsoen' or 'façon', they were well aware of this meaning of 'fashion'; hence reassessing the concept of 'fashion' is important for understanding contemporary commentaries on the phenomena under investigation. Besides that, the older and multilingual meaning of 'fashion' is to a great extent operational, where as the multifaceted concepts of 'fashion' and 'fatsoen' in their colloquial meanings are less applicable within a social scientific framework of analysis.

Instead of keeping their deposits in the form of pewter, brass and copper wares, the inhabitants of Leeuwarden increasingly made use of private debenture bonds to stockpile their wealth. In this study interest rates – that were steadily declining during the seventeenth century – are used as a proxy for this supply-driven expansion of the capital market. Regression analysis shows that interest rates predict the shares of copper/brass, pewter and ceramics in the total bundle of goods as good as time does, or even better. And the number of paintings and prints owned by Leeuwarden bakers can be predicted by interest rates equally well. In all four cases the residuals showed no longer a significant linear correlation with time. This indicates that interest rates can statistically account completely for the time-bound linear trends observed earlier. As regards the ownership of pewter wares, however, a time series of pewter prices had to be added to the regression in order to flatten out a parabolic correlation of the residuals with time. Ownership of pewter wares, as far as measured by value, was nonetheless only moderately affected by the price of pewter. All these analyses show that there was a strong correlation between changes in the possession of consumer goods and an expanding capital market.

To some extent, we can call upon the principles of rational calculation to explain fashioning processes. For the bearer debenture bonds had the advantage of returning interest on his savings, whereas hoards were idle in this respect. On a macro-economic level, the more extensive use of debenture bonds may have had a considerable wealth effect by increasing the circulation – and even the creation – of capital. Furthermore, the fashionable items that replaced the copper, brass and pewter wares were actually consumed. So households came to spend more on production instead of raw materials. Although the wealth effects of fashioning processes can easily be theorized, it is much harder to prove them empirically. In this study only a few data could be provided on this topic and further research on this issue remains desirable.

Despite the economic advantages of using bonds instead of objects for the storage of wealth, Renaissance literature treated both fashion and contractual modes of credit like bonds as morally suspicious. Both were commonly depicted as fake values and were juxtaposed by real values like precious metals and the word of honor. This view was so common and until the eighteenth century other views in this respect were so rare, that it is hard to conceive that it was new ideas that were fostering the fashioning process described in this study. We must, however, not overlook the fact that moralist rejections of fashion and contractual credit were so appealing because they touched upon practical values as well. This is especially true for the recurring criticism that fashion and bonds lacked virtue and honor, because honor was in the seventeenth century still one of the essential practical values in everyday life.

Post-medieval culture was in many respects what anthropologists call a 'culture of honor'. In these kinds of cultures, honor is essentially conceived as a birthright, as something that is intrinsic to man. Honor in these cultures is not confined to those of high rank. Although social status might definitely enhance one's sense of honor, ordinary men have honor as well. Honor in this context reflects both social identity and pride. It is to a great extent what one really is. Besides this essentialism there is another characteristic to cultures of honor: the necessity to protect one's honor against insult by force. To outsiders, cultures of honor seem therefore rather agonistic. Such a culture of honor was initially understood to be something specific for the Mediterranean, but it has now become clear that this concept is applicable in a much wider geographical context, ranging from explaining the high rates of violence in the south of the US to elucidating the cultural world of artisans in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dijon or to understanding popular culture in the Dutch Republic.

Cultures of honor are hostile environments for both fashion and contractual credit, for quite fundamental reasons. This is pretty obvious in the case of contractual credit, because in cultures of honor trust is ultimately defined in terms of honor. In this context the word of honor is the primary means for establishing relations of trust, and any agreement that would depend on contract would in the end deny the honor of one or both parties. Furthermore the very idea of contract is that it prevents parties in the case of disagreement from restoring their rights and their honor by force. Although not as clear as in the case of contractual credit, cultures of honor are equally hostile environments for fashion. The problem of fashion is that it is always open to interpretation. Fashion does not reflect the social world as it 'really' is. And those who adhere to it are easily accused of social emulation, the vice of pretending to be someone one not 'really' is. It is elucidated by the fact that in Shakespearian English the verb 'to fashion' was often used in the sense of 'to cheat' or 'to trick'. Besides that, toughness is considered virtuous in these environments. Being though enables a man to defend and uphold his honor. And this emphasis on toughness facilitated a preference for sturdy materials and objects. It is for instance hard to conceive that a 'man of honor' would replace his pewter beer mug by a porcelain teacup. Although pewter beer mugs were certainly used for drinking, it is wise not to just to look at them as mere drinking utensils. By their shape and presence, they were perfectly fit to serve as weapons, ready for use in case conflict might arise. Indeed late medieval criminal records reveal that they were often used that way.

Both honor and contract function at the very core of human relationships. They are both instrumental in establishing what is generally referred to as trust, one of the most debated concepts in recent sociology, where the issue was raised by seminal theorists like Luhmann and Fukuyama. Nevertheless few sociologists have attempted to give a more or less operational definition of trust. One of the exceptions is Adam B. Seligman who has called for a clear distinction between confidence and trust. Although both words are often used synonymously in present-day English, the former implies some kind of guarantee whereas in the latter this feature is lacking. This subtle difference is important for understanding to what extent covenantal credit, which is based upon the principles of honor, differs from contractual credit. It is not so much that contracts are more reliable than words of honor. A creditor who borrows money in a covenantal relationship will seek confidence in the person of the creditor. There are penalties for breaking a covenantal agreement: violence, loss of honor and above all shame for the perpetrator. While confidence is established at a personal level, trust on the other hand will be located in the public sphere. In cultures of honor trust is heavily dependent on public reputations. In a contractual situation trust and confidence are located exactly at opposite sites. Because confidence is established by public instruments, trust can become a feature of private, even intimate relationships. It was this 'privatization' of trust that enabled the inhabitants of seventeenth-century Leeuwarden to make sense of fashion.

Because trust facilitates transactions it is an important means of production. Over the past two decades this insight has led many social theorists to think of (potential) trust as social capital. The social capital theory as it has evolved over the last decade has, however, in large measure ignored the distinction made by Bourdieu between social capital and symbolic capital. This distinction is especially significant when we compare covenantal and contractual modes of credit. Symbolic capital is (potential) trust that is imposed upon relationships by ideologies and worldviews. For example, we trust kings and priests because we ought to trust them. Symbolic capital is therefore closely affiliated with the 'public trust' we discussed above in the context of cultures of honor. Furthermore, the amount of symbolic capital present in a society is more or less fixed. When social capital is 'freed' from symbolic constraints, it becomes in need of being constantly generated. It becomes dependent on cultural exchange rather than cultural determination. In this context sharing preferences is an important means of establishing mutual trust, or when we hold on to Bourdieuesque terminology: social capital is produced with cultural capital. This system demands patterns of consumption around goods that are flexible in both value and meaning.

When trust is privatized, it tends to become dependent on the empathic sensibilities of the parties involved. Once prestige and status in the public realm and the personal guarantees by one's sense of honor and shame are no longer active in establishing confidence and trust, there are hardly any other options left than relying on empathic feelings to judge someone's trustworthiness or lack of it. Enlightenment philosophers like David Hume and Adam Smith were somehow well aware that 'sympathy' and 'moral sentiments' were the subtle but necessary emotional counterweights in the private realm that balanced the increasingly rationalized nature of social intercourse in the public realm of a contractual society. It is a paradoxical phenomenon, but contractualist philosophy and Sentimentalist literature in eighteenth-century Britain had pretty much the same intellectual roots. Eighteenth-century Sentimentalism advocated quite extreme and afflicted sensibilities and is regarded by Colin Campbell to have been a key movement in shaping modern attitudes towards consumption. Sentimentalist sensibilities covered a wide range of feelings, from feeling sorry for oneself and for others to being moved by beauty. In this context being a man or woman of good taste more or less defined one's moral standing. The Sentimentalist character therefore ideally required goods to posses and to consume that were subject to judgment rather than goods of absolute intrinsic value. It does not require a lot of sensibility to possess and to consume goods that are more or less made up of raw wealth. Making sense of fashion, on the other hand, does.

Although Sentimentalism shows a clear 'elective affinity' with the consumption of fashion, that does not mean that this movement shaped modern patterns of consumption. Fashioning processes can be observed long before Sentimentalist novelists like Richardson and Sterne were even born. And sentimentalist (without a capital S) attitudes started to evolve long before Sentimentalism hit the stage as a kind of *grande finale*.

Leeuwarden was certainly not the only place where a fashioning process occurred in the early modern era. Similar and related processes have been suggested for various regions and places in the Dutch Republic, Britain, France and the Southern Netherlands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Nevertheless, more robust data on these developments elsewhere are still desired. The methodological, conceptual and theoretical frameworks outlined in this book may provide a sound basis for further research on this topic, including international and intertemporal comparisons.