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"With The Commodity In The Hand":  
A Practical Investigation of the Intersection of  
Material Culture with Performance Theory

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Virginia Commonwealth University  
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and to Theodore Given, husband extraordinaire.



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## Abstract

### "With The Commodity In The Hand": A Practical Investigation of the Intersection of Material Culture with Performance Theory

by Katharine M Given, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2021

Director: Keith Byron Kirk, PhD, Department of Theatre

This thesis examines the intersection of performance theory and material culture through the practices of garment reconstruction. In chapter 1, I examine key theorists in the fields of material culture and performance studies and articulate the connections between the two fields. In chapter 2, Using practice as research, I recount the experience of building reproduction garments from the eighteenth century using historically appropriate tools and methods, as well as the experience of wearing those garments. Finally, in Chapter 3, I walk through a possible historical examination of my encounter with these reconstructed garments, and consider the way in which feminine clothing in this period signified maternity -- a conclusion drawn as a result of the embodied research practices here employed. The construction of an entire period outfit acts as an embodiment of my research of the interconnected theory and the way history performs for/with modern bodies, and offers an exciting way forward for two disciplines to inform and enhance one another.

History is necessarily false; it has to be. On the other hand, literature can weave small fictions into profound and true insights regarding the human condition.

*-- Jules David Prown*

The original “truth” or “source” of the behavior may not be known, or may be lost, ignored, or contradicted – even while that truth or source is being honored.

*-- Richard Schechner*

## Introduction

I have been enamored with the practice of historical dress and historical interpretation since around 1996, when my grandparents took me to the Jamestown Settlement and let me dress up in my "real Pocahontas dress." I felt as though I looked every bit as "real" as the interpreters at the site, although if I recall correctly, I was disappointed in the way my sneakers broke up my perception of authentic presentation.

Sharing that account now feels more than a little gauche, and I would appreciate the chance to have a careful discussion with six-year-old me (or perhaps, more appropriately, my caregivers) about the appropriateness of dressing a little white girl in clothing meant to represent Native American dress and identity. Still, approximations of English cultural historical garments were not to be had, and so there stands my entry into the practice of wearing the garments of the past, in beige, fringed polyester.

I became interested in theatrical costuming in high school, and during the course of my undergraduate degree and in the years following, I costumed several theatre productions (often historical) a year. In this way, I dressed others in historical garments: there were the luxurious eighteenth-century frocks I made for *A Servant of Two Masters*, beautiful bustles altered to fit Thea and Hedda in *Hedda Gabler*, and a full array of 1930s outfits in all shapes and styles to clothe Clare Boothe Luce's *The Women*. These garments reached for (and achieved) varying levels of accuracy of presentation, although the means of constructing them were decidedly modern. I never wore these costumes myself -- I'm a decent character actor, in fact, at least enough to understand the process, but I feel more comfortable keeping my involvement backstage. Still, I became acquainted with the way costumes fit to an actor's body, and the way

those actors used their clothing to build character, and the way my costumes themselves performed onstage to contribute to the storytelling.

I had been noticing the performativity of costumes for years when one of my professors introduced the idea of *performance theory* to my senior seminar class: the ways in which behaviors and actions are understood to be inherently performative, and the ways in which that performativity yields understanding and knowledge . I read Judith Butler and Richard Schcechner and suddenly things I had already noticed about the way I interacted with the world made sense. And my interaction with the world was tied to my experience with costumes, and even from my time in dabbling in props. The materiality of the world is, to me, front and center. And so, from my earliest readings about phenomenology and performativity, I was thinking about these ideas through the broad lens of *objects* and the finer lens of *dress*.

This thesis is an exercise in practice-based research, and as such, I center my experiences as the researcher and practitioner. I am a costumer with a generous interest in performance theory. I am also a queer person who works through conversations about dress, performance, and gender both professionally and personally every single day.

Taking all of these disparate, intertwined parts of self: onward.

When I added a Certificate in Public History to my MFA program at VCU, I had a mind to consider the way these fields, starkly siloed from each other, intersected. In my Public History class, I reflected on the ways theatre functions as a site of public history. In my oral history class, we learned about affect theory, a theory which centers emotional, subjective responses -- the only surprising thing there was the way I hadn't read about it before as a theatre practitioner. I took on a historical interpretation internship where I clothed myself in seventeenth-century dress and presented to the public on a regular basis at Henricus Historical Park. The class I was most

looking forward to, though, was that on material culture. My interest in performance, as I've said, has always featured objects and clothing. So, throughout the semester of the material culture course, it seemed very clear to me that that field in particular asks, through a variety of methodologies, some very familiar questions: How does an object perform? How does the object signify? Performance theory was present in many of the material culture reading materials, and yet it went unnamed.

My particular interest in material culture, much like my particular interest in my theatrical background, was in dress. I did not come at this terribly academically at first: rather, the recent explosion of costume-based content throughout YouTube and Instagram made me aware of the widespread practice of historical clothing reconstruction. Early on in my graduate work, I became especially intrigued in the practices of notable YouTuber Bernadette Banner, who uses cinematography to document her research and construction processes.<sup>1</sup> Banner is not only a researcher or a sewist; by documenting and presenting these processes, she performs them for her audience. Other sewists who document their work online focus similarly on the qualities of process rather than the end product: most notably Louisa Owen Sonstroem and Sarah Woodyard. Sonstroem is not a historian or a costumer; she focuses on using hand stitching techniques to construct modern clothing.<sup>2</sup> She regularly blogs about the meditative process of slowly building a garment by hand, and has opened a way for me to think about the process of stitching itself. Woodyard *is* a historian, and a milliner who apprenticed at Colonial Williamsburg. Her Instagram page, like Sonstroem's, regularly features meditations on the act of hand sewing. Her posts more often include historically-based information. Woodyard in particular takes an anti-racist stance in her online presence; she often presents research on

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<sup>1</sup> Bernadette Banner, "Bernadette Banner," YouTube, accessed August 30, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSHtaUm-FjUps090S7crO4Q/featured>.

<sup>2</sup> Louisa Owen Sonstroem, *Hand Sewing Clothing: A Guide*, (Connecticut: Louisa Merry, 2021).



enslaved Black stitchers in eighteenth century America, or discusses the ways clothing trends were shared between white colonists and Native Americans.

Woodyard's Instagram presence led me to her professional website, on which she had posted her 2017 masters thesis: *Martha's Mob Cap? A Milliner's Hand-Sewn Inquiry into Eighteenth-Century Caps ca.1770 to 1800*.<sup>3</sup> Upon reading this title I became utterly fascinated. Hand-Sewn Inquiry? I had never heard of such a thing. And yet, like the time I had been introduced to performance theory and felt my previous epistemological stance explained to me, I felt a sense of recognition as I read through Woodyard's thesis. Making was not only product, not only process -- it was also performance, and it could open the historical researcher's eyes to new truths about the process.

Eager to try this embodied practice of making on my own, I employed Woodyard's hand-sewn inquiry methodology to study the form of eighteenth-century shifts in my material culture class in Fall of 2020. I researched the shape of the shift, the construction process, and so forth. I felt, through that project, that I had reached a deep level of historical understanding, and perhaps had even made overtures to adding new knowledge to the academy. I did not, however, feel satisfied in my consideration of hand sewn inquiry and performance. Like Woodyard, I had embodied the skill of stitching to investigate historical knowledge, and come away feeling as though I knew more than I had before. But I did not feel as though I had particularly *performed* anything. And yet I still felt that there was an undercurrent of performance within historical practice that I knew could be grasped. And so, I have taken on this project: to reproduce feminine working class garments of the eighteenth century, and to find out how the process of making produced both historical knowledge and performance.

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<sup>3</sup> Woodyard, Sarah E, "Martha's Mob Cap? A Milliner's Hand-Sewn Inquiry into Eighteenth-Century Caps ca.1770 to 1800" (master's thesis, University of Alberta, 2017).

This thesis moves through three chapters to explain my work. In Chapter 1, I examine the two fields upon which I am drawing: material culture and performance theory. I hold up the major tenets I am responding to within material culture practices, and then examine those same tenets through the lens of performance theory. Chapter 2 is a complete discussion of the making process of this project, in which I walk the reader, garment by garment, through the construction of an entire set of mid eighteenth-century feminine dress. Finally, Chapter 3 takes a look at potential sites of historical knowledge which are generated by the awareness of performance through garment construction practices. Throughout, I make an effort to keep an awareness of the practices of historical research as they complement and are complemented by a constant understanding of performativity.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review: The State of Two Fields

### **Material Culture**

Material culture is a specific discipline of the field of history in which historians and researchers consider historical objects. History as a field can sometimes have a near-crippling reliance on the written record -- a written record which largely prioritizes men, and among them, white, straight, wealthy, non-disabled, cisgender men. In her article, "State of the Field," dress historian Serena Dyer summarizes material culture's response to traditional, record-based history: "Material culture's strength, as yet only partially tapped, is its ability to look beyond the restrictions imposed by the white, patriarchal and class-based systems which have shaped written sources. Material culture often acts as a marker of humanity's distinctions, divisions and diversity."<sup>4</sup> There is an air of the relative democracy and prevalence of *objects* -- pieces created, held, and interacted with by any number of people. This relative democracy of material culture should not go unexamined -- objects which have survived hundreds of years into the present may well be the objects which were deemed "worth saving," over and over, indicating (as with the record) their connection to systems of wealth and power.

This turn in the field of history to material objects began in earnest over fifty years ago, although, as Dyer notes, the field still seems to struggle with the need to defend its validity. Indeed, I was surprised by how many of our conversations in the material culture class I took turned to questions of the field's validity. As a costumer who has also dabbled in the world of theatrical props, I understand that objects signify, and it feels obvious to me that historical objects would do the same in an academic sense. Of course, material culture is a well-established

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<sup>4</sup> Serena Dyer, "State of the Field: Material Culture," *History* (2021): 6, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.vcu.edu/10.1111/1468-229X.13104>

field, even if it can still be a somewhat controversial one, and Dyer concludes in her "State of the Field" that historians of material culture ought to put aside conversations regarding validity, and get on with the work. In the 2019 article "The Embodied Turn," Hilary Davidson maps various changes throughout the field of history, and makes use of the same "turning" metaphor Dyer references.<sup>5</sup> Davidson focuses, however, on the notion of embodiment within material culture. Davidson focuses on dress history, and writes about the ways scholars are beginning to use garment reproduction practices to ascertain embodied historical knowledge -- much like Woodyard's hand-sewn inquiry project. It is this "embodied turn" which seems to me to be so tied to ideas of performance.

Material culture as a field looks at historical objects, and scholars within this field use a variety of axes to examine the objects they are analyzing. Some look at the way an object has changed over time -- how a piece was altered or repaired, or how it has deteriorated. Some scholars look at the way an object was used by its owners, or at what is indicated by the design. Still other scholars look at the way the object was created -- at the actual labor practices that went into its construction. As a scholar of theatre, these phrases and questions sound familiar: how does an object perform? What performances does a certain object engender? How does a craftsperson perform their labor? What are the connections between the performance of construction and the performance of use?

In this segment of my thesis, I will examine two main schools of thought within material culture. On the one hand, I will discuss the writings of Jules David Prown, whose methodology

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<sup>5</sup> Hilary Davidson, "The Embodied Turn: Making and Remaking Dress as an Academic Practice," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 23, no. 3, (2019), accessed February 20, 2021, <http://proxy.library.vcu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,cookie,uid&db=oih&AN=137585114&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

focuses on the object in use. On the other, I will examine a collection of scholars whose work is included in Davidson's "embodied turn."

Jules David Prown is a scholar of art history and material culture who came into the field around the mid-twentieth century. His methodology is shaped around the experience and use of the finished object rather than its construction. Prown writes, "artifacts constitute the only class of historical events that occurred in the past but survive into the present. They can be re-experienced; they are authentic, primary historical material available for first-hand study."<sup>6</sup> This approach positions objects themselves as actors; they have occurred in the past; they continue to occur in the future. Unlike the ubiquitous text of the record, objects are the tangible impression the past makes on the present. Prown takes the idea of object-as-actor yet further when he suggests that the very design of objects is indicative of the "underlying cultural assumptions and beliefs" of the society in which it was made.<sup>7</sup> When I first read this assertion, I was reminded of the decisions I make when I design costumes. That process, for me, is a way of distilling the themes and characters of a story and synthesizing those qualities into physical form by way of clothing. Prown suggests that any object can take on this performative role. Although cultural mores are "not visible in what a society says, or does, or makes," those same ontological beliefs are "detectable in the way things are said, or done, or made -- that is, in their style."<sup>8</sup> The idea Prown presents is that historians can perceive unspoken or unwritten truths about the culture in which an object was made by closely examining the object, and pairing that examination with further research. Put succinctly, to Prown, material culture exists as "the manifestation of culture through material productions."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jules David Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?" in *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*, eds. Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Prown, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Prown, 13 - 14.

<sup>9</sup> Prown, 11.

In an introductory chapter to *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*, Kenneth Haltman breaks down the process of Prownian analysis. Such an analysis begins with a close description of the object, then moves on to deduction of those characteristics and a speculation about further research. Following these introductory steps, the examiner conducts research on the object. These stages all culminate in the findings shared through interpretive analysis.<sup>10</sup> In this work, Prown walks readers through an example of this process by examining a metal teapot from America, dated to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. The descriptive process begins with slight obstruction: the teapot is not taken as a familiar object ("this is a teapot") but is instead broken down into its physical form -- the curvature of the edge, the presence of handle, spout, and covering at the top, and so forth. Ideally, the researcher will manipulate the object -- in his analysis, Prown notes that "manipulating the object suggests the use of the handle and the finial."<sup>11</sup> I am struck by the physicality of this observation: the handle signifies not only through its appearance, but through a tangible connection between hand and object. Haltman categorizes this physicality of interpretation as a "[way] embedded meanings are actualized through use."<sup>12</sup> Following the close description of the teapot, Prown then works through a series of possible metaphors in his process of deduction and speculation. He comments on the way the wood handle and finial suggest the use of hot liquid which would make the metal too hot to touch, then calls to mind a scene in which hot drinks are served from the teapot. That connection allowed him to draw insights about the connection of the curved shape of the teapot and the shape of a breast, the process of serving warm drinks from the teapot and the process of breastfeeding (both acts providing comfort and nourishment). From there, Prown delves into the potential sites of

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<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Haltman, introduction to *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*, eds. Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>11</sup> Prown, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Haltman, 9.

historical research which stem from the object of the teapot, and in so doing, situates the way the teapot signifies within its time and culture.

Prown's work focuses on the way an object embodies its culture, but other scholars of material culture prefer methodologies which focus on the way craftspeople -- historical and modern -- embody the knowledge and the processes necessary to produce the object in the first place. I have been most deeply influenced, as I have indicated, by Sarah E Woodyard's recently developed methodology of hand sewn inquiry. Woodyard positions her methodology as a complement to Prown or another object-focused methodology, not as a replacement to it. She writes that her "method blends the agency of the hand with the agency of the material objects" -- centering maker as well as object.<sup>13</sup>

"The hand" is the actor for Woodyard's methodology, where the object is the actor for Prown's. Woodyard suggests (citing works from Tim Ingold, Nithikul Nimkulrat, and Juhani Pallasmaa) "that there is a level of intelligence and knowledge production that is located in the body of hand-sewing practitioners," and that practitioners can translate the intellect stored in the hand to more traditional academic research and writing.<sup>14</sup> These observations certainly align with my own experiences and reasonings. When I was working on my shift reconstruction project, I relied heavily on the work of Susan North, particularly *Sweet and Clean?: Bodies and Clothes in Early Modern England*. In that work, North references the lack of information about construction techniques in the written record, and supposes that contemporary writers must be "relying on traditional skills" in their lack of written instructions.<sup>15</sup> Of course these skills are traditional, but I have also come to believe, through working with the primary sources and the materials myself,

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<sup>13</sup> Woodyard, 31.

<sup>14</sup> Woodyard, 29.

<sup>15</sup> Susan North, *Sweet and Clean? Bodies and Clothes in Early Modern England*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 192

that these skills quickly become apparent to any stitcher provided with linen, sewing tools and instinct, and time to consider text, fabric, and body. Woodyard's idea of the intellect of the hand is informed by her training as a milliner, and it makes sense that any stitcher-researcher could trust the instincts of their hands with the materials. Indeed, my most significant primary source, a 1789 tract titled *Instructions for Cutting Out Apparel for the Poor*, suggests that this was equally true for historical stitchers. In the introduction, the authors of that text write:

although there may be particular articles that will, perhaps, require some little consideration to comprehend, and the description of which may appear very obscure on a cursory view, yet it is conceived that, with the commodity in the hand, and an attention to each measure and direction as they follow each other, the intended object will not fail to be gained, almost without any previous knowledge on the subject.<sup>16</sup>

Woodyard's reverence and trust for knowledge stored in the hand is in no way, it seems, a modern conception. Even in the eighteenth century, stitchers may not have relied entirely on North's "traditional skills," but at least partially on laying materials in hand and figuring out the rest.

In her work, Woodyard recorded herself via video and audio to witness the way her body interacted with the textiles and to record thoughts as they occurred to her while they worked. Her self-reflexive methodology centered her emotions as much or more than it centered the idea of pure historical truth. She also participated in regular interviews with a faculty supervisor, in which she spoke about "conceptual ideas (e.g. agency and performativity)."<sup>17</sup> The acknowledgement of the performativity and making felt like an exciting leap, and one which I am hoping to contribute to via this work.

Since Woodyard's thesis focuses on a mob cap worn by Martha Washington, Woodyard also takes care to establish who could have been sewing the cap she is reproducing, and whose

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<sup>16</sup> *Instructions for Cutting out Apparel for the Poor; Principally Intended for the Assistance of the Patronesses of Sunday Schools, And Other Charitable Institutions* (London, 1789), ix.

<sup>17</sup> Woodyard, 158.



labor she might be re-performing. She credits the seamstresses enslaved by the Washington family and references their appearance within the primary record whenever possible. Woodyard highlights the skill those women would have possessed to make such a fine and technical garment. Overall, Woodyard seeks to use her modern performance to highlight the great and invisible skill of women whose names and lives have been lost to history -- and particularly Black, enslaved women.

Woodyard references the work of Philip Zimmerman, whose 1981 article "Workmanship as Evidence: A Model for Object Study," suggests some key ideas regarding how to read scholarship from modern reproductions of historical labor. He looks in particular at the ways furniture would have been produced in the late eighteenth century. Zimmerman suggests a division between embodied knowledge and that which is written and recorded: "Researchers should be aware that historical data from other sources (primarily written) may contradict rules derived from these object examinations, and, in such cases, both sets of data must be examined more closely to determine the possibility of error."<sup>18</sup> This nuanced position acknowledges the possibility of error within written sources (when they are available) while also cautioning against relying *too much* on modern construction -- rather, finding the complexity of truth by analyzing both closely.

Zimmerman also maps existing ideas about the levels of skilled workmanship. Considering Woodyard's focus on centering the laboring bodies of the past, this acknowledgement of varied kinds of skill is important to articulate. Zimmerman shares David Pye's idea of a "workmanship of certainty" -- ie, work that is easily and consistently done, essentially low-skilled work, like using a stencil.<sup>19</sup> In contrast is Pye's "workmanship of risk" --

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<sup>18</sup> Philip D. Zimmerman, "Workmanship as Evidence: A Model for Object Study," *Winterthur Portfolio* 16, no. 4 (1981), accessed February 20, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1180870>.

<sup>19</sup> Zimmerman, 286.

ie, the maneuver is a risky one and may result in a loss of materials and income.<sup>20</sup> Pye's idea of the certainty/risk dichotomy posits that there is skilled and unskilled labor, and that the divide is stark and easily identified in the finished product. Zimmerman then adds a discussion of Benno M. Forman's "workmanship of habit" -- defined as a maneuver that is risky, but that the craftsman has spent so long training and repeating that the work *is* skilled but bears significantly less risk.<sup>21</sup> The idea of workmanship as certain, risky, or habitual is very compelling to me. Most amateur dress historians who make their own clothing take steps that could be considered "workmanship of risk," but these practices historically could have been considered "workmanship of habit."

Zimmerman focuses on the craft of furniture making. Scholars of material culture tend to focus on a particular area -- furniture, dress, etc -- because the ability to read a certain type of object is a very specialized skill.<sup>22</sup> However, certain ideas and concepts can be shared among a variety of objects. The discussion of types of workmanship resonated with me when considering dress history and dress construction. For example, when cutting cloth for a new project, a wrong cut can feasibly destroy the whole line of the piece, wasting valuable material in the process. This is a nerve-wracking process, and yet highly trained historical professionals did such work, with far more costly fabric, every day. In workshops with Colonial Williamsburg trained milliner Brooke Welborn, she has shared that as part of her apprenticeship she went through a series of stages: first she was allowed to sew pieces cut by geometry (aprons, bedgowns, petticoats), then allowed to cut those pieces, then allowed to sew gowns more skilled workers had cut, and finally

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<sup>20</sup> Zimmerman, 286.

<sup>21</sup> Zimmerman, 287.

<sup>22</sup> Dyer, 3.

allowed to cut gowns herself.<sup>23</sup> In this way, the historical skills of the milliner were built slowly, and the risk to expensive fabric cut by inexperienced hands was lessened.

Hilary Davidson maps the existing practices of garment reconstruction in academia in her article "The Embodied Turn." Within this article, she references a wide variety of projects within dress history that have focused on reconstruction practices to generate academic knowledge. Within this, Davidson identifies two kinds of garment reproduction: that which replicates an extant garment as exactly as possible, or the making of a garment when no extant to reproduce exists.<sup>24</sup> I find this division helpful: in my own reconstruction practices, including this project and my previous work examining an eighteenth-century shift, I have undertaken Davidson's second kind of reproduction: when there is no specific extant garment, but one is made from copying portraiture and/or old patterns. Davidson's framework is a useful one, although more potential categories spring to mind. Perhaps a garment was constructed *nearly* accurately but some modern concessions were made due to fabric width, thread count, and so forth. Or perhaps a garment was made to look accurate with little cause for it to *be* so. These categories are mostly unacceptable for the production of embodied academic knowledge, and yet may possibly yield reasonable results. Would it still be possible to check seam position if those seams were sewn on a machine, for example? Or is the wearer's experience altered because something was machine-sewn rather than hand sewn? The opportunities for construction and reproduction abound.

Davidson's article also features a conclusion which I feel is so powerful and has so strongly contributed to my understanding of embodiment as a performative and academic practice that I wish to reproduce it here.

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<sup>23</sup> Brooke Welborn, "Intro to Mantua-Making" (online workshop series, Burnley and Trowbridge, Williamsburg, VA, February 16, 2021).

<sup>24</sup> Davidson, 341.

The embodied turn recognizes that we can map the body of knowledge; dissect and anatomize the knowledge composed of and comprising a body; that experts have many bodies and their knowledge is a corpus. Curators, art and material historians, and practitioners overlay that body of knowledge onto the body of an object when they look at it, and see how it conforms to or challenges their existing body of knowledge. As our cells change daily, our body of knowledge is remade unconsciously through awareness, targeted through reading, research and critical thinking. Although tacit knowledge and its embodiment can be found in any aspect of making, clothing has a dual privilege as materiality that can be worn on the body, experienced through the body's becoming and adorning. Clothing must be understood in relationship with the body, present, absent, or liminal. Reconstruction or recreation of historic dress foregrounds that experience and relationship. Remaking changes the questions asked of dress history and can provide unexpected answers. I look forward to seeing the embodied turn change the historical landscape and future fashion studies, and how we understand all the bodies they involve.<sup>25</sup>

Davidson calls for the awareness of a multiplicity of bodies, and extends the metaphor of embodiment to even the process of developing academic knowledge. She uses the language of a dress fitting to describe the way practitioners of dress history can fit the understanding of reconstruction, the record, and the body. As with Woodyard's thesis, through Davidson's writing I feel called to produce knowledge about the ways in which garments are constructed by and perform with the body.

The theme of embodiment runs through all of these scholars of material culture which I have thus far referenced. Prown is concerned with the way objects embody their culture's beliefs and mores, Woodyard and Zimmerman center the body of the practitioner, and Davidson moves towards a practice of reproduction which places the body as both craftsman and wearer.

One idea that crops up repeatedly among other examples of dress history is the anxiety which bodies produce. Most specifically, there seems to be an anxiety between the "historical body" and the "modern body." (From a lens of performance theory, we might ask how the historical body performed differently than the modern body.) This anxiety is most readily apparent in titles: for example Mandy Barrington's book *Stays and Corsets: Historical Patterns*

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<sup>25</sup> Davidson, 352.

*Translated for the Modern Body*, or the article "'And Her Black Satin Gown Must Be New-Bodied': The Twenty-First Century Body in Pursuit of the Holbein Look" by J. Malcolm-Davies, C. Johnson, and N. Mikhaila.<sup>26</sup> Ironically, none of this anxiety is present within these sources: Barrington simply explains the process of drafting stays and corsets, although using a modern drafting technique, presumably because that is what her readers would be familiar with. Malcolm-Davies, Johnson, and Mikhaila trace the development of reproduction sixteenth-century garments for reenactors at Hampton Court, and the focus of their concern is on the supportive layers in the garments, not the bodies of reenactors themselves. Bodies still function much the same way they have always done -- to my scientific understanding, although modern bodies and historical bodies face/faced different circumstances, the body itself has not fundamentally altered in five hundred years. Even *Costume Close-Up*, however, an invaluable resource by Linda Baumgarten examining extant garments from the mid eighteenth century, shares some of this anxiety. Baumgarten writes:

Although the talented seamstress or tailor with advanced skills will be able to construct reproductions using the information in this book, exact copies of eighteenth-century clothing will seldom fit or look the same on a modern person. Body shape and posture have changed in the past two hundred years because of a combination of body-molding clothing, lessons in posture and deportment, and habits of exercise.<sup>27</sup>

The point Baumgarten makes about the habits of exercise and habitual posture are certainly a convincing argument with regards to the innate difference between "historical" and "modern" bodies. And yet I do not fully agree with this assessment. Any actor who has done any extensive movement training is familiar with the necessity to carry the body in different ways in order to convey a variety of meanings -- the actor's natural stance cannot conceivably and

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<sup>26</sup> J. Malcolm-Davies, C. Johnson, and N. Mikhaila, "'And Her Black Satin Gown Must Be New-Bodied': The Twenty-First-Century Body in Pursuit of the Holbein Look," *Costume* 42, no. 1 (2008): 21–29, accessed January 15, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1179/174963008X285160>

<sup>27</sup> Linda Baumgarten, John Watson, and Florine Carr, *Costume Close-up : Clothing Construction and Pattern, 1750-1790*, (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, in Association with Quite Specific Media Group, New York, 1999), 5.

accurately portray every possible "other." When I have worn period garments, and spoken with others who have done so, there seems to be a consensus (though granted, an amateur one) that the clothes one wears have an impact on the way the body moves in space. Of course if a modern person were to wear an eighteenth-century gown with none of the other under-pinnings, they would not look particularly historical. A historical person would not, then, necessarily "look historical" either -- because clothes exist in their context, with layers of underpinnings beneath and accessories on top. I do not understand the anxiety present between the "historical body" and the "modern body." The circumstances of each body are undoubtedly different, and I must concede that a modern body will never achieve "true" accuracy, however that elusive goal might be defined, because of the differing circumstances. But with Davidson above, I must conclude that the making and wearing of historical garments can provide surprising and useful information about dress history. The modern body is more than capable of taking on a historical performance for reasons of scholarship. The question, then, is what can performance theory add to this extensive and developing field?

## **Performance Theory**

In the section above, I have made some mention of the ideas of performance and embodiment. These ideas which exist throughout material culture studies resonate within the field of performance theory as well. Once the fields are put in conversation, other key tenets of performance theory clearly stand out and can be seen as resonant with material culture.

Notable performance theorist Richard Schechner defines performance as "behavior heightened, if ever so slightly, and publicly displayed; twice-behaved behavior."<sup>28</sup> Performance

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<sup>28</sup> Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1.

theory considers the way actors (meaning anyone taking an action) engage in performance (repeated behaviors). Many daily repeated behaviors which make up our inherent lived performance include objects (material culture) in general, and clothing (dress history) in particular. Consider the favorite shirt in your closet, or the toothbrush you use every day. These might be studied by future scholars of material culture: what did it mean to this culture that their toothbrushes were shaped like that, or that their clothing was increasingly made of polyester and other man-made materials? These are objects with which we perform daily, and can be read as such.

Schechner considers performance to be a place of experimentation for the social sciences. He says in an interview titled "Behavior, Performance, and Performance Space" that by using the lens of performance, "the controlled life action can be observed from the outside and thus repeated and tested. The difference between scientific inquiry and artistic play is not so much what's going on, but how you treat what's going on."<sup>29</sup> In addition, Schechner offers performance as a way to examine "others, other cultures, the elusive and intimate 'I-thou,' the other in oneself."<sup>30</sup> Through the ideas of embodiment and performativity present in much writing about material culture and dress history, a performative lens can help to more deeply access that research practice. The act of sewing becomes a ritual, performative act. This performative act of sewing or wearing can be re-created and studied. As Woodyard attempts, when one engages in an act repeated both *now* and *then*, perhaps one can reach out emotionally to the past, even to a past that has gone largely unrecorded. The space of performance, when it is applied to material culture and dress history, allows for an experimental repetition of behaviors through which to understand the historical other.

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<sup>29</sup> Richard Schechner, "Behavior, Performance, and Performance Space -- an Interview with Richard Schechner," *Perspecta* 26 (1990): 98, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1567156>.

<sup>30</sup> Schechner, *The Future of Ritual*, 1.

This section of my thesis will highlight some key tenets of performance theory which I believe could be highly beneficial when applied to practices of material culture. I will discuss the role of objects as performers; ideas of performance/performativity; mimesis or reproduction; phenomenology; ideas of ritual and liminality; and restored (or twice-behaved) behavior.

### **Presence of Objects / Objects as Performers**

In his 2003 work, *The Stage Life of Props*, Andrew Sofer examines the way stage props signify within theatrical productions. He suggests that his book explores "a particularly theatrical phenomenon: the power of stage objects to take on a life of their own in performance."<sup>31</sup> He references significant and iconic stage props throughout theatre history, such as a bloody handkerchief in Elizabethan theatre, a skull in Jacobean theatre, or a gun in a modern script, and suggests that these props signify with performers and to the audience in and of themselves. Sofer suggests that these stage props exist in multiple dimensions, and "include not only the three-dimensionality of objects as material participants in the stage action, but the *spatial* dimension (how props move in concrete stage space) and the *temporal* dimension (how props move through linear stage time)."<sup>32</sup> I disagree with Sofer, however, in that this phenomenon is entirely theatrical. Prown discusses, as I have shown, the way an object exists in its three-dimensionality and in its interaction with the world. Other scholars focus significantly on the way an object has changed through time. The question of how objects signify is central to Prown's analysis, indeed, central to the field of material culture as a whole.

Sofer suggests that it is the *performance* of an object within theatrical production which specifically centers the object. He writes, "simply by virtue of being placed on stage before an

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<sup>31</sup> Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>32</sup> Sofer, 2.



audience, objects acquire a set of semiotic quotation marks, so that a table becomes a 'table'.<sup>33</sup> When this idea is held up to the study of material culture, several questions arise. How narrow is the idea that an object might be "placed on a stage before an audience"? What makes up a stage? Or the audience? Is an artifact in a museum situated on stage before an audience? What about an object which a researcher places on the desk before them to carefully study? I feel that the table could become the stage; and the researcher the audience. Indeed, the researcher fulfills the role of actor and audience within the analysis of the object. To go back to Prown's teapot: I believe that through the process of description and analysis, the teapot has acquired "semiotic quotation marks" of its own. The teapot no longer exists on its own, unobserved: by entering into the ritual questioning of an object, it is now a signifier of its meaning (whatever that meaning may be). Of course, I am also considering the process of garment reconstruction as a facet of material culture. Does a reproduction signify in the same way as a "real" artifact? How accurate does it need to be in order to achieve this, if it is even possible? If historical objects perform, and objects perform in and of themselves -- perhaps the analysis of an extant garment or a reproduction both could be valuable tools in the search for information about the past.

### **Performativity**

One of the key themes in performance theory, and one which is so central in connecting it to material culture studies, is the idea of performativity. This term is difficult to define exactly. In *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Richard Schechner offers,

Performativity is everywhere -- in daily behavior, in the professions, on the internet and media, in the arts, and in language...[it is] very difficult to pin down...often [it] is used to indicate something that is 'like a performance' without actually being a performance in the orthodox or formal sense.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Sofer, 31.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Sara Brady (New York: Routledge, 3rd ed. 2013), 123.

I find that public historians make use of performativity all the time. This might be in the form of actual performance -- a costumed scene in a documentary or a piece of museum theatre, for example. Costume historical interpreters make use of performativity, even when they are presenting in third-person -- the presence of the costume creates something that is *like a performance*, even if it does not bear all the original trappings. Even history presenters like Lucy Worsley, with her popular history documentaries, or the trio of Ruth Goodman, Peter Ginn, and Alex Langlands with their historical farm series, make use of the performative nature of dressing up to share a lived experience with their audience.

In my understanding of performativity, so many things we do every day are performative -- saying "Good morning" or "I'm fine, thanks," even when we don't feel it might be *like a performance*. Going to work on a particularly bad day might be performance-like, if you are more concerned with the presentation of working than the work you are meant to be doing. Performativity might even mean projecting a calm you don't entirely feel to help a child calm down. Performativity has certain connotations of the false, but that need not always be something negative. The presentation of reality is a key feature of everyday life. The presentation of an object or a garment is likewise performative, and can be examined through that lens. The stitcher-researcher undertakes a performative act when she recreates facsimiles of historical garments, the wearer-researcher dresses in the same garments and the act of dressing is itself performative. The researcher's actions, then, are performative of a past reality, echoing into the present.

## Mimesis

Mimesis is a concept of performance theory which can be traced back to Aristotle's *Poetics*. The word *mimesis* is translated from Greek as "imitation," and although scholars debate what precisely Aristotle meant by this imitation, "most commentators agree that Aristotle did not mean mimesis literally but as a specific artistic process of representation."<sup>35</sup> If, then, mimesis is meant to be the representation of that which has come before, the practices of garment reconstruction can be understood to be mimetic. Per Aristotle, the imitation, the mimesis, which happens on stage comprises an action which features a beginning, a middle, and an end: these stages are found in many things, including the practice of garment construction/reconstruction. Schechner suggests that "mimesis is a subcategory of twice-behaved behavior where the figure on stage is standing for something else."<sup>36</sup> Per this process, the reconstructed garment (particularly if no original garment exists, as in Davidson's secondary category of garment reconstruction) stands in for the imagined original garment. As Woodyard posits in her thesis, the modern researcher stands in/imitates the historic laborer. Later in this thesis, I hope to explore this question further: how exactly is garment reproduction mimetic?

A key text in exploring the process and implications of mimesis is Elin Diamond's 1997 work, *Unmaking Mimesis*. That work, like this one, is situated at an intersection: in the case of Diamond, the intersection is between performance studies and feminist theory. In her introduction, Diamond states this intersecting point through a series of questions: "Who is speaking and who is listening? Whose body is in view and whose is not? What is being represented, how, and with what effects? Who or what is in control?"<sup>37</sup> *Unmaking Mimesis* explores a feminist mimesis, in which the given order of knowing and representing truth is

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<sup>35</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 166.

<sup>36</sup> Schechner, "Behavior, Performance, and Performance Space," 98.

<sup>37</sup> Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (New York: Routledge, 1997), ii.

fundamentally questioned. Academia in general, and the field of history in particular, have been defined by their patriarchal structures for decades. The modes of knowing and presenting knowledge in these fields have traditionally been masculine. In contrast, the vast majority of dress historians and sewists are, at least in my experience, women. The field of sewing and clothing is itself historically gendered towards the feminine. It is significant, I believe, that most of the scholarly voices pioneering this new mode of mimetic historical knowledge-building are themselves women. Woodyard's hand sewn inquiry (itself a form of mimesis) includes decidedly feminine modes of knowing: knowledge that is stored in the body more than the mind. Davidson's ideas of embodiment similarly lend more trust to the subjective experiences of making and wearing than the supposedly objective practices of parsing historical truth through records. In leaning into a feminist mimesis, or imitation, of historical practices, new modes of knowing and learning are developed and strengthened.

### **Gender and Performance**

Clothing itself is, of course, a highly gendered space, even as masculine and feminine styles of clothing increasingly share characteristics as the twenty-first century marches on. This significant gendering of clothing was only more apparent in Western cultures before the widespread adoption of trousers by feminine clothing around the mid twentieth century. As such, any discussion of dress history must simultaneously take in an examination of gender as presented by that dress history. Judith Butler's writing from the 1980s and 90s has been foundational to my understanding of the conflation of dress and gender, although I know Butler has since developed their thinking on the practices of gender even further since writing the foundational *Gender Trouble*. In the 1988 essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An

Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," Butler suggests that gender is not a fixed identity, but rather

an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.<sup>38</sup>

In other words, gender is a performance, and a performance which is actively negotiated and experienced by both the person *acting* the gender as well as the society *expecting* and *perceiving* the gender. The primary -- though by *no means* the only -- way that these gendered acts are presented is through clothing. Certain clothes signify "man," others signify "woman." In 2021, certain clothes might signify "nonbinary" or "androgynous." The clothing, the costume, is the primary tool by which individuals perform their gender. In what ways, then, does historical clothing work to gender the body? The performance of gender, in particular, becomes foundational to my later conclusions when examining the garments I constructed.

### **Ritual, Liminality, Communitas**

Another well-studied site of focus in performance theory is that of ritual. Sewing in and of itself is a ritual act, whether it is through a process of garment reconstruction or simply a hobby. I referenced Aristotle's mimesis earlier, with its beginning, middle, and end: the ritual of sewing shares these parts as well. The sewist must prepare their sewing kit and their project, work on it, and then eventually the project comes to an end. In each making session there is a small, constantly repeated ritual: cutting the thread, threading the needle, waxing the thread, beginning to sew, knotting the thread, then beginning again, over and over. Modern sewists

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<sup>38</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3207893>.  
Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2nd ed. New York and London: Routledge, 1999.

(Sonstroem and Woodyard in particular) identify the process of hand sewing as meditative. Schechner positions rituals as "liminal performances," or special performative occasions which mark times of liminality -- for example, rituals to mark birth, marriage, and so on.<sup>39</sup> Those who go through one of these liminal performances, Schechner explains, must first strip their old identity (in the example of marriage, the old identity as a single person) and then take on the new identity (entrance into married life).<sup>40</sup>

The stitcher does not (necessarily) undergo this transformative liminality in each making session, but there is a strong element of transformation within each garment construction or reconstruction process. The stitcher begins with cloth on the bolt and thread on the spool, and unmakes them -- the cloth is cut, the thread is unwound. The cloth and thread exist in a liminal space, betwixt and between, neither what they were nor what they will be. And at the end of the sewing ritual, the thread and cloth and whatever notions have been transformed and emerge in their new form. A key element of ritual, then, is *communitas* -- the practice of being in community with those who enter the ritual space with you. Methodologies used by Woodyard, Zimmerman, and Davidson all attempt to connect to some historical truth, inaccessible except through the *communitas*-building act of reenacting the rituals of historical labor. Stitcher-researchers and wearer-researchers, by engaging in the mimetic and performative acts of reconstructing and wearing historical garments, attempt to engage with the historical community of stitchers and wearers of clothing.

### **Restored / Twice-Behaved Behavior**

Restored behavior, or twice-behaved behavior, is potentially the undercurrent to all ideas about performance and performativity. I see this idea of restored behavior as a key factor in the

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<sup>39</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 66.

<sup>40</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 66.

mimetic ritual Woodyard's hand sewn inquiry suggests to material culture researchers. Schechner explains, "restored behavior is living behavior treated as a film director treats a strip of film....Restored behavior can be of long duration as in ritual performances or of short duration as in fleeting gestures such as waving goodbye."<sup>41</sup> Essentially, by repeating the behavior, or by creating the mimetic impression of the behavior, performance offers a site of inquiry and investigation. Repeating behaviors that you have done before, or repeating them in the act of questioning, can allow for greater discovery. Schechner even suggests that doing a repeated behavior "as if you were someone else" can result in a connection of the self with the other. Actors, when they perform their rehearsed behavior, develop an understanding of the other (their character). Woodyard and Davidson suggest that one can forge historical empathy and understanding through the completion of reconstruction processes. The crux of the issue of embodiment in material culture studies, then, is the idea that modern researchers can restore historical behaviors in order to better embody and understand them.

Throughout Chapter 1, I have examined some key concepts in the fields of material culture and performance studies, with an eye for the echoes and resonances between these disparate fields. Ultimately, the ideas of embodied practices within material culture are echoed by the ideas of performativity, ritual, and restored behavior within performance studies. In the study of historical objects, the researcher can function as the performer, or the object can. In the coming chapters, I will continue to examine these two separate sites of performance within material culture and reproduction practices. In Chapter 2, I will discuss my own performance as a stitcher-researcher, and Chapter 3 will conclude with a discussion of the way the completed garments interact with and perform on the body.

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<sup>41</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 34.

## Chapter 2: The Researcher's Performance: Reproducing Historical Garments

### **What, Why, and How?**

#### **What?**

For this project, I researched and constructed a series of garments to represent the feminine working class dress of the mid eighteenth century. I am curious about the experience both of *making* these garments as well as *wearing* these garments, and the embodied experience of each of those goals. Through this process, I will reflect on the theory I have shared above. How does this reproduction process afford me historical information as a historical researcher? How does the awareness of performance theory in this process add insight or obscure it?

Through this next section of my work, I will detail the research and construction processes I undertook on each of these pieces of my outfit. I needed to acquire or build shoes, stockings, garters, a shift, stays, pockets, several layers of petticoats, a bedgown, an apron, a pair of mitts, a kerchief, and a cap. In the following pages, I have included a discussion of each of these individual parts, structured from the "ground up."

One of my best sources for this process was the work from 1789 titled *Instructions for Cutting Out Apparel for the Poor*, (previously quoted above), a guide for using fabric economically to make as many garments for the poor out of as little fabric as possible.<sup>42</sup> This guide focused on the act of cutting out the fabric pieces, which is a more highly skilled category of labor than simply stitching the pieces together. As such, this resource provided cutting guidelines, but no stitching guidelines. I largely relied on previous knowledge and modern

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<sup>42</sup> *Instructions for Cutting out Apparel for the Poor; Principally Intended for the Assistance of the Patronesses of Sunday Schools, And Other Charitable Institutions* (London, 1789), ix.



resources including a workshop from Sarah Woodyard and online YouTube tutorials from fabric supplier and collective of dress historians, Burnley & Trowbridge. *The Workwoman's Guide*, published "by a Lady" in 1838, also provided some insight into hand stitches, although it of course was written well after the period in question.<sup>43</sup> I also made extensive use of portraiture and images of extant garments in museum collections. Finally, *Costume Close-Up* by Linda Baumgarten was an invaluable resource which provided very clear and minute details about extant garments from Colonial Williamsburg's collection.<sup>44</sup>

### **Why?**

\_\_\_\_\_I have already mapped many of the investigations which have converged, to my understanding, into the blending of history and performance. But why have I chosen this project in particular? Why an eighteenth-century working class English culture feminine impression? Why not a masculine one? Or a more documentable merchant or higher class outfit? Why the eighteenth century at all?

The first consideration I took, when choosing a time period in which to focus, was the necessity of featuring hand sewing. Frankly, this is a matter of personal preference; I dislike machine sewing. I dislike how fiddly it is, and how time consuming it is to get all the mechanics set up nicely and keep them in working order. I dislike the racket that comes (at least to my perception) from even the most well-oiled of sewing machines. Hand sewing, by contrast, is meditative, simple, and calming. Machine-sewn garments were not the norm until past the mid-nineteenth century, so I would pick a period to replicate prior to that point. The

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<sup>43</sup> Lady, *The Workwoman's Guide* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1838), (Reprint: Connecticut: Opus Publications, 1987), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.49015000239229>, 234.

<sup>44</sup> Linda Baumgarten, John Watson, and Florine Carr, *Costume Close-up : Clothing Construction and Pattern, 1750-1790*, (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, in Association with Quite Specific Media Group, New York, 1999), 5.

English-culture dress of the eighteenth century was an obvious choice at that point: that period and culture has something of a "fandom" in online, non-academic spheres of dress history. There is a wide amount of information about the clothing of that period, so finding other makers' experiences to lean on was much easier to do for the eighteenth century than other periods. I chose to focus on feminine clothes because they match my gender presentation, and to focus on working class clothes because I find them particularly compelling. Part of the appeal of embodied material culture scholarship is the ability to move beyond the boundaries of well-documented wealthy individuals, and so I had little desire to recreate very fine clothes.

I tried to guide my impression to the 1760s, with some leeway given especially for older styles. I made this decision after finding a pair of stays I wished to recreate in the Colonial Williamsburg collection from this period that were front-lacing.<sup>45</sup> Stays in the eighteenth century were a supportive garment for the feminine torso; they are often seen as part of the progression of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century pairs of bodies, through eighteenth-century stays, into nineteenth-century corsetry. Most stays in this period were back-lacing, which made this pair of extant front-lacing stays enticing to me. Early in 2020 I suffered a wrist injury that limits some of my mobility. Although most people could and did get into back-lacing stays on their own (hence their ubiquity in the period), I believed that the movements necessary for that kind of dressing would risk re-injury for myself. As such, I was excited to take inspiration from this particular extant pair of front-lacing stays that I found, and accordingly decided to keep the rest of my clothing items centered around a similar period, about 1760 - 1775.

Most pressingly, I find the aesthetic of eighteenth-century clothing very pretty. I wanted to work on garments I liked the look of, and potentially on garments I could wear following the

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<sup>45</sup> "Stays," Colonial Williamsburg, accessed October 12, 2020, <https://emuseum.history.org/objects/2206/stays?ctx=a2ce2702dc80ee3e56b74bd27faff1ff4f3c653&idx=7>.

completion of the project in my day-to-day life. Working class clothing of the mid eighteenth century is practical, comfortable, and lovely, and these all informed my decision.

### **How?**

In the stitching process of constructing an eighteenth-century outfit, I made use of Sarah Woodyard's hand-sewn inquiry methodology as a jumping off point. I also took inspiration from modern hand-stitcher Louisa Owen Soenstrom and her new work, *Hand Sewing Clothing: A Guide*<sup>46</sup>. Sonstroem, like Woodyard, is an advocate for slow movements and self reflection. My process was auto-ethnographic, as I carefully recorded my experience of the embodied process of making.

Like Sonstroem when she has tracked her projects, I tried to track the time and duration of each "making session" I sat down to (Appendix 1). Like Woodyard when she developed her methodology, I journaled frequently throughout the process. I wrote down brief thoughts after each small making session, and tried to write one fuller journal entry each day that I stitched. I used a list of prompts (Appendix 2) to spark thoughts about history and performance in each of these journaling sessions, although I also allowed myself to free-write. In addition to Woodyard's methodology, I take inspiration from her modern writings on her Instagram page. A throughline of modern writing about sewing and other handwork is the idea of slowness and awareness of self. By sewing slowly, recording the process, and reflecting through journal entries, I hope to maintain an intentional and productive making process.

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<sup>46</sup> Louisa Owen Sonstroem, *Hand Sewing Clothing: A Guide*, (Connecticut: Louisa Merry, 2021).

## The Making Process



Fig. 1: Rendering of the completed eighteenth-century feminine working class ensemble c.1760s. Credit: Theo Given ©.

## Shoes

Moving from the ground up, we must begin with the shoes. Not having any experience in shoemaking, I elected to purchase mine. The guidelines in *Instructions for Cutting Out* also suggest that shoes were purchased from skilled craftspeople in the period.<sup>47</sup> According to a price list provided in that source, a pair of shoes for women could be obtained for about 2 shillings and 9 pence (fig. 2). For reference, this is just a penny less than the cost of materials for a linen shift or a linen petticoat.

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### The EXPENCE of CLOATHING for a Poor WOMAN.

	<i>l.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
A Gown of Grogram	0	6	10
A Linsey Woolsey Petticoat	0	2	10
A Flannel ditto	0	2	7
A Dowlas Shift	0	2	10
A Check Apron	0	2	0 $\frac{1}{2}$
A Cap with a Border	0	0	5 $\frac{1}{2}$
A Double Check Handkerchief	0	0	10
A Pair of Black Worsted Stockings	0	1	2
A Pair of Black Worsted Mitts	0	0	10
A Black Stuff Bonnet	0	1	6
A Pair of Shoes, ready made	0	2	9
A Grey Duffield Cloak	0	5	6
	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>

Fig. 2. The Expense of Clothing a Poor Woman from *Instructions for Cutting Out*, 1789.

Fabric was extremely valuable in the eighteenth century, as the construction techniques used throughout (as well as the focus of *Instructions on Cutting Out*, on preserving economy of fabric) indicate, but this comparison is staggering to me. The cost of fabric for a shift was

<sup>47</sup> *Instructions for Cutting Out*, 36.

practically equal to the cost of a completed pair of shoes! In contrast, during our contemporary era, the cost of the linen for my shift or for my linen petticoat was roughly \$30. The shoes I purchased cost \$180. This fact alone begs many new research questions. What economic factors, historically and now, contributed to the difference between a pair of shoes equal in value to a length of fabric to that same length of fabric being only one-sixth the cost of the shoes? I purchased both shoes and fabric from sellers who prioritize good quality and ethical production, yet this massive discrepancy still exists in the relative low cost of fabric.

I chose a pair of shoes from the American Duchess company, and they are very beautifully made. They look as if they will last for years, and I trust the research that went into the development of this product. Per the American Duchess website, "Kensingtons exhibit all the trademarks of shoes historically accurate for the American Colonial period, particularly the Revolutionary War years."<sup>48</sup> Like most shoes in the period, these came without buckles, which I had to add on my own, similarly purchased from American Duchess (fig. 3). The process of attaching the buckles revealed a far greater interactivity with shoe-wearing than I had previously anticipated. The straps on top of the shoe must lace through the buckle in a particular way, and the consumer must pierce the holes in the appropriate location for the buckle to fit through. This allows for greater adjustability for a large number of foot variations. What most struck me, though, was the way this process of attaching the buckle acquainted my hands with the shoes. I had anticipated this part of my outfit would remain boring and sterile; instead, the buckle-fastening process granted me a greater understanding of and tactility with the purchased shoe itself.

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<sup>48</sup> "Kensington 18th Century Leather Shoes (Black)(1760-1790)," American Duchess, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.americanduchess.com/collections/18th-century-shoes-and-boots/products/kensington-18th-century-shoe-black?variant=35772104474774>.





Fig. 3: Kensington shoes purchased from American Duchess, with and without buckles. Photo: K. Given ©

### **Stockings**

In place of socks, eighteenth-century dress (like much of Western historical dress) features stockings that reach well up over the knees. I examined art work (some of it rather risqué) and extant examples of stockings in museums to determine appropriate color and construction. *Instructions for Cutting Out* provided tantalizing clues about the appropriate yarn for stocking, and suggested that light blue is a color well suited to young girls, but no clearer instructions for how to actually knit the stockings. The *Workwoman's Guide* of 1838 provided highly detailed instructions, and I originally hoped to "translate" them to more modern knitting instructions and knit my own set of light blue stockings. Despite my purchasing yarn and reproduction "knitting pins," I decided early on in my process I did not have the time to knit two very long stockings out of very thin yarn. If I knit my own stockings for an eighteenth-century impression, that will happen far past the time of this thesis. Both *Instructions for Cutting Out* and *The Workwoman's Guide* suggest that having a set of knitting on the go is good for character and economy, so perhaps electing to purchase my stockings was not very industrious or period of

me. My no-doubt tarnished character notwithstanding, I purchased a pair of blue cotton knit stockings and a pair of cream-colored silk stockings (fig. 4). I found examples of blue and cream colored stockings in several different examples of portraiture to justify each of these purchases. In Linda Baumgarten's *Costume Close-Up*, she analyzes a pair of machine-knit stockings from roughly the 1750s. My purchased stockings are not hand-knit accurate, and nor are they historically machine-knit, but I suppose in some ways they must stand in for very fine, historically appropriate machine-knit stockings.



Fig. 4: Blue cotton stockings from Long Creek Mercantile and cream silk stockings from American Duchess. Photo: K. Given ©

### **Garters**

Knitting as a skill makes use of two kinds of stitches: knits and purls. These two stitches can be combined to make different patterns in the fabric. When the skill of knitting was first



developed, the knit stitch was the only one in use. Modern socks feature a band of ribbing at the top of the sock, which encircles the calf: this ribbing is made up of a regular pattern of alternating knit and purl stitches. The purl stitch shows up in 1838's *Workwoman's Guide* (called a "turn stitch"), alongside a description of "welting" (ribbing). This ribbing stitch is not often found in pre-nineteenth-century stockings. Without this stretchy ribbing, knit socks or stockings would easily fall down. In order to solve this problem, garters, or narrow strips of material, were tied just under the knee.

The majority of extant garters seem to be beautiful embroidered ribbons. I didn't wish to do any more embroidery than I had already decided to do (more on that later), and the embroidery on the extant garters was so delicate and beautiful it seemed far beyond my current skill level. Additionally, when I looked at garters and stockings in the portraiture, I rarely saw such beautiful embroidery -- just strips of fabric or ribbon tied around the knee. I ended up purchasing woven garters from a shop called Long Creek Mercantile (fig. 5). Kristin Toler, the owner of the shop, specializes in hand woven tape created in period-appropriate manners. A strip of ribbon or a strip of wool broadcloth would also have sufficed.



Fig. 5: Handwoven wool garters from Long Creek Mercantile. Photo: K. Given ©.

## Shift

The garment worn closest to the skin in the eighteenth century (indeed, again, for the bulk of Western dress history) was a white or light colored linen garment. In feminine clothing, this was known as a shift; in masculine clothing it was constructed slightly differently and known simply as a shirt. A shift is essentially a T-shaped garment, shaped via a clever geometric construction to conserve fabric. Women would have owned at least two shifts, even at the poorest levels of society, and upper-class women may have owned dozens of them.<sup>49</sup> A shift protected the body from the outer clothes (the supportive stays in particular) but, just as importantly, protected the outer clothes from the body. By dressing in a linen shift or shirt, any sweat or other unpleasantness produced by the body could be stopped practically at the source.

As I have shared, this thesis comes in part out of my experience of constructing that shift for my material culture class. I used a combination of sources to develop my reconstruction plan. I began with non-academic online sources like the Burnley and Trowbridge historical sew-along YouTube series<sup>50</sup> and a collection of research called "The Cognitive Shift" put together by reenactor and researcher Sharon Ann Burnston.<sup>51</sup> Burnston in particular helped me shape my thinking as I descended into the primary sources. Linda Baumgarten's *Costume Close-Up* provides excellent details on an extant shift, and the *Instructions for Cutting Out Apparel for the Poor* provide detailed measurements. I examined several other shifts in various museum collections and cobbled together an approximation of the various extant examples and primary documentation I had found to develop the shift I ended up constructing (fig. 6).

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<sup>49</sup> North, 149 - 150.

<sup>50</sup> Burnley, Angela, et al, "Burnley & Trowbridge Co," YouTube, accessed August 30, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCySy8zO2XCnsSM1STJc0r6A>.

<sup>51</sup> Burnston, Sharon Ann, "The Cognitive Shift, or 18th Century Shifts: What I Know and How I Learned It," Sharon Ann Burnston, 2018, Access October 14, 2020, <http://www.sharonburnston.com/shifts/shifts.html>



Fig. 6: Detail: gores stitched down at the side seams of the completed shift. Photo: K. Given ©.

I cut and sewed the shift over the course of three days, totaling about twenty-five hours of work in all. The clever, geometric piecing was my favorite part of the process. I have read about the value of fabric in the past, when every bit of fabric was necessarily hand spun, woven, and finished, but this construction of a shift really illustrated that point. The entire blousy construction can be made out of just one narrow rectangle of fabric by a process of cutting off triangular gores to make the narrowed shoulders, and then reattaching them to the lower half of the shift to make a flared skirt (fig. 7).

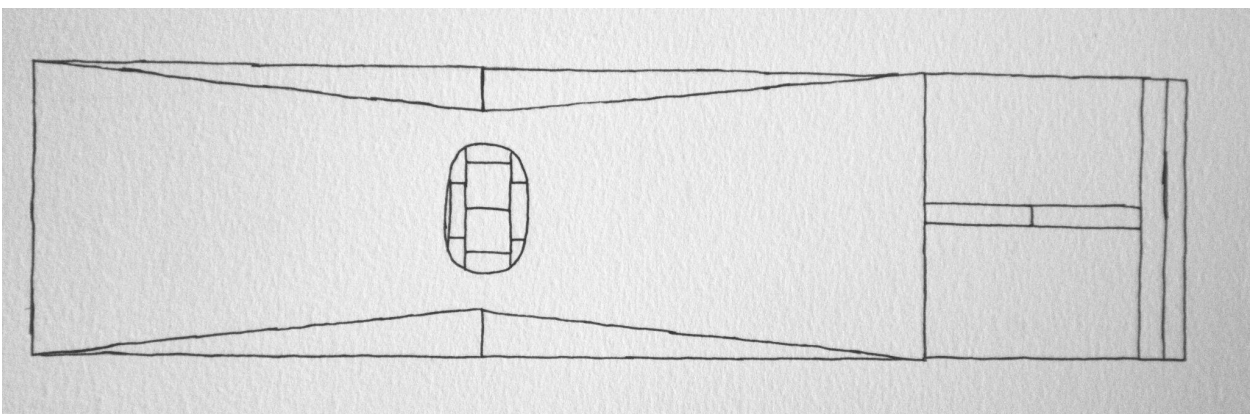


Fig. 7: Illustration of the economical way fabric was cut to produce the finished shift. Credit: K. Given.

Based on the scant instructions in *Instructions for Cutting Out*: "the gussets out of the bosom," I used even the wide-cut neckline to cut out necessary gussets and reinforcement strips<sup>52</sup>. By the time I had finished sewing my shift (fig. 8), I had less than a square inch or two of scrap fabric to dispose of. I felt that by using the geometric cutting patterns and focusing on very narrow hems and seam allowances, I accessed historical sewing practices in a way my hand-sewing practice had not yet achieved.



Fig. 8: Completed mid eighteenth-century shift. Photo: K. Given ©.

## Stays

As I have stated earlier, the discovery of a pair of front-lacing stays in Colonial Williamsburg's collection served as the jumping-off point for this entire project. Stays were worn nearly universally among women of all classes in America and England, although they were less widely worn in other European countries (fig. 9). As I briefly explained before, stays served as a

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<sup>52</sup> *Instructions for Cutting Out*, 67.



support garment and are often considered to be part of the tradition of shapewear for feminine bodies in Western dress. Stays are created from layers of linen, wool, and a stiffening material. In the eighteenth century this was likely baleine, or whalebone, although other materials may have been used such as dried bent grasses, wood, or metal.<sup>53</sup>

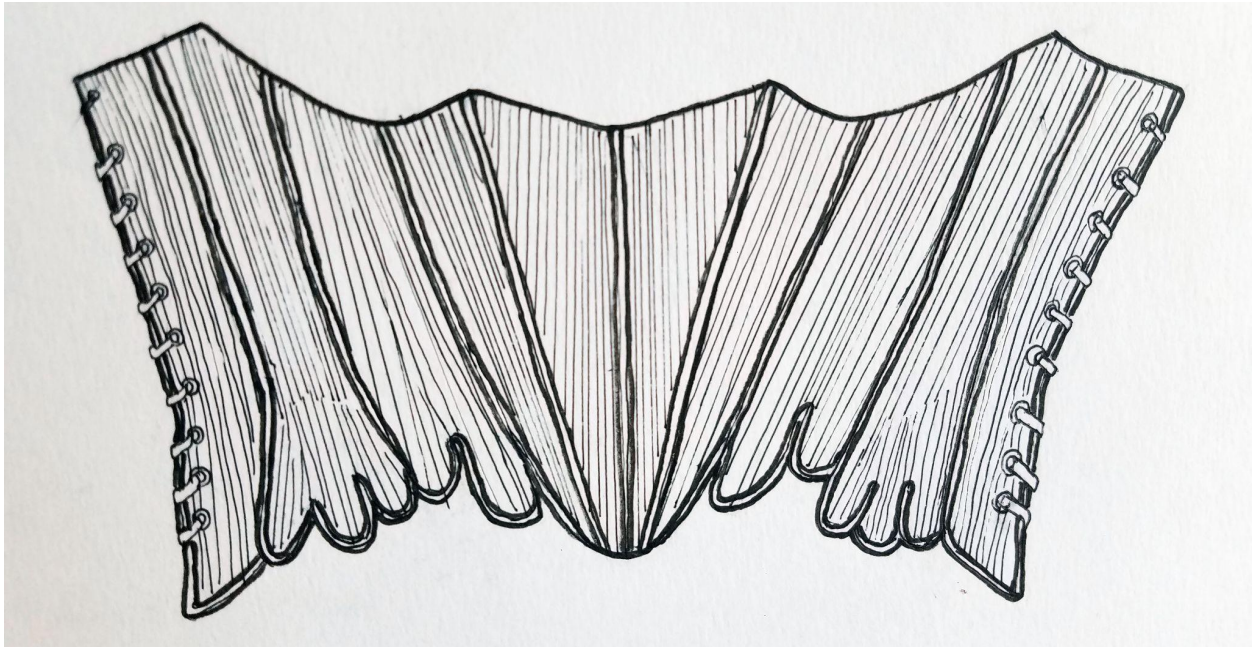


Fig. 9: Illustration of a mid eighteenth-century pair of stays (this pair is back-lacing). Credit: Theo Given.

There is often confusion between the eighteenth-century "stays" and the later Victorian "corset." It is worth taking a moment to acknowledge the difference. Stays created a conical body shape, and are a clear descendent of the earlier "pairs of bodies" and later "stays" from the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Corsets and their predecessors often exist in the popular mind as archaic torture devices of the patriarchy -- this is a misunderstanding. Stays provide a covering for the body that (while certainly capable of being eroticized) protects and shields as

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<sup>53</sup> Janet Arnold, Jenny Tiramani, Luca Costigliolo, Sébastien Passot, Armelle Lucas, and Johannes Pietsch, *Patterns of Fashion 5: The Content, Cut, Construction and Context of Bodies, Stays, Hoops and Rumps, c.1595 - 1795* (London: The School of Historical Dress, 2018), 6 - 7.

much, if not more, than it tantalizes. Far from limiting movement, stays also physically support the wearer -- imagine a weight lifter's back brace.

Very sadly, I have not yet made my stays -- the work required to create a full outfit took too long to allow for the completion of a set of stays, as well, which anyway were rarely sewn by home-sewers. The outfit is complete without them, although having the stays made would have, of course, generated a yet more complete understanding of the collective impression of eighteenth-century garments. Dressing sans stays was not entirely unheard of: some women *did* go without stays in England and America, even if that was far from the norm. I will construct a pair of stays for myself following the conclusion of this thesis; it will be a worthwhile research endeavor to see how that future construction interacts with my current understanding.

### **Pockets**

Until the mid nineteenth century or so, *clothing* did not have pockets, and yet *people* did. In the eighteenth century, these took the form of a pocket bag tied around the waist which could be worn with just one or as a pair. These pockets were shockingly large: costumer Ruth Watkins undertook a survey of extant pockets recorded in costuming books or whose details are shared online and found out that most surviving extant pockets were sixteen or seventeen inches long.<sup>54</sup> To give a bit of context: when I used a pocket as an interpreter at Henricus Historical Park, which was only about twelve inches long, the shape was so roomy that I regularly fit a small paperback book, a walkie-talkie, and most of my lunch into the single pocket. Any modern cries about the injustice of the lack of pockets in feminine clothing only show how far we have fallen in terms of pocket-having.

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<sup>54</sup> Ruth Watkins (@ruthwatkinscostumes), "The pocket length information you didn't know you needed," Instagram, November 27, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CIGGfrghzmF/?hl=en>.

I had made a couple pockets before, and so I felt very confident in my pocket-making by the time I got to this part of my project. In fact, I felt so confident that I decided to embroider the fronts. Embroidered pockets are fairly common among existing extant pockets from this period. I did not copy an existing pocket, but instead reviewed embroidery designs and created an amalgamation of themes I found in those existing patterns (fig. 10).



Fig. 10: Pair of completed pockets, approx 11x15". Photo: K. Given ©.

I quickly came to regret my decision to embroider my pockets. The embroidery took just over twenty-one hours of work, and the construction of the actual pair of pockets took around eight and a half hours. My journal throughout the embroidery process is marked with anxiety -- I worried that I was not embroidering "accurately," that I had not done enough research, that my stitches were inadequate. I even worried that I would run out of embroidery wool! In contrast,



the actual pocket stitching is marked by a much greater confidence in my journal. I studied the construction of a pocket in *Costume Close-Up* thoroughly, and I felt sure that my construction choices reflected period practices. I backed the embroidery with a light-weight linen and pieced together strips of fabric to use as a pocket binding: I took both of these details directly from the extant pocket studied in *Costume Close-Up*. In the end, the pockets turned out beautifully, and provide a study in contrasts: the sheer jaw-clenching anxiety over the embroidery (fig. 11) versus the easy confidence in the pocket construction.



Fig. 11 Detail: pocket embroidery, wool on linen. Photo: K. Given ©.

### **Petticoats: Considerations and Concerns**

Petticoats in the eighteenth century might be more simply referred to as "skirts." They would be worn under gowns, which were often open in the front to reveal the petticoat beneath.



In the case of my kit, I have made up a short gown, meaning my petticoat is open all round. Petticoats made up both outer-wear and underwear.

The development of petticoat layers served as another place of great anxiety throughout this process. I knew from brief mentions in Linda Baumgarten's *What Clothes Reveal* that feminine dress usually featured at least two petticoats, and several other costumers mentioned "under-petticoats" off hand.<sup>55</sup> I struggled to find documentation of how, exactly, an under-petticoat might be constructed. *Instructions for Cutting Out* called for a linsey-woolsey petticoat and a wool flannel petticoat; the wool petticoat being made up shorter than the linsey-woolsey. I supposed the flannel was meant to be the under-petticoat, but I had no idea how it might be structured, if it was different in construction at all. Then, upon watching the dress historians at Burnley & Trowbridge in a YouTube Live where they discussed their research on petticoats, they mentioned that the point of an under-petticoat was that it might be washable! This made sense, logistically, because most undergarments in the eighteenth century were focused on the idea of protecting outer garments from the body. The wool flannel I had purchased, however, was seriously *not* washable. I also hesitated because of the lack of readily available scholarly information: it seemed dicey, at best, to make full construction decisions based on an off-hand comment, even if I did generally trust the researcher that comment came from.

In the end I decided on three petticoats: a linen under petticoat, and two "fashion" petticoats: one wool flannel, one striped linen. They can be worn all together for a very voluminous appearance, or I could wear just one over-petticoat at a time. In any case, having two

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<sup>55</sup> Baumgarten, Linda., and Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, *What Clothes Reveal : The Language of Clothing in Colonial and Federal America : The Colonial Williamsburg Collection*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, 29, 40.

skirts provides the potential for more warmth in cold weather as well as the potential for more variety of presentation.

### **Petticoat: Linen, Under**

Despite my initial misgivings about the under-petticoat as a garment, this ended up being one of my favorite pieces to research and construct. An invaluable resource during this project has been Larsdatter.com's Eighteenth Century Notebook, a website that catalogues links to extant garments in museum (and other) collections online, as well as a bibliography of secondary and tertiary sources per garment type. When I was spending some time looking through those links, one of the links I followed led me to an embroidered linen petticoat in Colonial Williamsburg's collection. The piece was labeled an under-petticoat and dated to 1750 - 1770.<sup>56</sup> I felt as though I had literally stumbled over the answer to a research question which had been gnawing at me for weeks.

I knew at that point in the semester, after seeing how long the embroidery on the pockets took, that I would not have time to embroider the lower edge of my under-petticoat as the Colonial Williamsburg piece had been embroidered. But I decided to replicate the construction all except the embroidery, and see what came of it. The extant petticoat was made of a thin linen, and had another linen strip backing the wool embroidery that wound around the hem. The lower edge was bound with linen tape (fig. 12). The fullness of the skirt (about ninety inches around) was pleated to the waist-tape with a wide front panel and a center back opening.

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<sup>56</sup> "Under Petticoat," Colonial Williamsburg, accessed March 2, 2021, <https://emuseum.history.org/objects/98459/under-petticoat>.



Fig. 12: Detail: layered structure of the bottom of the under-petticoat. Photo: K. Given ©.

I had some period-correct width linen leftover from my shift project in the Fall, and I cut out my pieces to make an under-petticoat similar in dimensions to the Colonial Williamsburg example (fig. 13). This was a quick project: only six and a half hours in total. When I finished the garment and tried it on, I was immensely pleased with the way the treatment of the hem held the skirt out from the body. It is narrower than my over-petticoats, but the combination of the linen band and the linen tape at the lower edge seems to stiffen the construction and provide more shape. I had seen some secondary sources suggest an under-petticoat be quilted or made of matelasse fabric (which has the appearance of being quilted although it is flat-woven), both of which would provide more body to the under-petticoat and thus to the overall look, but my budget had long since run out. I had resigned myself to a limp linen under-petticoat, but I was delighted by the surprise that the construction alone provides such structure.



Fig. 13: Completed linen under-petticoat. Photo: K. Given ©.

### **Upper Petticoats: Wool Flannel and Linen**

My original plan was to have one upper petticoat of linen and one under petticoat of wool flannel. With this in mind, I originally purchased a wool flannel to make an under-petticoat based on the recommendation in *Instructions for Cutting Out*. I cut my fabric to a length indicated by that source. Following that irrevocable decision, I changed my mind about the construction of my under-petticoat, and decided I wanted my wool petticoat to serve as a typical fashion petticoat -- that needed to be three inches longer than it was. I committed to piecing the wool petticoat -- a process of sewing up panels of fabric to make the piece as large as one needs (fig. 14).



Fig. 14: Detail: Piecing near hem of wool petticoat, front (left) and back (right).  
Photo: K. Given ©.

Petticoats in the eighteenth century were wide skirts, ranging from about 90" to 120" -- this measurement for skirts without skirt supports, to say nothing of the iconic hoops of finer gowns of the period. They were constructed with two panels, a front and a back. These panels crossed over at the side-midline of the waist, leaving a slit through which a person could access her pockets. Modern linen and wool tends to be about sixty inches in width, allowing for a perfectly wide 120" petticoat with only two panels of fabric. The seams line up nicely and make up part of the pocket slit. I have followed this modern construction on both my linen and my wool petticoat, not least of all because I have done it before and I presumed it would take less time than using historical widths of fabric, which was usually between 27" and 36". This would indicate that pocket slits would need to be cut into the material and joining seams could potentially be visible, or at least not hidden neatly on the sides. I am not sure that this was the right decision -- I felt very little connection to past making practices using these wide, modern panels, although I used historical seaming techniques on all the petticoats.

I added both width and length to my wool flannel petticoat panels. Piecing bits of fabric together to get to the size you need is common throughout history, and particularly in the eighteenth century -- fine silk dresses are often seen pieced together pell-mell, so I supposed it was fine for a working class impression. The piecing itself did add a shocking and frustrating



amount of time to the project, though. The straightforward construction of the linen over-petticoat took about eight hours and the under-petticoat about six and a half; the pieced wool petticoat took nearly eighteen hours to complete. I did find a way to cleverly hide the piecing seam of the 3" strip to lengthen the petticoat. I took inspiration from a few images and decided to sew a piece of wool tape over the pieced seam. This adds decoration to the petticoat, a little bit of weight to the hem, and covers up the unsightly seam (fig. 15).



Fig. 15: Completed wool petticoat. Photo: K. Given ©.

The linen over-petticoat was very simple to construct in comparison to the linen under-petticoat or the wool flannel petticoat. Having seen many striped petticoats in art depicting working and lower class women, I elected for a muted grey stripe. (Historically, bright colors

tended to be favored, but I prefer dark and muted colors myself. I presume there must have been people in the past with boring tastes like me, just as there are people with loud and colorful tastes now.)

I cut two panels of the sixty-inch wide fabric, seamed the sides, sewed a hem, and bound the waist. This was an exceedingly simple project that took about eight hours to construct, but took relatively low mental energy (detail of stitching, fig. 16). In my journal, I describe my feelings towards the process of constructing the linen petticoat as "neutral." I worried about the choice not to use period techniques, but not over-much. I felt pleased and confident about the work but not too engaged by it. Ironically, I wonder if this might perhaps be more of an indication of the emotional state of a milliner or her apprentice in the period? I felt a good deal of apprehension on a number of these projects, but I cannot imagine that doing this sewing day in and day out yields to regular nervousness. In fact, the more often one does something, the easier it becomes. I wonder if my easy, low-stress attitude to the pocket construction above and the linen petticoat could potentially be just as valuable in terms of emotionality as the great pride or angst I feel in other parts of the project?



Fig. 16: Detail: hem stitches on linen upper petticoat. Photo: K. Given ©.

As a quick aside, this linen petticoat became the first of these garments to have crossed over to my modern life. I've worn it out and about this winter over leggings and boots, and look forward to its use as a summertime skirt as well. I'm pleased with its versatility in that regard -- warm in winter, cool in summer. These are properties which would have been valuable to a historical wearer, just as they are valuable to a modern one. I am also pleased by the way this petticoat, more than anything else I have made on this project, feels like "just a piece of clothing" to me. Part of my interest in performance theory comes from the idea that our daily life is a repeated performance, and that repetition, as I discuss above, breeds familiarity. When I dress in my completed outfit, I won't only be wearing a costume, but at least one piece will be "just my clothes" (fig. 17).



Fig. 17: Completed linen upper petticoat. Photo: K. Given ©.



## **Bedgown**

For the top half of my outfit, I chose to make a bedgown (potentially also known as a short gown -- it seems that those two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, although they may have different meanings). A bedgown could have been worn by any class of women, although for higher-class women the bedgown was likely to be worn in "undress" -- when getting ready for the day or after retiring for the evening. Working class women wore bedgowns in public with more frequency, although full gowns were the norm. (I elected to make a bedgown as it was the far more forgiving of the two options, in terms of pattern drafting skill required and in terms of time investment of construction.) Bedgowns were cut, like the shift, by geometry, and usually were long-sleeved and about mid-thigh length.

My approach to the bedgown project was to begin with Burnley & Trowbridge's YouTube sew-along and pattern as a starting-off point for the pattern shape, and then to reference a short gown analyzed and presented in *Costume Close-Up* to base the garment I made on. Since I had little idea about the way a bedgown should interact with the body, I elected to take a truly modern process and create a mock-up, a fitting tool, from the pattern I had purchased, in order to see how the garment interacted with my body. Once I had determined that the pattern would fit me appropriately, I altered it slightly to reflect the cutting pattern that the *Costume Close-Up* short gown suggested (fig. 18). I folded a piece of fabric into quarters and cut out sleeve shapes and triangular gores as I had done for the shift. Those triangular gores became the flare of the bedgown's skirt. The sleeves were extended by cutting additional rectangles.

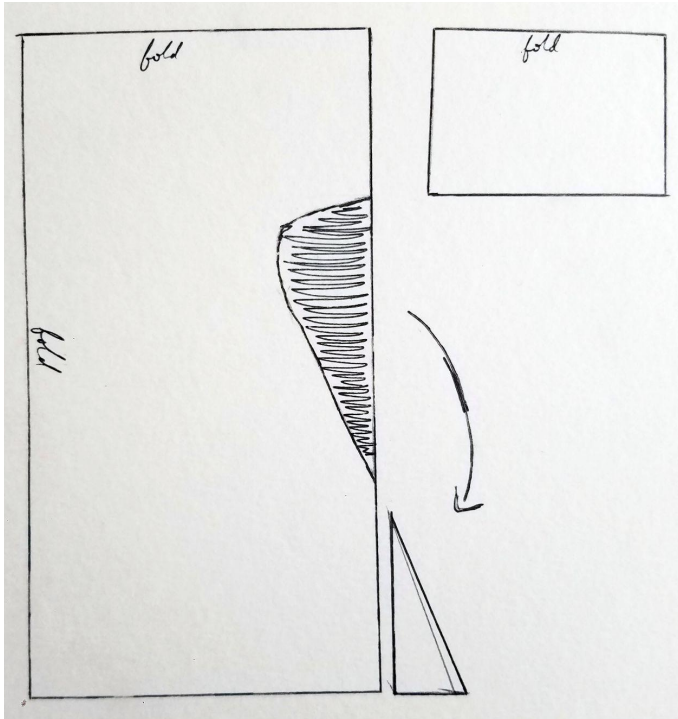


Fig. 18: Diagram demonstrating the fabric-saving geometric construction of the bedgown. Credit: K. Given.

I have spoken before about the relatively narrow width of historical fabrics, and their significant value. I did not cut my modern fabric to a historically appropriate width, but took an approach to cutting the garment shapes in a way which felt to me "historically inspired." The cutting diagram I developed for myself was designed to leave me with large leftover rectangles of fabric, economically kept ready for use in another project. Cutting only the pattern from Burnley & Trowbridge would have left excess fabric, but in an awkward shape, more difficult to make use of later.

I constructed the bedgown shapes I had cut out using *Costume Close-Up* as a guide.<sup>57</sup> I kept a circular neck opening present in *Costume Close-Up* and lined the brown, medium-weight linen bedgown in a lightweight pink linen. The extant from *Costume Close-Up* was likely from the 1790s or even the first few decades of the 1800s, but the shape and construction was nearly

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<sup>57</sup> Baumgarten, Watson, and Carr, 43 - 46.

identical to those in the mid eighteenth century. The only difference which significantly altered the shape was the presence of a drawstring at the back of the neck and at the back around armpit level (fig. 19). When these drawstrings are drawn up, they create an early nineteenth-century shape; when they are loose, the gown looks identical to gowns earlier in the eighteenth century. I replicated this detail on my gown as a matter of curiosity. The drawstrings drawn up would mar the presentation of mid eighteenth-century dress, but with them loose they are only a charming secret visible on the inside of the gown.



Fig. 19: Detail: "Secret" drawstrings at the interior neck and upper back of the bedgown. Photo: K. Given ©.

The process of making the bedgown took sixteen hours. My journal entries regarding the bedgown are fairly positive -- I was excited about the "more accurate" cutting technique I had employed, and looked forward to seeing the finished garment. But I was terribly irritated for plenty of the process as well -- sewing up the gores and the pieced sleeves seemed to take such a long time that I even began to regret my decision to cut the bedgown out in multiple pieces rather than all in one piece. In the end, though, I was very pleased with my efforts. The bedgown was so comfortable that I ended up wearing it around the house for several days. The two layers of

linen lie heavy on the shoulders and almost provide the sensation of wearing a sleeved blanket-cape around the house. When I wear the bedgown with the rest of my garments, I will pin it closed and fasten it firmly around my waist with my apron ties, but it is just as comfortable as a modern layer. Like the linen petticoat, I feel like this garment has already become a piece of clothing, rather than a representational costume (fig. 20).



Fig. 20: Completed bedgown. Photo: K. Given ©.

### **Apron**

Aprons were commonly worn by women of all classes, whether hard-wearing linen aprons for working or ruffled gauzy aprons for personal decoration. The *Instructions for Cutting Out* suggests that a poor woman ought to have a check apron, and many such aprons are seen in

artwork featuring working class women.<sup>58</sup> As such, I purchased a blue and white check linen from Wm. Booth, Draper, which their website advertised as based in research as a type of check linen available in England and America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>59</sup>

Most artwork of English women shows them wearing aprons that tie around the waist, with no pinned-up bib. Girls and very young women in English and American cultures seem to have worn bib aprons on occasion, as did women of all ages in French artwork. I confess to have appreciated the aesthetic of the bib apron, particularly when worn with a bedgown, and so I wished to make myself a bibbed apron. In order to match more closely with the American presentation I have worked towards with the rest of my garments, I wanted to be able to tuck the bib out of the way -- to be able to wear the same apron in multiple ways. I guessed the dimensions of my apron based on the proportions I perceived in portraiture, and used an apron highlighted in *Costume Close-Up* for construction guidelines. The pieces were all hemmed individually, I gathered the apron to the waistband, and whip stitched the bib to the apron skirt (fig. 21). The apron I was taking as inspiration from *Costume Close-Up* was a bibbed apron, but was from the late eighteenth century, and had such details like a pointed center front that a reproduction of that apron could not pass for the 1760s (at least, not per my research).



Fig. 21: Detail: bib attached to apron waistband with butted whip stitch. Photo: K. Given ©.

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<sup>58</sup> *Instructions for Cutting Out*, 67.

<sup>59</sup> "Check and Stripe Linen Fabric," Wm. Booth, Draper, accessed December 28, 2020, [https://www.wmboothdraper.com/Linens/linens\\_checks.html](https://www.wmboothdraper.com/Linens/linens_checks.html).

The apron took six hours and thirty minutes to construct, although the process was curiously painful. I felt very anxious about cutting out the right size of the apron skirt and bib. To call back to Zimmerman's work: although a milliner in the eighteenth century might see the cutting of an apron as an example of workmanship of habit, to me it felt seriously risky. Once I had cut my pieces out, I felt stalled on sewing them, even though I knew the process would be easy. Perhaps my earlier distress had colored the rest of the project. Once I had hemmed the edges and completed the gathering of the apron skirt, however, the pieces came together quickly enough (fig. 22).



Fig. 22: Completed apron with bib (bib can also be tucked behind apron skirt).  
Photo: K. Given ©.



## **Mitts**

Many gowns in the eighteenth century came to about elbow length, or in the case of long-sleeved bedgowns, are often seen turned up to about elbow length. These elbow-length sleeves were often paired with elbow length fingerless mitts. These mitts were often lined and featured fine embroidery and other decorative stitches all over. I received a kit to make wool mitts for Christmas, and decided to wrap this present into my thesis.

In earlier parts of this work, I have referenced my decision to rely on the research done by the small businesses I have shopped at. Whether the garters or shoes I purchased, or trusting the quality and look of fabric at Burnley & Trowbridge or Wm. Booth, Draper. I decided, then, that I would attempt to trust the research of the shop who put the kit together, Penny River Costumes, and see what the experience was like.

The construction process took me about seven hours, which I completed in one day. This was an extremely rewarding project, and I enjoyed the process immensely. As much as I enjoyed the actual embroidery and sewing process, though, I felt as far removed from the historical process as I had ever felt throughout the course of my thesis sewing. I had done some research of my own into mitts, but just enough to be dangerous, as it were. I knew that most extant examples were lined, and I had not found any documentation of unlined wool broadcloth mitts, so I worried as to the accuracy of my decision. I feel as though the finished mitts do not fit well at all -- I wonder if I had drafted my own pattern, and not relied on the kit, if they would have fit better. Then I found myself wondering -- how would a working class woman have obtained her mitts, if she wore them? Would she have purchased a pair ready-made from the milliner, or maybe taken a second-hand pair from someone else? Could she have afforded to get a pair

worked up for herself? The making process felt somewhat awkward and stilted, in terms of any attempt to *reach back to history*, but did raise a good number of research questions (fig. 23).



Fig. 23: Completed mitts, wool and silk. Photo: K. Given ©.

### **Kerchief**

In art of the eighteenth century, it is common to see women, particularly working women, with a fichu or a kerchief around their neck, tucked into the top of their gown or tied over their chest. These were typically square pieces of fabric, made of cotton, and were easily available in a wide variety of prints. For my eighteenth-century impression, I used a madder red and olive green flowered handkerchief I purchased from Burnley & Trowbridge some time last year (fig. 24). I have stated before how excited I am to have pieces of my eighteenth-century outfit that feel like "my" clothes rather than a costume: I regularly wear this kerchief in a variety of ways, so I am pleased it fits well with the rest of my garments.





Fig. 24: Kerchief purchased from Burnley & Trowbridge. Photo: K. Given ©.

## Cap

The linen or cotton cap was, again, worn by most women at most levels of society, at one point or the other. Caps served to keep the hair clean and out of the way. Of all of the pieces I constructed, there was the most research readily available on the construction of caps in this period, both amateur and professional. The amount of research available (and my relative inability to align amateur research with my own readings of the primary sources) was overwhelming. I believe that this great wealth of research on caps exists because caps take, of all the projects I have described here, probably the most technical skill on the part of the stitcher. All other pieces have been relatively simple to cut, and very easy to sew. The cap, by contrast, gave me a good deal of trouble.

I was very frustrated by the process of sewing the cap, and yet when I completed it I felt more proud of it than anything else I had made. I decided to follow the pattern developed and sold by Burnley & Trowbridge, along with the accompanying YouTube tutorial. I made this decision to follow their resources considering the level of trust I felt in their research and the

intimidation I felt at sewing a cap. A cap is made of three pieces: a caul (the largest part which covers the head), a band (sits in front of the caul, close to the head), and the ruffle (decorative; frames the face) (fig. 25). I had little to no intuition for how these pieces might have fit together, so I was grateful to follow along with video tutorials for this project at least.



Fig. 25: Individual cap pieces. Left: caul of the cap. Top right: cap band, hemmed. Bottom right: Unfinished cap ruffle. Photo: K. Given ©.

First, the band was hemmed, along with three edges of the ruffle and a few edges of the caul. This was a new technique for me: the hems on caps are famously small, sometimes as small as  $\frac{1}{32}$ ". I aimed for a more practical  $\frac{1}{8}$ ", which was still the smallest hem I have ever managed to sew. These narrow hems are not the result of a preternatural skill at folding just a thread or two of fabric: the fabric is folded quite narrow once, and then folded on itself, so the original fold is effectively halved in width (fig. 26).



Fig. 26: Detail: Tiny hem with folding technique completed on one side of cap ruffle. Photo: K. Given ©.

Of this process, I wrote in my journal, "I can barely get a decent hem around a curve, and that's making me feel pretty insecure. Trying to trust the process. Really admiring historical sewing skills." Later, the caul is gathered down, then sewn to the band, and following that, the ruffle is gathered down and also sewn to the band, completing the cap. The gathers are done with a technique called a "rolled whip gather" (fig. 27), which I had never done before, either. The technique utterly failed for me at least three or four times before I understood how to make it work. No guidelines in primary sources or on the web helped me trouble shoot exactly what was going on -- only me, my fine linen, and the intellect in my hands, which were not feeling very intellectual.



Fig. 27: Detail: Ruffle attached to band with rolled whip gather. Photo: K. Given ©.

Once I had determined the mistakes I was making, however, the rest of the sewing on the cap absolutely flew by (fig. 28). It was like something "clicked" between my hand, mind, and fabric, and I again felt confident and sure while I sewed. This was an especially thrilling moment as a researcher, to feel the principles of embodiment I am writing about at work. As the author of *Instructions for Cutting Out* assured their readers in 1789, the "intended object" of the rolled

whip gathers did not fail to be gained -- all that was necessary was time spent materially amongst the fabric and thread.



Fig. 28: Completed cap with silk ribbon pinned to band. Photo: K. Given ©.

### **Moving Towards Findings**

Looking back at the work I have completed, I feel proud to have done so. The work has taken just over one hundred hours in all (over one hundred twenty-five hours, if the shift is included in the sewing total). I have moved through research processes and experienced the embodied practice of making through a performative lens. I have, however, intentionally kept the pieces themselves separate and disembodied. Looking back at the establishment of the parallel fields of material culture and performance studies as well as the reconstruction work I have completed, I now look forward to my understanding of the theory as applied to the practical research I have undertaken. In Chapter 3, then, I will move towards an examination of these

garments in coordination with one another and with the body, and propose sites of connection that arise from the embodied understanding of these pieces.



## Chapter 3: The Garments' Performance: Reconstructed Historical Garments and the Body

Thus far, I have discussed key methodologies and theorists in the fields of material culture and performance theory, and I have suggested the ways in which these fields intersect. I have walked the reader through the elements and construction of a set of garments for feminine dress for a working-class person in eighteenth-century American and English cultures. This experience of creating the garments was an exploration and explanation of Woodyard's hand sewn inquiry methodology and has echoes in Davidson's writing about reconstruction and Zimmerman's writing about generating knowledge as a result of embodied labor practices.

I have not yet entertained the work of the scholar of material culture with whom I began this thesis: Jules David Prown. I will now endeavor to walk the reader through a Prownian analysis of these garments, with the additional understanding afforded me by both the construction process and the process of wearing these garments. Per the Prownian format, I will begin with a description of these garments, focusing on both the dressing process as well as the completed "look." I will then move onto deductions made possible by this descriptive process and speculate about possible sites of research using these garments as a jumping-off point. Finally, I will offer a possible analysis of the way these garments signify with the body of the wearer. Through this use of Prown's methodology, paired with an understanding of performance theory I hope to demonstrate the key features of embodiment and mimesis add value to the practice of material culture.

In his explanation of the Prownian process, Kenneth Haltman suggests that researchers "do not analyze objects; we analyze our descriptions of objects."<sup>60</sup> One issue of the notion of

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<sup>60</sup> Haltman, 5.

embodiment as a scholarship practice is the process of communicating embodied ideas in a disembodied way. As such, the clear and thorough description (best supported with images), becomes a necessity, and is the opening site of this Prownian analysis.

### **Description & Deduction**

The first garment the wearer dresses themselves in is the shift (fig. 29). This is a long, plain, T-shaped garment. The neckline is wide, although relatively shallow, and reveals more shoulder and collarbone than most modern necklines. There is an extra thickness of fabric separating the thinness of the material at the top of the shoulder and within the sleeve: this is a reinforcement strip which covers seams and provides stability. The sleeves themselves are finely gathered into the shoulder, and billow out around the upper arms. They are gathered again into narrow cuffs which are fastened with double-buttons like cufflinks. These cuffs can be worn very tightly just underneath the elbow, creating a full blousing effect around the bend in the arm, or can be worn loosely around the middle of the forearm. The latter style is more comfortable, but less attractive. The shift reaches a little under mid-calf. There are gores to widen the lower opening of the shift, but these are imperceptible to the wearer. This garment, although completely unrecognizable as underclothes to the modern eye, feels unmistakably like underclothes when on the body.



Fig. 29: The shift on a dress form, the first stage of dressing. Photo: K. Given ©.

The next garments to be put on are the stockings, garters, and shoes (fig. 30). The stockings are a bit stretched out from previous wear, and bag a little around the bend of the ankle. There is a "seam" on the back -- since these are knit around, this is not a real seam, but rather an inverted knit stitch. When stockings were hand-knit, this allowed the knitter to keep track of the beginning of each new row. In machine-knit stockings, this line was an actual seam. The dresser must take care to maintain this seam with a straight line up the back of the calf. Once the stockings are on, they are tied on with the garters, which are thick, fuzzy, and slightly scratchy to the touch. These characteristics are not felt by the legs through the stockings, however, but to the fingers as they tie the garters on. The garters are long strips of woven tape -- the length suggests a double-wrap around the leg, not a single. This creates a firm squeeze



directly under the knee. The shoes fasten with a buckle, providing a similarly firm squeeze around the foot.



Fig. 30: Tying the garters to hold up the stockings. Photo: Theo Given ©.

Following the most under- of the undergarments comes the under-petticoat (fig. 31). This is a long cylinder of fabric gathered down into a waistband, with one placket opening. The placket opening is opposite a very wide box pleat: from the center point, about four inches out, the fabric is tucked under itself until it meets in the middle at that center point, and then sewn down. This construction of the box pleat perfectly opposite the opening placket suggests that the opening placket makes up the center back. The petticoat, on the body, reaches just a few inches below the shift. It can be somewhat cumbersome to get into: the length, if not shaken out carefully before dressing, might twist onto itself. The width of the top of the petticoat and the

length of the ties extending from either side of the center back suggest the manner in which this petticoat is put on. The center back opening must overlap, the ties brought around to the front of the body, and tied in a bow. If the petticoat were tied exactly at center-back, it would be far too large for the figure. With so much "extra" around the petticoat's waist, a changing body (or a multitude of bodies) is suggested: this petticoat would fit a waist smaller than mine, or could easily be worn by a much larger body with no disruption to the line of the garment. The petticoat creates a firm, wrapped around sensation around the waist. A subtle heaviness hangs around the bottom of the petticoat; the wearer is not constantly aware of the specifics of the layered construction around the hem, but the slight A-line effect and the slight weight suggest a heaviness.



Fig. 31: Under-petticoat on the body. Left: front view on the dress form, photo: K. Given ©. Right: tying the under-petticoat on the body, photo: Theo Given ©.

At this point, the stays would be laced on to the figure. Of course, at this point I have sadly not completed this garment. My experience of eighteenth-century dress without stays is undoubtedly still valuable, although the presence of stays would make it even more so. I will reflect briefly on my experience of wearing stays (albeit a hundred years too early in style) at Henricus Historical Park: the lacing process takes quite a while. The experience of the body in stays creates a hugging kind of tension throughout the entirety of the figure's core, from hips to bust. Rather than the tension sitting at the waist, as in the under petticoat, it is spread evenly throughout. A certain upright posture is suggested by wearing the stays, which is difficult to maintain without them.

Following the (hypothetical) stays comes the pair of pockets (fig. 32). Stays are exceedingly helpful to have under pockets: without a firm foundation, any weight added to the pockets pulls on the waist and runs the risk of pulling the pockets down. The two large pocket bags are connected by a short length of linen tape, and long lengths of linen tape come off the other sides of the pockets. It feels as though the pockets are suggesting that the short length fit neatly across the back, although it could possibly be worn with the short length fitted across the front. Again, the idea of a changing body is suggested: the pockets, like the petticoats, are tied on around the waist. Keeping the short length between pocket bags against the back, rather than the front of the body, allows for the waist tapes to be tied tighter or looser, as a growing belly might dictate.

Having done the embroidery myself, I feel a certain amount of pride when taking in the crewel work on the front of the pockets. The sensation on the body is that of the side-hips being covered and protected by the layers of fabric ensconced in the pockets. In a modern dress, sans

pockets, one often feels somewhat unprepared, and the experience of strapping on one's pockets adds a sensation of utility to the ritual of dressing.



Fig. 32: Pockets worn on dress form, tied at center front. Photo: K. Given ©.

The fashion petticoat comes next. More than one might be worn, and I have constructed both a wool and a linen petticoat, but the day in which I am making this experiment is warm, and I am choosing to only wear my light linen petticoat. This, like the under-petticoat, takes the form of a long cylinder pleated down to a waistband. Unlike the under-petticoat, there are two openings: this suggests a front and a back, with the openings coming at the sides. The pocket slits in the layer just under the upper-petticoat similarly suggest a need for side opening in the

upper skirt. One of the sides features a box pleat, the other an inverted box pleat (the same width of fabric is manipulated similarly to the box pleat, but the fold is featured on top of the fabric, rather than tucked underneath). It stands to reason that the flatter profile of the box pleat should be the front, rather than the slightly more raised inverted box pleat. I get into the petticoat by lifting it over my head as if it was a shirt: the hems of the shift and under-petticoat would get in my way if I tried to pull it up like most modern skirts are put on. The back is tied on first: I know this from previous experience, but the object itself suggests that order: it looks more lovely to have the front piece covering the back rather than the back reaching around to the front. This significant overlap of the back section over the front section again suggests a malleability in the waist measurement of this petticoat. In addition, a real sensation of heaviness is building in this collection of garments, although the upper petticoat itself seems quite light in profile.

After the petticoat is on, I add (for me) the first and only layer on the top of the body: a bedgown (fig. 33). This, like the shift, is a T-shaped garment, although this garment features an opening down the front which suggests the garment must be put on like a jacket. My sleeves are still rolled up to just under elbow length (three turns) from the last time I wore this garment. The pink color of the lining is very cheery next to the staid brown color of the primary linen. The bedgown hangs open, and must be fastened with pins: I use three, two at the neck, and one at about under-bust level. I had to retrieve my pins from my pin-pillow, attached to my apron strings by a long ribbon. The bedgown hangs open below this under-bust pin, but there is still a significant overlap (more adjustability in fit!) and there is no danger of seeing my shift or even the top of my over-petticoat under the bedgown. If I bend my elbow, I can see the cuff of my shift poking through slightly: this makes me wish I had done neater stitching on the cuff. It feels



a little embarrassing to have my less-than-lovely shift cuff even somewhat on display. The bedgown itself feels heavy on my shoulders.



Fig. 33: Wearing the bedgown. Left: the bedgown on a dress form. Photo: K. Given ©. Right: pinning the bedgown shut. Photo: Theo Given ©.

The apron which followed the bedgown also finishes the way the bedgown closes. The apron has exceedingly long tape ties extending from either side of the waistband, which suggests that the ties wrap around the back fully to tie in the front. The delicate gathers provide a very wide surface area to cover nearly the entire front half of the petticoat. The crispness of the colors

in the linen, along with the wide area of coverage, suggest a usefulness to the garment. Attached to the waistband of the apron are silk ribbons (fig. 34), one of which is attached to a pin pillow and another which is attached to a small pair of scissors. These items are useful in daily life: if something needs pinned together quick, or snipped, these tools are easily at hand. The apron and its associated tools speak to the functionality of this outfit.



Fig. 34: The apron finishes closing the bodice. Left: the apron on the dress form. Photo: K. Given ©. Right: Detail: pin pillow and small scissors hanging from waistband by silk ribbons. Photo: Theo Given ©.

The apron, however, only covers the petticoat and the lower half of the bedgown. I put on a kerchief following the apron: it is a large square of fabric, folded to create a triangle. This triangle is then situated over my shoulders: the center of the hypotenuse is situated at my center back neck, and the two thin tails are brought down over the front of my body and tucked into the waistband of the apron to secure it. This piece of decoration livens up the plain bedgown, the folds at the center back neck could provide protection from the sun, and in cool weather the bedgown is another layer of warmth.

The final garment worn is the cap (fig. 35). This piece looks frilly and a little superfluous when laid out on the table. It features a ruffle and a drawstring at the base. This drawstring curves inward and holds the cap around the head. As the petticoats, pockets, and apron provide a firm hold around the waist, and the garters provide a firm hold around the knees, the cap provides a firm hold around the head itself. No pins are necessary to hold the cap in place, although if I felt the need on a windy or very active day I could easily reach down to my pin pillow and use a few pins to attach the material to my hair. The band of the cap covers my ears entirely, although that is not a terribly distracting sensation. When I raise my hand to touch the cap, I can feel the silk ribbon I decorated the cap with, although it is not noticeable otherwise.



Fig. 35: The cap and kerchief, here worn by K. Given, shown in profile view.  
Photo: Theo Given ©.



The description of the outfit in its entirety is as follows:

The shoes have two points of contact with the ground: the low heel, about an inch and a half in height, with a square base about an inch square, and the ball of the foot. The rounded toe points up very subtly so the tip of the toe of the shoe does not touch the ground. The shoes fasten with wide gold buckles. The light stockings cling to the ankles, although there are some folds around the front of the ankle, particularly as it bends. The straight hem of the striped petticoat begins just a few inches above the ankle. The fabric looks soft and crinkly and falls in generous folds. The design is alternating dark and lighter stripes of grey and black.

The grey and black striped fabric is interrupted soon by the bright white and blue check of the apron skirt. At the base of the apron, it falls in three or four large, soft folds, but up towards the waist, these folds are more numerous as a result of the way the fabric has been gathered. When the wearer stands in about  $\frac{3}{4}$  view, a pair of small silver scissors is visible hanging on an orange silk ribbon which terminates at the apron string. Next to the scissors is a maroon colored, small pillow, dotted with the silver heads of pins. This is attached to a teal piece of ribbon, which also terminates at the apron string. Tucked into the waistband of the apron is a kerchief patterned with light red flowers and green leaves on a white field. This creates a triangular shape over the front of the torso.

The kerchief covers the front and top of a brown jacket-like garment, the bedgown. The closure of this garment is not visible. This garment is blousy around the torso underneath the kerchief. In profile view, it becomes clear that this garment reaches down nearly to the wearers' knees at the sides (and about mid-thigh across the back of the body). The sleeves of this garment are soft and boxy and terminate just under the bend of the elbow. They have clearly been rolled up, revealing a light pink color that nearly matches that in the kerchief. Soft white linen fabric is

just visible underneath these sleeve cuffs. When viewing the back of the body, it becomes clear that the bedgown is under tension from the apron strings, and gathers into the center back of the body. The kerchief creates a "V" on the back which points to the center back waist.

The outfit is topped off by a white head-covering. Some of the hair is visible underneath, and the hair and face is outlined with ruffles that are slightly fuller on the right side of the face than the left. There is soft gathering in the ruffle and in the main covering of the hair (the caul of the cap), and a flat piece to connect those two gathers. This flat piece is covered by an olive green silk ribbon.



Fig. 36: The completed ensemble, here worn by K. Given. Photo: Theo Given ©.

The second step in the Prownian analysis process is *deduction*. Haltman explains: "we see articulation and deduce patterns of use; we see interaction and deduce relationship; we see expression and deduce reception."<sup>61</sup> In many ways, this practice invites researchers to examine the way the object embodies. Accordingly, when the object is a reconstruction and can be manipulated and in fact put on the body as a part of description, these deductions happen organically. As I got dressed, I knew from prior experience how pieces worked, and I also allowed natural deduction processes to happen and suggest use, when perhaps in a more traditional Prownian analysis I would resist these natural deductions in such an early stage. For example: the waist tape of the under-petticoat must be crossed over in the back; the box-pleated panel of the over-petticoat ought to be the front; the bedgown does not feature any closures and so must be pinned; and so forth. The way the kerchief covers the bedgown suggests its use as a way of protecting the garment underneath. The way the cap covers the hair suggests its utility in also protecting the hair. I have also begun to deduce relationships: the pockets must be accessible, and so the over-petticoat must be situated in such a way (ie, with the skirt openings located at the sides of the body) that the pocket remains accessible. I neglected to mention this earlier, but the bedgown does not seem related to the pockets in any way. The bedgown reaches almost to the knees over the sides of the hips, and yet has no pocket slits with which to reach the pockets. One must hike up the bedgown in a less-than-attractive way to access those pockets. I have even suggested a potential deduction of reception: the apron and the attached tools seem to present an air of usefulness. The loose fit of the bedgown suggests a certain level of casualness and even freedom of movement. I shared some anxiety about the visibility of relatively poor stitching on the shift cuffs: how would such visible stitching represent the industry of the maker?

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<sup>61</sup> Haltman, 5.

In the space provided for researchers to make deductions, they are also encouraged to reflect on the emotional responses the object elicits in them. I have acknowledged some emotional responses to the process of dressing, above, and so here I will focus on my emotional response to the completed outfit. The first emotion I feel is that of self-consciousness. My body in these clothes looks completely alien to my body in modern clothing, and the discrepancy is unsettling. I have often experienced this feeling as an actor when I first put on the costume that has been assigned to me. There is a putting-on of a different self: Schechner's connection to the [historical] other at work. As soon as I have acknowledged my internal discomfort with the self that I am now seeing, I begin to feel my discomfort as a maker. Can anyone tell how bad those cuffs are, really? The fit of the bedgown seems off. What did I do in the drafting process? Was the circular neckline a mistake? Should it really be as long as it is, and shouldn't I have evened the hem? I'm not sure if this petticoat isn't too long after all. As my earlier reflection brought to mind times when I had acted, these reflections bring to mind my thought processes as a costumer: working with fabric and garments to have them present "best."

It is necessary to accept that this is my body, even though it looks different, and that these clothes have been made to fit me with the best possible knowledge. They can be altered, or made differently in the future, but they are not *too* far off the mark now, I do not think, and so are a fine site of continued analysis. I like the way the waistband of the apron nips my waist in, and I feel some confusion about my feelings towards the blousiness above and below my waist. Modern people, particularly women, have a societal pressure to be and present thinness at all costs. This same imperative is absent in these garments. Proportion is important, but the six layers (seven if you were to add in stays) right around my waist make any "real" thinness unlikely even for the smallest of bodies. The importance is in the relation between the waist and

the hips, the waist and the shoulders, not the actual measurement of the waist itself. I am not used to seeing my shoulders or hips made larger with full layers in order to create these proportions and it is unsettling.

Once I have worked through the myriad of negative feelings, I can begin to acknowledge the positive emotions which arise. The colors are pleasant, and I am happy with the choices I made there. The pieces interact in ways that look similar to what I have seen in portraiture: another win. I like that my ankles stick out under the petticoats: the long skirts give an amount of grace and elegance to the presentation, and still I know they are short enough not to get in my way as I work. I love that I have such a useful garment as my apron on, which can be used as an impromptu pot-holder, a kind of temporary basket, or an ever-present kitchen towel. I feel proud that I have stitched every single piece I am wearing aside from stockings, garters, and shoes.

The most important deduction I have made throughout the process of dressing and analyzing is the changeable fit that is present in each of these garments. The under-petticoat, pockets, over-petticoat, and apron all fasten around the waist with long linen tapes. There is a generous overlap to every one of these garments (fig. 37). It is possible that these garments could fit a wide variety of bodies: they could easily be shared among people of differing body types. Another possibility, however, is that they can easily accommodate a changing body, as in pregnancy.



Fig. 37: Detail of the midsection of the dress form as the layers of clothing are built up via wraps and ties around the waistline. Top row: Shift, under petticoat, pockets, half of wool petticoat. Bottom row: Front half of wool petticoat, linen petticoat, bedgown, apron. Photo: K. Given ©.

## Speculation & Research

The next step in the process of Prownian analysis is to begin to speculate about the object. What questions arise from this object? What could it signify? How does it signify?

The most immediate and pressing question I have developed as I have manipulated this collection of objects is the adjustability I referred to above. I felt, as I dressed, that the garments signified this adjustability of fit *to my body*, rather than outwardly, to other observers. Is this adjustability perceived by others, then? Surely by other women, who would have been wearing similar garments. Did men perceive the adjustability inherent in feminine clothing? What was the culture of pregnancy and maternity like in the eighteenth century?

In addition to the speculation about maternity in the period, I find myself still wondering about the way a bedgown interacts with the presence of pockets. Did bedgowns have pocket slits? Were pockets not worn with bedgowns? If pockets were worn with bedgowns, did women just hike up their gowns to access their pockets? I also begin to wonder about the transition of clothing pieces throughout the eighteenth century, and the way one person would interact with

one piece of clothing throughout their or its life. Since I copied a late eighteenth/early nineteenth-century extant bedgown, this question feels especially relevant. How were earlier shapes modified to remain fashionable, if they were at all? I wonder about quantity: I have seen a good deal of research into quantity of linens (shifts and caps), but what about the number of petticoats, gowns, and aprons working class people had?

The cap, apron, and kerchief seem to signify the readiness to work. A woman wearing these garments, including the tools attached to her waist by ribbons, was ready to spring into action at a moments' notice. And yet the tools are attached with ribbons, and another ribbon adorns the cap. My preliminary research suggested that silk ribbons were accessible to all social classes, and this is certainly a source of speculation. What is the significance of a working class person decorating themselves with silk? The patterns of fabric are important signifiers: whether they are stripes or checks woven into the fabric, or printed as on the kerchief. The presence of patterns and a variety of colors suggests an affinity for variety and style, and variety and style suggest an amount of wealth, even in the lowest working classes.

Obviously, many of these speculations yield fruitful research questions. One might look into the practices of clothing ownership, or second hand clothing acquisition by working class individuals. The issue of pocket slits in bedgown side seams is particularly compelling from a dress history perspective. Another potential site of embodied, reconstruction-based research would be to build a gown from around this same period, and test the range of motion and ability to work. Research suggests that gowns were more common, although bedgowns seem feasible as a garment which allows the wearer to be "more active." Is this supposition true, or are gowns just as active?



One potential caution, for researchers who apply principles of reconstruction and embodiment to traditional material culture studies, is to be aware of the modern bias researchers bring to the table. Serena Dyer focuses specifically on the widespread material literacy in the eighteenth century, which is relatively absent today. Dyer writes, "It is vital that historians, who are often part of a twenty-first-century culture which is disengaged with the practices of making, do not project this gulf back upon their readings of material interactions in the past."<sup>62</sup> The reconstruction process itself is a step with which to avoid this pitfall. Even when researching extant garments, those with experience in reconstruction tend to be able to "read" those garments reliably, considering their knowledge of construction practices. (This is one reason I made the choice to trust the research from Burnley & Trowbridge so thoroughly, despite its place "outside of the academy," because many of their staff are Colonial Williamsburg trained milliners.) Even with this advantage, it might be easy to allow modern garment construction practices to influence the reading of the construction process or the finished product itself, and Dyer's warning is worth listening to.

Especially when Prown's process is paired with the reconstruction process, some of these stages must (as above) go out of order. The next stage following speculation is, naturally, research on the questions that have come up. I have completed a good deal of research before construction, although there is always yet still more to do. This speculation and development of research questions can provide exciting arenas of research, or can yield inaccurate and false modern misconceptions of the past. I find that the embodied practice of creating and wearing a reconstruction can help minimize the risk of the latter. For example, in Leslie Shannon Miller's article in *American Artifacts*, a collection of studies using the Prownian analysis process, Miller examines a late nineteenth-century corset. Of course, this corset was an extant example, and

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<sup>62</sup> Dyer, 9.

could not be tried on: any embodiment had to remain theoretical. Miller's article rails against the corset, emphasizing its small waist measurement and extrapolating from the singular object the idea that all women who wore corsets laced down to such a tiny size. In fact, corsets are made to measure a variety of bodies -- if a corset is itself very small, it is likely because the body it is made for is very small. Miller focuses on her bias of a corset as an "iron cage" despite her previous assertions that the corset in question was particularly "lightweight."<sup>63</sup> Should a replica corset have been constructed and placed on a body which would have fit it, Miller could have perceived that her opinion of the corset as torture device designed to shrink the waist was simply that -- an opinion, and an ahistorical one at that. Naturally, such an understanding might also be arrived at by a more careful analysis of object and researcher bias. Not all researchers are qualified or able to take on lengthy and expensive reconstruction processes, which is all too understandable. This is all the more reason to be aware of the practices of embodied research, and to endeavor to support scholarly research with a deep knowledge of the interaction of garments with the body.

Of course, when reproduction projects are possible, the ability to represent and investigate the performance of *dressing* as well as *making* in one's research is invaluable. One of the most striking pieces of information I have gleaned about the entirety of this feminine outfit from about the 1760s is its adjustability. Here, I wish to provide a hint of the interpretive analysis that could be possible via a certain train of research, following this idea of adjustability.

Considering the garments' figure-accommodating waistlines, and the fact that they are designed to be worn by women, a correlation begins to emerge. The (cisgender) female figure, far more than the (cisgender) male figure, is characterized by its changeability. In puberty, the breasts

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<sup>63</sup> Leslie Shannon Miller, "The Many Figures of Eve: Styles of Womanhood Embodied in a Late-Nineteenth-Century Corset," in *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*, eds. Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000), 134 - 136.

begin to develop and the hips fill out as the body moves from childhood to adulthood. Once adulthood is reached, the female body fluctuates: as the menstrual cycle waxes and wanes, a person might experience her breasts enlarging and shrinking back, or bloating in the stomach might come and go. Beyond these monthly changes are the more significant changes that come with pregnancy. The stomach and breasts grow, and then return to a size closer to (if not the same as) their pre-pregnancy state. If a woman has multiple children, this takes on a cyclical nature as well. When a woman ages, her body changes yet more as she enters menopause. Thus, I find that by deducing the flexibility of fit within all of these garments -- which I mostly realized by seeing the way those garments interacted with my body -- and by speculating on the necessity of those changes, I can refine a research topic: what was maternity like in the mid eighteenth century? How were ideas of maternity tied explicitly to the experience of womanhood?

I would point further research to works such as Eileen Janes Yeo's 1999 article, "The Creation of 'Motherhood' and Women's Responses in Britain and France, 1750 - 1914,"<sup>64</sup> Nora Doyle's 2018 book *Maternal Bodies: Redefining Motherhood in Early America*<sup>65</sup> and Susan E Klepp's 2009 book, *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, & Family Limitation in America, 1760 - 1820*<sup>66</sup> for secondary sources to examine this topic. Klepp suggests that, in the early to mid eighteenth century, "if all was well, married women gave birth roughly every eighteen months or two years until menopause."<sup>67</sup> Rhetoric and ideas around this frequency began to decline around 1763, however, and by the end of the eighteenth century the "abundant and redundant fertility of the colonial, patriarchal family" had been replaced by "a sensible,

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<sup>64</sup> Eileen James Yeo, "The Creation of 'Motherhood' and Women's Responses in Britain and France, 1750-1914," *Women's History Review* 8, no. 2 (1999): 201 - 218.

<sup>65</sup> Nora Doyle, *Maternal Bodies: Redefining Motherhood in Early America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

<sup>66</sup> Susan E Klepp, *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, & Family Limitation in America, 1760 - 1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>67</sup> Klepp, 4.

sentimental, and carefully planned family of beloved daughters and sons that freed women to pursue other interests."<sup>68</sup> Naturally, this was a slow cultural shift, and even if new ideas abounded in the 1760s, the garments of an earlier mindset still abounded. In addition to these secondary sources, the archive could possibly provide a fascinating look into conceptions of fertility around this period. If a researcher happened to become pregnant while working with eighteenth-century clothes, such ideas could even be attempted on their own changing figure. In the absence of detailed and diligent research, I hesitate to draw a firm analysis. However, it seems to me that there is a strong connection between the way eighteenth-century Americans and English people considered and thought about motherhood, and the design of their garments. Every single garment I constructed could easily accommodate significant fluctuation within the body with barely a change to its functionality. I propose that the high pregnancy and birth rate is directly tied to these features of feminine clothing in this period. By wearing these changeable garments, a woman communicated (signified) her possession of a changeable figure: in essence, these garments by their very existence communicate fertility.

It is largely the performance of making (mimesis) and wearing that has allowed me to come upon such an observation and analysis. The length of time required to complete a reproduction garment alone increases the amount of research (and therefore information) available to the researcher. The shortest amount of time I spent on a single garment was six and a half hours, with the longest being eighteen hours (excluding the embroidery design on the pockets, which took over twenty hours itself). When it came time to study these pieces, I knew them intimately. The ability to experience these objects on my body was also groundbreaking: I did not need to imagine a body which might fit these garments, but fundamentally understand how they *did* fit my body, as well as how they might fit it differently.

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<sup>68</sup> Klepp, 8.

These actions I have taken are all accepted practice within material culture studies, even if they are relatively new to the academy. Performance theory does not necessarily add new *actions* to practices of material culture, but it can add new dimensions of thought. Researchers already understand the quality of information which comes through reconstruction and wearing practices. I would invite future dress historians and scholars of material culture to consider garment reconstruction and the wearing of reproduction garments as modes of mimesis and of restored behavior. An understanding of these ideas of performance allows for the discussion of the ritual act of sewing (perhaps a site for future study itself), the connection of the present self with the historical other (accessed through the performance of reconstruction), and a greater arsenal of tools available with which to explain and examine these research methodologies.

## Conclusion

Throughout the course of this thesis, I have tried to examine the ways material culture and performance theory intersect. I have discussed the importance of acknowledging reproduction of historical garments, as well as the wearing of those garments, as a kind of historical performance: viewing the modern practice of historical labor as a kind of restored behavior to be studied. Hand sewn inquiry, as developed by Sarah Woodyard, hinges upon the connection of self/other which Richard Schechner situates as vital to performance studies. Performance theory already concerns itself with physical objects, as per the inclusion of Sofer -- this connection can be extended from built (reconstructed?) theatrical props to extant historical artifacts/objects, and thereby to material culture. Both Sofer and Prown are intimately familiar with the way in which objects signify. This signifying is done for and to an audience, whether the theatrical audience or those experiencing the object through the research.

I have also questioned how this awareness of performance theory can inform the field of material culture. Ultimately, I suggest, the practices and ideas of performance theory are already enconced within material culture, and this awareness need not *change* the practices of the field much at all. Instead, an awareness of performance theory allows for a dialogue between two factions of the academy. Historians of material culture could dip into the theatrical understanding of (re)presentation, performance and embodiment. Here is another intersection, if stitcher-researchers indeed lead to wearer-researchers as I have suggested: the convergence of material culture, dress history, and historical movement. Performers could feasibly step into the role of wearer-researcher, and through future collaborations performers and historians who use embodied practices could develop yet more avenues of historical knowledge. Historians offer a nuanced understanding of the record and the materiality of the past; performers offer a deep

understanding of the embodiment of the other, and a willingness to engage in repeated performances to uncover some as-yet unknown truth. In the segment above in which I illustrated the way a physical embodiment supported a Prownian analysis, I offered an example of this connection between research and physicality. By performing the act of dressing, and by acknowledging the importance of that performance to historical inquiry, I have been able to draw a connection between objects (the garments themselves) and greater historical understanding (the embodiment of eighteenth-century motherhood within feminine clothing).

I have also wondered, through this work, about what kinds of historical knowledge can be added via the process of reconstruction. I propose that we might find practical historical knowledge in this manner: the order in which items may have been constructed, or realizations about fabric-saving practices, or an acknowledgement of the adjustability of garments. It is worth noting that this kind of historical knowledge may be considered tenuous, and indeed, it tends to be speculative. I think this is another place in which performance theory bolsters this historical information-gathering. Performance allows for a repetition of events (Schechner's "twice-behaved behavior"). A researcher practicing garment reconstruction can repeat the event of stitching as many times as possible until it most closely aligns with accepted knowledge. (Indeed, this repetition plays out in the article about pursuing the "Holbein Look" I referenced in Chapter 1. In this instance, costumer-researchers struggled to understand the possible construction of sixteenth-century garments, and reconstructed multiple variables before arriving at a plausible solution.) By acknowledging the falseness of performance, and accepting that as a strength rather than a potential downfall, new avenues for researchers to develop historical knowledge are opened.

I find that these questions are important ones to have asked, because of the universality of clothing and the relative paucity of information regarding it. Material culture, in general, is a small field within the larger field of history. Very little is written about objects themselves, and as such, very little is known about these objects via the record. Clothes, in particular, have long been relegated to the field of women's work, and as such their importance has been minimized. In particular, the clothes belonging to marginalized groups are rarely studied: people of the working class, people of color, people who are fat, and so on. These clothes are rarely saved and rarely make their way to museum collections. This is to say nothing of clothes from periods from which we have relatively few extant garments. By allowing for the experience of performance and ideas of embodiment, and recreating garments within working class parameters, or garments worn by enslaved people, or garments which would fit larger bodies, we can develop *something* to study that is representative of these marginalized groups. The process of reconstruction also highlights the labor of those seamstresses and sewists who are so often lost to history. Sewing has historically been women's work, and as such its importance has often been downgraded. By preserving the knowledge which was embodied in historical women laborers, we preserve their history, even without the record.

I have, of course, focused on garment reconstruction, but that is not the only field in which these questions can be asked or in which these skills can be practiced. Any field of material culture can embrace reconstruction practices: metal work, furniture making, and so on. One might look into, for example, the history of cleaning. Or as an extension of dress history, one could reconstruct "receipts," recipes, for old cosmetic recipes. Food historians often engage in reproductive practices, and could engage with questions about the way cooking creates ritual or performance. In effect, any element of material culture, any site of historical questioning about



things which make up the bodily reality of life, is prime work for the practice of reconstruction. Any historical minutiae might be approached with an understanding of performance and embodiment.

One of the most significant parts of this work, for me, is the idea of the implications that might spring from this reconstruction work. As always, I focus on the practices of garment construction, but allow for the echoes of this work to resonate out beyond these bounds. There is an idea, in our modern world, of the historical ways of doing things being a "dying art." Hand sewing must be a dying art. Cooking from scratch could be considered a dying art. Blacksmithing, woodworking, on and on -- these historical practices seem the province of particularly twee bloggers, not widespread or widely used. And yet, I see historical practices as a potential way forward. The rate at which humans globally live and consume is, as we are currently all too clearly aware, unsustainable. Statistics regarding fast fashion in particular are staggering. The fashion industry contributes 10% of all carbon emissions each year, and clothing production doubled between 2000 and 2019.<sup>69</sup> Naturally, the movements of single individuals are not the solution to this problem: it is well established that the majority of carbon emissions can be tied to a handful of companies. However, I hope it may be possible that single individuals might take actions that exist as part of a larger, policy-based solution. Policy and politics, after all, inevitably inform daily life.

I have particularly been inspired by Louisa Owen Sonstroem, who I have referenced earlier in this work. She recently published *Hand Sewn Clothing: A Guide* through which to teach readers how to hand sew modern garments using traditional hand sewing methods.

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<sup>69</sup> Morgan McFall-Johnsen, "The fashion industry emits more carbon than international flights and maritime shipping combined. Here are the biggest ways it impacts the planet," Business Insider, last modified October 21, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/fast-fashion-environmental-impact-pollution-emissions-waste-water-2019-10#while-people-bought-60-more-garments-in-2014-than-in-2000-they-only-kept-the-clothes-for-half-as-long-2>.

Sonstroem does not focus on the history, and is just as likely to reach for a couture hand-sewing technique as a historical one, and yet her inspiration is certainly the idea of millenia of hand sewers crafting hand-sewn garments. Sonstroem opens her book with an essay about "Why [Hand Sewing] Matters." She opens the essay with an appeal to these hand sewers:

For thousands of years before the invention of the sewing machine, people wore sturdy, long lasting, beautiful clothes that required no machine. This is an ancient skill that can still belong to us if we choose to embrace it. I want us to know that our hands have the power to make the clothes in which we live.<sup>70</sup>

I wish to echo this idea: that by accessing historical skills, individuals might tap into a slower and more intentional way of crafting the things necessary for living. This might take the form of learning these skills themselves, or choosing to shop from a local artisan who has learned those skills rather than purchasing fast fashion or fast home goods at a big box store.

The Industrial Revolution ushered in a complete restructuring of the way humans interacted with the objects which make up our lives. Perhaps, by the spread of awareness of and study in slow historical making practices, a subtler (but far more necessary) revolution can, at a minimum, be dreamed up.

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<sup>70</sup> Louisa Owen Sonstroem, *Hand Sewing Clothing: A Guide*, (Connecticut: Louisa Merry, 2021), 8.

## Appendix 1: Work Log

2/16

10:00am - 1:45  
3:00 - 5:45  
Mitts

2/18

6:00pm - 7:00  
8:10 - 9:00  
9:10 - 11:00  
Pockets (Embroidery)

2/19

11:00am - 12:00pm  
Pockets (Embroidery)  
8:30 - 10:30  
10:50 - 12:10  
Bedgown

2/20

2:30pm - 4:00  
5:00 - 6:00  
11:30 - 1:00am  
Bedgown

2/21

10:00am - 11:00  
11:30 - 1:20pm  
2:00 - 3:30  
5:30 - 7:00  
10:30 - 11:50  
Bedgown

2/22

10:30am - 12:00pm  
Bedgown  
10:40pm - 12:40am  
Linen Upper Petticoat

2/23

11:00am - 12:00pm  
2:00 - 3:00  
4:00 - 5:00  
Linen Upper Petticoat

2/24

10:00am - 1:00pm  
2:30 - 3:30  
Linen Upper Petticoat

2/26

6:30pm - 7:30  
10:30 - 12:30  
Pockets (Embroidery)

2/28

2:00pm - 4:00  
Pockets (Embroidery)

3/1

7:40pm - 11:00  
Pockets (Embroidery)

3/2

10:30am - 11:30

3:00pm - 3:30

4:30 - 5:00

Apron

6:10 - 6:40

8:30 - 9:00

9:30 - 10:30

Cap

3/3

11:00pm - 12:00am

Cap

3/4

11:40am - 12:20pm

2:00 - 3:00

Apron

3:00 - 3:50

Cap

3/5

12:50am - 1:30am

10:00am - 12:10pm

Apron

3:30 - 5:30

5:45 - 7:15

8:00 - 9:00

Cap

3/6

11:30am - 12:30pm

Pockets (Embroidery)

3:00 - 4:00

Linen Under Petticoat

4:30 - 6:00

Pockets (Embroidery)

7:00 - 8:30

Linen Under Petticoat

9:30 - 11:30

Pockets (Embroidery)

3/7

4:30pm - 5:30

8:10 - 8:30

8:45 - 9:15

11:30 - 1:00am

Pockets (Embroidery)

3/8

2:30pm - 3:40

Pockets (Embroidery)

8:20 - 10:00

11:50 - 12:50am

Pockets (Assembly)

3/9

10:10am - 10:50

3:15pm - 3:45

4:50 - 5:10

7:15 - 7:45

9:10 - 11:30

11:40 - 1:00am

Pockets (Assembly)

3/11

6:50pm - 8:00

8:40 - 9:00

9:10 - 10:20

11:00 - 12:20

Linen Under Petticoat

3/14

10:00pm - 11:20

Wool Petticoat

3/15

8:20pm - 10:00

11:55 - 1:45am

Wool Petticoat

3/16

1:10pm - 2:00

10:15 - 1:15am

Wool Petticoat

3/17

11:45pm - 12:45am

Wool Petticoat

3/18

8:30pm - 9:30

11:10 - 12:40am

Wool Petticoat

3/19

6:00pm - 7:10

Wool Petticoat

3/22

1:50pm - 2:30

8:20 - 11:00

11:30 - 11:50

12:00am - 1:00

Wool Petticoat

3/23

10:00am - 11:00

Wool Petticoat

## Appendix 2: Journal Prompts & Entries

When I was working on the sewing portion of this thesis, I kept a working journal of my time spent working on each garment. I used the following questions to guide my reflections. It was important for this process to record what I had worked on as well as my emotional responses to it. Hand sewn methodology centers the holistic, embodied experiences of the researcher, and process as well as emotional response are important to that method. I also included questions about my experience of "encountering the past." I do not, of course, propose that through historical making methods we can fully know the embodied experience of historical actors. However, the goal of using historical practices is to find ways in which we might generate or uncover new knowledge about the past, and so a careful and thorough awareness of when these moments of knowledge arise (or fail to arise) is critical.

Below I have included the list of prompts I used when journaling, as well as three sample journal entries.

### Journaling Prompts

What did I work on today?

What went well? What kind of emotional response did my successes engender?

What went poorly? What kind of emotional response did these failures engender?

In what ways do I feel like I am "accessing the past" through performance?

In what ways do I feel separate from the past?

## Sample Journal Entries:

*February 19*

Fine work on filling in the green outline of the pockets. The bedgown -- I feel so great about some choices I made here! I'm starting with the Burnley and Trowbridge pattern but I'm also using the short gown in *Costume Close-Up* as a jumping off point, and actually sort of making more of a reproduction of that shape (although not those dimensions as I think it's for a young girl, and I'm small, but not that small). I feel way more like I am "accessing the past" by getting really deep into research on my own. Like I have some ideas about pockets and mitts, but I know A LOT about this bedgown in *Costume Close-Up*.

I changed my cutting diagram to reflect how the short gown in *CCU* was (presumably) cut out -- it reminded me of the way I cut out my shift, basically folding a long length into four and then cutting out triangular scoops at the sides. Then those triangles are sewn on for gores. I'm honestly so tickled by this construction. And the waste from each of these -- I would have had lots of weird shaped scrap fabric cutting out the pattern as-is, but by doing this geometric construction I achieve the same end result, but my scrap fabric is in nice big useable rectangles. Although I will say I'm feeling funny about my decision about *how* to piece this together on the gores and the sleeves. I've elected to running stitch them together and running stitch them down. *CCU* was a little scant on the details of how this was pieced so I am for sure just making this up.

*March 2*

I set out to have a "sewing work day" today and I felt like I was moving through *molasses*.

It took me ages to figure out dimensions for the apron. I'm basing it off some Chardins and other French paintings because, well, I always love a Chardin. Although apparently bib aprons for women older than like 20 were fairly uncommon in England -- per online sources, haven't found much discussion in published sources. (Maybe Styles has something?) Anyway. I wanted a bib apron so I'm making an apron that works both ways! And taking some input from the apron in *CCU* as to construction. I guess because there were no extant examples to just take their dimensions, I was trying to make best guesses based on images in the portraiture and dimensions from my own body. And any kind of drafting, no matter how simple, gives me a lot of anxiety. So I felt like I was "accessing history" on the one hand, with the Chardin paintings and *CCU*, but also like I was going rogue and ignoring English sources and only picking the French ones I liked the aesthetic of, which is fine theatre/design, but rather poor history. It's my costume design background coming out, sticking to accuracy until I like a different region/period/style better aesthetically!

I was pleased to get on with the cap, although I got a little up in my feelings about what grain lines to use to cut it out on. I'm quite nervous about the cap. I learned the new hem method B&T teach in their sew along -- you do really make such a teeny hem that way, and I'm glad I've learned the technique (which now feels like, "oh, of course"). But I'm looking at these pieces like....what is happening??



*March 5*

I was very pleased to finish both the apron AND the cap today! I woke up with that goal and I'm so pleased I achieved it. The apron sewing was fine. A bit fiddly to sew the gathers to the waistband -- I always feel like I'm doing stroke gathers wrong. I taught myself from written sources (modern and period) and I have never found a good video tutorial and I just. Am basically making my best guess. So I have this feeling that I'm somehow doing the historical stitching wrong. And maybe I am! Maybe I am. But it gets sewn down so I guess that's it.

The cap...boy, I thought this cap was gonna kill me. I tried the whip gathers last night and they did not work. I tried them again like probably three or four different ways before I figured it out. Which is actually very unusual for me! I just "get" sewing, and I'm also not a perfectionist (and I see that as a strength). I can't remember the last skill I didn't pick up on the first go. Plenty of skills aren't *amazing* on the first go, but the whip gathers just straight up didn't work until the fourth or fifth try. I felt so frustrated while I was working it out, but now I feel so, so proud that I figured out this embodied skill. I referred to videos and written guides, but I couldn't find any trouble-shooting on the problem I was having (the fabric simply not gathering down as much as necessary, and/or the thread snapping constantly due to tension). So I really feel like I figured out this really tricky skill with just my hands. So neat! The cap is so delicate and teeny and I attached a ribbon via pins and I love it. I can't believe I made it. No wonder there is so much scholarship on caps, they're so technical and take such skilled labor and *I made one!*

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