One Size Does Not Fit All

Size and Scale in the Archaeological Interpretation of “Child-Related” Artifacts

POWER RELATIONSHIPS

In the early twentieth century US, miniaturized objects were used in a similar fashion by adults to construct hierarchical relationships between the powerful and the powerless. During this era, the country received a flow of immigrants hailing from all over the world. Widespread panic over the number of immigrants entering the country who (many Anglo-Americans argued) were unfamiliar with democratic forms of governance, coupled with the economic crises of the 1890s and late 1920s, provoked an outpouring of hatred against immigrant groups. As Ann Stoler notes in Race and the Education of Desire (1998), situated betwixt and between geographies and categories of citizenship, immigrants endured comparisons to “lower order beings, lacking civility, discipline, and sexual restraint” much like Britain’s colonial subjects, justified by arguments based on Social Darwinism.

Existing alongside Anglo-Americans’ apparent dislike for immigrants was a contradictory appreciation of small, exotic things produced by immigrants or depicting immigrants’ homelands. At Los Angeles tourist sites, Anglo-Americans purchased rugs, baskets and jewelry “hand-crafted” by Mexican and Native Americans. They also devoured stories of miniature books that contained stories on the “realm of the cultural other” (Susan Stewart’s On Longing, 1993).

COLLECTORS, PRODUCERS AND EXHIBITORS

Miniaturized, we find that the meanings—economically, culturally or personally (Journal of Material Culture 6[1]:49-66). In modern day Guatemala, Maya ritual practitioners collect and place German-produced, mass marketed “Frozen Charlotte” dolls in Classic period (AD 600) ceremonial structures to gain access to the divine powers of their ancestors (Linda Brown in Latin American Antiquity 11[4]:319-33). In both of these cases, small objects are used by agents of the state or by adults, not children.

IMMIGRATION AND “AMERICANIZATION”

These social ideologies played out in regionally and temporally specific ways. Between 1890 and 1930, Southern California witnessed a large influx of Mexican immigrants moving into the region due to a combination of both Mexican- and US-imposed economic and political shifts in Mexico. US corporations took advantage of these migration patterns and hired Mexican immigrants to repair and maintain railway lines at significantly cheaper rates than their Anglo-American counterparts. Anglo-American communities weren’t pleased with the drastic increase in Mexican migrants as it threatened what they perceived as the racial homogeneity of the nation. Many Anglo-Americans reasoned that democracy could not persist if the country was “infiltrated” by “non-Americanized” ethnic groups.

In 1915, President Theodore Roosevelt proposed that all immigrants undergo an “Americanization” program upon arriving on American soil. Over the past four years, my dissertation research has examined the archaeological and archival remnants of an early twentieth century Mexican American railway workers’ homestead that was subjected to one of these immigrant assimilation programs. Located in what is now known as Angeles National Forest, this homestead was built to house workers employed to maintain and repair Mount Lowe Resort and Railway’s world renowned incline railway, the steepest of its kind between 1893 and 1936. The resort, which was owned by Pacific Electric Railway Corporation, featured four hotels, a miniature golf course, the largest searchlight in the world and miles of hiking trails.

In many ways, these corporations’ reform and social uplift programs were less a practice than a rhetorical performance tied to Anglo-American cultural notions of charity during the Progressive Era, a period when performing “charity” and presenting the illusion of care became a central component of Anglo-American identity and a way to enact national belonging. Pacific Electric Railway, for instance, boasted providing English language instruction for their employees and their employees’ dependents in an article written in 1918. By 1921, a reformer working for the company stated in their monthly magazine, “We would like to teach our people the English language, but time is limited and it is not possible to do so.” Language instruction, if offered, was limited in scope: Mexican Americans were taught “road signs, railroad signs, and advertisements” as well as “the buying and selling language of the

Commentary

At present, archaeologists tend to catalog all miniature objects as “child-related,” a practice Jane Baxter (2005) and Joanna Derevenski (2000) have noted. However, assuming that small objects are naturally “children’s” toys poses a twofold danger. First, it projects a monolithic idea of scale and size onto artifacts. Second, and more importantly, miniature objects were often used to discipline marginalized subjects by reformers and colonizers. Pint-size tea sets, housekeeping equipment and porcelain dolls were used as disciplining agents through which “improper” behavior could be corrected and refashioned. Associating small objects with children thus reproduces the racist cultural logic that colonizers and reformers drew upon to rationalize the “instruction” and oppression of their adult subjects. In what follows, I use the archaeology of an early 20th century Americanization movement aimed at Mexican American railway workers in Los Angeles as a case study to illustrate that the pursuit of understanding “childhood” in the past should not be limited to age groups. Unraveling the construction of “childhood,” rather, means studying how the concept of childhood is employed within context-specific discourses.

Even in the case of contemporary periods where objects are mass marketed and standardized, we find that the meanings and usages of miniaturized artifacts vary across regions, social groups and time. Hummel figurines, for example, were used and marketed by the German nation-state to refashion its image after World War II. These porcelain figurines (approximately 4–7 inches in height and 2–4 inches in diameter) depicted Germans as innocent, childlike dolls, frolicking in pastoral and rural scenes. However, as John Chaimov demonstrates, the racist cultural logic that the railway workers in Los Angeles as a case study to illustrate that the pursuit of understanding “childhood” in the past should not be limited to age groups. Unraveling the construction of “childhood,” rather, means studying how the concept of childhood is employed within context-specific discourses.

Commentary

At present, archaeologists tend to catalog all miniature objects as “child-related,” a practice Jane Baxter (2005) and Joanna Derevenski (2000) have noted. However, assuming that small objects are naturally “children’s” toys poses a twofold danger. First, it projects a monolithic idea of scale and size onto artifacts. Second, and more importantly, miniature objects were often used to discipline marginalized subjects by reformers and colonizers. Pint-size tea sets, housekeeping equipment and porcelain dolls were used as disciplining agents through which “improper” behavior could be corrected and refashioned. Associating small objects with children thus reproduces the racist cultural logic that colonizers and reformers drew upon to rationalize the “instruction” and oppression of their adult subjects. In what follows, I use the archaeology of an early 20th century Americanization movement aimed at Mexican American railway workers in Los Angeles as a case study to illustrate that the pursuit of understanding “childhood” in the past should not be limited to age groups. Unraveling the construction of “childhood,” rather, means studying how the concept of childhood is employed within context-specific discourses.

Even in the case of contemporary periods where objects are mass marketed and standardized, we find that the meanings and usages of miniaturized artifacts vary across regions, social groups and time. Hummel figurines, for example, were used and marketed by the German nation-state to refashion its image after World War II. These porcelain figurines (approximately 4–7 inches in height and 2–4 inches in diameter) depicted Germans as innocent, childlike dolls, frolicking in pastoral and rural scenes. However, as John Chaimov demonstrates, the racist cultural logic that the railway workers in Los Angeles as a case study to illustrate that the pursuit of understanding “childhood” in the past should not be limited to age groups. Unraveling the construction of “childhood,” rather, means studying how the concept of childhood is employed within context-specific discourses.

Commentary

At present, archaeologists tend to catalog all miniature objects as “child-related,” a practice Jane Baxter (2005) and Joanna Derevenski (2000) have noted. However, assuming that small objects are naturally “children’s” toys poses a twofold danger. First, it projects a monolithic idea of scale and size onto artifacts. Second, and more importantly, miniature objects were often used to discipline marginalized subjects by reformers and colonizers. Pint-size tea sets, housekeeping equipment and porcelain dolls were used as disciplining agents through which “improper” behavior could be corrected and refashioned. Associating small objects with children thus reproduces the racist cultural logic that colonizers and reformers drew upon to rationalize the “instruction” and oppression of their adult subjects. In what follows, I use the archaeology of an early 20th century Americanization movement aimed at Mexican American railway workers in Los Angeles as a case study to illustrate that the pursuit of understanding “childhood” in the past should not be limited to age groups. Unraveling the construction of “childhood,” rather, means studying how the concept of childhood is employed within context-specific discourses.

Even in the case of contemporary periods where objects are mass marketed and standardized, we find that the meanings and usages of miniaturized artifacts vary across regions, social groups and time. Hummel figurines, for example, were used and marketed by the German nation-state to refashion its image after World War II. These porcelain figurines (approximately 4–7 inches in height and 2–4 inches in diameter) depicted Germans as innocent, childlike dolls, frolicking in pastoral and rural scenes. However, as John Chaimov demonstrates, the racist cultural logic that the railway workers in Los Angeles as a case study to illustrate that the pursuit of understanding “childhood” in the past should not be limited to age groups. Unraveling the construction of “childhood,” rather, means studying how the concept of childhood is employed within context-specific discourses.

Even in the case of contemporary periods where objects are mass marketed and standardized, we find that the meanings and usages of miniaturized artifacts vary across regions, social groups and time. Hummel figurines, for example, were used and marketed by the German nation-state to refashion its image after World War II. These porcelain figurines (approximately 4–7 inches in height and 2–4 inches in diameter) depicted Germans as innocent, childlike dolls, frolicking in pastoral and rural scenes. However, as John Chaimov demonstrates, the racist cultural logic that the railway workers in Los Angeles as a case study to illustrate that the pursuit of understanding “childhood” in the past should not be limited to age groups. Unraveling the construction of “childhood,” rather, means studying how the concept of childhood is employed within context-specific discourses.
The Power of Children over Household Food Consumption

JOYLIN NAMIE
UTAH VALLEY U

That our children eat so poorly in a land of plenty is a national travesty. A mere 1% of American children have diets resembling the recommendations of the USDA Food Pyramid and nearly one half of them (45%) fail to meet any of the numbers in this same set of nutritional guidelines. Our children’s eating habits are increasingly leading to poor health. Childhood obesity is one of the fastest growing health problems in the US, where 22 million children over the age of five are overweight and nine million of these are obese. The future of “Generation XXL” is far from rosy. Potential health problems of overweight children include chronic conditions like cardiovascular disease, hypertension, cancer and a number of bone and joint conditions brought on or worsened by excess body weight. Paradoxically, US children are progressively more malnourished, to the point that pediatricians are diagnosing diseases like rickets once thought confined to developing nations. Add to this that 30%-40% of children are now estimated to develop Type 2 diabetes at some point in their lives and our health care system, such as it is, stands to collapse under the weight of those it serves at a point in the not too distant future.

Why has this state of affairs come to pass? Based upon my studies of eating, cooking and shopping habits among California women and families, in conjunction with the scholarly research of others, I argue that one of the reasons our children eat so poorly is because we allow them to. When it comes to food in US households, children may not be driving the car, but they are often driving the cart. In the absence of checkbooks, credit cards and driver’s licenses, let alone the literacy to read a menu or devise a shopping list, children are getting what they want to eat, with their food preferences shaped by their peers and targeted advertisements for “kid food” products, an estimated 80% of which have poor nutritional value.

Parents’ Self-Perception
Why we give in to children’s demands is complicated. This behavior is related to children’s rise to prominence in social, legal, medical and economic realms (eg, James and Christensen 2000; James and Prout 1997). It is also a reflection of changes in parenting ideals in recent generations. Sociologist Martha Lear coined the term “modern pediocracy” in the 1960s to describe our child-centered society in which parents compete with one another to have the happiest, most well-adjusted children in the eyes of their peers. This “competitive parenting” (see Warner 2005) carries across class and social status and is often mediated through food. I observed this among many families as parents used food to gratify their children (and themselves) and to avoid conflict, especially in public, thereby preserving the myth of a happy family with happy children made even happier by a “Happy Meal”.

All of the mothers in my study worked full-time outside of the home, as is the case in over 50% of US households with children. These mothers were not only breadwinners—bringing home the bacon alongside their husbands (or in their absence)—but they were also the parents in charge of moving this bread and bacon from market to table. Mothers in my sample often deferred, however, to the wishes of their children when making choices about food. They did so for a variety of reasons including guilt, lack of time or “not wanting to fight with my child over a quarter of a cup of peas” (as one of my subjects succinctly described it).

COMMENTARY

The nightly task in most households was getting through dinner as quickly and efficiently as possible, even if “the only things we eat in this house come from a package or a can.” Mothers were the gatekeepers, but children were informing family consumption patterns, choosing the packages and cans. Women reported giving in to children’s requests and demands at the supermarket and at home. Falling prey to “pester power” and the needs to please one’s family and to be seen as a “good” parent raising independent, self-reliant children.

See Food on page 12