

Purveying Provincial Attitudes:  
Tourism Workers and the Creation of Commodifiable Culture in Nova Scotia

By

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**Abstract:** *Nova Scotian tourism workers labour in a space between daily provincial life, and an entertaining representation of that life that is produced for tourists. The implications of being able to profit from culture have been studied through the anthropology of tourism, but the majority of this work examines tourists who travel to ‘exotic’ destinations. Nova Scotia, as part of a Euro-American, capitalist society, with a booming tourism industry based on provincial uniqueness, is an interesting site to examine how the processes of cultural commodification play out in a context where the difference between tourists and tourism workers is not so clearly demarcated. Additionally, the experience of tourism workers in general deserves to be more completely understood. This thesis conveys how they position themselves to interpret and respond to the desires of tourists, and how these interactions create a narrative about what it means to be Nova Scotian.*

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about what it means to be someone who sells expressions of Nova Scotian culture, as part of the tourism industry. Broadly speaking, it has been my aim to explore the socio-cultural dimensions of tourism that lie behind the more obvious economic interactions that occur when people travel to destinations for leisure purposes. The inspiration for this topic area came largely out of my own experience as a busker in Halifax, where I played Irish and Scottish music, principally to the passengers of cruise ships. These tourists would often stop to talk to me about the music I was playing, having some knowledge of Nova Scotia as a place with its own Celtic music tradition. Often, they wanted to know how long I had been playing, who taught me to play, and what the role of music was in my community. It disappointed them – seemingly, I disappointed them – if I told them I had learned the banjo by watching YouTube videos when I was twenty. As this experience repeated itself, I felt compelled to conform to their desires, and tried to use my general knowledge about Nova Scotian music to make myself align more closely with the vision of an authentic folk musician they seemed to want to see. Reflecting on this encounter made me want to better understand the dynamic relationship between tourists as a group of people with a set of expectations and desires, and Nova Scotia as a destination that can cater to their wishes in exchange for money. *How do Nova Scotian tourism workers understand their role as purveyors of cultural experiences to tourists?* This became my research question. In posing it, I have endeavoured to explain what it means to be someone who sells expressions of Nova Scotian culture as part of the tourism industry.

This brings my work within the scope of the anthropology of tourism, which has, as a disciplinary genre, asked similar questions of the tourist encounter. Particularly among scholars who critique the uneven distribution of power between tourists and destination cultures, the

concept of cultural commodification has been used as a lens through which to view these social processes (MacCannell, 1976; Roland, 2011; Davidov, 2010; Gotham, 2002). Examining the commodification of culture means asking how the significance of cultural expressions change when they become profitable through performance for group outsiders. In my research, this has been a theoretical cornerstone for analysing the data I collected. Asking what experiences and expressions of Nova Scotia have meaning for tourism workers, and how they, in turn, interpret what tourists find meaningful, led me to use constructivist authenticity as a second analytical concept. It examines how people differentiate between what is ‘real’ and ‘fake’ at a cultural level, and what significance these categories have for them.

My analysis suggests that tourism workers are astute agents who are both economically and emotionally motivated to meet the desires of tourists. While tourist desires motivate the creation of consumable cultural narratives, the tourism workers are, themselves, the creators, which gives their perspectives a certain salience. As such, my research explores an element of how provincial culture is lived, shared, and generated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I believe this research can point to a more complex, and therein, more complete understanding of the ongoing processes through which commodified culture arises in Nova Scotia. This thesis adds a critical perspective to the discussion of the purpose and outcomes of tourism in the province, and focuses on the tourism worker as generator of cultural commodity – rather than the tourist as consumer – in a way I have not seen reflected in other scholarship. My work contributes to the theoretical discussion of cultural commodification by suggesting that in a post-industrial, capitalist context, the process does not simply cheapen and reduce cultural expressions. I argue that an important function of commodified culture in the context of my research is that it creates new narratives about places, although this fact alone does not address the question of whether these narratives, being so much

the result of the expectations of cultural outsiders and the need to profit, are particularly helpful or desirable. The exchange that happens through tourism is complex, and the better it is understood, the more agency tourism workers will have to participate in it completely.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### ***Cultural Exchange and The Anthropology of Tourism***

The cultural exchange has become an almost unavoidable feature of contemporary anthropology. Few 21<sup>st</sup> century cultures can be presumed to exist as singular and discrete, and the perspective that culture is intrinsically mutable, and constantly changing in response to internal and external influences, characterizes the work of most contemporary scholars (van der Veer, 2016). No social group is an island unto itself. Because of its concern with understanding the shared meanings that make up cultures and societies, social anthropology begs certain questions of tourism as a particular type of cross-cultural encounter. Cross-disciplinary research often focuses on tourism as an economic endeavour – which it undeniably is – however, through an anthropological lens, tourism can be studied as a cultural exchange that is defined by economic relations. This perspective creates the possibility of more holistic analyses of the aims, assumptions and outcomes of tourism for the various actors who take part in it.

What does it mean to be able to profit from an expression of culture? This is a central question for the Anthropology of Tourism. As it presently exists, tourism is a product of the growth of capitalist economies in developed nations, and middle classes with enough income to allow them to travel for leisure. Any exploration of the social relations of tourism must take into account this definitive economic factor; tourists visit a destination because they are willing and able to pay for a set of experiences. The nature of those experiences can range from enjoying well-appointed accommodations to appreciating unfamiliar landscapes, but in many cases, some

dimension of the tourist experience is geared toward experiencing a local culture (Roland, 2011), which I will call the ‘destination culture’. This means that the anthropology of tourism can provide a glimpse of the ways in which middle-class people conceive of and relate to the idea of culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (MacCannell, 1976; MacCarthy, 2016). Furthermore, it can speak to how the expectations and financial means of outsiders shape the lives of destination culture members (Roland, 2011; Davidov, 2010).

The implications of a group being able to capitalize on elements of its culture has been theorized differently by different anthropologists. One debate in the literature can be polarized between those who argue for the potential of tourism to benefit communities with few economic means (Giampiccoli & Kalis, 2012; Guerrón Montero, 2014), where others critique the uneven power relations that exist between destination cultures and those with the means to pay for the experience of tourism (MacCannell, 1976; Davidov, 2010; Roland, 2011; MacCarthy, 2016). The concept of cultural commodification, which describes how cultural expressions can take on economic value, is often employed in the analysis of this relationship (Watts, 1997; Gotham, 2002; Roland, 2011). Similarly, Gotham (2002) points to a dispute between scholars who see a potential for tourism to encourage inauthentic, misinforming performances of culture, and those who argue for its capacity to discourage ethnocentrism and promote cross-cultural interaction and understanding. Underlying this debate is the concept of authenticity, which is often used to ask what ideological underpinnings motivate the production of materials and experiences that are presented as authentic in tourism (Hughes, 1995). Although there are notable exceptions (see Gotham, 2002), the majority of this research has focused on tourist destinations situated in what might be called ‘exotic’ cultures, where the difference between the lives of locals and tourists can seem more clearly demarcated (MacCannell, 1976; Davidov, 2010; Roland, 2011;



MacCarthy, 2016). My research explores how the tourist encounter plays out in so-called ‘developed’, capitalist cultures. I believe that the tourist gaze does not necessarily have to travel too far – physically or socially – for its effects to be felt.

As with most social phenomena, the effects of tourism cannot be reduced to proclamations that render it, ‘good for local economy’ or ‘bad for local culture’ without glossing over substantial nuance. The outcomes of tourism are complicated wherever they occur, and even when theorists summarize their work as demonstrating mostly positive or negative outcomes, the concepts they employ are methods of teasing out the threads of a complicated tapestry, rather than definitive accounts of worth. My applications of cultural commodification and authenticity are intended as means of capturing some of the social processes that result from a thriving Nova Scotian tourism economy. My aim is not to unveil the hidden ills of local tourism, nor to suggest that the province should not take part in it, but to provide a critical perspective that can speak to unexplored social dimensions of the relationship between tourists and Nova Scotians.

Before providing a more detailed explanation of these concepts, the historical scholarship related to this topic bears mentioning specifically. Examining the social often requires contextualizing it through the investigation of history, in order to locate social phenomena not simply as the result of what is happening in the present moment in which data is collected, but as part of a historical process that both comes from somewhere, and is going somewhere. Comoroff (1996) describes historical narratives as a fundamental element in the solidification of groups that identify as ethnically or culturally united. As I will demonstrate, historical narratives play an important role in how my participants make sense of Nova Scotia and the role tourism plays in its contemporary society. To this end, I have drawn on MacKay’s (1994) *The Quest of the Folk, Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, which analyses the

development of a ‘myth’ of Nova Scotians as a folksy, simple people, adept at handicrafts and separate from a modern Canada. MacKay’s (1994) general thesis – that what might be seen as the obvious historical truths that lead seamlessly into a unique Nova Scotian culture were and are selected by powerful groups to serve certain socio-economic ends – was a major contributor to my own analysis of current phenomena. I attribute my use of the idea that the values of the present moment impact what is valued historically to his work. It is also important to note that Osbourne (2009) has focused specifically on the question of how Nova Scotia has historically been presented through tourism, making her work a thematic contemporary of this thesis.

### ***The Commodification of Culture***

Besides requiring a class with enough money and time to travel for pleasure, tourism in itself has become a fixture of the international economy, accounting for 10.2% of GDP globally in 2017 (Turner & Friersmouth, 2017). Wherever it happens, then, tourism is intimately related to profitable exchange; it creates competition between destination regions for tourist money. It is incumbent on the profit-savvy destination region to provide goods, services, and experiences that tourists will wish to purchase over those of other locations. This means that some elements of a culture can represent a unique ‘product’ that only a given region can lay claim to. It becomes profitable to accentuate those elements of local culture that outsiders, as tourists, are willing to pay to see. This process is often referred to as cultural commodification (Bunten, 2008; Roland, 2011), and it represents a contemporary set of affairs between cultures where market relations dictate the terms of social relations (Gotham, 2002), even at this finer level of cultural expression.

Cultural commodification has its conceptual roots in 20<sup>th</sup> century neo-Marxist thought that strove to explain the advance of capital into new aspects of human life by demonstrating how

commodities had moved beyond the material. Marx (1867) defined commodities as objects that are initially valuable in that they are useful – they have use-value – but in the context of a capitalist mode of production, they gain an abstract, quantitative exchange-value that overshadows their use-value (27). By way of example, a post card with a picture of Halifax and a Nova Scotia tee-shirt are each valuable in that they are useful, but they have different uses. Their worth only becomes comparable when they are given a price. Marx (1867) cautioned that the worth placed on this abstruse value ‘fetishized’ and obscured the actual worth of commodities, and its source, which he held to be the labour of workers.

As capitalist economies have developed, however, their functions have moved beyond the sort of early industrial manufacturing of goods upon which Marx based his prescient analyses. The service economy, and – of particular relevance to tourism – the experience economy (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011), are among the newer sectors that economists understand as central to contemporary capitalism. Neo-Marxists have asked how commodities impact social life when they are conceived of as immaterial. To this end, the work of Guy Debord (1967) has been particularly significant to the development of the concept of cultural commodification. In *Society of the Spectacle* (Debord, 1967), he argues that modern conditions of production replace authentic experiences with consumable ‘spectacles’, and as a result, “all that once was directly lived has become mere representation” (p. 5). He claims that, “commodities are now all there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity” (Debord, 1967, p. 42). These arguments represent an effort to expand the dimensions of the Marxist commodity. Although he does so with considerable hyperbole, Debord (1967) effectively conveys that commodifying experiences can opacify the relationship between the sign and the signified (Watts, 1997), in a similar way to how exchange-value obscures use-value. People buy not only an experience itself, but what it has

come to represent by way of others paying for it as a commodity. My findings explore how the role of some signs and symbols of Nova Scotia can be analysed as spectacles for tourist consumption, and how, as such, they become consumable commodities.

Whatever its specifics, asking how cultural commodification plays out in tourism is a way of examining how tourism changes the meaning of culture. It can affect how the elements of a cultural practice are expressed and preserved. For example, Davidov (2010) explores how the demand for exotic experiences with Ecuadoran shamanism has created an industry around its performance that has denigrated its practice in Kitchwa life. She describes how these ‘new’ shamans, in response to the demand from tourists, need to learn performance skills and knowledge of hallucinogenic drugs, but forego traditional training since it does little to serve them financially (Davidov, 2010). Commodification can also change the meaning of cultural symbols. Roland (2011) uses the example of the *Mulatta* in Cuban culture; young ‘mixed race’ women who were held up as symbols of urbanization and multi-ethnic unity in post-revolutionary Cuba. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of tourism as a primary source of revenue brought outsiders who saw the *Mulatta* as an exotic, sexualized object of desire, and because of their willingness to pay for such a representation, this has become the symbol’s most obvious presentation in Cuban society (Roland, 2011). In an application I draw on specifically in my analysis, Bunten (2008) refined cultural commodification to speak to how the indigenous tour guides she studied in Alaska created characters that they could market to tourists, calling this process the commodification of self. I argue that tourism workers can commodify various aspects of their job, from self, to space, to ideas of place, according to what they do and what is available to them.

By examining how tourism workers understand Nova Scotian culture, and what they think

tourists want to see, my research raises questions about how commoditization changes culture. I address how the processes by which the perceptions of outsiders, local culture, and a financial incentive, interact with meaning. Like Davidov (2010), I analyse what skills the tourism economy demands of its labourers, and in turn, how this impacts the presentation of local culture. These concerns, coupled with my analysis of some of the symbols they use in their work begins to create a picture of the link between tourism work and the creation of a Nova Scotian cultural narrative that has implications outside of the touristic. As such, my position diverges from those theorists who claim that commoditizing culture is a purely damaging process (MacCannell, 1976; Shepherd, 2002). Rather, particularly when both tourist and destination exist in the context of a North American capitalist society, where the local economic and social conditions already adhere closely with those known to tourists, I offer that it has potential to influence the development of new culture, as long as it is a commoditized culture in which market relations dictate social relations.

### ***Constructivist Authenticity***

Asking how individuals interpret authenticity provides a means of teasing out the nuances of how tourists interact with destination cultures. MacCannell's (1976) seminal work, *The Tourist*, proposed that tourists are fundamentally motivated by a search for an authentic encounter with a cultural 'Other', but are stymied by the inherently performative nature of the interactions that they could access. Conceptualizations like this have led to the criticism that authenticity is simply a binary opposite to the idea of cultural commodification, and that its use seeks to depict any tourist interaction with a destination culture as inauthentic, while culture that is 'traditional,' and only shared among group members, is rendered as authentic and valuable (Shepherd, 2002). As most anthropologists consider group cultures to be fundamentally fluid and changing, this is a

somewhat shallow reading of the concept, even in its more essentializing applications. My research did not seek to apply authenticity as a means of delineating what is truly Nova Scotian from that which is performed for tourists. I employed what MacCarthy (2016) calls ‘constructivist authenticity’, which, “takes as its premise the significance of the ways in which people define, recognise and identify a given entity as authentic, even if it is in some way a contrivance, copy, or simulacrum” (p. 22). What is important in this approach is not deciding what is authentic, but asking what authenticity means in the eye of the beholder, and what actions are thereby taken with respect to that which is perceived to be authentic.

Discourses of authenticity are useful both for understanding how tourism workers make sense of their work in the context of provincial life, and how they interpret the desires of tourists. Previous scholarship has focused more on authenticity in the minds of consumers. Pine and Gilmour’s (2007) *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want* is an influential book on contemporary marketing which posits that consumers increasingly categorize the world in terms of ‘real’ and ‘fake’, and that for companies to be successful, they must become progressively more adept at presenting their products as authentic. MacCarthy’s (2016) ethnographic research suggests that these processes are at work among an increasingly prevalent demographic of tourists who have a desire to avoid the performative aspects of tourism. They often refer to themselves as ‘travellers’, and seek experiences that lack the accommodations and leisure accessories of vacationing (MacCarthy, 2016), and in this way search out a particular kind of authentic experience. A combination of these two ideas has proved useful in my work when compared with my data. Although presented as a guide to marketing, Pine and Gilmour’s (2007) observation that the authentic is a desire that can be fulfilled, and MacCarthy’s suggestion that there is a particular niche of tourists who see the authentic as ‘what the locals do,’ helped me

consider how my data suggested that locals could, in fact, begin to practice a kind of tourism that seeks to cater to this desire. As I will demonstrate, several of my interviewees spoke to an understanding of this genre of tourist desire, and explained how they positioned themselves and their work to conform to it.

To reiterate, my research question is, *how do Nova Scotian tourism workers understand their role as purveyors of cultural experiences to tourists?* This phrasing allows me to apply cultural commodification as a concept through which to view the processes of their work, and constructivist authenticity as a means of situating it within the larger context of constructed cultural meanings. My interpretations rely on tourism workers as interpreters in their own right. As Geertz (1973) famously argued, anthropologists deal with second-hand understandings of how their participants interpret their own lives; all of my participants were engaged in a similar effort through their effort to interpret and respond to the expectations of tourists, which makes them a rich source of ethnographic data.

## **METHODS**

As a work of social anthropology, this project was, from its earliest conception, intended to reflect an ethnographic methodology. The lived experiences and understandings of tourism workers seemed like information with important subtleties that could not be captured through quantitative analysis. Furthermore, I was interested in how daily life, work, heritage, consumerism and personality interacted, and the holistic picture of these forces I hoped to capture seemed likely to be accessible through ethnography. Due to time constraints, however, it was clear that the sort of comprehensive data that is the product of traditional long-term ethnographic research would be outside of its scope. As a result, the methods that were selected for its execution were chosen in part to reflect the methodological foundations of anthropological

ethnography. By using a combination of semi-structured interviewing and participant observation, I hoped to generate complementary data that could speak not only to how tourism workers articulated their experiences, but also how tourism sites and the people who interact with them appeared in their quotidian detail, and how this related to interview data.

Cohen (1984) describes how ethnographic interviewing draws on local discourses and extended learning about participants, and that it is itself an exercise in learning, in which the interviewer, “[uses] conversations... largely to discover the correct questions to ask” (p. 225). Because I was not able to spend the amount of time with participants that would allow the development of this kind of reflective interviewing, my use of semi-structured, or as Berg (2009) calls them, ‘semistandardized,’ interviews with open-ended questions was an attempt to capture the spirit of Cohen’s method. In accordance with Berg (2009), I allowed substantial time for interviewees to direct the conversation according to what inspired them. This lent itself to the study of constructivist authenticity, as it allowed me to discover what had meaning for participants in ways I could not predict in phrasing questions alone. While in one case this resulted in a (pleasant) twenty-minute discussion of the merits of Cape Breton fiddle music, it often provided some of my most useful data. In one case, a story that participant John Morris shared with me prompted me to explain to him how at times, as a busker, I had cherry-picked details about my life in order to provide tourists with a story they wanted to hear. He then shared with me several similar techniques he used to communicate with tourists in his work, which related significantly with Bunten’s (2008) concept of self-commodification. The original questions I had developed for my interview guide (Appendix III) remained the same throughout my research. As interviewees frequently pre-empted my questions, I often did not ask every one I had prepared, as it would have become redundant.



My interview guide was divided into two thematic sections. As part of understanding how tourism workers understand their role as purveyors of Nova Scotian culture means getting an idea of what they understand that culture to be, the first section attempted to gain a sense of how a participant understood the culture (or cultures) of Nova Scotia. I aimed to discuss this generally at first, then more specifically by addressing which cultural groups or ethnicities a participant felt contributed to provincial culture, and which they felt the tourism industry represents. My hope was that after considering this, participants would be better prepared to offer critical insights in the second part of the interview, which asked how they understood tourists and their jobs. I tried to get a sense of what they felt tourists expected, how they understood the role their job entailed, how it influenced them, and what material culture might be associated with it.

The main object of participant observation was to understand some of the contexts in which the work being described by participants was carried out. In part, this was to compensate for research taking place during the industry's winter off-season. I felt that if I could situate what my participants spoke about in some kind of setting, it would be a proxy for actually observing them at work. I conducted participant observation at Peggy's Cove, the Halifax Stanfield Airport, and Lunenburg's Old Town, for a period of three hours over two sessions at each location. I was not trying to achieve some of the more traditional ends of participant observation. This was not an endeavour to become a member of a group, or to interpret the shared meanings of tourism workers, but as Tonkin (1984) conveys, participant observation encompasses such a broad range of practices that it is difficult to refer to any one approach as 'standard'. I employed what Spradley (1980) calls 'nonparticipant observation', meaning that I never directly engaged people at observation sites, existing much more as a passive observer. Although I was not engaging directly with humans, I was trying to experience the places I went as a tourist might, and to

interpret the impressions they were designed to create. In keeping with this method, I also observed advertisements as part of the tourist landscape, in the form of three video ads (N.S. Tourism Agency, 2017b; Discover Halifax, 2015; Right Some Good, 2012) which I selected due to the generality of their content (i.e. they were not event-specific, location-specific, etc.), and the *Doers and Dreamers Guide* (N.S. Tourism Agency, 2017a), a provincial publication on tourism. I was generally concerned with what narratives were present at observation sites, if these were consistent between sites.

I employed a snowballing sampling technique in my recruitment of participants. I did not look for a specific demographic; my only criterion was that a participant held a position that entailed serving tourists within the last five years. My aim was to discover if workers had common experiences when relating to tourists, irrespective of demographics or the specifics of a job. Because this research took place during the industry off-season, when many tourism workers are otherwise engaged, snowballing allowed me to more easily connect with the seven participants I was able to recruit.

Once transcribed, interviews were coded for themes based on the approach described by Bernard, Wutich, et al. (2017). I looked for a mixture of a priori and induced themes (Bernard et al., 2017); I knew I was curious about how participants conceptualized Nova Scotia, and I had asked questions specifically to that end, so while that data sometimes appeared in unanticipated places during an interview, I did anticipate that it would be present. On the other hand, while I had studied the history of tourism in Nova Scotia, I did not anticipate that discourses of history would appear as a feature of several interviewees' conceptions of culture. Once this became apparent, I searched for the theme elsewhere, and ultimately established that for some of my participants, it was a central means of discerning legitimate culture. The temporary notes I took

during participant observation were written up in a more permanent form according to Ellen's (1984) method, where shorthand field notes serve as memory triggers for more detailed information. Also in keeping with Ellen's (1984) recommendation, I kept notes and my interpretations of them as separate as possible.

Because this data is qualitative, it is non-generalizable to similar populations. Furthermore, due to the small sample size of interviews, I did not approach a point of saturation in my data collection. The principle ethical concern of this research was the risk that a participant would be identified by colleagues in the industry. This had the potential to harm them if they disclosed an opinion that they would not want known professionally. Informed consent of this risk and a knowledge of their rights needed to be ensured prior to interviewing. To mitigate the risk, all participants were given a pseudonym, and any details of their work that could be used to identify them, such as the locations of workplaces (beyond the very general, e.g., "the South Shore region"), details of uniforms, company names, etc. were omitted in this thesis. In some cases, specific details from interviews that could identify a place or person were changed to ensure confidentiality.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***Vignette: New Meaning in Old Town***

On a Saturday in Lunenburg's Old Town, my ears aching from the February cold blowing in off the water, I was hard at work trying to figure out what I had come to see. The place was lonely and empty. I wound my way around its corners, reading a now-familiar message – some iteration of "closed for the season" – that hung in the windows of gift shops, restaurants, craft stores, book stores, every store for a block, save a Subway. I had expected to see few tourism workers, but instead I saw none. Standing by the water, I wrote down the names of businesses:

The Savvy Sailor, Admiral Benbow Trading, Tradewinds Realty, The Fish Shack, Fisherman's Catch, The Grand Banker, and The Old Fish Factory, all of them across the street from the well-known replica of the schooner *Bluenose*, which lay hidden beneath a great white tarp. It was like an abandoned maritime theme park. I had seen the odd nautically-styled business in other towns, but here, they were the rule, not the exception. Still, without tourism workers to interact with this space, what did I think I was looking at?

Further along, I found the one gift shop that was open. Inside were the familiar postcards of Peggy's Cove, some jewelry, pottery, knitting, and novelty items, all in the same genre of the gift shops I had visited elsewhere. Behind them, an elderly woman talked with the clerk. "Do you think she'll ever move these?" she gestured to a pair of Blundstone boots. "Can't imagine," the clerk answered, "Americans only want to buy stuff that's made here." Leaving the shop, it became apparent to me that this lack of people was a finding in itself. The whole of Old Town was an apparatus that had no function without community outsiders; on a Saturday, it was entirely stalled without tourists. Here was a UNESCO heritage site, every possible crevice and cranny of which was filled with a thematic commercialism, whose shop owners did not always want to sell local, but *had* to, because their largest customer base demanded it. So much effort had gone into creating the impression of a uniquely local, iconically Nova Scotian place, and very little of it seemed to be for the people who actually lived there.

### ***What a tourist wants***

For tourism workers, tourists are a known quantity. I was surprised by the homogeneity my participants expressed when articulating what they understood to be tourist desires. All participants felt that regardless of where they came from, tourists generally wanted to do and see the same things. "A lot of times, they rely on us to make their plans," Terry said about the guests

who vacationed at his bed and breakfast, “people already know what to expect, right? They have an idea of what they want to see already, and we are like, ‘yeah. Go and do that, it's great.’ We're not here to change anybody's plans.” This capacity for assessing what tourists are seeking, and the awareness that they arrive with a pre-existing set of desires, underpins the mechanics of the tourism industry and the objectives of tourism workers. While the content of these desires changed somewhat depending on a participant's job – museum curators may cater to different wants than hotel managers, for example – there were identifiable themes that emerged from my data. An indistinctly Celtic heritage, a seagoing, nautical lifestyle, and an exceptionally friendly and decidedly rural population are the broad categories under which most of the minutiae the Nova Scotian tourism narrative falls. All of these are derived in some way from the history and daily life of Nova Scotia – they are not fabrications – but they are also tools for contextualizing experiences in ways that tourism workers know their clientele expect. The simple significance of this information is that it means for perceptive tourism workers, success can seem dependant on meeting these desires. The knowledge of a set of fairly consistent expectations and the financial incentive attached to meeting them creates a repository of ideas that amount to the tourism narrative of Nova Scotia. This narrative is self-reinforcing; the more tourists want to see something, the more tourism workers labour to present it.

The interesting thing about these narrative themes is that they are cultural in nature. Each suggests elements of a way of life that is distinct to the province, and as such, can be used in the creation of cultural products. Analysing the use of Celtic culture in the tourism industry can exemplify this. The idea that Nova Scotia is a Celtic place appears frequently in tourism advertising, from the tourism agency website's ‘Celtic culture’ category (N.S. Tourism Agency, 2017c), [author's note: as of 2018, the category appears as ‘Celtic and Gaelic culture’] to Celtic

music and dance in video ads (Discover Halifax, 2015; Right Some Good, 2012), to the proliferation of the Nova Scotia tartan in merchandise that was apparent at each site where I conducted observation. Certainly, Scottish and Irish immigration has shaped Nova Scotia, but as McCarthy and Hague (2004) convey, the catch-all term ‘Celtic’ is a modern concept that is too often used to combine several ethnic groups into an easily identifiable category. In northern Nova Scotia, there are clear cultural links to the Scottish Highlands, which Cape Breton native and tour guide John Morris referred to as ‘the Gaelic culture’, but as he pointed out to me, it is not a pan-Nova Scotian phenomenon. John Morris laughed about returning to Nova Scotia from a vacation and realising how widespread the Celtic theme was. “You’d hit the Nova Scotia border, and you almost had to stop to hear the piper. And what were they selling? The tartans. You know, all the Nova Scotia bullshit,” he scoffed. Yet, later in the interview, when we were discussing good tourism practices, the topic re-emerged, and a certain complexity in his point of view became clear. While discussing how often bagpipers appeared at tourism sites, he offered, “you know, I don’t think we sell as much of it as we should. Because, I mean, if that’s what people are looking for...” He noted that tourists loved to tell him about their Celtic roots. John Morris had two ways of understanding the Celtic narrative; as contrived ‘bullshit’ that did not speak to his own lived experience, and as a tool by which to promote economic growth in his industry, in order to benefit himself, the province, and the people he works with.

Sebastian, a tour guide who grew up in an Acadian community and had little personal experience of Nova Scotia as a Celtic place, still understood its relevance to tourism. He told me that when a job he was working hired a bagpiper to play outside, their attendance improved. “Something about the noise that the bagpipes had, [there was] some kind of significance to it,” he said, “like, that’s what they came here for, and everything that symbolized by that is what they

kind of flock toward.” He offered that Nova Scotia, as a North American, primarily English-speaking destination, could benefit from tourists who felt they wanted a Celtic experience but did not want the challenges of overseas travel or navigating linguistic differences. All of my participants spoke to the role the Celtic narrative plays in tourism. In the touristic context, the primary function of themes like these becomes the service of a certain expectation for outsiders, as cultural products that can come to shape how Nova Scotia is both represented and experienced.

### *Discerning the Saleable: Commodification in Action*

Tourism work, then, is related to understanding the most commodifiable cultural narratives. Bunten (2008) uses the term, ‘commodification of self’ to refer to a specific facet of the cultural commodification process by which the tour guides she studied “construct[ed] marketable identitie[s]” (p. 381) that fit with the experience they felt tourists wanted to have. She suggests that although it is essentially the enactment of agency, this process requires an adjustment of values or emotions in the service of an economic goal (Bunten, 2008). Although the people I interviewed had jobs that entailed different responsibilities, each of them conveyed, in some way, how they present either themselves, their place of employment, or the space in which it was located, in a way that conforms to the prevailing narratives of tourism. Three of them conveyed a sense of the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) demanded by the job; “...you take on a persona that may not necessarily be you,” said Justin, who organizes tours of a heritage site. “We all have lives, and not everything is peachy keen. But when you’re here, and you’re dealing with somebody, [peachy keen] is plastered on your face.” That service work demands a taxing politeness, however, is not a particularly noteworthy finding. It is in the specifics of where participants chose to manifest some of the touristic narratives of Nova Scotia that the presence of

the commodification process can be seen most clearly.

In some cases, participants commodified themselves in the way Bunten (2008) describes; this was particularly true for John Morris, whose job was similar to the work done by the tour guides she studied. In order to, “sell the sizzle, not the steak”, as he put it, John Morris had a catalogue of stories that he could apply to common interactions with tourists. He had anecdotes about the uniform he wore; when tourists asked about the significance of its tartan, he told them a story about a clan of skinny Scots who wore it because it was the only garment that would fit them. “I’ve had people who come back, you know... and they’ll see me, and they’ll say, Mr. MacThin!” He also had ways of playing into perception tourists had of the landscape as rare and beautiful – he qualified the following as a ‘fib’ – “I say, you know, I come out here when I’m having a really tough day. I come out, and I sit on the rocks. And I get a new perspective of nature, and the creator, and all of a sudden, things don’t seem so bad. And people love that kind of stuff, right? So, I’ve touched them emotionally.” Sebastian described a similar approach to endorsing the expectations of tourists that he used in his own tours. If someone had been to the Cabot Trail, he told me, “every time, with the same tone of voice, I would go, oh isn’t that so gorgeous?!” These kind of scripted, performative interactions aim to interpret what the tourist wants to experience, and then confirm it from the position of authority that being a local denotes. The tourism worker enacts their own agency in an attempt to align themselves with a prevailing narrative. For people like John Morris, who sells only his own labour and who is incentivized through tips and repeat customers, the commodification of self – which is the element of his work he has the most control over – is an excellent strategy for success as a tourism worker.

By contrast, Terry and Sarah Moynihan, who co-own a bed and breakfast in the South Shore region, were both clear that they tried to be ‘genuine’ when interacting with customers; they



treated them politely, but intentionally avoided any kind of spiel. “People like to see genuine, so I’m just trying to be myself”, Terry told me. Their workplace, however – which as owners, they had full creative control over – was resolutely presented in a way that adapted to fit one of the narratives I have proposed characterize Nova Scotian tourism. I asked Terry about some nautical paintings in the main building on their property, and he rattled off a list of other thematically similar artifacts on their property; “That’s what people want to see”, he told me, “anchors, yellow lobster traps, wooden buoys, folk art. That kind of stuff. We used to have an old wooden dory that we would keep down on the dock, just for [pause] I think, looks? Aesthetic purposes. That’s what they want see”, he reiterated; “they expect that”. This interpretation of and response to tourist wishes was confirmed by Sarah. I asked her if this presentation was meant to create an experience for tourists. “Yeah,” she laughed, “Because our house isn’t nautical! But here, you end up putting it everywhere”. Sarah recognized that these were not the symbols of her normal life. Rather, their inclusion was an intentional move to situate her business competitively in the tourism market. I asked Terry if this was part of a proven formula: “tried and tested”, he replied, “...it would be unwise not to go along with what works”.

This sort of thematic commodification of space appears, like self-commodification, to be the result of the savvy tourism worker adapting the narratives of the tourism industry to a facet of their work, in an attempt to create pleasing experiences. This was supported by Carl Brand, who worked at his family’s campsite. He explained to me what kinds of accessories they felt created a tourist-friendly environment. “In the office off the driveway, we had a giant lighthouse made of wood. Probably about ten feet tall, and pictures and paintings of lobsters, things like that... Buoys, waves, boats”, he told me.

I propose that most tourism workers are motivated to determine which elements of a given job

can best be transformed to conform to the expectations of tourists. In this sense, these parts of a job – such as how self or space are presented, as in the above examples – are resource-like, and through the labour of tourism workers, they are converted into experiential commodities. This can range from creating a pleasing atmosphere, as in the case of Sarah and Terry, to, as John Morris put it, creating emotional experiences through performance. To do this effectively, tourism workers must accumulate knowledge about what tourists expect and desire Nova Scotia to be. “We are part of their experience, too”, Sarah told me, “we have to show them a good time”. This is knowledge that is apart from, but which overlaps with, their own lived experience of being Nova Scotian. It references elements of history and daily life, but ultimately draws from, and contributes to, a narrative of its own.

### ***An Authentic Interpretation: Constructivist Authenticity via Tourism Workers***

As I have argued above, the narratives of tourism draw on aspects of the historical and quotidian in provincial life. Discourses of authenticity help clarify this space between the local, the tourist perception of the local (as seen through the eyes of tourism workers), and the interaction between the two. It is not my aim to declare any expression of culture more or less authentic than another, but to ask what the search for authenticity, and the effort to present it, means for those who are engaged with it. Although I had prepared questions to ask participants related to authenticity, the concept often came up naturally in the course of interviews. I am also not claiming to present information that speaks directly to the tourist perception of an authentic Nova Scotia, but rather, what the tourism worker’s opinion is of that perception. While I question whether or not the act of tourism is *always* a search for an authentic experience, as some (MacCannell, 1976) have claimed, my research suggests that at present, there is a connection between localism and authenticity in the minds of tourists who visit Nova Scotia. Justin

suggested that this is becoming more so the case, as the ‘local’ has gained a certain cache in recent years. This is in line with MacCarthy’s (2016) description of certain contemporary tourists – many of whom prefer to be called ‘travellers’ – who want to have experiences that do not seem ‘programmed’ or produced, and who seek out seemingly unperformed practices and representations of everyday life.

Several of the tourism workers I spoke to were keenly aware of this: “a lot of people now, they want to go to places where locals eat. I’m getting more and more of that; people don’t want to go to a tourist place. Like, ‘where do you go?’ You know?”, laughed Sarah. Colleen, who had worked as a customer sales representative for an airline, but had recently started working in the hotel industry, told me, “you know what really surprised me in the hotel business, is how many people had come to ask the concierge on duty, do they know anybody [unaffiliated with the hotel] who could just give them a personal tour?” This desire for things intimately local, which Sarah described as a niche market that Nova Scotia could provide, was mirrored in the conversation I overheard during participant observation in Lunenburg, which was detailed in my opening vignette. The clerk’s conviction that Americans only want to buy ‘stuff that’s made here’ reflects the desire for an authentically local experience, even in material items. The ironic consequence of this desire is that it can become the impetus for creating ‘the local’. The tourism workers I spoke to do not behave as though it is their job to provide tourists – American or otherwise – with ‘stuff that’s made here’, or genuine local experiences; they understand their job to be providing tourists with what they *want*, and if it becomes clear that what they want is an experience of that nature, tourism workers will labour to provide it.

Several participants framed their own ideas about what constitutes authentic presentations of culture in terms of history or heritage. “Culture, to me, is found in history. The history of a

place,” said Justin. “The uniqueness in destinations comes from your history, and what you have preserved.” This perspective seemed at first – and to some extent likely is – related to the context of his work at a heritage site, but the idea appeared in other interviews. While Sarah’s work did not obviously involve the historical, when I asked her about tourist desires, she told me several times she had been asked to provide a local history. Regarding tours of various sites in Halifax, Sebastian offered: “One thing I always touched on was that these were historical buildings, but that they were still in use. I would almost beat them over the head with it. I was always very insistent on the authenticity of what they were looking at.” Sebastian used the word ‘authenticity’ organically here, without any prompting. History was not only used to legitimate culture, but its misrepresentation was taken as a sign of poorly performed labour. Three interviewees spoke of other tourism workers as ineffective at their jobs, or as dishonest, based on their lack of historical knowledge and tendency to conflate the serious topic of heritage with entertainment. John Morris described how he often overheard another tour company’s bus “telling a totally different story”, with what he understood to be incorrect dates. Justin criticized other companies for including pubs in the same tour as historic buildings. Sebastian recounted how another tour would stop at a historic building he frequented, where, “they would give a little spiel, and then they would be like, ‘oh look at that statue, doesn't he look like a guy from Jumanji? Hahaha.’ And then they would leave. And that's just something that I would never say.”

Conflating historically significant statues with contemporary entertainment was, for Sebastian, a kind of low and obvious commercialism. Yet, I would argue that what is seen as significant about the past is invariably shaped by the contemporary moment, and that especially when it comes to touristic presentations, there is an ongoing exchange between history and

entertainment (McKay, 1994). The historical re-enactors who portray the 78<sup>th</sup> Highland Regiment at Citadel Hill in Halifax appeared in all three of the video advertisements I reviewed (N.S. Tourism Agency, 2017b; Discover Halifax, 2015; Right Some Good, 2012), as well as the *Doers and Dreamers guide* (N.S. Tourism Agency, 2017a). This historical display is also part of a contemporary construction of Halifax. The regiment was present for fewer than three of the Citadel's 269-year history (Crowell, 1985), yet these years have been chosen as particularly worthy of recreation, and the reenactors have been, of decades, a major tourist attraction and symbol of Halifax. This could be because they fit well with the Celtic narrative I have proposed, where the imperial British fortress does not, or it could simply be because they make a good spectacle. In either or both cases, however, what is being remembered is a reflection of what is desired to be seen now, and crucially, of what is entertaining.

When we were concluding the interview, Sebastian wanted to tell me about the *Bluenose II*; "...it's a very historically important boat, but it's a boat! And just the importance that we put on a boat [pause]. If you talk about it just in terms of what it is, and you take away all of the implications, we've spent millions and millions of dollars to make sure that this boat works and stays in the water." I found this a perceptive observation. As my opening vignette conveys, the relationship between the historical and the commoditized was tightly interwoven in Lunenburg, where the *Bluenose II* is docked. Its status as a UNESCO heritage site seems fundamental to the operation of its commercial sector; the *Bluenose II* itself is a recreation of history, but it is at least as significant as a means of drawing visitors to Lunenburg. It appeared in two of the three video advertisements I considered (Discover Halifax, 2015; N.S. Tourism Agency, 2017b), as well as on the cover of the *Doers and Dreamers Guide* (N.S. Tourism Guide 2017a). As a symbol, its function is simultaneously to create a sense of history, and to be a means of

encouraging commerce, both as an attraction itself and as a feature of a tourist destination. It embodies the close relationship between history and entertainment that characterizes this kind of tourism.

My data suggests that when participants used language associated with authenticity without prompting, they did so to convey a sense of a thing's worth to tourists. Sarah told me about a deep-sea fishing trip she frequently booked for her guests; "the fisher down in Lunenburg, he is a straight-up fisherman!... So I guess you are getting a true experience." I heard this as an implication of the trip's authenticity. From the next room, Terry shouted that it was so popular, he was thinking of getting a boat and doing tours himself. Terry, who is not a fisherman, was preparing to respond to tourist desires, while Sarah's characterization of the experience as 'true' seemed principally related to its value to tourists. It did not suggest to me that she personally valued deep-sea fishing. These findings raised more questions for me. Perhaps what is authentic about a place for the people who live there is not actually thought about in those terms. Like culture more generally, the authentic may be taken for granted. In the mind of tourists, then, does the search for authenticity somewhere else denote a sense of it being unavailable at home? Do we even conceive of our own cultures as authentic, or is it primarily a lens through which we view what others have? In Nova Scotia, a decidedly capitalist, Canadian place, authenticity as my participants thought tourists wanted it had to do with demonstrating Nova Scotia to have a way of life apart from other North American places, that they could experience. Perhaps being able to perceive difference in a way of life not too far removed from a tourist's own creates a sense of their own lived experience as unique. In the end, for tourism workers, these desires become another method to discern the commodifiable.

### *Spectacular Selling-points: Symbolism in the Tourism Industry*

What I have called the themes of the prevailing narrative of Nova Scotian tourism are presented and re-affirmed in a myriad of ways. My research suggests that one of the most prominent ways it is consumed is through the development of symbols that are directly, and at times primarily, significant to the tourism industry. My interest in the use of symbols in tourism stemmed from an idea that discussing how they were used by participants might be a means of opening conversations more to the idea of self-commodification. This was true in some cases, but their prevalence, both in interviews and at observation sites, led me to a deeper analysis of their meaning. Certain images or objects – so far I have mentioned the bagpipes, lobsters, the Peggy’s Cove lighthouse, the Bluenose, the Citadel Hill re-enactors, and the Nova Scotia tartan – were used by participants to articulate ideas about what was representative of the tourism narrative. “When I go out West, I want to see the cows and wheat, and see the cowboys.” Justin told me. “I don't want to see necessarily see someone dressed up in the image of a fisherman in a sou’wester and the rain slicker. I want to experience what they experience.” Whether or not many Nova Scotians regularly have contact with fishermen in sou’westers is beside the point. What Justin identified in this statement was a symbol that fit into the nautical tourism theme, that he felt people would travel here out of a desire to see. In the context of the tourism economy, objects like the sou’wester come to refer to something beyond their original use via an encounter with tourists. This section of my thesis will analyse how these symbols are shaped by tourism, and the meanings they convey, as a way of more completely teasing out the threads of the cultural fabric into which tourism work is woven.

During participant observation, I was struck by the omnipresence of the Peggy’s Cove lighthouse. I saw a tourist buy a painting of it, telling the store clerk she would bring her brother

there next summer. It adorned tee shirts, jewelry, and post cards in souvenir stores, and appeared in all of the media I analysed (N.S. Tourism Agency, 2017a & 2017b; Discover Halifax, 2015; Right Some Good, 2012). Four participants referenced visiting the lighthouse as a primary desire of tourists. What makes Peggy's Cove and its lighthouse so significant? A fisherman from nearby West Dover offered, during an informal interview, that the iconic fishing village is not primarily a fishing village at all. "What other fishing village do you know with three art galleries?" he queried. Yet, it is so representative of that idea that a resort in Thailand re-created the lighthouse and sections of the town as part of a 'western fisherman' experience (Blackburn, 2016). Debord's (1967) proposition that the colonisation of modern life by the commodity transforms "everything that was directly lived... [into] a mere representation... an immense accumulation of spectacles" (p. 4) seems a useful lens through which to view how touristic commodification has, in part, constructed Peggy's Cove. What is the primary function of the Peggy's Cove lighthouse? While it 'functions' in the sense of shining a light, it is no longer needed to guide ships; in fact, it was nearly torn down in 2012 after the Department of Fisheries and Oceans declared it surplus (Chisolm, 2012). Its main purpose, both practically and symbolically, is now as a thing to be seen, to be photographed, and then compared with the plethora of other images that exist of it elsewhere. The meaning is in the seeing. A great number of the community's people are perhaps no longer employed in fishing, but in service of the *idea* of fishing. Thus, the town is a commodifiable spectacle. The lighthouse itself is not saleable, but the idea of it as iconic is.

Symbols used in this way help demonstrate Gotham's (2002) proposition that the outcome of commodifying experiences is "the development of a consumer society where market relations subsume and dominate social life" (p. 1737). I found an example of this in two interviews where



participants used the slogan on the Nova Scotia licence plate, “Canada’s Ocean Playground”, to refer to their experience of the province. That phrase was coined by Alistair Campbell, the publicity director of the Tourism Investigation Committee, in 1923; The Nova Scotia Archives (2018) call Campbell, “Nova Scotia’s foremost tourism bureaucrat” (para. 6). The argument can be made, then, that this was an effort to use the licence plate as an advertising medium. This is not to say that Nova Scotia is not or should not be thought of as an ocean playground, but rather that the genesis of this term is intimately connected to tourism, and therein, the ambition to sell an idea of the province. In this case, it appears as a kind of nautical theme park, and its use by my participants to describe their experiences suggests the quiet dominance of market relations in social life in the way Gotham (2002) describes. It is also a narrow account; there are many who live here who are not lucky enough to experience Nova Scotia as an ‘ocean playground’. This would be impossible without tourists as spectators and consumers. In this way, the tourist gaze helps fashion symbols that become representative of Nova Scotia. From the child I observed at Peggy’s Cove with a stuffed lobster running back to a car with Alberta licence plates, to a Tam O’shanter with the Nova Scotia tartan and attached fake red hair being purchased in the airport, what many provincial icons mean today is shaped, in part, by tourism.

### ***Missing Narratives and Meaningful Labour:***

I have written at length about how the tourism workers I interviewed become effective at their jobs. This does not mean that they are uncritical consumers of the narratives put forward by the provincial tourism industry. As my interview with Sarah progressed, she voiced some discomfort with respect to the disconnect between her life and the representation of Nova Scotia she put forward in her job. “I kind of feel like we’re representing what Nova Scotia is, but at the same time, we might not do that stuff all the time. Do you know what I mean, though?” she asked

earnestly, “It’s a little confusing.” Whether tourism workers are like John Morris and have no problem using touristic narratives to profit, or have some reservations like Sarah, they can understand themselves as actors in the space between everyday life and tourism itself.

Furthermore, my participants demonstrated a pronounced awareness of what these narratives can omit. Six of my seven participants spoke to how tourism excluded African Nova Scotians. While the tourism agency’s website pays lip service to the culture, Sebastian told me, “definitely not in those tourism guides do you see a front page devoted to the African Nova Scotian side of it.”

Colleen mentioned that she’d never seen a person of colour in a kilt, and that given that various tour bus drivers, hotel concierges, and tour guides wear kilts, she felt that the emphasis on Celtic culture necessarily made less of a space for African Nova Scotians as labourers. John Morris emphasized the necessity of including “that part of the story” in his tours. “And not a lot of our guys have done that. I was shocked at how few of us were doing it,” he told me. “And I’ve had a couple of times where I’ve had African Americans on my tour, who have come up to us and said, ‘thank you for doing that’.”

Finally, while the labour involves meeting demands in a way that I have suggested trumps questions of authenticity, and sometimes truth, it should be understood that tourism work can be meaningful for those who participate in it. While it can be taxing, five of my participants spoke about the pride they took in their jobs. Collen called herself an ambassador of Nova Scotia.

When I offered this term to John Morris, it resonated with him. “Yeah! I’m the ambassador for the province, right? So, I want to speak positively about everything, even if it’s negative!

[laughing] You know?” The realities of capitalism may often be cold and unyielding, but tourism workers are human, and my participants did not want to do a good job for profits alone. They

wanted tourists to enjoy themselves, to think well of the province, and to appreciate the people who live here.

## **CONCLUSION:**

My research suggests that a central facet of tourism work is the ability to anticipate the expectations and respond to desires of tourists. Like most economics, there is an element of supply and demand at work in the industry; however, the demand is more often for a set of experiences than for material goods. While tourism workers are complex human beings with a range of motivations themselves, supplying these experiences is the most obvious way to operate successfully in their work. I have argued that, to this end, the tourism industry creates a narrative about Nova Scotia that draws on history and local experience, but is a thing unto itself, because it is principally defined and re-defined through its presentation to tourists. The tourism workers I interviewed skillfully crafted elements of their trade to fit with this narrative and meet the expectations of tourists, which amounts to labour that aims to convert a resource the worker has access to – such as a workspace or personal story – into a saleable commodity that tourists will want to buy. Each of my participants demonstrated a knowledge of the variety of stories and ways of life that exist in Nova Scotia, and most of them felt that the industry could be more representative of the variety of histories and lived experiences that exist within the province. The difficulty is, however, that the existing narratives seem to work so well. Each of my participants felt they knew what tourists wanted to see, and in the context of performing seasonal labour in a ‘have-not’ province, the precarity of tourism work may dictate that doing what is safe, or as Terry would say, what is ‘tried and true’, is the wisest approach.

Particularly for a place like Nova Scotia, a province of a post-industrial, capitalist nation, where economic conditions already play the sort of role in social life that is often critiqued by

those studying cultural commodification in other cultures (Roland, 2011; Davidov, 2010) the expressions of culture that are performed for tourists may have the ability to become central to the provincial identity in a way that they would not elsewhere. Perhaps part of the reason that tourism in Nova Scotia has developed a powerful narrative is the degree to which Nova Scotian life is already quite similar to life elsewhere in North America. Difference must be accentuated to the point where it becomes established as obvious in a way it would not otherwise. The experiential commodities that arise out of this do not always, or only, cheapen pre-existing practices, but create ways of life that were not there before, and that become re-enforced the more they are exchanged with tourists. Through an analysis of symbols tied to tourism, I have offered some examples of these processes in action. The touristic perceptions of authenticity that my participants shared with me usually had to do with how Nova Scotia was authentically different; a place and life apart. For their part, participants never expressed a sense that tourism corrupted the authentic, or even that authenticity had some conceptual relevance to their experience of Nova Scotia outside of the industry. Their use of the term was usually reflective of their understanding of authenticity as a tourist desire that they could meet. A growing demand for authenticity in contemporary markets the way Pine and Gilmour (2007) describe means, most obviously, that labourers will work to meet that demand, not that some wealth of 'real' or 'authentic' products and services will rise to prominence.

I propose that this connects authenticity and cultural commodification in post-industrial, Euro-American context in a way that is theoretically significant. Furthermore, I offer that the potentially generative nature of cultural commodification that I have argued for above expands the concept's applications. This research is a brushstroke towards a more complete image of tourism in Nova Scotia, giving voice to some of its workers, and contributing a critical

perspective to the discussion of its purpose and outcomes. Because of its small sample size, future research could ask similar questions within a larger group, possibly with more demographic specificity. The understandings of the tourists themselves is also an obvious area of possible inquiry. Themes latent in the data also suggest that exploring the Nova Scotian diaspora could be a rewarding source of information on how the culture is constructed. One question that I am left with has to do with the usefulness of thinking about the province of Nova Scotia as a boundary for culture. Certainly, because there are efforts made to present it as a cultural vessel of sorts, it is worth studying in this sense, but does the suggestion that there is a daily way of life to be seen behind this presentation essentialize the interactions of various groups whose cultures are not bound by provincial borders, or identities? A comparison of ethnographic research on the daily life of cultural groups within the province to this thesis would be useful. Through studying the fine details of life, anthropology can call into question hegemonic narratives about civilization and society. My work here is a contribution toward that effort, but more remains to be done within Euro-American societies themselves to demonstrate the variety of influences that give rise to shifting narratives that are presented in the moment as natural and whole.

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## Appendix I: Ethics Consent Form



*Faculty of Arts and*

*Social Sciences*

### CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in research being conducted by me, Alastair Parsons, an undergraduate student in Social Anthropology as part of my honours degree at Dalhousie University. The purpose of this research is to interview and observe how tourism workers understand the roles they play in performing a version of Nova Scotian culture for tourists. I will write up the results of this research in a paper for my class, called the honours thesis.

As a participant in the research you will be asked to answer a number of questions about how you understand Nova Scotian culture and your job as someone who presents some element of that to tourists. The interview should take about an hour to an hour and a half, as I want to leave some space for you to talk about anything you feel is important. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to answer questions that you do not want to answer, and you are welcome to stop the interview at any time if you no longer want to participate. If you decide to stop participating after the interview you can do so until March 1. I will not be able to remove the information you provided after that date, because I will have completed my analysis, but the information will not be used in any other research.

Information that you provide to me will be kept private; I will delete the tape of our interview as soon as I have transcribed it to a computer, and I will save the transcription in a password-protected file. I will keep this file so that I can learn more from it in my future studies. This consent form will be kept in a locked filing cabinet after you sign it. Only the honours class supervisor and I will have access to the unprocessed information you offer. I will describe and share general findings in a presentation to the Sociology and Social Anthropology Department and in my honours thesis. Nothing that could identify you will be included in the presentation or the thesis. Please note that because I am a busker in Halifax, I can be considered a tourism worker in the way this project describes. I will never speak to anyone I know within the tourism industry about your participation in this project.

A risk associated with this project would be if your employer or a colleague heard something you said to me that you wouldn't want them to hear. Even though the questions I'm going to ask you aren't meant to be controversial, I want to make sure you feel able to share your ideas and experiences freely. For that

reason, you will be made anonymous in the honours thesis. You will be given a pseudonym – your real name will not appear anywhere in the project – and any details you provide me about your job that might let someone else identify you will be changed as well.

There will be no direct benefit to you in participating in this research and you will not receive compensation. The research, however, will contribute to new knowledge on the parts of our culture that outsiders are most likely to pay money to experience, and on how tourism workers understand their role as purveyors of culture in this way. If you would like to see how your information is used, please feel free to contact me and I will send you a copy of my honours thesis after April 30.

If you have questions or concerns about the research please feel free to contact me or the honours class supervisor. My contact information is [al516394@dal.ca](mailto:al516394@dal.ca). You can contact the honours class supervisor, Dr. Laura Eramian, at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University on (902) 494-6754, or email [leramian@dal.ca](mailto:leramian@dal.ca).

If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, or email [ethics@dal.ca](mailto:ethics@dal.ca).

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**Participant's consent:**

I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Tel: 902.494-6593 • Fax: 902.494-2897 • [www.dal.ca](http://www.dal.ca)

**Appendix II: E-Mail Recruitment Message**

Hello,

My name is Alastair. I'm doing a research project involving tourism workers in Nova Scotia, and I'd like to invite you to be part of that. I'm a senior undergraduate student at Dalhousie University, and this research is part of my honours thesis in Social Anthropology. I am interested in speaking to anyone who has had a job where interacting with tourists played a central role in the work. That could include anyone from museum guides, to bed and breakfast owners, to buskers, to name just a few examples.

I want to talk to people whose job includes sharing aspects of Nova Scotian culture with tourists. I've worked as a busker in Halifax for two seasons, and it seems to me that some people come to Nova Scotia as tourists with expectations of what they'll find. Those of us who work in the industry have the job of providing them with something they'll want to experience. In a way, tourism workers could be thought of as purveyors of these cultural experiences. By interviewing you, I hope to learn about what that is like for you, how you understand Nova Scotia, and your experience with the desires and expectations of tourists.

An interview will probably take between an hour to an hour and a half, depending on how much you have to say. I'd be happy to meet you at a public location of your choice, at a time that is convenient to you. You can be made anonymous if you have any concerns about being identified. I can't offer you any compensation for your time, but you would be contributing to a deeper understanding of how we make Nova Scotian culture what it is. I would be happy to answer any questions you have. If doing this interests you, I'd love to have the chance to interview you.

Alastair Parsons  
[al516394@dal.ca](mailto:al516394@dal.ca)

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you can contact my supervisor, Dr. Laura Eramian, at [leramian@dal.ca](mailto:leramian@dal.ca)

### **Appendix III: Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

Questions on personal conceptions of Nova Scotian culture:

- If I say, 'Nova Scotian culture', what does that bring to mind for you?
  - o What is Nova Scotian music like?
  - o What is Nova Scotian food like?
  - o What is Nova Scotian art like?
  - o What are Nova Scotians like?
- In your mind, what sorts of things are authentically Nova Scotian?
- How different do you think Nova Scotia is from the rest of Canada?
  - o In what ways is it different?
  - o In what ways is it the same?
- Nova Scotia is the result of colonization, so a lot of different ethnic groups contributed to shaping its culture. Which groups do you think influenced it the most?
  - o Which cultures do you see the tourist industry representing the most? Why do you think that is?
  - o Is there anything that you feel is left out? (can mention 4 categories)
- I've been looking at tourism ads, and I see a lot of Celtic imagery. Do you think Nova Scotia is a particularly Celtic place?
- Do you think that there is a unique Nova Scotian character, or way of behaving?
- Do you think Nova Scotia is particularly related to the sea; to seagoing, etc?
- Do you ever say 'sociable!' as a drinking toast? Are you familiar with the practice?

Questions on tourists and being a tourism worker:

- What do you think tourists want to see when they come here?
- What places do you see tourists coming from in your work?
  - o Have you noticed any differences in what people want to see, or expect, based on where they come from? If so, what?
- Are there any symbols of Nova Scotia (eg. The bluenose) involved in your job? How are they used?
- Most jobs require a kind of role performance (examples to offer: doctors may have a bedside manner; police officers may try to embody authority). How do you understand the role you perform?
  - o Do you have any kind of script you follow, a certain way of talking, or a spiel that you give to tourists?
    - Can you do it for me?
- Are there any clothes/uniforms associated with your job?

- (depending on answer) Could you call this a costume? What do you understand it to mean?
- How has your job influenced the way you think about Nova Scotia?
- Are you aware of any ways in which you interact differently with tourists than you do non-tourists?
- Is there anything you would like to discuss that we haven't covered so far?

Network-building questions:

- Do you know any other tourism works I could speak to? If so, could you pass on my contact information?
- Does your job have any interesting advertising associated with it?
  - Is it possible for me to see some of it?

Demographic questions:

- What is your age?
- Are you originally from Nova Scotia? Do you consider yourself Nova Scotian?
- What is your cultural/ethnic heritage?
- How would you describe your job in tourism?
  - How did you come to work in tourism?
    - (depending on answer): what interests you about it?

**Appendix IV: Observation Guide**

I hope to collect data on the stories told by tourist sites and their employees. What narratives are they trying to construct about place and people? In tourism advertising for Nova Scotia, there are often recurring themes, such as seagoing and Celtic heritage. Are these same ideas represented at tourist sites? Does a location like the airport, a site that is the first impression of Nova Scotia for many tourists, try to accentuate different ideas about the province than sites where daily life overlaps with tourism, such as Peggy's Cove or Lunenburg's Old Town? Are there narratives that are absent from these places? I am working from the position that these representations are not absolute historical truths that apply to all or even most Nova Scotians, but representations

that are carefully chosen with outsiders in mind. I am interested in how staff present themselves, as well; are there costumes involved in their work, and if so what do they represent? What kind of roles do staff perform? Do staff seem to be behaving similarly between sites, or do roles change?

#### **Appendix V: REB Final Permission Form**



## ANNUAL/FINAL REPORT

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Annual report to the Research Ethics Board for the continuing ethical review of research involving humans and final report to conclude REB Approval

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## A. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

A1. Lead researcher contact	
Name:	Alastair Parsons
Email address:	al516394@dal.ca
For student research:	
Supervisor at Dal:	Dr. Laura Eramian
Supervisor email:	leramian@dal.ca

A2. Lead Researcher Status
Please indicate your current status with Dalhousie University: <input type="checkbox"/> Employee/Academic Appointment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Current student <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain):

A3. Project Information	
REB file #:	2017-4388
Project title:	In the Eyes of a Stranger: The Curation of Nova Scotian Culture through Tourism Work
Sample size (or number of cases) approved by REB:	12

## B. STUDY STATUS

B1. Study progress (check all that apply)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Participant recruitment not yet begun Reason (please explain):		
	During past year	Total since study start
<input type="checkbox"/> Secondary data use (no recruitment) Number of records used:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Participant recruitment on-going Number of participants recruited (by group):		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participant recruitment complete Total number of participants/records:	7	7



<input type="checkbox"/> Data collection on-going
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Study complete. Data collection complete. No further involvement of participants. Approved data analysis and writing may be ongoing. This report is the final report to close the REB file for this project.
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe):

<b>B2. Study Changes</b>
Have you made any changes to the approved research project (that have not been documented with an amendment request)? This includes changes to the research methods, recruitment material, consent documents and/or study instruments or research team. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, please explain:

**C. PROJECT HISTORY**

Since your initial REB submission or last annual report:	
C1. Have you experienced any challenges or delays recruiting or retaining participants or accessing records or biological materials?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, please describe:	
C2. Have you experienced any problems in carrying out this project?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, please describe:	
C3. Have participants experienced any harm as a result of their participation in the study?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, please describe:	

<p>C4. Has any study participant expressed complaints, or experienced any difficulties in relation to their participation in the study? If yes, please describe:</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>C5. Since the original approval, have there been any new reports in the literature that would suggest a change in the nature or likelihood of risks or benefits resulting from participation in this study? If yes, please describe:</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>

**D. ATTESTATION (this box *must be checked* for the report to be accepted by the REB)**

- I agree that the information provided in this report accurately portrays the status of this project and describes to the Research Ethics Board any new developments related to the study since initial approval or the latest report.

**E. SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Submit this completed form to Research Ethics, Dalhousie University, by email at [ethics@dal.ca](mailto:ethics@dal.ca) at least 21 days prior to the expiry date of your current Research Ethics Board approval.
2. Enter subject line: REB# (8-digit number), Last name, Annual (or Final) Report.
3. Student researchers must copy their supervisor(s) in the cc. line of the Annual / Final Report email.

**F. RESPONSE FROM THE REB**

Your report will be reviewed and any follow-up inquiries will be directed to you. You must respond to inquiries as part of the continuing review process.

Annual reports will be reviewed and may be approved for up to an additional 12 months; you will receive an annual renewal letter of approval from the Board that will include your new expiry date.

Final reports will be reviewed and acknowledged in writing.

**CONTACT RESEARCH ETHICS**

- Phone: 902.494.3423
- Email: [ethics@dal.ca](mailto:ethics@dal.ca)
- In person: Hicks Academic Administration Building, 6299 South Street, Suite 231
- By mail: PO Box 15000, Halifax, NS B3H 4R2