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# Material History Review

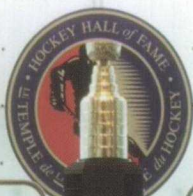
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## Revue d'histoire de la culture matérielle



CANADA  
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MUSÉE DES  
SCIENCES  
ET DE LA  
TECHNOLOGIE  
DU CANADA



Popular Culture  
Culture populaire



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## Material History Review Revue d'histoire de la culture matérielle

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I begin this editorial with a confession, or perhaps what might better be termed a declaration. Over the past twenty years I have strayed rather far from my training in the world of academic history. In fact, some readers (more so in the U.S. than in Canada) might be inclined to think that by working full time in museums for nearly two decades, I have renounced this part of my heritage altogether. This conclusion would not be altogether in error, as I somehow managed to find my way into the world of museums without ever giving much thought either to objects as historical evidence or to material culture as a field of study. On the other hand, I did, as a historian of twentieth-century American social and cultural history, give considerable thought to the issues surrounding popular culture, and to the ways that ordinary people make sense of the world around them and manifest that sense through a variety of cultural expressions.

The serendipitous choice of museums as a place to apply my historical training opened, in short order, the doors to the discipline of material culture. The world of objects, immanent with a multitude of stories to discover and explore, soon became an indispensable and treasured part of my daily life, and has remained so ever since. Thus the invitation from the editors of *Material History Review* to serve as guest editor of this special issue on popular culture and material culture came as a welcome opportunity both to survey the current landscape of material culture study and to bring these two pieces of my professional self together. What sort of proposals would make their way to my mailbox, I wondered. What would they reveal about the intersection between these two fascinating and compelling fields of study? And what would I discover about the degree to which the essential methodology of material culture study has penetrated the study of culture as a whole?

Some of the answers to these questions will be found in the pages of this special issue. While it does not seek to offer a comprehensive

Je commencerai par une confession ou, mieux dit, une déclaration. Au cours des vingt dernières années, je me suis passablement écarté de la voie que me traçait ma formation universitaire en histoire. En fait, certains lecteurs (plus aux États-Unis qu'au Canada) pourraient penser qu'à travailler à plein temps dans les musées depuis une vingtaine d'années, j'ai pratiquement renoncé à cette partie de mon bagage culturel. Ils n'auraient pas absolument tort, car j'ai trouvé mon chemin dans le monde des musées sans vraiment penser aux objets comme à des témoins de l'histoire ou à la culture matérielle comme à un champ d'étude. Par ailleurs, en tant qu'historien spécialisé en histoire sociale et culturelle américaine du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, j'ai beaucoup réfléchi aux questions se rapportant à la culture populaire et à la manière dont les gens ordinaires donnent un sens au monde qui les entoure et traduisent leur vision par divers modes d'expression culturelle.

Cet heureux choix des musées comme lieu où appliquer ma formation historique m'a ouvert d'un coup les portes de la culture matérielle. Le monde des objets, empreint d'une multitude d'histoires à découvrir et explorer, est vite devenu une partie indispensable, chérie, de mon quotidien et l'est restée. L'invitation que m'a faite la *Revue d'histoire de la culture matérielle* à agir en qualité de chef de la rédaction de ce numéro consacré à la culture populaire et à la culture matérielle est donc pour moi l'occasion rêvée d'examiner le champ des études en culture matérielle et de réunir ces deux facettes de mes compétences. Je me suis demandé quelles sortes de propositions j'allais trouver dans mon courrier. Qu'est-ce que celles-ci me révéleraient sur l'intersection entre ces deux champs d'étude captivants ? Et dans quelle mesure la méthodologie nécessaire pour étudier la culture matérielle avait-elle pénétré l'étude de la culture dans son ensemble ?

Vous trouverez des réponses à ces questions dans ce numéro spécial. Celui-ci ne vise pas à fournir un catalogue exhaustif des approches actuelles en études sur la culture matérielle mais

catalogue of current approaches to material culture scholarship, this issue suggests, in my view, that our ranks are well appointed with bright individuals who can write well about objects in the context of cultural history. In a moment I shall come back to these essays and offer further introductory detail.

In the meantime, however, I want to share with readers some observations about those submissions to the journal that they will never see. One of the guest editor's less enviable tasks is to inform the authors of some proposals and submissions that their work will not ultimately grace the pages of this issue of *Material History Review*. If the reader wonders why I should pause for this unusual diversion, here's why: regular readers of this journal are treated to high quality essays by authors who, by and large, know how to write about material culture. But what of the rest of our colleagues, some of whom aspire to join us in the investigation of objects and their meanings? Are they adequately prepared to do so, and if not, why not? What does the full range of submissions for this issue reveal about the understanding of material culture that extends beyond our immediate field of specialty?

A glance through the file of proposals that missed the mark reveals three general categories of difficulty. Into the first group falls the work of a number of authors who proposed to write about objects, or about popular culture topics directly related to objects, but failed to address those objects as material culture — in other words, they failed to take the objects themselves seriously as evidence. These included, for example, proposed essays on a famous piece of memorial sculpture, on an article of everyday dress related to a particular religion, on a particular category of kitsch objects, and on an icon of popular culture related to horror movies.

I would venture to guess that the majority of readers of this journal, if pressed, could propose a question or questions to be addressed in an essay on any of the above-mentioned topics that engaged fully and fundamentally the questions inherent in the objects around which these proposed essays were to be created. But the submitters of these proposed essays could not do so. I want to suggest that this has little to do with the innate intellectual capacity of the submitters, all of whom had very respectable academic credentials, and some of whom produced essays of considerable merit — but that were not, ultimately, essays about material culture. Thus it

il indique clairement, je pense, que nous comptons dans nos rangs des gens brillants, capables d'écrire de bons articles sur les objets dans le contexte de l'histoire culturelle. Je reviendrai plus en détail sur ces écrits.

J'aimerais au préalable vous faire part de quelques observations sur des textes proposés à la revue qui n'ont pas été retenus. L'une des tâches les moins enviables d'un rédacteur invité est d'informer certains auteurs que leurs écrits ne seront pas publiés. Si vous cherchez la raison de cette digression inusitée, la voici : les abonnés de la *Revue* sont habitués à lire des analyses de qualité, rédigées par des auteurs qui, en général, savent traiter de la culture matérielle. Mais qu'en est-il de nos autres collègues, dont certains souhaitent se joindre à nous pour étudier les objets et leur signification ? Sont-ils bien préparés pour le faire et, si ce n'est pas le cas, pourquoi ? Que nous révèle l'ensemble des textes soumis pour ce numéro sur la compréhension d'une culture matérielle qui dépasse notre champ de spécialisation immédiat ?

Si on jette un coup d'œil sur les textes non retenus, on peut dégager trois grandes catégories de difficultés rencontrées. Dans la première entrent les travaux d'auteurs qui se proposaient d'écrire sur des objets ou sur des sujets de la culture populaire directement reliés à des objets, mais qui n'ont pas traité ces objets comme inhérents à la culture matérielle. En d'autres mots, ils n'ont pas considéré les objets comme des témoins. Je pense par exemple à des textes sur une célèbre sculpture commémorative, sur un vêtement de tous les jours associé à une religion, sur une catégorie d'objets kitsch et sur un symbole culturel populaire lié aux films d'horreur.

Je ne crois pas me tromper en disant que, si on insistait, la majorité des lecteurs de la *Revue* pourrait proposer un ou des points à traiter dans un texte qui porterait sur n'importe lequel des sujets mentionnés et ferait le tour des questions se rapportant aux objets à l'étude. Mais ceux qui nous ont soumis ces écrits ne pouvaient le faire. Je pense que cela a peu à voir avec leurs capacités intellectuelles, car tous ont des titres universitaires respectables et certains ont rédigé des textes d'un grand intérêt mais ne traitant pas de culture matérielle. Il semble donc qu'en tant que spécialistes de la culture matérielle, nous ayons du travail à faire pour que notre méthodologie, le système utilisé pour interroger les objets et le genre de questions que nous posons pour placer les objets en contexte soient apparents et accessibles à nos collègues non spécialistes du domaine.

would seem that we as material culture specialists have some work to do in making sure that our methodology, our system of questioning objects, and the types of questions we ask to place objects in context are visible and accessible to our colleagues who are not specialists in this area. One might also conclude that our specialization is not taken seriously enough by some scholars who assume that they can work in this area without mastering its basic assumptions and methodology.

A second group of submissions has more to tell us about the field of popular culture, in particular about the overarching influence of cultural studies. Indeed, the literature on popular culture is vast (and much of it, I freely admit, has been produced in the two decades since I completed my basic education in cultural history). But the essential critical vocabulary of cultural studies is the lingo of textual criticism and performance analysis. Many accomplished students of popular culture are therefore deeply averse to considering (or perhaps altogether unaware of) the meanings embedded in the everyday objects that permeate our lives. Such was the case with several submitters, including the individuals who proposed to construct essays on aspects of popular music, and on the meaning of certain sequences in a popular film. It's true that musical notation resides on paper, and that a film is a material object, but alas, in these cases the object has little to tell about the meanings sought by the authors.

Finally, a word about how the essays incorporated in this volume differ from yet a third group of proposed submissions. In this third group reside several proposals that understand well that the search for cultural meaning can (and often should) lead us directly to three-dimensional objects. However, one of the achievements of the authors whose work you will read in this issue is that they understand that particular objects exist in a broader context that must be acknowledged and understood in order to extract meaning from the objects themselves. Thus the microcultural analysis of a single object, especially when presented as part of a dispute or dialogue with one or another writer or academic at the level of theory alone, is, at least for this special issue, an incomplete and ultimately unsatisfactory exercise that leaves the "people" out of popular culture.

This issue offers analysis of an intriguing variety of material expressions of popular culture, from baseball stadiums to product logos to folk art and handicraft. In each case, we learn

Nous pouvons aussi conclure que notre spécialisation n'est pas assez prise au sérieux par certains chercheurs qui croient pouvoir travailler dans ce domaine sans en maîtriser les hypothèses et la méthodologie fondamentales.

Une deuxième catégorie de textes nous en dit davantage sur le champ de la culture populaire, en particulier sur l'influence dominante des études culturelles. La littérature sur la culture populaire est assurément vaste (et la plupart de ces textes, je le reconnais, ont été rédigés dans les vingt ans qui ont suivi la fin de mes études en histoire culturelle). Mais le jargon de la critique textuelle et l'analyse du rendement constitue l'essentiel du vocabulaire critique des études culturelles. Beaucoup d'étudiants versés en culture populaire répugnent donc à examiner (ou peut-être n'en sont-ils pas conscients) le sens caché dans les objets qui meublent notre quotidien. C'est le cas de plusieurs personnes ayant soumis des textes, dont celles qui se proposaient de traiter de certains aspects de la musique populaire et de la signification de séquences d'un film populaire. Il est vrai que la musique se note sur du papier et qu'un film tient dans un rouleau de pellicule, mais dans ces cas, hélas, l'objet a peu à dire sur le sens cherché par les auteurs.

Parlons enfin de la différence entre les écrits publiés dans ce numéro et une troisième catégorie de textes non retenus. Cette catégorie regroupe plusieurs propositions montrant une compréhension que la recherche d'une signification culturelle peut (et souvent devrait) nous mener directement aux objets tridimensionnels. Cependant, l'une des réussites des collaborateurs de ce numéro est d'avoir compris que des objets particuliers existent dans un contexte plus vaste qu'il faut considérer et bien saisir pour extraire la signification des objets eux-mêmes. Ainsi, l'analyse microculturelle d'un seul objet, surtout quand elle se présente dans le cadre d'une discussion ou d'un dialogue avec un autre auteur ou chercheur sur le seul plan théorique, est, du moins pour ce numéro spécial, un exercice incomplet et en définitive insatisfaisant, qui tient « le bon peuple » en dehors de la culture populaire.

Ce numéro analyse diverses expressions matérielles fascinantes de la culture populaire, des stades de baseball aux logos de produits, en passant par l'art populaire et l'artisanat. Dans chaque cas, nous apprenons quelque chose sur les fabricants et les consommateurs des objets en cause, sur les conséquences politiques et économiques de l'utilisation et la diffusion de ceux-ci et, parfois, sur l'éventuelle signification



something about both the makers and the consumers of these objects; about the political and economic consequences of their use and diffusion; and in many cases, about the irony of their eventual popular meanings as compared to the initial vision of their creators.

In this issue, Sharon MacDonald's essay on the booming cross-border trade in hooked mats from Nova Scotia early in the twentieth century explores the impact of a developing consumer market for folk art collectibles on domestic objects originally conceived for their practical value. Garth Wilson offers a penetrating examination of the imagery of seafaring in contemporary popular culture — and in the gift shops of maritime museums. Interestingly, and perhaps not simply coincidentally, the issue of items for sale in the museum gift shop also figures in Elisabeth Ward's discussion of Vikings in contemporary popular culture, seen through the lens of her experience developing a travelling exhibition on Viking history and culture. Jocelyne Mathieu encourages us to take a step back and think about the contrast between how popular culture meanings are constructed both in and out of the academy, taking contemporary Quebec as her focus. Cindy Donatelli carries us inside the gendered meanings created in and around minivans, objects associated in popular culture with the successful negotiation of family life in the North American suburbs. John D. Fairfield invites us to return to the city by way of an examination of the design of urban baseball stadiums, as he explores the relationship between stadium architecture, popular culture, and community, past and present.

Meanwhile, Isabelle Simard and Shirley Wajda, the authors of the issue's two research reports, offer (again, perhaps not simply coincidentally) two perspectives on the ways that the excess supply of leftover material goods from the recent past is given new life, on the one hand in the chic of urban fashion, and on the other, in the slightly less polished environment of roadside flea markets that offer instant antiques, or "collectibles," for sale. Finally, the issue features a review of several museum exhibitions on popular culture topics by a scholarly collective from Montreal, as well as reviews of several recent books on topics that explore the connections between popular culture and material culture.

Taken together, the contents of this issue offer substantial evidence of the vitality of inquiry into popular culture via the critical vocabulary of

populaire des objets comparativement à la vision initiale de leurs créateurs.

L'article de Sharon MacDonald, sur le florissant commerce transfrontalier des carpettes crochetées de Nouvelle-Écosse au début du *xx<sup>e</sup>* siècle, examine les répercussions d'un marché grandissant pour les œuvres d'art populaire sur les objets domestiques d'abord conçus pour leur valeur pratique. Garth Wilson nous offre une étude perspicace de l'imagerie de la vie des marins dans la culture populaire actuelle — et dans les boutiques de musées maritimes. Fait intéressant, et peut-être pas simple coïncidence, la question des articles vendus dans les boutiques de musées est aussi soulevée par Elisabeth Ward dans son article sur les Vikings dans la culture populaire d'aujourd'hui, basé sur son expérience en tant que commissaire d'une exposition itinérante sur l'histoire et la culture des Vikings. Jocelyne Mathieu nous encourage à prendre du recul pour observer le contraste entre la façon dont les significations de la culture populaire se construisent à l'université et à l'extérieur de celle-ci, en axant son étude sur le Québec d'aujourd'hui. Cindy Donatelli nous fait découvrir les significations basées sur l'appartenance à un sexe données aux camionnettes, des objets populairement associés à l'organisation réussie de la vie familiale dans les banlieues nord-américaines. John D. Fairfield nous ramène en ville en examinant la conception des stades de baseball en zones urbaines. Il étudie le lien existant entre l'architecture des stades, la culture populaire et la communauté, d'aujourd'hui et d'hier.

Les auteures des deux rapports de recherche, Isabelle Simard et Shirley Wajda, offrent (ici encore, ce n'est peut-être pas une coïncidence) deux perspectives sur les façons dont on redonne vie au surplus de biens matériels produits depuis peu, d'une part dans les magasins chic des villes et d'autre part dans le cadre un peu moins raffiné des marchés aux puces installés au bord des routes, qui vendent des « antiquités instantanées » ou des « pièces de collection ». Pour finir, le numéro publie le compte rendu par un collectif savant montréalais de quelques expositions présentées dans les musées sur des thèmes de culture populaire, ainsi que des comptes rendus de livres récents traitant des liens entre culture populaire et culture matérielle.

Dans son ensemble, ce numéro spécial fournit des preuves substantielles de la vitalité de la recherche en culture populaire par le biais du vocabulaire critique de la culture matérielle.

material culture. This special issue of *Material History Review* also suggests, I think, that researchers and scholars are well-rewarded for mastering this valuable approach to cultural inquiry, regardless of their field of specialization.

Guest Editor,  
Christopher S. Clarke

Ce numéro de la *Revue d'histoire de la culture matérielle* suggère aussi, selon moi, que chercheurs et savants sont bien récompensés de leurs efforts en vue de maîtriser cette approche très utile des études culturelles, quel que soit leur champ de spécialisation.

Le rédacteur invité,  
Christopher S. Clarke

# Articles

## Viking Pop Culture on Display: The Case of the Horned Helmets

ELISABETH I. WARD

### Résumé

*L'exposition itinérante Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga comprenait une vitrine abritant surtout des casques cornus en plastique, objets déconcertants dans une exposition culturelle sérieuse. Pourtant jamais porté par les Vikings, ce symbole populaire est une manifestation concrète de la différence entre la connaissance que donne l'érudition et la connaissance populaire du passé des Vikings. L'exposition dans son ensemble visait à mettre en lumière de récentes études qui avaient révélé une vision complexe du passé des Vikings, contredisant le stéréotype populaire simpliste des Vikings, et la vitrine aux casques cornus constituait une bonne introduction à ce thème. Mais celle-ci démontrait en même temps le fait que les musées n'ont aucune autorité sur les significations associées aux objets de la culture populaire. L'exposition a donc été une expérience ironique et un peu problématique pour les visiteurs. L'article traite de questions soulevées par les volets conservation, conception et exposition de cette vitrine, qui supposent une division catégorique acceptée mais peut-être pas justifiée entre culture matérielle populaire et objets façonnés « authentiques ».*

### Abstract

*The travelling exhibition, Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga, featured a case containing primarily plastic horned helmets seamlessly included within a serious cultural exhibition. Never worn by Vikings, this popular culture icon embodies the disjuncture between scholarly and popular knowledge of the Viking past. The exhibition as a whole sought to highlight the recent studies that have revealed a complex view of the Viking past at odds with the simplistic popular stereotype, and the horned helmet case was a fitting introduction to this theme. But it simultaneously demonstrated the lack of agency museums have over the meanings associated with modern popular culture items and was therefore an ironic, somewhat problematic, experience for the visitor. This essay examines issues that arose during the curation, design, and display of this case, suggesting an accepted, though perhaps unjustified, categorical division between popular material culture and "authentic" artifacts.*

In 1898, a Swedish farmer living near Kensington, Minnesota, was grubbing up trees to clear more land for crops. According to the published reports,<sup>1</sup> as he toppled one poplar tree, he discovered clenched in its roots a large stone slab. Upon inspection, the stone turned out to have peculiar carvings, identified later as Scandinavian Runic letters. As transcribed, the letters tell the story of "8 Goths and 22 Norwegians" who came to North America in 1362 and were on an exploratory journey that brought them to modern day Minnesota. If true, this would provide proof of a European

presence in North America almost 150 years before Columbus "sailed the ocean blue."

Current scholarly opinion is that the stone is a modern hoax, created most likely by Scandinavian American immigrants who populate this area of North America. Neither the forms of the runic letters nor the circumstances of the find inspire serious scholarly attention. However, despite the united front of professional academics, amateur enthusiasts throughout the Mid-west continue to push for a re-evaluation of the stone.<sup>2</sup>



The cliché of “talking past one another” hardly does justice to the serious social phenomena that the Kensington Stone controversy represents. All involved are educated, Caucasian, westernized individuals who would normally be considered members of the same culture group; but if culture implies a shared set of values, nothing could be further from the truth. Two disparate modes of thinking about what constitutes proof and two separate normalizing pressures — on the part of scholars to declare it a hoax and on the part of Scandinavian-Americans to staunchly support it — operate at odds with one another. There is in fact very little hope of a resolution, despite calls for a conference in which both sides would be equally represented.

The Kensington Stone is a very specific and local issue where the origin of the discrepancy and the points of difference can be well defined. Through it we see a narrow case of a much broader phenomena: the disjuncture between scholarly and popular thought. In a touring exhibition, *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*, I and the rest of the creative team had to grapple with divergent conceptions of the term *Viking*: one created through the medium of modern popular culture — including of course television and print media, but also material culture items like plastic horned helmets — and one created by scholars conducting ongoing research into the topic. We attempted to address the opposing nature of these two conceptions in a section of the exhibition entitled “Recapturing the Past,” which included one case of Viking popular culture items: the case of the horned helmets. Visitor response to this case was disproportionately high. In this review of that case and the role it played in the exhibition, a number of assumptions regarding museums, exhibits, and popular material culture will be examined.

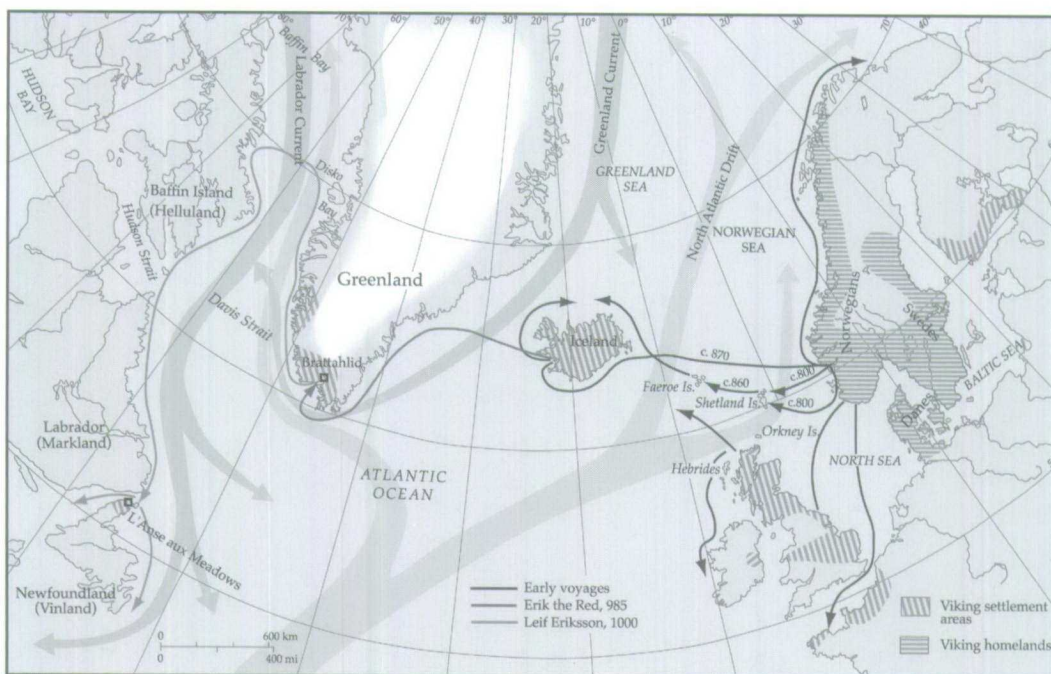
### The Viking Stereotype

While defining a stereotype seems a somewhat ridiculous endeavor, one working definition of the Viking stereotype is that it revolves around an image of a barbaric, uncontrollable, dirty, male warrior. This stereotype has evolved over time and place in diverse ways.

The mainland European view of the Vikings finds its origin in medieval documents that testify to the widespread destruction caused by Scandinavian raiders during the Viking Age, which began in A.D. 793 with the raid on Lindisfarne Monastery and ended with the defeat of the

last Norwegian invasion fleet by England in A.D. 1066.<sup>3</sup> The accounts of the myriad invasions that took place throughout England, France, the Netherlands, and even one excursion into the Mediterranean, were written by the horrified Christian monks on the losing side of the battle. These documents are now seen as propagandized, one-sided statements through a more critical historiography, but for centuries their descriptions of the barbaric actions of the Vikings were taken at face value, which led to a pervasive acceptance in Europe of the negative Viking stereotype. No one disputes that Viking raids did indeed take place, but the more complex economic and social explanations for the raids offered today have not yet become part of the popular European conception of the Vikings.<sup>4</sup>

In Scandinavia, the stereotype of the Viking is not one of a feared enemy but of a beloved ancestor who is still close in the heart and minds of many. Part of this enthusiasm rests on the pivotal role the Viking Age (750–1050 A.D.) played in the development of Scandinavian history. Before the Viking Age, the people of the Scandinavian peninsula were isolated tribes engaged primarily in internecine battles, although with impressive trade contacts; but by the end of the Viking Age they were active participants in the wider European arena. Over this three hundred year period, the first royal lines in each of the three Scandinavian kingdoms became established as the nascent kingdoms formed, somewhat in emulation of the European model, and Christianity replaced — often at the violent insistence of the newly powerful kings — the traditional pagan religion of the Vikings and their ancestors.<sup>5</sup> Because each of the medieval Scandinavian Kingdoms — Denmark, Norway, and Sweden — find their origin in the Viking Age, it is easy to understand how “the Viking” has attained a central place in the Scandinavian conception of self. But the stereotype is more complicated than simply thinking of Vikings as the “fathers” of the Scandinavian countries. Nationalistic Scandinavians can boast — with only a bit of an exaggeration — that their Viking ancestors controlled great trade networks and vested mighty armies (Fig. 1). The wealth and power obvious in several opulent burials excavated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries<sup>6</sup> and the tremendous range of activity — from the Byzantine Empire to the shores of North America — described in the sagas and other works of literature all contributed to a conception of the Vikings as worthy to be emulated and greatly esteemed. Lauded as



**Fig. 1**  
From A.D. 750 to 1050, Viking ships carried Norsemen throughout the known world, and even to the shores of North America 500 years before Columbus. (Marcia Bakry, NMNH)

sophisticated poets and talented artists who worshiped powerful gods, the Vikings were especially embraced by Scandinavians in the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> They continue to be the cornerstone of museum exhibits in Scandinavia.<sup>8</sup> The modern Scandinavian stereotype of the heroic Viking is primarily a nationalistic statement about the historic independence and uniqueness of Scandinavia.

Scandinavian immigration to North America took place primarily between 1850 and 1870,<sup>9</sup> which was ironically also the period of heightened Scandinavian nationalism. The cultural complex imported to North America from Scandinavia included that nationalism, and with it the more positive Viking stereotype of Scandinavia. But in the one hundred years since immigration, the Scandinavian-American sense of their Viking ancestors has diverged from that of Scandinavia. Here the Vikings are taken as adventurous explorers, rather than paragons of a unique northern culture. The 1893 sailing of a replica Viking ship from Norway to the Columbian World Exposition in Chicago (intended to celebrate the 400-year anniversary of Columbus in the New World) was likely the origin of this conception, since it was a brilliant public relations campaign championing the saga accounts of Leif Eriksson's voyage to North America 500 years before Columbus (Fig. 2). Today, one of the more common items of Viking popular culture in North America are small models of Viking ships, and many Scandinavian-American businesses utilize

a likeness of the 1893 ship as their company logos, thus solidifying the association between Vikings and exploration for Scandinavian-Americans.<sup>10</sup>

But for the broader North American population, the stereotype of the Vikings has evolved (or devolved) into something far broader. In a survey I conducted of a small sample of visitors to the museum, it was clear that the word Viking conjures up violent images of cavemen, barbarians, or crazed killers. Although most could not name specifics about the Vikings such as when or where they lived, they felt they knew what the word Viking meant because they were familiar with the stereotype. Stripped of any definite referent, the Vikings are simply representative of a bestial male type, completely at odds with civilized society. Utilizing a structuralist model, such a type exists only to highlight the exact opposite: the docile male who controls his anger, bathes regularly, and in all other ways is a perfect gentleman. We see the tension between the two in the comic strip "Hagar the Horrible"<sup>11</sup> where a stereotypical brutish Viking male is asked to live within the domestic rules of his wife.

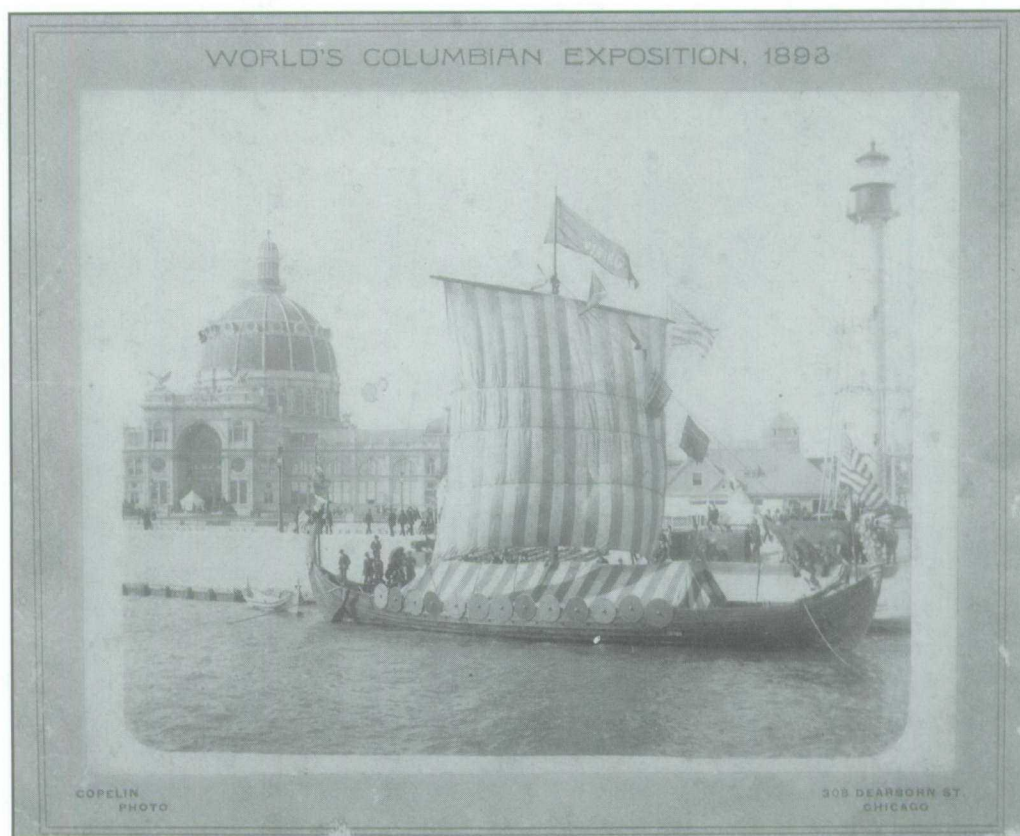
### Viking Stereotype Takes Material Form

The Vikings have been a successful theme for popular material culture, especially in Scandinavia, France and the United States. The language of Viking popular culture relies primarily



**Fig. 2**

*Sailing this replica Viking ship, the Viking, from Norway to the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 created a public relations coup for Scandinavian Americans. (Photograph courtesy Chicago Historical Society)*



on the inclusion of horn-shaped appendages protruding from a cone-shaped helmet.<sup>12</sup> But other common elements unite popular material culture items about the Vikings: males with bushy beards are most often depicted, and the items are often associated with male activities like shaving and sailing. This is the material manifestation of the stereotyped view of the Vikings.

The horned-helmet icon seems to have its modern origins in the Wagnerian Ring Cycle opera, where the male chorus wore horned helmets, while the other characters wore winged helmets. Winged helmets were a classic Greco-Roman motif that had been adopted throughout Europe. But during the Romantic Nationalism movement of the nineteenth century, Northern Europe began to seek themes and design elements in opposition to the Southern European models,<sup>13</sup> perhaps as a further codification of the break between the Catholic South and the Protestant North. So the Wagner costume designer was working within that process when he/she replaced wings with horns.

Why horns? Archaeological excavations of the nineteenth century have uncovered magnificent curving bronze horns, including two helmets with curved appendages on either

side. Though most likely used for shamanistic rituals and not for war, bronze horns were understood to be of deep significance for pre-historic Nordic people in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Although we now know these Bronze Age horns predated the Viking Age by over 2000 years, such chronological distinctions were less well defined in the nineteenth century. In addition to providing an opposition to Southern Europe, and bespeaking great antiquity, the horned helmet also resonated on another level. Archaeological evidence suggested that silver decorated horns were used as drinking vessels during the Viking Age (Fig. 3). Symbolically, cups made of cow horns presumably intended for consuming alcohol neatly connected man with nature, a hallmark of the Romantic Nationalistic movement, implying a deep connection between the people and the land on which they lived.<sup>14</sup>

By resonating on all these levels, the horned helmet became a singularly appropriate manifestation of Scandinavian nationalism. Over the last two hundred years, Viking inspired material culture has continued to evolve in response to the changing political fortunes in Scandinavia. One particularly interesting



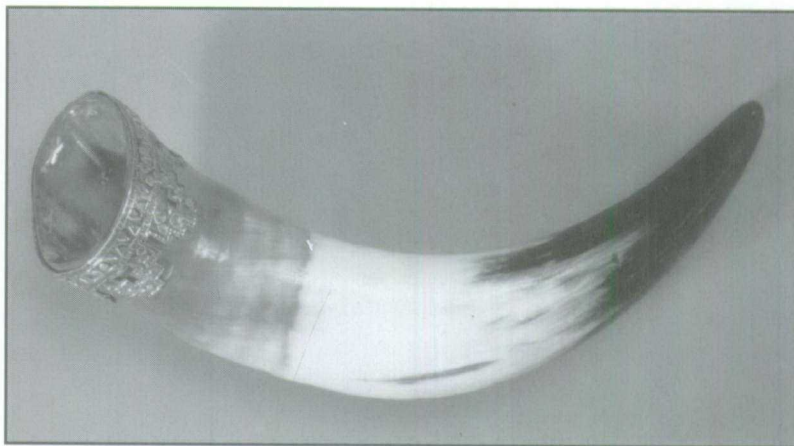
manifestation is the troll doll wearing a horned helmet (Fig. 4). Since the publication of Norwegian folktales in the mid-nineteenth century,<sup>15</sup> trolls have been a popular embodiment of Scandinavian nationalism. By adding a horned helmet to this mythical creature, the importance of the Vikings in Scandinavian nationalism is also acknowledged, although the reality of the Vikings as a people is certainly undermined. Tourist shops in Scandinavia are well stocked with troll dolls and horned-helmeted warriors.

The horned helmet has had at least as successful a career in North America as it has had in Scandinavia. One obvious source for the ubiquitous horned helmet is the Minnesota Vikings football team. Minnesota has a concentration of Scandinavian immigrants, and their descendants continue to actively promote their Scandinavian identity through festivals and traditional foods. But more importantly, they continue to exhibit pride in their Viking ancestors, just as most Scandinavians do (Fig. 5). For Scandinavian-Americans, the tales of Vikings crossing the North Atlantic 1000 years ago in open decked boats seems an especially fitting parallel to their own emigration. This may explain the appeal of the Kensington Stone: it suggests descendants of Vikings were probing deep into North America, not simply accidentally sailing to her shores.<sup>16</sup> Thus when in 1961 Minnesota acquired rights to create a National Football League team, they chose the Vikings as their name and mascot. And they, of course, painted horns on the side of the helmet. With the tremendous popularity of NFL football as a staple of American culture, nearly every American associates Vikings with horned helmets.

The sale of plastic horned helmets, dolls wearing horned helmets, even beautiful pewter statues of horned-helmeted warriors, is so commonplace that our museum sales shop had trouble ordering Viking-related merchandise that did not have horned helmets.<sup>17</sup> The marketing and production forces were squarely lined up behind the viability, and consumer appeal, of the horned helmet.

### Current Research

All this despite repeated claims by archaeologists that Vikings, or Norsemen, did not wear horned helmets. The only complete (though not intact) Viking Age helmet from Scandinavia that has been excavated was a metal cap with a cat-eye shaped eye and nose



**Fig. 3**

*This re-creation of a Viking-age drinking horn was based on decorative elements that were most likely used to adorn drinking horns. Glass fragments and pictorial evidence also indicate conical cups were used in the Viking Age. (Courtesy Statens Historiska Museum, Stockholm)*



**Fig. 4**

*Part of the collection of Viking kitsch items held by the Canadian Museum of Civilization, these troll dolls represent a recent manifestation of the Viking stereotype. (Photograph by Peter Harholdt, NMNH)*

guard, but certainly no horns (Fig. 6). The fact that Vikings did not wear horned helmets is the first of many stereotypical views that are directly at odds with current Viking scholarship. Excavations in trade sites in Sweden and the British Isles and of farm sites in the islands of the North Atlantic, analysis of environmental indicators, and new evaluations of literature written directly following the Viking Age have all contributed new ideas about who the Vikings were. Even the use of the term Viking is incorrect: technically, the culture name is Norse, and Vikings are simply one occupation which a Norseman could choose to follow.



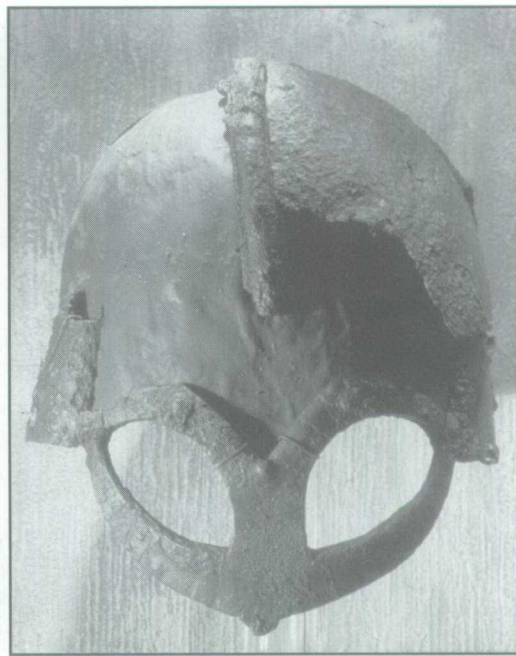
**Fig. 5**

Though the Kensington Runestone is discredited by most scholars, residents of nearby Alexandria, Minnesota, are so convinced of its accuracy that they erected this statue, and a museum to house the stone. (Photographer unknown)



**Fig. 6**

This fragmentary helmet, known as the Gjermundbu helmet, found in Norway and held by Universitetets Oldsaksamling is the best evidence of Viking headgear found to date. Notice it has no horns! (Photograph by Peter Harholdt, NMNH)



### The Exhibit

It was in an attempt to bridge this tremendous gulf that the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History began working on a special, travelling exhibition entitled *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*.<sup>18</sup> The project was envisioned as a commemoration of a little known piece of history: the arrival of the Vikings in North America 1000 years ago. The exhibition opened in Washington in April 2000 and is currently touring the United States and Canada.<sup>19</sup> Containing almost 400 objects borrowed from 29 institutions throughout Scandinavia, the U.K., Canada, and the United States, the exhibition is intended as a serious treatment of the new information scholars have uncovered about the Vikings in the last twenty years and to solidify in the national narrative that the Vikings did arrive in North America 1000 years ago.

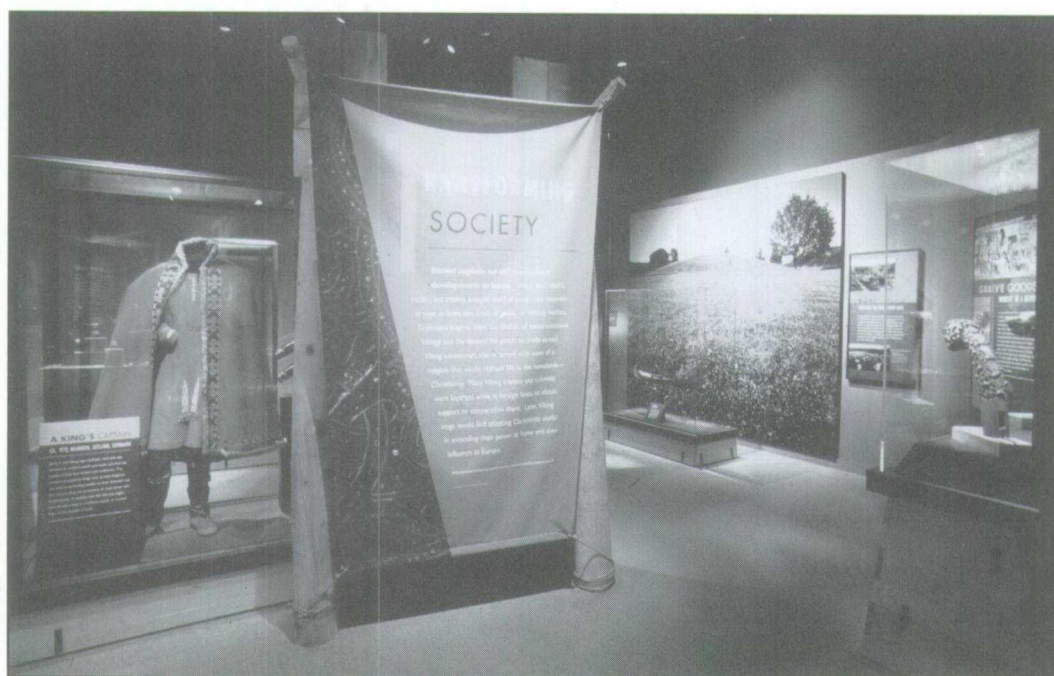
As such, the main body of the exhibition follows the western expansion of the Vikings. Their life in the Scandinavian homelands of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway is exhibited through a series of cases: artifacts uncovered from major Viking trade sites highlight the many who were craftsmen and traders; jewellery and clothing demonstrates the social divisions between elites and commoners and between ethnic groups like the Saami and Finns; pagan and Christian religious items focus the visitor's attention on the process of the conversion to Christianity; and eating implements and iron

manufactured tools illustrate daily life on the farm. All of these cases serve to demonstrate the complexity and richness of Viking Age Scandinavian culture (Fig. 7).

The next section launches the visitor into the North Atlantic. A video of ships at sea paired with a fibre optic map conveys the dramatic spread of the Vikings from Scandinavia beginning in 830, to the Faeroes by the 850s, to Iceland by 875, to Greenland by 985, and finally to North America by 1000 A.D. The American Museum of Natural History, the second venue for the exhibition, added a large-scale model of the type of ship used to cross the North Atlantic as a new component in this section.

The next three sections follow that geographic spread. In the "Taking the North Atlantic" section, artifacts from Iceland demonstrate how Vikings adapted to life in this treeless, iron-poor environment, but the focus of this section is the original saga manuscripts and an audio presentation of saga stories of voyages to "Vinland the Good." The exhibition's next section is on "Vinland" itself, showing the archaeological evidence of Vikings in North America and their contact with First Nation peoples. Here a large model of the only confirmed Viking site in North America, near the village of L'Anse aux Meadows in northern Newfoundland, is the visual anchor. The final section of the exhibition displays housewares and religious items from the Norse colonies in Greenland, which were established by Erik the





**Fig. 7**  
The introductory text and several cases for the fourth section of the exhibition, entitled "Transforming Society," which focused on the Viking homelands of Scandinavia. (Photograph by Chip Clark, NMNH)

Red in A.D. 985 and which flourished until the 1300s, but gradually died out by the mid 1400s. An infant's coffin and a young girl's burial dress, displayed in a simple case, convey this sad ending to the Vikings western expansion, and end the exhibition.

While these sections are the central curatorial content, our design team rightly wanted to begin the exhibition with some orientation material. The introductory section paired a time-line of the major events in North Atlantic history from A.D. 750 to the present and a large wooden map of the North Atlantic with select objects from throughout the region, including a cast of the Jelling Stone, a magnificent Viking Age monument from Denmark, and a smaller authentic Viking Age stone memorial marker from Gotland, Sweden. Our designers also encouraged us to create a separate section focusing on the Vikings as raiders, a topic which our curatorial team had not wanted to emphasize. A one-to-six scale model of a Viking ship, a large mural of the Viking raid on Lindisfarne monastery, a case of Viking weapons, and a case of magnificent items looted by Viking raiders (Fig. 8) was tempered by a discussion of the bias of historical records, a panel on the many Vikings who stayed to settle in the areas they raided, eventually integrating into the cultures of areas such as Normandy and Scotland, and a 3-D computerized animation demonstrating the sophisticated construction and agile operation of a Viking ship.

### Confronting the Viking Stereotype

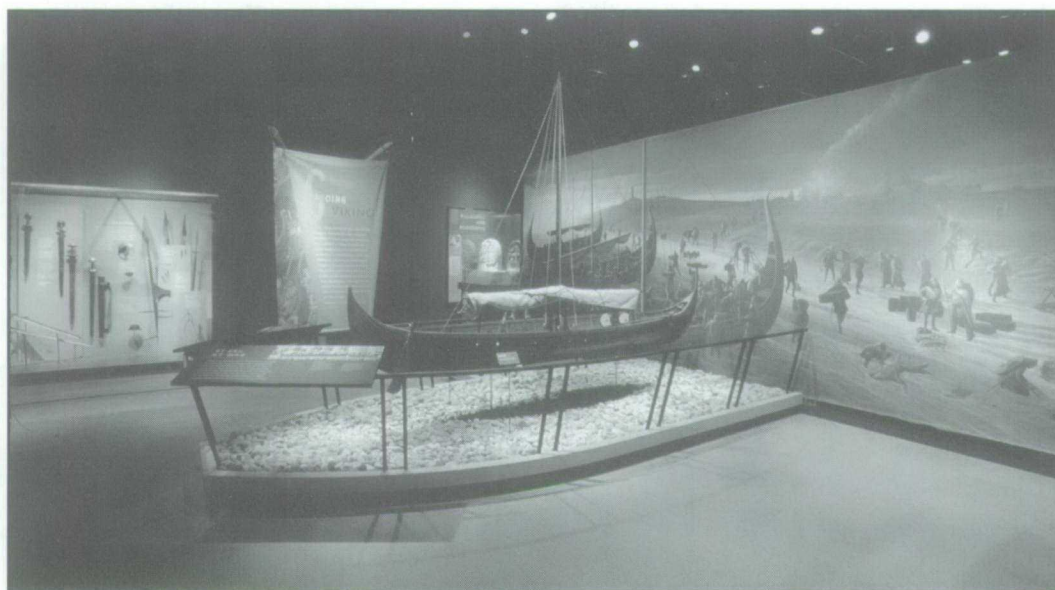
There was still one aspect of the Viking story that we wanted to include in the exhibition: the modern popular interest in the Vikings. Originally, this was planned as the final exhibition section, in keeping with the chronological order of the exhibition. But the exhibition team realized, given the pervasiveness of Viking stereotypes and our use of the term Viking in the title of the exhibition,<sup>20</sup> that such a placement would tacitly reinforce those ideas. We hoped that debunking those stereotypes early in the exhibition would encourage more visitor interest by demonstrating that perhaps they did not know as much about Vikings as they thought they did. Our exhibition was planned as a fairly text-heavy presentation, so it was critical to set up a rather didactic learning environment.

We therefore decided to create as the second section of the exhibition, following the introductory material, a room entitled "Recapturing the Past," which focuses on the reinterpretation of the Viking past that has occurred since the nineteenth century. This reorganization opened up the rhetorical possibility to make the discussion of the modern interest in the Vikings far more than a post-script. Rather it became an ideal locale to directly address those stereotypes, which we hoped to demonstrate were an outgrowth of ideas over 100 years old. (And with a demonstration of their "archaic" origin, to instantly undermine their credibility in a very modernist statement of the evolution of ideas.)



Fig. 8

A mural depicting the destruction of Lindisfarne monastery and a model Viking ship evokes the image of the Vikings portrayed in contemporary historical documents. (Photograph by Chip Clark, NMNH)



The main text, printed on both sides of a thick canvas, is illustrated by a famous Norwegian painting from the nineteenth century entitled *Thor Battles the Giants*,<sup>21</sup> which sets the tone for the romantic and overblown view of the Vikings explained in the room. In the Washington installation, this hung over the central case in the section: a re-created archaeological excavation of a mass burial. Utilizing a combination of authentic and replica bones, this visually impressive case shows the remains of thirteen males, either Viking warriors or perhaps shipwreck victims who have dramatic gashes in their skulls, found together in a single plot in a Norse graveyard in Greenland.<sup>22</sup> In order to make the case fit within the theme of the room more clearly, the text focuses on how popular interest in the Vikings led to serious archaeological investigations during the late nineteenth century. Around this case, four cases and one wall panel present various manifestations of interest in the Viking past since the 1800s, divided roughly between European and North American views of the Vikings.

One case contains a costume from the Metropolitan Opera's 1930 production of Wagner's *The Ring* — Brunnhilde's costume complete with metal breast covering, winged helmet, shield, and spear. Another case pairs an authentic sixteenth-century handmade saga book with its nineteenth-century mass produced translation and a silver drinking horn decorated with scenes from the sagas given to a nineteenth century Swedish poet. The third case displays a replica of the Kensington Runestone, with accompanying text discussing the problems with the piece and a map showing

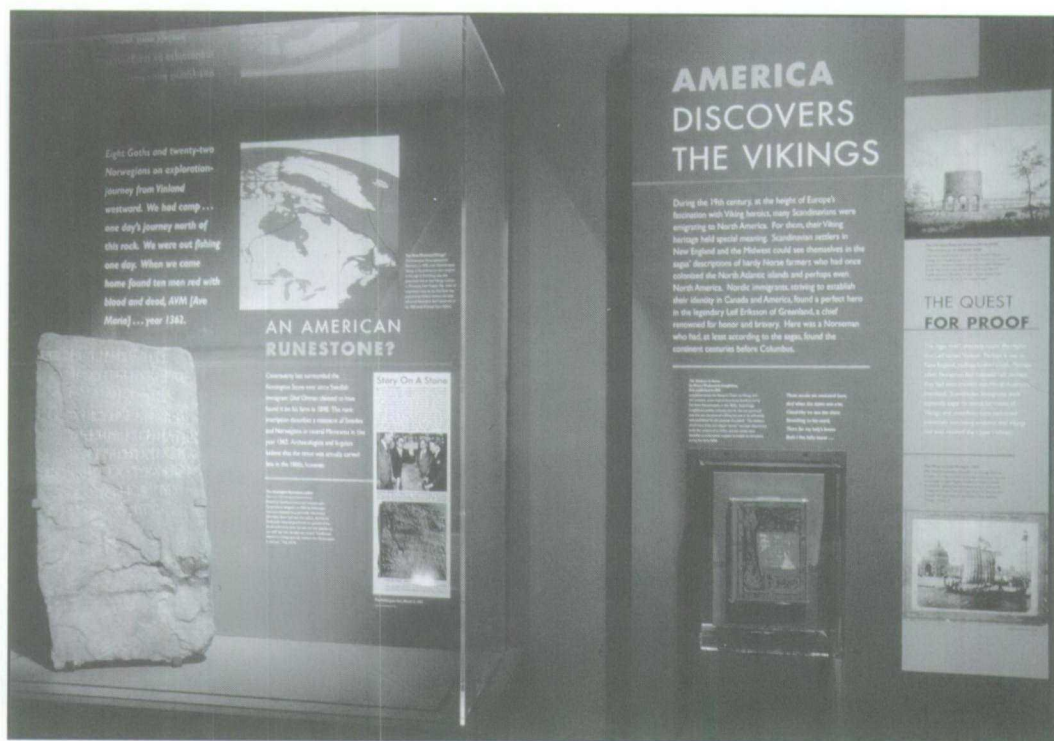
the unlikely route such a group of explorers would have needed to take (Fig. 9). The wall panel beside this case, entitled "America Discovers the Vikings," includes a vitrine of H. W. Longfellow's poem about a Viking in America, "The Skeleton in Armor."

All of these pieces, save the replica of the Kensington Stone, were impressive pieces of material culture that drew the attention of the visitor because of their fine craftsmanship and beauty. The text for each explains that they were all attempts to reinterpret the Viking past during the height of Romantic Nationalism, suggesting that their meaning lies squarely within the context of that particular political movement. This movement and its origins and outcomes, including the desire for Germans and Scandinavians to heroize their ancestors during this period, needs, for the average visitor to the exhibition, to be explained and contextualized.

### Displaying Viking Popular Culture Items

While this section does address the romanticized view of the Vikings and presents the idea that scientific investigations have uncovered more mundane and realistic aspects of their lives, none of these cases directly addressed the erroneous contemporary view of the Vikings. The exhibition team wanted to confront the visitor with the modern stereotyped image of the Vikings through a case on "Viking popular culture." Although this case was included in even the earliest floor plans, it was





**Fig. 9**  
In the "Recapturing the Past" section of the exhibition were these cases on controversial finds like the Kensington Runestone and the Newport Tower.  
(Photograph by Chip Clark, NMNH)

one of the last to be defined in terms of what its theme would be or what specific items would be shown.

During our research into the available museum collections, I and the head curator, William Fitzhugh, had located two collections of Viking popular culture items, one at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) in Hull, Quebec, and one at the Statens Historiska Museum (SHM) in Stockholm, Sweden. These collections contain, among other things, many small Viking statues, pins with Viking inspired slogans, examples of horned helmets, and textiles and ceramics decorated with images of Vikings. Of this interesting array of goods, we had great difficulty making our selection. In most other cases, Fitzhugh and I made the selection of appropriate items with little advice from the designers. But in this case, we had a long discussion with the design team until we finally chose only hats with horns, since we reasoned this was the most recognized aspect of the Viking stereotype. Our educational goal for this case was to convince people that the Vikings did not wear horned helmets, and in so doing shake their faith in the stereotyped view of the Vikings, and in fact in the very idea that they knew what the name Viking meant.

The case contains crassly commercialized, absolutely contemporary modern Viking pop-culture items: six examples of horned helmets, a knock-off Minnesota Viking football helmet,

and a cell from a Bugs Bunny cartoon (Fig. 10). The curatorial impetus for including all of these was simply to demonstrate visually what has been said in this paper and elsewhere: horned helmets are everywhere.

The horned helmets are displayed in this wall case in a colourful arrangement. A bronze coloured plastic helmet with large horns, and a blue baseball cap with cotton horns topped with bells on either side and the word "Sverige" (Sweden) written across the front were borrowed from SHM. From the CMC we borrowed a red plastic helmet with two small white plastic horns on either side, complete with two long synthetic blond braids — obviously a nod to the Brunnhilde image of the Viking warrior woman (and thus her horns were smaller!); a purple and bright blue dyed felt hat with matching horns on either side that looked like a medieval joker's hat; and a brand new Minnesota Vikings football helmet.

We also included in amongst these obviously mass-made plastic and synthetic horned helmets one very nicely made modern horned helmet out of all-natural materials, handmade by the Odin Forge in California, which we borrowed from a private individual.<sup>23</sup> At first glance, it looks as if it could be a replica or a very well preserved helmet from the Viking Age. Although it draws upon the erroneous horned-helmet stereotype as much as the other pieces,



**Fig. 10**

Boldly titled "The Way They Weren't," this case, containing horned helmets, was problematic from its conception to design, and garnished a disproportionate amount of visitor response. (Photograph by Chip Clark, NMNH)



it does not "read" as a piece of popular culture. I've since seen a photo of this type of helmet being worn at an NFL Viking football game, and wish I had incorporated the photo into the horned-helmet case to better emphasize the mass production of this piece.

The Bugs Bunny cartoon cell was from "What's Opera Doc?" which tells an extremely abridged version of the Wagner opera story. It features a pigtailed Bugs in drag as Brunnhilde, and Elmer Fudd as both his suitor and also his horned-helmeted hunter. The graphic designer, who had otherwise relied on our curatorial illustrative suggestions, felt that we should include something from this cartoon in the case. However, we had difficulty reaching someone at the Warner Brothers Studios to supply us with a photo, or rights to show a clip from the cartoon itself. We settled therefore for purchasing a framed "limited reproduction" cell at the local WB Store, which even had a built-in sound chip feature. It shows Elmer plunging his spear into Bugs' rabbit hole, while Bugs looks on, from a different hole, with concern. Though in hindsight it seems more appropriate to have the mass produced piece of true popular culture in our case,<sup>24</sup> it did necessitate that this became a labeled object in the case rather than simply a graphic image.

This overview of the process by which the case was defined and the objects chosen

illustrates how ad hoc and abnormal this case was. In fact, a sister exhibition developed by the Newfoundland Museum that was also funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers<sup>25</sup> chose to not threaten the seriousness of their exhibition through the inclusion of a case on Viking popular culture. In Europe, Viking exhibitions at the state sponsored museums do not do this either, although a travelling exhibition developed by Carin Orrling (see below) does end with a short note on this idea. In general, it is not normal practice for curators and exhibit designers to place popular culture items in the midst of a traditional exhibition.

### "The Way They Weren't"

How did visitors respond to this unusual case? Two written evaluations of visitor response to the exhibition *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* have been conducted, one at the opening installation in Washington, D.C., and one at the second installation in New York.<sup>26</sup> Both used similar questions to make comparison possible, though the New York survey tracked visitor time in what they defined as forty-five exhibition components. The horned-helmet case, which was grouped with three other cases from "Recapturing the Past" as a single component, was stopped at by over seventy-five percent of the visitors to the exhibition. Only the re-created

burial, which was low to the ground and one of the more accessible cases for children, was stopped at by more visitors (close to eighty percent). Both of these extremely high numbers confirm that visitors are prepared to commit more time to reading early in the exhibition, validating our decision to re-organize.

Interviews were conducted with visitors at the end of the exhibition, and one of the questions asked in both surveys was: "What surprised you in the exhibition?" Over two-thirds of the visitors to NMNH and half the visitors to AMNH said something surprised them, and of those, the fact that the Vikings did not wear horned helmets was cited as the most surprising piece of information. Some sample comments include: "There goes my image of 'horned' helmets" — male, age 70, at N.Y. venue; "I'm surprised that they addressed the stereotypes in the exhibit, they needed to be addressed" — young man at D.C. venue; "Vikings did not really wear those helmets" — male, age 19, N.Y. venue. Although the promotional material did sometimes mention this fact, the horned-helmet case was the only place in the exhibition itself where this message was conveyed. Since it was near the front of the exhibition, the fact that visitors recalled it upon exiting the exhibition suggests that message was well retained.

This retention was certainly due to the method by which it was conveyed. My personal observations from the hours I spent in the exhibition hall suggests why this case made an impression on the visitors. Often the first case people would see after walking past the introductory timeline and map, visitors approached this case as they would any other. Because they had come to an exhibition that had been heavily publicized, the visitors expect to see real, authentic.<sup>27</sup> objects; many visitors did not comprehend immediately that these were modern popular culture items. As with any case, visitors would quickly look over the objects to determine for themselves the theme of the case, and only then if sufficiently interested would they read the text and labels.<sup>28</sup> When they walked up to the case, their central impression of the Vikings as horned-helmeted warriors was instantly, and perhaps gratifyingly, reinforced. Every once in a while, the visitor would then quickly walk away.

But most stayed at the case long enough to notice something was strange about it. The helmets were plastic; was plastic around 1000 years ago? And some were brightly coloured; how could they survive so intact? And what is Bugs Bunny doing in a serious museum exhibit?

Then they would see the Minnesota Vikings football helmet and know something was wrong.

With these questions raised, they would then turn to the text. The bold first line read, "The Way They Weren't," a very clever title developed by our talented script writer, Sue Voss. What made this so effective was that the title relied upon a sense of irony. Beyond the unexpected word ending of the title, there were also other layers of irony at work, for instance the realization that the most common symbol for the Viking was in fact historically incorrect. I would argue that it was the encounter with irony that made this case so memorable, and so effective at conveying its message.

Linda Hutcheon's review of the "Into the Heart of Africa" exhibit at the Royal Ontario Museum<sup>29</sup> discussed the problems associated with using irony within a museum context, primarily because visitors have an expectation of straightforward, reliable information coming from museums as institutions. In that example, the irony depended upon a post-colonial critique of the museum and the state of Canada, and was less than successful. *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* on the other hand was one of the most successful exhibitions ever mounted by the NMNH, whether one evaluates it based on visitor understanding of the main points, number of visitors, or amount of media coverage. I believe this is because our use of irony was isolated and carefully framed. The unusual beginning to the exhibition created a rhetorical space separate from the main storyline that provided sufficient suspension of convention to allow for the inclusion of the even more unusual case of Viking popular culture items. Here irony served a well defined purpose and essentially drove the point home.

### Collecting Popular Culture Items

Another somewhat ironic component of the horned-helmet case was that these obvious items of popular culture were treated just like all the other pieces in the show: they were in a locked case, with appropriate lighting and labelling. I recall one group that was touring the exhibit laughing at the case upon reading the object label "Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1999.79.29" or "Museum of National Antiquities, Sweden." Their comment was meant to convey "these pieces were borrowed from a museum!" Perhaps they thought the object labels were actually a joke, much like the opening line of the case: the thought that museums had put effort into collecting these pieces was obviously amusing.

The collections from which these pieces were borrowed are in fact unusual. Both the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Statens Historiska Museum have popular culture collections somewhat by accident. The collection at the CMC was recently bequeathed to them by the estate of Magnus Einarsson, an Icelandic-Canadian who was a curator in their folk-culture department. Manitoba, Canada, has the largest concentration of Icelanders outside of Iceland, and Einarsson explained that his interest in collecting popular culture items about the Vikings stemmed from his own cultural background.<sup>30</sup> He had therefore purchased items he found representative of the genre, and had intended to one day mount a "Viking Kitsch" exhibition before his untimely death.

The collection at the SHM has been made by Carin Orrling, their editor-in-chief, who has curated exhibitions about the Vikings that have toured in South America as well as all over Europe. After working on an exhibition in 1972 documenting the Romantic Nationalist movement and one in 1996,<sup>31</sup> which examined France's interest in the Vikings during the Romantic period, Orrling has continued to track the various material forms Vikings have taken in modern popular culture, though in a casual way by shopping in local stores wherever she might be travelling. She is presently working on a volume of her collection.

Both collections reflect the interest and taste of the collectors rather than a focused research effort, and they are somewhat marginalized within their museums. Some pieces in the collection are or were privately held by the curators, while other pieces belong to the museum. In the case of the CMC, our request to borrow these pieces for our exhibition was met with some surprise. From the humorous reaction the case itself elicited — which suggests confrontation with the unexpected — I surmise that the public is also somewhat uncomfortable with the idea that museums, especially honoured and authentic national museums, collect commercialized, commonplace, popular culture items.

This unease with "serious" museums having collections of popular kitsch items probably reflects that such collections are outside of the sphere of the museum, defined as the keeper of culturally important objects from the past. In a "natural" life of a group of objects, almost in a Darwinian model, time acts to wean down the group, and then the museum collector, perhaps 50 or 100 years later, acts deliberately upon that accidentally-formed group of contemporarily

existing relics of the past. Through the agency of a museum, the life of an object chosen to become part of a museum collection is extended with appropriate care and conservation. What emerges is a small group of objects, miraculously "saved," that the public can then value as special, and unique. The role of the museum in saving these objects heightens its cultural worth. But the thought of curators in museums actively collecting these pieces available at any tourist shop is problematic and disconcerting for the public. Popular culture items are not special; they are commonplace, and therefore considered unworthy of the institutional efforts of a museum.

### Contextualizing Objects

Exhibitions rely upon the interplay between object, text, graphics, as well as visual clues such as case design and lighting, to create meaning. In this delicate, unpredictable dance, the object is the centrepiece around which all else revolves. Nothing better convinces us of the foreignness of the past or of another culture than being confronted with an object whose meaning is not apparent to us.<sup>32</sup> Objects can be strange to a museum visitor either because they come from a culture whose lifeways are different than their own, or because they were created in the past, or both. In modern western capitalist societies, there is an obsession with advancement and change, such that the once obvious purpose of objects made even fifty years ago quickly erodes. If the objects are unfamiliar to the visitor, the visitor must rely upon the museum to provide information from which they can glean meaning. The more unusual the material culture items being displayed are to the visitor's own life and experience, the more the museum has the ability to define those objects' meanings.

The trend in exhibitions at cultural museums especially has been towards greater care in "contextualizing" the objects by providing extensive historic and geographic background information through well written and organized text. Museum texts have become elaborated into diverse types to accommodate a hierarchy of information from the detailed to the general: simple object identifications; focus labels for groups of objects; case title and explanatory text; stand-alone text panels; and introductory texts throughout the exhibition. The latter three often utilize varying font sizes and bullet points to allow visitors who simply skim exhibition texts to quickly recognize the main point. Through the text, the curator and writer

can choose what information the visitor has to build meaning, a power with which museum professionals often struggle.<sup>33</sup>

Almost every single piece in the exhibition *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* was both chronologically and geographically separate from the life experiences of the visitors. Because of this, we had great power to contextualize the objects and thus we were able to carefully define their meaning. Even in the "Recapturing the Past" section of the exhibition, there was need for the pieces to be explained and there was a straightforward curatorial message, much like the historical treatment given to Art Nouveau in the recent exhibition from the Victoria and Albert Museum and National Gallery of Art.<sup>34</sup> These pieces were artistic, valuable, unique, and indisputably "worthy" of inclusion in a serious exhibition.

The only exception to this was the case of horned helmets. Unlike the other pieces in the exhibit, or even in the "Recapturing the Past" section, the horned-helmet case was full of extremely contemporary pieces. These objects, whose meaning rests solely within the context of the last fifty years, do not need to be explained for most museum visitors. In the quest to create a product which resonates with every single member of society (in hopes that all will buy it), popular material culture items, quickly mass produced and designed to be discarded, pair visually obvious shapes, colours, and materials with simplistic ideas. If they are, according to this rubric, made well, fully-functioning members of the target society have no need for the agency of the museum. In the case of Viking popular culture items, the meaning of horned helmets as iconographic of Vikings was entirely apparent immediately to the visitor. The visitor needed no explanation of what these items were meant to convey. Rather, the text for the horned-helmet case, unlike any other in the exhibition, assumed that the visitor would have specific foreknowledge of these objects. In fact, the irony of the text would not work if the visitor did not have the stereotyped view of the Vikings as horned-helmeted warriors imbedded in their consciousness.

In some ways, the immediate goal of undermining the Viking stereotype is less important than this more unintended outcome of including this case in the exhibition: the public became an integral part of the exhibit process. While museum professionals always acknowledge the role of the public in making meaning in an exhibit, it is often with some sense of displeasure or resignation. Certainly the plan of the exhibit as

a whole sought to confine the public to a linear storyline, and to strictly define the objects' meaning through a text-heavy presentation. The horned-helmet case did the exact opposite: it welcomed the agency of the visitor. It opened up the museum process to the visitor; their knowledge of these horned helmets was extremely important for the case to be effective. Rather than assuming that the public had no knowledge, this case depended on them having a specific concept which by and large they did have.

## Conclusion

The ubiquitous nature of the Viking stereotype, codified and commercialized through the material culture of plastic horned helmets, demonstrates how effective popular culture is at disseminating its ideas. Our case on horned helmets had to acknowledge and work within the realm of meaning established by pop culture, unlike every other case in the exhibition. On other levels as well, my experience in curating this case suggests that there is a perceived distinction between popular culture items and other material culture items. The effectiveness of this case, how memorable it was, and even our curatorial hesitancy to include it, all testify to a societal proclivity to place popular culture items in a separate category. Popular culture items are not seen as authentic<sup>35</sup> subjects deserving of museum treatment; they may be humorous or interesting, but they are not considered educational in the same sense as other pieces of material culture.

The ironic aspects of the case — that these commonplace pop pieces were collected by professional scholars; that they were seamlessly included in a serious exhibition; and that the text relied on the visitor's knowledge to a great extent — all stem from this artificial distinction between "authentic" objects and popular culture items. The case would not have been ironic had there not been a transgression of boundaries, and in so doing, the case questioned the validity of that distinction. We seem to think ourselves, and our own material products, are set apart from those of other times and places. However, I would suggest that this is little more than modernist arrogance about the uniqueness of our times and our modes of production. Popular material culture items can be subjected to serious examination, and the process can be very revealing.

But in other ways, the case was very traditional. While subtly challenging the authority of the museum by suggesting curators are collecting



commonplace items and by relying on the knowledge of the visitor to be effective, the case also strongly reaffirmed the authority of the museum by stating that the ubiquitous horned-helmet icon is historically incorrect. The ironic title was used as a vehicle to effective learning, rather than demonstrating a post-modernist hesitancy to make statements of fact. I feel that the case struck a pleasing balance between alienating and welcoming the visitor, and this allowed it to play an important role in the overall

experience of the exhibition, and in the specific goal of debunking the Viking stereotype.<sup>36</sup> But in a final piece of irony, I must admit that plastic horned helmets and swords have been the top-seller in each of the museum shops that have hosted the exhibition, mostly thanks to kids and teenage boys. It seems predestined that the horned-helmet icon will go the way of the Kensington Runestone, always to be embraced despite the best efforts of scholars, curators, and attentive museum goers.

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#### NOTES

1. A review of the sources and controversy surrounding the Kensington Runestone was recently published in Ralph Scott's article "Who Carved the Minnesota Runestone?" *Ancient American* 18: 4–7. As a supporter of the stone, he presents one side of the story. A more comprehensive treatment will be forthcoming from Birgitta Wallace, the archaeologist most actively involved in disproving the validity of the stone.
2. See also Elisabeth Ward, "Reflections on an Icon: Vikings in American Culture" in *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*, ed. W. Fitzhugh and E. Ward (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2000), 365–373.
3. Shortly after King Harold of England defeated King Harald of Norway, he was himself defeated by William the Conqueror of France. William was the descendant of a Viking chieftain who had won land in northern France and created the Duchy of Normandy, so the Norman invasion of England following the Battle of Hastings in 1066 is sometimes referred to as the last Viking raid, with the Vikings the victors.
4. Peter Sawyer, "The Age of the Vikings and Before" in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*, ed. P. Sawyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1–18.
5. Some excellent overviews of the Viking Age include Else Roesdahl's revised *The Vikings* (London: Penguin Books, 1998); James Graham Campbell's *The Viking World* (New Haven: Ticknor & Fields, 1980) and his edited volume *Cultural Atlas of the Viking World* (Oxford: Facts on File, 1994); and Peter Sawyer's edited volume cited above. I also, of course, highly recommend *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*, edited by Fitzhugh and Ward.
6. The Oseberg Burial of a female Viking found with her magnificently manufactured ship in the Oslo Fjord region of Norway is perhaps the greatest example of this. See Arne Emil Christensen, "Ships and Navigation," in Fitzhugh and Ward, *Vikings*, 88–91 and Anton W. Brøgger et al., *Osebergfundet: utgit av den Norske stat* (Oslo: Universitetets Oldsaksamling, 1917).
7. See David Wilson, *Vikings and Gods in European Art* (Højbjerg: Moesgård Museum, 1997) for a discussion of the origins of the use of Vikings in this national rhetoric, and Carin Orrling, "The Old Norse Dream," in Fitzhugh and Ward, *Vikings*, 354–364 for an overview of the many material manifestations this took from the nineteenth century to the present.
8. On the central role of the Viking Age in Scandinavian museums, see Bozena Werbart "Archaeology Yesterday and Today: Sweden 1930–1945," in *Glyfer och arkeologist rum — en vänbok till Jarl Nordbladh*, ed. A. Gustafsson and H. Karlsson (Göteborg: Department of Archaeology, Univ., 1999), 275–288.
9. It is notoriously difficult to calculate immigration figures, but Lars Ljungmark in *For Sale Minnesota* (Chicago: Swedish Pioneer Historical Society, 1971) provides a useful summary. An impressive new online database ([www.migrationinstitute.fi/nordic/](http://www.migrationinstitute.fi/nordic/)) has been developed in conjunction with the exhibition *Scandinavian Roots, American Lives* (touring from 2000 indefinitely) and this promises to facilitate research of Scandinavian immigration into the U.S. and Canada tremendously.
10. Perhaps not coincidentally, the Kensington Stone was "discovered" in 1898, shortly after the viability of Viking voyages to North America, even deep into the interior of North America, had been established by this replica ship sailing.
11. Drawn by Dik Browne since 1973 and syndicated in over 1200 international newspapers.

12. See Martin Djupdræt, *Billeder af Vikingen [Images of Vikings]* (Copenhagen: Skoletjenesten, 1998), 31; and Ward, "Reflections on an Icon," 373.
13. See Orrling, "The Old Norse Dream," 357.
14. David Wilson, *Vikings and Gods*, 48–50.
15. Peter C. Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe's collection of Norwegian folktales has been translated into English by Pat Shaw Iversen and Carl Norman as *Norwegian Folk Tales*, and illustrated by the original, and now well-known, drawings of trolls (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).
16. In both the *Saga of the Greenlanders* and the *Saga of Erik the Red*, the discovery of North America is attributed to a Viking voyager (Bjarni Herjolfsson in the former, Leif Eriksson in the latter) being mistakenly blown off course.
17. Our sales shop was heavily criticized by everyone from the volunteers to government officials because we sold plastic horned helmets.
18. NMNH began the project at the request of the Nordic Council of Ministers in May 1997.
19. For a full tour schedule, please visit [www.mnh.si.edu/vikings](http://www.mnh.si.edu/vikings) and click on Tour Calendar.
20. The use of the term "Viking" was dictated by our sponsors and the museum administration; the tremendous response the exhibition has received is testimony to the power of marketing. Our strategy for dealing with this was to elide the difference in meaning between Viking and Norse — an anthropological term connoting the explorers and settlers of the western North Atlantic during the late Viking and early medieval period — by using them almost interchangeably.
21. This painting is held by the National Gallery of Art, Oslo, and was painted by Márten Eskil Winge between 1862 and 1877.
22. The inclusion of this case had been a source of some concern, since the display of human remains is controversial in Native American museum contexts. However, the bones are from Scandinavian individuals exclusively, and Scandinavian culture has no taboo against displaying skeletal material. It is meant to convey the wealth of knowledge that can be gained from examining skeletal material.
23. It was borrowed from a Scandinavian America curator at the National Museum of American History, Donald Kloster, whose wife had found it at a flea market.
24. Sales of these limited productions and the original cells represents an attempt on the part of specialty galleries to elide the distinction between high-art and popular culture, but I would argue that the general public has not embraced this effort.
25. Entitled *Full Circle: First Contact*, this exhibition focuses more on the aboriginal First Nation peoples of northeastern Canada, which partially accounts for the omission of popular culture items, but not entirely so. See the catalogue edited by Kevin McAleese of the same name, published by the Newfoundland Museum in St John's, 2000.
26. The first is Johanne W. Gudrandsen, "A Report Based on the Visitor Study of *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*, at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C." (Trondheim: Master's Thesis for the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Department of Social Anthropology, 2001). The latter, "*Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga: The Exhibition's Impact on Museum Visitors*" was prepared by Ellen Giusti of the American Museum of Natural History's Education Department, March 2001.
27. Richard Handler, "Authenticity," *Anthropology Today* 2, no. 1: 1–4.
28. John R. Falk in *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning* (with Lynn D. Dierking, Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2000) argues that there is a strong relationship between interest and the action of visiting an exhibition, stopping at a case or reading the label. This self-selection process usually results in visitors confirming pre-existing understanding rather than gaining new knowledge.
29. Linda Hutcheon, "The Post Always Rings Twice: The Postmodern and the Postcolonial," *Material History Review* 41 (Spring 1995): 4–23.
30. Personal communication with David Morrison at Canadian Museum of Civilization, January 2000 and June 1999.
31. The catalogue for these two exhibitions are difficult to find in North American libraries, but they were produced. The first is: Inga Lundström and Carin Orrling, *Viking, Viking: forntidsdröm och verklighet* (Stockholm: Statens Historiska Museum, 1972). The second is an edited volume to which Carin Orrling contributed a chapter: *Dragons et Drakars: le mythe viking de la Scandinavie à la Normandie, XVIII<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. Lucien Musset (Caen: Musée de Normandie, 1996).
32. David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 244–249.
33. Museum professionals rarely want to completely lose their authoritative voice, but articles like Sally Love's "Curators as Agents of Change" in *Exhibiting Dilemmas* and Stephen Alsford and David Perry in "Interpretive Theatre: A Role in Museums," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 10: 8–23 suggest ways in which curators can responsibly exercise their role. The Enola Gay controversy that the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum weathered in 1995 has further heightened awareness and concern about the messages conveyed in museum displays. See also *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Levine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).
34. *Art Nouveau: 1890–1914*, ed. Paul Greenhalgh (London: Victoria and Albert Museum Publications, 2000).
35. Handler, "Authenticity."
36. Debunking stereotypes has often been cited as one of the more effective parts of the exhibition in popular reviews such as "The Amazing Vikings," *Time Magazine* (8 May 2000): 69–78; and "The Ancient Mariners," *Newsweek* (3 April 2000): 48–54.

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## The Park In the City: Baseball Landscapes Civically Considered

JOHN D. FAIRFIELD

### Résumé

*Les stades de baseball comptent parmi les rares installations à avoir survécu à la frénésie de destruction créatrice qui a saisi les villes américaines au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Typiquement américains, propices aux rituels collectifs et sources de fierté civique, les stades classiques construits entre 1909 et 1923 ont favorisé la conscience communautaire. Si différents des stades des années 1960 et 1970 inspirés de la banlieue, les stades de baseball classiques répondaient à la ville qui les entourait, liant parc, emplacement, quartier et ville. La récente démolition des stades classiques a suscité de la colère et un sentiment de dépossession chez les gens. Mais rien n'a ralenti la cadence de la destruction et seuls deux des quatorze stades classiques subsistent. Malgré la vive opposition des amateurs de baseball, les propriétaires d'équipes et les pouvoirs publics continuent de trouver des raisons de détruire ces stades. Les nouveaux stades « rétro », produits d'alliances politiques entre les élites des secteurs privé et public, ont peu à offrir à la ville ou aux amateurs moyens. L'histoire des lieux du baseball met ainsi en lumière le déclin des places et lieux publics et de l'égalité sociale concomitante et l'atrophie de l'opinion publique en tant que force vive d'une république.*

### Abstract

*Baseball parks are among the few buildings that survived the creative destruction that swept through American cities in the twentieth century. Accommodating public ritual, shaping public space, and responding to the surrounding city, the classic ballparks built between 1909 and 1923 promoted civic consciousness. The recent destruction of the classic ballparks has occasioned anger and anguish. Yet nothing has slowed the pace of destruction, as only two of the fourteen classic ballparks remain. Despite the opposition of baseball fans, team owners and public officials continue to find reasons to destroy the classic ballparks. The newest ballparks, the "retros," products of political alliances between private and public elites, have little to offer the city or the average fan. The history of baseball landscapes thus illuminates the decline of public places and spaces and the closely-related decline in social equality and the atrophy of public opinion as a governing force.*

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American cities are notorious for destroying and remaking themselves at a furious pace. Returning to New York from self-imposed European exile in 1904, Henry James felt the "dreadful chill of change" in the physical disappearance of the buildings, the neighbourhoods, he had known. A generation later, in his pioneering studies of collective memory, Maurice Halbwachs asked how "can spatial memories find their place where everything is changed, where there are no more vestiges or landmarks?"

Memories are not only socially constructed (individuals telling and writing stories, sharing, celebrating, lamenting with others) but they were also physically constructed. Memories are the product of one's encounters with landscapes and buildings and are stored in those physical artifacts which then serve as stimulants to recollection. For James, the disappearance of physical landmarks was not just a matter of personal memory or nostalgia. If cities made history visible through their architecture, as

Lewis Mumford later argued, then American cities threatened to make history invisible. James found the city "crowned not only with no history, but with no credible possibility of time for history." The encounter with landscapes and buildings shapes our image of the city and its history, making it more legible, and stirs our loyalty to place and our aspirations for it. The destruction of physical artifacts frustrates the development of civic consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

Only a few buildings survived the gales of creative destruction that swept through American cities for most of the twentieth century. Conspicuous among those buildings were the first generation of steel and concrete baseball parks built between 1909 and 1923. When James returned to New York in 1904, the ballpark at the north end of Manhattan Island, the Polo Grounds, had already become a local landmark. Nestled into Coogan's Bluff, the Polo Grounds had hosted baseball games since 1890. In 1911 it would burn and be rebuilt. The new Polo Grounds became a civic landmark, treasured precisely for its longevity. Instantly identifiable by its horseshoe shape, the Polo Grounds would please baseball fans until its destruction in 1964, hosting such memorable moments as the Merkle "boner" (1908), Bobby Thomson's "shot heard round the world" (1951), and "the catch" by Willie Mays (1954).<sup>2</sup>

Like the great railway stations, civic centres and City Beautiful parks and monuments of the time, the classic ballparks focused civic pride and promoted civic consciousness. Connecting past and present, the ballparks provided a sense of place and shared memories of heroic exploits and monumental blunders. No wonder the destruction of these ballparks has occasioned so much anger and anguish. Yet nothing has slowed the pace of destruction, as only two — Wrigley Field in Chicago and Fenway Park in Boston — of the fourteen classic ballparks remain and Fenway is seriously threatened. The latest to fall was Detroit's Tiger Stadium, where three-fourths of the members of the Hall of Fame had played. Creative destruction has come to baseball with a vengeance. On average, one new major league baseball field\* has opened per year since 1989 as even the many stadia built in the 1960s and the 1970s are being demolished.<sup>3</sup>

Whether you are a baseball fan or not, the history of baseball landscapes\*\* illuminates the decline of public places and spaces. The urban ballpark is a uniquely American building, accommodating a public ritual and stimulating civic pride. The best of these structures use public space to shape the city on a grand scale. So unlike the suburban-inspired stadia that followed, the urban ballparks respond to the city around them, linking park, site, neighborhood, and city. Baseball fans knew what they had. No "building type commands more allegiance," the *Architectural Record* estimates, "than the early twentieth-century ballpark." Yet, despite the passionate opposition of many baseball fans, team owners and public officials continue to find reasons to destroy them.

The disappearance of these classic ballparks amount to what architect John Pastier calls our "greatest failure" in historic preservation. The classic ballparks are now being supplanted by the "retro" parks that superficially honour the classic form but are more like baseball "theme parks" for the rich. Consider what appears to be the main entrance to the new Comiskey Park that opened in 1991 at the corner of 35th and Shields in Chicago. Superficially reminiscent of the grand entrances of the classic ballparks that created lively public spaces, the entrance is engraved with the words "Comiskey Park" and seems to invite the baseball fan to enter the structure his or her taxes have built. But the entrance is exclusively for team officials, the public officials responsible for the park's construction and those in luxury suites.<sup>4</sup> Such developments suggest a great deal about the political alliances that are building these baseball fields and the reasons they often have so little to offer the average fan. The history of baseball landscapes thus not only suggests the decay of our public spaces but also the closely-related decline in social equality and the atrophy of democratic public opinion as a governing force in the republic.

### The "Park in the City"

The essential quality of the classic ballpark was that it wove green and public spaces into the city's fabric. While clearly an urban structure, the field also remained a grounds. The visual impact

\* The term "baseball field" will be used as a generic category that includes two distinctive forms, the urban ballpark and the suburban stadium.

\*\* By "baseball landscapes," I mean to call attention not only to these large public structures but their physical settings and relation to the surrounding city.

of the Polo Grounds, for example, was vastness. The expanse of the playing field was an enclosed vastness, the field surrounded by the grandstand and the city beyond. The Polo Grounds, historian G. Edward White writes, symbolized the "bright, expansive, reassuring, open-air features" of the early twentieth-century city, not its "dark, cloistered, dangerous, industrial features." Linking elevated trains, large crowds, and a massive structure with the surrounding bluffs, the Harlem River, and surviving meadows, baseball at the Polo Grounds celebrated the march of the city up the lush island of Manhattan. When New Yorkers paused in 1911 to "take a fresh breath and brag about the 'biggest baseball yard in the world,'" they found that the ballpark created a large amphitheatre that afforded excellent views of the surrounding landscapes of buildings and natural features. Ebbets Field, the Brooklyn *Eagle* editorialized when it opened in 1913, also "offered unusual opportunities for an extensive view of the borough and its suburbs," setting off nearby parkways and neighbourhoods to good effect. The ballpark also ensured that green, open space, the focus of the event that attracted the crowds, would not disappear from the city. Injecting green, open space into the heart of the city, the urban ballpark transcended the either/or of city/country.<sup>5</sup>

Baseball's quality of juxtaposing the city and the country is famously celebrated. Evoking pastoral associations — spring training, fall classic, green fields — the game was popularized by ambitious artisans and clerks from the big city, who wielded the artifacts of the urban crafts (bats, balls, gloves; woodworking, needle trades, leather working) and were eager to exploit the sport commercially. This quality extended to the baseball field itself. The hands-on instructions for laying out a baseball field from the 1867 *Beadle's Dime Base-Ball Player* combined the skills of the farmer and the city builder. "In selecting a suitable ground," the guide (written by Henry Chadwick) explained, "there are many points to be taken into consideration. The ground should be level, and the surface free from all irregularities, and, if possible covered with fine turf; if the latter can not be done, and the soil is gravelly, a loamy soil should be laid down around the bases, and all the gravel removed therefrom." The ground having been prepared, the geometry could be laid out. The guide retailed a technique city builders employed for laying out a foundation: "take a cord one hundred and eighty feet [55 metres] long, fasten one end at the home base, and the other at second, and then grasp it

in the centre and extend it first to the right side, which will indicate the position of the third; this will give the exact measurement, as the string will thus form the sides of a square whose side is ninety feet [27 metres]."<sup>6</sup> Rural and urban modes of construction, of approximation and precision, feel and measurement, are embedded in the game.

This is echoed in the geometry of the field. Unlike the football field, basketball court, or hockey rink, the baseball field is both precisely determined and indeterminate. The infield and foul lines, the distance and angle between the bases, the strange five-sided home plate are all based on precise measurement but the amount of foul ground where pop flies are turned into outs and the distances to the foul poles and outfield walls is flexible.<sup>7</sup> "Squares containing circles containing rectangles," Bart Giamatti wrote of the baseball field, "precision in counterpoint to passion; order compressing energy." Rectangular batter's box and pitcher's rubber sit inside the dirt circles, which sit inside the infield diamond, which sits inside the semi-circle created by the edge where infield dirt meets outfield grass, which sits inside the larger half diamond extended outward along the foul lines, which sits inside the semi-circle created by the outfield fence from foul line to foul line, which sits inside the city block on which the ball park is built, which sits inside the city as a whole. At the center of game and field is the "curious pentagram," home plate whose "irregular precision" organized "the field as it energized the odd pattern of squares tipped and circles incomplete," expressing the combination of "boundary and freedom" that is essential to the game. The baseball field, Giamatti concluded, evokes paradise, an "enclosed, green place" of the Edenic myth. But at the same time, Giamatti links the baseball field to urbs and polis, the political and culture-making elements of city life.<sup>8</sup>

The recent documentary *Forever Baseball* more simply describes the baseball field as "a geometrically perfect landscape."<sup>9</sup> A combination of rural expanse and urban artifact, the baseball field and the park in the city in which it was embedded spoke to a central problem in American culture. A terrifying image insistently surfaced in the nineteenth century: the machine in the garden. Inheriting a European dream of a pastoral harmony with nature, and transforming it into a social and political theory of the middle landscape and the yeoman's republic, Americans were troubled

by the intrusion of machine technology into the landscape. Our literature, as Leo Marx has beautifully shown, is filled with disturbing images of the trains, steamboats, furnaces, and cities of ash defiling a once pristine landscape. Could Americans establish an urban and industrial civilization, these images asked, that was based on a sustainable relationship to nature?

The park in the city represented the beginnings of an answer and counter image to the machine in the garden. In a 1938 promotional film, an unreliable work of undeniable imagination, the National League of Baseball Clubs offered a revealing image of baseball's relation to city and country. Combining the Abner Doubleday myth of baseball's 1839 immaculate conception in pastoral Cooperstown with a fractured account of Alexander Cartwright's actual codification of the rules in 1845, the vignette opens with Doubleday and Abner Graves in a pasture teaching boys to play baseball. (An elderly Graves's recollections would later provide the only "evidence" for the claim that Doubleday "invented" baseball.) Doubleday's game is not working; the bases are too close together. Graves explains: "What you need is an engineer... You know the essence of this game lies in the relation between the distance for the runner and the speed of the ball." The "documentary" then explains (over the image of a technical blueprint) that six years later a young "civil engineer," Alexander Cartwright, "scientifically established the base lines." Cartwright was actually a bank clerk, but the story captures baseball as wish fulfillment, as the product of an urban intellect that remains in harmonious touch with its pastoral bearings.<sup>10</sup>

Integral to the landscape of baseball, the park in the city is also the foundation of landscape architecture. The association of baseball with landscape architecture links it to the most promising response to the greatest problem of American civic life, the encounter with nature. In discussing the legacy of pioneer landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Lewis Mumford stressed that city life did not, as we carelessly assume, lessen humanity's dependence on nature but elaborated it. Open, green spaces and a respect for nature, Olmsted's parks suggested, would civilize America's cities.<sup>11</sup> At the same time the baseball field and baseball park were being designed, Frederick Law Olmsted was creating Central Park and embarking on a long career as a designer of urban parks. The same sense that the city was overwhelming the

country that gave rise to the call for Central Park and for Olmsted's philosophy of parks was generating the mania for baseball.

In an era when innovations in construction and communication were allowing cities to enclose more activities than ever before, what should be understood as the great incarceration intensified the thirst for the great outdoors. In the 1850s, *Porter's Spirit of the Times* reported, every vacant lot "within ten miles of [New York] was being used as a playing field." When entrepreneurs began building fences and grandstands around baseball fields and charging admission, the baseball fraternity derided it as "the enclosure movement." But enclosure did not extinguish the park-like character of the baseball field. Turning William Cammeyer's Brooklyn skating rink into the first enclosed baseball field in 1862 required the same sort of landscaping skills (the *Brooklyn Eagle* reported on Cammeyer's "draining, leveling, sodding, and converting") that Olmsted's parks did and promised to serve some of the same civic and social purposes.<sup>12</sup>

The urban park, Olmsted argued, must provide "the greatest possible contrast with the streets and shops" of the business city. In the business streets, Olmsted explained, "to merely avoid collision with those we meet and pass upon the sidewalks we have constantly to watch, to foresee, to guard against their movement." We are therefore brought "into close dealings with other minds without any friendly flowing toward them, but rather a drawing from them." The urban park provided the "opportunity for people to come together for the single purpose of enjoyment, unembarrassed by the limitations" of their ordinary lives, "with an evident glee in the prospect of coming together, all classes largely represented, with a common purpose."<sup>13</sup> Walt Whitman saw the baseball park fulfilling something of the same function. "It will take our people out of doors," Whitman wrote, "fill them with oxygen, give them a larger physical stoicism, tend to relieve us from being a nervous, dyspeptic set." When the *Brooklyn Eagle* reported on the opening of Cammeyer's 1862 revamped skating rink, the newspaper instinctively invoked Olmsted's Central Park. "At the Central Park," the paper reported, "there are ball grounds on the same plan as those established here."<sup>14</sup>

Olmsted's parks promoted a democratic culture aimed at elevating and educating the lower classes. The urban park, he wrote, would exercise "a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence upon the most unfortunate and most lawless classes of the city," encouraging in them



"courtesy, self-control, and temperance" while weakening their "dangerous inclinations." The *Eagle* similarly found Cammeyer's park "a suitable place for ball playing, where ladies can witness the game without being annoyed by the indecorous behavior of the rowdies."<sup>15</sup> While Olmsted was insisting to a parsimonious and skeptical nation that a judicious public investment in parks would help civilize the city, baseball parks were realizing some of his hopes.

### The Civic Ideal Made Real

After Cammeyer's experiment, the enclosed ballpark became more and more prevalent, providing the essential foundation for the commercialization and professionalization of the game. The urban ballpark would find its classic expression early in the twentieth century, when the first steel and concrete parks replaced the wooden ballparks of the nineteenth century. "Just as the monumental cathedrals which everywhere dot Europe are the expression of the ideals and aspirations of mankind," the City Beautiful advocate Frederic Howe argued at the height of the Progressive era, "so in America, democracy is coming to demand and appreciate fitting monuments for the realization of its life, and splendid parks and structures as the embodiment of its ideals."<sup>16</sup> The classic ballparks appeared to fit the bill. "Is there any other experience in modern life," philosopher Morris Cohen asked in 1919 after visiting one of the new ballparks, "in which the multitudes of men so completely and intensely lose their individual selves in the larger life which they call their city."<sup>17</sup> Cohen's question was rhetorical as a consensus had emerged on the civic value of the baseball park.

A visit to the ballpark, *Outlook* reported in 1913, promoted "social solidarity" and "due respect for lawful authority," providing a "safety-valve" of "momentary relief from the strain and intolerable burden" of city life.<sup>18</sup> Journalists found democracy in the baseball crowd, with "some of the best-known business and professional men...standing side by side with their clerks and stenographers. There was a portly banker next to a ragged bootblack, a street-car conductor and an army officer." They praised the ballpark for accommodating a "democratic amusement" that brought together "the banker and the office-boy, the millionaire and the chauffeur, the professor and the laborer."<sup>19</sup> "Business and professional men," *Harpers Weekly* reported in 1910, stand "shoulder to shoulder with the street urchin,"

cheering at the ballpark.<sup>20</sup> The *Atlantic Monthly* praised the baseball park as our "national contribution to the building arts," housing "the religion of democracy" for crowds "made up of all conditions, ages, races, temperaments, and states of mind."<sup>21</sup> Connie Mack was thus repeating a truism when in 1950 he recalled the "great democracy of fans in the grandstands and in the bleachers."<sup>22</sup>

The classic ballparks thus made real the civic ambitions of the City Beautiful movement. Heir to Olmsted's landscaping ideals, the City Beautiful movement sought to promote civic loyalty and good citizenship through inspiring physical artifacts.<sup>23</sup> Daniel Burnham, a leader of the movement, argued that "good citizenship is the prime object of good city planning." Charles Mulford Robinson added that a beautiful city would be "more pridesworthy ... more majestic, [and] better worth the devotion and service of its citizens."<sup>24</sup> The owner of the Cincinnati Reds, John Brush, rebuilt his ballpark in the architectural image of the "White City," the centrepiece of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and exemplar of the City Beautiful. Cincinnati's Palace of the Fans would influence the design of Comiskey Park, Shibe Park in Philadelphia, and other ballparks that copied the classical architecture promoted by the City Beautiful.<sup>25</sup>

Privately-constructed, the classic ballparks were certainly profit-oriented ventures. Brush included an early version of luxury boxes, deemed "Fashion Boxes," overhanging the dugouts. But the central feature of the Palace of the Fans was a classical pediment behind home plate engraved "CINCINNATI" in an appeal to civic pride. Barney Dreyfus, owner of the Pittsburgh Pirates, insured that the design of Forbes Field (1909) would maximize premium-priced seats. But Forbes Field also provided an Olmstedian "scene to make participants forget the business cares of a manufacturing city." The Reds banned advertising in their new park for fear of "spoiling" the appearance of the park and criticized other teams for defacing their parks just to "grab a few dollars." Dreyfus also banned advertising. Anxious to make his ballpark a civic institution, Charles Ebbets commissioned a massive rotunda, complete with marble floors and chandelier.<sup>26</sup> Walter Briggs, the Tigers' owner in the 1930s, believed Detroit's autoworkers should have access to the games. His renovations of Tiger Stadium created two to three times the number of low-cost bleacher tickets than the average park and he started games at 3 p.m. to accommodate auto



**Fig. 1**  
*The design of Pittsburgh's Forbes Field (shown here ca 1930) complimented its urban surroundings, and blended seamlessly with neighbouring Schenley Park (bottom right). (Courtesy Library and Archives Division, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh)*

workers on the day shift. Briggs reportedly never took a cent out of the team, but reinvested it in park and team.<sup>27</sup>

The classic ballparks thus acknowledged the key City Beautiful tenet. The "city cannot maintain a high commercial standing," St Louis's City Beautiful plan put it, "unless it maintains, at the same time, a high civic life." As Howe put it in his praise of the City Beautiful, a belief in the city "as an object of public-spirited endeavor" had tempered the "earlier commercial ideals that characterized our thought." The key to linking commercial and civic success was integrating open space into the fabric of the city. Olmsted had explained that it was "a common error to regard a park as something to be produced complete in itself, as a picture on a canvas. It should rather be planned as one to be done in fresco, with constant consideration of exterior objects."<sup>28</sup>

The best of the classic ballparks had exactly this quality. Privately-built, they were often located in run-down neighbourhoods where cheap land could be found. Having made an investment in the location, the teams tried to repair and upgrade the area. Philadelphia's Shibe Park supplanted a recently-closed hospital for smallpox victims as the focus of

its reviving neighbourhood. Philadelphia's mayor commented in his opening day speech on the residential and commercial improvement of the Shibe Park neighbourhood. Local realtors promoted adjoining real estate when Ebbets opened.<sup>29</sup>

Although the classic ballparks were "not generally shaped by landscape architects," Pastier writes, they "contributed to and grew out of the urban landscape."<sup>30</sup> Forbes Field, which was in fact designed by a landscape architect, illustrates Pastier's point. Dreyfus located Forbes Field in Pittsburgh's Oakland neighbourhood, situated between a working-class residential area and the mansions of the city's elite. Already something of a cultural centre, the area supported two colleges, a museum, library, concert hall, conservatory, and the city's largest public park. Dreyfus's landscape architect, Charles Leavitt, worked with a lot dominated by a deep gully requiring extensive backfilling. Since most of the site was unsuitable for building, a ballpark with a grandstand on one edge and an open field elsewhere was the perfect facility to repair and complete the urban fabric. The park complemented and set off the site, the green of the field echoing the hilly Schenley

Park just behind the field. From the outside, the park was a combination of structural steel painted green, a white terra cotta exterior, and a copper-sheathed roof that produced an orange glow. The park contributed to the vitality of the neighbourhood, where fans would stop in the Kunst Bakery before the game and linger for a beer after the game at Gustine's or other establishments within easy walking distance.<sup>31</sup>

The park that replaced Forbes Field occupies what potentially is the most spectacular civic site in the country. At the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers where they combine to create the Ohio, the enclosed, circular Three Rivers Stadium (1970) cut off the sounds and sights of the surrounding city as well. Blocking a view of the city's skyline and striking bluffs, complains a critic, the stadium "might as well be situated in the Mojave Desert." The urban renewal programs of the 1960s would demolish Forbes Field as the University of Pittsburgh coveted the real estate and the Pirates were eager to escape the costs of maintenance. Three Rivers Stadium would be cast as the crowning achievement of Pittsburgh's urban renaissance, but the long walking distance from downtown has never been overcome as an obstacle to integrating the Stadium into the city's fabric. Three Rivers Stadium was only one of fourteen new stadiums built in the 1960s and 70s. Built in a period when Americans had lost faith in their cities, the new stadia were oblivious to their sites, even when located downtown. Circular in shape, often covered by a dome, the new stadiums kept the surrounding city at arm's length, acknowledging and contributing to the deterioration of American cities.<sup>32</sup>

The classic ballparks became victims of the disinvestment in and resulting decay of America's cities. Although urban renewal was touted as a means of revitalizing the city, the lion's share of federal monies went to encouraging suburbanization. Public subsidies for interstate highways sped commuters to the suburbs while ripping apart the urban fabric for new traffic arteries. Meanwhile federal mortgage insurance almost exclusively targeted suburban residences. Receiving a much smaller share of funds, urban renewal tended to favour institutional expansion for universities and hospitals rather than the restoration of existing residential neighbourhoods. As more and more baseball fans left for the suburbs, the occasional return to the ballpark no longer invoked the possibilities of city life. Instead traffic delays, a scarcity of parking, and face-to-face encounters

with the impoverished who made up an increasing proportion of inner-city populations reminded fans of all the reasons they had left the cities in the first place. Overconfident owners were slow to renovate the ballparks themselves and so instead of elegant civic landmarks, fans found deteriorating ballparks that mirrored the conditions of their surrounding neighbourhoods.<sup>33</sup>

### **Urban Renewal and the Baseball Landscape**

The clearest measure of what was happening to the baseball landscape was in the fans' experience. Going to the ballpark was losing its park-like quality, a quality that heightened one's focus on the game itself. At the classic ballparks like old Comiskey, Pastier writes, fans were "immersed in the game as a tactile and psychological event, not just a visual one." The feel of Forbes Field, a fan recalled, "made you concentrate on the game itself." In discussing the design of one of Olmsted's parks, Tony Hiss suggests how the ballparks did this.

Olmsted designed Brooklyn's Prospect Park, Hiss writes, as "a physical analogue of the rearranging of one's expectations that occurs whenever one wants to experience an area." Olmsted sought to generate the sense of being "a part of a serene and endless world," "being pulled forward," finding that "everything around them has become more vivid," that one is overwhelmed by "feelings of welcome, of safety, of wonder, of exhilaration." Baseball fans will recognize the device Olmsted used, moving through a dark passage into a green bowl of light and life. In approaching Prospect Park's Long Meadow the visitor first passes through a dark tunnel called Endale Arch. Hiss describes the "sensory alertness" that comes from the "very pronounced contrast between the gloom of the tunnel...and the bright, bright light and endless view in the meadow." Coming back into the light, the parkgoer experiences a change of perception that "lets us start to see all the things around us at once and yet also look calmly and steadily at each one of them."<sup>34</sup>

Older fans know well a similar experience in recalling their first exhilarating sight, as they passed through the dark passages between the stands, of the green fields of the classic ballparks. Contrast this with architect Philip Bess' description of entering the new Comiskey Park, built on the suburban model. The fan ascends ramps on the exterior of the park "so

interminably long, wide, and high that ascending them (to the upper deck, anyway) effectively kills most of the anticipation of arrival, substituting mere relief for the joy that one should feel upon seeing the inside of the stadium."<sup>35</sup> The introduction of Astroturf further compromised this experience. Fans' hatred of Astroturf must be understood in the context of what sociologist Tony Hiss calls the need for "gregarious out-of-door recreation." Hiss cites Dr John H. Falk, ecologist and expert on grass. The grass savannahs of East Africa, Falk explains, was where the human species evolved. Thus grass provides a unique environment "where people from all cultural backgrounds can come together and feel comfortable and relaxed" and reduce the stresses of modern life. Baseball fans, Bess adds, "have sound and healthy instincts when it is appropriate to be part of and when it is appropriate to 'transcend' nature." They doubt Astroturf really improves upon "a well-manicured lawn." The stadia provided an experience of neither park nor city.<sup>36</sup>

Bill James captured the frustration of baseball fans who lamented the loss of the park and city experience when he called the new stadiums "sterile ashtrays." Cincinnati fans who became "bored with the sterile confines of Riverfront Stadium" actually rebuilt Crosley Field on a nearby site. In desperate need of a "personality transplant," Riverfront was a "cold place" compared to Crosley. Crosley was recalled as "a good neighborhood place" because "so many people knew each other. The old park had "that touch... not being nosy, just that friendliness." One fan estimated that he had made hundreds of friends over thirty-seven years of attending games. Reds first baseman Lee May "loved the intimacy and the relationships with the fans near the Reds dugout." Crosley's "smallness enabled it to blend in with the neighbourhood, giving it the blue-collar image that it seemed to adopt." A decidedly urban place, Crosley provided a "sense of adventure."

In contrast, Riverfront was "efficiency, harmless, joyfully uninteresting." It appealed to "families more inclined to consuming than adventuring." Riverfront's "concrete sterility" made a trip to the ballpark "more like shopping at a supermarket than dropping in on an old friend." A "model of convenience," Riverfront was the work of the "slickest marketing organization in baseball."<sup>37</sup> At the classic ballparks like old Comiskey, the "scents were shellacked onto the walls, adhering to brick like the very soul of the game made manifest;

cigar smoke, Old Style beer, sausage, cooking oil." For Riverfront, the Reds management worked with the business school at the University of Denver to devise a spray that would produce an artificial smell to make "everyone happy and hungry."<sup>38</sup> Marketing experts searched in vain for a substitute for the park in the city.

The interminable stadium ramps that undercut the aesthetic experience of encountering the park in the city remind Pastier of nothing so much as a garage. (Riverfront Stadium actually boasted of being located "in the middle of the world's largest garage."<sup>39</sup>) That the new stadia would take on the characteristics of suburbia's most ubiquitous contribution to modern architecture, the garage, is not surprising. The new stadia took on all the characteristics of the suburban exodus that had made urban renewal so insensitive to the needs and the assets of city life. Catering to the automobile, urban renewal projects embraced single-use superblock development, destroying the mixed-use city block and urban fabric that the classic ballparks had respected. The automobile was having its own impact on the classic ballparks as a suburbanizing fan base required the devotion of more and more surface area to parking in ballpark neighbourhoods, contributing to their deterioration.<sup>40</sup>

Good cities need a mix of uses. The juxtaposition of the "monumental and domestic, grand and charming, fragile and resilient, ceremonial and workaday, familiar and strange, shared and personal, cultivated and low," Bess explains, made for an interesting and lively city. A mixture of dwelling, workplaces, retail, and recreation could be particularly enlivened by civic structures and public spaces that gave character and focus to an area. That is exactly what the classic ballparks once provided. But the suburban model rested on zoning and the strict, systematic segregation of functions. This incidentally necessitated driving to each separate activity — hence the suburban stadium and its acres of parking and garages.<sup>41</sup>

The suburban superblock had an immediate and identifiable impact on the baseball landscape and the game itself. From the use of superblocks instead of an existing pattern of streets and blocks came the much lamented uniformity of playing fields. Tiger Stadium, cramped by Trumbull Avenue, projected its right field upper deck ten feet over the lower deck, placing it 315 feet from home plate. For fifty years the upper deck in right field served as "midwife for hundreds of little fly balls that turn into strapping homers."



Fenway Park's celebrated Green Monster is similarly the result of Landsdowne Street (now Ted Williams Way) just beyond the left field wall. Ebbets Field's inviting and asymmetrical right field fence and the Polo Grounds' short foul lines and sprawling centre field reflected the local streetscapes.<sup>42</sup> In the symmetrical, cookie-cutter stadiums, even the ballplayers complained that they could not tell what city they were in from the field. The sprawling superblock sites also encouraged huge seating capacities and the distant upper decks, set above and behind the field level seats — an impossibility in classic ballparks hemmed in by the existing streetscape. The expanding seating capacity then made necessary the extensive parking lots that insured isolation from other city activities and gave the stadiums their sterile quality.<sup>43</sup>

The frustration of baseball fans with the suburban stadium has become widespread. Popular dissatisfaction is generally expressed in terms of the aesthetics of baseball and, increasingly, in terms of the economics of public financing. But the more fundamental and overriding objection should be on urban design grounds — the other problems having derived from poor urban design. To reduce costs and enhance benefits, facility planning must focus on promoting ancillary development. The suburban model is clearly not conducive to such development — but other designs could be. What is necessary is a mix of uses, commercial, residential, event-oriented — to generate the pedestrian traffic that is essential to ancillary development.

The key, one careful study explains, is “to counterbalance the tendency of suburbanites to leave the stadium neighborhood for home immediately after the game.” Surrounded by a parking lot, a baseball field can accomplish none of this.<sup>44</sup> What is needed is the same sensitivity to site that made for the idiosyncracies and the intimacies of the classic ballparks. The classic ballparks, Pastier writes, “were good citizens, economical of land, and gentle to their neighborhoods.” They exemplified the virtues of what Jane Jacobs called gradual development, whereas the stadia represented what Jacobs derided as cataclysmic development. The classic ballparks “were rarely perfect and finished,” Pastier adds, “more often, they were products of remodeling and accretion” like the best parts of the cities they adorned. These principles of good urban design cannot be taken for granted, not even among professionals. But, happily, baseball fans are gaining a knowledge of urban design principles

through their interest in baseball fields. Applying these principles to the baseball field can make them more widely understood and encourage their application to the entire city. Toward that end, Bess and the Society for American Baseball Research's Ballpark Committee designed a model ballpark to replace old Comiskey Park.<sup>45</sup>

Bess designed Armour Field as a traditional urban ballpark, sensitive to its site and the surrounding urban fabric in Chicago. Using a realistic budget and the available site, Bess's plan nestled Armour Field in the rectangle of the neighbourhood's Armour Square Park. To replace that open space, the plan transformed old Comiskey's playing field into a neighbourhood baseball park. Armour's rectangular site would produce the major leagues' shortest foul lines (requiring a relaxation of a minimum distance requirement) and deepest power allies. In turn, the short foul lines, small foul areas, and interior columns for an upper deck cantilevered forty feet over the lower deck would bring fans close to the action. (Old Comiskey's 2 000 column-obstructed seats would be reduced to 150.) The rectangular site also produced two pyramidal bleachers, similar to Wrigley Field's, rising up from the power allies.

Drawing on Chicago's factory vernacular, the brick and concrete exterior of the ballpark blended with an active, tightly-knit neighbourhood. Six-story mixed-use buildings would surround the park. Providing commercial space on the first floor, offices on the second, and residences above, these buildings would promote economic and social activity around the ballpark. Residents of the neighbourhood would be able to see into the park and fans inside would be treated to a spectacular view of Chicago's Loop and Gold Coast skylines. Instead of blighting the site with surface parking, Bess placed multi-story garages along the railroad tracks to the west and an expressway to the east. Recognizing that inadequate parking would encourage a blighting of the area with surface lots, Bess added his most innovative feature: a network of four miles of boulevards within a square mile of the park. On game days, these boulevards would provide five to six thousand parking spaces within a ten-minute walk. At other times, they would serve as a neighbourhood park. Bess's design would heal and enhance a neighbourhood rather than destroy it. Baseball fans who examine this design will be torn between tears of joy, that someone else understands and cares, and tears of frustration, that the White Sox and the public authorities resolutely ignored Bess's design.<sup>46</sup>



### **“Retro” as Theme Park**

Bess’s design, or rather the widespread dissatisfaction with the suburban stadium of which it was an expression, has had some impact. We are now in a period of baseball field construction that is outpacing the two earlier bursts of construction of the classic ballparks and the suburban stadia. The best of the new parks pride themselves on the “retro” look, honouring the classic ballparks. But too often the plan appears to be to devise marketing ploys to exploit commercially and superficially the fans’ growing understanding of the baseball park’s historical and civic roots. The White Sox made few concessions to the “retro” mood, not even replicating old Comiskey’s distinctive embedded-brick “C’s” on the exterior walls. But even the White Sox encouraged their fans to come out and see the beloved relic of old Comiskey — even as they abandoned routine maintenance.

The park that replaced old Comiskey is hardly a traditional urban ballpark. In what Bess calls the “commodification of the old Comiskey Park’s ‘character,’” the White Sox provided the new Comiskey with a version of the beloved picnic grounds behind old Comiskey’s outfield fence. What was once a first-come, first-served location with tables and the option to bring food from

the concessions during the game, became a pay-and reserve-in-advance \$20 all-you-can-eat buffet open only the two hours before the game. The White Sox’s advertising hype promised the “intimacy, charm, and character” of the old ballparks. But both the larger foul territory and the service road between the outfield fence and outfield bleacher placed fans — even in the first deck — further from the field than at old Comiskey. The front row of new Comiskey’s upper deck is actually further from the field than the last row of old Comiskey’s upper deck.<sup>47</sup>

The White Sox’s claim that new Comiskey was an urban ballpark in tune with the architecture of older American neighbourhoods is the most egregious. Where the old ballparks “adjusted themselves to, and had their playing fields and character shaped by, the city in which they were located,” Bess reports, the new Comiskey forced the city “to do all the adjusting; it is essentially anti-urban and does not accommodate city life.” Built upon a superblock that obliterated the existing streetscape, the new Comiskey’s expansive parking lots precluded a surrounding neighbourhood of bars, restaurants, and shops. Not only did the new Comiskey’s design insure that no multiplier effect would create the jobs and

**Fig. 2**

*Chicago’s old and new Comiskey Parks stand side by side in 1991, after completion of the new park and just before the demolition of the old ballpark (left) to make way for a parking lot. (Courtesy Aerial Images Photography, [www.aerialimages-photo.com](http://www.aerialimages-photo.com))*

tax revenues to partially repay public subsidy. Rather than repair and enhance a neighbourhood, the new Comiskey supplanted it with what Pastier calls "a 7,136 car sea of asphalt." The mall-like concourse of shops inside the stadium is no substitute for lively city streets outside. No "pre- or post-game food and drink will be found, or allowed," Bess writes, "within nearly a half mile of the park."

Such opportunities appeared to the White Sox as merely a matter of undercutting the ballpark's concession revenues — all of which went to the team, none to the city. The South Armour Square neighbourhood, including 220 low-income, black households, was simply leveled. The remaining church-sponsored housing for the elderly and handicapped is segregated by chain link fences, though the residents are treated to post-game fireworks launched 100 feet from their dwellings. Fully-enclosed, lacking any view of the city (though fans in the upper deck are treated to the drone of the Dan Ryan expressway), the new Comiskey is "the perfect modern ballpark: no interaction at all with the surrounding neighborhood; no relation to the city; no view of anything." Even the architectural details on the outside facade are obscured by pedestrian ramps carrying suburbanites directly from their cars to the game without setting foot in South Side Chicago.<sup>48</sup>

The disappointment with the new Comiskey was much in the air as the Baltimore Orioles began planning their new facility. "Everybody knows they like the older facilities," Janet Marie Smith, Orioles vice-president in charge of the project explained, "but people aren't able to quantify what it is exactly they like about them." Smith discovered a few simple design principles in the classic ballparks. "The buildings were always very civic in appearance," she noted. "They could easily have been a library or a city hall." They employed park-like colours, usually green. Where allowed, advertising was integrated into the architecture, worked into the scoreboard or outfield wall. The advertising was local as well, instead of the ubiquitous national brands of today that "simply reinforce our loss of place, and thus of self." Idiosyncracies, like Crosley's inclined terrace in left field (the product of dealing with marshy ground), gave each park a personality. The ballparks employed "traditional street walls that came right up to the sidewalk." Inside, the traditional street walls supported grandstands that brought fans close to the field, a quality enhanced with small foul areas. Outside, these walls were low and

contained within the building profile. As a result, Smith concluded, "baseball rubbed up against commerce and life."<sup>49</sup>

The Orioles management battled with the Maryland Stadium Authority, whose interest was minimal cost, and with HOK, a construction firm masquerading as designers, to build a Camden Yards "mindful of the past." But many wondered if the "history" at Camden Yards would be as "slick and glib" as Baltimore's Harborplace theme park, where "tradition" was placed at the service of "your basic upmarket shopping mall." The "retro" parks do have that quality, as they offer an expensive and inadequate simulation of a baseball park in the city. Like the theme parks that cynically commercialize a genuine desire for city life, the "retro" parks are so expensive that they cannot replicate the city's essential quality, the promiscuous mixing of people.

Smith was more accurate in her nostalgic take on the classic ballparks than she knew. Fitting the park to the existing streetscape, she argued, meant "the game is taking on the character of the community it is in."<sup>50</sup> The "retros" do indeed reflect something of their surrounding communities, namely the social inequality of contemporary America. These are simply not places designed for the average fan. Even at much-lauded Jacobs Field in Cleveland, which opened in 1994, private concourses and restaurants and other plush amenities separate the average fan from those in the premium seats. "Overhead walkways that elevated the well-to-do above the masses," one architect noted, made "social stratification all too clear."<sup>51</sup> But no place captures this like the new Comiskey where the rich are comfortably ensconced near the action, attended by waiters, while the rest of us cling to the steeply-inclined upper deck watching the action through binoculars. The thirty-five percent rake of the new Comiskey's upper deck is so frighteningly steep that it even "makes one think twice about jumping up and cheering for the home team."<sup>52</sup> The "retros" are a more appropriate metaphor for elite and populist America than we might like to admit.

Postmodern has been the adjective of choice in criticizing the "retros." With "postmodern packaging," Pastier argues, the "retros" resemble "a semi-upscale mall" far more than an urban ballpark. Ballpark architects too often "interpret charm and character as facets solely of facade design." Rather than respond to site and history, Pastier concludes, they engage in "an arbitrary, generalized postmodern exercise."



The substitution of city experience and tradition with commercial, simulated substitutes is the quintessential postmodern exercise. Theme parks and shopping malls, the postmodernists warn, are supplanting our memories of what city life is like. (The "ballpark comes equipped with memories," *Sports Illustrated* oddly enthuses over Camden Yards, as is appropriate to "a provincial, blue-collar, crab-cakes-and-beer town with thick roots.")

As theme parks, the retros peddle urban and historical experience to a citizenry eager for it, but they have the look and feel of affluent suburbs. Comfort and spaciousness, in parking, concessions and seating, are the design imperatives. The design that inspired the new Comiskey Park and other new parks is the shopping mall. The concourse that encircles the last row of field-level seats at Comiskey has reminded every reviewer of a shopping mall. A Michigan official charged with overseeing a new park for the Tigers cited his model as a suburban Detroit shopping mall. Pastier calls the new parks "sprawling objects of variable urban sensitivity," sitting "like shopping malls, in seas of open parking."<sup>53</sup> Theme parks and shopping malls, even in our ballparks, threaten to take the place of city streets and enshrine the commercial transaction as the only authentic city experience.

Camden Yards was, however, the best of the retros, the one most integrated into its site and city, mindful and respectful of history. The retros to follow seemed not to recognize its virtues. In Denver, all vernacular industrial structures adjoining the new ballpark were destroyed. In Cleveland a functioning public market was shut down rather than weaved into the design. Landscape architects are commonly involved. "Our charge," one who worked on Jacobs Field explained, "was not only to coordinate the overall design, but to be the watchdog for public spaces." Yet the watchdog did not prevent the demolition of surrounding buildings for parking lots or prevent the sharp segregation between ordinary fans and occupants of luxury seating.<sup>54</sup>

At Coors Field in Denver, a design team that included landscape architects "made an effort to cover all the bases in creating a sense of place." Conceived as part of a thirteen-block district, rather than a four-block building site, their design included a \$370 000 public art initiative. Yet one landscape architect warned of a "real concern that building owners will tear down old warehouses for parking." Although Coors creates several inviting public spaces, its decaying but historic north and east

edges lack protective zoning or historic district status. Nor do the Coors architect believe the ballpark can "revive neighborhoods in the Jane Jacobs sense. Working-class ventures have long ago left Lower Downtown. Rather, Coors should be judged as the centerpiece of a so-called urban entertainment district."<sup>55</sup>

Strangest of all the new parks, The Ballpark at Arlington, Texas, placed an eclectic ensemble of postmodern simulations of an urban ballpark in the middle of an undeveloped, suburban lot. Its immediate context is "Six Flags Over Texas, Wet 'n Wild water park." Thus The Ballpark at Arlington stands at "the epicenter of the newer American landscape of freeways and strip shopping centers and amber waves of satellite dishes." It has justly been called a "hollow hotel," a self-contained baseball theme park with no connection to any real urban community. Maybe to distract attention from a backdrop of oil rigs and amusement park water slides, the Ballpark's "brick towers and soaring arches evok[e] everything from the campanile at St Mark's to the Ponte Vecchio." The effort was to turn "no place into someplace," but it is not yet clear whether it has "created a different kind of suburban place or just another destination." The Arlington facility has at least addressed one problem of suburban stadiums, the acres of asphalt — here turned into "smaller landscaped 'rooms' for 50 to 200 cars."<sup>56</sup>

All the postmodern styling and packaging obscure, of course, that the architectural designs aim at maximizing club revenue. An architect for Osborne Engineering Company, long-time designer of ballparks, explained that retro "designs seek to revive the classical style while incorporating modern needs — luxury boxes, wider seating and unobstructed sight lines." The problem is that the two are not compatible. "Why shouldn't thousands of fans in the upper deck rejoice in an intimate view," the architect asks, "Just because several hundred would be blocked by pillars?"<sup>57</sup>

The answer, he surely knows, is that the driving force for architectural design is to make money for the teams. To insure that field-level seats command the highest possible price, teams insist that there be no column-obscured seats. The upper deck has to be placed not directly above the first level supported by columns, but above and behind the field level at a steeply ascending angle. To make matters worse, skyboxes, club seating, private restaurants add additional levels between the field and the upper deck. New Comiskey's upper deck, Bess writes,



"has the character of an entirely different, and notably inferior, stadium."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, doling out space for parking, concessions, luxury seating, and ease of circulation, club revenue is the guiding light. Nothing else gets in the way.

### The Cash Value of Civic Consciousness

While schools, transit and other public facilities are starved for funds as tax revenues dwindle, legislators and owners plot schemes for new tax levies to build stadia to replace other publicly-built stadia less than forty years old. Twelve new parks have been built since 1989, each of them costing a minimum of \$200 million, with more on the way. This is despite fan opposition and bitter second thoughts.

"We now know," Chicago *Tribune* columnist John McCarron explains, "though certain suits will never admit it, that old Comiskey should have been saved and rehabbed; that the old neighborhood around it should have been renewed, not removed." In Boston, the Red Sox now insist that Fenway Park must give way to a "retro" park. TV ads explain that in the new park, seats will be arranged so that fans were "just as close to the action, but not to your fellow fan." But as the new Comiskey showed, accommodations for corporate clients mean more distant seats for the average fan, seats at higher prices on top of the tax bite public subsidies take. Boston's Mayor Tom Meinin, having signed on to the campaign for a "retro" Fenway, explained that it would help save a "blighted" neighbourhood. Challenged on that description of the lively Fenway neighbourhood, the Mayor added: "We don't mean 'blight' in the real sense of the word 'blight'."<sup>59</sup> What could be so important to cities to put up with this kind of abuse?

The dynamics of the vote on Cleveland's Jacobs Field suggests one answer. Suburbanites voted for the public subsidy for Jacobs Field, but inner-city voters, disproportionately burdened by the taxes on tobacco and liquor that financed the park and dependent on the funds-starved public schools, opposed the project.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps baseball facilities do nothing for cities and their citizens, but are merely entertainment zones for suburbanites. Advocates of public financing argue that subsidies generate a multiplier effect that provides jobs and tax revenues within the city. But studies have shown again and again that this impact is grossly exaggerated. Local spending is simply redistributed while the jobs provided are generally low-paying and seasonal.

Ancillary development, while possible if planned for, is certainly not automatic and impossible in suburban-style stadia surrounded by parking lots. Yet every facility built since Dodger Stadium in 1962 has benefited from public subsidy and the trend continues. Although cities are demanding private partners more and voters are approving tax levies less, public subsidies remain significant — in acquiring land below market rates, providing infrastructure, relocation expenses, and tax abatements. Why do cities continue to subsidize baseball? The most thorough studies show that a new baseball facility provides "intangible, non-economic benefits to municipalities," namely the "psychic satisfactions attendant to being a 'major league' city, the stadium as local landmark, etc." In other words, ballparks promote civic consciousness, civic pride, and a sense of place.<sup>61</sup> These are indeed important and valuable things. But exactly how much and in what form are cities paying for this?

Consider the White Sox's deal, which is hopefully as bad as it gets. Illinois Sports Facilities Authority, chartered in 1986, issued \$150 million in bonds to be retired in twenty years at a cost of \$260 million. Stadium-generated revenues have paid for none of this. Instead a two percent tax on hotel rooms and direct city and state subsidies will retire the bonds. Stadium revenues are shared on the basis of attendance — if the White Sox sold every ticket for every game, the ISFA would get \$4.3 million (about a third of annual debt servicing). But if the White Sox drew substantially below 1.5 million fans the ISFA could actually wind up paying the White Sox as much as \$2.5 million. Revenues from concessions, parking, and skyboxes all go the White Sox. Capital repairs on the park remain the responsibility of the ISFA with routine maintenance the club's responsibility. But even routine maintenance is subsidized with \$2 million in public money regardless of what the White Sox actually spend. The ISFA also absolved the White Sox of all property taxes.

Cheaper proposals to renovate Comiskey Park, to rebuild it, or build the new park on a site just north of the existing park were all rejected by ISFA for the alternative, which required multi-million dollar relocation expenses of residents and municipal facilities. In the process the ISFA destroyed — as a suit on behalf of the neighbourhood put it — "a stable community, South Armour Square, composed almost exclusively of Black residents, by expelling both the existing residents and important light

industry...[and] by isolating the remaining residents...from surrounding communities, stores, and recreational and other neighborhood benefits."<sup>62</sup> Whatever civic pride or sense of place Chicago might derive from the new Comiskey is undone by the misuse of public funds and the destruction of a stable neighbourhood.

The White Sox were able to extort public money for a new stadium because Governor Thompson, and Mayor Washington before him, calculated that the city would experience a devastating psychological loss — if not financial — if the White Sox left. At stake was not simply an economic asset, but civic pride and generations of memories associated with the White Sox. The question of baseball parks is an important one and may have a significant impact on the future of our cities. But the costs have been too high and the payoffs too low. These massive, voluminous structures are not cheap. They can only be built because the attendant social and economic costs have been borne by states and municipalities, while baseball fans bear the aesthetic costs. The new ballparks, Pastier writes, "are public buildings in the fiscal sense," but a lack of "concern for the ordinary fan, urban context, civic space, and pedestrian use" rob them of any general public benefit.<sup>63</sup>

The public and civic interest is simply not part of the process. As one stadium architect put it, "I'm a dinky little stadium architect. I'm not trying to design cities."<sup>64</sup> Instead stadiums are the "perfect vehicles for city hall insiders to wheel and deal," providing "a ribbon-cutting to die for," lots of consulting and construction contracts to let, and choice seats for popular events to distribute. The costs are borne by "working stiffs who consider themselves lucky to sneak the family into the bleacher seats once a season." The benefits go to millionaire owners, public officials, and those in the luxury suites who "sip sauvignon blanc."<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile the stadia teach the young that, at best, public life is a matter of long lines, large cash outlays, and high prices for poor quality.

The future is not promising. Consider Cincinnati's proposed "Great American Ballpark," which is to be built with \$300 million in taxpayer money and is still in the planning phase. When design plans were withheld from public scrutiny, the City Council angrily asked "why the public isn't allowed to see what it's paying for." There was "no public scrutiny of a massive public project," one councilman fumed, "We're already seeing decisions being made for the wrong

reason." Stadium planners had given "conditional approval to shutting the public out of public space." The mayor insisted that the "public has an absolute right to know what is going on with that stadium." A member of the Urban Design Review board, ostensibly charged with insuring the design advanced the city's goals, helpfully reminded the mayor that the relevant documents belonged to the Reds and their architects. The review board pontificated: "We don't make anything public."

But the board did have its own concerns, objecting that the design provided only a "modest public area of the plaza that does not fulfill the civic promise of the project." Objecting to the "privatization of public space," local architects complained that the plaza had been "designed with economics in mind — simply to 'catch the crowd' and draw them into a concession row" that would generate additional revenues for the team. When finally revealed, the design appeared to create "a field that is so uninspired it is almost somnambulant." Some feared a blight of "blue-blood flaunting," that is, the placement of luxury suites at the best locations for viewing the game. It still is not clear if the Reds will go ahead with plans to wall off part of the concourse level from the field to capture the fans' interest (and money). In any case, a wide, mall-like concourse remains a major element in the design.<sup>66</sup>

### **Repossess the National Pastime!**

The construction of sports facilities thus reflect how much we have lost control of our governments to corporate interests. There is a "spiraling corporate bidding war between different communities over teams," the *Washington Monthly* reports. Public officials, *Consumers' Research* explains, "have ignored or failed to realize just how few jobs professional sports teams produce" and how little they impact location decisions of major firms. "There has not been an independent study by an economist over the last thirty years that suggests you can anticipate a positive economic impact." Ballpark revenue goes to owners and players. Once one removes the myth of the ballpark as economic engine, one sees that localities are simply "taking public funds to guarantee profitability to a private business."

Free agency has so escalated players' salaries that they can be paid — and profits maintained — only if public subsidies for income-generating parks can be found. These are found all too

easily from officials who did not bother "to ask whether cities could prosper from professional sports." Even Camden Yards, two Johns Hopkins economists estimate, reduced private Maryland incomes by \$11 million. The bidding war is encouraged by — among other things — a federal tax exemption on the local bond issues that finance new sports facilities. Federal tax breaks often make possible the other inducements that state and municipal governments use to entice teams away from their current communities. All these are forms of corporate welfare that have generated strange bedfellows; both *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Nation* denounce the practice. Meanwhile cities are starved for tax dollars.<sup>67</sup>

Sports fans are notoriously difficult to organize — even Ralph Nader failed — and teams are adept at courting legislators with free tickets and personal contact with star players. But it is not for a lack of an interested public that the destruction and boondoggling goes on. Passionate fans ring old ballparks slated for replacement and pledge to maintain the vigil. Fans united as "Save Our Sox" sought to make old Comiskey a national urban park on the model of the Lowell, Massachusetts, textile mills. Instead of a theme park, Save Our Sox wanted a park with its original purpose intact and supplemented by historical perspective and education. It was found eligible by the National Park Service, but the White Sox vetoed the plan.<sup>68</sup> The Tiger Stadium Fan Club developed their own Cochran Plan to preserve the old park. But the Tigers ignored it, even as fans in Tiger Stadium unfurled banners reading "If you build it, we won't come."<sup>69</sup>

Many voices have called for referenda on stadium deals and such referenda did block public subsidy in San Francisco. President Clinton lectured owners in 1999 to consider "the obligations owed to the people in your communities. Make investments in your community second only to your priorities to bring home the championship trophy." But even Clinton failed to challenge the formal and informal prohibitions that preclude public ownership of sports franchises. Ballparks can be civic assets (they often are in the minor leagues, where public ownership is common and players' salaries are pathetically low). But it does not happen automatically.

Perhaps the greatest irony is that the best of the recent ballparks is the one that returned to "old-fashioned capitalist financing." Although taxpayers contributed \$15 million and assorted

infrastructural improvements, San Francisco's Pac Bell Park arose on a foundation of \$300 million in private funds. (This was after San Francisco voters rejected publicly financed parks four times.) The lack of public subsidy ironically explains part of Pac Bell's success as a civic project. Rather than taking the prime downtown real estate that publicly-financed parks take, Pac Bell chose to build in the same sort of gritty, working-class neighbourhood in which the classic ballparks arose. (The Pac Bell site is in a rapidly gentrifying area with a bayside view.)

The site is well-served by public transit and the design treats the site "deferentially," providing a public promenade along the bayfront. The ticketless can watch part of the game from the promenade, which has generated game-day crowds and new commercial ventures. The tightness of the site is made a virtue with a quirkily close right field foul line (307 feet (94 metres) from home plate) that rapidly expands to 420 feet (128 metres) in right centre, allowing home runs to drop into the bay down the line and triples and inside-the-park-homers to rattle around in right-centre. It is not perfect — the eighty-foot (24-metre) long Coke bottle above the left field stands announces the centrality of the concession dollar while the expansive concession areas and premium seats push upper-deck fans far from the action. The range of activities promoted within the park also seem to de-emphasize the game itself. But Pac Bell does suggest what might be done even without public subsidies.<sup>70</sup>

At the very least a true partnership is needed. Without making owners part of an urban development partnership with investment in the ballpark neighbourhoods, as was done in Phoenix's new Bank One Ballpark, team owners have no stake at all in the community and are just a sweetheart deal away from bolting.<sup>71</sup> Jay Weiner's *Stadium Games* shows how in Minneapolis owners and civic leaders have manipulated civic pride to exploit taxpayers for the benefit of a privileged minority. Local lawyer Hugh Barber, whom Weiner calls "the unsung hero of stadium history," repeatedly demanded stadium planning for the public good first and foremost. Barber argues that professional sports need the Minneapolis-St Paul market more than the Twin Cities need professional sports. (This is, incidentally, an insight with broader implications for American citizens confronting the multi-national corporations of the global economy.) Minnesotans, who have refused to build a park to subsidize the billionaire owner of

the Twins, appeared to have learned the lesson. Taxpayers are daring to ask what the city will get from building a new stadium.

Like the citizens of the Twin Cities, other communities should demand a percentage of tickets sold at affordable prices, living wages for employees, public disclosure of team finances, and a portion of profits for local youth sports. There must be an additional set of stadium uses, from art galleries to police stations, to make the ballparks a civic asset on other than game days.<sup>72</sup> Pac Bell suggests such improvements are possible even with private ownership. But a more direct and forthright appeal to civic pride and public initiative is more promising.

Repairing the urban fabric, increasing tax revenues, and enhancing civic consciousness are all central tasks for American cities in which baseball parks can assist. Indeed the future of cities in competition with one another depends upon the distinctiveness of their central neighbourhoods, not on the homogeneous suburban fringes that are virtually identical in every metropolis. But the current approach to constructing baseball parks is all wrong. What the classic ballparks offer us more than anything else is a glimpse of the city's possibilities.

The civic aspirations of those classic ballparks were contagious. In 1923, the year Yankee Stadium opened, a New York reporter interviewed Yankee owner Colonel Huston on "Baseball's Future." Baseball, the reporter began, "is practically a monopoly, and a monopoly whose support must come from the public." Then he posed the "fundamental" question. "Why cannot the chief municipalities interested take over baseball and manage it themselves?" The Colonel balked. "Why not?" the reporter continued. "We have municipal ownership of art galleries, of public parks, in some cities of choral societies. Surely none of these appeal more to either civic pride or pleasure than baseball?" Huston dismissed the idea as unworkable, but earlier in the interview he had argued that baseball "lives only because of the public."<sup>73</sup> Huston was right about that. It is time to repossess the national pastime.

What is it that the owners actually "own" anyway? The public already owns most of the parks. Do owners own a game the American people created out of their hopes and dreams, values and skills? Those millions of us who talk and write about the game, embellishing its past and present and imagining its future, create new generations of fans and strengthen the games' place in our culture. Can the owners say as much? Do the owners own the players?

Certainly not any more, although at tax time the owners do depreciate these "assets" to avoid paying their fair share. Mothers and fathers, coaches and fellow (if less talented) players, the admiring and encouraging fans, they created the players. In short, baseball is a socially-created form of wealth. The only thing the owners actually own is a franchise to sell to us, at monopoly prices, the national pastime that we have created.

Why are those franchises worth in excess of 100 million dollars? Because we have given the owners a monopoly (thanks to the 1922 anti-trust exemption). We allow them to be the only game in town and then they blackmail us into building them bad stadia with public monies. We have been willing to allow the owners to get rich off of our game as long as they took reasonable care of it. But owners who, as Bess puts it, "appear to love money more than they love the game risk alienating the affections of the fans."<sup>74</sup> Eight work stoppages since 1972, not a single negotiated contract without one, is quite enough. Another work stoppage now, incredibly, looms. Added to this, the destruction of shrines and the erection of theme parks is too much. The owners have blown it. It is time to take the game away from them.

It is the fans who will have to do it. We might try, as did a group of New York Yankee fans, to purchase one of those multi-million dollar franchises. But we do not need to do that. Instead we should demand that Congress end the anti-trust exemption and then watch those franchise values collapse as new investors flock to the industry. Those long-blackmailed cities could be among the first to benefit, fielding their own teams as already happens in the minors. Although the owners have long blocked municipal ownership in the majors, its time has come.

A lot would have to change. But we must recognize that the classic ballparks are so beloved because they speak to the possibilities of city life. They call to us an earlier time before we gave up on cities, when we aspired to build what settlement house reformer Robert Woods called "a broadly and humanly serviceable city, powerful, generous, considerate." Henry George showed how it might be done. Socially-created forms of wealth, George insisted, must not go "to the enrichment of individuals and corporations" but to "the improvement and beautifying of the city." Our cities might be filled with playgrounds and gardens, libraries and theatres, lecture halls and ball parks, George argued, and "in a thousand



ways the public revenues made to foster efforts for the public benefit.”<sup>75</sup> A municipally-owned and -operated baseball league, boasting the best ballparks and richest city life, might recapture some of those lost possibilities.

Uniting Olmsted's call for judicious public investments in parks and green, open spaces with George's desire to capture socially-created wealth for public purposes, we might yet civilize America's cities.

## NOTES

1. Built “into the physical landscape and individual encounters with buildings,” Max Page writes, “memories are literally impossible without physical landscapes to store and serve as touchstones for the work of recollection.” Max Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1–4, 251–252. James quoted on 1; Halbwachs quoted on 251.
2. The Polo Grounds, historian G. Edward White argues, became a civic landmark, reassuring precisely because it was “so obviously massive, so resolutely free of the dangers of disintegration or eradication.” G. Edward White, *Creating the National Pastime: Baseball Transforms Itself, 1903–1953* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 37. On the details of the Polo Grounds, see Lowell Reidenbaugh, *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (St. Louis: Sporting News Pub. Co., 1983), 166–176. The classic ballparks, historian Benjamin Rader writes, “were akin to the great public buildings” of the time, “edifices that local residents proudly pointed to as evidence of their city's size and achievements.” Moreover, they “were important depositories of collective memories; their presence evoked a shared past of heroic deeds and monumental blunders.” The ballparks helped provide “citizens with a glorious sense of place and sharply delineated collective memories.” Rader concludes that few “public structures in the nation were as effective as baseball parks in connecting the past and the present.” Benjamin Rader, *Baseball: A History of America's Game* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 86–87, xvi.
3. Yankee Stadium also survives, but in nothing like its original form. Tiger Stadium had hosted every American League regular through the 1999 season. A single field remains at which Ty Cobb, one of the game's most storied figures, played. John Pastier, “Diamonds Aren't Forever,” *Historic Preservation* 45 (1993): 26–33, 84–85.
4. The urban ballparks, Pastier writes, “shape space on a grand scale, accommodate a public activity that approaches ritual, and are potent emblems of civic pride.” John Pastier, “The Business of Baseball,” *Inland Architect* 33 (January/February 1989): 56–62. Pastier points out that “the people who decide the fate of those unique landmarks can usually find reasons to destroy them.” John Pastier, “Rescue Operation,” *Inland Architect* 35 (September/October 1991): 42–49. On the Comiskey entrance, see Philip Bess, “Mall Park; New Comiskey Park and the State of the Art,” *Inland Architect* 35 (September/October 1991): 32–41.
5. John T. Brush, “The Evolution of the Baseball Grandstand,” *Baseball Magazine* (April 1912): 1–3. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 9 April 1913, quoted in White, *Creating the National Pastime*, 19. This paragraph owes a great deal to White's discussion of the classic ballparks, 12–37; quoted passage on 36–37. Citing the history of images of the “good” that juxtaposed a garden and a city, architect Philip Bess argues that baseball is best “when it occurs within the confines of an enclosed park in the city.” Philip Bess, *City Baseball Magic: Plain Talk and Uncommon Sense about Cities and Baseball Parks*, (Minneapolis, 1989): 2.
6. Henry Chadwick, ed., *Beadle's Dime Base-Ball Player* (New York: Beadle, 1867).
7. The baseball field, Bess writes, is “both precisely defined and indeterminate.” Bess, *City Baseball Magic*, 2.
8. A. Bartlett Giamatti, *Take Time for Paradise: Americans and Their Games* (New York: Summit Books, 1989), 42–43, 48–55, 83–90, passim. Quoted passages are on 85, 87.
9. *Forever Baseball*, documentary produced by the Public Broadcasting Corporation, for the American Experience series (New York, 1989).
10. *The National Game*, a film produced by the National League of Baseball Clubs (Chicago, 1938).
11. Lewis Mumford, *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America, 1865–1895* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1931), 82.
12. On the enclosure of activities see Lyn Lofland, *The Public Realm*, 17 ff. Porter's *Spirit of the Times* and *Brooklyn Eagle*, 16 May 1862 quoted in Michael Gershman, *Diamonds: The Evolution of the Ballpark* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 11–12. On baseball's enclosure movement, see Rader, *Baseball*, 15 ff. On the construction of Central Park, Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992) is a good starting point.
13. Frederick Law Olmsted, *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns* (1870; reprint, New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1970). See my discussion of Olmsted in John D. Fairfield, *Mysteries of the Great City: The Politics of Urban Design, 1877–1937* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 18–42.
14. Cammeyer, a Brooklyn politician and associate of Boss Tweed, opened the grounds for free the first day, but began charging admission the second day. Michael Gershman, *Diamonds*, 11–12.
15. Olmsted, *Public Parks*; Gershman, *Diamonds*, 11.
16. Frederic C. Howe, *The City: The Hope of Democracy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), 241–242; quoted in John Betts, *America's Sporting Heritage: 1890–1950* (Reading, Mass.: Don Mills, Ont.: Addison-Wesley, 1974), 178.
17. Morris R. Cohen, “Baseball,” *Dial* 67 (16 July 1919): 57.

18. H. Addington Bruce, "Baseball and the National Life," *Outlook* 104 (17 May 1913): 104–107.
19. Hugh C. Weir, "Baseball: The Men and the Dollars Behind It," *World To-Day* 17 (July 1909): 752–761.
20. Edward B. Moss, "The 'Fan' and His Ways," *Harpers Weekly* 54 (11 June 1910): 13–14.
21. Simeon Strunsky, "The Game," *Atlantic Monthly* 114 (August 1914): 248–256.
22. Connie Mack, *My Sixty-Six Years in Baseball* (Philadelphia, 1950), iii–iv.
23. The architecture of the City Beautiful movement, Paul Boyer argues, was "the civic ideal made real." Paul S. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978). On the City Beautiful Movement, see William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
24. Boyer, *Urban Masses*; Burnham and Robinson quoted in Fairfield, *Mysteries of the Great City*, 122–123.
25. Gershman, *Diamonds*, 70–74. Movie theatres, eager to become the working man's civic centre, also flirted with classical architecture around the same time.
26. While the Reds would later relent on advertising, Dreyfus only once allowed advertising, a larger-than-life soldier to promote the sale of war bonds during the Second World War. *Pittsburgh Post*, 1 July 1909, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 10 April 1911; quoted in Robert F. Bluthardt, "Fenway Park and the Golden Age of the Baseball Park, 1900–1915," *Journal of Popular Culture* (Summer 1987): 43–52; Daniel L. Bonk, "Ballpark Figures: The Story of Forbes Field," *Pittsburgh History* 76 (Summer 1993), 52–70.
27. Pastier, "Diamonds Aren't Forever," 30–31.
28. *A City Plan for Saint Louis* (St Louis: 1907), 8; Howe, *The City: The Hope of Democracy*, 239–240; Olmsted, *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns*, quoted in Mumford, *The Brown Decades*, 91.
29. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 9, 1913, quoted in White, *Creating the National Pastime*, 19; Bluthardt, "Fenway Park," 50.
30. Pastier, "Play Ball."
31. Bonk, "Ballpark Figures."
32. *Ibid.* Built in an "anti-urban period," these stadiums were "generally oblivious to their sites, even when built downtown." Pastier, "Play Ball," *Landscape Architecture* 85 (June 1995): 70–73. The suburban, domed stadiums "shut out the unpleasant realities of the 1980s: the slow painful death of the inner cities..." *Diamonds*, 214.
33. The literature on urban renewal is voluminous. But a good starting point is Mark I. Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933–1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) and Arnold Hirsh, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Rader, *Baseball*, 174–176.
34. Pastier, "The Business of Baseball," 59; Bonk, "Ballpark Figures;" Tony Hiss, "Connectedness," chap. 2 in *The Experience of Place* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 27–52.
35. Bess, "Mall Park," 37; Pastier, "Business of Baseball," 58.
36. We "are both part of and transcend 'nature;' it is in our 'nature' to be artisans," Bess writes, "to create within and in accordance with our biological constitution artifacts and institutions." Bess, *City Baseball Magic*, 5; Hiss, *Experience of Place*.
37. Articles from the *Cincinnati Enquirer*: 25 June 1970, p. 1; 26 June 1980; 25 January 1984; March 31, 1984; all from clipping file on Riverfront Stadium at the Cincinnati Public Library. R. Mark Rohr, *Crosley Field* (Blue Ash, Ohio: Crosley Field Fund Raising Committee, 1970).
38. Peter Richmond, *Ballpark: Camden Yards and the Building of an American Dream* (New York: 1993), 112. Robert Harris Walker, *Cincinnati and the Big Red Machine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 35.
39. Pastier, "Business of Baseball," 585; "Riverfront Stadium Fact Sheet," from the *Opening Day Souvenir Magazine*, 16 June 1970.
40. Urban renewal reached its "apotheosis in the 1960s" and "resulted in the systematic destruction of city blocks and building, and their replacement with single-use superblock developments." Bess, *City Baseball Magic*, 24.
41. *Ibid.*, 18.
42. Pastier, "Diamonds Aren't Forever," 30; Pastier, "Business of Baseball," 56–62.
43. Bess, *City Baseball Magic*, 18–19.
44. *Ibid.*, 17–18.
45. *Ibid.* 2–4, 23–27; Pastier, "Diamonds Aren't Forever," 26–33, 84–85. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).
46. Bess, *City Baseball Magic*, passim. See also the summary description in Pastier, "The Business of Baseball."
47. Bess, "Mall Park." Richard Sandomir, "Rising Above the Field," *Sports Illustrated* 75 (August 5, 1991): 8–13.
48. The park's crowning glory is a state of the art Jumbotron, "technically impressive," Bess notes, "to be sure, but not as welcome or essential to some Sox fans as to others." Bess, "Mall Park." On the multiplier effect, see Philip Bess, "Ballpark Figures," *Planning* 59 (July 1993): 28–9. Pastier's description in "Business of Baseball," 58. Richmond, *Ballpark*, 113–114.
49. Richmond, *Ballpark*, 176–178. The "loss of place, loss of self" is Richmond's point.
50. Smith quoted in Phil Patton, "The House that Ruth's Father Built," *Esquire* 115 (April 1991): 82.
51. Steven Litt, "Two-Base Hit," *Landscape Architecture* 85 (June 1995): 75–6.
52. Gershman, *Diamonds*, 227.
53. Pastier, "Play Ball;" Pastier, "Diamonds Aren't Forever;" Tim Kurkjian, "A Splendid Nest," *Sports Illustrated* 76 (April 13, 1992): 34–41; Bess, "Mall Park," 37; Pastier, "Rescue Operation," 47. On postmodernism and the city, see Michael Sorkin, ed., *Variations On a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).
54. Litt, "Two-Base Hit," 75–6.

55. Michael Leccese, "Taking it Downtown," *Landscape Architecture* 85 (June 1995): 77–80.
56. David Dillon, "Texas Leaguer," *Landscape Architecture* 85 (June 1995): 83.
57. Sandomir, "Rising Above the Field," 8–13.
58. Bess, "Mall Park," 32–41.
59. Neil deMause, "Flattening Fenway," *Sportsjones* (<http://www.sportsjones.com>).
60. Joanna Cagan and Neil DeMause, "A Tale of Two Cities," *The Nation* 267 (10/17 August 1998): 24.
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68. Pastier, "Business of Baseball," 59.
69. Pastier, "Rescue Operation."
70. John Pastier, "Ballpark by the Bay," *Metropolis* 20 (August/September 2000): 114, 116.
71. On Phoenix, see William Fulton, "The Neighborhood Ballpark," *Governing* (June 1999): 57; Wayne M. Barrett, "Politicians and Club Owners Milk the Public," *USA Today* (May 1996): 77.
72. Jay Weiner, *Stadium Games* (Minneapolis, 2000). Tom Oates, review of Weiner, *Sportsjones* (<http://www.sportsjones.com>); Jay Weiner, "Thinking Out of the Batter's Box," *Business Week* (24 April 2000): 175–176.
73. Richard Barry, "Baseball's Future," *Outlook* 133 (25 April 1923): 748–50.
74. Bess, *City Baseball Magic*, 4.
75. Fairfield, *Mysteries of the Great City*, Woods quoted on 100; George quoted on 38–40; Olmsted and George as forerunners of the city planning movement, see ch. 1–4.



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## Découvrir, étudier et mettre en valeur la culture matérielle : dialectique entre cultures populaire et savante, l'exemple québécois au 20<sup>e</sup> siècle<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*Popular culture and academic culture are mutually supportive. The discussion of the concerns and motivations of the academic community to uncover one's heritage, to study it and raise its profile, provides an opportunity to examine, from an ethnological point of view, the meaning of objects in popular and academic culture along with the dynamics between them. In search of local, regional and national distinctive characteristics, some supporters of culture, intellectuals for the most part, met inhabitants of particular regions to discover their habits and customs. Academic circles and governments draw up inventories, and develop and promote cultural and socio-economic characteristics. In this way, they return to the people what they had yielded up, and in so doing, help them rediscover certain facets of their culture.*

### Résumé

*La culture populaire et la culture savante se nourrissent. L'évocation des préoccupations et des motivations des chercheurs à la découverte du patrimoine, à son étude et à sa mise en valeur donne l'occasion d'aborder, dans une perspective ethnologique, la signification des objets dans les cultures populaire et savante ainsi que la dynamique qu'entretiennent l'une et l'autre entre elles. En quête de particularités locales, régionales et nationales, quelques passionnés de la culture, des intellectuels pour la plupart, ont rencontré des gens du terroir pour découvrir leurs us et coutumes, leurs savoirs et leurs pratiques. Les milieux universitaires et les gouvernements réalisent des inventaires, développent et mettent en valeur des caractères culturels et socio-économiques, redonnant ainsi à la population ce qu'elle avait livré, et même plus, en lui faisant redécouvrir certains pans de sa culture.*

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La vie humaine s'incarne dans le concret et les habitudes de vie prennent diverses formes que nous matérialisons dans notre environnement, sous notre toit et sur notre corps grâce à une panoplie d'objets. Portés par les tendances<sup>2</sup> et selon les contextes spatio-temporels et sociaux, ces objets, ainsi que la perception qu'on en a, se modifient.

Une communauté d'habitation, si petite ou si grande soit-elle, inclut des personnes de diverses fonctions, occupations et statuts au regard de leur éducation, de leurs apprentissages et de leurs choix de vie. C'est ainsi que se côtoient l'agriculteur et le marchand, le domestique et le bourgeois, l'artisan et l'intellectuel. Leurs rapports par l'entremise des objets créent une dialectique qui fait en sorte que les objets sont

délaissés par les uns, découverts et mis en valeur par les autres. Qui plus est, certains s'en passionnent et les collectionnent, provoquant et nourrissant ainsi une circulation orientée des objets. D'autres, dans un contexte particulier et généralement institutionnel, les étudient et, pour cela, retournent sur le terrain rencontrer leurs propriétaires et des témoins privilégiés. D'autres encore s'en inspirent dans un contexte artistique ou médiatique.

Cet article vise à suggérer que la culture populaire nourrit la culture savante et que celle-ci valorise la première. Les objets se révèlent alors comme étant perçus différemment par ceux qui les confectionnent, par ceux qui les possèdent, par ceux qui les utilisent, par ceux qui les étudient. Les variables liées aux contextes

influent sur les perceptions, sur le degré d'importance et d'intérêt qu'ils suscitent. L'expérience québécoise servira d'exemple. Je tenterai d'esquisser le parcours de la culture matérielle<sup>3</sup> au 20<sup>e</sup> siècle en faisant ressortir quelques préoccupations manifestées selon les périodes et les contextes. L'évocation des motivations des chercheurs à la découverte de notre patrimoine, à son étude et à sa mise en valeur, nous donnera l'occasion d'aborder la signification des objets dans la culture populaire et savante ainsi que la dynamique qu'entretiennent l'une et l'autre entre elles.

### Culture populaire et culture savante

Si la culture populaire et la culture savante (dite aussi de référence, ou des élites) ont longtemps été placées en opposition, on leur reconnaît maintenant une certaine autonomie sans pour autant nier leur contamination inévitable<sup>4</sup>. La polysémie du terme *populaire* inclut l'idée du non-académisme, faisant valoir une transmission de nature familiale, locale et régionale. Elle renvoie aussi à la cohésion du groupe territorial et à la collectivité d'appartenance par la fonction, l'engagement social. C'est ainsi qu'on parle de cultures populaires régionales, ouvrières, associatives, etc. Aucune définition du mot *culture* ne fait l'unanimité, les idéologies et les perceptions étant trop variables pour cela. Je privilégie comme éléments constitutifs du concept le fait qu'une culture est construite par couches superposées dans le temps et dans l'espace<sup>5</sup>, que ses éléments constitutifs s'emboîtent dans un assemblage dont l'articulation permet l'adaptation et le mouvement. Les concepts de culture et d'identité sont indissociables dans la perspective ethnologique que je privilégie. Pour les fins de cet article, je retiens spécialement la synthèse de Denys Cuche<sup>6</sup> qui rappelle le rôle premier des analystes littéraires en France, auquel on peut ajouter celui des littéraires au Québec. Par la suite, les folkloristes ont élargi la perspective en s'intéressant aux traditions paysannes et du terroir. Ont emboîté le pas les anthropologues et les sociologues. Cuche relève l'ambiguïté sémantique émanant de la polysémie des deux termes qui composent l'expression et tous ne s'entendent pas sur une même définition de *culture* et de *populaire*. N'adoptant ni la thèse minimaliste qui considère les cultures populaires comme étant des dérivés de la culture de référence, ni la thèse maximaliste qui place les cultures populaires au-dessus de la culture des élites parce qu'authentiques, je rejoins l'idée que « la réalité est autrement plus complexe. Les cultures populaires apparaissent à l'analyse

ni entièrement indépendantes ni entièrement autonomes, ni de pure imitation ni de pure création. En cela, elles ne font que vérifier que toute culture particulière est un assemblage d'éléments originaux et d'éléments importés, d'inventions propres et d'emprunts. Comme n'importe quelle culture, elles ne sont donc pas homogènes, mais pas pour autant incohérentes »<sup>7</sup>.

Cependant, il faut reconnaître que les cultures populaires rejoignent davantage la masse, répartie par collectivités caractérisées selon des paramètres sociaux et géographiques notamment, et que, dans un certain sens, elles se détachent de la culture de référence en exprimant de la résistance face à celle-ci. L'altérité est donc une marque de distinction entre ces deux cultures, en ce sens qu'elles comportent chacune leurs manières de faire qui constituent un ensemble reconnaissable et relativement autonome. À cela s'ajoute l'idée de Michel De Certeau que la culture populaire est celle des gens « ordinaires » et qu'elle se fabrique au quotidien dans les activités à la fois banales et chaque jour renouvelées<sup>8</sup>.

Pour boucler cette explication, empruntons à Fernand Dumont l'idée que la « singularité foncière [de la culture savante] lui vient d'un dépassement (effectif ou illusoire...) qu'elle s'attribue par rapport à la culture commune »<sup>9</sup>.

### Découvrir, s'étonner, reconnaître

Dans son article « L'étude de la culture matérielle »<sup>10</sup>, Jean-Claude Dupont relate la première mention de l'intérêt d'étudier la culture matérielle au Québec. En 1852, Isidore Lebrun publie dans le journal *La Minerve* qu'il faudrait « qu'on inventorie les arts visuels comme tous nos pères savaient les exercer, les sortes d'instruments et d'outils, les formes de métier, les ameublements, les espèces de produits manufacturés, etc. (l'imagerie comprise), tout ce qui servirait à nous remémorer quelle était la vie domestique et industrielle durant les siècles derniers et déjà anciens »<sup>11</sup>.

Prendre conscience de l'intérêt de ce qui nous entoure et ne pas oublier les savoir-faire de nos ancêtres, voilà une attitude qui rejoint celle prévalant déjà en Europe, alors que l'époque romantique propose un sol fertile à la recherche d'identité et à la mise en valeur des arts et traditions populaires. La fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle verra dans plusieurs pays un certain aboutissement du cheminement de cette recherche et une reconnaissance officielle auprès de quelques

disciplines universitaires en place<sup>12</sup>. Au Québec, même si le 19<sup>e</sup> siècle est aussi témoin d'un réveil graduel de l'élite, un intérêt soutenu pour les traditions ne se développera que graduellement au siècle suivant. La recherche de soi-même s'avérera sans fin, au fil de redécouvertes périodiques du patrimoine québécois.

### Des intellectuels en quête de pittoresque

En général, les objets de la vie quotidienne représentent peu d'intérêt pour la population qui les possède, jusqu'à ce que « quelqu'un », souvent un « étranger » du lieu, attire l'attention sur ses « trésors ». En quête de particularités locales, régionales et nationales, quelques passionnés de la culture, des intellectuels pour la plupart, parcourent diverses régions du Québec. Ils s'émerveillent en rencontrant des hommes et des femmes du terroir, en découvrant leurs us et coutumes, leurs savoirs et leurs pratiques. Ils prennent contact avec ces milieux qui leur sont apparus d'une richesse à préserver. Par là, ces passionnés rejoignent le désir de sauvegarde manifesté au siècle précédent.

La voie des travaux savants, sous l'angle d'approche qui nous intéresse, est ouverte par l'anthropologue et ethnographe Charles-Marius Barbeau, qui se captive pour « toutes les manifestations de l'activité humaine »<sup>13</sup>. Barbeau est en effet le premier à considérer d'un œil scientifique toute une panoplie de faits de culture. Dans son sillon s'inscrivent d'autres chercheurs qui, à leur tour, guideront le travail d'investigation<sup>14</sup>. Peu à peu, on s'arrête aux objets jusqu'à ce que la culture matérielle devienne un champ d'étude accueillant des chercheurs de diverses disciplines, notamment les historiens d'art et d'architecture, qui en font vite leur domaine d'intérêt, et plusieurs autres chercheurs en sciences humaines et sociales<sup>15</sup>. Dans cet article, mon propos s'attarde cependant à la vision des folkloristes, ethnographes et ethnologues.

Certains érudits et des illustrateurs font connaître des pratiques et interprètent des coutumes, fixant quelques pans de la vie traditionnelle, particulièrement celle du milieu rural. Ces images, véhiculées dans les romans, les journaux et les almanachs, vont marquer l'imaginaire collectif. Dès le 19<sup>e</sup> siècle et au cours du premier tiers du 20<sup>e</sup>, plusieurs écrivains contribuent à valoriser la culture populaire, plus particulièrement celle de la campagne. On entretient le culte de la tradition, particulièrement au regard de l'héritage français, et en cela, les écrivains « agriculturistes participent à une entreprise idéologique de portée nationale »<sup>16</sup>.

*Le Dictionnaire des œuvres littéraires du Québec*<sup>17</sup> propose un regard éclairant sur la place des romans du terroir et des romans régionalistes non seulement dans la littérature québécoise, mais aussi quant à l'idéalisation du passé et à la retenue face à la modernité. Après *Jean Rivard, le défricheur* (1862) et *Maria Chapdelaine* (1916), *Un homme et son péché* (1933) et *Menaud, maître draveur* (1937), la trilogie de Germaine Guèvremont (1946-1948) clôt une époque. Les Roger Lemelin (*Au pied de la pente douce*, 1944) et Gabrielle Roy (*Bonheur d'occasion*, 1945) invitent leurs lecteurs à la ville, en leur présentant une culture populaire devenue majoritairement urbaine. Toutes ces œuvres présentent un univers qui reflète la réalité matérielle des personnages. Plusieurs d'entre elles s'incarneront d'ailleurs à la télévision dans un décor et avec un propos qui subjuguera des familles entières rivées à leur petit écran.

Les arts visuels contribuent aussi à fixer des représentations qui vont s'incruster dans l'imaginaire collectif. Ainsi, le dessinateur Henri Julien et les frères Massicotte, l'archiviste Édouard-Zotique et l'illustrateur Edmond-Joseph, présentent à la population, chacun à sa façon, des traits de l'habitant énergique, jovial et respectueux des ancêtres. Les douze tableaux sur les fêtes d'Edmond-Joseph, en particulier, fixent des scènes de vie où le type de costume et d'habitat sera encore véhiculé des décennies plus tard pour illustrer un mode de vie traditionnel du début du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle.

### À la recherche de nos traditions perdues

La base du travail des ethnographes et des ethnologues est le terrain, qui permet d'établir le contact entre les intellectuels et les gens du peuple. Au fil des enquêtes, le champ de la culture matérielle se construit. Des légendes, contes et chansons, on passe à la sculpture, aux métiers traditionnels et à l'art populaire, notamment des textiles. Lorsque s'amorce, au début du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle, une ère de modernisation qui prendra un rythme de plus en plus accéléré, la conscience des traditions s'éveille et, avec elle, le désir de les connaître et de les préserver. C'est dans ce contexte que la carrière du jeune Marius Barbeau commence. Les enquêtes qu'il entame en 1915 ouvriront ainsi une double voie : l'une de recherches anthropologiques et ethnographiques et l'autre de valorisation populaire, par la tenue de festivals, par exemple, qui feront naître des collaborations entre les gens des lieux visités et un petit groupe de scientifiques dont il sera le chef de file.



Marius Barbeau découvre et fait découvrir les arts, pris au sens large, comme le feront aussi plus tard Jean-Marie Gauvreau et Gérard Morisset. Les enquêtes de terrain permettent de pénétrer dans une culture du terroir. Pour lui, les traditions se divisent en trois rameaux : « la tradition intellectuelle, religieuse et littéraire, entretenue dans les séminaires, les couvents et les écoles; la tradition des arts et métiers, qui se perpétuait dans les ateliers, de maîtres à apprentis, ou simplement de père en fils; et la tradition orale, dans la masse rurale et même urbaine de la population »<sup>18</sup>. Barbeau s'attarde à rappeler les survivances françaises en Amérique et particulièrement à démontrer que Québec en a été jusque-là une forteresse. Il déplore ensuite plusieurs disparitions et le danger de l'influence américaine.

Une fois sensibilisée à sa propre culture, l'élite conservatrice se sent investie d'une mission. Les années 1930, décennie pendant laquelle sévit une importante crise économique, donnent l'occasion de décrire la ville, lieu de tous les maux et, pour plusieurs, incubateur de pauvreté. La campagne est alors présentée comme un paradis perdu où le travail de chacun vaut son pesant d'or. Les racines terriennes confèreraient force, courage et habileté; le gouvernement en fera son message.

C'est à cette époque que l'on tend à redonner un nouveau souffle à l'artisanat. On organise des cours et des expositions pour montrer des techniques oubliées et pour présenter des « chefs d'œuvre » nés de mains habiles. Apparaissent aussi des publications visant à faire l'éloge et la promotion de la créativité dans un contexte de référence à la tradition. Jean-Marie Gauvreau devient l'un des meneurs de ce mouvement de « revival » où la population est appelée à participer.

Jean-Marie Gauvreau jouera un rôle majeur. Sa formation à l'École Boulle de Paris l'a ouvert à la modernité. Profondément attaché à l'artisanat traditionnel et convaincu de l'importance de faire valoir les richesses locales, il instaure à Montréal, en 1935, une École du meuble qui marquera la culture à différents points de vue. Refusant la philosophie de l'école allemande Bauhaus, qui privilégiait la machine et l'esthétique industrielle, Gauvreau et l'École du meuble tentent de favoriser l'entrée de leur société dans la modernité en s'appuyant sur ce que la tradition a de meilleur, soit une connaissance des matériaux locaux, une habileté d'exécution assurée par la transmission exemplaire et une sensibilité au milieu de vie. C'est ce que Gauvreau démontre notamment dans son ouvrage *Les intérieurs de demain* (1929) où

il affirme certaines idées qui influenceront les façons de voir et d'habiter un lieu<sup>19</sup>.

Il prône entre autres l'importance d'entretenir des relations étroites avec les Français, dont la tradition serait davantage en accord avec l'état d'esprit de ses concitoyens que celle des Américains, qui apparaissent plutôt comme des usurpateurs de biens, notamment de vieux meubles qu'ils achètent à des prix dérisoires.

*Quant à nous, Canadiens, nous devons tirer le plus grand profit de nos relations avec les décorateurs français. [...] de grâce, n'allons pas chercher nos inspirations chez nos voisins. Nous sommes capables de faire autre chose que de la copie servile. Autres pays, autres usages, autres mœurs. Adaptons à notre vie un mobilier qui réponde vraiment à nos besoins quotidiens, et dont la tenue puisse symboliser notre caractère national. Sachons faire appel, chaque fois que ce sera nécessaire, à ceux qui savent maintenir avec tant de distinction le souvenir d'un passé glorieux. Cette tradition est celle qui s'adapte davantage à notre état d'esprit*<sup>20</sup>.

#### Des lois structurantes

La découverte par les Québécois de leur culture, notamment de leur culture matérielle, doit à la passion de quelques intellectuels d'avoir fait pression sur les gouvernements pour qu'ils posent des actions concrètes de reconnaissance. « Dès la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, la plupart des sociétés occidentales commencent à réagir au changement et élaborent petit à petit des mesures de conservation de l'environnement matériel. »<sup>21</sup> Lorsque l'on crée la Commission canadienne des lieux et monuments historiques (1919) puis, au Québec, la Commission des monuments historiques (en 1922), on consacre alors certains lieux et bâtiments. La même année voient le jour la loi sur les musées de la province de Québec et celle créant l'École des beaux-arts à Montréal. S'ensuivent la mise sur pied de l'Association des musées canadiens et l'Association professionnelle des artisans. Le processus d'évolution rendant compte de l'étendue du domaine de la culture matérielle à reconnaître se poursuit sur une longue période. Progressivement, les gouvernements considéreront différents types de patrimoines, au fur et à mesure du développement du concept, en commençant par le secteur de l'immobilier. En plus du patrimoine bâti, ce concept inclura peu à peu des pratiques techniques, artisanales et domestiques, de sorte que la population sera de plus en plus consciente de sa contribution au bien collectif. « Au tournant du [20<sup>e</sup>] siècle, des

événements contribuent à sensibiliser la population à l'importance de la culture matérielle »<sup>22</sup> : en 1895, ouverture au public du Château Ramezay à Montréal où, pour la première fois, sont exposés des objets de la société traditionnelle au même titre que des œuvres d'art ou des artefacts archéologiques, en 1908, fêtes du tricentenaire de Québec, en 1922, ouverture du Musée McCord à Montréal, en 1923, organisation d'un centre d'interprétation de la vie traditionnelle au moulin de Vincennes à Beaumont et, à la même époque, début de la collaboration de William H. Coverdale, président de la Canada Steamships Lines, et de Marius Barbeau, du Musée de l'Homme à Ottawa, pour constituer l'une des plus importantes collections de meubles anciens, acquise en 1967 par le gouvernement du Québec.

Tous les paliers d'intervention se structurent : le gouvernement, les organismes, les individus. La reconnaissance se construit, au fil des lois et de la constitution de masses critiques qui donnent une force d'action et assurent la visibilité nécessaire au développement.

Il faut cependant attendre les années 1960, puis 1970, pour assister à un redéploiement : mise sur pied du ministère des Affaires culturelles, Loi de la Place Royale, création de divers services gouvernementaux fédéraux et provinciaux, comme une Direction générale du patrimoine ou un Service de l'artisanat et des métiers d'art. Ces décennies voient aussi le développement de Parcs Canada et du réseau des musées. En 1992 naît une première politique culturelle.

### Tableau 1 Culture et patrimoine matériel au Québec

Ces quelques dates sont tirées pour une bonne part de l'ouvrage de Cyril Simard (en collaboration avec Andrée Lapointe et Corneliu Kirjan) *Patrimoine muséologique au Québec : repères chronologiques* (Québec : Commission des biens culturels du Québec, 1992).

- 1919 Création de la Commission canadienne des lieux et monuments historiques
- 1922 Création de la Commission des monuments historiques (Patrimoine immobilier du Québec)  
Adoption de la loi créant l'École des beaux-arts de Montréal  
Adoption de la Loi sur les monuments historiques ou artistiques  
Adoption de la Loi sur les musées de la province de Québec
- 1943 Réorganisation des archives nationales en service autonome, détaché du Musée de la province
- 1947 Fondation de l'Association des musées canadiens (AMC)
- 1949 Fondation de l'Association professionnelle des artisans du Québec (APAQ)
- 1950 Ouverture de la première Centrale d'artisanat du Québec par l'Office provincial de l'artisanat sous la direction de Jean-Marie Gauvreau
- 1955 Tenue au Palais du commerce à Montréal du premier Salon de l'artisanat, organisé par l'Office provincial de l'artisanat et la Centrale
- 1958 Fondation de la Société des musées québécois
- 1961 Mise sur pied du ministère des Affaires culturelles
- 1963 Remplacement de l'Office provincial de l'artisanat par le Conseil supérieur de l'artisanat, qui relève du ministère du Tourisme
- 1968 Organisation d'un premier salon dans le métro de Montréal par les Métiers d'art du Québec

**Tableau 1 (suite)**

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1972	Adoption de la Loi sur les biens culturels (remplaçant celle de 1922) et création de la Commission des biens culturels
1973	Tenue du premier Salon des artisans de Québec, organisé par la Corporation des artisans de Québec
1974	Création du Service des inventaires relevant du directeur général du patrimoine (reprise de l'inventaire arrêté par Morisset en 1969)
1975	Création du Service de l'artisanat et des métiers d'art au ministère des Affaires culturelles
1978	Création de la Direction des arts de l'environnement du ministère des Affaires culturelles : Service de l'artisanat et des métiers d'art, Service des arts visuels, Service design et architecture
1979	Adoption de la Loi sur l'aménagement et l'urbanisme Fondation du Conseil de l'artisanat et des métiers d'art du Québec (CAMAQ) par les associations régionales Mise sur pied du Centre de conservation et de restauration du Québec (CCQ)
1980	Fondation du Conseil des arts textiles
1981	Fermeture de la Centrale d'artisanat du Québec
1984	Fondation du Conseil des métiers d'art du Québec (novembre)
1986	Création du Conseil des métiers d'art du Québec Création du Comité consultatif de la formation professionnelle des adultes en métiers d'art (MMSR) Signature d'une convention de coopération pour le développement des métiers d'art entre le Québec et la France (MCC)
2000	Remise de la proposition du Groupe-conseil sur la Politique du patrimoine culturel du Québec, sous la présidence de Roland Arpin, <i>Notre patrimoine, un présent du passé : communiquer, transmettre, créer</i>

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**Quelques grands chantiers**

*Dans le domaine du patrimoine, la fonction « inventaire » sert en quelque sorte de fondement à l'acquisition des connaissances<sup>23</sup>.*

De 1922 à 1930, la Commission des monuments historiques du Québec réalise un nombre impressionnant de travaux sous l'impulsion de l'archiviste Pierre-Georges Roy. Ces travaux correspondent aux premiers inventaires québécois des richesses « historiques et artistiques »<sup>24</sup>. En 1937 est lancé « l'inventaire des ressources naturelles » qui se subdivise en deux volets : l'inventaire des œuvres d'art, par Gérard Morisset<sup>25</sup>, et l'inventaire de l'artisanat, par Jean-Marie Gauvreau<sup>26</sup>. Plusieurs années

seront consacrées à ce travail majeur. Jusqu'en 1969, Gérard Morisset s'applique à « mettre sur fiches un patrimoine historique révolu »<sup>27</sup>. Jean-Marie Gauvreau, pour sa part, écrit qu'il « entendait plutôt documenter un patrimoine pour le faire renaître et lui donner un avenir ».<sup>28</sup> Il travaille à cette fin jusqu'en 1944 en menant des enquêtes de type ethnographique auprès de la population des différentes régions du Québec.

*Pour construire la société idéale, ils [les hommes] pensent nécessaire de faire d'abord l'inventaire exhaustif des connaissances accumulées par l'humanité, comme si cette collecte scrupuleuse et raisonnée devait susciter, par la confrontation multipliée des données, une intelligence nouvelle du monde, et, partant, la sagesse des gouvernants<sup>29</sup>.*

Même si la découverte de la culture québécoise ne semble jamais finie, une autre étape se dessine avec la « révolution tranquille »<sup>30</sup>. La Seconde Guerre mondiale a permis une ouverture sur le monde et la période de prospérité qui s'ensuit offre l'accessibilité aux biens de consommation et aux modes internationales. Durant les années 1950 se côtoient des pratiques traditionnelles plus timides et des façons de faire nouvelles.

Ce chevauchement se poursuit durant une vingtaine d'années en exerçant un mouvement d'aller-retour entre le traditionnel et le moderne. Les années 1945 à 1965 voient les objets industriels dépasser les objets traditionnels et artisanaux. La ménagère de cette époque préférera le mobilier du commerce, entre autres proposé dans les catalogues commerciaux, et une lingerie domestique différente de celle de sa mère. Les enquêtes qui se poursuivent sur le terrain sont menées en milieu rural, la ville ne représentant alors pas d'intérêt pour les scientifiques. L'exposition universelle, qui se tient à Montréal en 1967, fait découvrir aux Québécois que leurs traditions et leur artisanat peuvent côtoyer les savoir-faire des autres pays sans empêcher l'accès à la vie moderne.

Comme dans les années 1930, les années 1970 voient renaître cette préoccupation de reconnaissance des patrimoines, soutenue par une volonté politique. La différence est que cette décennie, beaucoup plus prospère que la précédente, fait montre d'une effervescence où le goût de se connaître est soutenu non seulement par une volonté politique, à saveur nationaliste encore plus marquée qu'elle ne l'avait été précédemment, mais aussi par une motivation populaire de collectivités, jeunes en majorité, qui souhaitent s'assumer.

Divers inventaires sont lancés parallèlement à l'échelle canadienne et québécoise. Sous l'égide du gouvernement fédéral se poursuivent de grands inventaires, plusieurs toujours actifs, des lieux historiques nationaux, des gares patrimoniales, des personnes et des événements. S'ajoutent de nombreux inventaires circonscrits qui ont mené à maintes études en culture matérielle sous la responsabilité, notamment, de spécialistes œuvrant au Musée national de l'Homme à Ottawa<sup>31</sup>.

En 1975 commence une tournée du Québec ayant pour objectif d'inventorier les croix de chemins, sous la direction de Jean Simard<sup>32</sup>. S'ensuivent l'inventaire des métiers artisanaux<sup>33</sup>, l'inventaire systématique des artisans traditionnels de l'est du Québec<sup>34</sup>, etc. Ces nombreux inventaires s'inscrivent dans une opération

d'ensemble, *Le Macro-inventaire du patrimoine québécois*<sup>35</sup>, qui comporte plusieurs volets : paysage architectural, inventaire des œuvres d'art, histoire et archéologie, etc. Le volet ethnologique est spécialement dirigé par Bernard Genest. L'ouvrage *Guide d'inventaire des objets mobiliers* complète bien la présentation des concepts et de la démarche ; en effet, toute cette pratique donne lieu à une réflexion qui a favorisé le développement de méthodes et d'analyses devenues des références dans le cadre de la pratique ethnologique<sup>36</sup>.

### Apprendre et enseigner<sup>37</sup>

La découverte par les Québécois de leurs arts et la prise de contact avec le terrain et les régions ouvrent un dialogue entre la culture populaire et la culture savante. La rencontre d'informateurs, qui racontent et chantent pour les enquêteurs intéressés, permet d'étendre l'investigation aux objets, inscrits dans des pratiques ludiques ou quotidiennes. Les textiles et le costume seront parmi les premiers artefacts à retenir l'attention<sup>38</sup>.

### Diverses voies de transmission des savoir-faire développées au fil du temps

La sensibilisation à la culture canadienne-française et l'enseignement des traditions ne passent pas d'abord par les établissements d'études supérieures. Des écoles spécialisées et des groupes institués comme les Cercles de fermières, par exemple, s'en donnent la mission. Progressivement, le gouvernement, que ce soit par les ministères de l'Agriculture, des Terres et Forêts, du Tourisme, de l'Instruction publique ou de la Culture, apportera son renfort en créant, entre autres, des instances particulières de reconnaissance et de valorisation des « biens culturels »<sup>39</sup>.

Au début du siècle naissent aussi des associations et organismes supportés par le gouvernement, comme les Cercles de fermières, que les agronomes Georges Bouchard et Alphonse Désilets mettent sur pied dans le but « de promouvoir des petites industries rurales par les fermières »<sup>40</sup>. On organise des salons pour présenter les réalisations de ces dames et quelques « chefs-d'œuvre » qui mériteront des prix. En dehors des couvents de filles sont fondées des écoles spécialisées, comme l'École des arts domestiques dont le premier directeur est Oscar Bériau, qui se fera notamment connaître par ses publications sur la teinture et le tissage<sup>41</sup>.



Les années 1930 s'avèrent une période cruciale pour la redécouverte, la diffusion et la valorisation des techniques artisanales. Notons l'ouverture de l'École du meuble par Jean-Marie Gauvreau, le lancement de la revue *Paysana* (1938-1950) par la journaliste et communicatrice Françoise Gaudet-Smet, la création des premiers ateliers-écoles du gouvernement en région, comme celui de sculpture à Saint-Jean-Port-Joli, la présence de l'artisanat québécois hors frontières, sous la responsabilité du ministère du Tourisme, les festivals sur les arts et les traditions populaires organisés au Château Frontenac à Québec.

L'époque de l'Entre-deux-guerres se caractérise par le contraste grandissant entre la tradition et le modernisme qui entre de plus en plus au Québec comme ailleurs. Le poids des traditions est encore lourd, jusqu'à ce que la population rurale gagne massivement la ville. L'éducation en matière de traditions se limite alors à ce qui se fait au sein du giron familial, ébranlé par l'exode rural des jeunes, et par certaines organisations en milieu scolaire féminin (couvents, écoles ménagères) ou dans un cadre gouvernemental (cours du ministère de l'Agriculture, Cercles de fermières). Le 2<sup>e</sup> Congrès de la langue française au Canada, qui se tient à Québec en 1937 et dont Luc Lacourcière rédige et édite le compte rendu, est un événement marquant pour la conscientisation à l'importance de la culture.

Par la suite, les années 1940 et 1950 consacrent l'intérêt envers la culture populaire en la faisant entrer officiellement à l'université. Les cours alors offerts à l'Université Laval mènent à la création des Archives de folklore, qui deviendront un pôle central de formation et de diffusion des traditions francophones en Amérique du Nord.

L'activité créatrice, encouragée, donne des fruits<sup>42</sup>. Des coopératives d'artisans s'organisent, une Centrale d'artisanat voit le jour, de même qu'un Institut des arts appliqués. Ce développement se poursuit jusqu'aux années 1970, alors que les gouvernements provincial et fédéral investissent dans la recherche et dans la mise en valeur, comme nous le verrons plus loin.

Par la suite, on assiste à une stabilisation des activités de promotion proprement dites en cette matière. En continuant son chemin, la culture matérielle passe par d'autres intérêts, ceux de la géographie culturelle et ceux de l'archéologie. Si on prend les salons d'artisans comme repères indicatifs, l'artisanat se rapproche de nouveau des arts spécialisés en s'éloignant quelque peu des arts domestiques. Cependant, il est important

de nuancer en soulignant l'intérêt croissant pour un certain retour au plaisir de la création individuelle en milieu privé, que ce soit par la fabrication de vêtements, de mobilier ou de conserves fines, par exemple. Cela semble s'inscrire dans la recherche d'équilibre entre l'internationalisation et la régionalisation<sup>43</sup>.

En effet, le contexte qui prévaut depuis quelques années, à savoir le courant d'internationalisation favorisant la suppression des frontières et la constitution de divers regroupements en même temps que l'affirmation de nationalismes, amène les individus tant à adopter des comportements partagés entre plusieurs cultures et à en emprunter qu'à actualiser certaines pratiques traditionnelles. Les pratiques alimentaires nous en fournissent de bons exemples, alors qu'une éducation populaire se fait par les médias et les publications de toutes sortes, d'une part pour montrer ou « réapprendre » à manger des produits connus pour leurs effets bénéfiques sur la santé et d'autre part pour découvrir des goûts nouveaux qui seront mêlés à ceux acquis dès l'enfance. On retrouve alors sur les tables plus de produits régionaux, tirés des terroirs locaux, de même que des produits méditerranéens, par exemple ; cela suggère de faire la cuisine différemment des manières acquises et de manger autrement.

### Des thèmes et des approches

Jules-David Prown démontre que l'étude de la culture matérielle, comme façon d'examiner la culture, se situe entre l'histoire et l'anthropologie culturelles. Pour illustrer ce propos, je me référerai surtout aux enseignements prodigués à l'Université Laval depuis 1937, renforcés par la création des Archives de folklore et des programmes de formation en *études canadiennes*, *ethnographie traditionnelle*, *arts et traditions populaires* et *ethnologie* (du Québec et des francophones en Amérique du Nord)<sup>44</sup>.

Dans le milieu universitaire, les arts, entre autres populaires, ont retenu très tôt l'attention<sup>45</sup> et les pratiques techniques ont suivi<sup>46</sup>. Les textiles artisanaux repérés lors d'enquêtes sur le terrain par Barbeau en sont un bon exemple. L'une des premières vues générales de la culture matérielle figure dans la thèse de doctorat de Nora Dawson (1955)<sup>47</sup>. Cette recherche est considérée comme l'un des premiers travaux universitaires à traiter d'un ensemble de faits de culture au regard de la culture matérielle<sup>48</sup>. Cette thèse servira de modèle pendant plusieurs années.

En 1958, Robert-Lionel Séguin introduit l'étude des techniques agricoles, se préoccupant des outils

**Tableau 2**  
**Formation et diffusion des traditions artisanales**

Ces quelques jalons sont tirés en bonne partie de l'ouvrage de Louise Saint-Pierre *Bibliographie québécoise de l'artisanat et des métiers d'art (1968-1985)* (Québec : Centre de formation et de consultation en métiers d'art, 1986). Voir « Repères historiques », par Cyril Simard et Jean-Louis Bouchard, p. iii-viii.

- 1905 Fondation des écoles d'agriculture par Mgr J.-C. Allard, avec la collaboration des religieuses de la congrégation Notre-Dame, à Saint-Pascal-de-Kamouraska
- 1906 Création de The Canadian Handicraft Guild, la Guilde canadienne des métiers d'art, à Montréal  
Exposition permanente de produits de métiers d'art et galerie d'artefacts inuits et amérindiens
- 1915 Fondation des Cercles des fermières par Georges Bouchard et Alphonse Désilets
- 1929 Fondation de l'École des arts domestiques par le Service d'économie domestique du ministère de l'Agriculture, à la demande des Cercles de fermières (directeur : Oscar-A. Bériau)
- 1935 Création de l'École du meuble à Montréal par Jean-Marie Gauvreau
- 1938 Fondation de la revue *Paysana* (publiée jusqu'en 1949) par Françoise Gaudet-Smet
- 1939 Création des premiers ateliers-écoles du gouvernement à Saint-Jean-Port-Joli (directeur : Médard Bourgault) et à Pointe-au-Pic (directeur : Georges-Édouard Tremblay)  
Première participation officielle, sous la responsabilité du ministère du Tourisme, de l'artisanat québécois à une manifestation hors frontières, au World's Fair (États-Unis)
- 1940 Début de l'enseignement du folklore à l'Université Laval
- 1941 Ouverture du « Beaumanoir » par Paul Gouin et exposition des collections du patrimoine *Collection Canadiana*.
- 1943 Parution de l'ouvrage de Marius Barbeau *Nos arts populaires : rustiques, professionnels*
- 1944 Fondation des Archives de folklore de l'Université Laval par le vice-recteur de l'Université, Mgr Félix-A. Savard (premier directeur : Luc Lacourcière)
- 1945 Fondation de la première coopérative des arts domestiques à Québec  
Début de la section Céramique à l'École du meuble  
Création par le ministère de l'Industrie et du Commerce d'un organisme consultatif, l'Office provincial de l'artisanat et de la petite industrie (premier président : Jean-Marie Gauvreau)  
Certificat d'études supérieures canadiennes-françaises
- 1947 Début de la section Tissage à l'École du meuble
- 1950 Ouverture de la Centrale d'artisanat du Québec à Montréal, sur la rue Sherbrooke
- 1958 Création de l'Institut des arts appliqués du Québec, qui sera annexé en 1968 au Cégep du Vieux-Montréal (directeur : Paul Sauvé)
- 1964 Institution de la licence ès lettres en études canadiennes à l'Université Laval

**Tableau 2 (suite)**

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1970	Fondation de l'Association de la ceinture fléchée du Québec par Lucien Desmarais
1971	Début d'une mise en valeur intensive du patrimoine et de formation dans ce cadre par Parcs Canada Début du projet Relance des métiers d'art dans l'Est du Québec
1972	Formation de 12 CRÉA (entreprises de création, recherche, éducation, artisanat) par la Centrale d'artisanat du Québec
1976	Fondation du Centre d'études sur la langue, les arts et les traditions populaires des francophones en Amérique du Nord (CÉLAT) à l'Université Laval
1977	Formation du Comité de travail sur l'artisanat et les métiers d'art
1980	Lancement du programme de développement de la production des ateliers, préparé conjointement par la Direction des arts de l'environnement (Service des métiers d'art) et la Société de développement des industries culturelles (SODIC)
1981	Tenue du premier salon Plein-Art à Québec Fondation du Centre de valorisation du patrimoine vivant (CVPV) à Québec
1982	Création des trois prix d'excellence par le Salon des artisans de Québec : le prix Alcan Design métiers d'art, le prix Labatt attribué à la production, le Prix de l'Intendant Talon attribué à la relève
1984	Établissement de deux centres désignés de formation : l'Institut des métiers d'art (IMA), rattaché au Cégep du Vieux-Montréal, pour la région de l'Ouest du Québec, et le Centre de formation et de consultation en métiers d'art (CFCMA), rattaché au Collège de Limoilou, pour la région de l'Est du Québec Fondation des écomusées par Cyril Simard

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et des produits. Sa thèse sur l'habitant<sup>49</sup> marque une étape importante dans la recherche. S'inscrivant dans une perspective historique, les travaux de Séguin ouvrent un champ d'investigation, mais sont perçus comme se situant entre l'histoire et l'ethnographie. La recherche s'oriente vers une ethnologie historique où les documents d'archives prennent une place appréciable. Mais Séguin travaillera de plus en plus près des personnes et des objets, que sa collaboration avec l'Institut des arts appliqués, lors de l'inventaire et la présentation de la collection Gauvreau en 1963-1964, lui fera aimer puis collectionner. L'ère des recherches qui puisent aux sources historiques, particulièrement aux inventaires de biens après décès, prend son essor. Robert-Lionel Séguin, un historien de formation, surnommé par le poète Gaston Miron « historien de l'identité et de l'appartenance »<sup>50</sup>, réalise plusieurs études qui attestent cette présence et cette influence française. Considéré par Jean-Claude Dupont comme le premier chercheur

ayant su faire parler les documents figurés, Séguin est homme de terrain et porte une affection profonde et sincère aux gens du peuple qu'il juge détenteurs d'un savoir ancestral précieux<sup>51</sup>. On pourra estimer que les recherches de Robert-Lionel Séguin sont prétextes à dépeindre le visage français des Canadiens.

Quelques années plus tard, avec l'arrivée de Jean-Claude Dupont à l'Université Laval en 1968, se développe le secteur d'art et technologie déjà ouvert en 1964 avec le costume et le folklore matériel traité par Madeleine Doyon. Séguin et Dupont entretiendront une collaboration professionnelle complémentaire.

C'est en effet avec Jean-Claude Dupont que le domaine particulier de la technologie culturelle prend de l'importance. Respectueux des travaux de Séguin, il s'appuie surtout sur ceux du Français Leroi-Gourhan et sur ceux de l'Américain Henry Glassie avec qui il se sent des affinités, d'ailleurs partagées. La direction du

CÉLAT, qu'il assume entre 1977 et 1983, est une période marquante pour le développement des études en culture matérielle, alors que des recherches se poursuivent sur à peu près tous les thèmes relatifs aux matières premières<sup>52</sup>, aux productions domestiques<sup>53</sup>, à l'environnement domestique régional<sup>54</sup>. Une centaine de thèses se font sous la direction de Dupont<sup>55</sup>. Il est aussi important de souligner que, par ses tableaux et les séries de petits ouvrages thématiques qu'il publie, Jean-Claude Dupont assure une diffusion très large de coutumes, de légendes et de traditions illustrées de culture matérielle.

À l'orée d'une époque effervescente des années 1970, Jean Simard se joint à l'équipe de l'Université Laval et collabore étroitement avec Jean-Claude Dupont. Tous deux sont parties prenantes des grands inventaires. Tous deux considèrent essentiel le rapport entre les aspects proprement matériels et spirituels des objets. Tous deux dirigent plusieurs thèses dans cet esprit. Tous deux entretiennent des liens étroits avec le marché du travail et sont reconnus comme experts et personnes-ressources dans le milieu du patrimoine.

Les grands inventaires auxquels ils contribuent largement les amènent à structurer la matière selon des classifications raisonnées et à publier plusieurs ouvrages marquants. Pour l'un, ce sont les métiers artisanaux qui retiennent surtout l'attention ; pour l'autre, ce sont les signes matériels de pratiques dévotives. Les deux s'intéressent à diverses formes de l'art populaire.

D'autres chercheurs, en particulier Marcel Moussette, chef de file de l'archéologie historique<sup>56</sup>, Laurier Turgeon, ethno-historien qui a travaillé sur les transferts culturels<sup>57</sup>, Michel Lessard, ethnologue dont l'œuvre est teintée d'histoire et d'histoire de l'art<sup>58</sup>, et John Porter, historien d'art qui a su réhabiliter le mobilier victorien et développer une analyse de cette époque galvaudée<sup>59</sup>, méritent que leur contribution à la connaissance de la culture matérielle soit soulignée.

Si les champs de la culture orale ont surtout été étudiés au moyen de la méthode historico-géographique, deux autres méthodes sont à retenir comme étant caractéristiques de la démarche lavalloise en matière de culture matérielle. D'abord, le développement d'une méthode descriptive détaillée et de l'analyse formelle qui y est rattachée, laquelle rejoint celle qui est présentée par Prown<sup>60</sup>. Ensuite, le traitement par croisement méthodologique, qui emprunte à l'histoire, à l'histoire de l'art

ou à la géographie culturelle, rejoignant ainsi l'interprétation culturelle qui permet tant l'analyse des symboles<sup>61</sup> que l'analyse de contextes particuliers<sup>62</sup>.

## Diffuser et mettre en valeur

### De l'objet témoin à l'objet symbole

L'étonnement des premières découvertes de Marius Barbeau porte sur les arts en général puis sur ce qu'il considère comme des chefs-d'œuvre de l'artisanat. La sculpture statuaire notamment et les arts de l'aiguille développés par les religieuses au Régime français amènent Barbeau à écrire sur les *Saintes artisanes*<sup>63</sup>. Mais ce monde des arts mène à celui de l'artisanat. Les couvertures tissées et particulièrement la couverture « boutonnée », aussi appelée « bouclée par la trame » ou « boutonnée », incarnent bien ce passage d'œuvres savantes, d'écoles et d'artistes aux ouvrages dont la technique est transmise dans un contexte d'abord familial, de génération en génération. « Au cours de ses pérégrinations à travers le Québec, vers 1917, à la recherche de chansons de folklore et d'artisanat domestique, monsieur Marius Barbeau a trouvé dans plusieurs foyers, particulièrement dans le comté de Charlevoix, des couvre-lits tissés au point "boutonné". »<sup>64</sup>

La valorisation de la production domestique et artisanale s'inscrit tout à fait dans le contexte de valorisation globale de la culture de tradition française et dans l'esprit d'une sauvegarde, voire d'une renaissance des valeurs traditionnelles, particulièrement en milieu rural. « Les arts textiles n'ont pas été négligés durant ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler la renaissance des arts rustiques, qui a commencé au Québec, dans les années 1930, pour prendre de l'ampleur dans celles qui ont suivi. »<sup>65</sup>

La période de la Crise a favorisé ce phénomène en ce sens que les problèmes ressentis par les agriculteurs ont poussé les gouvernements à trouver des moyens de diversifier l'économie tout en tentant de maintenir à la fois une tradition menacée par les produits industriels proposés en série et par un exode des jeunes vers les villes dans l'espoir de trouver un travail qui les ferait mieux vivre que les seuls produits de la terre paternelle.

La création des Cercles de fermières (1915) ainsi que la publication de périodiques bien diffusés dans de nombreux foyers, comme le *Bulletin des agriculteurs* (1905) et, plus tard, *Paysana* (1937) de Françoise Gaudet-Smet, ont



incité les femmes à retourner à leur métier à tisser et à leur aiguille pour « retrouver » les techniques perdues et pour faire œuvre de création. On a donc voulu animer l'ingéniosité populaire, faire créer et recréer.

C'est ainsi qu'on voit apparaître une production typée, conforme aux enseignements prodigués par le ministère de l'Agriculture du Québec tout spécialement, qui invitait des techniciennes d'autres pays pour montrer aux femmes d'ici diverses techniques des sciences domestiques.

La fabrication de tapis et de courtépintes, entre autres, est le reflet de cet enseignement qui vise non seulement à sauvegarder certaines connaissances passées, mais aussi à favoriser l'ingéniosité par la récupération et à promouvoir la créativité. On tente ainsi de refaire le lien entre activités domestiques, art et artisanat. L'intérêt envers l'objet pour lui-même laisse se révéler ce qu'il représente par sa matière, sa technique, son décor. L'objet renferme une histoire et devient le témoin d'une époque et d'un genre de vie.

Après l'émerveillement des découvertes et la satisfaction de s'être rendu compte qu'ils possédaient aussi un patrimoine digne de ce nom, les Québécois sont poussés surtout par des motivations de sauvegarde à prendre les objets à témoin de leurs traditions et à s'acharner à retrouver des caractéristiques d'origine française.

Jean-Marie Gauvreau contribue à valoriser et à recréer le patrimoine matériel du Québec.

*Parmi tous les caractères de nos origines françaises, l'artisanat est incontestablement un des plus nobles héritages [...] Les récentes expositions nous ont révélé que l'artisanat, dans la diversité de ses techniques, mobilier, tissage, céramique, sculpture, etc. est en progression constante. On a donc raison d'applaudir à ses succès*<sup>66</sup>.

Les enquêtes qu'il mène sur l'artisanat dans les diverses régions du Québec le font entrer en contact avec les gens du milieu. Au début de sa démarche, lorsqu'il se présente comme fonctionnaire du gouvernement provincial, il est mal reçu car on craint de fâcheuses conséquences, comme des réclamations indues de taxes. Conscient du problème, Gauvreau modifie alors sa démarche et tait la référence au gouvernement, ce qui lui permet d'établir des contacts plus spontanés. Ses enquêtes laissent « le premier corpus ethnographique qui associe objets et savoir-faire recueillis in vivo dans leur contexte fonctionnel »<sup>67</sup>.

Quelques passionnés participent ainsi, par leurs relevés et leurs enquêtes, à la découverte et à la

reconstitution du patrimoine matériel du Québec. C'est la recherche du fait français, allant même jusqu'à nier toute influence autre que française. Au cours des années 1940 et 1950, maints thèmes ont servi l'optique de la reconstruction d'un patrimoine aux origines françaises. Dans cet esprit, évacuant rapidement la présence anglaise, Madeleine Doyon écrit en 1946 :

*[...] si l'on n'a pas trouvé de costumes... c'est que peut-être on ne les a suffisamment cherchés. Nos pères ont certainement apporté, avec les autres traditions, les costumes de régions de France qu'ils avaient quittées. [...] À la conquête anglaise, le Canada vit dans un isolement quasi absolu par rapport à la France. Le souvenir des modes des vieux pays s'efface peu à peu de la mémoire populaire. L'imagination de nos pères s'exerce désormais sur nos propres textiles [...]*<sup>68</sup>

Madeleine Doyon instaure un cours sur l'histoire du costume. Ses enquêtes sur le terrain l'amènent vite à présenter un costume de type régional, à l'instar des pratiques européennes traditionnelles qu'elle connaît très bien puisqu'elle entretient des liens avec le milieu scientifique européen en cette matière, notamment par la participation à divers congrès. Son influence sera grande comme personne-ressource, d'une part à l'occasion de l'organisation de festivals et de fêtes commémoratives, comme les centenaires, et d'autre part auprès de troupes de danses folkloriques.

L'interprétation des objets dépend du rapport qu'on entretient avec eux. Pour les uns, ils sont souvenirs personnels, objets de valeur estimables ou représentations historiques et sociales qui font figure de symboles identitaires. Pour les autres, ils sont images à effacer ou réalités à oublier.

La ceinture fléchée est un bon exemple d'objet qui inspire des sentiments contradictoires. Lorsque Marius Barbeau publie *Ceinture fléchée* en 1945<sup>69</sup>, il poursuit plusieurs buts, dont celui de faire renaître cette technique particulière. À la suite d'Édouard-Zotique Massicotte qui a écrit en 1907<sup>70</sup>, puis en 1924<sup>71</sup>, sur la ceinture fléchée en faisant entre autres appel à ses souvenirs, Barbeau reprend ce sujet pour s'attarder sur sa technique à peu près perdue, sur son histoire complexe et sur l'intérêt de faire revivre cet artisanat particulier, producteur d'un chef-d'œuvre négligé. Dans sa thèse de doctorat, Monique Genest-LeBlanc s'applique à démontrer, notamment, que la ceinture fléchée est un symbole ambivalent, positif pour les uns

et négatif pour les autres. Elle précise : « Si le symbole est un signe qui représente quelque chose, il peut être arbitrairement choisi, mais il suggère une idée, une appartenance. C'est même à partir d'objets d'usage courant que les symboles peuvent prendre forme; lorsqu'ils sont convoités et possédés par d'autres, ils prennent une signification différente. »<sup>72</sup> Alors que la ceinture fléchée semble tomber dans l'oubli, une octogénaire décide en 1967 d'en confectionner une – elle est une des rares personnes à posséder encore les secrets de la technique – pour l'offrir en cadeau au Québec. Elle déclenche alors un mouvement qui mène à la création de cours et à des rassemblements. Une association est créée sous cette impulsion par Lucien Desmarais, en 1972. Des publications voient le jour et on assiste à une production nouvelle et actualisée. « Tout cela [est] un second souffle à l'instauration de cours à l'école des arts et métiers par Jean-Marie Gauvreau en 1939 et au ministère de l'agriculture à Québec par Germaine Galerneau, engagée comme enseignante »<sup>73</sup>. Pourtant, cette tentative ne réussit pas à réhabiliter la ceinture fléchée comme chef-d'œuvre de confection artisanale. Elle demeure plutôt un symbole passéiste qui ne peut plus répondre aux exigences de la vie moderne en raison notamment de sa difficulté d'exécution et de son prix élevé<sup>74</sup>.

L'appropriation des traditions est donc variable dans la population. Certains sont plus sensibles à la poussée de la modernisation et à la pression des modes. Grosso modo, les années 1920, 1940, 1960, 1990 auront été moins favorables au discours de valorisation des traditions, si ce n'est, pour la dernière période, des traditions régionales du monde. L'adoption de celles-ci, dans les façons d'habiter un lieu, de se vêtir ou de manger, témoignent de l'ouverture qu'on veut se donner, à la différence du repli sur soi que semble signifier le fait de privilégier ses propres traditions.

Le désir de repérer des traits marquants pousse donc les collectivités à retenir et à consacrer, ou à l'inverse à rejeter, certains objets comme des symboles.

*L'objet matériel examiné sous différents angles, témoigne à plusieurs points de vue. Pris isolément, sa morphologie est déjà significative, mais, relevé dans son contexte de fonctionnement technologique et associé aux circonstances d'utilisation, il revêt toute sa valeur de document figuré et peut alors servir à la connaissance de l'homme, seule raison d'être de son étude*<sup>75</sup>.

## Rendre à César...

En 1942, Luc Lacourcière souhaite

*[...] un inventaire scientifique et complet du folklore, un enseignement qui en ferait valoir toutes les richesses, outre l'aliment spécifiquement américain qu'il donnerait à nos beaux-arts, rendrait au peuple, dans l'avenir, une partie des biens qu'il nous a légués*<sup>76</sup>.

Trente ans plus tard, après plusieurs publications, des cours, des expositions, des salons, etc. s'ouvre une ère de mise en valeur des patrimoines. Parcs Canada et le ministère des Affaires culturelles du Québec jouent un rôle majeur dans ce développement et pour l'avancement des connaissances, entre autres avec la mise en valeur de sites comme le Fort Chambly, le Parc Cartier-Brébeuf, les Forges du Saint-Maurice, la Place Royale à Québec, le Vieux-Québec, le Vieux-Montréal, etc. Plusieurs spécialistes faisant carrière à l'un ou l'autre des paliers de gouvernement contribuent à exploiter des fonds documentaires jusque là ignorés et à mettre au point diverses méthodes, et publient nombre d'ouvrages. En partenariat avec l'Université, ces chercheurs-praticiens, souvent regroupés en équipes multidisciplinaires, permettent d'enrichir la formation des étudiants, à tous les cycles d'études, et participent à leur encadrement.

Des archéologues, des ethnologues et des historiens forment des équipes qui travailleront à constituer des dossiers documentaires pour servir à la connaissance de sites bien identifiés, puis à leur reconstitution et à leur interprétation.

Selon Philippe Dubé et Raymond Montpetit, qui signent la préface de *Patrimoine muséologique au Québec : repères chronologiques*, la muséologie aurait commencé son nid bien avant la mise sur pied d'un réseau muséal<sup>77</sup>. Grâce à un certain nombre de collectionneurs, plusieurs musées sont nés et continuent de se développer<sup>78</sup>. Les maisons d'enseignement ont aussi fourni une contribution importante en présentant aux élèves, et parfois au grand public, des collections à vocation pédagogique, mais qui n'en avaient pas moins le mérite de diffuser des éléments de la culture. Des musées à caractère commercial ont soulevé l'intérêt du public en s'adressant « au goût populaire pour les curiosités »<sup>79</sup>. La volonté politique des gouvernements a incité à la mise sur pied de réseaux et d'institutions nationales. Le contexte socio-économique aidant, des musées régionaux ont aussi vu le jour en s'appuyant fortement sur les collections locales et sur

des amateurs éclairés. À ce jour, plus de 450 institutions muséales existent au Québec.

Du côté de la population, toutes les actions posées depuis que Barbeau et ses disciples ont pénétré dans les campagnes en quête de diverses formes d'expressions originales de la culture lui ont fait prendre conscience non seulement de la richesse de ses traditions, mais aussi du potentiel d'exploitation, au sens large, que celles-ci représentent.

Curieux et poussés par quelque motivation scientifique ou politique, les chercheurs qui parcourent le terrain en quête de matière originale font en même temps œuvre de sensibilisation et de valorisation. Ce sont eux qui ont réveillé la fierté nationale et régionale. Ces enquêtes et ces inventaires ont produit l'effet d'une sensibilisation générale. L'exercice qui visait à demander de livrer des connaissances et de présenter les biens patrimoniaux a fait en sorte que plusieurs se sont rendu compte de l'intérêt de s'en occuper. Se réclamant de l'originalité dégagée, des individus et des groupes se sont alors mobilisés pour agir sur ce patrimoine méconnu, oublié, méprisé<sup>80</sup>.

C'est ainsi que des personnes se sont remises à entretenir la croix de chemin plantée jadis sur leur terrain, que d'autres sont retournées au coffre d'outils laissé par le grand-père, qu'un bon nombre a suivi des formations pour réapprendre à tisser au métier, que des familles entières se sont partagé les vieux meubles du grenier, etc. Les communautés locales et régionales ont aussi contribué à la mise sur pied de petits musées thématiques, au développement de petites et moyennes entreprises basées sur la fabrication de produits du terroir et à la mise en valeur des patrimoines bâtis, mobilier, textile, photographique, etc. Les traditions sont devenues une source de fierté et une ressource pour constituer des patrimoines pris au sens de richesses collectives, transmises de génération en génération et susceptibles d'être réintégrées avec profit à la vie moderne.

Les nombreux ouvrages, publiés surtout durant les trente dernières années, sont achetés et lus par une large tranche de la population. On s'en inspire pour restaurer les bâtiments et s'y réfère avant d'acheter des antiquités. Le dialogue, entamé dans les années 1930 et relancé intensivement au cours des années 1970, se poursuit de toutes sortes de façons. L'engagement de certaines institutions et d'individus s'exprime encore dans les diverses régions du Québec ; un bon exemple de ceci est l'activité « Le patrimoine à domicile » proposée par le Musée de la civilisation de

Québec, dans laquelle les personnes intéressées reçoivent de l'information sur les objets apportés à des experts qui se sont spécialement déplacés à cette fin.

Le rapport qui s'est établi entre les intellectuels, les artistes, les fonctionnaires et les Québécois sur le terrain a donc été fécond. Le dialogue qui s'est installé entre eux relevait d'un certain pari, celui de convaincre : en faisant découvrir aux gens ordinaires que leur culture est intéressante et, par là, qu'eux-mêmes le sont, les intellectuels donnent le ton au dialogue. Mais ils ne resteront pas maîtres de la situation.

### Changer le monde

L'arrivée de la télévision force la comparaison entre soi et les autres. S'incarnent, puis se transforment, les images du Canadien, du Québécois, du campagnard, du citadin, des jeunes, des vieux, des familles et de la société en effervescence après cette Seconde Guerre mondiale qui a repoussé les frontières et fait entrer la modernité.

La programmation qui propose des émissions d'information comme l'une des pierres angulaires du nouveau médium fait aussi place au divertissement passif. Entre autres, le téléroman, genre – voire phénomène – devenu fort important au Québec, contribue à remplacer en quelque sorte le conte<sup>81</sup>. Dorénavant au cœur des réunions familiales quotidiennes, la télévision devant laquelle tous et chacun s'assoient pour s'en faire raconter, sert de moyen d'apprentissage, de transmission et d'innovation. Les récits d'époque occupent une large place dès le départ (en 1952) et présentent des reconstitutions plus ou moins fidèles de la vie passée. Cependant, ils laissent de la place à des représentations et à des mises en scènes contemporaines où le traditionnel est bousculé par le moderne.

Le phénomène de la télévision et, par ricochet, celui des téléromans, remodèle les mentalités et fait naître de nombreux clichés qui prennent forme dans certains objets comme le poêle à bois, la berçante, la coiffe et le tablier, la chemise à carreaux ou la pipe de maïs. Les artistes de la scène, pleins d'ingéniosité, s'inspirent de ce qu'ils connaissent, mais le transforment, par commodité, par goût ou, plus ou moins consciemment, pour changer l'idée d'une réalité que l'on veut différente ; le décalage entre la campagne et la ville, entre autres, est mis en évidence. Dépendant du contexte à créer et du message à passer, on rend la scène belle ou misérable, fidèle ou arrangée.

La population entière a ainsi l'occasion de se retrouver dans ce qu'on lui présente, avec bonheur ou dérision. Des symboles se renforcent, d'autres se créent pour former une banque de référents culturels qui changent au fil du temps et dont la perception aussi change. Ainsi, alors que, durant les années 1950 et 1960, les émissions de variété et certains téléromans offraient aux spectateurs des personnages vêtus « à la canadienne », il est maintenant à peu près impossible, au Québec, de concevoir une ceinture fléchée comme un symbole positif<sup>82</sup>.

À l'instar des littéraires qui ont louangé la terre, les traditions et les savoir-faire anciens, les intellectuels ont accordé de la valeur aux témoignages, aux objets quotidiens et aux manières d'être locales. L'avènement de la radio a déjà permis que des personnages « du monde ordinaire » s'expriment, mais l'entrée de la télévision dans les foyers fait beaucoup plus en les montrant, en les replaçant dans leurs demeures à l'image de celles des téléspectateurs. La télévision joue un rôle incontestable dans la valorisation et l'actualisation des traditions, notamment par la reconstitution de décors, de costumes et d'environnements propices aux réminiscences ou à la séduction des spectateurs.

Les artistes et les artisans de la scène jouent un rôle majeur dans la construction des images identitaires projetées dans les médias, particulièrement à la télévision. Les décorateurs, les costumiers, les accessoiristes valorisent, déprécient ou transforment les objets devant donner le ton, créer l'ambiance, suggèrent les attitudes et cela, au risque d'introduire des anachronismes : « [...] tout concourt à prétendre au réalisme ; mais ce travail du vraisemblable en est un de simple camouflage du processus idéologique »<sup>83</sup>.

Derrière une façade de divertissement, la télévision se manifeste clairement comme un système d'influence beaucoup plus large, qui transmet des valeurs, des modes de vie et de pensée, des modèles d'interaction sociale : elle ne se contente pas de présenter sur les ondes des individus bien de chez nous, avec les problèmes et les conflits quotidiens de tout un chacun ; elle les transcende, en quelque sorte pour « vendre » des modes de vie, des images, des symboles. Cette propriété fait de la télévision un phénomène social extrêmement important, parce qu'elle contribue de façon indéniable à l'évolution de la culture, soit en renforçant, soit en modifiant les patterns culturels établis. La télévision suggère à ses spectateurs des valeurs de conduite et des

modèles d'identification : par le divertissement passe donc un message de conformité à un mode de vie suggéré. C'est ce mode de vie, cette image de soi qui est l'enjeu de l'interaction profonde entre les concepteurs des émissions et leurs publics<sup>84</sup>.

Si la télévision joue un rôle majeur dans le dialogue entre la culture populaire et la culture savante, quant à la construction et la reconstruction de l'image qu'on entretient de sa propre culture, le cinéma en fait probablement autant. L'une et l'autre mériteraient une analyse de contenu, sans aucun doute révélatrice quant à la connaissance et la perception de différents volets de cette culture toujours en mouvance. D'une part, les filons de type ethnographique<sup>85</sup> et, d'autre part, tous les films de fiction s'avèrent des objets d'étude fort riches, auxquels il serait par ailleurs intéressant de s'attarder.

## Conclusion

Lorsque Barbeau aborde son terrain, les traditions font partie de la vie privée. Peu à peu, elles sortent de l'ombre, sous l'impulsion de quelques individus curieux, étonnés et convaincus de leur intérêt. Puis le gouvernement lui-même en fait son affaire, créant des institutions, élaborant des lois, promouvant maintes actions favorables à un retour aux sources.

De l'étonnement, on passe à l'enchantement et au désenchantement, en alternance, dépendant du contexte qui prévaut, de valorisation ou de désaveu du passé. La formation est importante pour apprendre, réapprendre, comprendre. Les milieux universitaires et les gouvernements s'appliquent à inventorier pour connaître et pour développer des moyens d'intervention socio-culturels et socio-économiques. Les études qui s'ensuivent conduisent à restituer à la population de qu'elle a livré et même à lui donner davantage en lui faisant redécouvrir certains pans méconnus de la culture.

Pour plusieurs, la culture matérielle se résume aux antiquités. Pour d'autres, elle renvoie à la technologie ou encore à l'artisanat et à l'art populaire. Pour tous, elle représente, même sans l'utilisation de ce vocable, l'environnement d'abord immédiat, quotidien. Elle signifie aussi une réalité plus large, caractérisée par le lieu d'appartenance ou par l'exotisme.

L'objet témoin et l'objet symbole sont conservés par certains, rejetés par d'autres. Mais les courants de mode les réintroduisent avec vigueur ou subrepticement, comme si la modernité ne pouvait se passer de la tradition pour avancer.



## NOTES

1. Dans ce texte, j'évoque certains noms afin de mieux situer les propos, mais je n'ai pas la prétention d'une couverture exhaustive du champ de la culture matérielle et des chercheurs qui s'y sont intéressés. Je tiens à remercier Bernard Genest, responsable des dossiers en patrimoine à la Direction des projets spéciaux et de coordination au ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec, pour l'intérêt qu'il a porté à cet article et pour m'avoir fait bénéficier de ses compétences.
2. Au sens employé par André Leroi-Gourhan dans *Évolution et techniques : l'homme et la matière* (Paris : Albin Michel, 1971), 1<sup>re</sup> édition, 1943, coll. Sciences d'aujourd'hui, p. 27-29.
3. Je retiens deux définitions. 1) Celle de Jean-Claude Dupont : « Par culture matérielle, il faut entendre non seulement l'analyse de l'objet pour lui-même, la description des matériaux, des techniques et du décor, mais aussi ce qu'il révèle quant à l'adaptation au milieu, aux conditions économiques, aux fonctions magiques et religieuses. [...] On étudie donc les objets de la culture matérielle en les associant aux gestes humains, dans leur milieu porteur de rituels et de pratiques transmises et ce, aussi bien dans la période industrielle que préindustrielle. Cette approche [est] dite de "technologie culturelle" », « L'étude de la culture matérielle », *Ethnologies francophones de l'Amérique et d'ailleurs*, sous la direction d'Anne-Marie Desdoutis et de Laurier Turgeon (Québec : Presses de l'Université Laval, 1997), coll. Ethnologie de l'Amérique française, p. 25. 2) Celle de Jules-David Prown : « *Material culture is the study through artifacts of the beliefs – values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions – of a particular community or society at a given time. The term material culture is also frequently used to refer to artifacts themselves, to the body of material available for such study.* », « Mind in Matter : An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method », *Winterthur Portfolio : A Journal of American Material Culture*, vol. 17, n° 1, printemps 1982, p. 1. Il est intéressant de noter que les deux chercheurs considèrent non seulement l'objet lui-même, mais aussi les aspects non tangibles qui s'y rapportent.
4. *Les cultures populaires : introduction et synthèses*, Société d'ethnologie française et Société française de sociologie, colloque à l'Université de Nantes, 9 et 10 juin 1983.
5. Ce concept peut rejoindre celui de « cercles de culture » énoncé par Fernand Dumont : « La culture savante : reconnaissance du terrain », *Questions de culture 1 : cette culture que l'on appelle savante* (Québec : IQRC et Montréal : Leméac, 1981), p. 33.
6. *La notion de culture dans les sciences sociales* (Paris : La Découverte, 1996), p. 70.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
8. *La culture au pluriel* (Paris : Christian Bourgois, [1974], 1980).
9. Fernand Dumont, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
10. Jean-Claude Dupont, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
11. Montréal, 29 juillet 1852, p. 1.
12. *Hier pour demain : arts, traditions et patrimoine* (Paris : Ministère de la culture et de la communication, Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1980), p. 121.
13. « Bio-bibliographie de Marius Barbeau » par Clarisse Cardin. *Les archives de folklore 2 : hommage à Marius Barbeau* (Montréal : Fides, 1947), p. 25.
14. Les travaux amorcés pendant l'Entre-deux-guerres s'intensifieront avec la création des Archives de folklore à l'Université Laval en 1945.
15. Se référer entre autres à l'article de John J. Mannion « Multidisciplinary Dimensions in Material Culture », *Bulletin d'histoire de la culture matérielle*, n° 8 (1979), p. 21-29, numéro spécial : Communications du colloque sur l'histoire de la culture matérielle du Canada du 1<sup>er</sup> au 3 mars 1979.
16. Catherine Pont-Humbert, *Littérature du Québec* (Paris : Nathan, 1998), p. 37.
17. Le tome I rend compte notamment de la connaissance d'une certaine histoire par le roman en faisant référence, par exemple, à Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, *Les anciens Canadiens* (1863) ; le tome II expose « l'esprit nouveau » qui s'amène avec la guerre de 1914. Le roman de Louis Hémon *Maria Chapdelaine*, paru en 1916, propose aussi une nouvelle lecture de la réalité.
18. *Québec où survit l'ancienne France* (Québec : Librairie Garneau, 1937), p. 167.
19. « Une certaine émancipation est de mise aujourd'hui » (Montréal : Librairie d'action canadienne-française, 1929), p. 79.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 32-33.
21. Paul-Louis Martin, « La conservation du patrimoine culturel : origines et évolution », *Les chemins de la mémoire : monuments et sites historiques du Québec*, tome I (Québec : Les Publications du Québec, 1990), p. 8.
22. Voir le texte de Bernard Genest « Patrimoine ethnologique, mémoire des objets », *Les chemins de la mémoire : biens mobiliers du Québec*, tome III (Québec : Publications du Québec, 1999), p. 361-368.
23. *Guide d'inventaire des objets mobiliers*, sous la direction de Bernard Genest (Québec : Publications du Québec, 1994), p. 1.
24. Paul-Louis Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
25. Gérard Morisset, *Rapport de l'inventaire des œuvres d'art* (Québec : ministère des Affaires municipales, de l'Industrie et du Commerce, 1940).
26. Jean-Marie Gauvreau, *Rapport général sur l'artisanat* (Québec : ministère des Affaires municipales, de l'Industrie et du Commerce, 1939).
27. Jean Simard, « Profil historique des inventaires au ministère de la Culture et des Communications », *Guide d'inventaire des objets mobiliers*, sous la direction de Bernard Genest (Québec : Publications du Québec, 1994), Dossiers, coll. Patrimoines, p. 92.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
29. « Au temps des "lumières", un regard déjà ethnographique », *Hier pour demain : arts, traditions et patrimoine* (Paris : Ministère de la culture et de la communication, Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1980), p. 27.
30. Période des années 1960, qualifiée ainsi par les intellectuels, pour signifier une suite rapide de bouleversements, sans révolte apparente, dans la mentalité des Québécois, leurs pratiques traditionnelles et leur adhésion à la modernité.

31. Mentionnons les travaux d'historiens tels que Jean-Pierre Hardy et David-Thierry Ruddell.
32. Jean Simard et Jocelyne Milot, *Les croix de chemin du Québec : inventaire sélectif et trésor* (Québec : gouvernement du Québec, ministère de la Culture et des Communications, 1994), Dossiers, coll. Patrimoines.
33. Cet inventaire a contribué à la publication de quelques ouvrages sur les métiers traditionnels sous la direction du professeur Jean-Claude Dupont : *Les métiers du cuir* (Québec : Presses de l'Université Laval, coll. Ethnologie de l'Amérique française, 1981), *Exercices des métiers du bois* (Québec : Cahiers du CÉLAT, 1986), *Exercices des métiers de la pierre et de l'argile* (Québec : Cahiers du CÉLAT, 1988).
34. Bernard Genest, en collaboration avec René Bouchard, Lise Cyr, Yvan Chouinard, *Les artisans traditionnels de l'est du Québec* (Québec : ministère des Affaires culturelles, [Direction générale du patrimoine], 1979), Les Cahiers du patrimoine 12.
35. Réalisé par le Service du patrimoine du ministère des Affaires culturelles (Québec : Publications du Québec, 1985).
36. Voir *Guide d'inventaire des objets mobiliers*, publié sous la direction de Bernard Genest (Québec : Publications du Québec, 1994), Dossiers, coll. Patrimoines.
37. Différentes synthèses ont déjà été produites ; les suivantes m'ont servi pour cet article : « L'histoire de la culture matérielle » de Jean-Marie Pesez, *La nouvelle histoire* (Paris : CEPL, 1978), coll. Les encyclopédies du savoir moderne, p. 98-132 ; *Le Bulletin d'histoire de la culture matérielle*, n° 8 (1979), numéro spécial : Communications du colloque sur l'histoire de la culture matérielle du Canada du 1<sup>er</sup> au 3 mars 1979 ; Paul-Louis Martin, « L'ethnographie au Québec : bilan critique d'une période (1970-1980) », *Questions de culture 5 : les régions culturelles* (Québec : IQRC, 1984), p. 149-182 ; *L'ethnologie au Québec* (Québec : ministère des Affaires culturelles, 1987) ; le chapitre « L'ethnologie au carrefour des sciences humaines » de Jean-Claude Dupont et Jocelyne Mathieu, *Québec 2000*, sous la direction de Robert Lahaise (Montréal : Hurtubise HMH, 1999), p. 121-144, Cahiers du Québec ; Gérald L. Pocius, « Academic Folklore Research in Canada Trends and Prospects (Part 1) », *Ethnologies*, vol. 22, n° 2 (2000), p. 255-280, et « ... (Part 2) », vol. 23, n° 1 (2001), p. 289-317.
38. Madeleine Doyon « Le costume féminin, documents beaucerons », *Archives de folklore 1* (Montréal : Fides, 1946), p. 112-120 et « Le costume féminin, documents de Charlevoix », *Archives de folklore 2* (Montréal : Fides, 1947), p. 183-189.
39. L'expression « Monuments historiques ou artistiques » utilisée pour nommer le patrimoine a été changée en « Biens culturels » en 1972 lors de l'adoption de la loi qui remplaçait celle de 1922. Réf. Jean Simard, « Profil historique... », p. 94.
40. Yolande Cohen, *Femmes de parole : l'histoire des Cercles de femmes du Québec 1915-1990* (Montréal : Le Jour, 1990), p. 18.
41. *La teinturerie domestique* (1933), *Tissage domestique* (1938) et *Le métier à quatre lames* (1941). Ces ouvrages ont été publiés à Québec par le ministère de l'Agriculture.
42. Louise St-Pierre, *Bibliographie québécoise de l'artisanat et des métiers d'art (1689-1985)* (Québec : Centre de formation et de consultation en métiers d'art, 1986).
43. À propos du phénomène régional, voir entre autres Jocelyne Mathieu « La région culturelle : un terrain ou un concept? Approche ethnologique », dans *La région culturelle : problématique interdisciplinaire*, sous la direction de Fernand Harvey (Québec : CÉFAN et IQRC, 1994), p. 97-110, et le chapitre « Le phénomène régional au Québec, contribution ethnologique », dans *Le phénomène régional au Québec*, sous la direction de Marc Urbain Proulx (Québec : Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1996), p. 157-170.
44. Le parcours dont il est question est consigné dans l'ouvrage manuscrit de Jean Du Berger « Pour une histoire des études de folklore à l'Université Laval » ([1987]), [140 p.].
45. Marius Barbeau s'y est entre autres arrêté. Notons *Maître artisans de chez nous* (Montréal : Éditions du Zodiaque, 1942). À propos de l'intérêt de Barbeau pour les arts québécois, voir Mario Béland, *Marius Barbeau et l'art au Québec : bibliographie analytique et thématique* (Québec : CÉLAT, 1985), Outils de recherche n° 1.
46. En plus de ses recherches sur le costume, Madeleine Doyon s'est entre autres intéressée à la fabrication de la potasse (*Archives de Folklore* n° 4, 1949, p. 29-41) et à la récolte de la gomme de pin (*ibid.*, p. 62-64).
47. *La vie traditionnelle à Saint-Pierre (Île d'Orléans)* (Québec : Presses de l'Université Laval, 1960), *Archives de folklore* n° 8.
48. Sont abordés : l'habitation, le mobilier, l'outillage, les tissus et vêtements, la cuisine, les travaux domestiques, les industries, les métiers proprement dits et l'art populaire.
49. Robert-Lionel Séguin, *La civilisation traditionnelle de l'« habitant » aux 17<sup>e</sup> et 18<sup>e</sup> siècles : fonds matériel* (Montréal : Fides, 1967).
50. Sous la direction de René Bouchard, *La vie quotidienne au Québec : histoire, métiers, techniques et traditions : mélanges à la mémoire de Robert-Lionel Séguin* (Québec : Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1983), p. 3. Publiés sous les auspices de la Société québécoise des ethnologues.
51. Lire l'article de Jean-Claude Dupont, « Un chercheur d'avant-garde », *ibid.*, p. 25-30.
52. Études sur les métiers du fer (PUL, 1979), du cuir (PUL, 1981), du bois (CÉLAT, 1986), de la pierre (CÉLAT, 1988).
53. Notamment au regard de l'alimentation, *Le pain d'habitant* (1974), *Le sucre du pays* (1975), *Le fromage de l'île d'Orléans* (1977), tous parus aux Éditions Leméac de Montréal.
54. En plus de ses ouvrages sur l'Acadie, Dupont a aussi dirigé les travaux sur les corpus régionaux : *Corpus de faits ethnographiques* (Québec : ministère du Loisir, de la Chasse et de la Pêche et Université Laval, CÉLAT), régions de Charlevoix, 2 vol. (1978), du Bas-du-fleuve, 2 vol. (1978), de la Gaspésie, 2 vol. (1981), de l'Outaouais (1981), de l'Estrie (1981), de la Côte-Nord (1981), de Beauce-Dorchester (1982), du Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean (1982), de la Mauricie (1982), des Bois-Francs et du Centre du Québec (1983), de Lanaudière (1983), de Québec (1984), de Montréal (1985).
55. Il fait état de plusieurs d'entre elles ainsi que de nombreuses publications touchant la culture matérielle dans son article portant sur ce sujet dans *Ethnologies francophones de l'Amérique et d'ailleurs*, op. cit.

- La collection Ethnologie de l'Amérique française, qu'il a dirigée aux Presses de l'Université Laval, est importante à cet égard.
56. Pensons aux travaux sur le Palais de l'Intendant ou à son étude sur le chauffage domestique (Québec : PUL, 1983).
  57. *Transferts culturels et métissage Amérique/Europe, XVI<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, avec la collaboration de Denys Delâge et Réal Ouellet (Québec : Presses de l'Université Laval, 1996).
  58. Michel Lessard a publié plusieurs ouvrages qu'il présente dans une perspective chronologique. Soulignons *Encyclopédie des antiquités du Québec : trois siècles de production artisanale* (1971), *Encyclopédie de la maison québécoise : 3 siècles d'habitations* (1972), *Objets anciens du Québec : la vie domestique* (1994), *Antiquités du Québec : objets anciens, vie sociale et culturelle* (1995), *Au carrefour de trois cultures : meubles anciens du Québec, quatre siècles de création* (1999).
  59. *Un art de vivre : le meuble de goût à l'époque victorienne au Québec* (Montréal : Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal et Québec : Musée de la civilisation, 1993).
  60. *Op. cit.*, p. 7-8.
  61. Un bon exemple est l'article de Jean-Claude Dupont sur le tisonnier : « Le sens de l'objet (exemple : le tisonnier) », *Étude de la construction de la mémoire collective des Québécois au 20<sup>e</sup> siècle : approches multidisciplinaires*, sous la direction de Jacques Mathieu, Cahiers du CÉLAT, n° 5 (novembre 1986), p. 169-192.
  62. Par exemple, dans l'ouvrage *Un patrimoine méprisé : la religion des Québécois* de Jean Simard, en collaboration avec Jocelyne Milot et René Bouchard (Montréal : Hurtubise HMH, 1979), Cahiers du Québec, coll. Ethnologie.
  63. *Saintes artisanes 1 : les brodeuses* est paru en 1944 et *Saintes artisanes II : mille petites adresses*, en 1946, aux éditions Fides de Montréal.
  64. Les tisserands-créateurs de Québec, en collaboration avec Michel Laurent, ethnologue, *Boutonné d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*. Préface de Germaine Galerneau, technicienne en sciences domestiques, p. 5.
  65. Plusieurs pages de la publication de Gloria Lesser *École du meuble 1930-1950 : la décoration et les arts décoratifs à Montréal* (Montréal : Musée des arts décoratifs de Montréal, 1989) portent sur l'intégration et le développement des textiles dans l'œuvre de l'École du meuble (entre autres, p. 64-70).
  66. Jean-Marie Gauvreau, « L'artisanat du Québec », *Technique*, n° 24 (1949), p. 537.
  67. Le texte de Jean Simard rend bien compte du travail gigantesque de Jean-Marie Gauvreau, de sa démarche méthodologique et de son apport scientifique. Voir « Profil historique des inventaires au ministère de la Culture et des Communications », chapitre 4 du *Guide d'inventaire des objets mobiliers*, sous la direction de Bernard Genest (Québec : Les Publications du Québec, 1992), Dossiers, coll. Patrimoines.
  68. « Le costume traditionnel féminin : documents beaucerons » recueillis et présentés par Madeleine Doyon, *Les Archives de folklore 1* (Montréal : Fides, 1946), p. 112.
  69. À Montréal, aux Éditions Paysana. L'ouvrage a été réédité en 1973 par l'Étincelle, à Montréal.
  70. Dans le *Bulletin de recherches historiques*, p. 154-156.
  71. Dans les *Mémoires de la Société royale*, section 1, p. 1-13.
  72. *Introduction de la ceinture fléchée chez les Amérindiens : création d'un symbole de statut social*, thèse de doctorat (Ph.D.) (Québec : Université Laval, 1996), p. 181.
  73. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
  74. *Ibid.*, p. 192-193.
  75. Jean-Claude Dupont, « Le sens de l'objet (exemple : le tisonnier) », *Étude de la construction de la mémoire collective des Québécois au 20<sup>e</sup> siècle : approches multidisciplinaires*, sous la direction de Jacques Mathieu, Cahiers du CÉLAT, n° 5 (novembre 1986), p. 169-192.
  76. Jean Du Berger, *op. cit.*
  77. Ouvrage de Cyril Simard, en collaboration avec Andrée Lapointe et Cornéliu Kirjan (Québec : Commission des biens culturels du Québec, 1992).
  78. Richard Dubé, *Trésor de société : les collections du Musée de la civilisation* (Québec : Musée de la civilisation et Fides, 1998), coll. Images de sociétés.
  79. Cyril Simard, *op. cit.*, p. XI.
  80. Qualificatif donné par Jean Simard et son équipe au patrimoine populaire religieux dans *Un Patrimoine méprisé...* (1979).
  81. Jean-Pierre Desaulniers, *De la famille Plouffe à la petite vie* (Montréal : Fides et Québec : Musée de la civilisation, 1996), p. 14.
  82. À ce sujet, la thèse de doctorat de Monique Genest-LeBlanc démontre l'opposition qui existe entre la perception au Québec et dans l'Ouest canadien (1996).
  83. Annie Mear (sous la direction de), « Radioscopie des émissions de télévision », actes du colloque *Recherches québécoises sur la télévision*, manuscrit, tome 1, [1979].
  84. *Ibid.*
  85. Mentionnons notamment ceux d'Albert Tessier, entre les années 1930 et 1950, et ceux de Léo Plamondon, dans les années 1970-1980.

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## **“As the Locusts in Egypt Gathered Crops”: Hooked Mat Mania and Cross-Border Shopping in the Early Twentieth Century**

**SHARON M. H. MACDONALD**

### *Résumé*

*La carpette crochétée, produit domestique artisanal apparu dans le nord-est du Canada et des États-Unis au milieu du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, a connu dans les années 1920 un regain de popularité que les journalistes ont appelé « folie des tapis au crochet ». Dans leur volonté d'exprimer leur antimodernisme, les citadins américains aisés achetaient des produits artisanaux fabriqués par les gens « simples » de la campagne et ont fait de gros bénéfices en revendant ces tapis quand ils sont devenus populaires. Cet article étudie les répercussions sociales, culturelles et économiques de cette « folie » sur les habitants de la Nouvelle-Écosse. Collectionneurs, vendeurs et organisateurs d'expositions d'artisanat ont transformé ces couvre-sol d'usage domestique en produits de consommation n'ayant plus rien à voir avec leur fonction première, leur contexte social et leur provenance. Ironiquement, si le public ne s'était pas intéressé à cette tradition artisanale, il resterait peu d'information à son sujet. La demande a en outre permis aux campagnardes de contribuer de façon marquée à l'économie familiale en période difficile.*

### *Abstract*

*The hooked mat, a domestic craft product originating in northeastern Canada and the United States in the mid-1800s, enjoyed a revival in the 1920s that journalists dubbed “hook mat mania.” In an expression of antimodernist sentiment, affluent urban Americans acquired handicrafts made by “simple” rural folk, eventually realizing large profits through resale when the mats gained mass popularity. This paper explores the impact of the “mania” on Nova Scotians from a social, cultural, and economic perspective. Collectors, dealers, and handicraft organizers transformed these domestic floorings into consumer commodities, severed from their primary function, social context, and provenance. Ironically, without outside attention, little record would remain of this craft tradition. Furthermore, the consumer impulse allowed rural women to contribute significantly to the family economy during hard times.*

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In the closing years of the twentieth century the Nova Scotia Museum participated in an unusual instance of cross-border shopping, purchasing a hooked runner that had crossed the border in a southerly direction in the early 1900s. This act of repatriation was significant both materially and symbolically. Unlike most hooked mats<sup>1</sup> that travelled to the United States and changed hands often through auctions and antique sales, this particular runner had remained in one family for at least seven decades. Its pedigree was enhanced by the fact that the owner had

been none other than William Winthrop Kent, a noted collector whose articles and books on hooked rugs during the 1930s and 1940s even today remain important reference works on the subject. A photograph of the runner with a caption identifying it as Nova Scotian appeared in Kent's first publication, *The Hooked Rug*.<sup>2</sup>

Although the maker(s) and specific history of this hooked runner remain unknown, that Kent could name Nova Scotia as the place of provenance may have been sheer happenstance. Most of the hundreds of thousands of hooked mats that left



the province in the early years lost their Nova Scotian identity. Cross-border identity loss for Nova Scotian antiques has always been difficult to gauge or prove conclusively. However, another recent cross-border shopping excursion (via the internet) led to the discovery of an American source from the period which acknowledged this trend. The accompanying essay in the 1923 catalogue of a New York sale of hooked rugs "entirely of Nova Scotian origin" stated that:

[The collection had] *been gathered there by the owner over a period of years. It is the first collection of hooked rugs frankly offered as Nova Scotian...Up to the present time, great numbers of Nova Scotian rugs have crossed the United States border and have immediately become 100 per cent Americans* [sic].<sup>3</sup>

The Kent runner, a geometric with maple leaf design, twelve feet (3.6 metres) long by four feet (1.2 metres) wide and constructed of rags dyed in rich autumn and dark brown shades, is an impressive piece in its own right. However, as a token repatriation, its primary purpose at this point is symbolic. It becomes a commemorative to all the hooked mats forever lost to the province. Lest we become too teary-eyed and sentimental, though, it might be useful to remember the museum's participation in an ongoing process. In its various travels across borders and time, the runner's purpose, sociocultural meaning, and value have been and continue to be transformed.

To understand the mass exodus of hooked rugs from the province and how the meaning of these cultural artifacts has shifted, one must retrace the history of rug hooking, both real and imagined. While there has been considerable debate on the origins of the hooked rug, contemporary scholars agree that this form of rug making originated sometime during the second quarter of the nineteenth century in the Maritimes and New England. Initially, hooked rugs were made on a linen ground with homespun wool, implying an intensity of labour and material resources well beyond subsistence living. Rug hooking became far more widespread with the introduction of burlap to North America in the 1850s. The looser weave of the ground fabric made hooking easier and faster. As well, recycled feed bags provided essentially free material for those who could not afford to buy foundation cloth. The development of the North American textile industry, which lowered the cost of fabric further, helped to democratize access to manufactured cloth. Now required to

spend less time in primary production of household textiles, many women, especially in rural areas, turned their attention to making quilts and hooked rugs by recycling used clothing and bedding. In comparison with weaving, the tools and equipment required for rug hooking and quilting were simpler and more portable.

As an expression of Victorian domesticity, rug hooking allowed women to create both decorative and practical floor coverings with little financial outlay at a time when relatively few had the cash to purchase manufactured or imported carpets. As well, in the Maritimes, at least, rural women used mat hooking as an opportunity to socialize. Matting parties, like quiltings, brought relatives and neighbours together and in some areas of Nova Scotia, this tradition persisted (albeit on a much-reduced scale) well into the mid-twentieth century.

Though rug hooking originated as a domestic and, hence, primarily female-gendered undertaking, business-minded individuals, usually male, soon recognized the commercial potential in the craft and began producing patterns stamped on burlap.<sup>4</sup> Prior to this development women created their own patterns, borrowed from local design traditions or copied from other needlework sources. Either they or some member of the family or community would draw a pattern directly on the burlap canvas. These traditions continued, but stamped patterns opened up a large new market. Among the several commercial pattern makers to emerge, two of the most successful were Edward Sands Frost of Biddeford, Maine, and John E. Garrett of New Glasgow, Nova Scotia. Frost began in the late 1860s and sold his successful business less than ten years later. Garrett (whose company lasted for eighty years) started in 1892 and opened a second branch in Boston in 1900.<sup>5</sup>

By the turn of the twentieth century, rug hooking was still common in rural areas, but increasingly, families with any spare cash were purchasing ready-made carpets and linoleum, often through the mail-order catalogues of T. Eaton's in Canada and Sears Roebuck in the United States. The idea of rug hooking as a particularly nineteenth-century craft is communicated in Garrett's ad for the 8 August 1900 edition of *The Family Herald and Weekly Star*, Canada's national farm paper. "I make patterns for *old fashioned* [my italics], home made hooked rugs" proclaimed the advertiser, indicating, perhaps, an awareness or premonition that appeal to nostalgia might be a good sales pitch.

Garrett, whether knowingly or not, was anticipating future trends. The irony, of course,

was that at the same time as many ordinary folk were finally in the position to cast away their "old fashioned" hooked mats in favour of more modern floor coverings, wealthy Americans were beginning to desire such objects. Several social and cultural phenomena contributed to this trend. The arts and crafts movement, first-wave feminism, social and religious reform impulses, and tourism all played their roles. In North America, in particular, women were primarily responsible for the spread of arts and crafts ideals. As a result of the late nineteenth-century feminist movement, a growing number of women entered post-secondary education and fields of endeavour previously denied them. In the United States, art and design school graduates like Candace Wheeler and Helen Albee saw handicraft renewal as an ideal way for creative designers to practice their profession at the same time as providing moral and economic uplift to impoverished rural women. In Canada, women such as Alice Peck and Mary Phillips, the founders of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, promoted the arts and crafts ideals within the particular Canadian context.

If rug hooking did not initially register in the list of preferred crafts in the arts and crafts movement, it finally won recognition because designers learned that it was easier to implement their home industry programs using the existing craft skills of a local population. Not all efforts met with enduring success.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, a growing market for hooked mats encouraged attempts in various locales. Missionary initiatives also combined with the craft impulse to create fireside industries. One of the most famous and long lived of the hooked mat industries was founded by medical missionary Sir Wilfred Grenfell in Labrador.

Nova Scotians were relatively late in receiving the attention of fireside organizers, missionary or otherwise, but their mats were not ignored. The earliest mats left the province with little notice or fanfare under the arms of American summer visitors. Long before the provincial government took an active role in tourism promotion, Nova Scotia was on the traveller's map. Between the 1850s and 1900, American writers such as Frederic Cozzens, Charles Dudley Warner, and Margaret Warner Morley helped to publicize the rustic charms of the province.<sup>7</sup> Literature abounded for hunters and fishermen who sought out the woods and streams of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland for their sport.

Railway and steamship lines published pictorial essays to entice customers to their businesses.

In a travelogue written ca 1895 for the Dominion Atlantic Railway by Charles G. D. Roberts, a well-known Canadian writer of the period, Digby, a town on the Bay of Fundy, is described as "a veritable Sleeping Beauty until June brings the summer tourist to caress her into activity." This "Brighton of Nova Scotia" according to another travel guide of the same period listed ten hotels and boarding houses, accommodating more tourists than any other place in the province outside of the capital city of Halifax.<sup>8</sup> As will become evident, it is not surprising that by the time "hooked rug mania" hit the American public in the 1920s, Digby had become a centre for the hooked mat trade.

In addition to the hotel sojourners, a growing number of urban Americans with means sought out waterfront properties at various locations along Nova Scotia's coastline where they built vacation homes. They began to furnish their "cottages" with rugs collected from the surrounding countryside.<sup>9</sup> For example, in 1900, American geologist John Porter and his wife Ethel purchased a summer home in Guysborough, Nova Scotia. Appointed the first chair of the geology department in the late 1890s at McGill University, Porter discovered Nova Scotia while carrying out investigative work on mines for the provincial government. According to the grandson who inherited the house with its extensive collection of hooked mats, the Porters acquired their mats in the local area by knocking on farmhouse doors.<sup>10</sup>

This mode of gathering mats is confirmed by other travel writers and collectors of the period. Ruth Kedzie Wood, in her 1915 travelogue *The Tourist's Maritime Provinces*, recounted a visit to the home of the Desveaux family in the Acadian community of Chéticamp, Cape Breton. She described the living room as "carpeted with red-scrolled and gorgeously bouqueted hooked rugs." She stated:

*At the moment of departure a flowered vase [was] abstracted from the cabinet and the best mat thrust hastily into paper. One [had] no need to understand words then to perceive that this, in the Chéticamp way, [was] to say 'Good-bye'.*<sup>11</sup>

As Wood tells the story, one would gather that Chéticamp hospitality included giving away household items to travelling strangers. It is impossible to know whether this was a spontaneous action on the part of the Desveaux family, or whether there had been a hint or request for these items from the traveller.

Wood was ostensibly a travel writer who acquired at least one mat (perhaps more) on her journey. The Porters and others like them who regularly summered in Nova Scotia had many opportunities to build their collections gradually. However, there existed another kind of collector, whose chief purpose in travelling focused on the hunt for hooked rugs. And hunt they did. It is notable that in the accounts of collectors the language used to describe "rug hunting" sounded much like the language of game hunters. The Maritimes presented a prime hunting ground for rug collectors and the voraciousness with which they pursued their "prey" accounts for the relative dearth of older examples in the provinces today.

William Winthrop Kent, American architect and former owner of the Nova Scotia Museum's recently acquired hooked runner, provides one such commentary. In *The Hooked Rug* he described a brief foray into New Brunswick, in a chapter titled "A Hunt for Rugs in Canada." He set himself the challenge of seeing how many rugs could be found in a day, just by knocking on farmhouse doors in an area that had not been scoured already by earlier rug hunters. By dusk, the tally was a "slightly groaning" carload of thirteen or fourteen rugs.<sup>12</sup>

The 1927 publication *Collecting Hooked Rugs*, written by intrepid collectors Elizabeth Waugh and Edith Foley, also used the language of the hunt.

*The actual pursuit of the hooked rug is attended by much uncertainty. It is like betting on horses in point of the number of false tips received, like prospecting for silver because it involves a painstaking search over extensive wild territory, and like all other hunting in that to see the game is not necessarily to capture it.*<sup>13</sup>

When encountering rug owners who would not part with their rugs, these collectors seemed to think the owners' sense of attachment to their personal possessions unreasonable. "One frequently finds a complete unwillingness to part with hooked rugs at any price, even though they may be serving no other purpose than that of kitchen mats."<sup>14</sup>

Apparent in much of the writing of the time was the presumption by collectors that money and privilege allowed them to travel and enjoy the hospitality of "simple" country folk and then leave with their hosts' family heirlooms. Waugh and Foley express this truth with no compunction in the last sentence of their book:

*Possessors of fine early specimens may shortly have more reason to congratulate themselves than perhaps they realize, for we are a precipitate people; when we gather antiques we do it as the locusts in Egypt gathered crops [my emphasis].*<sup>15</sup>

It is true that the rural areas of the Maritimes were out of the mainstream of urbanized America; however, travellers and rug hunters often chose to assume that all country folk were simple, primitive souls who had little awareness of the outside world. In point of fact, newspapers such as the *Family Herald* and *Weekly Star* kept rural readers abreast of national and international news. As well, out-migration for work and educational opportunities was so widespread that few families in the region were untouched by this trend.

The 1924 correspondence of one rug hooker who produced work for Grace Helen Mowat, New Brunswick's most famous organizer of cottage industry, gives a humorous and insightful view of one of the "simple" folk. In describing her enjoyment of rug hooking, she says,

*When I finish [a rug] I feel as relieved as if I had had a baby!!! When I am doing one I feel something akin to an artist because I look just as untidy as Rosa Bonheur's pictures, to say nothing of the state the house is in, and I ease my conscience by thinking 'We are an easy going slack kind of folk in house keeping ways but the fires of genius must burn.'*<sup>16</sup>

It may be unfair to compare the above writer, Stella Surette, with the older, traditional hookers that Kent, Waugh, and Foley might have encountered on their rug-hunting safaris, for she was consciously producing for the hooked rug market, which by that time was considerable. However, it is unlikely that buyers seeking to satisfy their ravenous appetite for rugs (antique or otherwise) would attribute such cosmopolitan awareness to a rural rug hooker from the Maritimes.

As mentioned earlier, pattern maker John Garrett seemed adept at anticipating and taking advantage of market trends. In 1920, Garrett alerted Canadian readers to the revived popularity of hooked rugs.

*A short time ago a lady... passing a store...[in] Boston noticed in the window a home-made rug... The price marked on the rug was \$60.00. ...There is at the present time a great revival of interest in this work. Wealthy people will pay almost any price for a nice home-made rug.*<sup>17</sup>



Several crucial factors contributed to the unprecedented appeal of hooked mats in the 1920s. In an increasingly urbanized and consumerist America in which citizens were one or more generations removed from domestic production of household goods, nostalgia for "old-fashioned" home-made items created a new niche in the marketplace. In the flurry of interior decorating interest in colonial furnishings, hooked mats were promoted in magazine and newspaper articles as ideal additions to room settings. The rare commentator who suggested a more historically accurate assessment of the age of hooked rugs found few receptive ears; for the most part, romanticism triumphed. Understandably, dealers, auctioneers and others who profited from brisk sales found little reason to debunk the hooked mat mythology.

It would be incorrect to say that everyone assumed their hooked rugs were antiques. While those with money could purchase the older examples (Victorian, rather than colonial), most buyers satisfied themselves with newer rugs. The craze for hooked mats stimulated production, both in Canada and the United States, again, particularly in areas where designer/social workers thought that local populations might benefit economically from

the work. Not surprisingly, by the time hooked mats gained widespread popularity, the earlier collectors and trend-setters were beginning to sell off their amassed collections for considerable sums. From 1921 onwards, the *New York Times* began to carry announcements and reports on sales and auctions of large collections of hooked rugs accumulated by those astute buyers who had entered the field well in advance of the rest of the public.

Aside from the summer visitors and those determined rug hunters such as Kent, Waugh, and Foley, the number of collectors who would have travelled the country roads of the Maritimes to collect directly from householders was probably quite limited. Shrewd itinerant peddlers recognized the emerging market and were well positioned to become intermediaries in the trade. Familiar with farmhouses throughout their circuits, they offered linoleum and other goods to cash-poor rural women in exchange for hooked mats. Consequently, money made in Nova Scotia from the sale of hooked mats generally went to peddlers and dealers rather than rug makers.

This trend predominated for years; however, once women recognized the popularity of their craft and as the supply of older mats began to wane, rug hookers began producing specifically for the market rather than just for home use. The

**Fig. 1**  
Women's Institute, Lower  
Granville, Annapolis  
County, Nova Scotia,  
ca 1930. (Nova Scotian  
Museum copy negative  
N-23,635, courtesy  
Bernice Orde)



**Fig. 2**

*Large hooked rug made by Mary Wentzell, Pleasantville, Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia, ca 1930. Inspired by an illustration in an American antiques magazine, it is quite possible that the original was Nova Scotian. (Nova Scotia Museum copy negative N-9113, courtesy I. R. Irvine)*



Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, recognizing that the economic potential of hooked mats dovetailed nicely with its developing tourism thrust, published an article titled "Money in Rugs" in 1927. Appearing in newspapers around the province, the article urged women to get into market.<sup>18</sup> As well, the Women's Institute, operating under the Department of Agriculture, promoted hooked rug production through exhibitions, publication of a "how-to" manual, and setting up Women's Handicraft Exchanges at strategic tourist locations throughout the province.

As mentioned earlier, the Digby area on the Bay of Fundy was a popular spot for summer vacationers. An article appearing in the *Halifax Daily News* on 1 January 1929 attests to the volume of trade and export out of Digby. The report stated that one local antique dealer had shipped more

than 20 000 rugs to Boston during the previous year, and that he was only one of several buyers doing business in Digby.<sup>19</sup> A 1931 Montreal newspaper article reported that during the year "one firm alone bought about 50 000 mats in Nova Scotia. It went on to say that mats were bought up in such large numbers by American tourists that "women [were] busy with their fingers preparing for another season."<sup>20</sup> As an early reader of this paper has rightly suggested, one must exercise caution in accepting wholesale the numbers that newspaper accounts of the period put forward. Given that the Great Depression was well underway and the "requirement of media in Nova Scotia to do some 'positive thinking' in truly desperate times," it would not be surprising to see overblown figures to boost local morale and encourage craftworkers to greater labours.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, evidence from other oral and written sources of the time indicate that such numbers are not entirely without substance. Because the historic trend has been to under represent in public accounts women's domestic production, such numbers at first glance seem extraordinary. Yet, research into records of volunteer production of quilts and other textile goods for wartime and inter-war relief indicate similarly remarkable output.<sup>22</sup> As well, it must be remembered that the figures reflect not only hooked mats made specifically for the marketplace but also those culled from households throughout the countryside. In spite of the rug hunting in preceding years, hooked mats still graced the floors of many homes in the province. While rug hookers continued to produce for home use as well as for the market, the supply was not static. New rugs were made to take the place of worn (or traded) ones.<sup>23</sup>

The Nova Scotia government departments involved in encouraging the home industry discontinued their initiatives due to perceived falling markets; however, mat production and sales continued throughout the 1930s. Concerned about the economic plight of local constituents, in 1932, B. C. Mullins, Secretary-Treasurer of Gloucester County, New Brunswick, wrote to the federal Ministry of Trade and Commerce seeking help with direct marketing of hooked mats from the region. Aware of an upswing in the business over the "last two years" and referring to the dealers scouring the province, he wrote:

*They go through the country buying up hooked mats and I understand have considerable [quantities] in warehouses in Saint John and Halifax, whether they are holding them for higher prices or not I am not prepared to say.*



*What I am interested in is making connections with buyers in the United States to help out our unemployed people.*<sup>24</sup>

Two newspaper advertisements in a 1934 edition of the *Boston Globe* show that Maritime mats were still on the market in high volumes and illustrate the retailers' understanding of hooked mat appeal. The Chandler & Co. advertisement declared, "Sale! Hundreds of Antique and Semi Antique Hooked Rugs...real old-fashioned type made up by the people of the Canadian provinces for their own homes." "These New, Clean Hand-Made, Canadian Hooked Rugs present rare gift values!" trumpeted the T. D. Whitney Company.<sup>25</sup>

The production of hooked mats helped to pull many rural families through this difficult time. In adversity, the gendered division of labour lost some of its rigidity. Men and children, both girls and boys, joined in the work, particularly with some of the very large room-sized rugs that became popular with those who could afford them. For a small number of men in Chéticamp, rug hooking provided both monetary and creative satisfaction and they continued in the industry as full time permanent workers even after the Depression.<sup>26</sup>

Estella Withers, a widow in Granville Centre, Annapolis County, paid off the mortgage on her farm and helped support herself through hooked rug sales. The 1933 newspaper account of her story contains a rare and invaluable record of her work and earnings:

*I made \$1,051.35 by hooking rugs in three years. Among the many rugs I made was one 9 feet by 12 feet [2.7 × 3.7 metres], two rugs 8 by 10 feet [2.4 × 3 metres] and one 7 feet by 8 [2.1 × 2.4 metres]. In addition there were 53 other varieties of hearth rugs, circle and half-circle and door rugs. Besides these I made 67 chair seats, 51 chair sets, 26 table mats, 3 wall pieces and 2 hand bags.*<sup>27</sup>

In order to understand the economic impact of rug hooking, it is useful to compare Estella Withers' earnings with the *Labour Gazette* figures for male agricultural workers over the same three year period. Withers made over \$1000 at the same time as male farm workers earned just over \$1200, including room and board. Wages alone were less than \$900.<sup>28</sup>

Rather than calculating value according to hours of production labour, hooked mats were assessed by the square foot.<sup>29</sup> Based on a rough calculation of Withers' output, it seems likely



that she was making no more than 75 cents per square foot (.1 square metre) and, possibly, considerably less. The previously-mentioned Montreal newspaper article suggested that the average price paid for a rug was \$2.50. For even the most modest-sized mats (two by two or three feet) (.6 × .6 or .9 metres), this only translated into forty to sixty cents per square foot. One example cited, of a 12 by 12 foot (3.7 × 3.7 metre) rug made ca 1897, commanded a price of \$160.<sup>30</sup> Prices differed according to such variables as quality of hooking material (mats made from wool yarn or wool rag commanded better prices than those made with cotton, which had less durability); colouring (natural or synthetic dyes); design (original or commercial pattern); age (antique

**Fig. 3**  
Rug hookers working on large project at Belle Marche (Chéticamp area), Inverness County, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, 1938. (Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management (NSARM), Nova Scotia Information Bureau #835)

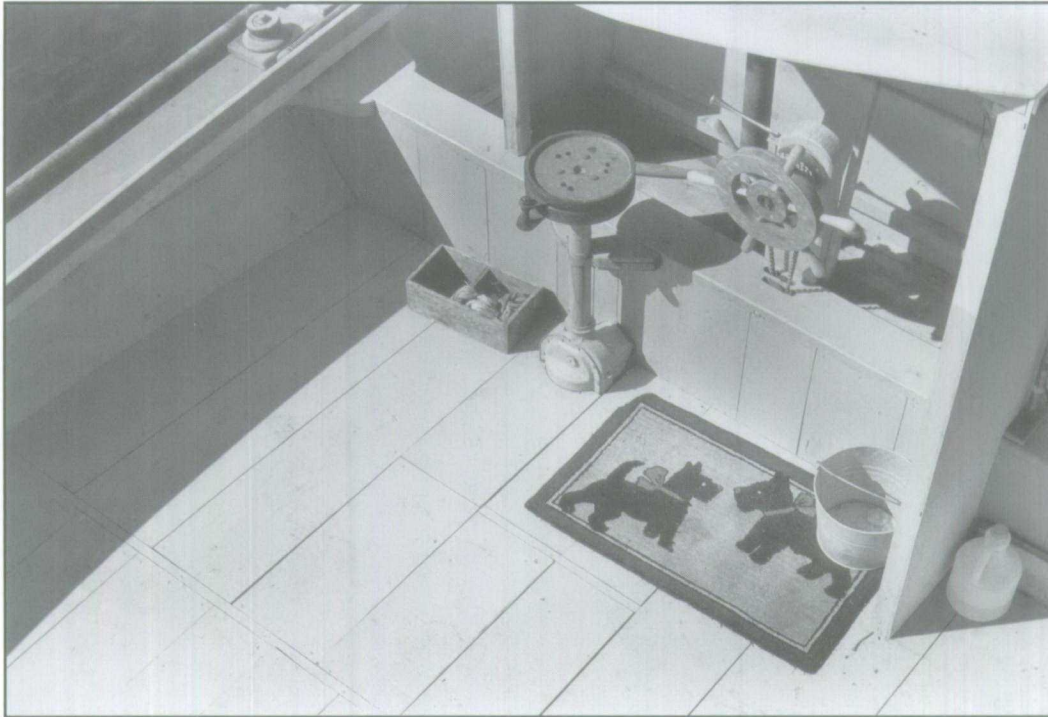
versus new); and size (room-sized hooked carpets generally commanded better prices per square foot). One informant from Colchester County who talked of dealers and itinerant trades people commissioning rugs in her area during the 1930s said that "men, women and everyone" would receive "the big sum of one hundred dollars" for a "nine by twelve rug," which meant they were receiving a handsome ninety-two cents per square foot.<sup>31</sup> Mary Wentzell of Lunenburg County was one of the rare rug hookers who enjoyed a high profile as an individual craftworker in the field. Reports of prices exceeding \$1000 for her large room-sized hooked carpets placed Wentzell's work in a class of its own.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, even in Wentzell's case, the real profit for her work went to others. One of her rugs bought by an American was purportedly resold to Henry Ford for \$4500.<sup>33</sup>

While this paper cannot do full justice to the story of the Chéticamp rug industry, it is useful to note that the famous revolt of the "hookeuses" (during 1936–37) centred on the issue of wages (that is, price paid per square foot). Chéticamp gained international attention from the 1920s onward because of its hooked rug industry. The local craft went through a dramatic and thorough transformation at this time when M. Lillian Burke, an American designer/occupational therapist and friend of the illustrious Mabel and Alexander Graham Bell family, began to work with rug hookers. In this economically strapped community Burke found a workforce willing to accept her direction and design ideas and the combined efforts of workers and designer quickly put Chéticamp on the map. Numerous newspaper and magazine articles highlighted their larger projects. The most famous rug, modelled on an Aubusson carpet in the Louvre, measuring 18 feet by 36 feet (5.4 × 10.8 metres) and considered at the time to be the largest hooked rug ever made, received particular attention.<sup>34</sup> However, the price of such success entailed long hours of home "factory" work to produce these handmade goods for a largely up-scale American marketplace. Division in the community arose when workers, inspired by discussions in study groups organized by the local co-operative leader, decided to petition Burke for higher wages. She had been paying, on average (although occasionally higher for more intricate work), from seventy-five to eighty cents per square foot and workers asked for one dollar. Her refusal led to a significant number of workers breaking off to work cooperatively. Eventually Burke had to pay those who remained faithful the higher rate.

While wages provided the flash point for the confrontation, in fact, Burke's workers were making more or less the same as independent rug hookers throughout the province and undoubtedly far more than they had previously made from their handwork. However, the nature of the work had changed. No longer an activity that women did when other commitments slackened (for example, in the winter season when outdoor chores were reduced), the pressure of fulfilling orders for a demanding urban clientele introduced the relentless clock of modernity<sup>35</sup> and, as Ian McKay has pointed out, in "the scientific redesign of work, conception and execution were separated; conception of the carpets took place in New York, while the rugs were executed in Chéticamp." McKay addresses the exploitative nature of Burke's enterprise and the process of cultural appropriation whereby, in a curious inversion, the designer claimed that those who defected were "guilty of a kind of aesthetic misappropriation."<sup>36</sup> The break-away workers were engaging in their own local craft tradition, but because Burke had transformed it so utterly, she felt that she "owned" the exclusive rights to its employment in the community. Burke fought but lost the battle to maintain control. While her outsider status (in terms of class and nationality, and to some extent, gender) undoubtedly worked to her advantage in orchestrating the reinvention of the rug-hooking tradition (that in itself was barely one hundred years old), two regional factors, one traditional and the other newly minted, ultimately proved her undoing.

First of all, among mat hookers in Nova Scotia, the concept of "ownership" of patterns was non-existent. Patterns were commonly shared, and if anything, imitation would have been considered the highest form of flattery. While creative individuals might attain a distinctive style and there were regional design trends, considerable borrowing and adapting of patterns occurred not only between rug hookers themselves but also between hookers and commercial pattern makers. Inspiration for patterns could come from anywhere — magazine and calendar illustrations, the decorative border around a cigarette package, motifs from the natural world — all might be employed in a hooked mat design. Ironically, even linoleum tilings furnished design ideas for some hookers. Burke herself borrowed from earlier French influences, particularly Aubusson and Savonnerie carpet designs. Not surprisingly,





**Fig. 4**  
*Scottie dogs on board.*  
*One of numerous hooked*  
*mats seen on fishing*  
*vessels anchored*  
*at Port Bickerton,*  
*Guysborough County,*  
*Nova Scotia, ca 1973.*  
*(Photo by Stephen*  
*Archibald)*

Chéticamp rug hookers failed to understand or comply with Burke's idea of ownership.

The second factor had to do with the emergence of the co-operative movement as a form of community empowerment. One can imagine Burke's chagrin when her amenable Chéticamp workers chose independence. After all, she had proved how successful they could be with her guidance. Too successful, perhaps: the market had been established. By this time, with or without Lillian Burke's help, Chéticamp products would sell like hot cakes.

Appraisal of Burke's legacy has been mixed and because her personal records have yet to surface, there are still some missing pieces of the puzzle. Burke was accused of making huge profits on the sale of Chéticamp hooked rugs; however, it is likely that such profits were exaggerated. Realization of larger profits occurred once the rugs changed hands on the American market. Nevertheless, T. J. Jackson Lear's analysis of the Arts and Crafts proponents who shifted from humanitarian reform to unwitting accommodation to "the corporate system of organized capitalism" might well apply to Burke, the occupational therapist, who began with a desire to help impoverished rural women maximize their potential earning power. As her investment in the Chéticamp project grew, her commitment to social betterment may have been overtaken by desire for personal

fulfillment or gain.<sup>37</sup> Under the harsh light of today's critical analysis it is, perhaps, too easy to pass judgement on a single woman of the early twentieth century who sought to make her creative mark in a world with limited opportunities. Through Burke, Chéticamp gained an enduring and unique industry that the community continues to claim proudly as its own. Without question, Burke's stylistic and technical approach has been naturalized. It is now the Chéticamp tradition.

Until 1939, the hooked mat market continued to thrive. With the eruption of the Second World War, rural women shifted their attention away from hooking. They turned their labour and talents to the production of relief supplies for the war effort or moved to higher paying industrial jobs. Lillian Burke reported as much to the Canadian Handicrafts Guild during the war. In 1944 she wrote, "When the girls come back after the war, I hope the industry will start up again. In the meantime the small orders attempt to keep it alive."<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the shortage of workers, burlap became scarce. The John E. Garrett Company closed its doors for a period of time during the war after torpedoes sank ships carrying their orders of burlap from Scotland.<sup>39</sup> Because the war had blocked access to source countries in Southeast Asia, the Canadian government placed an embargo on the use of burlap other than for specific wartime necessities.<sup>40</sup>

In the postwar period, some women resumed rug hooking for the market and the Handcrafts Division of the provincial government, recognizing that hooked rugs still attracted buyers, helped to promote the industry through directories for tourists and exhibitions (both in and out of province) with on-site demonstrations of rug hooking. Even as late as 1951, according to a survey conducted by the Handcraft Division, Department of Trade and Industry, hooking constituted the largest income-producing craft, representing forty-three percent of the total annual reported craft income in the province. However, even at this time, the estimated *retail* value of new rugs in gift shops ranged in price from \$2 per square foot for rugs made with cotton rag to \$3.50 per square foot for Chéticamp fine wool yarn rugs.<sup>41</sup>

With the growing prosperity of the 1950s, most rug hookers ceased to hook for economic reasons (with some notable exceptions such as Chéticamp). By the late 1950s and early 1960s, a return to hooking as a hobby or creative outlet actually transformed the craft into one more akin to its origins, at least superficially. However, instead of employing designs from the traditional Nova Scotian repertoire that early American collectors so avidly sought out, the new rug hookers more often looked to the United States for instruction and design direction, thereby creating a new dynamic in the cross-border trade concerning hooked rugs.<sup>42</sup>

Today, there are many hooked rug enthusiasts throughout North America. While there is still a considerable trade in antique hooked mats as is evident in the world of e-commerce and sale reports in the *Maine Antique Digest*, as often as not, the cross-border business is in the form of hooking workshops, magazines, supplies, and modern hooked art works. Among recreational rug hookers, the social aspect of hooking has been revived, harking back to earlier mat parties. However, rug hookers usually meet to work on their own individual rugs rather than group projects. They are not helping their neighbour to finish that rug for the parlour. As well, today's rug hookers are more likely to hang their works on the wall rather than allow people to walk on them. This indicates a considerable cultural shift in the meaning of the hooked mat.

One might ask why hooked mats, among all the craft traditions, created such a stir in the marketplace in the post-First World War period. What was implied by the phrase "hooked mat mania"? To begin with, we must consider that

while hooked mats enjoyed great popularity at the time, the term "mania" should be regarded with caution. Historians (this one included) are likely guilty of taking the journalistic hyperbole of the period too literally. Viewed within the broad spectrum of consumer goods available at the time, hooked mats probably represented a relatively small place in the market.

Hyperbole aside, hooked mats did capture the attention of a diverse public. To be sure, antimodern sentiment played a large part in creating a nostalgia for objects associated with a time before time was standardized.<sup>43</sup> Affluent Americans, disturbed by modernity and the imagined loss of a more innocent world, found in rural Nova Scotia a place that they perceived as forgotten by time. Still a place where women made their own floor coverings, Nova Scotia and its craftworkers appeared untouched by the rush of urban life.

However, there are other factors to consider. If one looks to the material objects themselves and the period literature, it is apparent that antimodernism may have been a trigger, but it does not account in total for the hooked mat's appeal. To ask, as Thomas Lackey did, "what happens when a folk craft tradition meets popular and commercial culture," it is useful to look at the John E. Garrett Company (or Bluenose) patterns produced over the company's many years of operation. The business took full advantage of the rage for antiques, but their pattern catalogues included not only "old-fashioned" designs, but modern designs as well. Lackey notes that "images migrating up from the folk culture and downward from more elite styles met in the designs issued by the Garretts."<sup>44</sup> When John Garrett's son, Frank, took over as the designer in the 1920s, he introduced a whole new range of design choices that were decidedly modern, influenced by art deco and commercial art. The Garretts were not alone in this trend. Other pattern companies and popular magazines offered similar fare. The Women's Institute pamphlet "Hooked Mats and How to Make Them," published in 1927, included only one illustration of a traditional pattern. All other illustrations and suggestions urged originality or copying from magazines or other contemporary sources.<sup>45</sup>

Kent, Waugh, Foley and a host of other arbiters of taste who wrote articles on hooked mats during the period usually decried the commercial pattern mats (and the garish use of bright colours), but a careful survey of their books and articles reveals that they could not always distinguish a pattern mat from an "original." As well, those with elite tastes who could afford antique mats at escalating

prices accounted for only part of the market. Rug hookers in Nova Scotia during the period of high popularity produced not only traditional designs, but also tapped into a vast array of images from popular culture. One can only speculate on how many Scottie dogs and Bluenose sailboats graced the floors of bedrooms and dens over the decades since their first introduction in the 1930s. One of Garrett's all-time pattern favourites was a storybook-like image of the Three Bears, first published in 1932. Fifty-five years later, *Canadian Living* reissued the pattern for a whole new generation of hobbyists.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, the hooked mat's appeal had much to do with accessibility. For both the maker and the consumer, the craft allowed unlimited design possibilities, from the subtle to the blaring to the humorous, from "high" to "low" art. In spite of their elevated and precious status in some circles, hooked mats still remained primarily functional. With limited exceptions, no matter how decorative, they still were meant to be walked on.<sup>47</sup> Handcrafted, they had more individuality than factory-made rugs but they did not have to be treated as *objets d'art*. Solidly part of popular culture, hooked mats were made by and for the people.

For Nova Scotian women in the late nineteenth century, mat making was a creative, practical, and social activity. During the first quarter of the twentieth century, collectors and dealers transformed hooked mats into consumer products severed from their primary function, social context, and provenance.

Initially rural women must have been mystified by the rug hunters' curious quest. If it seems that they handed over their rugs rather easily, a number of reasons are suggested. One hundred years ago, people opened their doors and offered hospitality to travelling strangers more readily than is the case today. In Kent's account of his rug hunt in Canada, he recalls stopping at one house where the woman assured him that she had no rugs to sell, but offered him and his companion a place to rest. Before they left, the woman offered to give him a rug to take to his wife. Kent wrote:

*Of course, I could not accept it as a present, although she said it was of no value, so after many protests on her part, I finally induced her to accept money for it, she making the condition that the amount would be given to the fund for Church Missions.*<sup>48</sup>

One suspects that many women found it difficult to attach monetary value to their home

handwork and that in the face of audacious offers from rug hunters, the only polite thing as a host was to accede to the wishes of the guest. With their skills and the availability of recyclable materials, rug makers could always replace an old rug. They were used to discarding or downgrading rugs to domestic locations of lesser importance as they became worn. What they may not have anticipated was a loss of rug-making interest or need among the next generation. Times were changing. Even where rug hooking continued, increasingly it was driven by economic more than sociocultural forces and the design approach was shifting. The dearth of older examples in the province meant a significant loss of the traditional pattern repertoire.

Ironically, although collectors essentially stripped the province of its earlier hooked mat heritage, without their interest and the subsequent hooked rug craze, it is probable that even less would be known about this craft tradition. Had rural Nova Scotians been more affluent earlier, they might have replaced old and worn mats with modern commercial floorings sooner, happily discarding the remnants of another age. The people who could afford to modernize the earliest (often the movers and shakers in industrial capitalism) were the very ones charmed by and greedy for traditional objects that represented a lost past. Whether collectors sought hooked rugs as "trophy of the hunt" or as homey reminders of a bygone era, they did so "as the locusts in Egypt gathered crops." In the process, the objects were separated from their historical roots and acquired new meaning.

That American buyers relied so heavily on Nova Scotia and the other Atlantic provinces for their supply of an artifact that most considered quintessentially New England in origin might be regarded as another irony. Writers of the period acknowledged the presence of Nova Scotian rugs in the antique market, yet it is unlikely that anyone had a clear concept of the volume of cross-border trade. The surprisingly large export figures reported in the newspapers of the late 1920s and early 1930s (not including all earlier trade) take on even more significance when one reflects on the comment made in 1918 by writer Nina Wilcox Putnam that "perhaps three or four thousand [hooked rugs] are in existence in the entire country [United States]."<sup>49</sup> Putnam may or may not have had an accurate assessment of the existing number of rugs in the country; nevertheless, her estimate provides a starting point for considering the prominence of Nova Scotian mats in circulation among antique collectors of the period.



Over time, women in Nova Scotia learned to take advantage of the market and turned to the commercial production of hooked mats. Especially during the Depression, whole communities came to depend on the income accrued from such labour. In spite of the incalculable loss of Nova Scotian material culture through exportation, the commodifying of hooked mats did provide critical economic benefits to rural families when there were few other options for employment or income.

William Winthrop Kent's Nova Scotian hooked runner returned to the province for a price that far exceeded what he originally would have paid for it. That Kent, one of the

most prominent of the early collectors and writers on the subject of hooked rugs owned this runner adds considerably to its historical interest. But for serendipity, this icon of traditional Nova Scotian craft would not have made its homeward journey, for fate very nearly relegated the runner to the dustbin. Through its story of survival, the hooked mat has gained a further layer of mythic meaning.

Crossing the border for a last time, the runner's function changes once again. As a fine example of Nova Scotian material culture, it will serve as an interpretive tool in the museum's developing history of mat making in the province.

#### NOTES

1. Traditionally Nova Scotians used the word "mat" rather than "rug." In this essay, the terms will be used interchangeably.
2. Kent's speculations on the origins of the hooked mat are no longer considered relevant by scholars (although his ideas are still promulgated widely in popular accounts); however, his earnest documentation and well-illustrated texts provide important information on the hooked mats in circulation at the time. William Winthrop Kent, *The Hooked Rug* (New York: Tudor Publishing, 1930), 42.
3. R. M. Riefstahl in "Antique Nova Scotia Hooked Rugs, Gathered During a Period of Years by Mr. Caswell Barrie of New York City" (New York: The Anderson Galleries, 1923), unpaginated.
4. The earliest known commercial producer of stamped patterns was, in fact, a woman. In the late 1860s Philena Moxley of Massachusetts produced patterns for embroidery and rug hooking. Few of her wooden stamps have survived; they were burned for firewood during difficult times. Irene Dodge, "Philena Moxley's Embroidery Stamps," *Antiques* (August 1972), 251-255.
5. The Garrett family business continued through three generations and only closed its doors in Boston in the early 1960s and in New Glasgow in the 1970s. Garrett papers, private collection.
6. One notable example is that of Helen Albee's Abnahee Rugs enterprise. Albee, a New York trained designer who moved to rural New Hampshire in the 1880s worked with local rug hookers until her patronizing remarks concerning her workers appeared in a *House Beautiful* article. Although her rug industry failed, Albee's writings inspired the next generation of cottage industry organizers. Cynthia Watkins Richardson, "A Profitable Philanthropy: Helen Albee's Abnahee Rugs" (unpublished paper, 1999).
7. Frederic S. Cozzens, *Acadia, or, A Month with the Blue Noses* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1859); Charles Dudley Warner, *Baddeck and That Sort of Thing* (1874; reprint, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895); Margaret Warner Morley, *Down North and Up Along* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1900).
8. *The Land of Evangeline and the Gateways Thither* (Kentville: Dominion Atlantic Railway, n.d.); *Beautiful Nova Scotia: The Ideal Summer Land* (Boston: Yarmouth Steamship Co., 1898).
9. Witold Rybczynski in *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 155, refers to nineteenth-century architect Andrew Jackson Downing's dictum that the difference between a house and a cottage is judged by the fact that "anything with less than three servants was a cottage."
10. Conversation with grandson, June 2000. Some of the mats from the Porter collection have been donated to the Nova Scotia Museum.
11. Ruth Kedzie Wood, *The Tourist's Maritime Provinces* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1915), 220.
12. Kent, *The Hooked Rug*, 148.
13. Elizabeth Waugh and Edith Foley, *Collecting Hooked Rugs* (New York and London: The Century Company, 1927), 106.
14. *Ibid*, 124.
15. *Ibid*, 135.
16. Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (PANB), Helen Grace Mowat papers, MC 2259 MS 9/56, letter from Stella Surette, Pomeroy Ridge, N.B., 16 March 1924. Nineteenth-century French artist, Rosa Bonheur (1822-1899), was famous for her animal paintings and eccentric lifestyle which included "manly" dress and a menagerie of exotic pets.
17. *Family Herald and Weekly Star*, 10 November 1920.
18. "Money in Rugs" article found in *The Spectator*, Annapolis Royal, and *The Acadian*, Wolfville, on 12 May 1927, and in the *Berwick Register*, 1 June 1927.
19. "23,000 Rugs From One Community Shipped to U.S.," *Halifax Daily News*, 1 January 1929.
20. "Women Establish Thriving Industry," *Montreal Gazette*, 8 October 1931.
21. Anonymous reader's comment.
22. Scott Robson and Sharon MacDonald, *Old Nova Scotian Quilts* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Limited

- and Nova Scotia Museum, 1995), 24. See also Sharon M. H. MacDonald, "Hidden Costs, Hidden Labours: Women in Nova Scotia during Two World Wars" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Saint Mary's University, 1999).
23. According to the *Census of Canada 1921* (Vol. III, Population, Table 7, Dwellings, rural and urban), 14, Nova Scotia had a total of 102 807 dwellings. Of that number 62 008 were rural. Hypothetically, if only twenty percent of the rural households had five hooked mats each, that would make a modest estimate of 62 000 mats on floors in rural Nova Scotia. If five percent of rural households had a rug hooker producing ten rugs per year for the market that could mean an annual output of 31 000 rugs.
  24. PANB, RS 149 B Records of the Municipality of the County of Gloucester, Correspondence of Secretary-Treasurer, B. C. Mullins. Letter to Deputy Minister of Trade and Commerce, Ottawa, 1 March 1932. Thanks to Gail Campbell for this reference.
  25. The *Boston Globe*, 4 December 1934. Thanks to fellow hooked mat researcher, Paula Laverty, for sharing this reference.
  26. Anselme Chaisson and Annie-Rose Deveau, *The History of Chéticamp Hooked Rugs and their Artisans* (Yarmouth, N.S.: Les Éditions Lescarbot, 1985) cite examples of at least four married couples and one individual male who earned ongoing recognition for their work.
  27. "Hooked Rugs to Wipe Off Mortgage On Farm," *Halifax Herald*, 14 October 1933.
  28. "Wages in Agriculture 1920, 1926, 1929-1937," *Labour Gazette*, 1939, March Supplement, Appendix A, 123.
  29. The pricing is still assessed by the square foot. At a recent meeting of rug hookers a recommendation put forward suggested a value of \$155 to \$211 per square foot.
  30. "Women Establish Thriving Industry," *Montreal Gazette*, 8 October 1931.
  31. Taped interview, Lynn Marie MacDonald, "A Survey of Mat Hooking Traditions in Central Nova Scotia 1900-1985" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1988), 72.
  32. "Hooked Rug Exhibition At Institute Shows Skill of Women," *Halifax Chronicle*, 10 June 1927.
  33. Gordon Green, *A Heritage of Canadian Handicrafts* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967), 53.
  34. For some of the articles on Chéticamp see Carolyn Cox, "The Rugs of Chéticamp," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, April 1938; "Rug for the Queen," *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 June 1939; Isabel Morgan, "Cape Breton Hooks a Rug," *Saturday Night*, 10 February 1940; Andrew H. Brown, "Salty Nova Scotia," *National Geographic*, May 1940. See also Chaisson and Deveau, *The History of Chéticamp Hooked Rugs* and W. W. Kent, *Rare Hooked Rugs* (Springfield, Mass.: The Pond-Ekberg Company, 1941), 30-31, 77-78.
  35. T. J. Jackson Lears, in *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 10-11, discusses the emergence of more rigid time-keeping with the rise of industrial capitalism.
  36. Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 205.
  37. Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 80.
  38. Annual Report of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild 1945, CHG archives, C11D3 254 1944, 8. Burke did not return to Chéticamp following the war; however, as the CHG report reveals, she did not make a complete break with the community in 1939 as is generally believed.
  39. Taped conversation, 15 October 1997, with Cameron Garrett, grandson of John E. and last family member to run the firm.
  40. "Burlap for Hooked Mats," January 1944; "The Burlap Situation," July 1945; "Burlap Restrictions Removed," April 1946, *Handcrafts*, Bulletin of the Handcrafts Division, Department of Trade and Industry.
  41. Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management (NSARM) TT1 H236 *Handcrafts* Bulletin, January 1951, 1; Mary Black papers, MG1 Vol. 2878, #29 Memorandum, March 1951 from Helen A. MacDonald.
  42. Massachusetts designer and teacher Pearl McGown had the most profound impact on the postwar return to hooking as a hobby. Although she is no longer alive, her teaching method is still strictly adhered to by certified instructors.
  43. Building on the work of Lears and others, Kim Sawchuk addresses "Modernity, Nostalgia, and the Standardization of Time" in *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, ed. Lynda Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 155-164.
  44. Thomas Lackey, "Image Sources for Bluenose Hooked Rugs," *Canadian Antiques and Art Review* 1, no. 7, April 1980, 22-26.
  45. "Hooked Mats and How to Make Them" (Halifax: Published by Authority of Hon J. A. Walker, Minister of Natural Resources, n.d.). Thus far, the only extant copy of this pamphlet found is in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. The Nova Scotia Museum has a photocopy. Date of publication has been determined through Women's Institute and other government reports.
  46. Anna Hobbs, "Get Hooked on the Three Bears," *Canadian Living* 12, no. 9, 5 September 1987, 81-82.
  47. Some Nova Scotian hookers made wall hangings, but this was not typical.
  48. Kent, *Rare Hooked Rugs*, 148.
  49. Nina Wilcox Putnam, "Hook Rugs — Rugs of the Future," *House & Garden*, May 1918.

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## Shiver My Timbers: Images, Objects and Ideas in the Popular Culture of Seafaring

GARTH WILSON

### Résumé

*La mer constitue un environnement vaste et influent et l'interaction que les êtres humains ont eue avec elle a produit une culture maritime particulière. En Occident, cette culture a à son tour donné naissance à un répertoire distinct d'images, d'objets et d'idées populaires qui font régulièrement surface et se répandent dans les médias et sur le marché. Cet article offre un libre examen de certains des aspects les plus notables de la culture maritime populaire et présente des arguments en faveur de l'intégration de la culture populaire aux collections contemporaines du patrimoine maritime. En fait, étant donné que les sociétés occidentales sont de plus en plus étrangères à la vie et au travail en mer, dans une certaine mesure, la culture populaire maritime est devenue la culture maritime pertinente, servant d'intermédiaire pour les perceptions populaires du passé tout en étant elle-même un important témoignage de la culture matérielle.*

### Abstract

*The sea constitutes a vast and influential environment, and human interaction with it has produced a special maritime culture. In the Western world, this maritime culture has, in turn, generated a distinct catalogue of popular, recurrent images, objects and ideas that permeate the media and the marketplace. This paper offers an informal examination of some of the most notable aspects of maritime popular culture and argues the case for including popular culture within contemporary collections of maritime heritage. Indeed, with Western nations becoming increasingly alienated from life and work at sea, maritime popular culture has to some extent become the relevant maritime culture, serving as both a mediator of popular perceptions of the past, and as an important material-culture record in its own right.*

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Approximately seventy-one percent of the earth's surface is covered by salt water. What we refer to simply as "the sea" constitutes a vast, complex and important ecosystem, one that is generally considered to be the cradle of life. We also know of the profound influence that the oceans have upon our climate and weather. Socially speaking, there is something universal in the appeal, mixed with awe, which all large bodies of water hold for human beings. For many people, and this is especially true of Canadians, annual holidays often involve some form of pilgrimage to the water, be it the lake that borders the family cottage, the river one will explore by canoe, or the ocean beach that serves as the focus of so many resorts. Similarly, port cities have about them a special atmosphere,

a fact famously celebrated by Melville in the opening chapter of *Moby Dick*. One can literally smell, feel and taste the presence of the sea, just as one can often identify the special energy that port cities, as junctions of international exchange, provide. All in all, the marine environment constitutes a very special place and so, not surprisingly, human interaction with it has produced a special culture.

In the Western world, this special culture — what one might call maritime culture — has generated a distinct catalogue of popular, recurrent images, objects and ideas that transcend language and learning, and permeate the media, the marketplace and our built environment. In an article entitled "The Case for Kitsch: Popular/Commercial Arts as a Reservoir

of Traditional Culture and Human Values" Alan Gowans has argued that the popular and commercial arts "now appear to present a dynamic, rich foundation for a vital material culture in touch with past and future alike."<sup>1</sup> While Gowans is here engaged in a larger endeavour, that of asserting the primacy of the popular, commercial arts as "the arts of our time, in the traditional sense of the word, 'art'," <sup>2</sup> in so doing he makes a compelling argument for the importance of popular culture and kitsch in our society, noting that "popular/commercial arts, including here material culture, are the means by which traditional attitudes and values are transmitted from one generation to another."<sup>3</sup> He also makes the point that historical consciousness, "a sense of the past," is conveyed

*in part, through historical museums; but far more through movies, television, plays, period furniture, Disneyland and the like, not excluding displays in department stores (which have influenced museum techniques a good deal).<sup>4</sup>*

To those working in the museum world today, this statement will come as no new revelation. Indeed, for many years now museums have been preoccupied with learning and applying communication techniques adopted, in whole or in part, from the media and indeed from Disneyland.<sup>5</sup> Yet while the virtues of adopting popular interpretive approaches to formal exhibitions may seem obvious enough to many, Gowans' argument ultimately extends to the contents of museum collections.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this study, therefore, is to consider the nature and place of popular culture as both subject and object in maritime museums.<sup>7</sup>

Maritime popular culture is dominated by a relatively small number of items which reappear with striking frequency. Indeed, a core sample of images, objects and ideas can usually be found, in whole or in part, wherever it is advantageous to evoke a romantic association with the sea, be it at waterfront tourist venues, seafood markets, restaurants, and last but not least, maritime museum gift shops. Even a brief, selective account of the most common recurrent images, objects and ideas strongly suggests a particular pattern of emphasis. As one might expect, this pattern ultimately proves to be a limited source of formal understanding about maritime history *per se*, while revealing a great deal about how the history of seafaring is perceived in the popular imagination. Simply to recognize this difference, however, is not

sufficient. In taking its measure, we ought also to consider the state of Western seafaring today, the particular circumstances of which, as I will argue, imbue maritime popular culture with additional significance.

Before attempting to define and explore this subject further, it may be useful to establish a contextual framework in the form of a basic anatomy of maritime heritage and material culture. I will limit this framework to the three most prominent subjects found in maritime museums and historic sites: ships, sailors and shore services. In part, this will serve as a brief introduction and orientation. However, equally important, it may also provide some indication of the connection between the formal heritage found in museums and the popular culture of the media and marketplace, for some general appreciation of the former is required if we are to begin to understand the essential nature of the latter.

The heart and soul of maritime history and heritage is the ship. Why this is so is best explained by the simple fact that the ship was and is the principal medium by which human beings experience the sea. Moreover, for many centuries ships were the largest and most complex of human creations. They were also among the most important, whether in war, commerce or simply as a way for moving people and goods from one place to another. Before the invention of aircraft, ships served as an essential bridge between continents and countries; they were the primary instrument by which humanity first discovered the extent and diversity of the world. The significance of the ship as an essential means to important human ends naturally made it the focus of considerable technological development, a fact which is manifest in a general increase in size, power and sophistication. This development became particularly acute beginning in the nineteenth century with the introduction of mechanical propulsion and metal hulls.

In addition to their obvious utility, power and presence, ships are also a common element in important and poignant social transitions such as exploration, emigration, deportation, and homecomings. It is, therefore, no surprise that ships and seafaring figure so prominently in the Western mytho-poetic tradition: Homer's *Odyssey*, the Biblical story of Noah, the Norse Sagas, and the Irish *Immrama* are among the more obvious examples. In modern times, perhaps the most common and vivid remnant of the mytho-poetic, almost religious, dimension of ships can



be found in the ship-launching ceremony. This small drama, performed by specially selected dignitaries before an assembled crowd, is the technological equivalent of a baptism, involving speeches, presentations, a benediction and a climactic christening to mark the new vessel's introduction to the sea. Thus, above and beyond their quantifiable size, form and value — social, economic and political — ships have traditionally been imbued with a certain mystic grandeur; and societies that build or are otherwise dependent upon ships usually celebrate this association through ritual, art and material culture. Yet, notwithstanding the range and richness of the subject, when we consider the ship in popular culture, as we will shortly, we find reflected an oddly fragmented image in which a particular historic period, and certain specific technologies, dominate the picture, obscuring in the process the many details and great variety inherent in its history.

This brings us to the people most closely associated with ships: namely sailors. Among Western nations, sailors are part of a very old profession which has, over time, accumulated a wealth of distinguishing characteristics, qualities and attributes. This includes such things as costume, folklore and leisure (crafts and song), ritual, speech, social habits, instruments and tools. There are, naturally enough, notable national and regional variants of this culture though these may be thought of as branches arising from a common trunk of technology and experience. In short, the history and heritage of the mariner — Jack Tar to use a common English rubric — represents a vast, multi-faceted subject, one which, given the rise in social history, has proven a rich seam of material for research. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note here that one of the salient results of this scholarship has been to reveal the weaknesses and limitations of any one stereotype. Still, as we will see, two specific historical incarnations of the mariner have taken on a life of their own and now, with the help of advertising and the media, enjoy a special prominence in a world of popular recognition and association.

The third and final element in this quick profile of maritime heritage is what I will call here shore services. This encompasses both architecture and technology, such as lighthouses, life-saving stations, wharves, shipyards, chandleries and warehouses, as well as economic and social institutions from taverns and brothels to schools, hospices, hospitals, brokerages and company offices, all specially

developed for and devoted to seafaring and shipping. The place of the ship at the centre of maritime heritage — already noted — is apparent in the emphasis one finds in many museums towards those institutions, like shipyards, shipping companies and lighthouses, that produced or served ships directly. Generally speaking, many of those services that were connected to the social and economic aspects of seafaring have a lower profile, or perhaps have proven more difficult to present to a family audience, and so have traditionally received less attention by those responsible for maritime heritage preservation. In many cases they have been relegated to a supporting role, or have been the subject of temporary exhibits.

This, then, is an overview of three pillars of maritime heritage. By and large, these three areas represent the focus of institutional investment for most maritime museums, in real and intellectual terms. Not surprisingly, they also provide the essential elements from which most of the images, objects and ideas of maritime popular culture are derived, and in relation to which they may be examined and better understood.

The small catalogue of popular items that follows is neither comprehensive in scope, nor developed from a formally structured investigation. Instead, it is the result of informed observations and documentation undertaken over a number of years by a professional curator of maritime history and technology. In today's climate of heightened accountability, curators are increasingly mindful of the general public's understanding and expectations regarding their subject areas. The world of popular culture is one obvious place to look for clues and insight, and the present effort, however limited, is the result of my exploration of this dynamic realm. The catalogue is made up of examples drawn from a wide range of printed publications, the general marketplace, and visits to various waterfront developments in Canada.

My reading of these images and objects is admittedly personal, but it is enriched by my professional knowledge and experience, including visits to various maritime museums and historic waterfronts in Europe and North America, and by my engagement with individuals and communities that were once, or are still, connected to life and work at sea. There is certainly room for alternative interpretations and it is hoped that this paper will inspire further thought and discussion. Formal research into the actual conceptual origins and commercial success of the images and objects

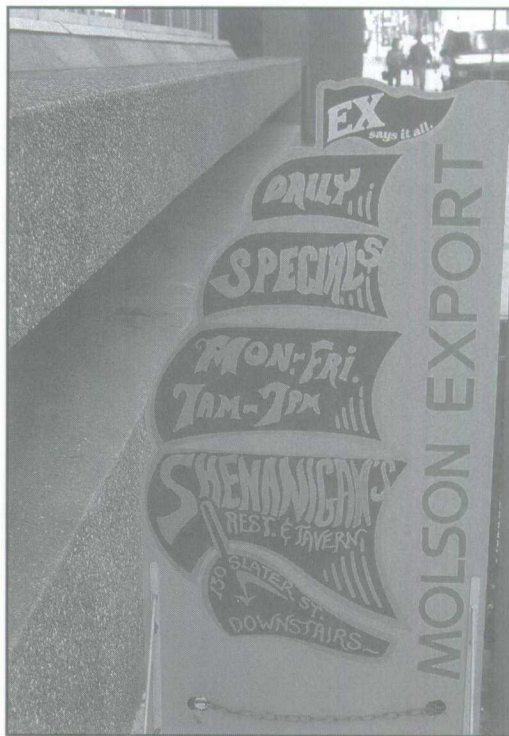
discussed remains to be done, but it should be noted that many of the items mentioned here are either logos or have otherwise gained prominent exposure through simple longevity.

For the purposes of the present exercise, my primary interest was in identifying patterns of emphasis among the many examples gathered and these emerged fairly readily. Thus, informal though it may be, this selection of maritime popular culture is, I would argue, representative. It reflects both the wide range of commercial applications and contexts, and the concentration of images and ideas around a few salient themes. Viewed as a whole, the effect is not unlike looking into a carnival mirror: a bright surface where one recognizes the essential contour and colour of the subject and finds, beyond the humorous exaggeration of certain features, some essential insight or meaning.

### Looking in the Mirror: Ships

In the maritime world reflected by the shiny surface of popular culture, one vessel type dominates: the square-rigged, multi-masted sailing ship now widely referred to as simply the "tall ship." Indeed, even the term "tall ship" is itself a product of popular culture. Meaningless in nautical tradition, the usage apparently originated in advertising aimed at promoting the bi-centenary gathering of large sail-training ships in New York in 1976 (OpSail '76).<sup>8</sup> Whatever its origin, the enthusiastic use of the term has only served to reinforce the popular association between one specific ship type — or, more accurately, a rough facsimile of this type — and the infinitely more complex history of Western shipping. Here, as with all of the popular maritime images, the examples cited are but a salient selection.

It is curious to note the variety of products wherein the image of the "tall ship" serves as a product icon. Of the many examples, some are certainly more intuitively logical than others; for example, beer. The tall ship has served as a feature in advertising for the German brewer "Beck's" where the text notes that Beck's is the leading import beer from Germany (the ship as symbol of international trade) and the catch phrase is the common affirmation of good fortune: "your ship's come in." North American beer drinkers will also recognize the tall ship's presence on the label of Molson's *Export* beer (again an evocation of international trade) sold by the venerable Canadian brewer. Here the ship is clearly intended to suggest an exotic



**Fig. 1**  
Sidewalk sign employing  
the familiar Molson's  
Export tall-ship logo



**Fig. 2**  
A "vintage" bottle of  
Old Spice aftershave



product shipped from a foreign land and — like the tea of the great clipper ship epoch — one highly valued in a competitive market. The fact that this is a brand sold largely in North America and, therefore, transported today primarily by modern semi-trailer truck, does little to lessen the inherent power of the image and its historic associations.

It might also be said that any brewery's use of the image of the tall ship has a gender-specific appeal, in so far as social beer drinking has traditionally been a part of male-bonding celebrations such as may be associated, in the popular imagination, with the predominantly male society found at sea. Whether or not this was part of Beck's and Molson's marketing strategies, the tall ship was certainly significant in the promotion of *Old Spice* male toiletries. Effectively mass marketing aftershave, scented soap and other such soft luxuries to men was, at least in the 1970s, very much an issue of mind over matter. Men were at once encouraged to clean and decorate themselves — to soften and scent their natures — with a particular product, the packaging and presentation of which was associated directly with the rugged, self-reliant maleness of the sailor. The message, in short, was that tough guys could also smell good (the same guiding principle also drove the promotion, more amusingly, of the popular 70s *High Karate* brand of toiletries). In addition to adopting the historically resonant tall ship as its long-time logo (now updated to the silhouette of a racing yacht), *Old Spice* took this obvious maritime association one step further. It applied the image of the tall ship to a trademark decanter that by its simple, white, ceramic appearance

suggests the bottles used for medicines aboard sailing ships in centuries past. Finally, there is the brand name itself, which clearly alludes to one of the great, historic inspirations for seafaring: the search for spice.

Of course, trading spice was only a means to an end, namely making money. In this respect, it may not seem so surprising that an investment management firm such as Connor Clark might also choose the tall ship as a promotional image. The use appears slightly more nuanced, however, when the accompanying banner text is read: "This Way to Superior Portfolio Performance." At first glance, the square-rigged sailing ship would seem an unlikely image of "superior performance" at least when compared to such modern conveyances as jet aircraft. However, further reading shows a deliberate effort to engage potential customers in an extended maritime metaphor, one where "clear sailing" is contrasted with "rough patches of monetary restraint and...sudden market squalls," against which the company offers a "steady investment course" over the long term. Clearly, then, the allure is essentially conservative and the tall ship represents a cautious — or to use a nautical phrase, "steady-as-she-goes" — approach in deliberate contrast to riskier, get-rich-quick schemes.

A subset — or perhaps an abbreviated form — of the tall ship can be found in the common use of specific technologies associated with large sailing ships, most notably the ship's wheel and the anchor; the means by which it is, respectively, steered and stopped. Although wheels have been used to steer ships for most of the last 300 years and the anchor has ancient origins, the actual technologies used, adapted and stylized in popular culture are predominantly those most closely associated with the "great age of sail."<sup>9</sup> This means ships' wheels made of wood, reinforced with brass, and characterized by spokes and protruding handles. As for the anchors, they are usually of a sort known formally as the standard, fisherman's or admiral's anchor, characterized by large flukes. The popular adaptation and commercial use of anchors and ships' wheels is arguably more numerous and varied than the image of the tall ship itself.

Examples for the anchor range from clothing, "J. G. Hook," to the cruise line, "Royal Caribbean," to the official tourism logo for the state of Rhode Island. More generally, the anchor is usually applied to any item wherein a nautical association is desired, for example on a child's

**Fig. 3**  
A small, classic ship's wheel as double-door handle, Sidney, B.C.



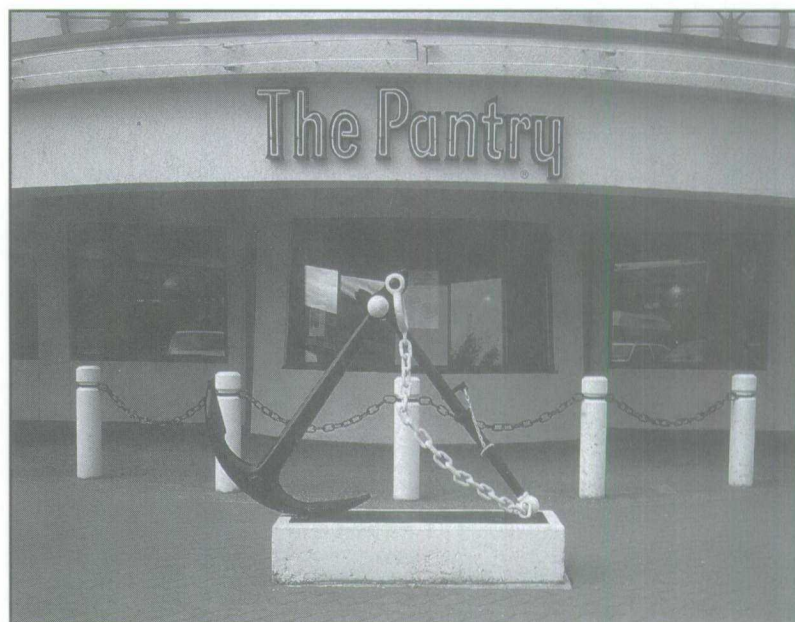


cap or a brass bottle opener target-marketed to the yachtsman. The same is also true for the ship's wheel, with perhaps the best known example of this particular nautical association, at least among millions of Web users, being the Internet provider "Netscape." Moving from image to functional object, real and replica ships' wheels are commonly used as props and decoration in seafood restaurants (just as it is common to find anchors used as a form of public art wherever a nautical association is deemed appropriate). In one observed instance, the classic ship's wheel was divided down the middle and thereby used, rather ingeniously, as the handles on a set of double doors. Indeed, any trip to a seaside tourist community will provide the casual observer with numerous examples of this phenomenon. What is perhaps less obvious, but important to this discussion, is the predominance of nautical references of a particular type and time.

### Looking in the Mirror: Sailors

Historically speaking, the mariner's working appearance was characterized by variety — influenced by regional traditions and conditions — and, outside the Navy or passenger service, practical irregularity. This may come as a surprise, since references to the seafaring profession no doubt conjure certain specific images and ideas. Not surprisingly, most of these, when considered, prove to be firmly based in popular culture and come readily to mind in large measure as a result of their being recycled regularly, with slight variation, by the media and the commercial arts. Above all, two types dominate: the pirate and what I will call here simply, "The Captain."

Of course, it is hardly original to note that irony (as often as not unintentional) is a prominent feature of modern advertising. In the case of the pirate in popular culture, the irony generated by the distance between historical reality and popular usage is particularly acute. Here it bears remembering that piracy on the high seas remains, even today, a very serious problem and pirates are unequivocally a very menacing, ruthless and deadly threat.<sup>10</sup> Historically speaking, the image of the pirate is no less ugly, though time, national politics and popular literature and entertainment have naturally allowed for a certain romanticism to influence our perceptions.<sup>11</sup> Even given the general hardships and brutality of life during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries —



the period from which most of our historical accounts, legends and popular ideas of piracy stem — the acts and ends of piracy managed to stand out, albeit fuelled by authorities anxious to underline the threat to civil order and to alienate the pirate from humanity. Perhaps the alienation from society was mutually reinforcing, but without doubt pirates lived in a world characterized by extreme violence, so much so that the average mariner, who hardly lived a life of comfort and personal liberty at sea, had good reason to fear them.

Reflected in the mirror of popular culture, however, the pirate image has shed almost all of its menace, leaving only the romance and attractive machismo. Rum drinkers will easily recognize the brand name of *Captain Morgan* and his commercial image as a dashing, handsome, man's man dressed in period costume. Less well known to many will be the role of the real historical Captain Henry Morgan. Captain (later Sir Henry) Morgan was a buccaneer based in Jamaica, who led an international band of pirates in a series of celebrated (by Morgan's countrymen at least) plundering raids, as part of a semi-official extension of England's attempt to challenge Spanish power in the Caribbean. While his cunning, courage and effective leadership rightly deserve recognition, the morality of his efforts and objectives were dubious even in the shadowy context of seventeenth century politics and war. And while the historical portrait of the real Captain Morgan is not as clear as we might wish, the existing record indicates that his excessive drinking was

**Fig 4**  
*Ship's anchor as parking-lot sculpture, Mariner Village Mall, Sidney, B.C.*



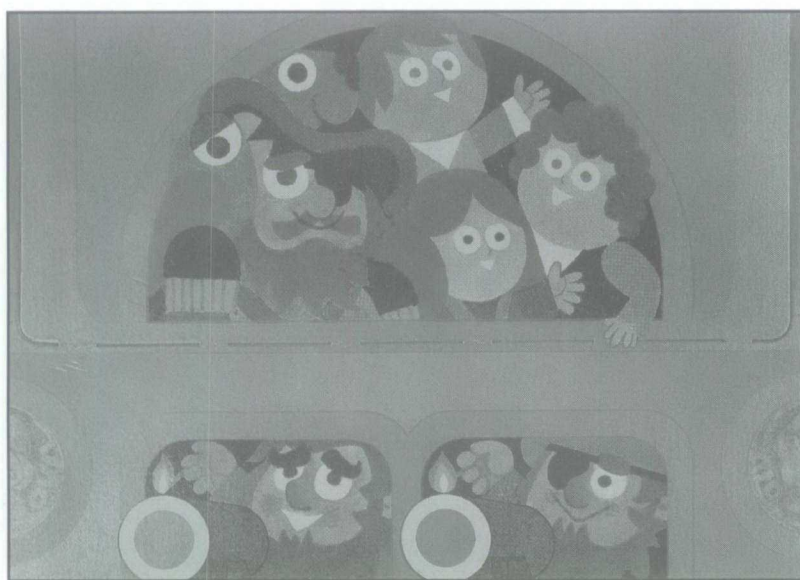
Fig. 5  
LEGO™ pirate figure



obvious even among his contemporaries, an irony either lost on, or ignored by, the distillers of the brand of rum that bears his name.<sup>12</sup>

While such a romantic, highly selective use of history is hardly unusual in the world of advertising and promotion, in the case of the pirate in popular culture, the extent to which this figure has been transformed is truly striking. One especially notable example is an illustrated printed advertisement for *Club Med* that depicts a passionate encounter on a tropical island between a man dressed as a buccaneer (albeit a very well-groomed one) and a woman with a full mane of blonde hair, and a simple, loose barmaid's blouse. The illustration style is

Fig. 6  
Detail from *White Spot*  
Restaurant's "Pirate Pack"  
container, ca 1996



of the sort that is usually associated with romance paperbacks. While admittedly some of the more obvious signature pirate elements are missing from this scene — patch, parrot, bandana — the accompanying text propels the irony of even this mild pirate association to a level beyond that of *Captain Morgan's* rum. Here, we read the line: "If only the real world were this real." One can only hope that the writers of this ad copy were not thinking of the real historical world of pirates, for to do so might well encourage a gross misreading of the degree of consent depicted, which, in the context of the product on offer (highly social holiday getaways) is surely very far removed from the intended allure. But perhaps nowhere is the transformation of the pirate image more flagrant than in its use in the marketing of products to children. Notable examples are the *LEGO™* pirate figures — itself a small micro-reservoir of popular pirate references — and the use of pirate culture in the promotion of children's fast food by the Canadian restaurant chain *White Spot*. In this latter instance, a standard combination meal is presented under the title "Pirate Pack" and delivered in a cardboard ship richly illustrated with fun, cartoon images of children and pirates playing together. To judge from the longevity of the idea, this transformative use of the pirate as a promotional concept has never been the subject of complaint or protest. In fact, it is fair to assume that it has been well received by the public in the positive spirit that was clearly intended. Still, to grasp fully something of the magnitude of the transformation, one needs to think of the likely response to a similar children's promotion in which a motorcycle gang was featured.

As prevalent as the pirate is in maritime popular culture, arguably the most dominant figure representing the mariner is that of "The Captain:" a white-bearded man with a mariner's cap and appropriate attire, usually a dark jacket over a white sweater or some variation of the same; a pipe is optional. Among North American consumers today, perhaps the best-known incarnation of this character is *Captain High Liner*, the fictional representative of the Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, based *High Liner Foods* first introduced in company advertising in 1978. Yet, in creating this character as a maritime equivalent to other such product personalities (for example, *Betty Crocker*), *High Liner Foods* was clearly building on a pre-existing archetype, one whose presence is apparent throughout the



world of the maritime popular and commercial arts. Indeed, they may well have been inspired, perhaps unconsciously, by the popular American cartoon figure "Popeye" or, more precisely, Popeye's bearded father "Poopdeck Pappy."<sup>13</sup>

One common manifestation of "The Captain" is a popular kitsch marine figurine which can be found, with only slight variations, in numerous seaside tourist shops — including museum boutiques — across North America.<sup>14</sup> Roughly carved out of wood (or sometimes moulded to resemble carved wood) and hand-painted, this mass-produced item appeals to the buyer both as the embodiment of a romanticised way of life, and, stylistically, as a reflection of the folk-art tradition which arose from that life. The same archetypal image can also be found in both local marine-related business — again often associated with seafood restaurants such as Wallymagoo's Marine-Bar, Toronto — and, more subtly, in the promotions and programs of the increasingly popular cruise business. Venerable Cunard Lines has issued an advertisement featuring a modern colour photograph of an attractive couple speaking to the Captain of their ship. Though the photo is clearly posed and planned, the ad text, in the form of a testimonial from the depicted Captain, suggests the mariner is real and, real or not, the figure was no doubt an enthusiastic choice on the basis of his visual similarity to the archetype.<sup>15</sup> Another example, found in a *New York Times* travel feature on cruising, is a photograph in which an onboard program of traditional marine crafts and skills is depicted. The presentation is here also being given by someone who sports a cap and white beard in close accordance with the generic Captain character.

### Looking in the Mirror: Shore Services

Turning from sea to shore, there is among the matrix of buildings, services and structures associated with seafaring, one item which stands out above all others — in this case both literally and metaphorically: the lighthouse. The use of the lighthouse as a popular culture image or logo is so frequent and pervasive, that any survey must by force be highly selective. The evident popularity of the lighthouse has much to do with its innate symbolic power. As it is commonly portrayed, the lighthouse combines two elements, each of which has strong, positive powers of association: a powerful light meant to be visible at great distance, and a strong tower, raising the light aloft and protecting it from the

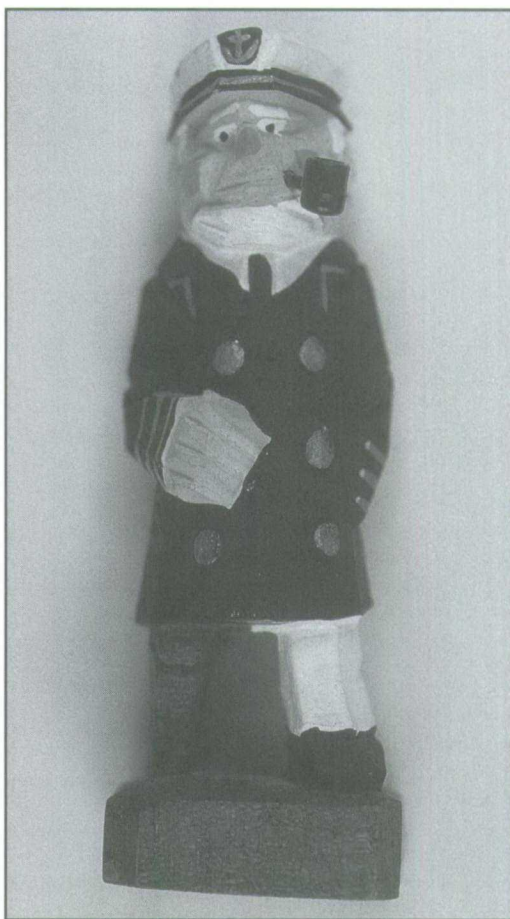


Fig. 7  
Souvenir Captain figure

violence of its environment. Even a simple description of this navigational aid contains obvious messianic undertones: a lighthouse is a beacon that provides guidance and reassurance through darkness and storms. This inherent appeal is further reinforced by historical connections reaching back into antiquity, whence the great lighthouse of Alexandria, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, guided mariners to a port city whose famous library made it synonymous with learning and wisdom.

Although the lighthouse originated in antiquity, the structure most often depicted in popular culture is predominantly one which was firmly established and widely duplicated in the nineteenth century. The commercial use of this image naturally includes a large number of seaside tourist promotions, often for places where the economy was once more closely connected to, or reliant upon, seafaring. Aside from the larger metaphysical associations, the basic idea of a destination for the traveller is also operative. Examples of its use as a destination logo range from regional promotion (Atlantic Canada), to state tourism (Massachusetts), to



geographic areas (Cape Anne) and specific overnight accommodation (Brant Point Inn).

While the connection in all these cases is intuitive, linking a seaside vacation with a structure associated strongly and positively with the seashore, it is worth noting that both the actual utility and importance of the lighthouse is, in fact, diminishing. Today, most lighthouses are automated and have no full-time keeper, a transition which has greatly diminished a unique, quietly heroic, way of life; in Canada those few that are still occupied tend to be the most remote. Moreover, with the advent of modern navigation technologies such as GPS, electronic charts and sophisticated on-board integrated systems, there is less and less reliance on lighthouses by commercial shipping. In response to this, many lighthouses have been entirely removed from service, only to be taken over by local preservation groups. In this way, lighthouses in Europe and North America are being literally transformed from a seaward-facing shipping landmark, to a landward-facing tourist attraction. It is a trend which will likely only increase and, from a popular culture perspective, it is a particularly informative one, since it echoes a larger phenomenon (about which more later).

The promotion of services and products with the lighthouse image is by no means limited to tourism. The list includes mass media (*Castle Rock Entertainment*, a Time Warner Company), shoes and clothing (*Rockport* and *Weatherproof*), prescription heart medication (*Norvasc*) and

even an automobile (*General Motors Blazer*). In this last instance, the product is promoted with an advertisement that, through the magic of photo manipulation, places the vehicle, lights on, at the top of a lighthouse tower where normally the lantern would be found. The accompanying text reads: "A little security in an insecure world." Leaving the best to last, the small seaside town of Sidney, B.C., boasts a wonderful example of popular culture manifest in the built environment. "The Mariner Village Mall" not only adopts the lighthouse as its logo, it also effectively incorporates an ersatz lighthouse into its very structure. Even more delightful, from the point of view of this discussion, is the fact that the tower is bracketed by a large ship's wheel on either side, while the parking lot features a couple of classic fisherman's anchors as ornamental sculpture. All that may be missing are security guards dressed as pirates.

### Finding the Meaning in the Mirror

This brief catalogue of popular, recurrent images, objects and ideas serves as a significant indication of the way in which seafaring is commonly perceived and understood among the general public. Distilled to its essence, what we find in this catalogue is overwhelmingly a nostalgic portrayal of the sea as a source of adventure, romance, and metaphor. Still, all of the items discussed originate in historical technologies and types, and to that extent, they do convey, albeit obliquely, information about Western

**Fig. 8**  
Mariner Village Mall,  
Sidney, B.C. Note the  
combination of lighthouse  
structure, ships' wheels  
and parking-lot anchors.



maritime heritage; what they lack in precision they may make up for in reach. Retired mariners, historians and curators may well be aware of the reductive and romantic nostalgia inherent in these examples, but among a huge cross-section of society they remain powerful signifiers of the material culture of seafaring and effectively function as such. Simply to state the obvious, if this were not so, then these images and objects would not be produced with such frequency and used in so great a range of applications.

Yet recognizing the commercial intention behind their repeated and varied appearance is less important than understanding their persistent appeal. In part, the answer lies in an easy recognition derived from the popular literature of an earlier era, most notably the classics *Moby Dick*, *Treasure Island* and *Peter Pan* (the latter two being particularly influential in the romanticisation of the pirate).<sup>16</sup> Beyond the enduring qualities and characters of these stories, all of which have been rejuvenated, amplified and further disseminated through the popular magic of the movies, there is also — though this is more difficult to quantify — the elemental appeal of the sea itself. The same general facts of geography and history that give the sea so great an influence over our sense of place and distance, and make it such a compelling force in the human imagination, are also the source of much of the romantic and metaphorical resonance of these popular maritime images, objects and ideas.

This raises the question: how has something as universal and timeless as humanity's experience of the sea come to be represented in the West by so limited a set of technologies and types, dating mostly from a period of about two hundred years: roughly the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? The answer may well lie in the fact that it was during this same period that Western nations managed, through exploration, empirical experience and scientific endeavour, to domesticate the sea. In these two centuries, significant milestones were reached in hydrography (the production and widespread distribution of standardized, reliable charts), navigation (the invention of the marine chronometer to determine longitude at sea), shipbuilding (the introduction of steam and steel); and communications (the invention of wireless radio). Then, in the twentieth century, the dramatic development of aviation shifted the primary frontier of human endeavour, with its power over the popular imagination, from the sea to the sky. With this change, it may be that the

common, public perception of seafaring effectively became fossilized, creating in the process the raw material of maritime popular culture.<sup>17</sup>

Recognizing the romanticised, selective nature of maritime popular culture and its distance from the lengthy, complex history of Western seafaring is an important first step. However, to appreciate fully the value and meaning of these romanticised images and objects requires consideration of another divide: that between the West and contemporary maritime industries and culture. Indeed, the significance of maritime popular culture may owe much to the fact that there is today very little operative social reality — direct experience — effectively to offset or alter its influence. During the last half-century, these popular images, objects and ideas have flourished against a background of growing Western alienation from life and work at sea. Not that ships and seafaring are irrelevant to the modern economy; far from it. Shipping is as important today as ever, arguably more so as the volume of trade has continued to grow. The important difference, however, is that Western nations are today largely absent from the business of building, servicing and especially serving aboard modern ships.<sup>18</sup> In 1998, the editors of the popular literary magazine *Granta*, aptly acknowledged this phenomenon in their introduction to an issue dedicated to the sea:

*The sea can still make us scared and wistful—the Titanic, Charles Trenet singing La Mer — but it also seems to have lost its power. The tide of images, metaphors and stories has been steadily retreating. There are some great and popular exceptions — the novels of Patrick O'Brian, Hollywood's new Titanic — but even these see the sea as history, evocations of the way we were. Why should this be? One obvious answer is that as travellers we no longer need the sea. Another is that ships have deserted great cities and their shorelines... With the ships have gone the men who sailed them, their waterfront bars long closed, the old piers turned into museums or marinas.*<sup>19</sup>

This touches upon an essential point. For simply to state that the popular culture of ships and the sea presents a romantic version of history adds little new to what we already know about the reductive tendency of popular culture (though admittedly a case-by-case analysis of origins can yield some interesting results). Seen in the context of Western alienation from contemporary seafaring experience, however, the images, objects



and ideas of maritime popular culture begin to take on a more important meaning and function. They are vivid manifestations of "the sea as history" alive and operative in the culture of the present; they embody and perpetuate a significant part of our collective memory, that which concerns our relationship with the sea. Or, to borrow Alan Gowans' formulation, these images and objects constitute "a dynamic, rich foundation for a vital material culture in touch with past and future alike."<sup>20</sup> Given the decline of, and growing detachment from, contemporary maritime trades in the West, popular culture has become, in some respects, *the* relevant maritime culture, in so far as it continues to function and resonate in society in a way that no Panamanian-registered car carrier, lap-top-using Supercargo, or the vast expanse of a container terminal, can.

This phenomenon is evident in different ways at different levels. For example, its development is apparent in Paula Johnson's examination of the evolving material culture of a community of watermen in Smith Island, Maryland.<sup>21</sup> Her research provides both a case study of how the transition from the sea as workplace to "the sea as history" happens in a contemporary coastal setting, while also offering a convincing argument for the serious study of the cultural activities and artifacts that are the products of this change. There is, of course, a distinction to be made between the folk-art activities and artifacts of communities like that on Smith Island, closely tied as they are to individual experience, memory and local traditions, and mass-produced maritime kitsch. Nevertheless, when one considers that these watermen are also living modern lives exposed to American mass culture and the temptations and necessities of the tourist economy, the distinction begins to blur.<sup>22</sup> To what extent is the difference largely a matter of proximity in time and place? If the watermen's way of life completely disappears, will future generations continue to transmit their memory through collectables and souvenirs? Whatever the answer, the general approach used in this particular local study might also be usefully applied to Western society writ large which, as we have seen, produces, sells and consumes the generic products of maritime popular culture.

A good place to start is in the maritime museum community. There, even the casual observer may be struck by the comfortable co-existence between the formal history and heritage presented in the galleries, and the generic popular culture proffered and sold in the adjoining gift shops. Rather than simply dismiss this as a reflection of creeping commercialism, or a necessary response

to budgetary pressure, the presentation and sale of popular culture in maritime museums deserves further consideration. After all, the visitors are, generally speaking, people who have come to the museum in order to experience, and learn from, the authentic material history on exhibit. What then do these same visitors seek and apparently find on the shelves of the museum boutique and how does it relate to their enhanced understanding of maritime heritage? The answer may come as a surprise, for as Stephen Cutcliffe and Steve Lubar have pointed out in an article discussing industrial history museums,

*exhibits...are only a small part of the visitor experience. Bathrooms, restaurants, shops — the entire setting — are essential to the success of the visit. Curators would do well to remember that the visitor does not necessarily draw the lines between exhibit and public space that the museum staff does.*" [Emphasis mine]<sup>23</sup>

Indeed; and if, as has been suggested, one should acknowledge that the items for sale in the shop do constitute "a dynamic, rich foundation for a vital material culture" then it is surely possible to begin thinking of the museum boutique as a kind of informal gallery in its own right, a prospect which begs the question of whether or not a case can be made for the preservation, study and interpretation of maritime popular culture?<sup>24</sup>

To consider this project should in no way be seen as pandering; nor is it intended as a postmodern or relativist argument. Instead, the point here is simply that the case for inclusion deserves to be made in any serious attempt to preserve, study and interpret our contemporary relationship with the sea. Western maritime museums, with their largely Whiggish intellectual foundations, today face the awkward dilemma of being rooted in a meta-narrative that has been fractured by the events and trends of the last fifty years. Groups of objects that once reflected active political, social and economic forces in Western society have effectively been transformed into a collection of lesser antiquities.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, it might also be argued that the distinct emphasis found in many maritime museums on technology from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries along with a certain type of mariner and shipboard experience, to say nothing of the celebratory spirit in which it is all generally presented, is really not so very far removed from the leitmotifs and tone of maritime popular culture, as some might wish to think.

Put in a more positive way, there is simply an undeniable connection between popular culture and popular understanding, one which deserves greater attention in maritime museums. Moreover, this general rule is made all the more pertinent by the diminished connection between Western society and contemporary seafaring. From a material culture point of view, it is hardly revolutionary to suggest that there can be as much social history inherent in a souvenir figurine, as in a piece of scrimshaw, even if the rarity and value of the latter attract greater attention and scholarship. In addition, museums today are increasingly considering the need for contemporary collecting, both as a serious, long-term exercise — *Sanddok* in Sweden — and as a response to the growing pressure to connect historic collections to the life experience of the visitor.<sup>26</sup> In this respect, maritime museums face a

very serious challenge, in response to which popular culture represents only one of several potentially fruitful new areas of future emphasis and growth.<sup>27</sup> The important thing is for curators not to succumb to the temptation to view maritime popular culture as merely trivial, or to limit themselves simply to exposing the amusing ironies. To do so would be at once professionally self-indulgent (the ironies are almost invariably more apparent to the curator than the public) and, at the same time, the loss of a rare opportunity to join the past and present together. Instead, curators ought seriously to consider the meaning and significance of maritime popular culture both as a mediator of the public perception of Western seafaring heritage, and as an important contemporary material-culture record in its own right, one worthy of preservation, study and interpretation.

#### NOTES

1. Alan Gowans, "The Case for Kitsch: Popular/Commercial Arts as a Reservoir of Traditional Culture and Humane Values," *Living in a Material World: Canadian and American Approaches to Material Culture* (St John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1991), 141. It is this article that first inspired the present inquiry into maritime popular culture. In fact, Gowans introduces his ideas using an extract from E. C. Segar's comic strip *Popeye the Sailor*, though here he does so for the political content rather than the maritime features of the principle character, 127–129.
2. *Ibid.*, 130.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 130–131.
5. George F. MacDonald and Stephen Alsford, "Museums and Theme Parks: Worlds in Collision?" *Museum Management and Curatorship* 14, no. 2 (June 1995): 129–147.
6. A superlative example of using popular culture in a museum exhibit is *1699: When Virginia Was the Wild West*, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Virginia, 1 May 1999, to 13 February 2000. This exhibit made use of popular ideas and techniques from both the movie *Western* and comic books to enliven its interpretation of seventeenth century Virginia. See Thomas Andrew Denenberg, "1699: When Virginia Was the Wild West: An Exhibition Review," *Winterthur Portfolio* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 291–300.
7. Gowans' analysis and understanding of art history, and the importance he attributes to the popular commercial arts today, is based on his concept — clearly defined — of social function or "those functions the activity called 'art' has traditionally performed in society." In essence, he argues that the so-called "high art" of the avant-garde no longer performs these same social functions, whereas the popular arts do. Alan Gowans, *The Unchanging Arts: New Forms for the Traditional Functions of Art in Society* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1971), 54. While Gowans' art historical analysis may be applied equally to the images and objects of maritime popular culture, my focus is different, though complementary: it is an examination of popular culture not as art (worthy of a gallery), but as maritime heritage (worthy of a museum). Still, the debt to Gowans is great, since his compelling case for popular culture validates, and makes room for, the present exercise.
8. While many of the largest sail-training ships do conform closely to the popular archetype of the multi-masted square-rigged vessel, it is interesting to note that "tall ship" events today include almost any large, sail-powered vessel.
9. The "great age of sail" is admittedly a rather amorphous phrase. Here it is meant to refer to that period from roughly 1700 to 1850 when the technology of the large, ocean-going sailing ship was perfected and remained unmatched by developments in steam propulsion. After 1850, the relative importance of the sailing vessel in trans-oceanic navigation began to diminish.
10. The problem, well known among mariners and shipping professionals, was recently given a very vivid and public airing in the *New York Times Magazine*. See Jack Hitt, "Dangerous Waters," *New York Times Magazine* (20 August 2000), 36–41, 52, 68–69.
11. For an excellent, insightful account of the history and romance of the pirate, see David Cordingly's *Under the Black Flag: The Romance and the Reality of Life Among the Pirates* (New York: Harvest Books, 1997). The book's first chapter, entitled "Wooden Legs and Parrots" is particularly interesting for its coverage of the popular stereotypes in literature and film.
12. For a concise account of the historical Captain Morgan, see Cordingly, *Under the Black Flag*, 42–55.
13. The E. C. Segar comic strip character "Popeye" dates to 1929, and became well-known among subsequent generations through the animated cartoon series which it inspired. Poopdeck Pappy was introduced to the series in 1936. In 1980, Robert Altman made a live-action film based on the cartoon.

14. One such figurine was, in fact, the focus of an earlier paper by the author on maritime museums and popular culture. The object was subjected to a simplified material culture analysis in order to demonstrate its potential as a legitimate artifact of maritime heritage. Garth Wilson and John Summers, "Maritime Museums and Material Culture Studies," *The Northern Mariner* IV, no. 2 (April 1994): 31–40.
15. A one-page feature in the magazine *Sea History*, reveals the contents of this ad to be factual. Capt. R. W. Warwick, "At the Helm of the Queen Elizabeth 2: A Family Tradition," *Sea History* 95 (Winter 2000–1): 14.
16. Regarding Robert Louis Stevenson's contribution, Cordingly notes: "The effect of *Treasure Island* on our perception of pirates cannot be overestimated. Stevenson linked pirates forever with maps, black schooners, tropical islands, and one-legged seamen with parrots on their shoulders." Cordingly, *Under the Black Flag*, 7. For his comments on J. M. Barrie's influence, see pages 19–21.
17. Seen in this light, the remarkable popularity of "Tall Ship" gatherings and events may be interpreted as part of a nostalgic celebration of this elemental triumph. For what is more powerfully emblematic of maritime endeavour during this period than a full-size working version of the primary technology?
18. The one partial exception to this rule may be the cruise industry. Still, as some of the examples given show, it is a business that is as well-served by nostalgia and romance as any other seaside tourist operation.
19. "Introduction," *Granta* 61 (Spring 1998).
20. Gowans, "The Case for Kitsch," 141.
21. Paula J. Johnson, "Boat Models, Buoys and Board Games: Reflecting and Reliving Watermen's Work," *Material History Review: Ships, Seafaring and Smallcraft* 48 (Fall 1998): 89–100.
22. Gowans makes this point as well, noting that "...the boundaries between folk art and popular/commercial art are always murky." "The Case for Kitsch," 130.
23. Stephen Cutcliffe and Steve Lubar, "The Challenge of Industrial History Museums," *The Public Historian* 22, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 23. Both maritime and industrial museums are, generally speaking, the products of a Whiggish world view. They therefore have much in common and in some cases are even one and the same.
24. The wonderfully eclectic British journal *Things* "published twice-yearly by an independent group of young writers and historians as a forum for the free discussion of objects, their histories and meanings" has enthusiastically embraced this prospect. A notable example can be found in two separate reviews by Laurel Blossom of the exhibit *The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition*. The first concerns the exhibit itself and the material culture it presents; the second concerns the contents of the exhibit gift counter. See Laurel Blossom, "Freeze Frame — *The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition*, American Museum of Natural History, New York," *Things* 10 (Summer 1999): 65–70; and "Tchotchke Schlock: Souvenirs of the Shackleton Exhibition, American Museum of Natural History, New York," *Things* (Summer 1999): 113–115.
25. I have discussed this problem and related issues at greater length elsewhere. See Garth Wilson, "Editorial," *Material History Review: Ships, Seafaring and Smallcraft* 48 (Fall 1998): 1–11, and "Maritime Museums and Material Culture," *Maritime Life and Traditions* (2000): 83–84.
26. Goran Rosander, ed., *Today for Tomorrow: Museum Documentation of Contemporary Society in Sweden by Acquisition of Objects* (Stockholm: Samdok Council, 1986). See also Mina Rieur Weiner, "New York Inside Out: An Exhibition and Experiment in Collecting Twentieth Century New York," *History News* 55, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 12–18.
27. Wilson, "Editorial," 6–8.

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## Driving the Suburbs: Minivans, Gender, and Family Values

CINDY DONATELLI

### Résumé

Depuis son élaboration en tant que marchandise dans les années 1970, la camionnette est construite comme un espace domestique au féminin, une réduction consacrée par des expressions telles « maman soccer » et « maman camionnette ». Le marketing des camionnettes depuis 1983 représente concrètement la réalisation des politiques pro-vie et anti-amendement sur l'égalité des droits de l'ère Reagan aux États-Unis, parce qu'il cloître les femmes dans de petites boîtes renfermant valeurs familiales, impératifs d'hétéronormalité, hyperfécondité et vie domestique en banlieue. Une lecture postféministe des camionnettes en tant qu'objets matériels permet de voir comment la conception et la fabrication des voitures ont délimité l'accès des femmes aux espaces publics et aux activités indépendantes. La rhétorique de libération par les véhicules loisir et travail révèle à quel point les femmes de la société du capitalisme avancé ont permis à la « maniabilité », à la « visibilité » et au « sens de l'aventure » d'évincer l'activisme politique confiant, le regard pénétrant et l'indignation.

### Abstract

Since its inception as a marketing idea in the 1970s, the minivan has been constructed as a feminized domestic space, an elision ratified by phrases such as "soccer mom" and "minivan mom." The marketing of the minivan since 1983 represents, in material form, the successful realization of Ronald Reagan's pro-life, anti-ERA policy of the 1980s by physically putting women into little boxes that bundled "family values"—imperatives of heteronormativity, hyperfecundity, and domestic suburban life. A postfeminist reading of the minivan as a material object enables us to consider how car design and manufacturing have delimited women's access to public space and independent activity. The current liberation rhetoric of SUVs reveals the degree to which women in a late-capitalist society have allowed "ease of handling," "driver visibility" and "a sense of adventure," to displace bitchy political activism, vision, and outrage.

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Since the introduction of the Dodge Caravan in 1983, minivans have literally driven through roads, suburbs, families, and women, thereby taking their place among the iconic cultural objects that construct late-twentieth-century life. In the first full model year, 1984, Chrysler sold more than 200 000 vehicles; by 1988, this number had climbed to 450 000.<sup>1</sup> Sales of all brands peaked in 1994, with 1 265 575 minivans sold.<sup>2</sup> Now firmly entrenched as both a vehicle and market segment, this phenomenon, which began as Lee Iacocca's brainchild for a teetering Chrysler, wrote itself into the suburban landscape as a "lifestyle vehicle," with more than forty makes and models currently available and eighty-three projected for the near

future. Marketing research, advertising, and use patterns confirm that the "minivan" (the word is a new coinage in English) serves as a nexus for bringing together a whole set of social scripts — of the nuclear family, of the renegotiation of women's domestic and professional lives, of suburban life and its modes of transportation, and of course, of motor vehicles as a complex sign system.

In this essay, I intend to discuss the minivan as having created a well-defined discursive space — mostly interior, as we all know — for bundling and defining familial and suburban social relations in a very conservative way. The vehicle creates a "myth" of family harmony, with everyone sitting in their own seats, during a time when divorce rates



have increased, teenagers have led increasingly independent lives, and two-career families are hard pressed to find time for both professional and domestic commitments. Since all objects play themselves out in this larger arena of socio-cultural politics,<sup>3</sup> I intend to demonstrate that the minivan acts as a material shell for the retrograde conservative agenda of "family values" that became one of the dominant themes in political discourse when Ronald Reagan was elected at the beginning of the 1980s, a time that coincides with the introduction of this "family vehicle." I read the minivan's very high degree of identification with women as yet another example of the backlash against the second-wave feminist visions of the 1960s and 1970s that is marked by the failure to ratify the ERA and the assault on women's reproductive rights since the early 80s.<sup>4</sup> It is a car that has literally and effectively boxed in millions of women, and by the new millennium these "little" boxes — or not so little, in the case of extended models — are driven to the "big box" environments of suburban housing developments, malls, and huge stand-alone Walgreens and Home Depots.

If we turn briefly to automotive history, we find that the much-heralded launch of the minivan as a new "concept" vehicle that emphasized interior space was repackaging an idea that had been around for some time.<sup>5</sup> Writers for specialized magazines like *Popular Mechanics* and *Car and Driver* observed that a minivan-like vehicle, the Scarab, had been produced as early as 1932, but only nine were ever built.<sup>6</sup> The Scarab had a long flat floor and the interior could be arranged for sleeping or a bridge foursome, having something in common with Airstreams, Winnebagos, and car campers. Vans and light trucks, for both commercial and commercial passenger use, had been introduced at a very early date. Station wagons were models that set out many of the goals that were later taken up in the minivan: they offered extended space to accommodate family members rather than goods or passengers being delivered. The folding third bench opened new possibilities for private passenger vehicles, as children wound up in a newly enclosed passenger space which, in a sedan, would have put them in the trunk. There is compelling statistical evidence that the minivan's success during the 1980s and the 1990s came at the expense of this former family vehicle as their paths converge and then lead in opposite directions on a graph of sales numbers for both vehicles in the late 80s.<sup>7</sup>

The most direct lines of descent for the design of minivans may be traced to the very successful launch of the Ford Econoline and Chevy Astro

series in the 1960s. The use of these vehicles was initially commercial, but they were marketed, eventually quite luxuriously, for personal use too. The layout was there in the 60s: two independent passenger seats in front, double doors for both side and rear entry. Yet another predecessor of the minivan which emphasized interior space and height was the Volkswagen Microbus, first introduced in 1950 by Volkswagen. Although it never achieved the kind of inevitable identification with the family that minivans enjoy, the VW bus remapped interior space by providing a strikingly different set of opportunities for social relations with its higher headroom and easier access for the eight passengers it seated. Moreover, VW buses, with their sunroofs and window space, provided prototypes of what was to become minivan "visibility." Of course, the VW bus literally wove itself into the political narratives of the 1960s and early 1970s, becoming highly visible as the vehicle of a "counterculture" that was engaged in various wars between the "establishment" and its luxury sedans, station wagons, and sporty coupes. In this context, the VW bus achieved an iconic identity, which interestingly it did not manage to pass on to Volkswagen's next van effort, the Vanagon. I would suggest that by the time the Vanagon was introduced in 1980, the VW bus script had played itself out, possibly tainting the Vanagon as a family car. In "Mini-Van Madness," an article published in *Motor Trend* in 1986, a reviewer pretty much dismissed the Vanagon as a vehicle best used "to stuff a dozen college students in it."<sup>8</sup>

Chrysler's 1983 models of the Dodge Caravan and Plymouth Voyager were in fact designated as light trucks but, from its very inception in the prototypes of the 1970s, the minivan was envisioned and designed as a family passenger vehicle, having an abundance of cargo and headroom. The minivan's most direct predecessor and namesake, "the Mini/Max," was designed at Ford in the late 1960s. It was envisioned as "a viable suburban transport module...a functionally sized box that could be employed for family hauling and shopping errands."<sup>9</sup> Chevrolet tried introducing a similar vehicle with the Corvair Greenbriar, but it was on the market only briefly because of the safety concerns that doomed the Corvair itself. This family market segment clearly existed from the 60s on, for both Ford and Chrysler were to discover in their market research that there were 800 000 potential customers for such a vehicle.<sup>10</sup> When Hal Sperlich, who had worked on the Mini/Max at Ford, followed



**Fig. 1**  
1984 Plymouth Voyager  
(Plymouth Voyager 1984  
brochure, CSTM 3064;  
reproduced with  
permission of  
DaimlerChrysler  
Corporation)

Iacocca to Chrysler, he brought with him the commitment to T-115, as the prototype was called. During the planning and development stages, designers referred to the vehicle as a “super van” or “box on wheels,” and the first production version, driven by Iacocca himself (who ended up being locked in the car!) came off the Windsor, Ontario, assembly line in September 1983.<sup>11</sup>

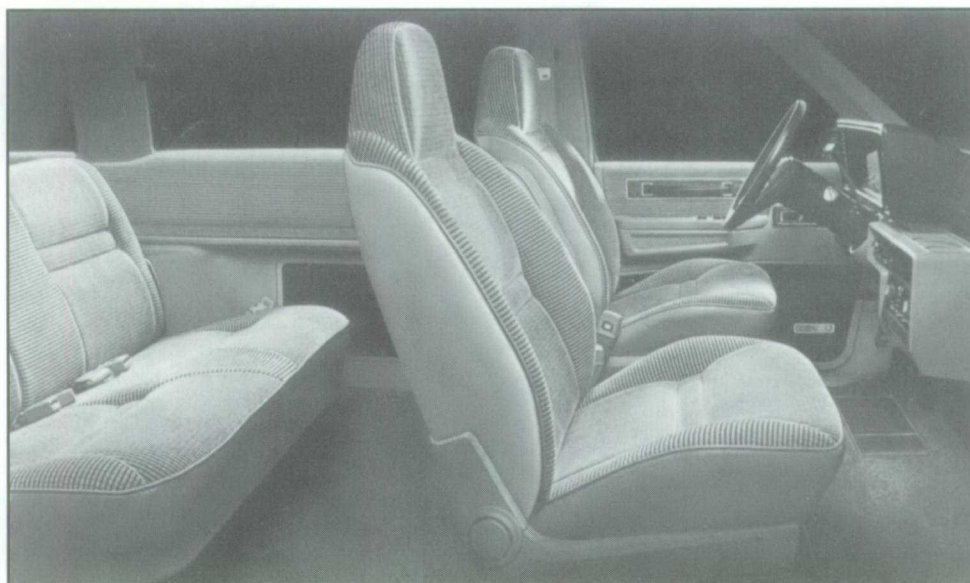
The designers achieved their objective of giving the minivan a “passenger-car feel” (as opposed to the Econoline and Astro) by building the minivan on the chassis of yet another successful Chrysler “family” car, the K-car. This was in keeping with the industry’s practice of updating basic platforms, by “reskinning” or even more prosaically, “perfuming the pig” (one of many sexist phrases that characterize the language of car design<sup>12</sup>). The minivan’s design emphasized the “functionality” of the vehicle so that it could adapt to family needs, from carrying the children (and the rest of their soccer team), to carrying groceries, to going on vacation, to carrying a 4 × 8 piece of plywood — the latter indeed became the standard unit measurement for the interior dimensions of a minivan. Its “shape-shifting” qualities led Chrysler to dub it the “Magic Wagon” at first, and to consider using the magician Doug Henning in order to promote it.<sup>13</sup> Exterior design was consciously sacrificed in favour of this “functionality.” In 1997, an article in *Popular Science* defended the utility of “Versatile Minivans” in the practice of everyday family life: “Judged solely on image, the minivan comes up short against the upstart, more rugged sport

utility vehicle. But for a road trip, a softball game, the carpool, or any long list of domestic chores, minivans remain the ultimate people mover and car carrier...Performing a multitude of tasks — and carrying out each at least reasonably well — is nothing to be scoffed at.”<sup>14</sup>

The identification with families, reinforced almost uniformly in the advertising of minivans, was clearly an identification with *certain kinds* of families. Against the background of social debates concerning ERA, abortion, and the public lobbying for gay and lesbian rights, the interior of the minivan resoundingly affirmed the heteronormative family of two different-sex parents and children, the more the better. The minivan by both its design and marketing endorses and privileges scripts of marriage and procreation (Fig. 1). While there are exceptions among very specific groups of purchasers (e.g., sports enthusiasts), it is abundantly clear that minivans are not designed for single consumers or even for consumers who have a partner and don’t have children. Other market segments are left unrepresented — images of the car and its passengers endlessly and numbingly repeat, in a Baudrillardian loop, the husband in the driver’s seat, wife in passenger’s seat — unless, of course, she is alone in the car with the children. This seating arrangement literally disposes bodies in a way that reinforces traditional heterosexual and monogamous gender roles as they are defined by family relations — images of men and women who do not fit the stereotype of “relationship material” are rendered invisible by the minivan’s space.



**Fig. 2**  
1984 Plymouth Voyager  
interior (Plymouth  
Voyager 1984 brochure,  
CSTM 3064; reproduced  
with permission of  
DaimlerChrysler  
Corporation)



Commercials and advertising are addressed to mostly white, middle-class, clean-cut, well-run families — according to the commercials, minivan drivers have their family relations under control, a fact which is represented by the collective disposition of all family members in the minivan at once.

The minivan also serves as an advertisement for a heteronormative imperative to reproduce, especially in the pro-life political environment of the 1980s.<sup>15</sup> As feminist theorists have noted, such reproduction has been identified traditionally with political service to the state,<sup>16</sup> in this case, Reagan's "Morning in America." With a minivan in their garage, American families "were on the move again." The minivan projects a hyperfecundity that flies in the face of actual statistics indicating average birthrates dropped among women in the early 80s, especially among working women who accounted for more than fifty percent of the workplace.<sup>17</sup> A review of minivans in *U.S. News and World Report* was entitled "When Room for Five is Not Enough": "Just a few years ago, the only people your car had to satisfy were you and your spouse. Now things are getting cramped. Check off as many of the following as apply to you: your family numbers five or more; you overload the car on vacations; you carpool hordes of kids to and from soccer practice, Brownies and other activities essential to a modern childhood."<sup>18</sup> The evocative phrases convey an explosion of children — "five or more," "overloaded," "hordes." In 1984, a title in the otherwise staid magazine *Money* screamed with sexual innuendo "Suburbia's Hot New Hauler," and described "families as piling into sporty alternatives to the station wagon," with a

background picture that placed children everywhere, including several popping out of the sunroof of a vehicle.<sup>19</sup> Indeed with its phenomenal sales figures, it seemed as if the minivan itself were breeding, as suggested by article titles such as "How Long Does it Take to Hatch a New Car."<sup>20</sup>

In thinking out how Dodge Caravan's and Plymouth Voyager's 175 inch (445 cm) body and 125 cubic feet (3.5 m<sup>3</sup>) of cargo space might act as a container for all kinds of packed social relations, designers departed from the normal practice of car design. The minivan was in fact designed from the inside out, with the interior space projected first, then boxed in by the metal skin.<sup>21</sup> The design team did absolutely everything to maximize interior space, which committed them early in the design process to front-wheel drive. The three rows of seating, which would accommodate eight, were positioned to allow easy access, and the side doors were to become key elements in minivan design. The seating pattern can be seen as predicating a network of social relations and generational hierarchies in the van: parents comfortably sitting in the two front seats which afforded the roominess of front-wheel design, with the children literally being disposed and cramped in rows in the back. Clearly, there was a greater gap of space between the front seats and first rows of back seats so that while the minivan projected a space that could collect the "nuclear family" with all its accessories (e.g., pets, video game gear, etc.) and cargo, it actually set up seating patterns inside the vehicle which distanced children from their parents, thereby opening possibilities for separate and independent realms inside (Fig. 2).

Since car purchases are second only to house purchases as a family investment, the vehicle becomes a crucial socio-cultural site for the "performativity"<sup>22</sup> of "family values" since the minivan's *raison d'être* assumes that large nuclear families will have occasion to travel together in a very close space. The marketing season for minivans is still March through July, reflecting the purchase of a minivan in time for summer vacations.<sup>23</sup> The identification of vehicles with children's sports teams, most notoriously soccer, envisage a kind of extended family that the vehicle might hold all at once. In keeping with Jean Baudrillard's positing of a regime of simulacra in late-capitalist societies,<sup>24</sup> commercials based on these activities on the TV screen or magazine page produce simulations of a Disneyland-like coherence to the family that overwrites and ultimately obliterates the many social statistics and popular movies (ranging from Stephen Spielberg's *E.T.* [1982] to Adrian Lyne's *Fatal Attraction* [1987], which contradict this idealized view of family life in the mid 1980s. I would thus suggest that the minivan was never a "futuristic" vision, but rather a repackaging of an idealized suburban domesticity that hearkened back to the station wagons of the 1950s. The wording of an advertisement for the 1950 Plymouth station wagon speaks the language of minivans: "Comfortably seats eight full-sized passengers. Both rear seats quickly and easily removed for maximum loading."<sup>25</sup> New container, similar script.

Historically, the minivan enters this larger social discourse of "family values" as a vehicle that aligns itself with the far-right politics of both Ronald Reagan, and his counterpart in the women's movement, Phyllis Schlafly, in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>26</sup> When we think of the fact that the concept of a large vehicle had been fully worked out by the late 1960s in the Mini/Max, this huge market segment was just waiting to be tapped in the early 1980s by Reagan's constituency, "conservative family types aged 35–44" who were looking for a vehicle which would be a "lifestyle enabler."<sup>27</sup> The minivan "enabled" them to recognize and embrace, in sheet metal, anti-ER and pro-life positions which had become focused not on the question of women's rights, but rather on the consequences for "family."<sup>28</sup> While these same conservative families may not have been keen to identify themselves with this agenda in a political arena (especially educated women with children), purchasing a minivan in effect

made this decision for them. While sociologists have long recognized that the divergence between the rhetoric and social reality of "family values," the consequences of this conservative social ethos was remarkably successful in terms of conveying its rhetoric and restructuring of society not in words, but in the material objects which were so prominently acquired and displayed in the 80s. Minivans remind women that in considering issues of maternity and family, it is important to move outside of "mainstream" feminist academic discourse on these subjects, and to consider that ideologies of reproduction are negotiated not only in hospitals and birthing rooms, but in car dealerships, television advertising, and on the road.

The minivan's orderly disposition of the family resulted in the development of certain specific technologies for "handling" the family in separate areas of the vehicle. The seating itself, as we have seen, established vectors of power, depending on whether the father or mother was driving. Moreover, innovations in design represent a Foucauldian "microphysics of power"<sup>29</sup> that is exercised in all rows to hold these bodies together in this closed space. While the first models were rudimentary, the minivan evolved a very specific set of features which eroded the absolute control of the driver's instrumentation: independent climate controls in the rear seats, cargo bins, safety latches and sliding doors. New sciences, which were to spread to other vehicles, were perfected in the minivan. In 1989, *U.S. News and World Report* reported that the addition of "crannies for drinking cups" was "a future frill"<sup>30</sup> but now models contain as many as 17 cup holders, with automakers having developed a science of "cupology." And, of course, the minivan's evolution has subsequently constructed the commodity of "more space," which technically is space (largely air, thinly surrounded by metal) added to the original space since the introduction of extended models.<sup>31</sup> The minivan plays a major role, I would suggest, in this commodification of "space" in the automotive industry, a quality which now seems to extend down to even the smallest compact car, perhaps fulfilling the mandate of the best of both worlds expressed by the original term, "Mini/Maxi." Ingenious solutions like the 60/40 split in rear seats may be seen as a ripple effect of this obsession with the shape-shifting quality of interior space in the minivan.

In light of this obsession with the design and disposition of interior space, the minivan is now best understood as an extension of the suburban



home whose owners were the most important market segment for these vehicles (Fig. 3). Statements to that effect are commonplace: after meeting with Caravan owners at consumer clinics, a marketing executive concluded, "These things are extensions of their homes."<sup>32</sup> In 1997, an *Esquire* article recognized that bodies had been distributed into separate spaces, like rooms: "a mini is like a big family house in the summer, with everyone coming and going and nobody in anybody's way."<sup>33</sup> Minivans belong to the increasingly mobile extensions of a home (like a cellphone), reflecting the reality of suburban two-career families who commute, shop for groceries, and then return home only to transport children to school and activities. It is worth noting that the development of the minivan also parallels the development of new residential areas since the early 1980s. Except during rush hours, these areas tend to be inadequately served by mass transit, and thus the car becomes crucial in getting families into and out of these neighbourhoods.<sup>34</sup>

In an economy of working women, Nancy Rubin has eloquently described such suburbs in North America as empty and deserted during the day: "The great suburban mansions and modest tract homes are often silent all day, mausoleums to a dream, the streets hushed until the schoolchildren return home."<sup>35</sup> The minivan has displaced the home as the locus of daily family life. Dean Stoneley, brand manager for the Ford Windstar, has spoken directly to this in a recent *National Post* article: "Consumers are busier than ever...With double-income families and longer commutes, I think people

are spending more time in their cars and generally trying to do more with less time, and they're looking for tools that allow them to do that. We are trying to help, by taking features that are currently in their home and putting them in their vehicle."<sup>36</sup> Emphasizing "functionality" on the go, one writer has described minivans as "Swiss Army knives on the road."<sup>37</sup>

The continuing story of minivan design in the 1990s may be read as a narrative of the architecture of a mobile domestic space, a kind of Deleuzian "nomadology"<sup>38</sup> rather than the design of a car. With the addition of the left-side fourth door (which immediately established itself as a requirement for these vehicles), increasing glass space and visibility, more storage compartments and amenities for activities (tray tables, glass holders, cargo bins) and continuing design refinements, especially for rear-seat passengers, the minivan reflects the architectural tendencies of the expensive suburban home, which admits lots of light by means of costly window openings, has built-in "smart" appliances, and the latest in comfort systems such as central air and high-efficiency heating. Consumers come to the minivan with the same expectations that they have in buying a home, and the market has increasingly moved in the direction of higher-end models like the Chrysler Town and Country, which make the original Dodge Caravan and Plymouth Voyager look like, well, a box.<sup>39</sup>

The current and future development of "home comforts" is about to bring the minivan to its logical conclusion as mobile domestic space,

**Fig. 3**  
1984 Plymouth Voyager  
(Plymouth Voyager 1984  
brochure, CSTM 3064;  
reproduced with  
permission of  
DaimlerChrysler  
Corporation)





rather than as a vehicle. Minivans already include on-board monitors so that rear-seat-passengers — read children and teenagers!! — can rely on the television screen for entertainment, as they do at home. The television, as Cecilia Tichi has argued, has been integrated into domestic life since the 1950s as “an electronic hearth”<sup>40</sup> and the extension of this hearth into the minivan’s interior demonstrates the degree to which the minivan has elided with a domestic space which is centered around televisuality.<sup>41</sup> In a recent issue of *Parents*, a mother has agonized over whether she is being a responsible parent in using videos to keep her children under control, thereby extending these gender-specific parental issues into the car.<sup>42</sup> In the future, we can look forward to Windstar Solutions, a Ford Aerostar concept vehicle whose name plate suggests that it will “solve” the problem of domestic living in late-capitalist America. When it was shown a few months ago at an automotive exhibition in Toronto, the minivan was equipped with a pull-down movie screen, a built-in microwave, washer-dryer, central wet/dry vacuum, refrigerator and trash compactor.<sup>43</sup>

The splicing of these appliances from the home into the minivan targets women as ground zero once again, for in many instances women continue to bear primary responsibility for housework and child care despite surface myths of the sharing of household labour with their male partners.<sup>44</sup> The minivan’s ability to inscribe the discourse of “family values” on to a vehicle depended upon the remarkable extent to which the “chassis,” with its “skin,” had been designed specifically for women. As such, it belongs to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century technological developments which, as Ruth Schwartz Cowan has demonstrated, define domesticity as a female regime by identifying women, rather than men, with material objects and practices in the context of the home.<sup>45</sup> As we have seen in both corporate development strategies and in subsequent media advertising, women have been pictured performing almost inevitably interrelated “housewifely” and “maternal,” roles that contradict the complexity of the lives of women with families at the end of the twentieth century.<sup>46</sup> The minivan was a vehicle that bundled family relations in such a way that women would play a central role, no matter what the gender of the actual driver, but what women may have gained in mobility was boxed in by both the scripts of the box itself and by the fact that women are still tethered to jobs which are closer to “home.”<sup>47</sup> There was no



way they were going to get in this minivan and just drive! We might bear in mind that there are some statistics that show the inevitable identification of women with the minivan to be less than factual.<sup>48</sup>

But women were built right into the minivan from the very beginning. Designers worried that women had “to feel comfortable” driving such a large vehicle. One of the solutions was, of course, built right into the car by using the K-car chassis. But this reference to “feeling comfortable,” which is repeated continually, itself demands further deconstruction of its rhetoric because the phrase makes clear that women need extra marketing research and design work “to feel comfortable” — the words themselves construct gendered patterns in relation to vehicles (Fig. 4).

It has been established that cultural objects are never neutral but almost always carry valences of gender.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps, of all material objects, the history of automobile design and marketing has been the most consistently sexist and gender-specific, with both language and design speaking the language of men. In her history of women’s uneasy relation to cars, Virginia Scharff has concluded that “sex has always outdistanced other factors as a focus of public debate about who could and should use motorcars.”<sup>50</sup> Cars assume a male audience and a male gaze as normative — styling features speak the language of aerodynamics and virility, accessories and instrumentation provide a sense of control and power, and highly sexualized advertising makes it clear that the bodies of women and cars (it’s not clear which has the priority!) share common assembly lines.<sup>51</sup>

**Fig. 4**

1984 Plymouth Voyager visor mirror (Plymouth Voyager 1984 brochure, CSTM 3064; reproduced with permission of DaimlerChrysler Corporation)



Fig. 5  
1984 Plymouth Voyager  
(Plymouth Voyager 1984  
brochure, CSTM 3064;  
reproduced with  
permission of  
DaimlerChrysler  
Corporation)



While there has always been some advertising directed towards women, in many cases it has been car-specific (e.g., the electric cars, station wagons, and the recent Saturn), with reference to particular makes and models that women “would feel comfortable driving.”<sup>52</sup> Since a gender-specific car culture has been so dominant — my recent visit to a car dealership reminded me of the pitifully small number of saleswomen, even now<sup>53</sup> — the idea of a woman driving a car, let alone enjoying a car, was marked as a “deviant” script which played itself against the normativity of a male identification with the car. Earlier twentieth-century examples of cars that were marketed for women clearly show that women were seen as a niche market who, because of their disempowerment in relation to the vehicle, required softer, kinder models outside of the mainstream of auto design.

In light of this socio-cultural context, we can appreciate how high-pitched and insistent the minivan’s Althusserian call<sup>54</sup> had to be in order to reach women in such large numbers. In the development phase, designers repeatedly defined and assessed what they thought were women’s “needs”: they wanted to ensure that the car was “drivable by women, who find larger vans too cumbersome to maneuver and park”; they were aware of women’s wariness about a left-side door because it might expose “a small child to traffic.”<sup>55</sup> Ford ran television and prints ads showing a dozen mothers, all Ford employees, with their children, standing in a nicely formed circle around a Windstar minivan. The ads conveyed the message that not just any old women but *mothers who had their children standing right by them* had worked together on a recent redesign of the vehicle.<sup>56</sup>

“Safety” was repeatedly framed as a gender-specific concern, exclusively identified with women (Fig. 5). The safety features, which figured so largely in the advertising (especially when Chrysler found itself confronted with poorly designed safety latches<sup>57</sup>), may be read as devices that were meant to reassure the female driver that she *did* have control of the vehicle, despite its size. In 1977, as the T-115 “Magic Wagon” was being built on the car platform of the “K” cars, “women in particular seemed favorably disposed to it since it could carry kids and groceries yet wasn’t too big or intimidating.”<sup>58</sup> This fetishistic gaze of male auto designers looked closely enough to obsess about skirts: “a woman wearing a skirt or dress didn’t like to climb up and down from a tall vehicle”<sup>59</sup>; a reviewer in *Money* declared: “Gone is the big, skirt hitching step up that annoys many women.”<sup>60</sup> At a premature launch of the vehicle in 1982, Chrysler assigned a public relations staffer “to woo” — note the sexist choice of the verb — women by offering special advance previews to editors of major women’s magazines. What better gendered endorsement of the vehicle than by having Martha Stewart, the doyen of domestic femininity, give the minivan her sanction by adopting the Dodge Caravan as her official company vehicle?<sup>61</sup>

While the measure of this maximized interior space was ostensibly the 4 × 8 piece of plywood, in both advertising and marketing, space was very heavily identified with the kinds of domestic chores that continue to be frustratingly identified with women’s lives in an era of supposedly equitable labour in the home. In “Mini-Van Madness,” the *Motor Trend* reviewers working for a guy car magazine found themselves travelling in unfamiliar, largely unmapped domestic territory after they had navigated the usual put-a-car-through-its-spaces route on freeways, city streets, and winding country lanes. “Before it was all over, we also put the minivan to use in most of the situations they were designed to handle — picking up some groceries, shuttling the kids to school, and stocking up with home improvements supplies at the lumber yard.”<sup>62</sup> I would suggest that the rhetorical positioning of the last phrase in the syntax, evoking the 4 × 8 plywood, represents an attempt to recuperate masculinity after their brief sojourn in an embarrassingly feminized landscape.

The success in creating this market segment could be attributed more specifically in getting women to identify with any car so strongly by

making its body a grid against which a mix of domestic, reproductive, and servile imperatives were staged. By 1998, an article in *Popular Mechanics*, declared that “[t]he ancient conundrum ‘Which came first, the chicken or the egg?’ has been replaced with ‘Which came first, the soccer mom or the minivan?’”<sup>63</sup> The category “soccer moms” represented the apotheosis of a woman’s being in a minivan: the vehicle is the generator of a woman’s identity, yet it is yet another “child” to whom she has given birth. Off road, the minivan was to colonize the political life of these women, as “soccer moms” became a hotly contested demographic category in American politics during the 1996 election between Bill Clinton and Bob Dole. The language of one magazine appears to suggest that American society had been run over in an “accident” caused by, yes, you guessed it, “bad women drivers”<sup>64</sup>: “America woke up one day in 1996 to find out that, through an accidental convergence of vehicle choice, children, sport and election year politics, they had become part of the hottest demographic appellation since ‘yuppie’ — the ‘soccer mom’.” The phrase, which piles on to the attributive adjectives that have been spliced with mom (e.g., “stay-at-home mom,” “working mom”) was in fact voted the “Word of the Year” in 1996 by the American Dialect Society.<sup>65</sup>

By the election of 2000, “soccer moms” had morphed again into yet another vehicular body as “minivan moms” who were being “wooed” by Al Gore and George W. Bush as reported by an article in *Business Week*. Every movement of Maryann R. Gallagher, the typical “minivan mom,” is inextricably tied up with her vehicle. The minivan becomes a surrogate self and partner, all rolled into one.

*Every morning at 6 a.m. the Vienna (Va.) mother of three flies out the door and into her Plymouth Voyager for the 30-minute, jam-packed commute to her job ... At 3:30 p.m., she's back in the left lane of Washington's Beltway, doing 70 mph to race home in time to take her daughter to soccer. Gallagher, 49, then speeds off to the market, whips together dinner, and picks up the children if her husband, Frank, can't get away from his job as a manager at GEICO Corp.*<sup>66</sup>

Almost every verb in this passage identifies Gallagher’s physical movement as if she were her minivan — she “flies,” “commutes,” “speeds off,” and “picks up.” She is “doing 70 mph” and “racing home.” Her day illustrates the social

reality that transportation now accounts for a larger proportion of the mix of domestic chores, much of it done by women.<sup>67</sup> But turning her into an automotive cyborg is not enough,<sup>68</sup> the article — written by a woman — makes sure that it deprives her of any illusion about her physical body through all too familiar ageism. Her age is prominently announced in stark numerals after her name, and the writer condescends to Gallagher’s middle-age by observing that “[m]inivan moms” are “slightly grayer and a little more tired than the Soccer Moms of 1996.”<sup>69</sup> The article reports that “they’ve grown more conservative” and we are left to wonder to what extent owning and driving the minivan has determined Gallagher’s political loyalties, her hair colour, the bags under her eyes, and her complexion.

At present, minivan sales are being eroded by SUVs, and it is evident, in television advertising and other types of marketing, that gender has played itself out so completely in the minivan over the past twenty years that both men and women are looking for “freedom” from the vehicle’s inscription of roles. In a *New York Times* article entitled “Minivan Crisis,” Ann Hood expresses feminist outrage towards the minivan, thereby trivializing the resistance which was once channeled toward ambitious claims for political, social and economic equity: “But what my husband envisions me driving is a minivan. ‘Why don’t you just move me out to the suburbs, put me in a pastel jogging suit and buy me a weed whacker for my birthday?’ I snapped at him...A minivan is everything I’ve spend my adult life fleeing, the 1950s suburban domesticity of my childhood. But now, as I am about to have another baby, the issue looms even larger.”<sup>70</sup> As we read this, we might measure Hood’s rhetoric of resistance, here entirely fetishized as suburban, against the politically engaged and outspoken feminist manifestos of the 1960s and 70s when Hood was presumably living through her teenage years. Her outrage about minivans, pink jogging suits and weed whackers might be compared with Betty Friedan’s out-and-out rejection of suburban life in *The Feminine Mystique* or Andrea Dworkin’s eloquent and radical rejection of the kind of heterosexual marriage that puts women in such compromised positions to begin with. How does being a husband give him the right to tell her what she is going to drive?

In *Esquire*, the feminization of the vehicle, which has put men in an uneasy position even when they are in the driver’s seat, now threatens



their virility directly. It asks "Do Real Men Drive Minivans?"<sup>71</sup> Framing the same question, a television commercial shows an all-guy gym, and when a voice over the loudspeaker asks for the owner of the minivan to identify himself, he cowers in the corner, obviously embarrassed. In a machinic language of the phallus which recalls the macho Italian futurists,<sup>72</sup> the mandate of SUVs is to "get them up in the air and make them husky," as opposed to a minivan which "makes buyers feel as if they were once again 'in the womb.'"<sup>73</sup>

But this freedom, in a typically Baudrillardian twist, is yet another box, this time with all that an extended hood has come to represent.<sup>74</sup> "What sells now, it seems, is the illusion of freedom and individuality. In America, that has always been symbolized by the West, and these days drivers see the West-on-wheels in their beloved, beefy, vehicles."<sup>75</sup> Can you imagine "beefy" describing a minivan? But this traditionally male language of westerns and travel adventure has now written itself on to women who are presumably sick of their minivans, middle-age, and domestic life. Recent commercials for the Chevy Tahoe have shown single middle-aged women riding cross-country over deserts and Moroccan villages, and driving, à la Thelma and Louise, to the edge of a cliff. In these lifestyle vehicles, buyers face their mid-life crisis in a box, and the box has by now become a metonym for lived experience, as is indicated by the *New York Times* article entitled "Minivans Facing a Midlife Crisis at Age 14."<sup>76</sup> In this article, a woman declares: "There's nothing wrong with being a mom...I wanted to be a mom, yet I wanted my own identity."<sup>77</sup>

This "backlash against the backlash" shows how successfully the family, and its reproductive practices, have been grafted on to the chassis of light trucks dressed up as cars. By 2001, new

reproductive technologies, especially with data from the Human Genome project now pouring in, threaten to disturb the binary gender and reproduction relations that made the minivan conceivable. A recent commercial for Pepsi One focuses on a wife who had just signed her name on the dotted line, as a typically geeky, obnoxious salesman congratulates her on having accepted her middle age and being "at peace with it." As she looks more and more distressed, she deliberately knocks the can of Pepsi over, and the soft drink washes away the ink of her signature. A suburban feminist like Ann Hood, she decides against the purchase, and walks out with her husband, who has been mute and off-camera, following behind. Where is she going when she walks out? How can this be read as a victory of any kind of women when it takes a can of Pepsi One, with the slogan "FOREVER YOUNG," to keep her out of the minivan? In a Baudrillardian hyper-reality, these are questions without answers, like koans,<sup>78</sup> but I would suggest that postfeminist theory achieves a kind of resistance in relentlessly pursuing and catching up with masculinist objects like cars, and subjecting them to a cold, clinical, market-driven assessment, which is all too familiar to automobile executives.<sup>79</sup> Based on the overwhelming record of women's victimization by the car industry throughout the twentieth century, a narrative of which the minivan is but a final chapter, it seems likely that the current liberation rhetoric of "hybrid" and "crossover" vehicles will lose its spark just like the electric car did, and we'll be left sitting in more boxes. It's time for powerful women drivers, taking a page from Oedipa Maas in Thomas Pynchon's novel *The Crying of Lot 49*,<sup>80</sup> to ditch the minivan, take the wheel, and drive on the freeway with their lights out, just to see what they hit.

## NOTES

1. I would like to thank David Gartman for reading an early draft of this essay and making some very valuable suggestions. Plymouth and Voyager are trademarks of DaimlerChrysler Corporation, and the photographs of the Plymouth Voyager minivan are used with permission from DaimlerChrysler Corporation. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the DaimlerChrysler Corporation for their co-operation. Illustrations are taken from a large format brochure (28 cm x 28 cm), unpaginated, entitled *1984 Plymouth Voyager*, PVWC-84-E, printed in Canada.
2. Brock Yates, *The Critical Path: Inventing an Automobile and Reinventing a Corporation* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1996), 33.

3. Robyn Meredith, "Mini-Vans Facing a Midlife Crisis," *New York Times* (12 May 1997): D11.
4. The bibliography for the ideological analysis of material cultural artifacts is now extensive, both with regard to theory and practice: e.g., Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman, eds., *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000), A. Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Langdon Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" *Daedalus* 109 (1980): 121-43.
5. Susan Faludi: *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991).

5. Yates, *The Critical Path*, 17–26.
6. On the Scarab, see Mary Seelhorst, "Think It's New? Thing Again!" *Popular Mechanics* no. 5 (May 1998): 154, and Frank Markus, "The Scarab — Was This the First Minivan?" *Car and Driver* 42 (1996): 143.
7. Meredith, "Mini-Vans Facing a Midlife Crisis," D11.
8. Jack R. Nerad, "Mini-Van Madness." *Motor Trend* 38, no. 1 (January 1986): 42.
9. Yates, *Critical Path*, 20.
10. *Ibid.*, 23.
11. *Ibid.*, 32.
12. *Ibid.*, 18.
13. *Ibid.*, 31.
14. Dan McCosh, "Versatile Minivans," *Popular Science* 251, no. 2 (August 1997): 84–88.
15. The radical feminist critique of reproduction as a form of subjugation in a patriarchal society was articulated in the 1960s and 1970s by writers such as Shulamit Firesone, Ti-Grace Atkinson, and Andrea Dworkin. For a summary discussion of their views, see Laura Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived: Feminism and the Legacy of the Sixties* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 16–51.
16. See Lauren Berlant's discussion of birth and citizenship in "America, Fat, the Fetus," *boundary 2* 21 (1994): 145–195.
17. For profiles of working women during this period, see Kathleen Gerson, *Hard Choices: How Women Decide About Work, Career, and Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
18. Francesca Z. Lunzer, "When Room for Five is Not Enough." *U.S. News and World Report* 106, no. 3 (January 23, 1989): 64.
19. Jerry Edgerton, "Suburbia's Hot New Haulers," *Money* 13, no. 4 (April 1984): 176–77.
20. Csere Csaba, *Car and Driver* 40 (July 1994).
21. Yates, *Critical Path*, 26.
22. On the performativity of socially constructed gendered relations, see Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1983).
23. Yates, *Critical Path*, 229.
24. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Phillip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983).
25. Yasutoshi Ikuta, *Cruise o Matic: Automobile Advertising of the 1950s*, trans. Japan-Michi Institute (San Francisco: Chronic Books, 1988), 40.
26. On Phyllis Schaflly and the defeat of the ERA, see Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 385–411.
27. Dick Johnson, head of one of Chrysler's two major advertising agencies which were charged with promoting the redesigned NS model of the Dodge Caravan in 1994, cited in Yates, *Critical Path*, 206.
28. Faludi, *Backlash*, 229–241.
29. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 26, 139.
30. Lunzer, "Room for Five," 65.
31. On the challenges presented by the extra space in the redesign of the *New Series* in the 1990s, see Yates, *Critical Path*, 90–1, 182, 221–24.
32. *Ibid.*, 206.
33. Phil Patton, "Do Real Men Drive Minivans?" *Esquire* 128, no. 1 (July 1997): 92.
34. See Susan Saegert, "Masculine Cities and Feminine Suburbs: Polarized Ideas, Contradictory Realities," *Signs* 5, no. 3 (1980), supplement, S96–111, and Sylvia F. Fava, "Women's Place in the New Suburbia," *New Space for Women*, ed. Gerda Wekerle, Rebecca Peterson, and David Mortley (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980).
35. Nancy Rubin, *The New Suburban Woman: Beyond Myth and Motherhood* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1982), 27.
36. Richard Foot, "Prototype For Minivan Has Washer, Dryer, Fridge, Vacuum," *National Post* (23 November 2000): A2.
37. Yates, *Critical Path*, 206.
38. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Semiotext[e], 1986).
39. Yates, *Critical Path*, 210, 291.
40. Cecilia Tichi, *The Electronic Hearth: Creating an American Television Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 42–61.
41. For a recent theoretical discussion of television viewing in relation to driving, see Margaret Morse, *Virtualities: Television, Media Art, and Cybertculture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 111–112.
42. Michelle Krebs, "The Best Family Cars in America," *Parents* 75, no. 3 (March 2000): 149–152.
43. Foot, "Prototype," A1–A2.
44. While women in heteronormative relationships continue to perform the majority of household work and childcare (Martha McMahon, *Engendering Motherhood: Identity and Transformation in Women's Lives* (New York: Guildford Press, 1995), 235–246), the issue of "separate spheres" has been problematized: see, for example, the essays collected in Rosemary Marangoly George, ed., *Burning Down the House: Recycling Domesticity* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998); Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992); McMahon, *Engendering Motherhood*; Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
45. Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 145–150.
46. See McMahon, *Engendering Motherhood*, 231–262.
47. See Fava's discussion of "locality-bound roles," "Women's Place," 137–138, and Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 84. In *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), Virginia Scharff notes that after the Second World War, "the middle-class housewife roamed farther from home, but home was always in range," 170.
48. Keith Bradsher, "Was Freud a Minivan or S.U.V. Kind of Guy?" *New York Times* (17 July 2000), A1.
49. See Katharine Martinez and Kenneth L. Ames, eds., *The Material Culture of Gender* (Winterthur, Del.: Winterthur Museum, 1997).
50. Scharff, *Taking the Wheel*, 166.

51. See C. Edson Armi, *The Art of American Car Design: The Profession and Personalities* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press), 52ff. For examples of the sexist language of car designers, a recent article by James Bennet, "The Road to a Roadster," in the *New York Times Magazine* (18 February 2001): 32–37 makes it clear that exterior design remains a masculinist corporate discourse in 2001.
52. See Scharff, *Taking the Wheel*, 48–49; 111–33.
53. On the historical failure of women to establish themselves in car sales, see *Ibid.*, 83–85.
54. Louis Althusser, *Essays in Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984).
55. Yates, *Critical Path*, 26–27.
56. Bradsher, "Freud," A16.
57. Yates, *Critical Path*, 235–38.
58. Doron P. Levin, *Behind the Wheel at Chrysler: The Iacocca Legacy* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 83.
59. Levin, *Behind the Wheel*, 83.
60. Edgerton, "Hot New Haulers," 180.
61. Yates, *Critical Path*, 31.
62. Nerad, "Mini-Vans Madness," 36.
63. Seelhorst, "Think It's New?" 154.
64. For historical examples of women's incompetence as drivers, see Scharff, *Taking the Wheel*, 26–33.
65. See the "Word of the Year" page on the American Dialect Society's Web site: [www.americandialect.org/woty.shtml#1996](http://www.americandialect.org/woty.shtml#1996).
66. Susan B. Garland with Richard S. Dunham, "Wooing Minivan Moms," *Business Week* (20 September 1999), 83.
67. See Judy Wajcman, *Feminism Confronts Technology* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1991), 84, and Fava, "Women's Place," 135–136.
68. The prospect of a cyborg elision between the automotive body and human flesh has usually been gendered male, as in David Cronenberg's 1996 film adaptation of J. G. Ballard's novel *Crash*, and David Lynch's movie of it, *Crash* (1996). Donna Haraway has written about the opportunities that the cyborg body represents for women, especially in escaping biological scripts of reproduction: see "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 149–181 and "Investment Strategies for the Evolving Portfolio of Primate Females" in *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, ed. Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth (New York: Routledge, 1990), 139–162.
69. Garland and Dunham, "Wooing Minivan Moms," 83, 86.
70. Ann Hood, "Lives: Minivan Crisis," *New York Times Magazine* (20 October 1996): 106.
71. Patton, "Real Men," 92.
72. On the futurists and cars, see Gerald Silk, "Proliferation and Assimilation," in *Automobile and Culture*, ed. Gerald Silk (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984, 57–75).
73. Bradsher, "Freud," A1, A16.
74. Armi, *American Car Design*, 50.
75. Meredith, "Mini-Vans," D11.
76. *Ibid.*, A1.
77. *Ibid.*
78. See the questions posed in the final chapter of Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, transl. Bernard and Caroline Schultz (New York: Semiotext[e], 1988), 103–104.
79. See Mary Wilton's *Car* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997) for an illuminating ethnographic study of the automotive industry, and David Gartman's critique of capitalist automobile design in *Auto Opium: A Social History of American Automobile Design* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
80. Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (New York: Harper and Row, 1996), 176.

## Rapports de recherches

### Récupérer pour créer : les enjeux de la récupération des textiles dans le design de mode québécois depuis 1980

ISABELLE SIMARD

*Rien ne se perd,  
rien ne se crée,  
tout se transforme.*

Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier

Réduire, réutiliser, recycler. Nous entendons et lisons fréquemment ces trois mots depuis quelques années puisque la pratique de la récupération touche désormais au quotidien notre vie et la société dans laquelle nous vivons. Pourquoi parler de récupération dans le cadre d'une thèse de doctorat qui se préoccupe de culture matérielle et de costume ? C'est d'abord le nombre croissant des commerces de vêtements usagés, communément appelés friperies, qui m'a amenée à m'intéresser de plus près à ce phénomène, puis la constatation que la pratique de la récupération s'était étendue à d'autres champs dans le domaine de la mode : en effet, il n'est aujourd'hui plus surprenant de voir des créateurs qui utilisent des matériaux récupérés et les transforment en vêtements et en accessoires de mode. Il m'est apparu que la rectitude politique actuelle, *Zeitgeist* ou esprit des temps modernes, avait sans doute eu pour conséquence la popularité grandissante de l'usage de matériaux récupérés. Ainsi, le sujet abordé dans cette recherche touche plus particulièrement la pratique de la récupération des matériaux et des objets depuis les années 1980. Pour illustrer concrètement ce propos, je m'attarderai à la récupération des textiles au Québec dans le design de mode contemporain.

Cette recherche s'inscrit dans le courant des préoccupations actuelles des chercheurs en sciences sociales (notamment en ethnologie et en anthropologie) qui s'intéressent à la culture matérielle. Dans ces différentes disciplines, la connaissance complète de l'objet est de plus en plus privilégiée ; elle suppose une compréhension approfondie du contexte de

production et d'utilisation de l'objet. Cette approche implique que l'objet en tant que produit fini n'est plus la seule préoccupation des chercheurs. Dans ce cadre, la personne qui produit l'objet, ses motivations et les techniques de fabrication qu'elle utilise, de même que les contextes d'utilisation actuels et passés de l'objet, deviennent aussi importants que leur contrepartie matérielle. Ces études contextuelles, qui ont débuté dans les années 1960 en culture matérielle, n'ont pas cessé de se renouveler, particulièrement depuis la fin des années 1980 : les chercheurs s'intéressent désormais à des objets, à des techniques de production et à des méthodes de fabrication contemporains, qui impliquent une transformation constante des productions matérielles<sup>1</sup>. Les études sur la mode et sur le costume en sont de bons exemples ; elles se multiplient aujourd'hui et les chercheurs qui se penchent sur le sujet sont de plus en plus nombreux<sup>2</sup>. La perspective adoptée en est généralement une de remise en contexte plus globale de l'objet. C'est donc par l'étude de l'objet (vêtement ou accessoire de mode fabriqué à partir de matériaux récupérés) en tant que fruit d'un processus de création complexe et riche de sens que cette recherche et son sujet démontrent leur pertinence scientifique et qu'ils s'inscrivent tout à fait dans le courant des recherches contemporaines en culture matérielle.

#### Quelques définitions

Tous les auteurs consultés dans le cadre de cette recherche établissent une nette distinction entre les termes « récupération » et « recyclage ». La récupération peut ou non introduire l'idée de transformation du déchet (généralement un objet). L'action de récupérer comprend implicitement la nouvelle utilisation d'un objet ou d'une matière qui le compose à des fins



similaires ou à d'autres fins que celles pour lesquelles il a au départ été conçu ou créé. La récupération chapeaute des actions qui mettent en jeu une transformation, une réutilisation ou un détournement de la matière secondaire (objet ou matériau récupéré)<sup>3</sup>. Deux autres pratiques sont considérées comme des actes de récupération : celles du réemploi et de la réutilisation (aussi appelée « détournement »)<sup>4</sup>. Le **réemploi** est l'action de « récupérer tout ou partie d'un objet pour le faire resservir [tel quel] au même usage »<sup>5</sup> ; il est souvent associé au circuit économique de la consigne<sup>6</sup>. La **réutilisation** (ou le **détournement**) concerne surtout l'utilisation d'un objet à d'autres fins que celles pour lesquelles il a été créé au départ, sans qu'il ne soit nécessairement modifié ; elle « comporte un changement d'usage de l'objet ou du matériau »<sup>7</sup>. Quant à l'usage de l'objet de départ, il peut ou non être modifié au cours du processus. La réutilisation met en évidence la notion de « nouvelle fonction » ou de « fonction seconde » de l'objet<sup>8</sup>. Les termes « réemploi » et « réutilisation » ne sont pas usités lorsqu'il y a transformation d'une matière récupérée en matière première secondaire. Finalement, le terme « recyclage » est employé lorsqu'une matière est récupérée et transformée avant d'être utilisée de nouveau. On retient différentes définitions du **recyclage**, dont « Récupérer le matériau utilisé (au moins en partie) » et « Intérêt pour une *matière première d'occasion* susceptible de venir en complément ou en substitution du même matériau ou d'autres »<sup>9</sup>. La récupération de *matériaux*, et non plus de *biens*, comme c'était le cas avec le réemploi et la réutilisation, est clairement mise en évidence dans le recyclage.

La récupération telle qu'elle est envisagée dans cette recherche ne trouve sa place dans aucune des définitions mentionnées aux paragraphes précédents puisqu'elle préconise un processus créatif (idée de recreation). Cette forme de récupération a été enrichie en fonction du caractère particulier du domaine de cette recherche. Le design de mode suppose en effet qu'une dimension créatrice est associée à celle de la récupération : les designers concernés par cette recherche recueillent ou collectent des matières ou des objets qui ne sont pas neufs pour les intégrer à leur pratique qui, elle, est créatrice. Les matières ou les objets au centre de cette étude sont textiles<sup>10</sup> et la notion de transformation ou de recreation est inhérente au processus de récupération étudié ; toutefois, son importance est variable (on peut reconnaître

ou non la matière ou l'objet récupéré au terme du processus de transformation)<sup>11</sup>.

Le design de mode renvoie, d'une part, « à une recherche créative d'équilibre entre forme et fonction, dans le cadre d'un projet de construction ou d'organisation de l'environnement matériel, et, d'autre part, aux produits marqués par cette intervention »<sup>12</sup>. Il peut être défini comme une discipline dans laquelle la production de vêtements et d'accessoires est menée par une recherche créatrice, qui considère le vêtement produit à la fois comme un objet esthétique et comme un bien de consommation.

### Problématique et hypothèses

Une problématique à laquelle se greffent trois sous-questions constitue les lignes directrices de cette recherche. Ainsi, je cherche avant tout à comprendre pourquoi de plus en plus d'individus (designers et consommateurs) s'intéressent à l'utilisation de matériaux récupérés, notamment dans la création de vêtements, et comment la pratique de récupérer pour créer est aujourd'hui perçue dans le Québec urbain. Afin de répondre à cette interrogation, j'explorerai trois avenues. Je commencerai par celle de la matière première en étudiant brièvement la pratique de la récupération de manière générale dans les sociétés occidentales industrialisées. J'aborderai ensuite le domaine de la création de vêtements en m'attardant aux motivations et aux sources d'influence de designers de mode québécois. Enfin, je traiterai de l'avenue de la consommation et de la perception de tels biens en analysant les raisons pour lesquelles ces vêtements sont vendus à l'heure actuelle, les motivations de consommatrices à se procurer de tels vêtements et les habitudes de consommation de celles-ci face aux vêtements de récupération.

Ainsi, le premier questionnaire qui contribuera à répondre à la problématique de départ est d'ordre général, puisque je chercherai à cerner certaines des raisons pour lesquelles, dans le monde contemporain occidental, et plus particulièrement au Québec, les gens récupèrent de plus en plus et adhèrent aux pratiques de collecte sélective des biens et matériaux. Les enjeux de la pratique de la récupération semblent s'être transformés depuis vingt à trente ans et ils s'insèrent désormais dans un contexte social tout à fait particulier : celui d'une prise de conscience écologique et économique. En effet, tout se passe comme si

les décennies 1970 et 1980 avaient sonné l'alarme face au gaspillage des ressources énergétiques et matérielles. Depuis, la population est de plus en plus soucieuse de la dilapidation des biens de consommation et des ressources naturelles et, par conséquent, de la production croissante de déchets que l'on ne sait plus où entreposer.

Ces nouvelles habitudes de vie selon lesquelles les gens se préoccupent du destin de leurs déchets s'opposent radicalement aux modes de consommation qui ont été adoptés depuis le début des années 1960 en réponse à la modification de la vie des sociétés nord-américaines et européennes. De nouvelles habitudes sont apparues conséquemment à la réduction de la taille des ménages, à l'essor de la mobilité, des loisirs et du tourisme, à l'augmentation du pouvoir d'achat, à la diminution unitaire du prix des biens de consommation, au développement de biens nouveaux, de même qu'à l'augmentation du nombre de centres commerciaux et de grandes surfaces<sup>13</sup>. Dès le départ, certains penseurs se sont insurgés contre la nouvelle société de consommation<sup>14</sup>. Ce sont toutefois la fin des années 1960 et le début des années 1970 qui ont donné naissance aux premiers mouvements de contestation<sup>15</sup>. À partir de ce temps, plusieurs chercheurs et penseurs ont accusé cette société moderne caractérisée par le dicton : « Dis-moi comment tu dépenses et je te dirai qui tu es »<sup>16</sup>. Cette prise de conscience et cette réflexion sur une société de consommation qui achète plus vite qu'elle ne consomme et qui jette allègrement les biens qu'elle acquiert sont à l'origine de la redécouverte et de la valorisation de la pratique de la récupération et du recyclage<sup>17</sup>.

La conscientisation des années 1960 et 1970 s'est progressivement étendue au reste de la population et, une quinzaine d'années plus tard, on a tenté les premières expériences de collecte sélective<sup>18</sup>. Signe des temps, de nouveaux périodiques dans lesquels la gestion des déchets était au centre des préoccupations ont paru dans les années 1980<sup>19</sup>. Par ailleurs, divers organismes à saveur écologique et préoccupés par la gestion des déchets et la récupération des matériaux ont été fondés au cours des mêmes années<sup>20</sup>. Une remise en question s'est aussi amorcée au Québec. En 1978, « si la majorité des gens avaient entendu parler de recyclage, peu étaient en mesure de répondre à des questions précises sur le sujet »<sup>21</sup>. L'importance du recyclage est peu à peu transparue ; plusieurs organismes se préoccupant

d'environnement et de récupération ont d'ailleurs été fondés au début des années 1980<sup>22</sup>. Au cours de la même décennie, des périodiques environnementalistes dans lesquels était encouragée l'exploitation des déchets ont été publiés<sup>23</sup>. Puis, en 1989, le gouvernement québécois a pris des mesures concrètes pour promouvoir la récupération matérielle<sup>24</sup>. Depuis, la collecte sélective se pratique dans la plupart des municipalités québécoises et nord-américaines. Tous ces jalons sont des indices que les enjeux de la récupération ont changé de façon notable et concrète depuis quelques décennies. Une méthode de recherche théorique (études et articles publiés sur le sujet) servira à analyser la situation dans le cadre de cette recherche.

Le deuxième sous-questionnement qui guidera cette recherche concerne la production et le discours de designers de mode utilisant des matières récupérées. Je m'y attarderai de façon à connaître les motivations de ces créateurs à récupérer des textiles dans le cadre de leur production. Pour ce faire, je comparerai les intentions (domaine immatériel) et la production (culture matérielle) de créateurs québécois à celles d'autres créateurs occidentaux<sup>25</sup> qui récupèrent des textiles dans le cadre de leur travail<sup>26</sup>. Ainsi, je vérifierai notamment si la pratique de récupération de textiles des créateurs québécois a été influencée par celle d'autres créateurs, plus particulièrement de pays occidentaux francophones et anglophones<sup>27</sup>, afin de déterminer dans quelle mesure la pratique québécoise et les raisons pour lesquelles les designers font de la récupération s'apparentent ou se distinguent de celles des créateurs d'autres pays industrialisés.

Pour les créateurs occidentaux, il semble que l'idée de récupération s'inscrive à la fois dans des courants d'économie, d'écologie et de mode, et que toutes ces tendances fassent partie d'un courant social actuel, lié de près à une plus grande accessibilité des matériaux et à une valorisation de la pratique de façon générale. Même s'il peut paraître péremptoire d'affirmer cela, il semble que les créateurs d'aujourd'hui ne révolutionnent rien en utilisant des matériaux récupérés ; en tant que pratique marginale, la récupération est originale, mais les créateurs qui en font suivent une tendance plus qu'ils n'en fixent les règles. Dans le contexte de mondialisation actuel, les créateurs québécois ne se différencient sans doute pas de l'ensemble des créateurs occidentaux.

D'ailleurs, tout porte à croire que nous assistons maintenant à un changement d'échelle

sociale dans la pratique de la récupération des textiles en Occident, y compris au Québec. Jusqu'aux années 1930, la récupération se pratiquait essentiellement dans un cadre domestique, au sein d'un noyau familial, pour des raisons économiques et pour contrer le phénomène de rareté des matières premières. Cette philosophie de la « déclinaison » voulait que l'on aille du plus grand au plus petit (des pantalons de garçons étaient taillés dans ceux de leur père, des objets de layette étaient faits à partir de lingerie féminine, etc.)<sup>28</sup>. Cela n'empêchait pas nos prédécesseurs d'exercer leur créativité, mais dans un cadre moins étendu, sans que la vente des créations ainsi produites (vêtements ornements ou de soirée, accessoires brodés, *patchworks* décoratifs, etc.) ne soit envisagée.

Entre les années 1930, années de crise économique, et la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, la récupération a été pratiquée par nécessité et encouragée par les autorités. Puis, de la fin des années 1940 aux années 1960, un changement radical est survenu dans les habitudes et dans les pratiques de consommation : les matières premières sont devenues plus accessibles et de nouvelles matières, synthétiques, ont été découvertes. Ceci a progressivement amené les ménagères à moins récupérer et à souhaiter acquérir des biens neufs. Avec la génération hippie de mai 1968, un retour aux sources en matière de réutilisation des matériaux s'est effectué et s'est poursuivi durant les années 1970. La récupération demeurait cependant marginale. C'est à partir du début des années 1980 que la situation a commencé à changer et que les organismes environnementalistes ont décidé de sensibiliser les gens à l'importance de récupérer les ressources dont ils disposaient. De nos jours, la pratique de la récupération n'est plus rare ; elle est même adoptée par certains créateurs de mode. Cela la fait glisser d'une pratique domestique ou marginale à une pratique reconnue et, quelquefois, élitiste<sup>29</sup>.

Le milieu de la mode représente un excellent exemple de changement d'échelle dans la pratique de la récupération des matériaux et dans la reconnaissance sociale qu'on lui attribue. Ce qui semble particulier à ce domaine est la cohabitation de deux tendances qui, au sein de la pratique de la récupération, s'opposent : de nos jours, c'est-à-dire depuis les années 1990, la mode de récupération d'une part se démocratise et d'autre part devient élitiste. En effet, dans le domaine de la mode, où la

reconnaissance du milieu est subordonnée à celle de l'élite sociale<sup>30</sup>, c'est l'élite qui, souvent, transmet son goût au grand public. Dès le début des années 1980, Marylène Delbourg-Delphis reconnaissait l'importance de la pratique de la récupération dans le domaine de la mode et soulignait à quel point cette pratique, d'origine populaire, avait été adoptée par l'élite :

*Les modes de fripe ne sont pas incompatibles avec les modes d'auteur. Elles apportent souvent des éléments, des accessoires qui en renforcent ou précisent l'esprit. [...] La fripe a de surcroît la capacité de détourner de son classicisme la mode moyenne réaliste, de grande série ou mieux de grand luxe – car alors, c'est très snob, c'est très chic-au-second-degré<sup>31</sup>.*

La production des designers de mode se transforme de jour en jour et s'adapte au climat social et politique dont elle découle. Le discours des créateurs reflète sans doute en partie les préoccupations d'une clientèle qui, de plus en plus, souhaite poser des actes sociaux lorsqu'elle consomme. Les objets créés et les propos des créateurs témoignent des enjeux actuels de la pratique de la récupération, c'est pourquoi ils revêtent autant d'importance dans cette recherche. Leur analyse et leur comparaison avec les créations et le discours de créateurs d'autres origines permettront sans doute d'explicitier comment cette facette du design de mode québécois renvoie aux valeurs sociales contemporaines et comment elle témoigne des transformations survenues dans les habitudes de consommation à l'aube du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Enfin, j'explorerai une troisième avenue dans le but d'étudier tous les aspects de la pratique de la récupération et de ses enjeux sociaux et économiques. Comme il a déjà été mentionné, j'analyserai d'abord certaines habitudes de vie des gens face à l'exploitation des déchets (récupération et collecte sélective) afin de déterminer dans quelle mesure et pour quelles raisons ces comportements se sont modifiés depuis quelques décennies. Ensuite, j'étudierai les objets fabriqués dans le cadre d'une pratique créative de récupération ainsi que les raisons pour lesquelles certains individus (les créateurs) ont choisi d'adopter une telle pratique, à la fois en conformité avec les habitudes de consommation actuelles et à contre-courant de celles-ci. Afin de compléter cette analyse, je chercherai d'une part à connaître les motivations des commerçants qui vendent des vêtements faits à

partir de matières récupérées et comment ces produits sont reçus par les consommatrices qui fréquentent leurs établissements. Je tenterai en outre de cerner de façon plus spécifique certaines habitudes de consommation de femmes qui achètent ou n'achètent pas ce type de vêtements. Le choix des consommatrices s'est imposé par la forte majorité de vêtements féminins créés par les designers interrogés et par la plus grande représentativité de ces vêtements dans les commerces de vêtements d'occasion. La méthode d'enquête orale (entrevues individuelles) permettra de cerner ces raisons. Des commerçants de vêtements confectionnés à partir de matières récupérées aideront à dresser un portrait des habitudes de consommation actuelles et de leurs transformations possibles. Des consommatrices amèneront à comprendre l'évolution des habitudes d'achat et les transformations des perceptions par rapport à l'achat de vêtements d'occasion ou de récupération.

En somme, et de façon générale, les raisons pour lesquelles les créateurs de mode récupèrent des matériaux semblent plus variées qu'elles ne l'étaient il y a dix, vingt ou soixante ans. Le fait que la récupération fasse désormais partie de la vie quotidienne des gens dans la plupart des sociétés occidentales industrialisées et l'intérêt que de plus en plus d'intellectuels et de chercheurs accordent à cette pratique témoignent de son importance croissante dans nos cultures. L'utilisation volontaire de la récupération des textiles comme moyen d'expression dans le design de mode illustre également cette idée.

## Méthodologie

Des enquêtes auprès d'informateurs variés permettront de témoigner des particularités de la pratique québécoise en matière de récupération et de mode ou, au contraire, de leur intégration au sein de pratiques plus généralisées et occidentales. La méthode d'enquête orale servira à recueillir des renseignements à ce sujet. Un guide d'enquête sera ainsi élaboré et trois différents types d'informateurs seront interrogés. Les premiers rencontrés seront des designers de mode qui utilisent des matériaux récupérés,

dont des textiles, dans le cadre de leurs activités. Les entretiens réalisés auprès de ces designers permettront de répondre aux questionnements au sujet des motivations des créateurs, de leurs sources d'influence et de leur perception de la pratique de la récupération. Dans un deuxième temps, sept ou huit commerçants vendant les vêtements de créateurs récupérateurs seront questionnés. L'objectif poursuivi avec ces informateurs sera de tenter d'obtenir des réponses à des interrogations sur l'intérêt des consommateurs pour les vêtements et accessoires confectionnés à partir de matériaux récupérés, sur les habitudes de consommation et leur évolution, et sur la popularité de ces pratiques. Finalement, sept ou huit consommatrices d'âges et de conditions professionnelles différents seront interviewées. Cette dernière partie de l'enquête aura pour but de révéler certaines habitudes de consommation et de perception de Québécoises à l'égard des vêtements de récupération.

## Conclusion

Au stade actuel de la recherche, aucune conclusion ne peut être formulée au sujet des enjeux de la pratique de la récupération, particulièrement dans le cas de la récupération qui implique une dimension créatrice. Ce sont essentiellement les enquêtes sur le terrain qui permettront de vérifier les motivations des créateurs, des distributeurs et des consommatrices de vêtements confectionnés à partir de matériaux récupérés. Toutefois, on constate que cette pratique est de plus en plus répandue en Amérique du Nord et en Europe, et que la pratique de la récupération a acquis une nouvelle dimension depuis quelques années : elle entraîne des transformations dans la façon de concevoir l'économie et la consommation de biens et elle amène les gens à se questionner sur leurs propres habitudes de consommation. Il reste à découvrir comment ce choix collectif de pratiquer la récupération se répercute sur le quotidien et sur les décisions personnelles tant des créateurs que des autres personnes qui composent nos sociétés industrialisées.

## NOTES

1. Henry Glassie, « Artifact and Culture, Architecture and Society », dans Simon J. Bonner, éd., *American Material Culture and Folklife : A Prologue and Dialogue* (Logan, Utah : Utah State University Press, 1992) ; Michael Owen-Jones, *Exploring Folk Art :*

*Twenty Years of Thought on Craft, Work and Aesthetics* ([Utah] : University Press of Utah, 1993) ; Thomas Schlereth, *Cultural History and Material Culture : Everyday Life, Landscapes, Museums* (Londres : UMI Research Press, 1990), 440 p. et



- Material Culture Studies in America : An Anthology* (Lanham, Maryland : Altamira Press, 1995).
2. Alfred Willener, « Les modes passent : quelques aperçus sociologiques » et Edwin Borscherg, « Le mythe du consommateur manipulé par la mode », dans *Le phénomène de la mode* (Lausanne : Publications de l'Université de Lausanne, 1985), respectivement p. 45-61 et 1-23 ; Jukka Gronow, *The Sociology of Taste* (Londres et New York : Routledge, 1997), 199 p. ; Marion Laporte et Dominique Waquet, *La mode* (Paris : PUF, 1999), coll. Que sais-je?, 127 p.
  3. La mise en vente d'un vêtement d'occasion dans une friperie est un exemple de **récupération** (récupération d'un bien – non transformation [habituellement] – retour dans le circuit de consommation). L'achat de vêtements usagés par un créateur de mode qui découpe et découpe ceux-ci pour en récupérer les tissus et les utiliser comme matière première (récupération de biens – création [transformation] – retour dans le circuit de consommation) est un autre exemple de **récupération**.
  4. Les termes « réutilisation » et « détournement » sont tous deux appelés « *reuse* » en anglais.
  5. Albert Tauveron, *Les années poubelle* (Grenoble : Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 1984), 211 p.
  6. Un exemple de **réemploi** est illustré par l'utilisation d'une bouteille de verre récupérée par un producteur de boissons gazeuses (récupération de l'objet – nettoyage [non transformation] – retour dans le circuit de consommation).
  7. Albert Tauveron, *op. cit.*, p. 171.
  8. Un exemple de **réutilisation** ou de **détournement** peut être observé dans l'utilisation d'embauchoirs comme patères (récupération des embauchoirs – non transformation – retour dans le circuit de consommation – changement d'utilisation). Un autre exemple de détournement se trouve dans l'utilisation d'un ancien berceau d'enfant pour exposer des plantes dans une salle de séjour (récupération de l'objet – non transformation – retour dans le circuit de consommation – changement d'utilisation).
  9. Albert Tauveron, *op. cit.*, p. 169.
  10. Il est possible que des créateurs utilisent d'autres matières ou d'autres objets récupérés dans le cadre de leur pratique. Cependant, ils doivent au moins utiliser des textiles récupérés pour être considérés par la présente recherche.
  11. Un vêtement acheté dans une friperie et revendu comme tel (sans être transformé) est un exemple de récupération sans préoccupation pour la recreation. Lorsqu'un créateur utilise un « déchet » textile (matière ou objet textile retiré du circuit de consommation) et le transforme pour fabriquer un nouveau vêtement ou pour intégrer ce matériau à un vêtement ou un accessoire, son travail s'insère dans le cadre de la présente recherche. Fait intéressant, on remarque que les matériaux récupérés sont de plus en plus valorisés dans le design de mode puisque dans plusieurs écoles de mode, les étudiants sont amenés à utiliser des matières récupérées dans le cadre de leurs cours.
  12. Gérald Baril et Michelle Comeau, « Le domaine du design : un nouvel objet », dans Denise Lemieux, dir., « Traité de la culture » ([Sainte-Foy, Québec] : [IQR], à paraître en 2001).
  13. Regina Weik et René Longet, *La gestion des déchets : la société du prêt-à-jeter* (Genève : Georg Éditeur S.A., 1988), 124 p.
  14. Vance Packard, *L'art du gaspillage* (Paris : Calmann-Lévy, 1962), coll. Liberté de l'esprit, 316 p.
  15. Jean Baudrillard, *Le système des objets* (Paris : Gallimard, 1968), 288 p. ; Jean-Paul Ceron et Jean Baillon, *La société de l'éphémère* (Grenoble : Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 1979), 254 p.
  16. En 1987, Gilles Lipovetsky reprend cette idée de l'omniprésence du gaspillage dans les sociétés modernes et l'applique au monde de la mode dans *L'Empire de l'éphémère : la mode et son destin dans les sociétés modernes* (Paris : Gallimard, 1987, 345 p.).
  17. Le phénomène est illustré par la fondation de divers périodiques destinés à l'industrie du recyclage à partir des années 1980 dans les pays industrialisés. Aux États-Unis, par exemple, on publie des périodiques tels que *World Wastes* (mensuel, 1958), *BioCycle* (mensuel, 1960) et *Secondary Raw Materials* (mensuel, 1963).
  18. En France, les premières expériences de collecte sélective ont lieu à La Rochelle en 1974, comme le rapporte Tauveron dans *Les années poubelle*, p. 128. Aux États-Unis, on redécouvre cette pratique en 1983 et le premier essai a lieu dans six municipalités de Montgomery, en Pennsylvanie, selon le texte collectif « Le monde et le recyclage » diffusé sur le site Internet *Le Fer Blanc World Wide Web* (accès au site le 30 octobre 2000, <http://www.le-fer-blanc.com/recyclageeurope.htm>). Effectivement, la « tripartition » était une pratique courante dans certaines grandes cités américaines de la première moitié de ce siècle. Chaque maison avait trois récipients destinés à recevoir les cendres utilisées dans le remblai des terrains, ce qu'on appelait le « *rubbish* » (papier, cartons, balayures, métaux, débris de vaisselle et de verre, morceaux de bois et de cuir) et, enfin, ce qui était nommé le « *garbage* » (épiluchures, reliefs de repas, os, etc.) était généralement traité en usine pour en extraire de la graisse, vendue aux savonneries, tandis qu'un résidu solide était transformé en engrais ou utilisé dans l'alimentation des porcs. Ce système de séparation fut peu à peu délaissé, puis abandonné, selon cette même source collective.
  19. En France, des périodiques tels que *Compost Information* (trimestriel, avril 1980), *Information déchets* (mensuel, avril 1980) ou *Recyclage, environnement, déchets* (mensuel, 1984) paraissent, tandis qu'aux États-Unis, la revue *Waste Age* (mensuel, 1980) est fondée.
  20. En France, on met notamment sur pied l'Agence Nationale pour la Récupération et l'Élimination des Déchets (ANRED), qui publie également, à partir de 1981, son rapport d'activités annuel. En Suisse, depuis plus de vingt-cinq ans, la Société Suisse pour la Protection de l'Environnement (SPE) se préoccupe de récupération et de recyclage. Enfin, en Grande-Bretagne, le groupe environnementaliste Greenpeace, fondé en 1971, s'organise à la même époque. Il devient particulièrement actif et médiatisé à partir de la fin des années 1970 et du début des années 1980.
  21. Collectif, *Compte rendu des journées de concertation sur la récupération et le recyclage*, 13-15 février 1981

- (Montréal : Collège de Maisonneuve, 1981), 531 p. Cette étude a été menée par l'Association des consommateurs du Québec et s'est tenue dans la ville de Sainte-Foy.
22. Éco-Sens (quartier Notre-Dame-de-Grâce à Montréal), Récupération, Recyclage-Québec (Récuperbec), le Regroupement des récupérateurs à la source du Québec et le Centre de récupération Les Feuillus ne sont que quelques-uns des organismes qui déposent des mémoires lors de ces journées de concertation. En février 1981, ils se rencontrent dans le cadre des Journées de concertation sur la récupération et le recyclage qui se tiennent à Montréal. Plusieurs de ceux qui déposent des mémoires dénoncent le peu d'actions entreprises pour récupérer biens et matériaux jetés au Québec, et les objectifs de ces journées sont entre autres de « Favoriser la sensibilisation de l'ensemble des Québécois à l'importance de la lutte contre le gaspillage » et de « Consulter les intervenants sur une éventuelle politique globale de récupération et de recyclage » (voir l'avant-propos du *Compte rendu des journées de concertation...*). Un autre objectif poursuivi par les journées de concertation est de permettre la rencontre entre les producteurs de matières récupérables, les utilisateurs de ces matières, les récupérateurs et les recycleurs (entreprises et organismes qui pratiquent la récupération et transforment ou non les matériaux récupérés).
  23. Par exemple, *Vecteur environnement* (bimestriel) et *Franco-Vert* (mensuel) sont fondés au cours de cette période.
  24. Le gouvernement se fixe l'objectif de « réduire de 50% la quantité de déchets d'ici l'an 2000 » grâce à la collecte sélective et à la récupération, ainsi que l'expose Yvon Deshaies à la page 3 du *Guide de la collecte sélective des matières recyclées* (Québec : Publications du Québec, 1994, 135 p.).
  25. Dans le cadre de cette thèse, le terme « occidental » désigne les pays d'Amérique du Nord et d'Europe de l'Ouest.
  26. Ces limites sont essentiellement dues à la langue. Toutefois, les sources secondaires consultées permettront sans doute de discuter de créateurs d'autres origines, le cas échéant.
  27. Xavier Fauche, *Rien ne se perd, tout se récupère* (Paris : Balland, 1988), 259 p.
  28. Effectivement, même si les créateurs utilisent des matières récupérées pour des raisons écologiques et se préoccupent de l'environnement, la plupart d'entre eux considèrent la reconnaissance du *milieu*, des pairs ou de ceux qui édifient ou détruisent une carrière comme la reconnaissance ultime (je fais ici référence aux journalistes et aux rédacteurs de mode).
  29. L'élite sociale est ici représentée par les individus qui ont les moyens financiers de s'acheter des vêtements griffés, ou par les personnalités qui bénéficient d'une certaine visibilité.
  30. Marylène Delbourg-Delphis, *Le chic et le look : histoire de la mode féminine et des mœurs de 1850 à nos jours* (Paris : Hachette, 1981), p. 246 [de 279]. Au Québec, par exemple, en 2000, la designer Marie-Chantal LeBreton (griffe Myco Anna), qui qualifiait elle-même sa collection de « haute couture », affirmait ouvertement sur son site Internet (<http://www.mycoanna.com/index2.html>) qu'elle se donnait comme « mandat d'habiller les plus grandes vedettes internationales et de percer avec succès les marchés américain et européen ».
  31. Les créateurs québécois qui utilisent des matériaux récupérés ne sont pas très nombreux. Dans le cadre de cette enquête, la saturation déterminera le nombre d'informateurs.

## Repo Culture

SHIRLEY TERESA WAJDA

In July 1995, artist Peter de Seve commented on Manhattan's unbearably hot summer weather by visually parodying, in *The New Yorker's* cover image entitled *The Treasure*, the contingent nature of desire. De Seve depicted a young couple, enchanted by a snowdome offering at least an imagined relief from the city's heat. They ignore in this cluttered second-hand shop objects immediately apprehended by the reader for their uniqueness: artworks by da Vinci, van Gogh, and Picasso; religious relics, such as the Shroud of Turin and the Holy Grail; precious stones, such as the Hope Diamond, and historical documents such as the United States Constitution. Comparable to these coveted artifacts and rarities are commercially produced — but no less unique — icons of popular culture: Charles Foster Kane's "Rosebud" sled immortalized in Orson Welles's film epic, or little Dorothy's red slippers from *The Wizard of Oz*. Even singular objects of myth and folklore and fantasy such as a unicorn horn, a jar of hen's teeth, photographs of the Loch Ness Monster and wide-eyed extraterrestrials, and a stone tablet of Commandments Eleven through Fifteen appeal because they are, for the credulous, coveted. In this image, desire itself is constructed within an evanescent consumer moment used to imagine a different, cooler season or to evoke a lost sense of one's childhood.<sup>1</sup>

This *New Yorker* cover offers the presumed urbane reader the image of the archetypal shop of second-hand goods. Even if you've not seen this particular image, you may easily conjure this quintessential space. Whether the contents are termed *junk*, *second-hand*, *thrift*, *used*, *collectible*, *vintage* or even *antique*, these business concerns are popularly imagined like a Dickensian Olde Curiosity Shoppe: housed in old, perhaps dilapidated buildings, often figured as dark, its goods disordered and dusty, its shop hours erratic and the shop proprietor likely eccentric. Second-hand shops so conceived constitute attic-like spaces in which the visitor may potentially satisfy a specific yen with an unexpected discovery, or simply marvel at the exotic or unfamiliar while passing the time.

This sense of individual discovery of the unique or the lost helps to maintain the curiosity shop image within American popular culture. The personal agency at the heart of such discovery also currently fuels a thriving economy of second-hand goods in the United States. Scouring flea markets, garage and yard sales, and antiques malls for "treasures" of all sorts, shapes, sizes, and statuses has become in the last decade the "chic" activity, worthy of Manhattanites, suburbanites and "exurb-ites" alike. "Smart shopping," according to one newspaper writer, requires not only a strategy but belief: "You have to 'believe' that amid all the junk lies a gem." Another reporter described the "antiques hunt" as "a heady, almost intoxicating experience." Martha Stewart, that doyenne of domesticity and disciple of thrift, describes flea markets as an experience "welcome and wonderful...filled with tables, each one laden with treasures waiting to be discovered."<sup>2</sup>

The quest for treasure, however, has never been easier in the United States. The treasure map where "X" marks the spot is quickly being redrawn and enlarged. And there are more "X"s on the map than ever before. Over 10 000 antiques malls now dot the national landscape, many constructed within the last twenty years, competing and/or collaborating with 350 000 antique dealers and 7 000 antique shows held annually. These enterprises possess their own recently formed professional organizations (Antiques and Collectibles Dealer Association; National Association of Antique Malls; National Association of Collectors; Antique and Collectibles Show Promoters Association, all headquartered in Huntersville, North Carolina) and trade journals (such as the newly founded *The World of Antique Malls*). Flea markets number anywhere between 2 500 and 5 000 nationally, with between one hundred million to one billion annual visitors (sources differ). The National Flea Market Association, founded in 1997 as a not-for-profit organization "committed to free enterprise," publishes *Today's Flea Market* and has enlisted Tammy Faye Bakker Messner as a spokeswoman.

Surely the curiosity shop, the flea market, and the quaint, out-of-the-way country antiques shop have become an industry — estimates place 70 million antique collectors worldwide, spending \$25 billion annually on their “discoveries.” And this does not even begin to take on the enormity of Internet auction sites such as eBay.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly the enormity of this commerce in second-hand material culture demands study. If one defines *popular culture* as those social practices and artifacts that do not adhere to a canonized set of aesthetic criteria and operate within the realm of commerce, the daily jostle of goods, prices, and people evident at a flea market (or, to a lesser degree, an antique mall) surely warrants its study as popular culture. In this sense, popular culture is distinctive from “official culture” (to borrow from cultural studies). Traditionally, popular culture has often been celebrated as “the people’s culture.” As Ray Browne defines it, “popular culture is the everyday culture of a group, large or small, of people. In the United States democracy, popular culture is the voice of the people — their practices, likes and dislikes — the lifeblood of their daily existence.” Whether local, regional, or national, those cultural forms or customs that relate directly to lived experience constitute popular culture.<sup>4</sup>

Imbedded within the study of popular culture are the ideological positions of this scholar and that. Many on the left consider popular culture inherently conservative, a form of false consciousness, a means by which people are led to support their own repression within capitalism. Other left-leaning intellectuals find in popular culture the possibilities and practices of subversion, in that such practices question implicitly those persons and institutions of power. Conservatives, on the other hand, see within popular culture an Arnoldian anarchy; the very indeterminacy of genres and practices are detrimental to the stability of “Culture-with-a-capital-C.” And contemporary culture offers yet another dissolution of boundaries. As John Urry observes in *The Tourist Gaze*,

*Postmodernism involves a dissolving of the boundaries, not only between high and low cultures, but also between different cultural forms, such as tourism, art, education, photography, television, music, sport, shopping, and architecture.*<sup>5</sup>

Whatever one’s politics, the contemporary demotic practices of what I am calling “repo culture” constitute a form of popular culture. Upscale Yuppies hire interior designers to scour flea markets to find that “distressed” table or chair that can be

made over. Un- or underemployed and retired individuals set up stalls at flea markets to gain or supplement incomes. Working- and middle-class consumers spend weekends or summer vacations exploring the cast-off junk of one individual to find a desired treasure to add to a collection, replace a cherished possession now lost or broken, aspire to the “shabby chic” of elites, or become pickers and dealers themselves. Whatever the purpose, these Americans are in the profession of repossession — of things, of feelings, of ideas.

This research report (or, perhaps more accurately stated, rumination) is a preliminary attempt to grapple with the meaning(s) of this second-hand economy in general and of second-hand goods for participants within this culture. “Repo” here is short for *repossession*, and I borrow it from the 1984 cult classic film, *Repo Man*, in which car repossession is more a mystical calling than a dirty job, and its practitioners transcendentalists rather than loathsome grubbers. In the film, a repo man takes back cars to remind car owners of the transitory nature of possessing things. *Repo Man* is about the circulation of things and of souls; the film explores the ephemeral, and ultimately false nature of *property*.

Indeed, scholars have not paid consistent attention to the implications for the latent meaning of objects as possessions or property, legally and historically construed. That is to say, we assume claims to status through specific possessions in a time and place, or through the values assessed to items in a probate inventory to reckon class. Or we divine affective or economic purposes in the dispensation of the deceased’s possessions through a will. But *possession* itself is not always the same as *property*, nor is it necessarily a permanent condition, nor is it only a legal right. Women and children, for example, may not have been considered legally to “hold” certain goods in the eighteenth and a good part of the nineteenth century, but surely these groups made claims to things that were recognized in their communities. *Possession* may also be a temporary state or relationship with what English jurist William Blackstone called “the external things of the world.” And when he argued that the foundations of property were man-made, Blackstone himself recognized that the only property of possession was evanescence.

*We think it enough that our title is derived by the grant of the former proprietor, by descent of our ancestors, or by the last will and testament of the dying owner; not caring to reflect that (accurately and strictly speaking) there is no foundation in*



*nature, or in natural law, why a set of words upon parchment should convey the dominion of land; why the son should have a right to exclude his fellow creatures from a determinant spot of ground, because his father had done so, before him; or why the occupier of a particular field, or of a jewel, when lying on his death-bed and no longer able to maintain possession, should be entitled to tell the rest of the world which of them should enjoy it after him.<sup>6</sup>*

I have begun to explore “repo culture” in two areas undergoing economic renaissance, itself a clue to the phenomenon: the Rust Belt of Northeastern Ohio and the Route 127 Corridor

between Covington, Kentucky, and Gadsden, Alabama. In the Cleveland-Akron-Youngstown axis over the last ten years, antique malls have been erected near major interstate highway exits, and economically struggling towns have created downtown “quaintscapes” of antique and collectibles shops and tea rooms to attract visitors and business.<sup>7</sup> (Such “quaintscapes” incorporate two histories: the region’s beginnings as the Connecticut Western Reserve, and its industrial heritage, from the canal era of the 1830s and 40s to the characteristic steel and manufacturing industries before the Second World War; see Figs. 1, 2, and 3.) The Midwest alone is home to nearly 2 350 multi-dealer antiques malls, and Ohio,

**Fig. 1**

*The AAA I-76 Antique Mall, located at Exit 33 near Ravenna, Ohio, is one example of the number of antique malls established in the 1990s along interstate highways throughout the United States Midwest. The business sign pictured here is only viewable from the interstate. (October 2000)*



**Fig. 2**

*This small sign, located at the exit of the parking lot of the AAA I-76 Antique Mall and positioned at drivers' eye level, directs shoppers to continue on to Ravenna's Main Street. (October 2000)*







**Fig. 3**  
This late-nineteenth-century commercial block located on Ravenna's Main Street houses antique shops — and empty storefronts. To attract patronage, Ravenna, the Portage County seat, invested in “quaintscape” amenities, such as lampposts, banners, and flower baskets. (October 2000)



**Fig. 4**  
The Route 127 Yard Sale in Kentucky, Tennessee, and a small part of Alabama, appeals by its appearance as a neighbourly activity. In actuality, many vendors travel from all parts of the United States to set up temporary stands, often in fields or yards rented out for the annual event. (August 2000)

along with New York State and Pennsylvania, are the nation's top collectible markets, according to QAS Systems, an Iowa computer software firm that provides software specifically to antique malls.<sup>8</sup>

The Route 127 Yard Sale, begun in 1986, has increasingly attracted national attention via collectors' magazines and national news broadcasts. Fentress County, Tennessee, executive Mike Walker, now an attorney in private practice, offered free media exposure to artists, crafters, and antiques dealers if they would set up stands at the side of the road to lure vacationers from the interstate highways. Now extending some 450 miles through Kentucky, Tennessee, and a wee

bit of Alabama, this “World's Longest Yard Sale,” occurring annually the third weekend of August, attracts over 3 500 vendors and some 40 000 visitors from across the United States (Fig. 4).<sup>9</sup> Traffic jams notwithstanding, vendors do a booming business. One antiques mall owner told me that during the Yard Sale of 1999, his small business “took in” \$38 000. He opened at 5 a.m. on each day and closed at 9 p.m. every night (instead of the normal closing hour of 5 p.m.) to accommodate the rush of customers. Exhausted, his partner and he quickly opted to sleep in a camper behind the building rather than return home every evening.<sup>10</sup>



**Fig. 5**

*Route 127 Yard Sale dealers, whether amateur or professional, display their cleaned second-hand goods according to size, genre, colour, or style. Price tags often adorn the sale items, but here act as a starting point for negotiation. (18 August 2000)*



For many, though, according to the family members who own Brothers Antique Mall in Montville, Ohio, it's not a business, "it's a calling."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, a cursory review of newspaper articles about this "craze" reveals a basic assumption that participants in the second-hand economy are collectors, and not just casual shoppers.<sup>12</sup> At the Memphis Drive-In market, interviewees reported they collected "kids' toy badges," political items, antique shoe-button hooks, old spoons, dippers, antique kitchen tools, gold watches, cookware (especially Fire-King and Fiesta), vintage clothing, and Roseville pottery.<sup>13</sup>

One Cleveland collector, asked about his penchant for acquiring pre-1964 skateboards, feared the publication of a price list.<sup>14</sup> These lists drive up prices by implying and rationalizing an emerging market. As much as dealers would gain by such increased knowledge and desire, a price list potentially destroys the sense of discovery upon which some repo men and women thrive. That is to say, many participants like to find something that hasn't yet achieved a market value and is, comparatively, cheap to collect: the thrill of discovery is tied intimately to one's pocketbook and his or her sense of value of the object. Paradoxically, such an attitude fosters the sense of community that dealers and collectors assert, defined through the shared ability to find desired items and "deals" and to control more readily value through bargaining and bartering. Moreover,

some individuals withhold goods from, or increase asking prices of certain prospective buyers, feeling that these persons haven't the right "attitude" or "commitment." What is being dealt here are social relations, built on a balance of authority (via knowledge) and trust. Still, many individuals rely on price guides to assess the monetary value of their collections, and antiques malls often provide bookstands with such guides for sale.

Participants in the second-hand culture of temporary flea markets and of bustling antiques malls often characterize themselves as collectors and dealers and not consumers, even as the goods they now collect were, overwhelmingly, mass produced and are, increasingly, displayed as department store goods are, by use, colour, size, or shape<sup>15</sup> (Fig. 5). Collecting connotes active engagement; consumption, quite the reverse is feminized as passive. Within the Rust Belt, where industrial culture has been "museumized" through the establishment of new institutions by state and regional historical societies, the mass-produced artifacts of one's childhood or first home still available to collectors may serve as a means to hold onto one's past as other authorities (call it "official culture") seek to create a historical narrative with artifacts of work that elides issues of individual self-sufficiency for identity based in industrial labour. For example, the Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor (created by the Ohio Historical Society) tells the story of larger movements of





**Fig. 6**  
The empty spaces of the Hartville and Byler flea markets in Hartville, Ohio, evoke the liminality of repo culture. (October 2000)

union labor and management and corporate power, only nodding to workers' domestic and leisure lives. Taking advantage of the economic renaissance of Cleveland, the Western Reserve Historical Society is creating the Crawford Museum of Transportation and Industry, which celebrates primarily machines, and incidentally the men and women who created them.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, Americans are resilient if not always resistant, and in these museums visitors may find their own meanings in the artifacts and activities proffered. Historians have recently turned their attention to the ways in which Americans seek and use their past(s). Under the leadership of David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig, historians and students surveyed Americans about their own "history making." In *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (1998), these historians sought to locate a "people's history" amongst various practices, from reading books and taking classes, to viewing television shows and documentaries, to visiting museums and historical sites. What these historians were amazed to discover is that Americans invested more trust in museums and historic sites (no surprise to material culture scholars, though).

Survey participants saw museums as collaborative in nature. They offered an immediacy with artifacts that translated to intimacy and authenticity. Most important, museums and historic sites offered visitors a space in which, through their own agency, their identities and narratives could be enacted. These characteristics apply equally to the repo culture of flea markets and antique malls, and beg for a

consideration not only of Americans' uses of the past beyond the marketplace, but within it.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, the proprietors of flea markets and antiques malls see themselves as independent entrepreneurs preserving, in the words of the Executive Director of the National Flea Market Association, the "Free Enterprise System" and protecting "an American Way of Life," by fostering opportunities for "a person to start a business without a large layout of capital and long term commitments."<sup>18</sup> Flea markets, traceable in part to market-day activities in the nineteenth century, and not necessarily restricted to used merchandise, have been enlarged or instituted on the vacated premises of drive-in theatres, empty factory buildings and warehouses, and bankrupt department stores.<sup>19</sup> The Hartville, Ohio, flea market had its origins in 1939 as a livestock auction. Now the weekly event, still owned and operated by the same family, attracts over one million visitors annually, averaging 25 000 visitors every Labour Day weekend. Byler's Flea Market is located next door, and the Hartville Kitchen serves some 3 500 meals on Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Labor day weekends (Figs. 6 and 7).<sup>20</sup> In the Cleveland suburb of Brooklyn, the Memphis Drive-In began hosting a flea market in the early 1970s. Open on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays, the drive-in offers new and used goods and farm produce. The market's manager, Don Evans, asserts that the Memphis is "a true 'flea market' in the sense that there is little management control over the types of items sold. We prohibit the sale of explosives, ammunition, flammables, alcoholic beverages and obscene materials. Other than that, anything goes."<sup>21</sup>



Fig. 7

The Hartville Kitchen, serving up to 3 500 meals during holiday weekends, still does a brisk business on non-flea market days. (October 2000)



With such a complicated project and at this early stage of the research, my findings thus far are tentative. And larger questions lurk about this project. For example, what do we mean when we term something *second-hand*? And how does that second-hand economy work within a larger national economy, the robustness of which is based on production of new goods? When goods are termed second-hand, we traditionally assume they are inferior. As Arthur H. Fox in his 1957 essay, "A Theory of Second-Hand Markets," observed, however, "In the eyes of the law the term second-hand may apply as well to a Gainsborough as a garden roller, or even a herd of goats." Dismissing consideration of the "related fields of the art, antiques, valuables and property markets," Fox preferred to analyse the "everyday usage" of the term to theorize a relationship between "first-hand" and "second-hand" goods: "Second-hand goods are inferior goods. Having once been bought new, durable goods are normally subject to physical use which results in a perceptible process of deterioration and in the end wears them out. It follows therefore that the continued availability of used goods in the second-hand market requires a continuing stream of new production feeding the market at the top."<sup>22</sup>

Fox's economic definition, by dismissing alternative categories of valuation (including signs of usage or patina that, for some, add interest, style, and value), dismisses to a degree the "repo culture" I wish to examine. Like many economists, Fox was more concerned with first-hand markets, in which productive activities could be measured and analysed in terms of

output, income, and employment (among other factors). As Tibor Scitovsky observes, "the sale of a second-hand good by its previous owner made no direct impact on productive activities," the primary focus of economists' studies.<sup>23</sup>

Owners and dealers of antique malls and flea markets, however, consider their activities as an important contribution to free enterprise, a point Scitovsky also makes when he writes that second-hand markets "stimulate the economy, partly by enabling the well-to-do the sooner to replace their worn out or obsolescing durable goods with new ones and thereby increasing the total demand for them, partly by generating employment and income for the middlemen who run the second-hand market."<sup>24</sup> Such economic stimulation may cause economic dislocation. Valley View Antique Mall, once Valley View Department Store located in rural Brookfield, Ohio, opened with the same owners who could no longer compete with national retail giants such as Kmart and Wal-Mart. They re-opened in March 1996 with 75 dealers. By the end of the year the 173,000-square-foot [16 100-square-metre] space housed 300 dealers, who themselves would rather spend their time acquiring goods rather than disposing of them, all the while spending less in overhead costs by sharing rental space and relying on the mall's small sales staff.<sup>25</sup> (One must quickly note, however, that new antique malls are more often built along interstates, and are actually chains.<sup>26</sup>)

Second, what do we mean by second-hand *material culture* rather than a second-hand *market*? The anthropologists Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, in their oft-cited *The World of Goods*,

asserted that "goods are good for thinking." But as Jay Mechling astutely pointed out in 1989, goods are also "good for feeling."<sup>27</sup> Visitors and dealers agree that the lure of the second-hand is based within nostalgia, or a curiosity, or some sentimental affection for a genre of collectibles. Dan Barnett, of Barnett Antiques in Jamestown, Kentucky, traces his start in business on the back porch of his childhood house, where he found his late mother's Flow Blue china. He collected to "fill in" the missing pieces, and found others who were participating in the same endeavor.<sup>28</sup> Mr June Hubbard, a retired owner of Hubbard's Restaurant in Kentucky, took down from a shelf an old Dripolator coffeepot when he explained to me why he had some four hundred coffeepots housed in a small outbuilding on his property along Route 127. The coffeepot he held was but a slightly larger version of the coffeepot with which he poured his first cup of coffee when he opened his own restaurant after years of cooking in a nearby state park restaurant.<sup>29</sup> Others tell similar stories of repossessing lost or arresting potentially transitory meanings through the collection of objects specific to a turning point in their lives — points at which these individuals realized new responsibilities.<sup>30</sup>

Third, scholars of material culture have overwhelmingly concerned themselves with issues of identity and status reified in new goods, in the acquisition or the circumstances of their acquisition. As sociologist Rob Shields points out in his *Lifestyle Shopping*,

*...a serious engagement with consumption must be open to discovering that lifestyles and consumption cultures are not "confusions over class, regional, generational and gender identities" but the emergence of new "identifications." There is a need, therefore, to treat consumption as an active, committed production of self and of society which, rather than assimilating individuals to styles, appropriates codes and fashions, which are made into one's own.*<sup>31</sup>

Such appropriations may be apprehended perhaps in the changing definitions of *antique* and *collectible*. If *antique* is legally defined as an object of 100 years and counting, the current collecting craze has added conditions: "contemporary antiques" are 60 to 100 years old, and the "exceptional modern collectibles" are in constant flux, according to the owner of a Parkman, Ohio, mall.<sup>32</sup> So, too, are decorating trends, accounting for a large portion of second-hand shopping.

The current trend of "shabby chic" for baby boomers, for example, a style created with "comfortable furniture with washable slipcovers, crystal chandeliers, and flea-market finds" perhaps has more to do with the memories of 1960s counterculture and 1970s recycling campaigns as well as a veiled higher status claim. In the words of one reporter, one "achieves" shabby chic.<sup>33</sup>

Thus an investigation of "repo culture" may shed light on assumptions currently held in American material culture studies. Costume historians have considered the "making-over" of garments, historians of the Colonial Revival and of collecting have explored the cultural meanings and political purposes of the old and the antique, and scholars such as Katherine Grier and Susan Strasser have explored the political and moral economies of "making do" and recycling.<sup>34</sup> In so doing, these individuals have shed light on the relationship of first-hand and second-hand goods and their meanings, but in the main material culture practitioners have focused their attention on firsthand meanings, on new things coming through the upper- or middle-class house's front door.

Last, the reconfiguration of the American built environment — urban and rural — may also be fruitfully re-examined. Temporary flea markets, new corrugated steel buildings, old factories and re-adapted department stores housing antiques emporia demand that we consider how such liminal spaces — in open fields, along interstates, in downscale urban areas and vacated suburban retail strips — are expressing social needs and demarcating new economic loci. These commercial spaces are also leisure spaces, competing with malls and galleries and bourses, and with museums and historical societies. Yet these spaces require and legitimate different behaviors — touching and inspecting objects, bargaining and bartering over value and worth, creating new social relations at the edges of towns, along highways, in vacant lots.<sup>35</sup>

Repo culture requires that the individual often be simultaneously buyer and dealer, consumer and collector, but always a producer — a *dealer* — of meaning. The multiplicity and complexity of roles, the agency of role players, and the urgency of their collecting zeal are perhaps succinctly captured in the title of a 1997 book by "trash-to-treasure" guru Mary Randolph Carter: *American Junk: How to Hunt For, Haggle Over, Rescue, and Transform America's Forgotten Treasures*.<sup>36</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Peter de Seve, *The Treasure*, cover image for *The New Yorker*, 17 July 1995.
2. Annette John-Hall, "Smart Shopping: Find Gems in the Junk: Yard Sales, Flea Markets and Auctions Require a Strategy and a 'Thrill of the Hunt'," *Knight-Ridder News Services*, appearing in *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 9 September 1997, *Tempo*, D-1. Chris Casson Madden, "Questions to Ask Yourself Before the Antiques Hunt," *The Plain Dealer* [Cleveland], 20 April 1996, *Your Home*, 9. Martha Stewart, "Make the Most of Flea-Market Shopping," *Dayton Daily News*, 17 July 1997, *Homelife*, 6.  
See also Judy Buchenot, "Today's Lifestyle: Past Perfect, Hidden Treasures," *Copley News Service*, 22 March 1999. For flea-market shopping as a disease or an addiction, see Barbara Hertenstein (*St Louis Post-Dispatch*), "Hunting for Bargains: Flea Markets Have Become an Addiction for Some," *The Plain Dealer*, 5 July 1998, *Homes*, 6F. These characterizations follow those examined in Werner L. Muensterberger's often-cited *Collecting: An Unruly Passion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
3. The number of antique malls, dealers, and shows are offered in D. L. Stewart, "Junking Up Definition of 'Antique,'" *Dayton Daily News*, 31 March 2000, *Life*, 1-C, and Charles E. Ramirez, "Antique Shoppers Making Deals Online," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 21 March 2000, *Financial*, 30. On the national associations, see [www.antiqueandcollectible.com](http://www.antiqueandcollectible.com). The disparity in the estimated numbers of flea markets is evident in Jerry Stokes, "A Flea Market By Any Other Name is a Flea Market," at [www.fleamarkets.org/history.htm](http://www.fleamarkets.org/history.htm), and Michael D. Clark, "Everything but Fleas: Shoppers Find a World Unlike Regular Stores," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 14 October 1999, *Metro*, B-1. On the National Flea Market Association, see [www.fleamarkets.org](http://www.fleamarkets.org); Tammy Faye Messner as spokeswoman discussed in Susan Vela, "Eyes Have It: Tammy Faye a Draw; Flea Market Visit Lures Fans, Curious," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 30 April 2000, *Metro*, B-1.
4. Ray Browne, "Internationalizing Popular Culture," *Journal of Popular Culture* 30 (1996): 23. The literature of popular culture studies, both on United States culture and beyond, is enormous, and I've likely done an injustice in my brief characterization. Studies I have found useful include John Fiske,

*Reading Popular Culture* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1974); Russel Nye, *The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America* (New York: The Dial Press, 1970); Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steve Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990). Two early readers in cultural studies were also helpful: Simon During, *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 2d ed. (London: Routledge, 1999), and Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1991). I have increasingly turned to work in consumer culture and consumption: Juliet Schor and Douglas B. Holt, eds., *The Consumer Society Reader* (New York: New Press, 2000), and Martyn J. Lee, *The Consumer Society Reader* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

5. See note 4. John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 82.
6. Paul Finkelman and David Cobin, introduction to *Blackstone's Commentaries: with notes of reference to the constitution and laws, of the federal government of the United States and of the Commonwealth of Virginia: in five volumes, with an appendix to each volume, containing short tracts upon such subjects as appeared necessary to form a connected view of the laws of Virginia as a member of the federal union*. By St George Tucker. Book II [of four books]: *Of the Rights of Things*, chap. 1, "On the Nature of Property," p. 1 (Union, N.J.: The Lawbook Exchange Ltd, 1996; originally published Philadelphia: William Young Birch, Abraham Small, 1803). Available at [www.constitution.org/tb/tb3.htm](http://www.constitution.org/tb/tb3.htm).
7. Of particular interest are the Medina and AAA I-76 antique malls, located in the Akron area. One of the first antiques malls in the region, the Medina mall, located near Interstate 71, draws about 40 000 people a week to its 450-dealer displays housed in a 52 000-square-foot former Finast supermarket. It has become a model for successful managed malls: Thomas W. Gerdell, "Collecting Shoppers: With a Growing Market for Antiques and Collectibles,

Places Like the Medina Antique Mall Spring Up, Offering a New Way to find that Perfect Something," *The Plain Dealer*, 21 December 1997, *Business*, 1-6; Karen Sandstrom, "Antiquing Yields to Modern Ways: Shops that Once Would Have Snubbed Collectibles Now Offer Them for Sale," *The Plain Dealer*, 9 August 1998, *Homes*, 1-F.

The AAA I-76 concern was built in 1997, several years after the nearby Portage County seat of Ravenna began advertising its small downtown as an "antiques row" with which to attract — unsuccessfully, as it turns out — travellers.

8. Lisa Biank Fasig, "Something New In Some Things Old: Antiques Mall Opens," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 27 May 1999, *Financial*, B-20.
9. Robert Kyle, "On the Trail of the 'World's Longest Yard Sale'," *Maine Antique Digest*, October 1997, reproduced at [www.maineantiquedigest.com/articles/yard1097.htm](http://www.maineantiquedigest.com/articles/yard1097.htm). The "official" Web site is located at [www.jamestowntn.org/worlds.htm](http://www.jamestowntn.org/worlds.htm).
10. Interview with author, Dan Barnett, Jamestown, Ky., 18 August 2000.
11. Karen Sandstrom, "Antiques Get Second Chance at Brothers; Medina Mall Sells, Restores Pieces of Past," *The Plain Dealer*, 4 November 1994, *Friday*, 3.
12. I've collected and reviewed over eighty pertinent articles in newspapers in the major cities of Ohio (Cleveland, Akron, Columbus, Dayton, Cincinnati) available through the Lexis-Nexis database, and I am in the process of collecting relevant articles in *The [Youngstown] Vindicator and Warren Tribune-Chronicle*. A clear increase in the number of articles dedicated to the topic is in evidence by 1994, but especially after 1997. A representative article equating second-hand shopping with collectors include John-Hall, "Smart Shopping" (appearing in *The Cincinnati Enquirer*), in which the collecting gurus Terry and Ralph Kovel, of Cleveland, Ohio, discuss the "social phenomenon" of collecting since the 1970s.
13. Lisa Palazzo, "Bargain Hunters Find Good Deals Now Laying at a Drive-In Near You," *The Plain Dealer*, 30 May 1999, *Living*, 1-K.
14. J. Peter Wentz, e-mail to author, 7 February 2000. This individual actively maintains approximately twenty active collections.
15. For an overview of collecting and its relation to consumption, consult Russell W. Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), esp. chap. 5, "Collecting in a Consumer Society: A Critical Analysis."
16. I refer the reader to these institutions' respective Web sites: The Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor ([www.ohiohistory.org/youngst](http://www.ohiohistory.org/youngst)) and The Crawford Museum of Transportation and Industry, still in its planning stages but called "a new way of experiencing motion, machines and museums" ([www.wrhs.org/cmth/htm](http://www.wrhs.org/cmth/htm)).
17. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
18. Stokes, "A Flea Market By Any Other Name." See also Tom Hopkins, "Flea Markets: Low Overhead, High Volume Make these Venues Ideal for Mom-and-Pop Entrepreneurs and Shoppers," *Dayton Daily News*, 15 February 1997, *Lifestyle*, 1-C.
19. See, for example, Jenny Callison, "If Shoe Fits, Fill It With Antiques: 1912 Building Gets a Makeover," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 22 April 1998, *Metro*, B-3. Not all proposed flea markets and antiques malls have been successfully constructed. City planners in Fairfield, Ohio, fought to control flea markets from "popping up" in parking lots of shut-down stores along busy retail strips: Maria Berninger, "Fairfield May Limit Flea Market Sites and Sights in City," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 29 January 1998, *Metro*, B-6. See also Natalie McNeal, "Clay Twp. Rejects Flea Market Proposal," *Dayton Daily News*, 16 August 1995, *Neighbors*, Z3-1.
20. Shane Hoover, "Wheeling and Dealing in Hartville," *Daily Kent Stater*, 4 September 2000; Debbi Snook, "Going to Market in Hartville: Folksy Town a Hub of Commerce Just As It Was in Farm Wagon Days," *The Plain Dealer*, 3 July 1998, *Living*, 1-E.
21. Palazzo, "Bargain Hunters Find Good Deals."
22. Arthur H. Fox, "A Theory of Second-hand Markets," *Economica* n.s. 24 (May 1957): 99-115; quotations at 99.
23. Tibor Scitovsky, "Towards a Theory of Second-hand Markets," *Kyklos* 47 (1994): 33-52; quotations at 35.
24. *Ibid.*, 37.
25. Karen Sandstrom, "Mall Has Everything From Soup to Nuts; They've Even Got your Goat...Mounted, With Horns and Forelegs," *The Plain Dealer*, 27 December 1996, 20.
26. Lisa Biank Fasig, "Industry Notes: Retail — Antiques 'Megamall' Opens Soon," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 22 May 1999, *Financial*, B-5; Randy McNutt, "National Chain Plans To Open Antiques Mall in Tricounty Area," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 11 March 1999, *Metro*, B-1.
27. Mary Douglas with Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 62; Jay Mechling, "The Collecting Self and American Youth Movements," in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 255-85.
28. Interview with author, Dan Barnett, 18 August 2000, Jamestown, Ky.
29. Interview with author, June Hubbard, 19 August 2000, Jamestown, Ky.
30. See, for example, John Seewer (Associated Press), "Malls Selling Antiques New Trend: Treasure Hunters Fill the Concourses," *Dayton Daily News*, Local, 1B.
31. Rob Shields, *Lifestyle Shopping: The Subject of Consumption* (London: Routledge, 1992), 2 (quoting A. Tomlinson, "Introduction: Consumer Culture and the Aura of the Commodity," in *Consumption, Identity, and Style* [London: Routledge, 1990]). Emphasis mine.
32. Martha and Richard Ellers, "Finding Antiques at Auntie's: Parkman Mall Offers Variety of Collectibles," *The Plain Dealer*, 12 December 1998, *Your Home*, 2. See also Judy Buchenot, "Today's Lifestyle: Past Perfect; Hidden Treasures."
33. Charlyne Varkonyi Schaub (*Fort Lauderdale Sun Sentinel*), "Achieving Shabby Chic: Decorating Blends Style, Comfort," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 20 March 1999, *Tempo*, D-3. Such "do it yourself-ers" must have the leisure and disposable income to invest in such a style. On "Shabby Chic" see, of course, Rachel



- Ashwell et al., *Shabby Chic* (New York: Harpercollins, 1996), and idem et al., Rachel Ashwell's *Shabby Chic: Treasure Hunting and Decorating Guide* (New York: Regan Books, 1998). Ashwell's epigones number in the hundreds. Among them are Emelie Tolley with Chris Mead, *Flea Market Style: Decorating with a Creative Edge* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1998), and Melanie Molesworth, *Junk Style* (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1998). On the growing acceptance of garage and yard sales beginning in the "Earth-conscious" 1970s, see Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (New York: Henry Holt and Company/Metropolitan Books, 1999), 280–83.
34. See, for example, Joan L. Severa, *Dressed for the Photographer: Ordinary Americans and Fashion, 1840–1940* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1995). Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: People, Parlors, and Upholstery, 1850–1930* (Rochester, N.Y. and Amherst: Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum and University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Strasser, *Waste and Want*.
  35. My understanding of culture and space depends on Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981). Tuan argues that place offers security, while space offers freedom, and in thinking of where successful flea markets and antique malls are situated at margins and "in-between" this binary proves useful.
  36. Mary Randolph Carter, *American Junk: How to Hunt For, Haggle Over, Rescue and Transform America's Forgotten Treasures* (New York: Penguin, 1997). Carter seems the least likely candidate for hunting and haggling: she is vice-president for advertising at Polo/Ralph Lauren.

# Exhibit Review

## Compte rendu d'exposition

### Cultures of Nothing: Popular Culture in the Museum Context — Hitchcock, Hip Hop, and the Hockey Hall of Fame

THE J>A>K>A>L COLLECTIVE, MONTREAL

**Montreal Museum of Fine Arts,**

***Fatal Coincidences: Hitchcock and Art***

**Producer/Sponsor:** Organized by the MMFA and presented by Investment Group. Other sponsors included Metro, Minister of Culture of the Government of Quebec, La Presse, British Consul, National Film Board of Canada, and the Minister of Culture and Communication of the City of Montreal

**Curator:** Guy Cojeval (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts) and Dominique Païni (Cinémathèque Française)

**Dates:** 16 November 2000 to 17 April 2001

**Accompanying publication:** *Hitchcock and Art: Fatal Coincidences*, ed. Dominique Païni, Milan: Les Editions Mazzotta, in collaboration with the MMFA, 2000.

**Brief synopsis:** The focus of this exhibit was to make direct connections between Hitchcock's film works and the tradition of the painted world and the sculpted image, these being the key elements of an art gallery. The exhibit was divided into five main themes that the curators found in Hitchcock's complete oeuvre, and used contemporary as well as classic works of art to support their analysis. The themes were: "Women," "Desire and Double Trouble," "Disquieting Places," "Sheer Terror," and "The World as Spectacle and the Spectacle of the World."

**Brooklyn Museum of Art, *Roots, Rhythms and Rage: Hip Hop Nation*. (Permanent location: Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Cleveland, Ohio)**

**Producer/Sponsor:** Levi's, Def Jam Records, Brooklyn Museum of Art Restricted Exhibitions Fund, National Endowment for the Arts. Media sponsors: *Rolling Stone Magazine*,

360hip-hop.com, Hot 97 FM Radio. The exhibit was organized by the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Brooklyn Museum of Art

**Curator:** Kevin Powell

**Designer:** Alternative Design Inc.

**New York dates:** 22 September to 31 December 2000

**Brief synopsis:** This temporary and popular exhibit justified and validated the hip hop subculture, and attempted to be particularly sensitive to the people it showcased and attracted. The show was presented chronologically, and emphasized the different components of hip hop, making sure they included not only the music, but fashion, break-dancing, and graffiti. Videos, photos, music, text panels and multiple cases of original items were essential in conveying this exhibit's message.

**The Hockey Hall of Fame, Toronto**

**Producer/Sponsor:** Esso, Blockbuster, TSN/RDS, McDonald's, Coca Cola, Ford, Royal Canadian Mint, IBM, UPS, Bell

**Curator:** Phil Pritchard

**Duration:** Permanent

**Accompanying Publication:** *Hockey Hall of Fame Magazine* is a quarterly visitor's guide, published by St Clair Group Investments of Toronto.

**Brief synopsis:** The Hall, located in the heart of Toronto's downtown, offers its visitors a mammoth and colourful display of the evidence of hockey's culture, its history, its legends, and equipment. Half of the exhibit was designed for the visitors' active participation, and the other half was devoted to hockey's artifacts. Memorabilia collected by die-hard fans was institutionalized in its collection.

### **Spectacle and Show — This is Entertainment After All...**

People with the means to plug and play into pop culture demonstrate their power as consumers through three broad levels of participation, where each can then be reduced and replicated through essential items that represent their experience. The first is at home in private, where recorded music, films on home video, and televised coverage of sports events simulate the sensation of a "real" experience within a fan's personal space, mediated through technology. The second level is within a culturally-specific venue in the public sphere where fans meet fans (for example, in a hockey rink, movie theatre, or concert hall). And finally, the third is the most detached and abstract level of a culture's representation, found in an art gallery, museum, or hall.

The difference between these categories relates to a fan's perceived reality and their relationships with the dominant culture. This paper examines three exhibits that took icons from the popular culture of Western entertainment and placed them in the museum context. The results are obvious, as the institutional environment engulfs them in its codes of display and reception, and attempts to justify their inclusion in that context. The function of having these cultures on display in an elite institution is to change our attitudes towards them. Here we pay special attention to memorabilia, their significance, and the ways in which the material history of a subculture can be used to define its meaning for greater society. A close reading of how these cultures were put on display reveal a number of problems and contradictions. All three exhibits involuntarily fetishized objects and played upon their audience's sentimental attachment to the cultures presented. All three also dedicated space to the (non)influence of women. They either contained women in their own display cases, or problematically peppered them throughout their exhibitions in a superficial treatment that maintained the status quo.

The definition of "popular culture" will refer to the inclusive norms and practices of mass society. Pop culture is meant to be consumed, whether it be by the senses or with the means of the wallet. It represents the tastes of a group of people, and therefore the word 'subculture' in the same context is a more specific and smaller group with its own language, icons, and practices that contribute to the larger rubric.

In these types of exhibitions, memorabilia and the material culture of that group's history

are essential in announcing its existence to a wider audience. For people who are not familiar with the subculture, mundane objects are imbued with new meaning by simply being included within a museum's walls. For those "in the know" who are intimately connected to every hockey game of the Montreal Canadiens, for example, authentic originals act as the ultimate collection of keepsakes.

For fans, artifacts and memorabilia act as memory triggers that directly relate to past events, and create a mysterious satisfaction for the people who are drawn to them. Such objects will condense time and space, because they become a conduit that immediately connects a receptive audience to previous spectacles of their culture. These kinds of examples of material history, then, provide the link between the real events and a fan's desires to actively participate in them. An original number 99 hockey jersey worn by Wayne Gretzky, for example, is a material object that a viewer can get physically close to in the present day. By being in its proximity, the object fulfills the viewer's desires to have been there when the shirt was worn, and supplants those past desires with an immense and immediate satisfaction of having an active connection to the original event. It is the object's capacity to fulfill these desires that creates the intense reverence for cultural relics and gives them value.

In the museum setting this relationship can be uneasy, as some of the objects found in the Hockey Hall of Fame and *Hip Hop Nation* shows demonstrate. Museums and galleries often add items to their collections based on cultural estimations of value. What traditionally makes something valuable is its uniqueness, authenticity, age, legacy, or historical significance. When mass-produced objects handled by a culture's celebrities go on display to illustrate the history of that group, the original concept of the museum artifact is stretched. In *Hip Hop Nation*, items such as key chains, sneakers, and pants found themselves in the ever-so-important display case. Similarly, the Hockey Hall of Fame contained hundreds of hockey sticks, pucks, and jerseys, but each one was deemed special because of its attachment to a single player of note, or its connection to a decisive moment in hockey history.

Object-centred displays scream out to their viewers that what is kept behind glass and guarded is important. Outside of the museum, memorabilia are only important to someone who wants to remember them. Consistent with museum display techniques, the memorabilia



**Fig. 1**  
 The "Great Hall" is the centre point of the Hockey Hall of Fame's permanent exhibition in Toronto. In this room the Stanley cup rises up to the architecture of this former bank building, and is an object enshrined by the culture of hockey.

of popular culture are tagged as things that are worth remembering for everyone, and in the art gallery context, follow the Duchampian tradition of questioning exhibit content by including everyday objects.<sup>1</sup>

In the Hitchcock show, visitors are first introduced to a room with an elaborately constructed display of everyday objects. We expect museums to display artifacts, not intentional fakes. But in this setup, the question as to whether what was on display were authentic original props or not was unclear, and the museum did

not provide this information in written form. When asked, a museum spokesperson stated that including original props would have elevated them to art status. Instead, their intention, he insisted, was to have objects which innocently represented the climaxes of Hitchcock's classic films. But these display techniques undercut their intent. In this room, each case was lit by precision lighting that focused on a crimson satin cushion, a film still, a key prop, and a descriptive brass plaque. Dramatic music composed by Bernard Herrmann for Hitchcock's films played in the



**Fig. 2**

*A version of Rodin's Kiss appears in the foreground of a setup typical to Hitchcock and Art's displays. In this gallery, sculpture is displayed with painting and photography, and reveals the Montreal Museum of Fine Art's inter-disciplinary approach to connecting themes and placing Hitchcock in a historical lineage of high art.*



background of this one room, and added to its tense atmosphere. Each film was reduced to an object: a doll, a knife, a pair of scissors. The room's atmosphere was so carefully constructed that visitors were compelled to filter between the twenty-one cases, silently observing common things which had accrued an aura beyond their original function. And this excessive attention and near reverence for "stuff" is precisely the definition of the word "fetish." The setup was incredibly misleading, and when told that these objects were not the authentic film props, some visitors even remarked that they felt cheated.

For the remainder of the Hitchcock show, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts put high art on display, and was thus much more successful at averting the fetishizing process. In our society, art has a symbolic layer of meaning that is missing in everyday objects. By including art that is said to represent the film maker's inspiration, the art museum managed to avoid the cultish elements found in the other exhibitions. The Hitchcock exhibit emphasized the personal genius of the film maker. Its curators believed that Alfred Hitchcock was brilliant at relating the ideas found in the traditions of high art to the tastes of the popular audience. When first released, his films were intended for a mass public, but over time they have attracted a cult of film-goers interested in Hollywood's classic narratives. Therefore

bringing this star director to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts places his work under the lens and on par with the painted canvas, and extends the tradition of high art to include him.

Like all of the relationships between fans and stars, the relationship between Hitchcock and his devotees is complicated. The MMFA exhibit did not cater to the common denominator. It had a cold edge to it, perhaps inevitable because of the nature of the man under the spotlight. It also drew attention to Hitchcock's hypothetical inspirations rather than the man himself, and thus avoided the bizarre attachment to personal mementos found in the other shows. A very authoritative feel is magnified by the quiet of the art gallery, forcing the viewer of the exhibit to become passive.

In this way the Hockey Hall of Fame and *Hip Hop Nation* differed from the Hitchcock show because they explored as well as provoked the intensely devotional relationship between stars and fans. Because their goals were to give an overview of each respective culture, for the most part there was only a cursory treatment of the many individual stars they attempted to showcase.

But perhaps the best example of a spotlight that breaks this rule was the Hockey Hall of Fame's ongoing major focus on Wayne Gretzky. In the very same exhibit as the *Coca Cola Rink Zone* and the *Blockbuster Video Dressing Room* lies the display Wayne Gretzky, *the Legend*.

Although not explicitly supported by any major corporation, there are well placed inferences to Esso, the space's official sponsor. No other player gets his own *room* filled with copious examples of product endorsements, an abundance of personal hockey sticks, or a cleanly laid out material history of an entire hockey career. This room acts as visual inventory of his experiences and triumphs in the commercial life of a modern sports hero. Whereas Rocket Richard had to sell used cars to make ends meet, Gretzky sells his smiling face to Sugar Crisp. This testament to the commercialization of sports underlies what is on display in the Hockey Hall of Fame, echoing the exhibit's glossy and commercial feel.

Because this is an institution of hockey specifically, it attracts a crowd that is trained to consume these images. Architecturally, it is located on the concourse level of a modern commercial space, which includes shops and restaurants. It uses the veneer of an old bank building to maintain the façade of a museum while retaining an aura of wealth and masculine power. The institution is a hockey shrine with no other focus, and whose patrons are more often than not jersey-wearing, stat-knowing, cap-sporting, enthusiastic and emotional males. Contrary to the stereotypical image of the male sports fan, their visible expressions of awe were evidence of the aura of memorabilia.

The audience of these three exhibits comprised predominantly two types of viewers—one that regularly visits the art museum, and the other that was specifically attracted to it because it reflected their interests and/or lifestyles. *Hip Hop Nation* served as an excellent example of this phenomenon. The controversial and often aggressive style of this culture had the potential to make the more conservative art gallery patrons uncomfortable. The curator anticipated these highly skeptical visitors. For these people the exhibit did not explicitly state that it was fine art, but justified its inclusion in the United States' second largest art museum based on hip hop as a billion-dollar industry, its appeal across ethnic and racial lines, and actual cultural impact on North American society. It can be assumed that both types of viewers received these statements differently. Hip hop fans who went to the Brooklyn Museum of Art did not need any justification for their experiences. Instead, these statements functioned as an institutional nod to the perseverance of this grass roots movement turned major music industry.

The hip hop show at the BMA celebrated the creation of a culture made from nothing. This

show revealed the creativity of New York's ghetto youth, who improvised with the world available to them: cardboard boxes to break dance on, cheap records to scratch-play, a mouth-made beat, and graffiti, the epitome of an urban art form that claims someone else's space. The show's analysis was given in two formats, one written and one aural, and intended for the two types of expected audiences previously mentioned. It was assumed that one type of museum goer would be more interested in reading, while the other would only respond to a visual and musical display of their history.

Similarly, the overwhelming visual and audio stimulation found in the Hockey Hall of Fame emphasized the spectacle of the sport itself and turned the hall into a carnival of sorts. As mentioned earlier, the Hitchcock show also used signature orchestrations in its most important room. All three of these exhibits featured background sounds that recreated an aural atmosphere essential to each popular culture, and in the process, went beyond the conventions of usual museum practices. "He shoots, He SCORES!" and "I like big butts and I cannot lie" from the song "Baby Got Back" (on Sir Mix-A-Lot's 1991 album *Mack Daddy*) blasted in the background certainly added to the total experience. Obviously, this stretched the genteel and composed experience usually associated with museum culture.

Exhibitions on the subcultures that exist under the larger umbrella of popular culture are intended for everyone's viewing, but it is possible to read between the lines and note discrepancies when it comes to "universal" culture. Does such a culture exist? Who does it really exclude? In the writing of this article, we realized that each of these subcultures considered it acceptable if not normal to marginalize women within their norms. Ideally, the function of a museum is to operate at a distance considered appropriate for objective social commentary. All of these museum displays however, upheld the status quo. Proof of this very problem lies in the fact that curators all made the effort to mention the place of women, but in a token fashion. They failed to criticize women's limited participation, and therefore as the institutions appropriated these subcultures, they legitimized them with little critique.

The Hockey Hall of Fame relegated women to two easily missed display cases in the international section of the exhibition. At the Hockey Hall of Fame, eighty-five to ninety percent of visitors we met were men, and women were not independent viewers, but brought along as



wives, mothers, and sisters. The two members of the J>A>K>A>L Collective who went to Toronto to visit the exhibit felt distinctly out of place. Being the only single women at the Hall without any male accompaniment to broker the experience located them in male territory feeling isolated. The precise dilemma is feeling this within an exhibit that claims to be universally encompassing. Indeed, there is even merchandise that declares "hockey is Canada." As an all female collective it took us several weeks of critical thinking to see this phenomenon in the first place and deem it important enough to mention. This demonstrates that female exclusion is so pervasive within the pop culture of our society, that it almost went unnoticed.

More specifically, Hip Hop as an artistic expression is known for its abusive lyrics that include women-bashing. The Brooklyn Museum of Art show nodded to the role of women in this culture, but at the same time contradicted itself by protecting the existing state of current society. A wall panel stated that "because hip hop is a subculture of the larger American society, it is little wonder that the same patriarchy, sexism and misogyny that permeate all levels of mainstream America are also omnipresent in hip hop." In a larger context this panel is problematic because it does not recognize how this music polices the boundaries of sexuality and defined social roles. These exact critiques were only voiced at the end of the exhibit in a video installation

made by young people that explored difficult issues within this cultural movement. This video was the official word of an outside group asked to participate in the show. As a result, the BMA denied taking responsibility for a harsh critique, and instead could get away with simply legitimizing the movement by accepting it as incontrovertible social fact in the museum context. Despite all this, the video occupied a pivotal place in the exhibit — right before the giftshop.

In the Hitchcock exhibit, we also found the strict definition of women's roles, particular to the vision of one man in the mid-twentieth century. As the curators of this show noted, Hitchcock's "signature style" was the use of typecast women, bleach-blond, fetishized, and depicted as either ice-cold villains, "good girls," or a blend of both. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts disregarded the inherent problems of these portrayals, and instead, considered these aspects as part of historical, cultural, and artistic traditions. *Hitchcock and Art* was yet another example of the problems of presenting women in pop culture that deserves more attention and further consideration in the exhibit planning process. Although going into a deep sociological analysis is beyond the scope of this review, we would like to acknowledge this discrepancy and identify it as an important point for further research.

On September 22, 2000, Roberta Smith published a review of *Hip Hop Nation* in *The New York Times* (Section E; Part 2; Page 31). One of her most pointed critiques declared, "I have never seen a major museum exhibition that looks so nearly identical to the requisite gift shop at its end," and later stated that "this show feels like the cross between a mall and a mausoleum." Sure enough, all three shows that we examine here included that requisite gift shop. But after our discussion of memorabilia, it is worth pointing out that these shops perpetuated the object-driven memorabilia craze, and had museums generating artifacts of their own. These consumer goods allowed visitors to bring home a souvenir of these exhibits which, for the most part, were exhibits of souvenirs.

*Hip Hop Nation*, *Hitchcock and Art*, and the Hockey Hall of Fame acknowledged their role in elevating and validating the cultures they chose to present. Each museum organized their exhibits around a collection of proud ideas communicated to its viewers through objects. Movies and rap music in this context brought in expanded audiences to high art museums, and thus opened up the elite's cultural arena to new discourses from voices not previously acknowledged.

**Fig. 3**  
This image is from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, which was instrumental in organizing the exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. It depicts the Hall's permanent exhibit, and again reveals the need to display memorabilia as artifact in order to elevate popular culture.



Furthermore, Hockey's permanent institution replicates some museum formulas in order to be a part of this equation. To give such cultures of nothing access to this forum, memorabilia, used as artifacts, are key. The material culture was a good fit within the museum context in an abstract way—the inclusion of popular culture can only succeed when memorabilia are given the same weight as devotional objects.

Yet not every institution was comfortable exploring these boundaries, neither accepting

responsibility for controversial exhibit content nor their social implications. The established "culture of something" has barely begun to capture the unfamiliar bounds of nothing. In the final instance, "cultures of nothing" can only succeed in the museum forum when memorabilia are respected and represented as devotional objects elevated to the status of museum artifacts.

#### NOTES

1. Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), noted French artist, played with the traditional concepts of art within the gallery context. He took mass-produced objects of every-day use such as a bicycle wheel, a window pane, etc., appropriated them as art, and called

them "ready-mades." His scandalous work "Fountain" (1917), was a urinal turned on its side and signed, and demonstrated his profound contempt for the bourgeois conception of art and the art world.



### Comptes rendus de livres

Joanne Hollows, *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture*

Alison J. Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*

RHONA RICHMAN KENNEALLY

Hollows, Joanne. *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000. 229 pp., paper, £9.99, ISBN 0 7190 4395 6.

Clarke, Alison J. *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999. 234 pp., illus., cloth, US\$24.95, ISBN 1 56098 827 4.

#### On Femininity, Consumerism, and Popular Culture

My mother, who was married in the mid 1950s and lived during the rest of that decade in Montreal's Park Extension district, and whose career has always been to care for her family and her home, saw the Tupperware party as a mixed blessing. It was a chance for an evening out with her similarly-employed friends while my father minded me; there was an aura of excitement associated with the event and she could get dressed up; and there were all kinds of attractive new products to examine and buy. On the other hand, she remembers feeling obliged to make a purchase, and perhaps there was even a bit of rivalry amongst her peers as to who would buy what and how much.

Were these Tupperware parties modes of oppression, exploitations of women who were shamed into consumerist behavior they couldn't afford, imposing acts which over-wrote their own design preferences while prioritizing (masculine) modernist aesthetics? Or were these occasions opportunities for empowerment, which valorized homemaking as the responsible, essential exercise of efficiency and frugality; made casual entertainment acceptable and hence facilitated

household chores; and created opportunities for women — including minorities and those considered too old for general employment — to develop lucrative, self-fulfilling careers?

Two recent books provide engaging opportunities to reconsider the roles and perceptions of women, Tupperware, and popular material culture writ large, from post-Second World War to the end of the twentieth century. Alison Clarke is a tutor in design history and material culture at London's Royal College of Art and a visiting professor of design history and theory at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna, Austria. Her book-length study of Tupperware takes in and substantially expands on articles of hers that have appeared in *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*, edited by Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison (Winterthur: Winterthur Museum, 1997), and *Visions of Suburbia*, edited by Roger Silverstone (London: Routledge, 1997). Joanne Hollows is Senior Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies at Nottingham Trent University in the United Kingdom, and she previously co-edited two books on film studies. Indeed, there has been a recent proliferation of books that address women and material culture from a number of perspectives, including Joy Parr's *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (University of Toronto Press, 1999); Mary Drake McFeely's *Can She Bake a Cherry Pie? American Women and the Kitchen in the Twentieth Century* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); and Sherrie A. Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (University of Iowa Press, 2001).

Joanne Hollows' *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture* serves as an excellent point of departure, not only to consider her target subjects — film, romantic fiction, television soap

operas, fashion and beauty practices, and youth culture and popular music, spanning from the 1960s to the 1990s — but Clarke's Tupperware analysis as well. Hollows begins with an examination and reconsideration, in the light of recent feminist studies, of so-called second-wave feminist critique of the 1960s and 1970s. During that period of intense social activism, feminist writing cast a critical eye on the evils of femininity as a principal mode of suppressing women's initiative and self worth.

In particular, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* points to American suburbia of the 1950s as catastrophic in the history of women's activism. The book asserts that women's decisions to succumb, at this time, to the ideals espoused in femininity, to prioritize their identity as wives and mothers and home-makers as promoted vigorously in women's magazines and advertising, put women in the same category as Nazi concentration camp victims. In this spectacularly disproportionate analogy, Friedan emphasizes just how much women were dehumanized, were taught to be passive and child-like, and were ultimately recast as subservient to their masters and incapable of justifying their own place in the world. To regain ground in the light of such weakness, women were encouraged by Friedan to champion traits associated with masculinity, such as the pursuit of higher learning and the development of a career outside the home.

Hollows acknowledges that Friedan's work as well as that of other second-wave feminists have already been subjected to rigorous criticism by researchers, and sums up these reservations; it is here that Hollows' own contribution finds its roots. She reiterates that Friedan homogenizes the character and experience of women in 1950s America, and overlooks the profoundly different perspectives determined by class, race and geography, perspectives which also change over time. Second, Friedan assumes a passivity and a consistency in women's responses to the hegemonic power of the media in propagating the feminine mystique, whereas research in media and cultural studies demonstrates how readings of these "polysemic" messages (capable of generating multiple meanings) varied substantially as a function of the social and cultural groups to which the readers belonged. Third, Hollows is invigorated by the fact that opposition between femininity and feminism has been revisited and reworked or resisted by post second-wave feminist and cultural-studies writers.

Hollows' own stance is further stimulated by configuring her own research to accommodate

recent work in the overlapping fields of feminism, popular culture, and cultural studies. For example, she sees contemporary feminist interventions into the realm of popular culture as creating a space for supporting femininity as an area of study, since "work within feminist cultural studies," for example, "has challenged the idea that the 'feminine' is inherently worthless, trivial, and politically conservative." Her objective, hence, is to demonstrate the following points: that "what it means to be a woman" is subject to "transformation, contestation, and change;" that "there is no single feminine identity but multiple feminine identities" and they have been diversely "classified, evaluated and ranked;" and that some feminist cultural criticism still castigates femininity, to the extent that "a feminist vanguard" continues to want to "teach 'ordinary women' the error of their ways." In short, feminist cultural criticism has to be understood in terms of its "relation to the ways in which different feminine identities (including feminist identities) are bound up with different power relations in different historical contexts."

Rather than making direct studies of the variety of subjects that she chooses to take on, in this book Hollows' strategy is to report on the recent historiography associated with each, as a litmus test in her consideration of productive feminist critique. What we have, then, is an evaluation of previous evaluations, rather than a primary-source study of artifacts themselves. Indeed, one cannot help being slightly disappointed by this, especially in light of the title, and the promise of the illustration on the cover. It is an image taken from the 1974 film *The Stepford Wives*, showing eight of them, in a bountiful supermarket, tantalizingly attired in an allure of décolleté primly countered by wide-brimmed, socially-sanctioned hats, with laden, numbered shopping carts serving as props on which white-gloved hands are demurely crossed. In other words, whereas Hollows' intentions are laudable, her ambitions in this book justified and welcomed, her own careful analysis of material culture would perhaps have served as an even more desirable and instructional model in the promotion of the ideals which she identifies.

While each section of the book is, at least indirectly, a study of material culture, some are more relevant than others as a demonstration of the ability of physical artifacts to stand as the basis of feminist exploration of cultural values and ideals. The chapter on fashion and beauty practices is a pivotal example of how material culture can form the basis of an emphatically revealing

feminist discourse. Beginning with the assertion, based on the work of Elizabeth Wilson, that modern "fashion is obsessed with gender," it brings to attention ways in which feminine identity is articulated and negotiated through dress and personal appearance (E. Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago, 1985), p. 117). Once more the thread of second-wave feminist attitudes is woven into the text, and focuses on the understanding of fashion as a form of bondage, one result of which was a famous trashing of bras, girdles and stiletto heels during a 1960s Miss America beauty pageant.

A more contemporary reference is the "waif" or "heroin" look of the 1990s, which has been linked with unrealistic and unhealthy demands young girls placed on their own bodies. Two feminist strategies emerged to rectify these practices: a rejection of feminine fashion in favour of masculine dress, and a call to withdraw from the paradigm of fashion altogether by adopting a "natural" look to reflect an authentic female self. From her perspective, Hollows finds it "highly problematic" even to try to consider a natural or authentic feminine identity outside of culture. In other words, even a feminist natural look is a cultural construct and can no more identify what women are *really* like than any other style, especially because the issue of what *women* are like itself overlooks the diversity of perceptions and practices that Hollows repeatedly asserts.

Instead of an approach that promotes ways to correct or improve dressing practices, Hollows favours an analysis of clothing and beauty practices as a means of articulating various forms of contemporary femininity. Fashion practices can hence be explored as means to subvert assumptions about gender differences and gendered behaviour, and also to consider how "everyday fashion and beauty practices work to construct, produce or 'perform' a feminine self." Such endeavours demand, both on the part of the fashion producer and the researcher, a sensitivity to the language of clothes, which itself is mediated by race, class, age and time, through a variety of vehicles such as women's magazines, television, and so forth. Hollows concludes that fashion practices, not passively followed but, rather, actively engaged, "do not simply reproduce femininity, but involve the production of a feminine self." Once more, at the end of this enlightening chapter, one wishes that Hollows put her investigative skills where her ideology is, and conduct her own primary sourcework on the artifacts themselves.

Hollows' chapter on culture and material consumption nicely forms the link between her

book and that on Tupperware. She argues that "consumption is not simply a process in which commodities are bought" but rather that such commodities are given meaning by being actively incorporated into the lives of their consumers. Moreover, "the ways in which these consumer goods are used are practices through which cultural identities are formed and reformed." Referring to one of Alison Clarke's earlier articles on Tupperware as well as the revisionist work of other feminists, Hollows seeks to dispel the notion that 1950s suburban women obsessed about consumer goods, and followed blindly the urge to satisfy false needs cooked up through advertising and other forms of social control. For example, she cites research that reveals that whereas architects and designers took it upon themselves in some experimental projects deliberately to impose a rational, modernist order on the design and configuration of houses and their contents, the "universal meanings" that were supposed to be inherent in these demonstrations of "good design" were "often either rejected or negotiated or redefined in use." Apparently, women were more reluctant than previously allowed for, to put aside their own class- and gender-specific tastes and preferences. Their domestic environment, then, could be seen as one which ultimately empowered them by allowing for the articulation of their own authority within it.

As befits her qualifications as an expert in material culture, Alison Clarke sets up her research on the basis of meticulous and thoughtful contact with physical and other artifacts associated with Tupperware: the containers themselves; manuals for users and salespeople; photographs; oral histories, and advertisements. The result is a convincing argument to reopen the debate about the cumulative repercussions of Tupperware as an anti-feminist icon.

Two elements of Clarke's argument come into high relief, especially in the context of Hollows' book. One is the extent to which the success story of Tupperware depended on its appeal having been mediated, not primarily through its aesthetic, but through social valorization. Clarke sets up her study by establishing an opposition between the perception of Tupperware as a manifestation of modernist ideals, and the reading and appreciation of this product in terms of the degree to which it stood as a marker with positive connotations in the lives of its users. She lists the various exhibitions of Tupperware at prestigious institutions such as New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1956, which gave its "carefully-

considered shapes” and functionalist aesthetic an elitist imprimatur by situating it within the paradigm of modernism, in contrast to the “ostentatious frippery of brightly coloured, overdesigned gadgetry.”

Even the designers of Tupperware seemed uncomfortable with this reductionist approach to the product, Earl Tupper himself deliberately taking inspiration from vernacular handicrafts since “unlike writing, talking or indirect day dreaming...handcrafts do not entertain any high flown abstractions.” Instead, Clarke reveals that the true secret to Tupperware’s success lay, not as a beacon of “good taste,” but in the attempt of its creators to target human relations, by reconfiguring and promoting the role of the homemaker as a contemporary “hostess,” and by catering to her needs by providing, as revealed in one Tupperware catalogue, “such accessories as...are essential to the hostess who wants all her invitations eagerly sought after.”

Aware that “activities such as home decoration and flower arranging valorized household labour,” companies such as Tupper’s — and Coca Cola as well — linked “socially-aspiring” activities with their broadly-distributed brand-name products and rode the crest of the consumerist wave. Tupperware also enhanced its own prestige in terms of making itself available as an “inalienable” object, by taking commissions to create promotional material for companies to give away as gifts. In this manner, “bounded...by such social ties as sentiment and reciprocity,” it took on additional social meaning and significance. Clarke discovers that it was precisely the significance of Tupperware as gift items, rather than as a strictly functional object, that was the basis of its first commercial success. These socially-valorizing practices, added to the rise of the Tupperware party as an undisputedly successful marketing strategy of the time, gave Tupperware its cachet and its esteemed status as one of the most famous North-American consumer products of the 1950s.

Clarke’s second key strategy in the book is to posit a new approach to the debate that originally resided in second-wave feminist discourse, and which saw Tupperware-ism as one more anaesthetizing, commodifying means to deprive women of their own choices and own identity. The Tupperware party, by 1951 the exclusive retail distribution method for the product, was especially condemned: characteristically hosted by a woman who invited her friends to witness a promotion and demonstration of products by Tupperware salespeople — usually also women — it was seen

to exploit existing social channels for profit, since the host would receive free Tupperware in proportion to the number of purchases she and her friends consequently made. On the contrary, Clarke strives to dispel this stereotype of “1950s women as domestic, quiescent victims of corporate capitalism.”

Women that Clarke interviewed in her research for this project “frequently spoke of their involvement with Tupperware not just as a means of circumventing the limitations of their domestic and economic situations but as a positive and self-determining experience.” From the production and distribution perspective, “Tupperware corporate culture offered an alternative to the patriarchal structures of conventional sales structures, which many women, completely alienated from the conventional workplace, wholeheartedly embraced.” Although corporate advertising for the containers depicted the Tupperware purchaser consistently as white, middle-class, and suburban, actual sales were aimed at minority women as well.

Moreover, Tupperware dealers came from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds and habitually included divorced women and single mothers, the most famous of whom was Brownie Wise. She began her career as a salesperson who perfected the sales technique of the Tupperware party, rose through the ranks of the company to become its vice-president, and, before losing in a head-to-head challenge against the inventor, Earl Tupper, himself, wielded true power in her position and even appeared on the cover of *Business Week* magazine in 1954.

There is strong merit, then, to this book, in problematising the earlier, simplistic feminist stance toward Tupperware and its selling methods, and, even more importantly, in its endorsement of the study of mass consumption and “feminine culture” as “wholly valid aspects of women’s history.” In promoting the study of women and consumer culture, Clarke places her priority squarely on a comprehensive feminist historiography: attention ought not to be focused disproportionately on certain constituencies, for example, politicized and working women, because “unless the lives of nonradical women involved in a feminine popular culture that embraced consumerism and glamour are acknowledged, the mendacious elitism previously ascribed to white patriarchal history prevails here as well.”

If Clarke is convincing in her recasting of Tupperware and its ethos as creating opportunities for women’s empowerment, even



she alludes to occasions which do not exactly highlight the long way that women have come. Perhaps the most disturbing is the 1954 "Big Dig" Homecoming Jubilee, which took place on the Tupperware company grounds. Sales people were invited to attend the festivities, metaphorically presented as an American gold-rush adventure. Distributorships were issued "sites" on a "Big Dig" map of the area on the basis of sales, with the highest-selling attendants permitted to advance furthest along the trail to where the richest deposits were. Buried under the ground was an estimated \$48,500 worth of prizes, including mink stoles and diamond rings, and the object was for each person to dig frantically to unearth as many of these objects as possible. *Life* magazine reported on this "All-Girl Gathering" and CBS televised the festivities,

no doubt tempting other women to consider a career in the same field. Literally encouraging women to get down and dirty by competing head-on with each other for luxury items, this event seems to epitomize the most negative aspects of the Tupperware phenomenon.

No longer is the Tupperware party the key means of distributing these plastic paragons. Today they are marketed at shopping malls, no doubt a consequence of the rise in the number of women employed outside the home, who have less time or inclination to host such gatherings. As for my mother, her own contemporary gesture of empowerment is to take a drive to the nearest dollar store. There, anonymously, she can make her selection of containers, buying only and whatever is desirable and convenient.

## **Maurice Rickards, *The Encyclopedia of Ephemera: A Guide to the Fragmentary Documents of Everyday Life for the Collector, Curator, and Historian***

**RUSSELL JOHNSTON**

Rickards, Maurice. *The Encyclopedia of Ephemera: A Guide to the Fragmentary Documents of Everyday Life for the Collector, Curator, and Historian*. Ed. Michael Twyman, with the assistance of Sally de Beaumont and Amoret Tanner. New York: Routledge, 2000. x, 402 pp., cloth, \$98, ISBN 0-415-92648-3.

*The Encyclopedia of Ephemera* was clearly a labour of love for its creators: its writer, the late Maurice Rickards, and its editor, Michael Twyman. Rickards was a scholar and collector of paper ephemera, and Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Ephemera Studies at the University of Reading. This reference work was first planned in 1971. Before his death in 1998, Rickards had researched and written almost four hundred of the entries included. Twyman, also at Reading, commissioned some forty more to complete the manuscript and to include new topics that date from 1980. The result is a stylistically seamless work that bears the enthusiasm of a collector. Chronologically, it spans the history of printed paper; geographically, its strength is Great Britain, though topics range into continental Europe and North America.

"Ephemera" is a term without a universally recognized definition. Here it is defined by Rickards as "the minor transient documents of everyday life," rendered chiefly from paper. It is, as Twyman

notes, an unsatisfactory term for analytical purposes, and has been adopted for its resilience rather than its rigour (p. v).

The encyclopedia attempts to refine its scope through example rather than argument, and consequently a very wide range of objects has been included. There are some items which enjoyed domestic popularity, such as silhouettes, envelopes, and lavatory paper, while other items are the official detritus of state agencies: election papers, postal-strike labels, and riot acts, to name three. However, by far the majority of the entries describe items commercial in nature. Examples of such items include account books, ships' deck plans, and bank notes. Certain printing terms are also explained, among them Braille, tinsel printing, and electrotyping. After that, there are some oddities in the mix: wax letter seals may be understandable, given their link to paper goods, but pressed flowers, shellac "advertising records," and "silks" (printed textiles) seem to test the compilers' own boundaries. The one thing that seems to unite all of these is their appeal to collectors — a characteristic imparted to said items through the beauty of their craft or their curiosity value.

Suitably for a reference work, the individual entries are more functional than interpretive, though they are written in an engaging and

accessible style. If a featured item is recognizable to a modern reader, its entry is comprised of a short history and a few examples are described. Where an item may be obscure, the text offers a more intricate discussion of its manufacture, appearance, and purpose. The author shows a collector's fascination for "firsts." Occasionally, a prominent collection of artifacts is listed at the end of an entry, which is welcome. Unfortunately, not all entries include sources for further reading. The introduction suggests that such entries were informed by Rickards's extensive, personal network of informants, many of whom are now deceased. In their place, where authorities could not be cited, one might have wished for noteworthy literary references to the artifacts described — something that might have depicted the object in a representative context. Still, the general presentation is greatly aided by many well-selected illustrations. A two-page spread often has two or more photographs, and there are sixteen colour plates as well.

Although an attempt was made to appeal to an international audience, the volume is clearly geared to the British experience. Because the objects collected are by definition the common paper objects of daily life, their names are subject to local vernacular, and British slang serves as the bench throughout. Further, the compilers have not been consistent in their attempts to ameliorate this situation. An entry might include alternative names for an item, but these may not appear in the index or the list of entries printed on the book's end papers. One example is the entry for "dance programme," a device also known as a "dance card." A similar situation holds for paper dolls; they do not appear in the index, but enjoy a central role in the rather broad entry for "Cut-out Toys."

Other anomalies occur. For example, the entry for "Relief Printing for the Blind" mentions the

entry for Braille, but not vice versa. One wonders why the subject requires two entries. The many genres of "Comic" — or funnies (not indexed) — are mentioned in one brief entry, while "labels" are detailed in over forty separate entries for different products and package types.

Are these serious problems? To the casual reader, who will enjoy roaming through the encyclopedia's pages, perhaps not. But to the researcher, a minor difference in terminology may well prove maddening. An index which cross-listed even the most common alternative names for the items described would have been helpful.

Twyman notes in his introduction the possibilities that ephemera research may have within the fields of social and business history. This point is amply confirmed. One area that begs for further research, even after a random sampling of entries, is the extent to which advertising features among the most collectable ephemera. Here, it seems, is fertile ground to discover links between social and business history. Much scholarly work over the last twenty years has viewed the relationship between advertisers and consumers as a hostile one; what are we to make of the volumes of scrapbooks kept over the last two centuries, in which have been preserved advertising trade cards, package labels, and cigar rings? Rickards and Twyman's work as collectors and encyclopedists may help to place these private documents into the historian's field of vision.

Ultimately, this volume may not find a wide audience in Canadian and American Studies. Much of the state and commercial ephemera it describes is peculiar to Great Britain, and Canadian material is particularly rare. But, as the editor notes, this volume is a pioneering scholarly effort in the field of ephemera. For students and scholars of British social, cultural, and business history, this will be a valuable tool.

## **Kevin Mulroy, ed., *Western Amerykański: Polish Poster Art and the Western***

**ANNA ADAMEK**

Mulroy, Kevin, ed., *Western Amerykański: Polish Poster Art and the Western*. Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999. 229 pp., 167 illus., cloth, US\$60, ISBN 0-295-97812-0; paper, \$40, ISBN 0-295-97813-9.

Kevin Mulroy, the director of the research centre at the Autry Museum of Western Heritage recalls in his interesting preface to *Western Amerykański: Polish Poster Art and the Western* that anyone who heard about the book would instantly ask: "Why posters from Poland?" Certainly the

Western, as a film genre, has been more prominent in other European countries such as Italy, Germany or Great Britain. In his account of the selection of posters presented in the book, Mulroy describes the story behind the publication of *Western Amerykański*, the catalogue accompanying an exhibit presented under the same title in October 1999 at the Autry Museum of Western Heritage in Los Angeles. According to its mandate, the museum was created to explore the history of the American West and the presence of its myths in contemporary society. Although the museum had acquired a unique collection of artifacts, the influence of Western imagery on European culture needed some further research. The foreign film posters provided an extensive range of stereotypical images and symbols associated with the American West. Furthermore, a poster collection could have been built quite affordably and the only challenge that the Museum had to face was finding a good source of high quality examples of this genre of art. As it happened, Grant Underwood, a law student from Texas who, during his travels to Eastern Europe acquired a wonderful collection of posters, decided to sell it to support his studies, and offered it to the Autry Museum. Mulroy recalls that as consecutive shipments of posters from Underwood's collection arrived at the Museum, it became apparent to him that Polish poster art was extraordinary.

While American and Western European posters were only intended to advertise movies, Polish artists used visual effects to engage the viewer in a dialogue on historical and sociological events. In order to convey a hidden message and grab the audience's attention, a poster had to surprise, struggle against existing attitudes and force the viewer to confront stereotypes. Although the artists employed a vast range of individual artistic expressions, typography and techniques, they commonly aimed at creating a medium for a critique of modern society. Old motifs were given fresh meanings. A picture of a lone gunman, images of violence and death, decorated with bold, striking colours and large typography predominated the artists' vision. A poster created by Wojciech Wenzel for the 1953 classic *Shane*, provides an excellent example of this original approach. The *Man from Nowhere* — the Polish title of the movie, spread in large, black letters across the image — is a frightening figure. His face is grey and eyes psychotic; dressed in a red shirt, he stands out from a

black background, observant, unemotional, dangerous, and ready to kill. Kevin Mulroy sees this beautifully composed piece of graphic art as an unexpected commentary on the violence in the West as well as a statement on universal values and the Polish experience — an example of art worth collecting and promoting. "It is difficult to respond succinctly when asked 'Why Poland?' — says Mulroy — "but spend some time with the posters, and the answer will come quickly and easily" (p. x).

The catalogue is a solid example of Western scholarship and can be enjoyed by anyone interested in the cinematic genre, graphic arts or popular culture in general. Contrary to its title, the book does not focus exclusively on Polish poster art, but pieces together information on the origins and history of Western mythology and its presence in European culture, defined in the most comprehensive sense. Thus, it places the Polish poster art in a framework of the American West. Beautifully illustrated with 164 good quality colour images, the book benefits from the diversity of presented reproductions. Replicas of modern Polish posters are juxtaposed with miscellaneous examples produced in other countries providing an excellent opportunity to examine these works of art in the broad context of its genre. In addition to posters, the editor of *Western Amerykański* chose to feature some book covers, pamphlets and advertisements dating back to the nineteenth century, as well as various photographs, including a wonderful image of a young poster gluer with his bucket of glue and a bag of rolled posters, pasting a colourful image onto an obscure fence, with ugly, grey buildings and an old, devastated sidewalk in a background. This image alone is worth a hundred words.

Unlike other exhibition catalogues, the illustrations presented in *Western Amerykański*, are subordinate to the text. The main body of the book consists of three essays, followed by artists' biographies, and a comprehensive bibliography. An index cross-references movie titles with art works; however, an English reader may find some difficulty in the fact that many of the indexed titles are cited in Polish. The three main essays are very informative and expressive, and were clearly preceded by in-depth historical and cultural research on the subject. They are a comprehensive source of information on Western imagery as presented in film posters.

The first of the essays, entitled "The Western Worldwide," written by Edward Buscombe, a former director of the British Film Institute in

London, and Kevin Mulroy himself, focuses on the history of a Western mythology and its journey into European culture. The authors do not attempt to analyse the sociological implications of the popularity of the myth of the last frontier in Europe and around the world, but concentrate mainly on the actual presence of Western motifs in other countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They aspire to establish a historical context for their contentious argument that the visible presence of certain American values promoted by the Western, such as the conquest of fear, political freedom, and the equality of classes had far reaching political consequences on European history. It is fair to say that the authors did extensive research on the topic. They point to the fact that Western imagery was omnipresent, from books, to paintings, to plays and operas; they even provide a number of Western-theme volumes in European libraries. Buffalo Bill's trips to Europe and the popularity of Gene Autry's rodeo are described in detail and are illustrated with some interesting comments from contemporaries, including Queen Victoria. The ideas of openness, individual freedom and sexual innocence suited Victorian morality, and a tale of pioneers, adventure, and wildness captured the nineteenth-century European imagination. Hence a mass audience had been prepared for the arrival of the Western movie. Indeed, the genre was so popular that it had been adapted by directors around the world: Jean Renoir, Akira Kurosawa, Horst Wendlandt and Sergio Leone.

So too, the posters promoting movies flourished; some were only replicas of their American counterparts, yet many European graphic artists seized the opportunity to look at Western symbols in fresh ways in order to comment on movies rather than simply illustrate their content. The authors of the first essay are alert to the often omitted fact that Russian poster art was one of the first to manifest this innovative approach. The international popularity of the Western has slowly declined since the 1970s, but elements of its powerful imagery live on in advertising, design and fashion. The image of America brought to Europe in the nineteenth century is currently, in the authors' opinion, revived and reconstructed by Euro-Disney, where "every day, the showman and the promoter emerge triumphant as reality slips seamlessly and stylishly into myth. Buffalo Bill would have been proud; and the audience applauds" (p. 50). It is unfortunate that Buscombe and Mulroy chose not to explore further the effects of Disney's interpretation of the American West on European

popular culture. Although undeniable, this influence is not necessarily entirely valuable.

The subject of Western mythology and foreign societies is also examined in the second essay of the reviewed volume, entitled "Poland and the American West." The author, Frank Fox, an expert on poster art and a former professor of Eastern European history, builds his analysis of Polish posters around the political image created by Tomasz Sarnecki that had been successfully used by Solidarity in the 1989 elections. Based on the Western *High Noon*, the poster presents Gary Cooper in his perfect sheriff outfit, carrying a ballot instead of a gun. Throughout his article, Fox focuses on the political aspect of poster art in postwar Poland. He recalls historical events such as partitions, uprisings and mass emigration that made Poles especially receptive to the American myth of freedom. The author's erudition is remarkable; he uses immigrants' correspondence as a background for Polish views on America; describes the contribution of Poles to their new country and demonstrates similarities in the literary descriptions of the Polish borders and the American West. The story of Buffalo Bill's visit to Poland in 1906 and the introduction of the first silent Westerns in the 1930s set the cultural framework in which the Polish fascination with the Western developed.

The genre reached the peak of its popularity in Poland between the 1960s and early 1980s. Fox comments that the response of audiences was so powerful that Polish producers and directors, such as Józef Kłtyk — a name completely unknown to this reviewer and her Polish friends — attempted, obviously with no great success, to develop a Polish version of the genre, the so called "kielbasa western." This comprehensive description of the presence of the American West in Polish culture is followed by an equally detailed analysis of the history of Polish film posters created for both Western and Eastern Europeans movies in the context of the communist regime. Fox describes the limited funding, the lack of supplies and the hard economic conditions that forced artists to be more creative, use alternative techniques such as simple printing and a sensual approach: a stress on colour, light and suggested texture. One of the most recognizable qualities of any aesthetic vision is a spontaneous, unpredictable use of irony and the grotesque, so characteristic of art created in times of despair. These ideas are illustrated with comments from critics and artists, providing an interesting mix of their opinions and Fox's own views.



The third and final essay of the catalogue, entitled "Two Legends: The American Western and the Polish Poster School" nicely complements the two previous articles. The author, Mariusz Knorowski, skillfully avoids repetition by focusing his article on the iconography of the posters rather than their history, a subject already recounted by Frank Fox. Yet again, the text is concerned in large part with the political circumstances surrounding the creative process. The author lists Westerns movies distributed in Poland and describes in detail the artwork produced to promote them. He analyses a number of requisites used in unconventional ways, such as the leitmotif of a gunman, in the Polish posters often outlined from the back, and portrayed in gray or red to stress passion. The mid 1980s saw the slow decline of the genre. The posters became redundant, the motifs uninteresting, the stylistics repetitive, and eventually, according to the author, Western posters disappeared completely from the streets of Polish cities.

The main weakness of the volume is a certain limit in the scope of the critique. The analysis of Polish poster art offered in *Western Amerykański*, although definitely interesting, is focused almost entirely on the political aspects of poster making and the political response of the viewer to conveyed ideology. This is not surprising, since the book was published in 1999, the tenth anniversary of the overthrow of communism in Europe. The influence of ideology on artistic creation in a country such as Poland is important and worth discussion. However, the ten years that passed since 1989 provide a distance that allows one to examine the non-political aspects of Polish art and culture. One of the intriguing, still unanswered, problems is the question of what the posters disclose about popular culture, rather than politics. What does the chosen imagery tell us about modern Polish society? Why did Westerns and the resulting artwork that promoted them become an integral part of Polish mass culture, and why, during the 1989 election, did Poles respond with such force to the image of the lone sheriff from *High Noon*?

The authors of *Western Amerykański* successfully present the origins of Western mythology in Polish culture and its influence on graphic art. Nevertheless, the volume lacks a critical examination of viewers' responses to Western imagery. The power with which the Polish society reacted to the images of the

American West goes far beyond the political reasons and is well worth exploring. Such an approach would provide insight into socio-cultural as well as ideological problems. The instant values of the Western contained all the attributes and functions of myth: the mystical or metaphysical level — a hero suffering mysterious pain, any pain — a stylistic analogy of an empty signifier that can be filled with any number of concepts: postwar contradictions, internal conflicts, loss of loved ones. At a cosmological level, the morally simple world of the Western offers an escape from social chaos; and, finally, at the sociological level, the Western provides a means of validating and maintaining a specific social and moral order in the community.

In fact, it is perhaps worth noting here that the Western, as a genre, was mostly popular among Polish men and therefore they were the posters' assumed audience. Mesmerized men would watch all of the numerous reruns of *The Magnificent Seven* on the national television channel with a religious fascination. The streets would become deserted, apartment buildings gleamed with the blue glow from television sets and the sound of gunshots carried through the Polish cities, as Polish men sat to catch a glimpse of the American way of life. At the same time, Polish wives identified themselves with the nineteenth-century slave Isaura, from a popular Brazilian sitcom. A social commentary on this matter can be found in poster design. The photograph of Gary Cooper used in *High Noon* is a very good example of the impassioned use of easily recognized accessories. The actor himself is only a shape, a physical perfection dressed in a costume, a cowboy hat and boots, black jeans with a double belt. A pure sketch of masculinity appealing to the intended audience, he escapes the ambiguity of gender roles in a society where women were becoming increasingly educated, important and independent. This was the sort of hero Polish men wanted to be. He was in command of his needs, a loner that will never be domesticated, and he saw the world with clarity. Arguably, it was the representation of a strong personality rather than the evocation of political freedom that Poles ultimately found so appealing. Yet gender representation in posters is only one of the vast array of interesting sociological issues conveyed in Polish graphic art. Any publication on this subject would benefit from a further analysis of social themes, in addition to the discussion of politics.

## David Thoms, Len Holden and Tim Claydon, eds., *The Motor Car and Popular Culture in the Twentieth Century*

DONALD F. DAVIS

Thoms, David, Len Holden and Tim Claydon, eds., *The Motor Car and Popular Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1998. 307 pp., 11 illus., cloth, US\$89.95, ISBN 1-85928-461-2.

A collection of eighteen brief essays, *The Motor Car and Popular Culture in the Twentieth Century* owes much to De Montfort University in Leicester, England, which provided editors and half of the book's contributors. Despite its sweeping title, the book focuses primarily on England, as thirteen of the articles never stray from that green and pleasant land even to forage in Wales or Scotland. Thus the popular culture being described is English, save when Paul Wells and Duncan Heining write about the depiction of cars by American animated films and pop music after 1950, or Sebastian Lockwood writes briefly about the psychic role of cars (for his own life in Toronto and the United States), Ken Gelder explains that Australian road movies, such as the Mad Max trilogy, are so conservative that they omit Aborigines in order to make "a claim for white Australians' repossession of [their] country," or Len Holden attempts to correlate such marques as Volvo, Ferrari, and Rolls-Royce with the technological styles and values of their homelands.

When Gelder draws on an article by Grayson Gerrard (*Mankind*, 1989) to discuss the "decommodification" of the "mutika" in the Aboriginal community of Arnhem Land, he clarifies for the reader that the popular culture in this book's title is English and not universal. The people of Arnhem Land, according to Gerrard, "humbugged" whites into permitting their vehicles and driving services to become communal property. By contrast, the English car that appears in these essays is private property (there being nothing here on rental cars or taxis), used by its owners, mostly middle-class, and its builders, mostly working-class, to seek respectively personal status and autonomy.

The book divides its analysis of English motor culture into three parts or "major themes": first, "the car as image;" second, "the role of the car in the development of entertainment and leisure;" and third, the "social and economic issues related to the production and sale of cars." This third category predominates, especially if one concludes that it could also have included the essays by Steven Morewood and Steve Koerner on the sports car and motorcycle industries. These seem to have

been inserted in the second section because the editors perceived them as pleasure vehicles, even though the motorcycle originally found its market amongst those unable to afford a light car.

As the book is interdisciplinary, it will have different strengths for different readers. For myself, I found the essays by Sean O'Connell and Tim Claydon especially interesting. O'Connell has contributed a piece on the interwar years, probably the best-known era of British automotive history. What new, then, can be learned about the 1920s and 1930s? A lot, it seems, once we appreciate the peculiar — when viewed from North America — English reluctance to buy on "hire purchase," that is, on credit. Manufacturers found it awkward even to advertise the possibility of hire purchase, lest their middle-class customers fret about their neighbours' wondering whether they had the financial means and rectitude always to pay cash. Status considerations seem to have been especially debilitating to the development of a mass market in automobiles in England, as it required companies to build too many different models to permit mass production methods, and to neglect the low income market thanks to a refusal to recognize the opportunities for them in joint ownership of cars by extended working-class families. O'Connell's approach is one that should be duplicated for other countries.

Tim Claydon's work is more distinctively British, as it looks at three London newspapers to argue that they used the automobile industry strikes of the 1950–1979 era to develop a meta-narrative of social disorder and destructive trade unionism that justified Britain's abandonment of "liberal collectivism" and its embrace of "liberal individualist principles" wisely rejected more than a century ago. O'Connell is convincing when he argues that labour strife in the British motor industry was a key factor in the right turn in British politics after 1979, but less persuasive when he tries to explain away 600 work stoppages at an auto plant in less than five years.

In O'Connell's essay, and in those by Brad Beaven on shop floor culture in Coventry's motor industry, by Paul Thompson on auto workers' leisure activities, or by Tom Donnelly on the impact of the Second World War on auto making, one finds a noteworthy aspect of England's motor culture, and that is a refusal of British academics to hold auto workers to account for their role in

the collapse of this key British industry. Middle-class Englishmen are chided repeatedly for their status-seeking and failure to buy the most utilitarian models on offer, but working-class Britons continue to get a free ride from these cultural historians. Quick to condemn middle-class snobbery, the authors are remarkably indulgent when it comes to auto workers who cheated the time clock, drank or gambled on the job, stole parts, or repeatedly went out on strike against the advice of their own unions.

Women also get a free ride in this book. Oddly, but predictably, they are never chastised for their role in the asphaltting of England. Instead, it is social progress each time a woman builds, buys, or drives a motor car. Those interested in gender as a category of analysis will find intriguing Kathleen Bell's observation that "one of the motor car's chief functions" in *The Wind and the Willows* (a classic tale about a joy-riding, aristocratic toad) is "to bring Toad's feminine side into the open... so that it can... be dispensed with, reclaiming Toad for masculine values."

Is the motor car feminine? Not according to the postwar car songs analysed by Duncan Heining,

for they generally equated the car with money, sex and male potency. Heining, however, makes the same error as the editors, in assuming that one culture, American in his case, sums up the gender implications of the motor car for popular culture. It is unlikely that the males who purchased American muscle cars viewed the automobile's gender in the same way as did the males who bought British mini cars. It is probable that gender had a different social dynamic in England than in North America.

In English car culture, women have traditionally been expected to prefer small cars and cycles. In the essay that makes the most use of semiotics in this collection, Jenny Rice and Carol Saunders complain that "gendered advertising discourse" still tries to confine women "to the small car market." As Rice and Saunders urge British car companies to target women as potential buyers for their bigger, more expensive models (in order to "offer female car consumers, a marginalised group, access to more positive images"), one cannot help but be struck that the most abiding aspect of England's car culture has been its social snobbery.

## Witold Rybczynski, *One Good Turn: A Natural History of the Screwdriver and the Screw*

RANDALL C. BROOKS

Rybczynski, Witold. *One Good Turn: A Natural History of the Screwdriver and the Screw*. Toronto: Harper Flamingo Canada, 2000. 173 pp., cloth, \$24, ISBN 0-00-2000031-8 or 0-00-638603-2.

I was asked to write this review because my Ph.D. thesis was on the scientific applications of precision screws. Hence, when I received this diminutive book my first reaction on scanning it was that it was going to be a bit of fluff. However, on sitting down and reading Rybczynski's *One Good Turn*, I was surprised at how readable and entertaining it was. Though an academic, Rybczynski has employed a journalistic writing style but he has also documented his work well though not as fully as a dissertation. He and his researchers have done a remarkably good job at ferreting out and referencing interesting and relevant facts that anyone interested in technology will find

fascinating. The references he cites are standard works but for someone not familiar with the literature of tools and craftsmanship, Rybczynski's work will provide a useful entrance to and a bibliography for the topic of screws and screw drivers. However, it is clear he did not do a thorough on-line search for recent studies on the topic and, as a result, he has missed some interesting materials and modern applications. As well, he missed the one essential and beautifully illustrated 1962 reference on screws, Rudolf Kellermann and Wilhelm Treue's *Die Kulturgeschichte der Schraube*.

The starting point of Rybczynski's book was an editor's request to write a contribution to the *New York Times* special millennium issue. On pondering the "best tool of the millennium" the author goes through the merits of everything from the hammer, to the level, to the brace and bit but when it comes to making the decision, the obvious choice — but one to which his

wife drew his attention — was the lowly screw driver. When it comes down to it, the screw is the most widely used mechanical device, bar none, except the lowly nail. Though it's origins predate the millennium, the screw has been used in everything from armaments, to clocks, to furniture, to tools, to the space shuttle, to scientific instruments, and was fundamental to the underpinnings of the technological revolution of the last half millennium. Threads can be from almost microscopic to metres across, and for most of that range, a screw driver is the tool of choice to drive a screw home. Until the advent of a wide array of speciality glues in the last 20 years, the screw has been the most reliable holding device since the middle ages.

Rybczynski has searched the origins of the term screw driver, not being satisfied with the *Oxford English Dictionary's* conclusions and he indeed found that the term in its earlier English form, turnscrew, evolved from the French term *tournevis* which appeared in 1723, almost a full century before the OED indicates. The author describes his path through various avenues to find the origins of screws and screwdrivers, and the style is entertaining rather than academic. In the tale one discovers how one fired an arquebus, a very early type of gun to which a match had to be held to the firing chamber — a task almost as risky as being in the line of sight! The vibration and stresses on guns made them a natural early application after Archimede's screws for lifting water and, of course, screws used in wine presses. One significant fact Rybczynski missed was that in fifteenth-century guns, screws were made precisely to bottom as the head contacted the surface thereby ensuring they were tightly fitted and would not come loose. Their heads were round with simple slots for a flat-bladed screw driver.

Though hardly precision-made by modern standards, screws of this period were rare and made by the best workmen and it is not too surprising that clockmakers were the next craftsmen to apply screws to their products. For carpenters, all that was necessary to make a wood screw was a flat or triangular file but that was time consuming and not worth the expense until, as Rybczynski points out, makers appeared with specialist tools. For instance, for metal applications, a screw plate with different sized holes was required to make the threads — one forced the screw blank through a succession of holes deforming the metal to form the thread. One important device the author missed was

the thread tap to form internal threads, which evolved in nineteenth century Britain. Rybczynski does recount some of the advances and early British and American patents that relate to screw making, to demonstrate how the cost dropped and the applications multiplied. He even discusses at some length the Canadian patent of Peter Robertson for the square slotted screw — arguably and demonstrably the most effective screw and screwdriver where power is required though they are still rarely seen outside Canada. Rybczynski relates that the crossed-style Phillips head screw gained favour over the Robertson in the United States because, on Ford assembly lines, the screwdriver slipped out of the head when driven fully home without damaging either the screw head or stripping the sheet metal. This was considered a major advantage but, for hand work, is a major flaw.

In *One Good Turn* you will learn that the screw is the basis of many key machine tools and their products. Screw lathes using carefully made lead screws were envisioned by Leonardo da Vinci and were soon used by wood turners for ornamental work and were made by craftsmen in Nürnberg for precision devices used by scientists. Henry Maudslay in London made the most precise screw lathe in his time at the beginning of the nineteenth century and it is said that every precision screw made in the nineteenth century could be traced back to that machine. Rybczynski describes Maudslay's impact and his successor, William Whitworth, the person who first attempted to standardize the elements of a screw thread, that is, the thread pitch, thread angles, and rounding of the crest and trough of the thread. He also describes the alternate standards and the reasons why they appeared in the United States (Sellers) and Europe (metric or *Filère Suisse*).

In the final chapter of *One Good Turn*, Rybczynski brings us full circle looking at devices from antiquity that are related to screws summarizing some of the results of research by twentieth century historians and archaeologists. By so doing, he completes our image of the place and role of the screw in shaping our millennium though it would have rounded out the work had Rybczynski described some of the innovative designs and applications of screws in modern technology. However, as I indicated at the outset, this is not a scholarly work but it is competently written and is entertaining. For anyone who studies or works in the history of technology, a few hours with *One Good Turn* will prove useful.



## Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning*

WIM GILLES

Blaszczyk, Regina Lee. *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. xiii, 380 pp., illus., paper, US\$49.95, ISBN 0801861934.

When, in the 1960s, I made acquaintance with the expertise of marketing, it promoted the maxim "stop trying to sell what you make: make what you can sell." I was to believe that this was one of those typical post-Second World War management concepts, a panacea for failing sales departments. Although the slogan was right, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* proves that the suggestion that this was a novel idea was wrong. Regina Blaszczyk's book describes in detail how, as early as the second half of the eighteenth century, famous British potter Josiah Wedgwood and his commercial partner Thomas Bentley successfully operated on that modern marketing principle, albeit that their methods differed from today's. Regina Blaszczyk's thesis is that Wedgwood's eighteenth-century case is the model for the development, manufacture and distribution of durable consumer products in nineteenth-century United States. The characteristics of this model are a clear division of the various labour tasks, a flexible production output of small batches of goods in a wide variety of designs, and the study of customers' opinions mainly obtained at showrooms and points of sale.

*Imagining Consumers* paints a comprehensive and well documented picture of Wedgwood's innovative management and the operation of his industry. It details the role of Wedgwood's designers-cum-modelers, known as "practical men," a group of "labour aristocrats" that also included the company's decoration designers. Practical men held the key positions in a technologically developing industry of fine earthenware whose customers belonged to a "middling class of people," who, unlike Britain's genuine aristocracy, could not afford the luxury of porcelain, imported from the European continent.

With the Wedgwood model in mind, and based on an abundance of archival material, the author outlines the evolution, between the American Civil War and the Second World War, of the product design and development practice in three major sectors of the American industry of durable

domestic products: that of decorative pressed-glass products, the related decorative cut-glass and the industry of heat-resistant tempered pressed-glass ovenware; the larger sector of decorated china tea and tableware; and, the industry of domestic ceramic and vitreous enameled cast iron sanitary ware.

In each of these sectors the author introduces the reader to the major manufacturers and their associates, recounting their management exploits, illustrated with many quotes and anecdotes. She details the contributions to the product development process of various labour aristocrats, such as the designers and makers of the steel moulds in pressed-glass product manufacturing and the practical men, modelers and decoration designers in the china industry. The book further identifies those who, in each of the sectors, gathered the information about the consumers' wants and desires, where and how they got that information and how they intervened with the design process. They comprise the "jobbers," and retailers not only in the glass and china trade but also in that of toilet and bathroom products, the buyers of the "dime stores," of the large department stores and of the companies that offer china and glass products as "premiums" for the stamps that went with tea, coffee, cereals, and so on. Particularly in the early twentieth century, manufacturers increasingly relied on the opinions of fashion intermediaries, often journalists from the growing number of popular women's magazines, such as *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Ladies' Home Journal*.

It is interesting to read how the industry of cut pressed-glass products serves markets for women and men, the latter mainly buying elaborately cut crystal as gifts, whereas the china crockery market almost entirely served women of all classes and backgrounds, in stores running from specialty retailers to designated sections in department stores and mass-marketing "five and ten" outlets like F. W. Woolworth's. An entire chapter deals with the successful design and marketing of the Laughlin China Company's novel Fiesta line of colored "tempered modernist" tableware, carried out by the company's amalgam of expert salesmen, chief decorators, modelers, and crockery buyers. Another intriguing and detailed chapter of *Imagining Consumers* recounts Corning Glassworks' struggle to market its superb

Pyrex press glass oven-to-table ware that did not meet women's expectations. Those responsible for the product's development and marketing were unaware of the practices in the pressed-glass trade of imagining female consumers. The rhetoric of efficiency only confused the product's promotion, a problem Wisconsin Kohler Company resolved by stimulating people to "make people want things" by using three interrelated strategies of enticement: product design, national advertising and consumer credit. *Imagining Consumers* describes the company's visionary president, Walter J. Kohler's, distinctive approach to design, innovation and marketing and his company's corporate strategy of emphasized continuity between his family firm, its community and its customers.

While Regina Blaszczyk's restricts her study of the product management's environment to the United States at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, it is useful to note that the European situation in the same branches and the same period and even in the first two postwar decades was not much different. The problem of who the consumers are and why they buy has not changed and, aside from techniques such as consumer panel discussions,

the department stores' buyers play a decisive role in the design selection process. The author does not give much information about what precisely the design criteria are other than those pertaining to quantity and price.

While the book clearly identifies the consumers of glassware, pottery and bathroom products as mainly female, it neither offers an analysis of typical feminine product design traits in the discussed products, nor does it record such feminine product design characteristics as should have resulted from the imagining process. Most likely, the available archival material did not refer to any such characteristics. One can even speculate that the imagining experts, many of whom were female, but none of them designers themselves, failed to be specific in this difficult matter. The problem was — and still is — that they, like the jobbers and the department store buyers, could do no more than imagine what the consumer would accept or reject from what the practical men and decoration designers proposed.

Regardless of the above flaw, for which Regina Blaszczyk obviously is not to blame, *Imagining Consumers* is a fascinating story that offers a wealth of information about the development of America's proto-consumer society.

# Last Impressions

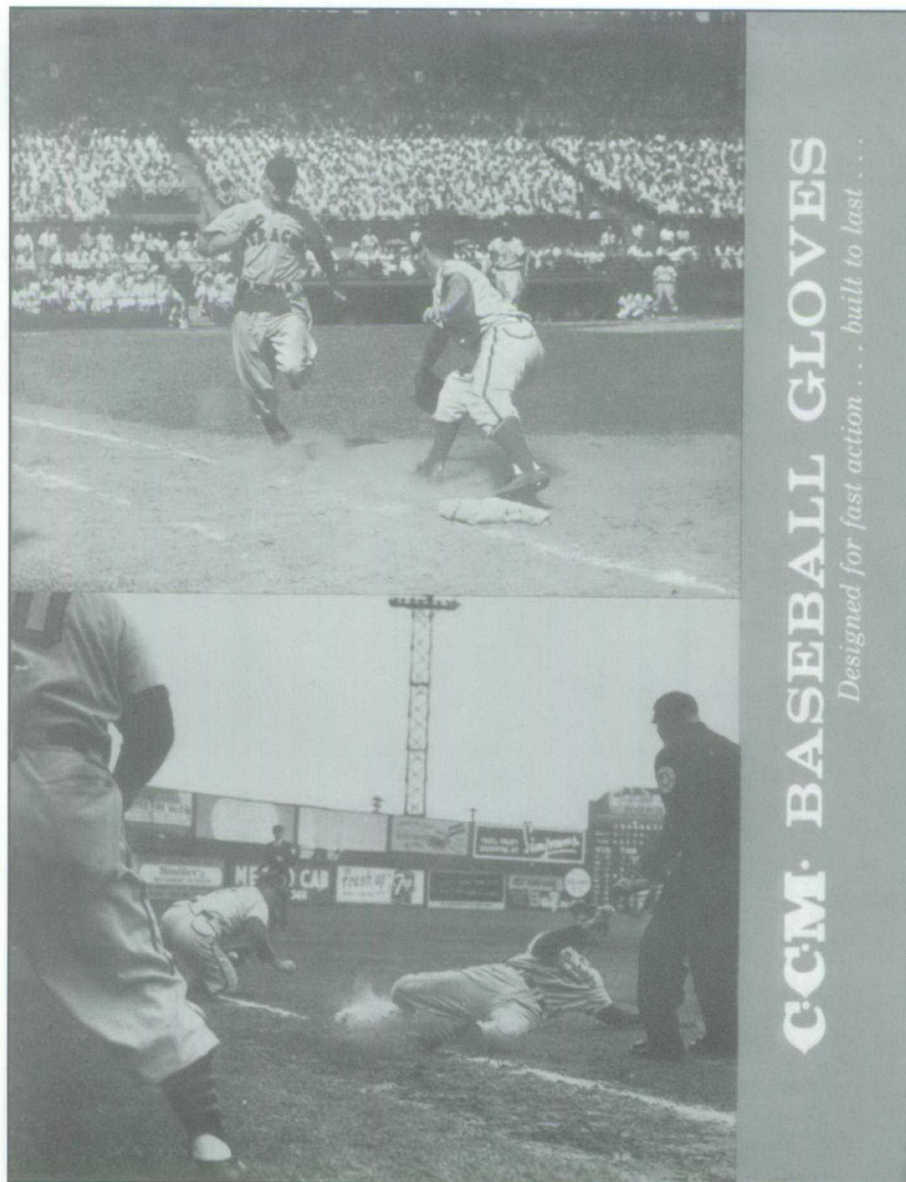
## Dernières impressions

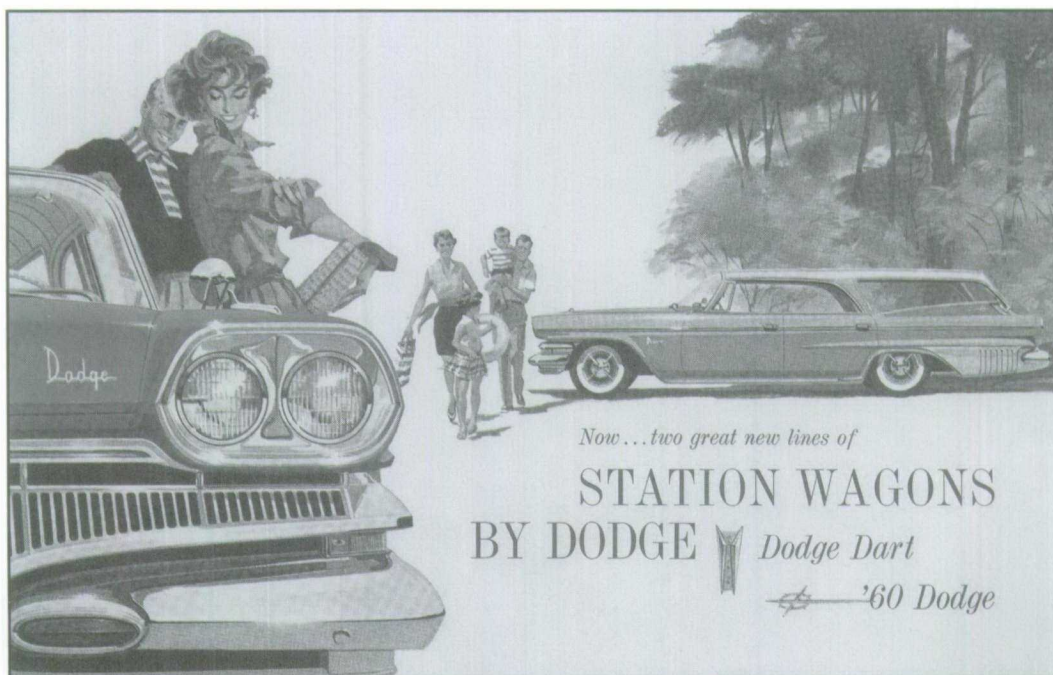
The imagery of popular culture permeates the photographic and trade literature collections of the Canada Science and Technology Museum. What follows is a small selection of items from the Museum's holdings reflecting themes from the articles published in this issue.

Les images de la culture populaire fourmillent dans les collections de photographies et de documents commerciaux du Musée des sciences et de la technologie du Canada. En voici un petit échantillon qui reflète les thèmes de certains articles de ce numéro.

**Fig. 1**  
CCM baseball equipment  
brochure, 1964  
(CSTM/Shields L31443)

Dépliant illustrant  
l'équipement de  
baseball CCM, 1964  
(MSTC/Shields L31443)





**Fig. 2**  
Promotional brochure for  
the 1960 Dodge Dart and  
Dodge Station Wagons  
(CSTM/Elliott L34523)

Dépliant publicitaire  
vantant la Dodge Dart et les  
familiales Dodge de 1960  
(MSTC/Elliott L34523)



**Fig. 3**  
Decorative lamp with  
ship's wheel from the Nova  
Scotia Hotel, 1970 (Photo  
by Ian Monsarrat;  
CSTM/CN H-673-3)

Lampe décorative à la  
roue de gouvernail  
provenant de l'Hôtel  
Nova Scotia (photo  
prise par Ian Monsarrat,  
MSTC/CN H-673-3)





**Fig. 4**  
 Hooked rugs from Nova  
 Scotia's South Shore,  
 ca 1950  
 (CSTM/CN X25544)

*Tapis crochetés de  
 la côte sud de la  
 Nouvelle-Écosse,  
 vers 1950  
 (MSTC/CN X25544)*

# Contributors

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**THE J>A>K>A>L COLLECTIVE** is an international cultural initiative based in Montreal. The members are Josina Dunkel, Annie Becker, Karen Latour, Alex Unrein and Lili Spiewak. Submerged in the popular cultures of the United States, Germany, English and French Canada, the collective investigates media and exhibitions in the western world.

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The *Material History Review* provides a venue for refereed articles and research reports encompassing a range of approaches in interpreting the past through an analysis of Canadians' relationships to their material world. Critical reviews of books, exhibitions, and historic sites, artifact studies and reports on collections encourage the use of material evidence in understanding historical change and continuity.

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