

Introduction to Folklore II: Folk Genres and Analysis

2010-03-14 Bronner's "Folk Objects"

**FOLK AND FINA 113**

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**WHAT DID *YOU* THINK?**

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# HIS POINT

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- ✘ Folk objects are the same as other aspects of folklore
  - + Each “performance” is distinct
  - + They tend to follow patterns established within the group (type)
  - + But they adapt to the specific instance of performance (version)
- ✘ But they differ in one critical way
  - + Which is...?

# THEY ARE “THINGS”

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- ✘ Verbal art, custom, ritual are *ephemeral*
  - + They exist only at the moment of performance – the moment of their creation – and then are gone (save for recordings)
- ✘ Folk objects, because they have substance, because they are constructed from matter, have permanence
  - + They exist long after the moment of their creation
    - ✘ (There is a caveat, that we need to return to)

# TANGIBLE

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- ✘ They are able to be touched, measured, evaluated quantitatively
  - + “Words may change radically from one tale version to the next, and the other versions are irretrievable. To change an object, the maker must create a new object or significantly alter an existing one. The older ones remain for us to see and to conceptualise as some kind of series.”

# OBJECTS ARE “OBJECTIVE”

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- ✘ Objects are created by humans but once created, they stand apart
- ✘ Objects claim an historical character because they endure
- ✘ Since *folk* objects commonly have to do with everyday life (shelter, work, prayer, play) they help us to re-experience something of that everyday past.
  - + Think Louisbourg and the display of objects pertaining to everyday life

# OBJECTS OFTEN HAVE AESTHETIC VALUE

- ✘ They typically serve utilitarian needs, but once those needs are met they may also be formed in a manner that is culturally pleasing
  - + Clothing allows for modesty and protection from the elements, but is designed and shaped – and selected – for aesthetic and/or symbolic reasons
  - + House paint protects building surfaces, but the colours chosen are based (mostly) on aesthetics

# OBJECTS REQUIRE SKILL TO CREATE

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- ✘ The techniques for their creation are often learned in face-to-face or apprenticeship interactions
- ✘ Objects are the opportunity to display those skills
- ✘ There is a connection between the maker and the object



# OBJECTS ARE CONSTRUCTED FROM THE FOUND ENVIRONMENT

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- ✘ Local materials – woods, rocks, etc.
- ✘ Immigrant populations might apply imported techniques / an imported aesthetic sense to newly encountered materials
- ✘ “Found environment” extends beyond the natural world, to include industrial materials available to the object-maker
  - + Steel, plastic, sheet paper, etc.

# OLD TECHNIQUES CAN BE EMPLOYED FOR NEW OBJECTS

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- ✘ The skills required to create one set of objects can be adapted to new sets
  - + Cf. Mi'kmaq basketry
  - + Cheticamp hooked rugs
- ✘ Both use traditional techniques to create objects for trade, meeting the needs / expectations of markets
  - + New basket shapes / purposes
  - + New rug designs

# OBJECTS CAN BE TRADITIONAL IN THEIR USE IF NOT THEIR CREATION

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- ✘ Much like makers can use industrial materials, users can use mass-produced objects in traditional ways
  - + Company houses adapted / renovated to meet cultural expectations of “house”
  - + A table is laid using cutlery, placemats, tablecloths not necessarily of the owner’s manufacture
  - + What you are currently wearing expresses some form of identity, despite none of it (likely) being of your own manufacture

# “CRAFT” VS. “ART”

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- ✘ One possible way to distinguish between craft and art is how much “need” is the central motivator for an object’s creation vs. how much is “aesthetics”
- ✘ Once, making these objects was necessary for everyday living. When equally useful objects are available otherwise, their ongoing creation / use is deliberate, either as a display of skill or as a display of traditional identity

**WHAT'S MISSING FROM BRONNER?**

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# THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF WOMEN

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- ✘ Often created from less enduring materials (e.g. fabric)
- ✘ Often created to be destroyed / consumed / dismantled immediately thereafter
  - + Food; a laid table; laundry hung on a line; etc.
- ✘ Mis- / under-representation of women as material culture producers in museums, etc.
  - + And conspicuously quiet in Bronner

# GO AWAY FROM THIS PLACE

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- ✘ Read “Objects of Memory” by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, from the *Reader*
- ✘ It kicks much ass