

museums underwent a democratization, leading to our more recent notion that museums, often funded by private benefactors, were run by expert curators for the education of the ordinary public. The museum became an instrument in the reorientation of power relations in countries like France, placing democratic ideologies in the forefront of curatorial work, criticizing the older power arrangements of museums and emphasizing values of the new. The accessibility of museum collections to the public led to new and specialized subject positions, as well as new display strategies.

Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge is an important contribution to our knowledge of the museum as a cultural artifact. Although Hooper-Greenhill's use of Foucault is an innovative and useful tool in understanding museum development, her final product can be considered that of any anthropologist: to produce an ethnography of the structures, rules and participants of this particular western institution. Because of this, there might have been additional attention paid to anthropologi-

cal ethnographies of museums (such as Sally Price's work) and to institutional ethnographies generally.

There are only minor criticisms of this study that might be raised. Most notably, the final chapter seems, at times, like an afterthought and does not approach present practices in the same relative framework as the earlier sections of the book. But this does not detract from the value of Hooper-Greenhill's work.

Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge provides a readable and informative account of the early European attempts to collect objects, and the various cultural reasons why these attempts occurred. Because of this, it is useful for both museum historians and students of material culture generally. Hooper-Greenhill has produced an important book that will be standard reading for those interested in museums as a cultural product of particular times. Only through such treatments can a clearer understanding be reached of the arbitrary nature of this important institution.

Gerald L. Pocius (ed.),
Living in a Material World:
Canadian and American Approaches to Material Culture

GREGG FINLEY

Pocius, Gerald L. (ed.). *Living in a Material World: Canadian and American Approaches to Material Culture*. St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1991. 290 pp., 60 illus. Cloth \$29.95, ISBN 0-919666-67-1.

Material culture studies are exhibiting more and more intellectual energy these days. One reason for the growing sophistication of the artifact studies movement is the array of material culture anthologies that have appeared in recent years. Notwithstanding these developments, a distinctive Canadian contribution remains to be added to this growing body of literature. A "Material Culture Studies in Canada" has yet to materialize. In the meantime, however, Gerald L. Pocius, an Associate Professor of Folklore and Director of the Centre for Material

Culture Studies at Newfoundland's Memorial University, has edited an important, new book – a material culture anthology that boasts substantial Canadian content.

Material culture practitioners from across Canada and the United States gathered in St. John's, Newfoundland, in the spring of 1986. The occasion was a conference entitled "North American Material Culture Research: New Objectives, New Theories." (See Gregg Finley's conference review in *Material History Bulletin* 24, Autumn, 1986: 39–41.) Some five years later, in 1991, Memorial University's Institute of Social and Economic Research published *Living in a Material World: Canadian and American Approaches to Material Culture*. Leading material culture theorists, including Jules David Prown, Thomas J. Schlereth and Henry Glassie, contribute to this anthology as do a number of

other noted Canadian and American scholars. Editor Pocius states that the book is intended to offer "a sampling of state of the art research in North America material culture study at a critical stage in its development" (p. xix).

An underlying theme of the book is cooperation (both international and interdisciplinary) among students of material culture. Citing a 1913 meeting between American, Franz Boas, and Canadian, Marius Barbeau, as an early and formative model of intellectual exchange between scholars in the two countries, Pocius recalls and highlights the fact that these two scholars placed the artifact at the very centre of their work. "Material culture research in these early years was focused squarely on the cultural questions that artifacts could address" (p. xiv). Observing that there was little concern for the boundaries represented by disciplines or university departments, Pocius notes that these early scholars addressed the object as a means to an end, not as an end in itself. Their preoccupation was culture (p. xiv). The editor states that the purpose of *Living in a Material World* is to "rekindle the spirit of exchange that Boas and Barbeau shared, ... an exchange that increased awareness of material traditions in both countries" (p. xix).

The goals of the 1986 conference and the book are similar: To "assess the theoretical gains of the past two decades" and to "develop some collective sense of the theoretical directions needed in the coming years" (p. xvi). In his introduction to the volume, Pocius explains that conference papers were selected on the basis of two "fundamental criteria." First, no matter how specific the content of each paper in terms of region or time frame, its major thrust(s) had to have wide theoretical application to make it useful to a cross section of specialists active in material culture studies. Second, each presentation had to point toward "new approaches, new directions, new ways of looking at artifacts" (p. xvii). Unfortunately, the volume does not contain the full proceedings of the conference (the reader is advised that space limitations made it necessary to omit 5 of the 20 conference presentations). In fact, the book brings together a selection of essays that have emerged from the conference. These revised conference presentations are grouped in a somewhat different organizational format from that of the 1986 event. *Living in a Material World* offers up some 15 chapters, clustered into five sections entitled "Ethnography," "History," "Art," "Ideology" and "Concluding Statements," respectively.

Many of the essays offer valuable judgments on theory and method. One is tempted to quibble over an assertion here or an inference there, but the net effect of this compilation is impressive. Readers of the *Material History Review* will want to examine this anthology in some detail; some will want to mine particular chapters for perspectives and insights on material culture research. To facilitate this process it is appropriate to at least recognize each contribution in sequence.

The first section, "Ethnography," contains articles by Laval Professor of Historical Ethnology, Jean-Claude Dupont, and cultural anthropologist, Jeanne Cannizzo. The Dupont piece, based on direct ethnological field work in Quebec, explores the configuration of a simple tool – the poker. The discussion points to the importance of this implement in rural French Canadian society from the seventeenth to the mid-twentieth century, particularly in relation to a host of social, economic and cultural themes. In the second chapter, Cannizzo examines museums and their collections as cultural texts and argues that they "reveal both the mundane and the greater truths of our collective lives" (p. 28). The reader is reminded that detailed ethnographic study of custodial institutions themselves can be as important as the more traditional field work of original objects in original contexts.

The second section, entitled "History," contains articles by Bernard L. Herman, Associate Director of the Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering at the University of Delaware; a piece co-authored by Adrienne D. Hood and David-Thierry Ruddel, respectively Assistant Curator of Textiles at the Royal Ontario Museum and Senior Curator of Industrial History and Technology at the National Museum of Science and Technology; and a paper by Ann Gorman Condon, Professor of History at the University of New Brunswick in Saint John. Posing the question, "Does the artifact reveal anything new?" (p. 31), Herman uses written and material evidence on barns in a case study of farming practices in rural Delaware from 1770 to 1830. He concludes that the most effective research strategies that succeed in integrating and interpreting data derive from different kinds of historical evidence. In their study of Quebec textile history, Hood and Ruddel reach the same conclusion with respect to research method. "What is important, therefore, is not to argue about the primacy of one or the other (type of evidence), but to use them as

complementary sources" (p. 89). Condon glimpses the aesthetic and ideological complexion of United Empire Loyalist Jonathan Odell, in her assessment of his material world. Looking at the artifacts he lived with in New Brunswick and contrasting them with those of an earlier phase of his life in pre-revolutionary America, she argues that such Loyalist material culture helped to fashion a pro-British sensibility in New Brunswick: "... the artifacts from Odell's New Brunswick years provide material documentation of a complex cultural commitment, amounting to a civil religion, which he and other elite Loyalists hoped to establish in British North American" (p. 95).

The third section, entitled "Art," contains chapters by architectural historian Alan Gowans; Yale art historian Jules David Prown; and Dell Upton, Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley. Gowans, in a piece called "The Case for Kitsch," writes about the popular-commercial arts as a reservoir of traditional culture and humane values. He uses selected cartoon strips of E. C. Segar, the creator of Popeye the Sailor, to suggest that such work can be considered as the arts of our time and thus as an effective means of preserving traditional culture. He ends by arguing that this form of art appears "... to present a dynamic, rich foundation for a vital material culture in touch with past and future alike" (p. 141). Prown takes his readers through a process of object analysis in an effort to explore the art in artifacts, to fathom the unintended "metaphorical structures embedded in artifacts" (p. 145). The artifact in this instance is an eighteenth-century pewter teapot by Thomas Danforth. An illustration of this teapot (the artifact itself is currently in the Yale University Collection) is part of the book's cover design. The discussion raises some suggestive insights about the extent to which artifacts express culture and about the linkages between ethnoaesthetics and material culture studies. Upton turns to the Anglican Church in eighteenth-century Virginia to inquire into the subtle relationship between artifacts and their users. Considering in turn the concepts of "style," "mode," "fashion," Upton probes the interrelationships between ideology and object within a particular cultural and historical context. He argues that to appreciate better the linkages between the objects and those who were consumers (users) of the objects, one may find answers "... in the conjunction of symbolism, ideology and the psychology of perception of the physical world" (p. 168).

The fourth section, entitled "Ideology," contains chapters by John Michael Vlach, Chair of the American Studies Program at The George Washington University; Michael J. Ettema, a curator at the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village; Eugene W. Metcalf, Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Miami University in Ohio; and Stanley Johannesen, Associate Professor of History at the University of Waterloo. Vlach and Metcalf contribute essays on American folk art. Vlach explores folk portraiture to try to revise the widely held view that such work reflects a set of "rosy assumptions ... [that] common man created folk art happily, effortlessly and instinctively." Calling this view "a spurious vision of an antique folk era," he sets out to "reconnect so-called folk paintings to their actual social and historical contexts" (p. 175) and argues that those who purchased folk portraits were more concerned with buying status than buying art. Metcalf's piece considers the ritual nature of folk-art collecting and finds that "folk art objects are best understood not as objects as all, but as part of a constantly developing process of cultural meaning" (p. 206). Ettema and Johannesen offer insights into the study of American furniture. Ettema seeks to demonstrate a relationship between objects (fashion) and cultural authority (materialism) in Victorian America. He argues that historians and material culture specialists will have more to say to one another when they categorize objects appropriately – in a manner that is "respectful of the various ways that people [in the past] have organized their worlds" (p. 192). He concludes that during the period in question, it was the business people who promoted the consumption of home furnishings because they were successful in taking control of the popular categories by which people understood and used the objects in question. Johannesen employs an analysis of a secretary-bookcase attributed to John Goddard of Newport, Rhode Island (1761), to develop a suggestive thesis that attempts to link furniture with a phenomenon (dating from the late Middle Ages until the late eighteenth century), which is identified as "a humane and civilizing process having to do with the rationalizing of the perception of personhood" (p. 208).

The final section of the book, entitled "Concluding Statements," contains essays by Thomas J. Schlereth, Professor of American Studies at the University of Notre Dame; Henry Glassie, Professor of Folklore at Indiana University; and the book's editor, Gerald L. Pocius.

Schlereth identifies and then goes on to discuss three essential questions having to do with the future of material culture research (p. 232): Questions of nomenclature, "What shall we call what we do?" Questions of methodology, "Do the research strategies that we have developed constitute a field or discipline?" Questions of theory, "What hypotheses do we wish to answer?" In his essay "Researching Artifacts in Canada: Institutional Power and Levels of Dialogue," Pocius muses about whether or not there is a "distinctively Canadian approach to studying and interpreting the artifact" (p. 241). He concludes that, unlike the situation in the United States (where the initiative for material culture research rests with the universities), it is the museum community that may well provide the institutional basis for the advancement of artifact studies in Canada (p. 250). Finally, Glassie brings *Living in a Material World* to a close by contributing an essay that deliberately attempts to set the Memorial University conference into context. Arguing that while those attending the 1986 conference use the label "material culture" to identify their scholarly preoccupation, in fact, a more fitting term for the artifact study process is "art" (p. 253). Glassie hails the conference as "a major landmark" precisely because it furthered the idea of keeping the definition of art "wide and useful, so that the old man's basket, the teenager's modified coupe, the old lady's beautiful kitchen made of junk, and our own earnest writings will all be taken seriously" (p. 266).

Currently, material culture scholarship occurs on a worldwide scale and, thus, one might be critical of the entirely North American parameters of the book. But this would not be entirely fair, because the book, like the conference that preceded it, deliberately sought to achieve a Canadian-American dialogue in material culture studies. A more substantive problem with the book is the occurrence of jargon and instances of oblique language in some of the contributions, making this anthology somewhat inaccessible to the undergraduate student or to the interested layperson. Indeed, the gobbledegook of this interdisciplinary field of scholarship inevitably grows with the burgeoning body of literature. It virtually guaran-

tees that the so-called nonspecialist will be shut out of the discussion. There are numerous examples, but Schlereth, a leading voice in the realm of material culture, offers a case in point. Schlereth provides a new term to describe his scholarly interests in material culture – "thingness." He writes:

It is a suggestion to take our beginning forays into methodologies indigenous to material culture studies and apply them to exploring the subject matter of "thingness" in order to see just what discoveries such an inquiry might elucidate (p. 240).

In referring to the 1986 conference as a "landmark event," Glassie did not miss the opportunity to add to the polemic of the material culture movement when he writes:

People with literal minds and limited imaginations cannot hear the voices in things, the screams of the stone gods prisoned behind glass in the museum; they trust only the meanings that lie in stripes of prose across pages. They live in the little world of words (p. 253).

Illustrations should have played a larger role in this book. The expressive quality and physical context of the subject matter demands that a material culture anthology be supported by a large quantity of clearly reproduced photographs. Some visual support does enhance the volume; however, half of the chapters do not feature photographs and those that do appear (in the contributions by Herman, Hood and Ruddel, Condon, Gowans, Prown, Vlach and Johannesen) are not listed in a separate index. Other technical concerns include the fact that the 15 chapters (266 pages of text) are supported by a nominal three-page index. Although pp. 267 to 284 are devoted to references, an annotated bibliography or at least an extended commentary on the sources would have been a useful addition.

Still these are minor concerns compared with Pocius's achievement in co-ordinating and editing this important collection of essays. Each chapter is suggestive in its own way and each contains insights that will stimulate further inquiry. In total, *Living in a Material World* exists as a valuable selection of provocative essays that largely realize their editor's aim.