Peggy's Cove became Halifax's cultural antithesis and playground, where painters and poets could savour peasant authenticity in a pleasing natural setting, without having to go a long way.
Twilight at Peggy's Cove: 
Towards a Genealogy of 
"Maritimicity" in Nova Scotia

Ian McKay

"In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradiction because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves." 1
As far as the past, I will restrict myself to pointing out the paradox under which contemporary society lives in relation to "tradition," and by means of which it in fact tends to abolish this tradition. It is a matter of the co-existence of hyper-information with essential ignorance and indifference. The gathering of information and objects, never before practiced to this degree, goes hand in hand with the neutralization of the past: an object of knowledge for some, of tourist curiously or a hobby for others, the past is a source and root for no one... Neither 'traditionalist,' nor creative and revolutionary (despite the stories it tells on this subject), the epoch lives its relation to the past in a manner which does, as such, represent a historical innovation: of the most perfect extremity.2

The past has become the property of the tourism industry in Nova Scotia. This colonization of the past by capital and the capitalist state in the interests of increasing tourism revenue poses a threat to the honest dialogue between past and present which constitutes the precondition of historicity, a society's ability to determine the order of its representations and visualize the future.

It is easy simply to disregard tourism, far harder to understand or transcend its dominant idioms. We have all enjoyed a knowing laugh at the expense of tourists, amusedly aware as we do so that we are often tourists ourselves. Modern tourism means the triumph of a sort of epistemological relativism—this is a "real" event, we are often made to wonder, or merely a "pseudo-event" for the tourists?—and a totalizing integration of aesthetic and commoditization production. It is thus a prima instar of what Fredric Jameson has suggested is the cultural logic of late capitalism. For this logic he reserves Plato's conception of the "simulacrum"—the identical copy for which no original has ever existed. The "cultures of the simulacrum" comes to life, writes Jameson, "in a society where exchange-value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use-value is effaced," and the image itself becomes the final form of commodity refutation. In the special case of a dependent and underdeveloped region where, for six decades, culture has been commodified in the interests of tourism, a myth of a pastoral golden age—for which we might (following Bataille) coin a word, "Maritimicity," a peculiar petit bourgeois rhetoric of lusher goats, grittier fishermen, scarves and schooners—is both a material and a moral force, both a resource to be appropriated and a powerful idiom shaping local interpretations of Maritime history and landscape.

And therein lies the pathos of Golden Age mythology: a region that has become economically dependent on tourism. A pastoral discourse on the region answers to the ideological needs of a certain kind of Maritime "nationalist" and to those of a certain kind of tourist. This duality was inscribed in the rhetoric of Maritimicity from the very moment of its birth in the 1920s and 1930s. For this reason, it can never be enough to confront the pervasive simulacra of the post-industrial folk as more tourist "fakes." What is especially tricky about tourism, as it rethinks and reimagines Maritime history, is that its reading of the region correlates perfectly with the precolonial beginnings of homogenous romantic regionalism, and in this correlation lies the secret of its cultural pervasiveness. This correlation was the product of history: both versions of the politico-cultural past were born in the region's crisis of the 1920s, both were key to a new international emphasis on the 'primitive' and the 'natural,' and both required the efforts of urban middle-class people, many of whom in fact worked on both sides of this cultural street.

I will try to explore the peculiar dialectics of tourism in Nova Scotia by tracing the genealogy of that famous form within the myth of Maritimicity, Peggy's Cove, and I shall suggest parallels between this story, that of the Bluenose, and of other recent appropriations of the myth of the Golden Age, which, since the present 1920s, has been the dominant idiom of provincial tourism.

Peggy's Cove: The Invention of Fishing Village

Peggy's Cove is the most unequivocal example of a form invented by modern tourism. That it is now the most famous landscape in the province would have shocked Nova Scotians in the nineteenth century, who did not consider Peggy's Cove beautiful but most fisherpeople picturesque. More natural beauty, which (anyway, is always socially and historically constructed), or the behaviourist theories that attempt to explore the origins of aesthetic satisfaction in our animal inheritance, or even psycho-analytical theories, cannot meet the challenge of this particular landscape which, over the course of a short twenty years, went from being ugly and sterile to being sublime and inspiring. Any explanation must therefore be based, not on the facts of the Cove's existence, but rather on the Cove's nature. To investigate the moment of its invention will give us valuable clues to the systemic cultural changes which made it possible.

There can be no doubt, the gene of the nineteenth-century tourist was not drawn to a place like Peggy's. The famous Baudelaire guide made no mention of Peggy's Cove in 1867, and neither did locally produced guides.2 This neglect did not arise from the fact that Peggy's Cove had not yet been "discovered," for it lay within easy striking distance of fashionable coastal resorts. It is true, rather, because of the dominant idiom of nineteenth and early-twentieth-century tourism. Within the dominant discourse of moral and social improvement, those landscapes were esteemed that most closely resembled the southern English countryside—fortile and gently rolling hills, hints of historical romance, comfortable towns, and so on. It followed that the most popular destination of tourists, and the first area within the region to succumb to a precocious experiment in "tourism," was the Annapolis Valley, which was thought not only to look somewhat Italian, but to be imbued with historical romance as the setting of Longfellow's Evangeline. Within this same horizon, however, the north-wooded South Shore was by common consensus constituted as the bleak, sterile, even monstrous and repulsive negation of beauty.2 Even in locally produced writings, the rocky shoreline is seen as the province's unattractive, iron frame, which visitors and intending immigrants should not mistakenly assume is typical of the beautiful and abundant interior.1 The travel books of the period 1890-1914 present what is to us an odd assortment of attractions—coal mines, the homes of wealthy individuals, immaculate public parks, the wondrous lodges of Yarmouth—which make sense only within a way of seeing that esteemed civilization and the rural "bourgeois" sense above other attractions.

Then, in the 1920s, everything changed, in the social equivalent of a "paradigm shift." The photographers Wallace MacAskill produced the first widely circulated image of Peggy's Cove in his Quiet Coast (1921) and the Cove became a major theme in his renowned work.2 Kenneth Leslie and other poets made the Cove a symbol of the treasures of nature and the admirable hardness of the fisherfolk, while a small army of amateurs and professional painters (notably Stanley Boyle and his associate and student) depicted Peggy's Cove (or coves like it) in countless paintings. The Cove first achieved prominence in provincial tourism literature in 1927, and by 1935 had closely achieved star status as the province's most renowned beauty spot. In the 1940s the writers J.F.B. Livesey and Dorothy Duncan brought the celebration of Peggy's Cove to an ecstatic climax in travel writings that had a national influence.
How should we try to explain these new evaluations and ways of seeing, whereby a vista once described as serene and ugly became the ultimate signifier of the province's natural beauty? First, Peggy's Cove was celebrated by local cultural producers as a sign of the distinctiveness, beauty, and worth—the difference—of the Maritime region, at a time of severe economic and social crisis. They selected that landscape and that culture which most closely conformed to their ideal of the regional essence. Secondly, Peggy's Cove was, somewhat later, taken up by commercially minded promoters, who emphasized those aspects of the province which were most in keeping with a new emphasis on "nature" and "the primitive" in international tourism, which in turn reflected a very marked sense of disillusionment with western civilization in the interwar period.

Although there were nineteenth-century anticipations of regionalism, Ernest Forbes is undoubtedly correct to date "the birth of the region" in the postwar period. It was only with the briefly rapid collapse of the Maritimes' industrial base in the 1920s that an earlier idiom of progress began gradually to recede. Then, slowly, beginning in the early 1920s and culminating in the 1940s, a quite different discourse—predicated on the idea that Maritimers were essentially rural, traditional, and conservative—took hold, and because the unquestioned common sense of those who thought about the region.

Progressive historicity, in Nova Scotia, as found, for example, in R.R. McLeod's comprehensive Maritimed, had been emphatically telological and future-oriented. History in this Victorian conception moved triumphantly through time towards its goals, which were, here as elsewhere, industrial, scientific, and moral. In contrast, the new mythical history of the 1920s and 1930s—found in F.W. Wallace's Wooden Ships and Iron Men and its numerous progeny—flowed backwards, by establishing a regional "essence" which was then postulated as "an immortality if not always ancient past.... In this chrono-logically and sometimes violently mellow perspective," writes Patrick Wright, on the analogous British case, it is not a "natural" people, the essential stuff of history remains identical through time—even though it is unfortunately all concentrated at an earlier point in the passage of time. Hence the passage of years becomes enigmatic, opening up an ever widening gulf between "us" in the present and what remains "our" rightful and necessary identity in an increasingly distant past."

The new historicisms of the 1920s and 1930s entailed commemorating the dying glow of a mythologically conceived past. Paradoxically, however, it did so by sliding past and present—by making the present into a kind of "past," which could be enjoyed and savoured with a fond melancholy pleasure. In empirically-oriented telological history, argues Wright, "historical development moves forward through qualitative change and transformation. Precisely because it takes place in a transformative process a distinction is established between past and present. The "historical past" is alienated from the present: it becomes other to the extent that it is transcended and therefore no longer with the present. This way of conceiving the relation between the past and present is founded on a properly historical consciousness (without which it would be impossible to conceive the past as in any way distinct from the present)." The mythical conception that came to prevail in the
Maritimes in the 1920s, is quite different: In the mythical conception, however, 'History' can be reversed and run backwards because it has identity rather than difference as its theme. What existed then can be retrieved and recognized now because it remains truly 'ours.' In this mode repetition is of the essence... There need accordingly be no essential discontinuity between past and present as long as the ceremonies are carried out and respected. As an essence that is embodied in such ceremonies the nation is immutable—either it finds its witness in the present or it is lost and betrayed. This essentialist treatment of Maritime identity is that of an organic and conservative society disposed to rash innovation and social experiment.

Given the pervasive power of this re-reading of history, across a wide cultural spectrum, it takes a real effort of will to remember that, no less than its progressive antecedent, was a highly selective context. After the First World War, fishermen, who became the "essential" Nova Scotians, were far outnumbered by industrial workers; only a small minority of Nova Scotians lived in isolated outports; the schooners of the Lunenburg fleet were typical weather of the Age of Sail (which had effectively lost its battle with steam in the 1880s) now of the province's main codfishing industry; and the Bransone, which became the ultimate symbol of the provincial essence, did so through an activity (winning men) which was at best a peripheral part of the traditional fishery. It would have been so appropriate to select as "essential" Nova Scotians the militant coal miners and to found the claim for regional difference on their distinctive traditions; but no so would not have been done with the empirically petit-bourgeois perspectives of most of the local cultural producers. The generation of these powerful symbols represented the choices and decisions of those in a position to impose these meanings upon the population at large: and this meant, essentially, Halifax cultural producers and externally based travel writers, working closely in tandem with each other. There is nothing unusual about a middle-class response to social crisis which, rather than launching a critique of the system, takes refuge from class conflict in a kind of integral nationalism, and this seems likely to be one significant key to the flowering of regionalism in the 1920s.

There were two connecting links between economic collapse and the invention of new traditions. One was the local intellectual response to the socio-economic, which took the form of a kind of defensive neo-nationalism. The other was tourism, which internationally began to emphasize the discovery of "natural," pre-industrial people, thus providing a niche for Nova Scotia.

The local cultural producers were, for the most part, members of the Halifax middle class, which provides us with perhaps the best answer to the question, "Why Peggy's Cove?" Peggy's Cove became Halifax's cultural touristism and playground, where painters and poets could savour peasant authenticity in a pleasing natural setting, without having to go a long way. What they sought, generally, were the "natural Maritimes," and for some, this search was tinged with a sentimental, romantic regionalism.

The multi-faceted, interwoven traditions of regional literature and art from 1920 to 1950—with Thomas Raddall and G.M. Adams writing forewords for MacAskill, with the artist Donald MacKay illustrating Raddall's history, with Andrew Merkell introducing so many friends to Peggy's Cove and producing a book on the Bransone with MacAskill, and so on—allow us to speak, rather tentatively, of a regionalist moment among Nova Scotia cultural producers, of a newly awakened passion for the maritime tradition and those coastal communities which seemed to embody it. Thus heralded in photography, poetry and art, Peggy's Cove drew thousands of tourists in the 1930s and 1940s, drawn by travel accounts which enthusiastically visualized the artists' and poets' pastoral vision. In many cases, local cultural producers were drawn directly into the sphere of promotion—in 1929, for instance, MacAskill's vision of Peggy's Cove was promoted in the Province's major promotional pamphlet, with the caption: "Visitors to Nova Scotia find new life in the sharp breath of the sea." Those in search of the "natural" were attracted to plain and humble folk: not, unsurprisingly, the industrial workers, for whom many middle-class tourists felt no particular fondness, but the pre-industrial lower classes—the peasant, the fisherman—specifically the poorer inhabitants of Europe's Mediterranean regions ("...for the people are as beautiful as the land!").

Nova Scotia's farmers and fishermen could be made to fit this peasant ideal admirably. Nova Scotia became an "old world land that civilization has not yet robbed of its charm," as one travel writer wrote in 1924, wrapping himself in a rather perfunctory contradiction in terms. "True, you will hear the roar of trains, you will see the scurrying of automobiles. But still the ox carts creep along the roads, the great patient beasts pooling in as a dream, and by their side go wheezy-belching old men who look with annoyance and disdain on the conveyances of modern life." (The process of "framing" seems to be going on here right before our eyes: oxen are centered and in focus, the automobiles and trains are blurry distinctions on the edges). It was an old world, pre-industrial society in which the visitor from the more developed world could savour the trusting innocence of the natives.

"Peggy's Cove is rapidly becoming the most famous and beloved spot on the Nova Scotian coast," Maylor reported in 1948, crediting much of this newfound fame to the work of MacAskill, the writings of J.F.B. Livesey, and the efforts of countless amateur artists. Communities that had been denounced as backward hampers by Victorian travellers and missionaries (and sometimes by twentieth-century social activists, who noted their high rate of tuberculosis and the appalling low prices for fish) were now re-constituted as refuges from the twentieth century. G.M. Adams, under contract as a writer by the provincial government, was lavish in his praise. A nest of rocky hills, near homes, hospitable fisher folk, and reviving natural beauty. There are no trees, very little earth in which to plant anything—but beautiful blue-grey rocks, tiny harbours with their fishing boats, nets and crates, tidy homes with their... flowers—and the sea. And here a peaceful, contented, happy folk. Simply and honest as the rocks that support their homes. Not a pessimist among them—"which would have been refreshing news indeed in such Depression years."

Within the new idiom, Peggy's Cove was constructed on the basis of its absence. "As everywhere to our ears. The natural life is all news today. These people have never been kept awake by trolleycars, newsoys, street cars, radio, gladiators. They do not make any dirty pictures. They never have telephones and ask us about the prices of a car or coffee? They never see a neighbour put out on the street. The very language of our times—blag-off calls, fade-outs, caterpillar suit, sex—all would be strange to them. Indeed to these dwellers on the bare natural rock, to which they even carry the soil for their flower-beds, our subway civilization must seem a herd underground." In Bluenose: A Portrait of Nova Scotia (1943), Dorothy Duncan was delighted to move to these defining aspects of South Shore life, the absence of serious politics or social questions, and of statesmen or intellec-
tuals, given their peasant stoicism, it was even better surprising that they had the imagination to turn to the sea in the first place. (The trick to such writing, as Raymond Williams has reminded us, is that the contrast between the city and the court, nature and workliness, depends upon the suppression of work in the countryside and the property relations through which this work is organized.) As for Peggy's Cove, Dun-
can found it to be a perfect example of what an absent use had been to like, though she lamented that its character had been largely lost with improved transportation and the coming of tourism. Other's treated in the "serene, good sense of her people" to keep Peggy's "pure and unspoiled from the world."

With the entry of the state into tourism planning (signalized by the formation of the Nova Scotia Tourism Bureau in 1923 and the Publicity Bureau in 1924, as well as a crash program of road-paving and the designation of various highways as specially designed tour-
ist trails), the pastoral idiom acquired the status of an official language. With the passing of the day, the state's supply of posters, pamphlets, and films. The province's example of the new idiom.
official language. Within the technological limitations of the day, the state’s activities were impressive: thousands of publications, photographic displays, and even films. The province’s new motto was a splendid example of the new idiom in work. Its first, mid-1920s

version was, “Nova Scotia, Canada’s Playground,” which rapidly metamorphosed by 1927 into “The Playground with a History.” Finally, the words achieved permanent in 1928, with “Canada’s Ocean Playground.” This motto crystallizes perfectly the social construction of the province within the new idiom: while nineteenth-century Nova Scotians had never stopped talking about industrial progress and their province’s buoyant future, every licence plate now proclaimed the province’s new tourism and bed-and-breakfast in the context of the country as a whole. We expect a dialogue with the past in the province that gave us “Je me souviens”, what do we expect from “Canada’s Ocean Playground”? Perhaps, just what the slogan says: this is a place where one can regress to the lost innocence of childhood, and which is defined, fundamentally, for others.

Total Tourism and the Proliferation of Simulacra

We have shown that Peggy’s Cove was constructed in the 1920s within a new pastoral idiom, by local cultural producers and by the public and private promoters of the tourism industry. The idiom has not changed decisively since then. Contemporary tourist literature from Nova Scotia still conveys the impression that the province is a tranquil, pre-industrial haven from the rigours of the twentieth century. However, what has changed decisively—since about 1960—in the scope and character of the state’s involvement. Until the 1960s, although the state was instrumental in building the infrastructure of tourism (roads, scenic hotels, visitors’ bureaus and so on) and in soliciting tourists, it generally stopped short of orchestrating the actual experience of tourists in the province. (There were some interesting exceptions, such as the invention of new sporting events.) This limited the extent to which the state undertook the responsibility for constructing an appropriate past, which was left in the less powerful hands of such private interests as the Dominion Atlantic Railroad. Once, however, this limitation was overcome, the path to “total tourism,” in which the state and capital collaborate in the active shaping of the tourists’ experience, lay open, and the pastoral idiom, far from reasserting in the face of indus-

After the First World War, fishermen, who became the “essential” Nova Scotians, were far outnumbered by industrial workers.

Toilets of the Sea, Wallace MacAskill, 1928
The state also set aside $160,000 to the CBC television "Coast of Dreams," and so less a pernicious televisual promotion special as a "tale about a disheartened sea captain who finds renewed meaning in his life through contact with the spirit of Nova Scotia." This is a gesture that people respond to those of this media saturation is evident: during the Parade of Sail, an estimated 300,000 people gathered on Halifax waterfront to watch the Tall Ships depart.

This cultural event was distinctively "post-modern" not only in its massive scale and dependence on the city, but because, focusing on vessels that often were literal stimulators of non-existing originals, it caused the actual history of seafaring in the nineteenth century to recede in memory. In the Parade of Sail, one heard no telling accounts of labour on the vessels or merchants' strategies: everything was wrapped in a lavish Disney glow, the war and combusting light of intemperate re-enactment. We found ourselves before a spectacle, which in Jim Overton's words, "a psychic escape, into an imagined world which does not exist and never existed."

"Myth," writes Barthes, "deprives the object of which it speaks of all history. All that is left for it is to do is to enjoy this beautiful object without wondering where it came from." 21

Nova Scotia was represented in this particular post-modern event by a simulacrum of the Bluenose, a vessel promoted by the Halifax Herald and whose victories in the 1920s and 1930s were accompanied by a fervent upswell of regionalist pride. The motives behind these races and the emotions aroused by the Bluenose were many and various. They included a pervasive belief that the design of fishing vessels could be scientifically tested in such races, a romantic sense of a need to preserve moments from the dying age of sail, and regional pride. The impulse to build a replica of the vessel came, appropriately enough, from Metro-Cabot-Mayer, which in the 1950s commissioned the Smith and Rhuland yard in Lunenburg to build a replica of the Bluenose for its forthcoming movie. The building of this simulacrum, Bluenose II, for a film studio prompted reflection on the possibility of similarly recreating the Bluenose. These were promptly taken up by a regional brewery, Labatt, which already sold a beer called "Simocron" and could see the promotional possibilities. The vessel was built in 1963.

Bluenose II is thus deeply rooted in the economic processes we have come to know very well in capitalist: its homelessness, its unacknowledged, the world of public relations. Here the notion of the "simulacrum" is a disturbingly literal one: Bluenose II is really the Bluenose (we are assured again and again, with diacritical insinuation), with only a few minor differences: the Bluenose actually did go to the Banks, it actually smelled of fish and salt, it actually did win races, and it met its end while prosaically doing business in the West Indies. Bluenose II has been fried from these fables to an actual history. It has been purified of the smell of fish and of the risks of racing: cut these from these impressions of realism, it can now become a purely aesthetic object, free to parade, as an infinitely beautiful and isolated work of art, before delighted crowds. Bluenose measured its achievements in the numbers of races won and catches caught, while Bluenose II counts her victories in the totals of favourable press releases and new tourist arrivals.

The full sense of this transition from populist romanticism in the 1920s to orchestrated Martintianity is conveyed by Silver Donald Cameron's "Schooner: Bluenose and Bluenose II" (1984), intended as an instant book for the Tall Ships' spectacle but, with a (surely intentionally) duplicitous back humour and squalor. Try as Cameron might to invoke the shore-themed clichés of wind-and-water romanticism, the story of Bluenose II is simply not the stuff of dreams and legend. When the Bluenose II sails from Nova Scotia to Atlantic City, Cameron hopefully essay the faithful "flirt of passage" rhetoric. The movie boy who had set sail from Nova Scotia such a short time before, he writes, now see more like men, they have a different bearing—indeed, Cameron sees evidence of this transition in the vivid display of a girly magazine in the cabin. The civil servants under sail keep remembering Cameron, and perhaps themselves, that they aren't really sailing an illusion—none postmodernists, they anxiously grope for some confirmation of their own reality. There was something hauntingly foreboding about this story in the 1970s, the Bluenose II sailed similarly on the high seas of hedonism, with local hacks using public money to pay staggering liquor bills and kept seamen crushing wildly around North America's ports. We want to laugh along with Cameron, but the bar, like so much myth, is ultimately far too rich: the political firings, the hard-drinking parties, finally a drunken Halifax party-goer dead in a sea of his own vomit.

And there are no heroic races to relieve this saga of unresolved aimlessness. Only such monuments as the world of post modern tourism can offer: "An estimated fifty thousand Americans visited the vessel and more than two thousand travel industry representatives were entertained aboard. Largest as a result of the trip, the number of U.S. tourists visiting Nova Scotia was up 18.5 percent over 1973 and the province won a Silver Award from the Public Relations Society of America."

An embalmed, cleansed past: on the Halifax waterfront, yet another shrine to Martintianity, its be-queathed face is everywhere. The redevelopment of the city's waterfront has allowed old, functional buildings to be saved, but only in the sense that they now convey a vague, stereotypical "pastness" of 1800s-ness, "while new buildings, such as the Sheraton Hotel, canamorandize plainly nineteenth-century styles all the better to highlight the brass-infested opulence within."

To walk through modern Halifax today is to confront a whole battery of aesthetic pastiches, a pastiche of pseudo-nineteenth century images and effects, which, for all their ostensible "history" than the waiting of miseducation. living history, our postmodern past as just one more at

Peggy's Cove's apparent fishing hamlet
(their ostensible "historians," testify to nothing other than the wanting of any effective sense of ourselves living history, our past modern capacity to bracket the past as just one more style. Nothing better captures the situation than the penetrating irony of the name of Halifax's "Historic Properties," which, in an immense panoply of images—stone warehouses, the Bluenose, and "historical" props (wagon wheels, iron anchors, period stocks in tourist playthings)—turn history into one vast, highly profitable property, where the claim to authenticity underwrites the barefaced universalism of standard-issue stores and boutiques. And in these shops, one may purchase handcrafts and standardized folk art, much of which appears to be locally-rooted and old while in fact representing the labour of poorly remunerated workers (some of them in the Third World) and forms of recent invention.

But we must return to Peggy's Cove, which through the years has become a painter and painter-simulacrum, a copy of a prosperous and tranquil fishing village which never in fact existed. Outwardly, Peggy's Cove has changed little since the 1940s. The road has been paved and straightened, the government has built parking facilities, and a large commercially operated restaurant has been strategically placed at the end of the road. Peggy's Cove faithfully produces both timeliness and history for the crowds: one may still go there and feel that one is touching an essence which has persisted, unchanged, since the beginning of the last century.

The modern state has made quite sure of this. Robert Stanfield's Conservative government established the Peggy's Cove Commission in 1962, to protect the charm of the community and that of the seventy-mile coastal stretch nearby. Under this legislation, the Minister of Municipal Affairs was given the power to purchase, expropriate, or otherwise acquire land in the area, and a Peggy's Cove Commission made up of local and provincial officials and four additional members from the community was given broad planning rights, including that of designating the purposes for which buildings may or may not be used, occupied, erected, constructed, altered, reconstructed, or repaired. It was also to control "the architectural design, character or appearance of any or all buildings proposed to be erected within the area." To thanks to these regulations, an annual tourist inflow estimated at about 200,000 persons from May to October (of a community with 47 permanent residents) has not led to a flagrant commercialization of the site. An outward continuity of appearance masks a whole series of political and cultural changes which have, in essence, transformed a real fishing village into a self-consciously constructed simulacrum of the pre-industrial community. The rocks are sprayed with paint or acid to remove the evidence of pains-taking tourism, strict prohibitions have been placed on children selling fudge and the other outdoor activities one normally associates with vast congregations of tourists, the precise angle of roof line and style of windows in houses are closely regulated, and vigorous steps taken to stamp out deviations from the picturesque norm. Once the pastoral idyll was the harmless whimsy of a few tourists; now it carries the force of law.

It is in this fairly direct and obvious sense that Peggy's Cove's appearance as a "tranquil" and unspoiled fishing hamlet is patiently a constructed image.
But even without this tight web of regulation, it is scarcely representative of the fishing outputs of the province—there are no unpretentious houses, shacks, or poor people. There is, in short, an immense divide between what is being presented to us—this unsullied, quaint, pre-industrial Cove—and the actual, overtly political and economic processes which made this Cove possible, and an equally large gap between this beautiful image and its actual history.

“If they haven’t already done so, everyone who owns a Winnebago will eventually visit Peggy’s Cove,” writes one columnist sarcastically, “and (1) suffer a vertigo attack watching the heaving surf, (2) zich themselves in the finger trying to eat a lobster, and (3) buy a souvenir for Uncle Bill which they will then wear back to Halifax to blend in with the locals.

‘The place is a Las Vegas of Quant.’ We laugh: it is a good line, and there is something faintly ludicrous about a community of 43 souls being inundated with 75 war wagons... their occupants opening up on anything that was faintly picturesque with blaring Nikons... Yet it is a kind of twilight, postmodern laughter. Nova Scotia, with its simulated racing schooners that will not race, with its bonfires and festoons professionally trained to simulate smiles that do not mean what they seem to mean, with its simulated fishing bard that only the state can preserve in its post-industrial subclass, has become the homeland of the surreal. Once does not come here to escape the postmodern sense of animality, but to feel its sharp, cutting edge, not to recover the healthy folk past before capitalism but to glimpse what will happen everywhere once all images are commodities, and all signs fully motivated.

But why should the state stop at just one, relatively removed, simulacrum of a fishing community? Why not go further and invent a community from scratch? To get a sense of how entrenched Marinism has become as an idiom, consider the leading question that will dominate provincial tourist circles in 1988: the proposal that the government invest an estimated $13 million in a re-creation of a fishing village at Upper Clements, near Annapolis Royal. The core of this theme park—which may also contain an amphitheatre,

an imitation grill mill, a “sophisticated” miniature golf course in the shape of Nova Scotia, a discarn roller coaster, and a maze—will be an idealized reconstruction of a fishing village. This will lend an element of history to its “authenticity” as a site which tourist planners hope will serve as a “honeypot” for Americans and others who may wish to visit the Annapolis Valley.

Does this concept make sense, given that the demographic base of our tourism industry is based on the wealthy, comfortable citizens of Canada and northeastern United States? Will the jobs be provided and well-rewarded? Why invest this money in the Annapolis Valley (incidentally in the riding of a prominent cabinet minister) rather than paving roads in other areas? But pertinent and useful are they, such practical questions somehow seem to miss the core of our uneasiness. This uneasiness stems from the state’s candid commercialization of an idealized Golden Age which never existed. What makes us uneasy is that the state, acting to further the interests of the tourism industry, has taken upon itself the task of interpreting history. As in Peggy’s Cove, an idiosyncratically historical myth will be given (as Barthes would say) the full guarantee of nature, a material and hence inevitable embodiment.

Human emancipation cannot even be imagined without a supposedly honest interrogation of, and a serious dialogue with, the past. What becomes of the future when the past is colonized by capital and by the capitalist state, and the possibility of this serious dialogue removed?

One-third of the houses of Peggy’s Cove are not inhabited on a year-round basis, and the number of residents who make their living off the tourist trade now exceeds those who go fishing. “Preservationists” are won over. Even unserviced houses in Peggy’s Cove, only 37 cents by Halifax standards, have commanded prices of up to $79,000, somewhat beyond the reach of the average fishermen on unemployment insurance. “If these wharfies go down and with just a few fishermen,” worried one resident, “I don’t think it’s going to be Peggy’s Cove. It’s just going to be a place to go stretch your legs and get back in your car again.” The foresight that seems to haunt Peggy’s Cove today is that of becoming an “archetypal” fishing village with no fishermen, a monument to rigid individualism propped up by state subsidies, a husk of rural tranquility owned by Americans and urban Nova Scotians and overrun with tourists. In an article in the province’s “heritage” handout, Kiddare Dobbs, with a rigorous adherence to the essentialism that is tourism’s unspoken philosophy, proclaims: “Nova Scotia is a province that becomes more itself in every decade.” He may, unfortunately, be right. Beseigned with simulacra, invented traditions, deftly manipulated mythologies, and pseudo-events, Nova Scotians may indeed become more and more like their “true” folk essences every decade, the ultimate living “simulacrum,” bereft of their collective memories, their actual traditions, and their future.

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Notes

3 Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” New Left Review, Number 146 (July-August 1984), p. 66.
4 Jay Appleton would explain the aesthetic pleasure offered by Peggy’s Cove in terms of prospect-ridge theory, which argues that the capacity of an environment to ensure the ability to see without being seen is an immediate source of aesthetic satisfaction. (See The Experience of Landscape (London, 1975), p.73. Fromidable insights could also be brought to bear on the enduring appeal of the cove flanked by the lighthouse tower. Nocturnal approach seems promising, however, when it comes to explaining a landscape which was so dramatically re-evaluated in the course of its history.
6 Hugh Murray, An Historical and Descriptive Account of British America (Edinburgh, 1839, Vol.I, 154; 190; Andrew Learmonth Spalding, Rambles among the Blue-Roses: Or, Reminiscences of a Trip Through New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, During the Summer of 1862 (Montreal, 1863), 124; among many titles that could be cited to substantiate this point.
7 See, for example, Herbert Crockett, Nova Scotia: Its Climate, Resources and Advantages. Being a General Description of the Province, for the Information of intending Emigrants (Halifax, 1872), p.5.
8 For a collection of MacEachkil’s exhuberant photographs, see MacEachkil’s (Halifax, 1963), although unfortunately this book does not have much in the way of an interpretation.
9 J.F.B. Lineau, Peggy’s Cove (Toronto, 1944);
12 Wright, On Living in an Old Country, pp.177-178.
16 "Peggy’s Cove," Magfair (May, 1940), p.84.
18 Maurice Longstreet, To Nova Scotia, pp.15-16.
19 Duncan, Bluenose, p.140.
21 Duncan, Bluenose, 150.
22 Magfair, May 1948, pp.84-85.
27 Butter, Mythologues, p.151.
28 Cameron, Schooner: Bluenose and Bluenose II (Toronto 1984), pp.89-90.
31 It should also be noted that, even given it’s immense popularity as a tourist site, no attempt has been made to present to visitors any real information about the site itself, or to commemorate those who lived and died in the Atlantic fishery. In contrast, at Escuminac, New Brunswick, the death of 35 Northumberland Strait fishermen has been commemorated in a sculpture by Claude Bourdel. There is one stone effigy, by William DeMarch, at Peggy’s Cove, which celebrates, however, allegorical fishermen, rather than commemorating an actual event.
33 These questions have been asked by the Halifax Daily News, in an editorial: "Fake fishing village a bizarre concept." 23 January 1984.
35 Kilian, Debts, Nova Scotia: The Living Heritage (Halifax, Department of Tourism, 1987).