

## **Changing Hands in 2021: New Directions in Canadian Material Culture Studies**

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## Changing Hands in 2021: New Directions in Canadian Material Culture Studies

**RICHARD MACKINNON**

Editor-in-Chief

This past year has been challenging for most individuals and institutions around the world as we contend with the transformations brought about by the global COVID-19 pandemic. New ways of working have developed and online teaching has become the norm in most Canadian universities as our institutions try to prevent the spread of the virus on campuses and in communities. Likewise, research has been significantly impacted; scholarly journals have had to contend with no face-to-face-meetings, no national or international conferences, and fewer submissions.

Despite these challenges, *Material Culture Review/Revue de la culture matérielle* has continued to publish. The journal has a forty-five year history of disseminating Canadian and international research in the interdisciplinary field of material culture studies. In 2006, the journal came to Cape Breton University from the National Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa. When the university secured my Tier One Canada Research Chair in Intangible Cultural Heritage in that year, I thought it would be an appropriate challenge for our small institution to take on the work of producing the journal. Part of my research program included not only intangible but also material culture. Furthermore, Cape Breton University had its own press focusing on regional history and culture, with a fulltime copyeditor and manager. I became Managing Editor of *MCR/RCM* and folklorist Marie MacSween served as the Editorial Assistant.

Gerald L. Pocius remained as Editor-in-Chief until 2009, when I assumed sole editorship of the journal. Together with the staff of Cape Breton University Press and a changing roster of dedicated editorial assistants, we have published *MCR/RCM* for the past fourteen years. While the editorial team is proud of what we have accomplished during our tenure, it is now time for the journal to change hands and continue to evolve and grow in its mandate to publish innovative and important object-driven studies from both Canadian and international perspectives.

Our first issue, Volume 63, Spring 2006, brought a name change for the journal, as *Material History Review / Revue d'histoire de la culture matérielle* became *Material Culture Review / Revue de la culture matérielle* in order to better reflect the journal's expanded focus on contemporary and ethnographic approaches to the study of our material world. With a refreshed design, and increased access by bringing the journal into the digital realm, we also solicited guest-edited and special topics issues that explored emerging paradigms of importance to Canadian and international material culture scholars. From foodways, to vernacular architecture, to heritagescapes, to the idea of objects "in motion," *MCR/RCM* special issues have reflected the diversity of topics and contexts in which material culture scholars engage.

To that end, one of the first special issues was Volume 70, Fall 2009 where a selection of essays were taken from the 2008 workshop, "Domestic Foodscapes: Towards Mindful Eating?" held at

Concordia University in Montreal with Rhona Richman Kenneally and Jordan L. LeBel as guest editors. Here, the editors explored the intersection of three ideas: the home; the culture of food; and the concept of mindfulness. We followed this collection of essays on domestic foodscapes with a guest-edited issue in 2010 by Jennifer Way, University of North Texas, on “Material and Visual Culture: Contributions to Narrating National Heritage in Global Contexts.” The essays in this volume observed “not only material culture but also visual culture linking near and far, nation and remembrance, nation and future, and national, international, transnational and global contexts” (2010: 5-6).

Edward S. Cooke Jr. and Imogen Hart’s guest-edited issue followed in 2012 (Vol. 74/75), which focused on the idea of “objects in motion” and the centrality of movement in the life histories of many artifacts. “Things between Worlds: Creating Exoticism and Authenticity in the West, from the 19th Century to the Present” (Vol. 79, 2014), edited by Noémie Etienne, Manuel Charpy, and Jean Estebanez was concerned with objects being used in a culture other than the one in which they originated. Both of these special issues in their discussions of objects and movement offered critical insights and new avenues for exploration in material culture studies.

The last two special issues at Cape Breton University are in areas in which folklorists have offered significant contributions to material culture studies. *MCR/RCM* has continued to be an important platform for the perspectives of folklorists in their study of vernacular objects. In 2015-2016 we produced a special issue on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) that furthered some of my research goals as Canada Research Chair. Vol. 82-83 demonstrates that tangible and intangible cultural heritage are inextricably linked and emphasizes the influence of the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage in shaping global understandings of heritage. Articles in the volume discuss ICH

issues and case studies from India, France, the Caribbean, Latin American, Australia, Canada, and the United States, with many demonstrating the intangibility of the tangible. Likewise, this current special issue on folklore and vernacular architecture, the last to be produced at Cape Breton University, includes articles by both established and emerging folklorists who study the built landscape. It also offers interviews and reflections by some of the founding scholars of the field, such as Henry Glassie. This special issue on folklore and vernacular architecture is a significant contribution to scholarly research in the fields of material culture studies and folklore, as it recentres focus and critical inquiry on what has become an increasingly marginalized field of study within folkloristics.

In 2021 the journal is moving to the new Visual and Material Culture Studies (VMCS) program at Mount Allison University, under the direction of Dr. Patricia Kelly-Spurles as Editor-in-Chief. I wish the new editorial and managerial team great success and look forward to seeing the changes and improvements planned by the VMCS program faculty as they work to strengthen this important journal. The interdisciplinary field of material culture studies in Canada continues to thrive, with programs and departmental foci at University of Alberta, Queen’s University, University of British Columbia, Carleton, Concordia, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and now Mount Allison University. Our regional and national museums continue to produce important exhibits and studies. Increasingly, *MCR/RCM* has welcomed more contributions from the closely related field of visual culture. I hope that both the Canadian and international scholarly community of material culture and museum researchers will continue to support the important work of *Material Culture Review / Revue de la Culture Matérielle* as it moves forward under new leadership, yet continues its long-standing commitment to exploring the relationship between people and things.