

Grasping Things: Folk Material Culture and Mass Society in America. By Simon J. Bronner. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986. Pp. xv, 247. Illustrations, map, table, notes, index. \$24.00.)

Interest in American material culture has grown rapidly in recent years, as is evidenced by the number of new publications and courses on the subject. Studies of the material manifestations of past cultures have evolved from simple descriptions of physical objects to analyses of the weave of objects in the daily lives of individuals and communities and considerations of the belief systems—values, attitudes, ideas—of the individual who made or used them. Consequently, it has become easier to examine and understand material objects within their broader historical and cultural contexts.

Grasping Things, the latest work from Simon J. Bronner, transcends typical discussions of material objects in American life. It seeks to define the basic tenets of “folk culture” and “mass society” and to describe the tension between the two spheres. In so doing, Bronner focuses on the “souls” of and human encounters with objects, which he defines as “extensions of ourselves and as mediators of social relations” (p. xii). He argues that the inherent meaning of any object ultimately reflects the characteristics of the cultural environment that created it and, therefore, of its makers and users.

Bronner divides his discussion according to the principal segments of material life behavior and illustrates his thesis with rich examples taken from his fieldwork in rural and urban America. “Entering Things” describes how shelters and the use of space reflect the cultural influences, values, ideas, and social priorities of their builders and residents. “Making Things” elucidates the motivations behind physical expressions of human creativity, ranging from hand-carved tombstones to genre paintings. Bronner also distinguishes between production in folk cultures, characterized by handwork, variation, and practicality, and that of mass society, represented by automation, uniformity, and faddism. “Consuming Things” follows the development of human consumption from an expression of community fellowship and utility to a display of “wealth and status through the wasteful extravagant purchase and display of goods” (p. 160).

Bronner’s study concentrates upon conflict between spirit, family, and community in folk cultures and materialism, technology, and progress in mass society. He also examines how modern society has trivialized physical expressions of folk cultures and subjugated them to the materialistic values of their present owners rather than emphasize their historical-cultural contexts and illuminate the creativity of their original makers.

Grasping Things is a provocative, thoughtful study of pluralistic human behavior and values within American society. While

it seeks to "describe things in action [and] to analyze them as parts of cultural scenes where actors can be identified" (p. xi), the book also calls on Americans to examine past and present values and to grasp hold of those which provide personal, communal, and social meaning and guidance for the future.

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The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America. By John Bodnar. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985. Pp. xxi, 294. Maps, illustrations, appendix, notes, selected bibliography, index. Clothbound, \$27.50; paperbound, \$8.95.)

The Transplanted is an impressive effort to bring together the extensive research that American historians have conducted since the 1960s on European immigration to the United States. John Bodnar demonstrates an impressive knowledge of the secondary literature, both on the old world background and the immigrant experience in America. He examines a wide range of topics, including the family, the adjustment process, religion and other immigrant institutions, the impact of the newcomers on unionism and radicalism, the rise of an immigrant middle class, attitudes toward education, and immigrants in urban politics. This book has much to commend it. However, one might conclude from reading *The Transplanted* that American immigration history stopped when the flow of European newcomers ended because of World War I and restrictive legislation in the 1920s.

Even before the 1920s America experienced immigration from Asia and from elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere. Bodnar ignores these sources. Even more significant is his silence concerning the fact that the United States is at present experiencing another wave of immigration, one as momentous as the earlier movement from Europe. One result of this current immigration is that by 1983 Los Angeles could be described as the new Ellis Island. Since 1968, when the 1965 immigration law went into effect, the character of American immigration has undergone dramatic changes. Prior to that date Europe was the principal (although not the only) source of immigration; since then the predominant sources are the Third World nations of Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Asia.

From 1971 to 1979, 3,962,675 immigrants entered the United States, 39.2 percent from Latin America, 34.1 percent from Asia, and only 18.3 percent from Europe. In addition to legal immigration estimates of undocumented aliens entering the country range from one-half million to one million annually. The post-1968 immigration represents a watershed in the ethnic composition of the United States. Congress has wrestled for years with the problem of illegal immigration, particularly from south of the border. Right