

I addressed similar problems with a number of exhibits at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, most of which predate developments in the fields of women's history and social history of the last 15 years. In the earliest exhibits, the role of women is simply subsumed within the history of "man," while later displays incorporate only fleeting images of women. However, recent additions to the permanent galleries are more successful in integrating the experiences of women, and the museum's final permanent gallery, now in the research and planning stages, is intended to go even further toward meeting this goal. As well, various temporary and travelling exhibits in recent years, along with related public and school programs, have directly focused on the experiences of women. One example is the National Museum of Science and Technology exhibit, "Women of Invention," an exhibit on contemporary inventions by Canadian and American women. In conjunction with this exhibit the museum presented its own display of historical inventions by women, as well as an exhibit of inventions by contemporary Manitoba women. The complementary programs, including workshops and guest speakers, proved highly successful, especially with high-school groups.

Most of those present at the Museums Session were curators, museum volunteers or high-school teachers interested in incorporating museum visits into their teaching. The discussion proved lively and resulted in a valuable exchange of ideas, including some planning for how those present might find ways to continue to 'network' or perhaps collaborate on projects in the future.

The greatest opportunity for the museum panelists to share their experiences in inter-

preting women's history with a wider group came in the final session, entitled "Making Women's History Exciting." The ideas introduced by museum speakers were received enthusiastically. Few university or high-school teachers had ever thought, for example, to have students critique a museum exhibit or historic site and consider its underlying assumptions or biases. Similarly, few had ever tried having students create their own small exhibit, or bring an object from home into the classroom, to use it to explore their own family history and relate their personal story to a larger historical picture.

In the final plenary session, a group of high-school presenters reminded the academics that, despite the marginalization they may have experienced as women, they are privileged in having the potential to influence younger women's lives. As feminists, the students pointed out, these teachers have a responsibility to use their authority and power in the classroom, to dare to be controversial and to integrate women of colour and other minorities into women's history. In the case of the museum, the same might be said with regard to collections development and exhibit work.

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Material Culture, the Shape of the Field

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A review of the 1993 Winterthur Annual Conference, Winterthur, Delaware, October 8-9, 1993.

In October 1993, Winterthur Museum held its annual conference; this year's topic was "Material Culture, the Shape of the Field." Co-

organizers, Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison, did an admirable job of selecting 22 papers that drew on a variety of disciplines, with history, folklore, geography, archaeology, anthropology, decorative arts and museology all represented. They grouped these into seven thematic sessions: Perspectives on Material

Culture; Objects, Communication and Culture; The Construction of Meaning; Learning from Things; Makers, Buyers and Users: The Problem of Context; and Artifacts, Cultural Diversity and American Exceptionalism.

Cary Carson, of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, opened the conference with his paper, "Material Culture History: The Scholarship Nobody Knows." Looking back over the 20 years since the last Winterthur conference examined the subject, Carson argued that while a large body of work has been produced by material culture scholars, it has not had a major impact on the practice of American history. This is due largely to the fact that many still write for specialized audiences with an emphasis on description. The important work in the field, according to Carson, must recognize that objects are indispensable agents of change that do more than merely reflect ideas, they produce them. He further asserted that access to consumer goods has underpinned the evolution of American democracy making the issue of consumption, rather than production, the next major focus of material culture studies.

Carson's plea was unnecessary since many of the papers dealt with consumption either as a major theme or as a subtext. The traditional focus on production techniques and the maker was overshadowed by a growing emphasis on the user and the constructs of meaning. One of the more sophisticated examples of this was a paper given by Alison J. Clarke of the School of Historical and Critical Studies, University of Brighton, England, called "Tupperware: Product as Social Relation." Clarke looked beyond design history's focus on production and aesthetics to include the world of the consumer. To do this, she examined the gendered social relations of the infamous "tupperware party" demonstrating that this form of marketing provided an interface between the maker, seller and user to transform and reinvent tupperware from a new scientific material to a popular commodity with international appeal.

While Clarke comes from a design history background, consumption was examined by scholars from a variety of perspectives. Joseph Corn of Stanford University, in his paper "Text as Context: Owner's Manuals and the Reading of Objects," explored how the increasing proliferation of new machine technologies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries spawned owners' manuals full of images and text that buyers had to learn to decode. A study of these manuals, he argues, allows us to learn about the "implied reader," showing us how

manufacturers perceived their potential consumers and what information they needed. We learned from Robert Hunter, of Colonial Williamsburg, that a comparative analysis of transfer-printed earthenwares from 1780 to 1860 found in different archaeological sites could tell us about changing styles, fashions and consumer choices at the household level in addition to showing gender and ethnic correlations. Margaret Mulrooney, a Ph.D. candidate at the College of William and Mary, looked at the material possessions of nineteenth-century working-class Americans and found that they were as interested in consumer goods as their middle-class counterparts and were capable of acquiring them, suggesting a re-evaluation of our perception of class relations.

Two papers, "Material Culture as Text: Review and Reform of the Literacy Model for Interpretation," by a group of museum educators at Winterthur Museum, and "Evaluating Exhibitions: History Museums and Material Culture," by museum consultant Ellen Paul Denker, dealt with the museum visitor as consumer. Both found that audiences do not respond to the analytical categories established by scholars and that the best exhibits are not didactic, they are metaphorical. These studies showed that people want to relate to objects, not to technical interactives, and that they don't recognize or value context unless they connect to it. Since exhibits are a major forum for material culture scholars these findings should be considered carefully.

Another theme explored at this conference was the meaning of material culture. In a very interesting paper, "Material Culture as Rhetoric: 'Animal Artifacts' as a Case Study," Katherine Grier, of the University of Utah, drew on anthropologist Grant McCracken's observation that people can often describe what they see but may not be able to interpret it (similar to the conclusions of the museological studies mentioned above). Rhetoric, she feels, provides a framework to help contextualize and interpret material culture to, for example, allow us to understand that Victorian animal artifacts created a discourse about what was animal and what was human in that society. Dorothy Washburn, of the University of Pennsylvania, also drew on anthropological models combined with experimental and developmental psychology for her project on the meaning of dolls and doll play for females in twentieth-century American life.

Analysis of the clothing worn by the subjects of eighteenth-century painter John Singleton Copley permitted Claudia Kidwell, of the

Smithsonian Institution, to demonstrate that we must understand contemporary perceptions of art in order to appreciate its meanings, especially in terms of gender and consumer tastes. Clothing analysis also provided the basis for the paper "Hunting Shirts and Leather Stockings: Clothing for Frontier Heroes in Literature," by Linda Baumgarten of Colonial Williamsburg. In an effort to find meaning and symbolism in historic clothing, Baumgarten looked at the novels of James Fennimore Cooper, positing that popular literature sheds light on contemporary perceptions of clothes in addition to influencing future directions of fashion.

In his paper "The 'Bricoleur' Revisited," Bernard L. Herman, of the University of Delaware, drew on a Lévi-Strauss model to try to construct meaning about the eighteenth-century material world – perhaps a needlessly complex way of saying that good historical analysis draws creatively on as many sources as possible while recognizing their biases and attempting to read them in terms of their past context. Context and meaning of another sort was the focus of the paper "Simultaneity of Contexts: An Orientation of Contextualism in Material Culture Studies," by Thomas Hubka of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Using the example of the California bungalow in its transformation from a cottage in the early twentieth century to a bario house in the present, Hubka argues that we need to view an object in all its contexts – as conceived by the creator, the maker and the different users (even if these contexts are no longer understood by the user). The important thing is that meanings are cumulative, even though they might become broken or lost, and this knowledge sets up new analytical problems for material culture specialists.

Other interesting papers explored such things as the evolution of the concept of comfort, the origins of national differences, the interrelationship of material and verbal culture, and the tension between material culture scholars and art historians. Although one of the largest shortcomings of the proceedings was the lack of opportunity for discussion of the papers, either formally or informally, there were two very provocative commentaries on the "shape of the field" as represented by this conference.

To commentator Del Upton of the University of California, Berkeley, "the shape of the field is middle age and sagging, but it's never too late to get back in shape." Upton calls the latest incarnation of material culture "new connoisseurship" in which the old models of makers

and users have been replaced by models of analytical procedure, reinforced by our training to see patterns in large numbers of objects. We must wean ourselves from the curatorial orientation to try to capture the dynamic condition of human life, the magic moments when the unexpected happens, says Upton. We must find new ways of doing this because none of the tools of the old or new connoisseurship can get us there. Until we do, he laments, we will remain static, predictable and mired in methodology.

Upton pinpointed the problems of the field well, as demonstrated at this conference – a strong focus on the object, especially if it was created and used before the twentieth century, an emphasis on connoisseurship and method, and an absence of theory and abstraction. One is almost tempted to call it a "Winterthur Approach" to material culture studies. This is not surprising given that Winterthur organized the conference and over the years has trained many of the practitioners in the field. Indeed numerous participants had either graduated from the Winterthur Program or had held fellowships at the museum. But the need for new directions in material culture scholarship was further underlined by the comments of "outsider," John Styles of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Styles was struck by profound differences between British and American approaches to material culture. In America, the study of things is usually taught under the American Studies umbrella, but in the absence of a British Studies equivalent, Cultural Studies and Design History are generating this type of scholarship in Britain. As a result, there are some fundamental differences in the two approaches: Americans ask what the object can tell us about society; British design and culture historians ask why do things look the way they do, making it easier to integrate their ideas into broader cultural themes. Styles wondered about the absence of contemporary material culture at the conference and offered some suggestions on how to make artifact study more broadly relevant. Like Carson and Upton, he felt that we must think at a more general thematic level in order to connect our work with other histories. To the theme of consumption, he would add power and manners. The study of power requires that we include elites even when doing history from the bottom up, and requires that the state be brought back into our histories. Consumption is, perhaps, the most dynamic theme, allowing us to explore how humans

construct their identities through material goods. Moreover it can bring all three elements of making, marketing and using together. And the study of manners can link the history of power, social and political history.

As a whole, the conference was a good one both because of what it did and what it failed to do. We did get a good feel for what the shape of the field of *American* material culture looked like from one perspective. But it may be time to break away from case studies and attempt a synthesis since the whole may be greater than the sum of its parts. Perhaps then it will have the impact that Carson says is missing from the

mainstream of scholarship. We also need a better sense of how the study of material culture is approached by other disciplines – their theories and findings – and by non-Americans. Styles's comments made it clear that British scholarship has a very different orientation. So does Canada, as was apparent in the book, edited by Gerald Pocius, *Living in a Material World: Canadian and American Approaches to Material Culture* (St. John's, Newfoundland, 1991). And finally, we must heed Upton's challenge to develop new ways to move beyond the object to capture the dynamic condition of human life.

Childhood – Playtime?

PETER E. RIDER

A review of an international symposium on the research and documentation in museums of the cultural aspects of toys, children and youth, Cologne, Germany, June 21–23, 1993.

The old adage that refers to play as the work of the child was the underlying inspiration for an international symposium of academics, museum workers and educators, which took place in Cologne, Germany, in June 1993. A varied range of interests brought approximately 50 participants from 14 countries to the three-day event. These interests included a curiosity about the meaning of play, a desire to know more about the role of playthings in learning or to explore the ways in which children and childhood can be interpreted, an appreciation of toys and games and a concern to attract and to engage young museum clients. A limited enrolment, a tight schedule of papers and tours, and the setting (a small but efficient conference hotel) ensured that all participants remained focused on the symposium's subject matter.

Twenty-one papers were presented on the themes "Childhood-Research and Presentation in Museums," "Toys-Research and Presentation in Museums," "Problems of Presenting Childhood in Museums" and "Children, Youth and the Museum." While many of the papers appealed to material historians, several of them stood out as particularly interesting. Michel Manson from the Musée National de l'Éduca-

tion at Rouen, France, reported on an extensive program of collection development and research at his museum. The program departs dramatically from the connoisseurship that is so prevalent in Europe by linking the collected objects to historical records found in archives. The result is a history of toys that spans four centuries and shows how toys shaped their users.

Rooksana Omar from the Local History Museum in Durban, South Africa, described the efforts of two economically deprived children who sought to imitate the toys of middle-class children by re-creating them out of readily available materials. One child ultimately became an artist depicting children's playthings, and the other achieved renown as a folk-toy maker. The stories of both these young men reflect the pervasiveness of white, bourgeois material culture while at the same time demonstrate how culture can be modified by race and economic status.

One particularly poignant paper was presented by Gudrun Volk of the Deutsches Spielzeugmuseum at Sonneberg, Germany. It dealt with the living conditions of the families who produced the lovely dolls that once graced comfortable homes around the world and that are now prized objects in museum holdings and private collections. A day's labour on the part of a whole family earned enough to purchase a pound of butter; 70 doll bodies were worth about a one-pound loaf of bread. The