

# Gone to the Mainland and Back Home Again: A Critical Approach to Region, Politics, and Identity in Contemporary Newfoundland Song

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# Gone to the Mainland and Back Home Again: A Critical Approach to Region, Politics, and Identity in Contemporary Newfoundland Song

CORY W. THORNE

A VARIETY OF ISSUES that foreground life in Newfoundland today, and life in a variety of forms in immigrant and small-scale communities worldwide, can be learned through the study of contemporary Newfoundland song. Contemporary Newfoundland song embodies the struggle between localization and globalization, in its texts, musical style, and functionality. Through the influences of migration and diaspora, it becomes a tool for understanding the worldview of the Newfoundland community as a whole. As a tradition-based genre which borrows from American-style country and western and popular music, it becomes an example of the lived complexities of musical categorization.

Contemporary Newfoundland song is a rich text that demonstrates the limitations of essentialized approaches to region and genre. While often nostalgic in nature, and thus sometimes critiqued as counterproductive to the liberation of cultural identity (the “goofy Newfie” stereotype), it gives a vernacular description of the development and problematization of region, politics, and identity. It helps us to better ask the questions: What is Newfoundland identity? What is Newfoundland music? What are the geographic and cultural boundaries of Newfoundland space? While reconstructing — and sometimes limiting — our knowledge of the past, Newfoundland song likewise directs our future.

My approach to these questions is largely based in ethnographic research and the study of critical regionalism — the analysis of region as a series of overlapping and interconnected spaces (social, cultural, and ecological) that must be kept in bal-

ance to maintain sustainability. Critical regionalism is a study of globalization, but with an emphasis on the role of the local in relation to the larger-than-local (Herr 2). My interest in this approach grows out of an interest in the relation between folklore and ecology (How is Newfoundland folklore influenced by the North Atlantic cod moratorium? How can traditional knowledge be used to build more ecologically sustainable regions?), an interest in the connection between folklore and community (How can we use folklore to build stronger communities, especially in non-traditional spaces such as the Newfoundland suburban enclaves of southern Ontario?), and an interest in how we can use folklore to combat forms of essentialized identity (How do we better teach ourselves and others about the realities of Newfoundland identity and its economic and cultural contributions to Canada using folklore data?).

## IDENTIFYING NEWFOUNDLAND SPACE: MY PLACE IN THE DIASPORA

Following in the wake of many Newfoundlanders, I left the island in 1999.<sup>1</sup> During my first few years away, spent mostly in Utah, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, I made the typical observation: most Americans were/are ignorant about Canadian geography, politics, and culture. More surprisingly, however, was discovering how many Americans knew Newfoundlanders living away, had relatives who had been stationed in Newfoundland during the war, or, at the very least, had a distant friend or relative with a connection to the island. Essentially, whenever someone heard that I was from Newfoundland, they had to tell me about their connections to the island, introduce me to someone else connected to the island, or tell me a “Newfie” joke. I quickly learned that one could find Newfoundlanders in almost every town and city in North America, and, if you looked a little deeper, everywhere in the world. I met fellow Newfoundlanders in Florida, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. I was told about them in California, Massachusetts, and Texas, and on the Canadian side of the border in Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario. These encounters led me to an interest in the diaspora, and the cross-border comparison of two particularly active expatriate Newfoundland communities: Cambridge (Ontario), and Virginia Beach (Virginia).

Located approximately 100 kilometres west of Toronto on highway 401, Cambridge has been an important destination for Newfoundlanders since the late 1950s. Migration ties with this area began in the 1940s when knitting mills recruited Newfoundlanders as part of the war effort. When the huge iron ore mines of Bell Island, Conception Bay, began to scale back (1958), and eventually closed (1966), these social ties became pathways for thousands of newly unemployed and underemployed Newfoundlanders. Cambridge was turning into a booming industrial centre, and Newfoundland was one of its largest sources of labour. With an esti-

mated population of 15,000-20,000 Newfoundlanders (20 percent of Cambridge's current population), the town eventually earned the nickname "Little Belle Isle," a reference to Bell Island (Weir 33).

Between 2002 and 2005 I made several trips to Cambridge to interview residents, to attend Newfoundland events, and to map out Newfoundland spaces. I attended the Canada Day Newfoundland Reunion at the Cambridge Newfoundland Club in 2002 and 2003 (see Figure 1), as well as Christmas and New Year's parties at the club in 2003 and 2004. During the fall of 2003 I lived in Cambridge and attended various other events as I tried to understand the historical and contemporary role of Newfoundlanders in the region. While doing this study, I likewise became interested in the role of suburban design in the construction of community in Cambridge. Cambridge is a post-suburban community (a distant suburb of Toronto; a suburb without a city where most residents commute daily between a variety of suburban spaces without entering into a city). The role of suburbia and post-suburban identity became a core theme of my study of contemporary Newfoundland community space in Ontario.

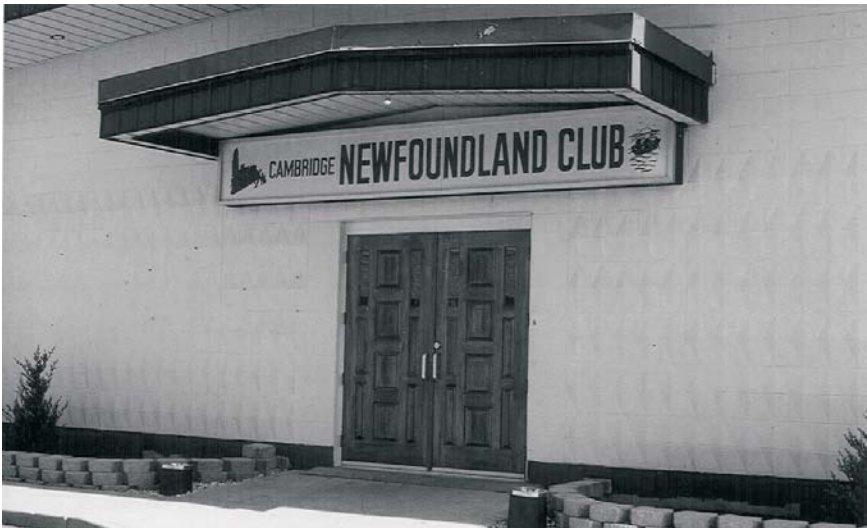


Figure 1. Cambridge Newfoundland Club, Cambridge, July 2002 (photo by Cory W. Thorne).

During the same period, I travelled to and from Virginia Beach, Virginia, as I became interested in another expatriate Newfoundland community, that of military brides — Newfoundland women who had married US servicemen during and after World War II, and subsequently settled near major bases in the US. Often described as a resort town surrounded by military bases, Virginia Beach guards the mouth of

the Chesapeake Bay, approximately 330 kilometres downriver from Washington, DC. Starting in the 1950s, the area faced rapid growth and meticulous planning as a suburb of Norfolk. The Norfolk Naval Base is the largest naval base in the world. Through the far too common scenario of abandoned industries, race and class divisions, lost tax base, and inadequate public schools, Norfolk lost its appeal among middle- and upper-middle-class families during the suburbanization of America. Virginia Beach became the city of choice for these military families and for Newfoundland military brides.<sup>2</sup>

My connection to Virginia Beach began in the spring of 2001 when I travelled from Philadelphia to Florida and back interviewing Newfoundlanders I had met through *Downhomer Magazine's* on-line database of expatriate Newfoundlanders.<sup>3</sup> While interviewing these Newfoundlanders in northern Virginia and in Florida, I was given several contacts in Virginia Beach. A region with a high concentration of military and retired families, Virginia Beach has become home to a number of Newfoundland military brides. From lists supplied by these women, plus material that I collected over the next few years, I soon had a list of nearly 200 Newfoundlanders in Virginia, most of whom live in Virginia Beach itself, largely because of its proximity to the Norfolk Naval Base. These women had met their American husbands at the Argentia naval base in Newfoundland. I also met a smaller group of women in Spotsylvania/Fredricksberg, near the Quantico Marine base (50 kilometres south of Washington, 280 kilometres north of Virginia Beach). Although my list consisted mainly of Newfoundland women who married American servicemen, exceptions include men in the Canadian Forces stationed in Virginia Beach, and, in one case, a male sibling who was sent to live with his sister (a military bride) when he was young. Most of the women on the list married their husbands during and shortly after World War II; however, many of them likewise came into this community much later. The youngest Newfoundland that I met in Virginia had married in Argentia in 1997. Her husband was responsible for handing over the keys to Canadian authorities when the base finally closed.

I attended various Newfoundland events in central and southern Virginia between 2001 and 2006, the largest of which was the annual Newfoundland St. Patrick's party held in Virginia Beach (see Figure 2). The Newfoundland military brides also organize a garden party/picnic each summer in central Virginia, and many of them hold weekly card games throughout the year. As I interviewed these women, and occasionally their husbands, I began to see Newfoundland identity and performance as an integral tool for developing a localized sense of place. In both Ontario and Virginia, Newfoundland traditions were/are embraced and manipulated in order to build stronger communities. The performance of Newfoundland identity becomes a tool for transgressing the weakness of community inherent in suburban design.



Figure 2. Newfoundland-born celebrants at the Newfoundland-St. Patrick's Day Party, Virginia Beach, March 2006 (photo by Cory W. Thorne).

### THE NEWFOUNDLAND CANON AND KITSCH

The study of contemporary Newfoundland song as a text in identity politics and regional categorization has been examined by a number of scholars, including Neil Rosenberg and Peter Narváez. Rosenberg defines the role of Newfoundland's musical canon: due to a combination of recording and collection practices starting in the 1940s, the political tension of Newfoundland's confederation with Canada in 1949, and the publication of popular song collections and recordings during this time frame, Newfoundland became identified by Canadians through a limited repertoire of lyric songs (1994). Popularly known as "ditties," these are short humorous songs that were previously seen as minor examples in the extensive repertoire of outport Newfoundlanders. These songs, which were allegedly popularized in part for their sing-ability, helped promote negative stereotypes of Newfoundlanders. This repertoire quickly became seen, internally and externally, as representative of a homogenous Newfoundland identity, bound by island outport identity, and subsequently used as a tool in the development and maintenance of the "goofy Newfie" stereotype. According to Rosenberg,

These could not have helped but contribute to growth of the Canadian stereotype of Newfoundlanders as simple, humorous folk, an unanticipated spin-off from the image of the idealized outport Newfoundlander promulgated in the 1940s that would emerge full-blown in the 1960s in the form of "Newfie" jokes. (1994, 64)

These songs contributed to the form of essentialized (or objectified) identity and region that, according to many Newfoundlanders, continues to hinder the position of Newfoundland within Canada today.

Ironically, many of the lyric songs at the centre of this canon have continued as core examples of formal definitions of Newfoundland identity: they represent the Newfoundland sold to tourists, school children, and the media. These songs, however, do not give accurate voice to the experiences of today's generation, such as the issue of seasonal/cyclical migration to mainland Canada, the effects of globalization and ecological mismanagement in Newfoundland outports, and the increasing definition of Newfoundland identity as something other than traditional, rural, and fisheries dominated. Alternatively, stylistic changes in Newfoundland vernacular and popular music demonstrate an intimate connection to more national and globalized forms of popular music. Newfoundland music is not just jig and reels, as we might be led to believe by our culture brokers.

Rosenberg uses Arthur Scammell's "The Squid Jiggin Ground" as one example of the canon. Written in 1928, but relatively obscure until the 1940s, this song was played on the Canadian Parliament Buildings' Peace Tower carillon in 1949 to mark the union between Canada and Newfoundland (Rosenberg 1994, 55). As such, it was presented to Canadians as a symbol of Newfoundland from the very start of confederation. "The Squid Jiggin Ground" is a comical song describing a group of men jigging for squid. While the men are shown to have a successful catch, they are presented as fun-loving imbeciles, who are often fooled by the slimy ink-filled invertebrates during their annual visit to Newfoundland waters:

Says Bobby, "The squids are on top of the water.  
I just got my jiggers 'bout one fathom down."  
But a squid in the boat squirted right down his throat,  
And he's swearing like mad on the squid jiggin' ground.

The Newfoundland fisherman, who is portrayed as having greater luck than skill, is successful at the catch in a scene that rivals a Rabelaisian carnival:

There's poor Uncle Bobby, his whiskers are spattered,  
With spots of the squid juice that's flying around.  
One poor little boy got it right in the eye,  
And they don't give a darn on the squid jiggin' ground.

Scammell presents a vivid and memorable image of the squid jigging ground. The problem, however, is in the fact that this is the only form of representation of Newfoundland identity that has been embraced and distributed by the media to Canadians outside of Newfoundland.



This “canon” to which “The Squid Jiggin Ground” belongs contains a multitude of ditties such as “I’se the B’y,” “Kelligrews Soiree,” and “Jack was Every Inch a Sailor” — many of which were first published in the Gerald S. Doyle songbooks. The canon also contains a variety of non-musical examples. “Newfie” jokes and joke books and their material culture equivalents, such as “Newfie” square rolling pins and clothespin clothes dryers, silk-screened T-shirts, and stereotypical foods, all come together to form the canon (see Figures 3-5). This concept of canon, however, is further complicated by Rosenberg:

Folkloristic canons may be transmitted in part by print, but they also have aural, visual, and tactile dimensions.... the question of who constructs the canon is particularly crucial when speaking of canon in the folkloristic milieu. While the literary canon is based on the total oeuvre of a writer or a group of writers, the folkloristic canon implies a collectivity. (2002, 204)

The canon is a collection of symbols of stereotypical Newfoundland identity. Ironically, however, the images selected for the canon are as much created and promoted by Newfoundlanders as they are by non-Newfoundlanders. With an emphasis on nostalgia — the mythology of a utopian past — the canon becomes a self-produced collection that promotes a simplified view of identity. In many ways, it is similar to kitsch.

Kitsch is often described as imitative, stereotypical, crude, repetitive, fake, and tacky. For many, it evokes an image of nostalgia, and thus is given a negative valuation for its unashamed conservatism. License plate holders and clocks shaped like the island of Newfoundland (Figure 3), “Newfie” jokes printed on T-shirts (Figure 4), and displays of traditional foodways (Figure 5) are frequently embraced within Newfoundland communities to evoke feelings of pride and dedication through nostalgia and uncritical acceptance. These items are kitsch because of the uncritical nature of the displays, the use of repetition, and the conservative approach to Newfoundland identity/image as a whole. As a “proud Newfoundlander,” you are expected, in many circles, to accept these items as core symbols of Newfoundland pride without questioning other potential messages.

The artificiality of these symbols might be understood better when we look closer at the images. All of the items in Figure 3 are produced by Danny Claremichael, a man whose family is from Israel and India. He began making Newfoundland memorabilia at the request of Newfoundlanders visiting his silk-screening store in Toronto. Several decades later, he has yet to visit the island. The Purity products in Figure 5 have been accepted as the ultimate symbol of Newfoundland foodways within the diaspora. The display case, however, is from the Purity Flour Mills company of Toronto. While Purity products are not always necessary for the performance of Newfoundland foodways, the association with a non-affiliated company from Ontario is a matter of convenience that might be seen as a further





Figure 3. Newfoundland license plate holders, wall clocks, and plaques on display at Claremichael's Maritime and General Shoppe, 1258 The Queensway, Toronto, November 2002 (photo by Cory W. Thorne).



Figure 4. Newfoundland T-Shirts on display at Newfoundland Necessities, 746 Markham Road, Scarborough, November 2002 (photo by Cory W. Thorne).

symbiotic weakening. As argued by Gerald Pocius in his comparison of vernacular architecture and professional wrestling in Newfoundland, authenticity is not important in the lived realities of everyday life. As with the traditional songs in the canon, these material examples of kitsch are supposed to evoke a sense of nostalgia, and subsequently support the development of communal identity.

A more critical approach to the term *kitsch* is suggested by Sam Binkley when he argues that it is a category constructed around three repetitive features:

First, there is kitsch's emulation of other cultural products, which often copies the signs of class status, through kitsch can also be found to emulate the rustic qualities of vanishing folk traditions or the exotic products of non-Western cultures.

Second, as a decorative feature of the household of the office, kitsch achieves an aestheticization of the everyday, and the repetitive, imitative habits this implies. Kitsch taste is expressed in many home-bound objects of mundane pleasure that provide, through a contrived modesty, a comfort that deflects any significance that might disturb the tranquility of the patterns and habits, the repetitive schemes themselves that constitute the fabric of daily life.

Third, and most importantly, there is kitsch's love for all things sentimental, expressing a joy in feeling itself, whether that feeling is elation, sorrow, or fondness. This feeling for feeling lies at the root of kitsch's imitative scheme. (142)



Figure 5. Purity Products on display in Downeast Crafts, 508 Bathurst Street, Toronto, October 2002 (photo by Cory W. Thorne).

The category of kitsch should not be seen as a negative in and of itself. Through its embracement of the everyday, privileging of tradition, and focus on localized cultural construction, kitsch supports the development of a strong sense of place and community. It helps establish the commons. Kitsch is an example of how an individual or community defines itself, rather than how it is defined from the outside. Because of this rejection of outside control and its embracement of nostalgia, however, kitsch is often devalued by outsiders and used to justify limitations on local power. The Newfoundland canon/kitsch becomes an excuse to better justify negative stereotypes of Newfoundland, and to justify the denial of localized control of resources.

Within globalization, nostalgia/kitsch is to be feared and rejected, not only because of its embracement of a utopian past, but also because of its rejection of globalization as a utopian future.<sup>4</sup> The Newfoundland canon/kitsch, however, is a reassertion of the local into the global. It is used to guide community within a globalized context, and as such approaches the “glocalization” espoused by Arjun Appadurai (2000)<sup>5</sup> and the philosophy of critical regionalist scholars such as Cheryl Herr (1996), Herbert Reid and Betsy Taylor (2002), and Mary Hufford (2002, 2003).

To summarize, the Newfoundland canon/kitsch is that representation of Newfoundland culture intended to evoke nostalgia for the mythical utopian folk culture of Newfoundland’s outports. This nostalgia is not intended to be questioned or examined beyond recognition of its existence. It is designed to create an image that will allow us to continue a dream for a world that never did, and never will, exist, while avoiding critique of the true issues that we face in our daily lives. This nostalgia, and its various representations through canon and kitsch, is used to support a sense of shared identity, and thus the formation of communal spaces and stronger communities. When removed from the context of Newfoundland space, however, and stripped of its complexities, the canon/kitsch becomes a hegemonic tool to be used against Newfoundland identity and power.

While typically presented as simple and fun-loving, images from the canon/kitsch are used by outsiders to maintain a sense of difference, and thus a justification for imbalance. When overly simplified, as often the case in media snippets, it is used to support the essentialization of Newfoundland identity. For example, the *Globe and Mail*, Canada’s “national” newspaper, has been known to draw on essentialized identity and overly simplified views of identity in its presentation of various localized cultures within Canada.<sup>6</sup> On 6 January 2005, *Globe and Mail* columnist Margaret Wente drove this home:<sup>7</sup>

Newfoundland’s population has dwindled to something less than that of Scarborough, Ont. Because of stupendous political malfeasance, it is at least \$11-billion in debt. But it still has seven federal seats. And so we send more money so that people can stay in the scenic villages where they were born, even though the fish are gone and there’s no more work and never will be, unless they can steal some telemarketing from Bangalore. Rural Newfoundland (along with our great land north of 60) is probably the most vast and scenic welfare ghetto in the world.

In her critique of Newfoundland's demands for greater retention of profits from its oilfields, Wenté argued that Newfoundland was a province of beggars who were constantly demanding more from their richer cousin, Ontario. From the perspective of Newfoundlanders, this fight was a chance for Newfoundland to use its natural resources for local development instead of sending all profits to Ontario and forcing Newfoundland into the continued status of an underdeveloped and unsustainable province. It was the image of a colony demanding the right to self-sustainability instead of being continuously raped of its resources in order to support the wealth of the more powerful colonizer. As in the presentation of canon/kitsch, Newfoundland is reduced to a couple of stock images and locality is attacked in the belief that it hinders more national/global aspirations.

The reaction to Wenté's column among Newfoundlanders was fairly predictable. First of all was the feeling that Wenté stood as proof that many mainland Canadians fail to recognize the history of Newfoundland's contributions to Canada — the fact that Ontario's economy is largely built on the resources harvested from places like Newfoundland and that federal equalization payments to Newfoundland are set up to help resolve this situation and give better balance and sustainability to the Canadian economy as a whole. More distressing, however, was Wenté's selection of words and the fact that Newfoundland was yet again given a false and derogatory description in the Canadian national media. The phrase "vast and scenic welfare ghetto" becomes a symbol of how Wenté, and other mainland Canadians, have yet to abandon notions of essentialized identity of Newfoundland; they propagate stereotypes of Newfoundland and use these stereotypes to argue against support for Newfoundland's development. The history of the stereotypes that Wenté draws on is intimately connected to the history of the Newfoundland musical canon and kitsch.

*Toronto Sun* columnist Bill Lankhof further supports such images. On 14 December 2005, he responded to the success of Newfoundland curler Brad Gushue (Gushue and his team later won a gold medal at the Olympics):

#### The Last Word

It's the biggest thing to happen in The Land Cod Forgot since the invention of the pogy cheque — Newfoundland's native son Brad Gushue will represent Canada in curling at the 2006 Olympics in Turin. The last time Newfoundland made such a big international splash the Titanic tried deep-sea diving. For Newfoundland, and for a sport looking for new blood, Gushue's victory is opportune because:

1. The local sport of baby-seal whacking is no longer coming across on TV as a great spectator sport. Most Canadians don't mind the rough play, noting it's part of the game, but it's a hard-sell on American networks.
2. Newfies finally have someone named Skip to look up to again whose livelihood doesn't depend on a cod fish to be born later.
3. Newfoundland has Newfie Screech, ice, rocks. Curling? Booze, ice and rocks.

Brad Gushue, *The Natural*. Coming soon to a National Film Board video.

4. Gushue can dance. No Sharpies required. His victory jig looked like Glenn Healy had snuck up and given him a blast of the bagpipes from behind. Gushue reacted like a man making himself comfortable on a nest of yellow jackets.

5. Locals now have something to chew the fat over — other than that yucky whale blubber they've been gnawing on for those CBC retrospectives the past 50 years.

“Newfie” stereotypes and “Newfie” jokes are clearly alive in the Canadian media, no matter how strongly we profess their disappearance. The mere fact that newspaper editors and columnists continue the use of the term “Newfie” alongside such stereotypical references to Screech, inaccurate portrayals of the seal hunt, and ridiculous references to foodways can be seen as a lack of understanding of Newfoundland diversity, a refusal to recognize the economic and social strengths of the island, and an inability to conceive of Newfoundlanders as successful contributors to Canadian identity and economics. While some will steadfastly argue that this is merely a form of humour, I remind them that this “humour” is not a mindless discourse. It continues to shape the attitudes of Canadians as a whole, and subsequently encourages Canadians to hold on to a simplified conservative understanding of identity and history.

In arguing that examples in the Newfoundland canon are examples of kitsch, we should note Peter Narváez's study of St. John's musician Ron Hynes, and his then relatively new composition (1976), “Sonny's Dream.” Narváez warns of the complexity of evaluating a song's impact and the idea that “popularity” in music is not, to the dismay of the media industry, merely about sales and consumption:

One lingering and firmly rooted distinction [between folksong and popular song].... is the idea that the “popularity” of song is inextricably linked to capital, that is, commodification, market value, and consumption.... Real song popularity, however, cannot be simplistically quantified. (269)

Songs that speak to contemporary issues in Newfoundland and through the diaspora are not part of the canon/kitsch, yet they are often more “authentic” in presenting the story of Newfoundland identity in terms of everyday life. The question of what is important and influential in Newfoundland contemporary song is not, to break with Adorno's notions of the culture industry, the homogeneous mass culture imposed upon Newfoundland by outsiders. Just because the media promotes and falls victim to the perpetuation of these stereotypes doesn't mean that Newfoundlanders as a whole listen and obey. This is the “glocalization” portion of “globalization.”

With the assistance of local recording studios and distributors, Newfoundlanders have developed large repertoires of song that tell a story that is quite contrary to the one told in more “official” collections of Newfoundland song. We have created our own counter-hegemonic system that breaks with the traditional



canon, but which is largely ignored by non-Newfoundland (and much of Newfoundland's own) media and culture brokers. "Sonny's Dream" is a much more influential song in terms of local and regional identity than anything that belongs to the traditional canon, or to anything defined as popular according to marketplace statistics. The canon/kitsch serves an important function in community building, but the "authentic" tells us more of the lived reality. Again, it is not all about jigs and reels.

## CRITICAL REGIONALISM AND COMBATING KITSCH

The construction of essentialized identity is a commonly problematized symptom of regionally based scholarship and identity politics. Critical regionalist theory, with its emphasis on the relationships between various forms of region, has the ability to help reverse this situation. Critical regionalism is the study of the relation between local and non-local structures. As Cheryl Herr argues, it is the study of the relation between the local and the larger-than-local — local and global are not oppositional; regions overlap and connect in a variety of unanticipated ways. As cultural scholars, it is our job to give greater attention to these similarities, to the resultant interstitial spaces, and thus lay the groundwork for better public policy to support the protection of locality and communication. We need to problematize our approach to region in order to better understand how we, as communities, construct our spaces:

I contend that both popular theoretical protocols and the reigning area studies paradigm controlling many of our investigations will benefit from increased procedural attention to studying the region, to the implicit, constructed filiation of regions that underlies global marketing strategies, and to the several material ways in which linked regions in the new world economy have quietly, historically woven and maintained their own provisional interspaces. (Herr 1996, 2)

Critical regionalism was introduced into the humanities by cultural theorists and folklorists such as Herr, Taylor, Reid, and Hufford. It belongs first of all, however, to architectural theorist Kenneth Frampton, who defines this idea as "not so much a style as it is a critical category oriented towards certain common features" (327). His list of features is a reaction against the homogenized universal style of modernism. It is the quest for the creation of balance between tradition and progress, and localization and globalization, a quest for the best of both worlds.

Frampton summarizes critical regionalism through a set of seven features which we should ponder as both architectural elements and patterns for cultural development: 1) critical regionalism is a marginal practice critical of modernization,



yet not abandoning it; 2) it is a consciously bounded architecture — rather than emphasizing free-standing, it stresses relations to surroundings; 3) critical regionalism treats architecture as a tectonic fact; 4) it places emphasis on certain site-specific factors; 5) it is about the tactile rather than the mere visual, i.e., there is an acknowledgement of senses other than just sight; 6) critical regionalism is not the reinsertion of the vernacular but rather a creation of locality drawn from local and foreign sites; and 7) it is an escape from “the optimizing thrust of universal civilization” (327).

As an escape from “the optimizing thrust of universal civilization,” a theory that emphasizes site-specific factors along with tactile senses and the relation between vernacular and foreign design, critical regionalism can be seen as a theory of the role of folklore within contemporary society. For example, what forms of knowledge are embedded in traditional practices and communities and how can they be manipulated to strengthen contemporary society? To address this question, we turn to the junction of architectural and cultural aspects of this theory. Frampton’s primary goal with this seven-feature list is to develop a set of architectural traits that strengthen communities without abandoning globalization. This notion is best achieved through the development and protection of various forms of communal spaces, or commons.

In architecture, the commons is the space designed within a building, or within a city, which is intended to create communication and thus strengthen community. Originating with idea of communally held land, the commons was once that space shared by residents to the benefit of all residents (for example, communal pastureland used by all members of a town or region).<sup>8</sup> All members have equal access and responsibility for maintaining the space. Any member who overuses the space harms the community as a whole, and therefore is encouraged to respect his or her neighbours for the sake of him/herself and the community as a whole. In Newfoundland, we can use the example of the fishery to understand what happens when communal management breaks down. The greed of some individuals/nations/companies has destroyed an industry that could not be maintained or controlled by any individual/nation/company. This lack of cooperation — overfishing — has led to the destruction of this industry as a whole, and the destruction of all members of the fishing community/communities — including the destruction of the livelihood of those individuals who abused the commons in the first place. The lack of communal cooperation throughout the region leads to the destruction of each community within the region; a failure to maintain the commons means a failure to maintain the community.

The commons, however, extends far beyond the negotiation of shared resources. It is that negotiation of space that forces a community to come together as a stable and sustainable entity. Over time, the commons becomes that space within a community in which all members have the ability to participate, communicate, and contribute. This is a space where people of varying identities come together on a regular basis — without regard to their spiritual, economic, or genealogical

position within the community. Idealistically, the commons provides a space for all participants to discuss and debate community issues. It is an informal democratic space where ideas are not just voted on, but developed. In many communities, the commons is a central piazza, a coffee shop, pub, barbershop, and/or salon.<sup>9</sup>

Commons no longer exist in most Western cities. Within suburban settings, such as Cambridge and Virginia Beach (and almost all middle-/upper-middle-class neighbourhoods in North America), there is no planned social space where all members of the community are welcome. Shopping malls are the closest thing to commons within these cities, but they are economically oriented and as such discourage the participation of non-shoppers. While coffee shops and, in a few places, neighbourhood pubs still remain, these spaces are increasingly overtaken by international franchises and reorganized to ban individuals who do not meet the target audience (you can try to talk politics or social issues with strangers in Starbucks, but you had better buy a \$5.00 coffee first). For a commons to be successful, it must be locally (individually or communally) owned and operated, and it must be open to non-commercial interactions between people of all walks of life.

Through migration, resource mismanagement, and the privatization of space, the Newfoundland commons has been largely transformed from a set of physical spaces into a virtual entity (and as such is exclusionary and not really a commons at all). This is achieved through the use of folklore and, in particular, through music. The musical canon, for example, is a communal entity that supports a feeling of community (though one based in nostalgia/kitsch). The locally produced and controlled music industry (the “glocalization” of “globalization”), however, has evolved into a core contributor of the Newfoundland diasporic commons, and to the more localized commons of various Newfoundland enclaves, such as those found across suburban southern Ontario. This music is particularly strong because unlike traditional examples within the canon, it represents a melding of tradition and progress. It selectively draws on tradition and melds it with contemporary popular styles, most often country and western-influenced, but also some rock-inspired sounds. As a symbol of intersitial space (Newfoundland space outside the geographic boundaries of the province), it exhibits many of the characteristics of critical regionalism and of commons.

A relatively recent (1981), grassroots-produced song — Simani’s “Salt Water Cowboys,” written and performed by Bud Davidge and Sim Savory — tells a piece of the migration story. It is not a part of the traditional Newfoundland canon, yet it is a much more accurate portrayal of life as a Newfoundlander since Confederation with Canada:

Salt Water Cowboys  
Bud Davidge

A Newfie's a Newfie wherever he goes  
It don't seem to matter the cut of his clothes  
The gleam in his eyes and the way that he walks  
And the true Newfie tone in the way that he talks

So, by the Lord dyin', by the thunderin' gee  
How are you doin' you son-of-a-b?  
You can't fool your old man by dressin' like that  
You're still just a Newfie in a Calgary hat.

Now, over the years when things aren't the best  
A lot of our fellers head out for the west  
But everyone knows that they ain't gonna stay  
They'll always come back with those up-along ways

No one suspected we'd ever have oil  
The Newfies took off for Alberta a while  
They traded their rubbers and the sou'wester caps  
For rodeo boots and big Calgary hats

So, by the Lord dyin', by the thunderin' gee  
How are you doin' you son-of-a-b?  
You can't fool your old man by dressin' like that  
You're still just a Newfie in a Calgary hat.

Now, the saltwater cowboy is new you'll agree  
It seems we've created a new kind of breed  
With our boots and our hats and our talk about oil  
We even talk Newfie in a soft-Texas style

So, by the Lord dyin', by the thunderin' gee  
How are you doin' you son-of-a-b?  
You can't fool your old man by dressin' like that  
You're still just a Newfie in a Calgary hat.

[“Salt Water Cowboys” words and music by Bud Davidge; © 1981, SOCAN/CMRRA as recorded by SIMANI Bud Davidge and Sim Savory.]

A more recent song, “Andy’s Cowboy Boots” composed and recorded by George Ryan on his 2003 album *A Collection of Memories*, references the surge in migration between Bell Island, Newfoundland, and Cambridge, Ontario, in the mid-1960s (dur-

ing the closure of Bell Island's primary industry, the iron-ore mines). Ryan, who lives in southern Ontario, has used Newfoundland stores and businesses within the region to distribute this self-produced album. The song makes direct reference to core values that Newfoundlanders typically promote as markers of in-group identity in Ontario, in particular the value of a strong family, the characterization of Newfoundland men as dependable and hard-working, and the unselfish generosity of Newfoundlanders regardless of their limited time and income. Newfoundlanders in Ontario often cite these traits as part of the contemporary "Newfoundland stereotype."

Andy's Cowboy Boots  
George Ryan

I left home in '62 and said goodbye to friends,  
And my little nephew Andy, who always wore a grin.  
I told him I would miss him, he said "I'll miss you too."  
"Please don't forget to send me a pair of cowboy boots."

When I arrived in Ontario and got myself a job,  
I made a list for Christmas, mom thought it was a lot.  
I had worked all summer saving every dime I could.  
The first thing on my Christmas list was Andy's cowboy boots.

I always seemed to know when he'd grow into a man,  
He'd be the most reliable if you needed a hand.  
Andy's never let me down, he's always there for me,  
And when called upon he's also there for his family.

For a few days this past summer, I helped a friend of mine.  
He said "I wish you'd work for me if you get the time."  
I told Andy about the job and the work I had to do,  
And with a grin he handed me a brand new pair of boots.

I always seemed to know when he'd grow into a man,  
He'd be the most reliable if you needed a hand.  
Andy's never let me down, he's always there for me,  
And when called upon he's also there for his family.

I always seemed to know when he'd grow into a man,  
He'd be the most reliable if you needed a hand.  
Andy's never let me down, he's always there for me,  
And when called upon he's also there for his family.

And when called upon he's also there for his family.

Although these songs perpetuate certain nostalgic images of Newfoundland, they have much greater relevance to the lived experience of contemporary Newfoundlanders. Unlike examples from the canon/kitsch, the musical style of these two examples reflect on the flexibility and interaction between local and global styles (both are performed in Newfoundland country and western style). The texts of these songs describe the migration experience — an event that I would argue all outport Newfoundlanders have experienced either directly, or through a close friend or relative. Because of the lived realities of such descriptions, such self-produced songs allow a greater understanding of Newfoundland identity — an acknowledgement of the complexity of identity that is avoided by purveyors of the canon/kitsch.

In using the term diasporic commons, I am no longer referring to just a physical community space (of which there are many for Newfoundlanders in Ontario), but the factors that support the sense of Newfoundland community that expands beyond geographic boundaries. Some might likewise call this a virtual commons, and some aspects of this commons certainly are virtual (for example, Newfoundland internet chat rooms that connect Newfoundlanders from all over the world). As I found through my multi-sited ethnography, however, the concept of Newfoundland identity is somewhat homogenous across much of the diasporic community: being a Newfoundlander in Philadelphia (PA), Virginia Beach (VA), Clearwater (FL), or Cambridge (ON) means similar performances — similar searches for community through the formation of a commons centred on Newfoundland traditions. The tools available to each community, however, differ.

The communities that I worked with in the United States differed from those in Canada in one major way: musical performance south of the border typically gave greater attention to the traditional Newfoundland canon/kitsch. Some members would play recordings of traditional Newfoundland music. Music from contemporary groups was almost always limited to that of more mainstream yet canon-oriented groups such as Great Big Sea and the Irish Descendents. These are groups that either have recording contracts with larger companies, or, at the very least, they have better access to international distribution. While the songs performed by such artists certainly fit best with traditional notions of Newfoundland, and fall more strongly into the category of kitsch, their value is more limited to a nostalgic image of Newfoundland, and thus one of limited sustainability. This division, of course, is largely a factor of geographic and social distance. The music that was used to bring the community together seldom reflected the actual experiences of living residents.

In Ontario, however, a large portion of the music performed in Newfoundland clubs and events was locally produced — either by Newfoundlanders in Ontario or by independent artists in Newfoundland. This music is typically produced in basement recording studios, distributed at flea markets and by word of mouth, and rarely available at franchise record stores, i.e., you have to enter a part of the New-

foundland commons in order to access the music. With this in mind, I theorize that the localization of Newfoundland music in southern Ontario has been essential to the formation of a strong localized sense of place within the diasporic commons, and thus a more flexible and sustainable community. Because Newfoundland-Ontarians still have new members moving to their community from Newfoundland everyday, and because many of the residents engage in seasonal/cyclical migration between Newfoundland and Ontario, their maintenance of a stronger commons is, of course, to be expected.

To further this argument, we can consider Jacques Attali's treatise on noise, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. After reviewing some of the literature on the localization of popular music, I encountered Attali's argument for the categorization of four musical networks — stages of production that create relation or network between individuals and their social organizations. Network one, sacrificial ritual, is the notion that noise is murder and that the harnessing and/or harmonizing of noise simulates social order (dissonance is therefore an expression of marginality, the construct of rules of harmony represents the formation of community). Network two, representation and commodity, states that greater professionalization, such as in the classical systems of production supported by royal families, demands greater separation between performer and audience, and therefore control of aesthetics of music begins to rest primarily in the hands of patrons of musicians (the control over the music industry begins to be removed from the community itself). Network three, repetition, argues that with the development of recording technology music is further commodified; the performers themselves are now removed, thus breaking all ties between music and time and space and allowing the re-creation of music to rest entirely in the hands of those who own the equipment (the music industry is completely removed from the community which it serves). Network four, composition, is the counter-hegemonic thrust that is spurred by the complete commodification of sound (communities reassert control over their culture; the grassroots production of music means that a link between a community and its music is reinserted).

With this in mind, I suggest we consider the idea that locally produced music, i.e., that music which reflects on the everyday but which demonstrates the complexity of Newfoundland region and economics, is a reassertion of community into music. Newfoundland's musical kitsch, stage 3 of Attali's treatise, is no longer intimately connected to the community for which it was meant to serve. Because of the disjuncture, it is most easily used to promote essentialized identity, and is closely related to stereotypical images of Newfoundland within Canada (images that are maintained and promoted both by some of Newfoundland's own culture brokers and by Canadian media as a whole). It is not a core part of the commons. Locally produced music that reflects on the surrounding community, however, is in stage 4 of Attali's treatise. The music being produced by grassroots artists in Newfoundland and within the expatriate population is reestablishing a form of Newfoundland com-

mons and, subsequently, supporting the maintenance of a strong sense of Newfoundland community in places like Ontario. Because of its intimate connection to space and experience (for instance, the story of Newfoundlanders moving to Ontario and back home again), this music attaches people to physical landmarks within their communities (Newfoundland stores) and to a sense of shared identity.

## CONCLUSION

In a sustainable community, one where there is balance between social, cultural, economic, and environmental realms of life, music is produced and controlled by the local. Such communities, however, by nature cannot be isolated but must interact with the larger-than-local, i.e., this is not a rejection of modernism or the “universal thrust of civilization” but rather the critical reinsertion of local into the popular. For Newfoundlanders in southern Ontario, this means the selection of certain aspects of tradition and locality, while embracing more globalized sounds — in various forms of globalized popular music. The Newfoundland music scene in southern Ontario is therefore an excellent example of how music is already being used to support stronger communities within spaces that lack many of the traditional tools of community development. Through music, and a variety of other cultural expressions, Newfoundlanders create a form of commons within the diaspora and within the suburb. We could argue that they themselves are fixing some of the social, economic, and environmental problems that we have inherited through previous flawed development policies.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>While I acknowledge that my path of travel and reasons for leaving were substantially different from most members of the diaspora (I left voluntarily to work for a music festival and to attend graduate school), I insert myself here to better demonstrate my relation to this diaspora. I cannot claim a comprehensive knowledge of the diaspora as a whole, but rather I focus on what I observed in those parts of the community where I lived and studied.

<sup>2</sup>The issue of suburbs and their inherent problems is best laid out by Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck in *Suburban Nation: The Rise and the Decline of the American Dream* (2000). Virginia Beach is cited as a perfectly designed example according to the regulations and ideals of American suburban developments (64). It is important to maintain a critical view of the suburb, however, to understand why this model fails when it comes to questions of environmentalism, class division, and community sustainability. From the critical regionalist perspective, the suburb is a catastrophe.

<sup>3</sup>At the time, this on-line database could be searched by community of origin in Newfoundland, or by expatriate residence so that Newfoundlanders living away could locate other Newfoundlanders living close to them. Entries were submitted by website users, and



thus the success of the database was largely dependent on the desire of expatriates to find/be found by fellow expats.

<sup>4</sup>Ray Cashman gives an extensive overview of “nostalgia” in academic discourse in his recent article “Critical Nostalgia and Material Culture in Northern Ireland” (2006).

<sup>5</sup>See also George Ritzer, “Rethinking Globalization: Glocalization/Grobalization and Something/Nothing” (2003).

<sup>6</sup>Pamela Morgan comments on this in her song “It Ain’t Funny,” *On a Wing and a Prayer* (1996).

<sup>7</sup>After reading several of Wente’s commentaries, I would argue that the oversimplification of cultural identity is a central condition in all of her work.

<sup>8</sup>Raymond Williams set the basis for this idea in 1973 in chapter 10 (“Enclosures, Commons and Communities”) of *The Country and the City*.

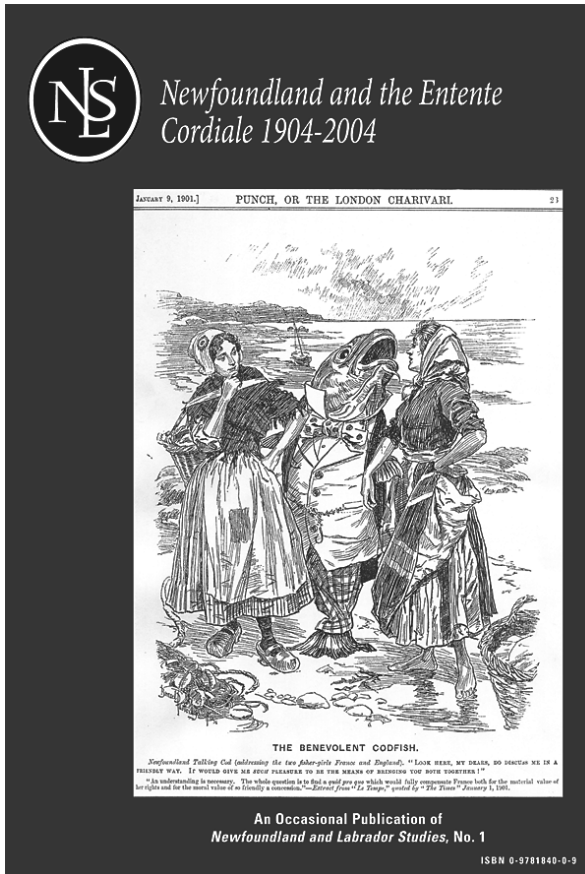
<sup>9</sup>Ray Oldenberg examines these spaces in *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (1989).

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