

Culture



Gerald POCIUS, A Place to Belong: Community and Order in Everyday Space in Calvert, Newfoundland. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1991, 350 pp. / Gerald POCIUS, Living in a Material World: Canadian and American Approaches to Material Culture, St. John's: Institute of Social & Economic Research, 1991, 290 pp.

Brian Rusted

Volume 12, Number 1, 1992

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081571ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081571ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (print)

2563-710X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Rusted, B. (1992). Review of [Gerald POCIUS, A Place to Belong: Community and Order in Everyday Space in Calvert, Newfoundland. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1991, 350 pp. / Gerald POCIUS, Living in a Material World: Canadian and American Approaches to Material Culture, St. John's: Institute of Social & Economic Research, 1991, 290 pp.] *Culture*, 12(1), 99–101.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1081571ar>

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1992

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

together; men hunted and trapped together; men talked to each other; the lawyers were men. But, women were there too — on the traplines, doing hides, doing meat; they were at the barricades and stood together in the dark awaiting the arrival of the Olympic torch and they were in Europe, in the courts and at home. They were the stabilizers and the encouragers; they continued to maintain family daily life when men couldn't. It is unfortunate, therefore, to see them rendered invisible.

In the Last Stand of the Lubicon, despite its jacket announcement that Goddard "points the way to solutions", there are missed opportunities for explanatory and critical analyses, which is disappointing. A question which haunts most of us concerns the lack of meaningful explanations for the duplicity, cruelty and hatred with which Canadian government officials, both federal and provincial at the highest levels, have sought to destroy the Lubicon people and society—and continue to do so. Perhaps others interested in publishing on the Lubicon situation can provide the insights and analyses into government and legal behaviours masked in the cloak of "policy and practice."

It is difficult not to expect too much from the first book out on the Lubicon. The book is an excellent documentary of key events which have been critical in the destruction of the way of life of the Lubicon Cree Nation. I recommend it for general reading, for courses, and for the basis of action because it's not over yet. We owe Goddard a great deal for condensing the complicated and extensive materials from the archives, government documents, the courts, and personal interviews into something we all can read and understand. It must have been a task that was overwhelming and depressing at many points. Give the book to everyone you know!

Gerald POCIUS, *A Place to Belong: Community and Order in Everyday Space in Calvert, Newfoundland*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1991, 350 pp.

Gerald POCIUS, *Living in a Material World: Canadian and American Approaches to Material Culture*, St. John's: Institute of Social & Economic Research, 1991, 290 pp.

by Brian Rusted

University of Calgary

In the penultimate essay of *Living in a Material World*, Gerald Pocius says that the study of material culture is "a distinct, if little unified, discipline." Both volumes under consideration here—one edited by and the other authored by Pocius—provide ample evidence of what makes material cultural research distinct. By implication, they also provide good reasons for a lack of unity.

Pocius has been researching aspects of material culture in Newfoundland and contributing to the field in both Canada and the United States since the 1970's. *A Place to Belong* is a culmination of his Newfoundland research, while *Living in a Material World* samples the richness and variety of scholarship from across North America. *Living in a Material World* is one in a series of "social and economic papers" published by Newfoundland's Institute of Social and Economic Research. The book is made to be held. ISER has a longstanding reputation for research, and publications like this will only enhance it. *A Place to Belong* is positively sumptuous. Replete with maps, diagrams, figures and photographs, the page design has an openness that places the reader in a landscape all its own.

The essays in *Living in a Material World* are from a 1986 conference on "North American Material Culture Research: New Objectives, New Theories" hosted jointly by Delaware's Winterthur Museum and ISER. Perhaps as a consequence, the papers themselves are uneven in quality: some are substantial scholarly pieces, while others are brief, often programmatic statements with little field research or theory development to support their claims. The latter may have force in a conference setting, but not when translated to the page; the former can be tedious when compressed into a paper session, but in published form they assume a defiant pose that supports the researcher.

Pocius organized the fifteen essays into sections on "Ethnography", "History", "Art", "Ideology", and "Concluding Statements". This bares the disciplinary influences on material culture and preserves the spirit and flow of the conference. Folklorists and museologists are prominent but for the most part, their perspectives and agendas are subsumed by the dominant rubrics. This does leave a question about "ideology".

These papers are distinct in three ways: their captivantly detailed "readings" of the material record (for instance, Jean-Claude Dupont's work on the meanings of the poker in New France, Adrienne Hood and David-Thierry Ruddel's meticulous consideration of textiles and industrialization in Quebec, or John Vlach's look at the role of folk portraiture and social position); their questioning the status accorded to material objects in our society (Jeanne Cannizzo's "Ethnography of Museums", or Eugene Metcalfe's suggestion that folk art collecting be viewed as ritual); or their endeavour to bridge disciplinary agendas (such as Alan Gowans' combination of art and popular culture to read Popeye comic strips, Ann Condon's blending of hermeneutics with history to decipher the material inventory of a Maritime Loyalist, or Stanley Johannesen's provocative use of the constructs of self, embodiment and cultural capital to read eighteenth century furniture). There are unsurprising degrees of unity here: emphasis on the object itself, respect for context and the relations between maker and object, and a keenness for the symbolic potency of material goods.

With such distinction then, why a concern for the status of the field, its unity, or its image? Pocius, rightly does not claim his collection to be "the definitive statement of what is new and necessary." Rather it is a "sampling of state of the art research...at a critical stage in its development" (p. xix). Discovering what is "critical" for this field is hampered by the way ideology is permitted to inform the research.

Cannizzo demonstrates that museums and their collections are ideological constructs of "a particular set of social and historical circumstances: they are negotiated realities" (p. 20). Such insight does not rebound on the volume overall. It is even discouraged when transformed into the use of material culture. What is "critical" is that the authority of the researcher remains unchallenged, that the context of objects is spoken only by specialists and is separated (by time, space or class) from contemporary life (if that might implicate the "discipline" or its practi-

tioners). Some essays celebrate the individual maker, owner or user of artifacts, or a pre-capitalist past, while disparaging the efforts to read collective or economic factors which animate the circulation of goods in a particular context. If the meaning of material objects is contested, it is only within the discourse of the academy, not in terms of the practice of who collects from whom.

What is critical about this stage of material culture research is the use of the first person plural pronoun: "The material culture tradition of which we are all a part..." (p. 260), or "Others make the parts, but we make the wholes" (p. 264). As Glassie says in the concluding remarks, research orientations towards material aspects of culture, "should not trick us into the belief that the little world we inhabit is the world" (p. 265). Any efforts to maintain such an ideology, to hamper questions concerning who this material culture research is about, or to include the researcher as a political element in the context perpetuates an uncritical use of "we".

Fortunately, this tendency does not figure in *A Place to Belong*. Here, there is a lively and ongoing dialogue between Pocius' academic training and his discoveries in the field. His study is the result of nearly two decades of research on the material and social qualities of space in a particular coastal community in Newfoundland. In it, he masterfully sketches the social, economic and cultural life of the island, provides an interdisciplinary commentary on the circulation, consumption and meaning of material goods, displays a rigorous ethnographic portrait of the local knowledge of space and, underlying it all, a rich bibliographic store. The beauty of this work is that it can be entered or enjoyed from any one of these perspectives.

The people of Calvert have taken up this book with enthusiasm: draft photocopies circulate like other artifacts so that when Pocius "asked Doris Sullivan where she learned about Calvert's past, she answered 'from you'" (p. 46). His ethnography is so vivid and thorough, one could telephone Calvert to discover how people feel having a map of their favourite berry patch available to readers all over North America!

Pocius has divided his research, and the community, into three spaces: the space of community membership and history, the space of production (in terms of work, gender and property), and the space of consumption (in terms of visiting, housing and

decoration). The book's primary thesis is that space structures culture. Material culture is read in terms of the community's spatial system. A corollary of this forms the basis of introductory and concluding sections on modernity and tradition: "As the ties of place generally weaken in any region, people perhaps increasingly create objectified signs of their culture, promoting item-oriented activities under rubrics like "folklore" and "heritage."" (p. 23).

A refrain identifies the researcher as stranger: "Around me I saw houses, lanes, paths, fields, and woods: all bewildering, all strange. Yet for the people who live there, it is all familiar" (p. 60). By extension, the reader is also a stranger, and Pocius eschews the dictum of modernism and makes the strange, familiar.

Several cautionary remarks are needed. At this point in our century it is difficult to discuss gender difference without mentioning economic inequality. Pocius opposes broad terms identified with a gendered use of space. Males work in public space to which they are "subservient"; it is extractive work that involves exploiting natural resources. Females work in domestic space which they "control"; it is additive work that involves collecting consumer

goods or gardening (p. 100). The suggestion that this is a matter "of necessity" (p. 99) for women without mentioning their contribution to the traditional (or contemporary) economy, or the context that translates only one of these gendered terms into labour and capital points out a little trodden path for future research

Finally, this is a readable book. It is so because Pocius frequently restates his arguments to keep the reader in step, and because he pushes any engaged discussion of relevant scholarly work into the notes. Both are exemplary strategies. However, he still finds time to disparage the importation of theory into an ethnographic context, yet arranges his own text with structuralist metaphors (domestic space/natural space; additive/subtractive work; social/ritual visits; kitchen/parlour, etc.) as if they were indigenous categories. To suggest this as an improvement is just name-calling between pots and kettles.

Both of these works will form important additions to the libraries of those interested in material culture and interpretive approaches to space, landscape and artifacts. The prospect of others continuing to build on the scholarship represented in these two books is delightful.