

***Making and Metaphor: A Discussion of Meaning in Contemporary Craft.* By Gloria A. Hickey, editor. (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Institute for Contemporary Canadian Craft, Mercury Series Paper 66, Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, 1994. Pp. 177, photographs, preface, abstracts, references, ISBN 0-660-14028-4.)**

Laurel Horion

Volume 21, numéro 2, 1999

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087821ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087821ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Horion, L. (1999). Compte rendu de [*Making and Metaphor: A Discussion of Meaning in Contemporary Craft.* By Gloria A. Hickey, editor. (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Institute for Contemporary Canadian Craft, Mercury Series Paper 66, Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, 1994. Pp. 177, photographs, preface, abstracts, references, ISBN 0-660-14028-4.)]. *Ethnologies*, 21(2), 217–219. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087821ar>

***Making and Metaphor: A Discussion of Meaning in Contemporary Craft.*** By Gloria A. Hickey, editor. (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Institute for Contemporary Canadian Craft, Mercury Series Paper 66, Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, 1994. Pp. 177, photographs, preface, abstracts, references, ISBN 0-660-14028-4.)

This book is a collection of eighteen essays which were originally presented orally at a symposium of the same name in October 1993. This meeting, the inaugural project of the Institute for Contemporary Canadian Craft, brought together representatives from a number of craft-related disciplines to address “a range of issues related to the development of contemporary craft and its place within the broader context of material culture” (p. 8). As a print monograph, this collection exhibits both the limitations and advantages of the genre of published conference proceedings. While it cannot recreate the ambiance, interchange, and energetic discussion that must certainly have accompanied the original presentations, it nonetheless makes the content available to those who could not attend the meeting. Two of the essays are presented in French, with English abstracts; the remainder are in English with French abstracts.

What seems particularly remarkable is the range of participants/authors, representing not only professors and students of art history, design history, anthropology, but also museum curators and consultants, gallery directors, editors, and practicing craft artists. The resulting collection is more notable for the variety of perspectives than for achieving any kind of unity of focus. Just gathering together this diverse group of participants for a discussion of overlapping concerns is a major accomplishment in itself; to expect consensus would be premature and unrealistic.

Because *Making and Metaphor* concerns itself primarily with contemporary art craft, this book is not likely to be sought out by folklorists generally. The subject, as conveyed in the title, may simply seem too narrow and exclusive. Yet, many of the issues addressed by various authors relate to craft traditions, historical movements, and, especially, modes of thinking that are central to the study of material culture and behaviour. These issues are addressed as recurring threads and strands, woven through various presentations; consequently, the reader must knit up one's own connections. A very thoughtful culminating essay is provided by Marjorie Halpin in her Symposium Summary, and, in lieu of an index, might be used to identify relevant essays for the reader seeking specific themes or areas of discussion.

To read the volume in its entirety, however, is to enter into the thought-provoking complexity of dueling disciplines and their divergent philosophies. One area of contention, one which must have fueled innumerable after-hours discussions during the symposium, deals with the use, or usefulness, of binary oppositions. Those of us whose work concerns cultural and affective domains are accustomed to being contrasted with natural and scientific disciplines: *we* are the intuitive and relational, while *they* are the rational. In *Making and Metaphor*, it comes as a bit of shock to confront an opposition which posits *art* as the established, hierarchical, rational pole, against *craft* as the intuitive, subversive "other." Several essayists addressed this polarity, offering historical evidence for its existence and suggesting how the situation might be altered. Other essayists opted for a more holistic, inclusive, feminist perspective, including respondent Kathy M'Closkey who states "To continue to support out-dated dualisms is counter-productive and serves the privileged status quo at the expense of the general populations" (p. 64). Clearly, this is a theoretical discussion the import of which extends not only through the realm of craft but also into a larger analysis of hegemonic structures.

It is customary, when reviewing published collections, to acknowledge, summarize, and evaluate individual essays. To do so in this case would unnecessarily emphasize the fragmentary quality of the book without doing justice to the whole. The essays are grouped into thematic clusters: "Toward a Language of Craft," "Historical Contexts and Contemporary Concerns," "Craft and Cultural Meaning," and "Craft and the Museum," each blessed with the reflections of a respondent. Given the wide range of both the topics and perspectives in the individual essays, this particular arrangement, probably reflecting the symposium structure, seems somewhat arbitrary. The essays might legitimately have been juxtaposed differently to highlight or contrast additional themes.

Some of the most compelling essays are those which address craft from the perspective of the craft artist. These presentations, informed by personal experience, illustrate and amplify concerns expressed by other essayists about the marginalization of craft and craft artists within fine arts, museums, and within the larger contemporary society. Key to our understanding of general attitudes toward craft are the demonstrated links between craft and the feminine, the sensual, and the trivial. Again, although the discussions deal more directly with contemporary art craft, the same issues also confront folklorists who work with traditional craftspeople, historic material artifacts, and the

interpretation of these subjects/objects to audiences with their own culturally embedded attitudes.

The wide scope of this collection makes for challenging reading, but the persistent reader will be rewarded with enough new ideas to fuel numerous discussions, both theoretical and practical. Designed to open up a dialogue and to lay a foundation for further multi-disciplinary study and projects, both the symposium and this resulting publication have surely made progress toward that goal.

*Laurel Horton*  
*Seneca, South Carolina*

---

***Another Night: Cape Breton Stories True & Short & Tall.*** By Ronald Caplan, editor. (Wreck Cove: Breton Books, 1995. Pp. x + 210. ISBN 1-895415-01-2.)

In 1971 Ronald Caplan first ventured onto the Island of Cape Breton. It seemed to be an island tailor made for the Pennsylvania native who was seeking change in his life. His first winter in Cape Breton was an unforgettable one not only for Caplan but also for his neighbors in the small community of Wreck Cove where he still lives today. A 1990 Canadian Geographic article on Caplan describes Evelyn and Alexander Smith's initial thoughts of Caplan and his family.

The way he looked, the odd clothes, the wife and baby, the naivety. More hippies, they thought, though to this day Evelyn is not sure what a hippie is. The difference Caplan says himself, is that hippies were running away from something, and I was running towards something (Howe, 1990: 63).

What Caplan ran into was an Island he knew little about yet which fascinated him. The problem he faced involved parlaying this love into a future for himself and his family. In 1972 he saw a publication by American school children, which evolved into the Foxfire books, consisting of oral histories of Appalachian life. He thought that a unique opportunity existed to do something similar to the Foxfire series in a Cape Breton context. To make a long story short Caplan began publishing "Cape Breton's Magazine" and has been doing so for nearly 25 years.