

When the Pipers Play: Identity Politics and Scottishness

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A Thesis

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Of

Sociology and Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

When the Pipers Play: Identity Politics and Scottishness

Genevieve Mari

My ethnographic research theorizes the multiple meanings of Scottishness and Scottish identity, the contradictions between these definitions and describes the development and functions of the National Piping Centre in Glasgow. This is a thesis that explores Scottishness --and the politics surrounding that identity-- by way of a number of individual pipers and two key exponents in particular. It uses the tried and tested anthropological methods of microsocial fieldwork and case-studies to ground an appreciation of abstract concepts such as 'identity' and 'Scottishness' in particular lived lives. What this thesis demonstrates is that the new piping is about musicianship rather than iconic or symbolic national identity, synthesizes other musical traditions and is global – thus transforming traditional or stereotypical ideas of Scottishness.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Ginette Labelle and Jack Mari; they are loving, generous and unfailingly encouraging people. They are my twin pillars without whom I could not stand. I am proud to be their daughter. Thank you both, you are my guidepost for everything.

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TABLE OF CONTENT

Chapter One: Introduction and Theoretical Framework.....	1
Introduction.....	1
The Discourse on Identity.....	4
Scottishness.....	7
Imaginary Scotland.....	10
Expressive Culture.....	13
Soundscapes.....	15
Thesis.....	17
 Chapter Two: Methodology, Field site and Background Information..	19
Welcome Back to Glasgow.....	19
Methodology, Field site and Background Information.....	21
Methodology.....	21
Identity Politics in Context.....	21
Bonnie Bonnie Scotland.....	24
I Pipe Therefore I Am.....	28
Field sites and Subjects.....	30
Glasgow, Scotland.....	30
The National Piping Centre.....	33
Background Information.....	36
Making Contacts.....	36
Methods and Notable Activities.....	36

Jamming Sessions.....	37
Glenfiddich Piping Championship.....	39
National Piping Centre Events.....	43
Exotic Piping Night.....	44
Piobaireachd Concert.....	44
Christmas Céilidh.....	45
Piping Instruction.....	45
Qualitative Interviews.....	46
 Chapter Three: The National Piping Centre.....	 49
Scottishness: What Does It Mean?.....	51
Entering the National Piping Centre.....	53
A Piping Environment.....	54
Inside the National Piping Centre.....	57
Entering the Field.....	64
A Day in The Life of The National Piping Centre.....	67
The Russians are Coming.....	68
 Chapter Four: The National Piping Centre Pipers.....	 72
Introduction.....	72
Finlay MacDonald.....	74
Simon McKerrell.....	90

Chapter Five: Conclusion.....	106
--------------------------------------	------------

Bibliography.....	112
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Exotic Piping Night Poster.....	117
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Appendix 2: Map of Scotland.....	118
----------------------------------	-----

Appendix 3: Maps of Glasgow.....	119
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Appendix 4: Map of Glasgow City Centre.....	120
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Identity Politics and Scottishness are the main concepts explored in the present thesis. They are at the centre of a literature on the Anthropology of Scotland, where the negotiation of individual and communal identity/identities, and the meanings of what it is to be Scottish have been explored by way of anthropological fieldwork typically amongst Scottish communities of the Scottish Highlands and Islands. This however has led to a disproportionate representation of Scottishness within the sphere of these ethnographies; one where Scotland's image, the face it turns to the world, suggests a greater resemblance to the Highlands and Islands, than it might the Lowland and the populous central belt.

Over the years, Scotland as an area of anthropological study has been disproportionately represented by ethnographers who seemed to favour the more exotic feel of the Northern and West Islander communities of the Scottish Highlands. Unfortunately, this has left a shadow on the southern part of Scotland, suggesting that its border with Northern England might be better represented by the Highland/Lowland divide. For the most part, ethnographies have tended to focus their attention on the communities of the North and West (Cohen 1987; Parman 1990; and MacDonald 1993), mimicking the same conventional divide of Highlands and Lowlands, so widely exploited in songs, stories and tourist guidebooks (Nadel-Klein 1997). Unfortunately, the outcome of these researches has reified the geographical Highland/Lowland divide, enforcing the notion that the north of Scotland is exotic and thereby worthy of anthropological interest, rendering the South of Scotland, an area better suited to sociology perhaps (Nadel-Klein 1997). This is highly problematic and fallacious; on the first hand, what is generated

from these ethnographies are depictions of communities that suggest an image of Scotland as a whole, thereby signifying, for example, that what it means to be “Scottish” for the inhabitants of Lewis becomes an overall interpretation of those residing in Glasgow. Subsequently, this takes away from the need for anthropological attention in the lowland regions of Scotland whereas this represents the majority of the Scottish population, especially those residing in more urban settings, areas seldom explored in ethnographies of Scotland that become misrepresented.

Interestingly enough, the bulk of these ethnographies share the common theme of identity; what it means to be Scottish, and the meanings derived from the ethnographies are constructed around a theme of locality that often negates notions of globalization, i.e., there is global sameness as well as local differences; “globalization does not create bland, uniform homogeneity”(McCrone 2001, 1). Therefore, globalisation produces difference. Modernisation, urbanisation, industrialism, and to a great extent, globalism have without a doubt, impacted these local communities and ways in which the residents of these very communities negotiate their sense of Scottishness. Although certain aspects of authenticity are highly revered in the Highlands and Island in part because of their touristy appeal and monetary value, the very same tourists that visit as well as the industry that promotes these notions of authenticity bring within themselves and their very being there, a huge impact. Globalization does not centre its focus on urban regions alone; it is an all-encompassing phenomenon that sweeps across a nation as a whole, intertwining itself within the economic, social, cultural, political and ecological spheres, increasingly binding people more tightly into one global sphere. However, it is this binding of differences that seems lacking from many of the ethnographies that present a

much more secluded version of Scottish communities. It is not so much that ideas governing industrialization and urbanization are completely ignored within the ethnographies; it is that communities are presented in an isolated manner, where the very same processes happening elsewhere in Scotland are not examined, nor are their impact on Scotland as a whole explored. Much of what is taken from them is a picture of Scotland seen through a lens pointed towards the Highland and Islands. The issues of representation as well as identity construction are at stake, where both are greatly affected by the ways in which others have come to understand Scotland through literature.

Through my research, I hope to demonstrate that the lowlands are highly worthy of anthropological attention and endeavour to illustrate, through an exploration of a Glaswegian piping community, its relationship to anthropological theory. To that end, I strive not to present my field site as a grand representation of the lowlands as a whole, instead, what I am attempting to do is to show how locality, in its differences, is equally worthy of anthropological research that does not seek to represent a greater whole. The anthropology of Scotland requires the exploration of these contending positions about what it means to be Scottish for all of Scotland, as well as for 'Scottishness' and its domains (Nadel-Klein 1997). Hopefully, this research will shed some light on how some lowlanders construct and negotiate their own sense of identity vis-à-vis the many ways in which being Scottish has been portrayed ethnographically and understood by an international population.

The Discourse on Identity

The discourse on identity has grown in popularity in the last few years, especially in the social sciences, including anthropology. The reason for this, according to David McCrone is that the “fluidity and plurality of identities is part and parcel of the post-modern condition” (1998, 31). Theorising identity therefore to contemporary thinkers involves generally a questioning of “routes” rather than “roots”; identity is not something that once was created and subsequently has become fixed and fundamentalised, on the contrary, it is something that is always changing, contextual, relational, and shifting (McCrone 2001).

“Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities [...] relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself: not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our ‘routes’.” (Hall 1996, 4)

As McCrone suggests, “identity politics becomes a sphere in which history, society and culture interact. It is a debate about different versions of being Scottish, which seek to mobilize process and iconography” (McCrone 2001, 3) It is with this in mind that I intend to explore the notion of being Scottish (Scottishness), for some people in Scotland, namely the piping instructors of the National Piping Centre in Glasgow.

Drawing on insights from sociology and social anthropology, recent studies in identity have most often fallen within the constructionist pole of the debate. The following stipulates that identity is produced in social processes of interaction, and it refers to the individual and to a group. It is not fixed or given. It is a stable and at the same time a flexible construct. Identity has multiple points of reference (national, ethnic,

gender, class, personal, religious, local, occupational) which vary with changing circumstances. The function of identity is twofold: First, it answers the questions “who am I?” and “where do I belong to?” thus, it supplies the individual with a sense of uniqueness and with a sense of belonging to a group. Second, it supplies people with a framework for the interpretation of objects, processes and events; it functions as an interpretative framework to structure perceptions, and thus helps to ‘make sense’ of the individual’s highly complex social realities. It relies on a framework of generalizations, prejudices and implications in which the world’s complexity appears to be transparent and understandable. Hence, identity implies a cluster of norms, rules, values and societal roles which help us to take decisions and to act.

Crucial for the understanding of the functioning of identity is the construction and maintenance of borders, because the self-definition of the group (‘who are we?’) always implies the definition of ‘the other’ (Barth 1969). Barth argues that boundaries and cultural differences between ethnic groups persist despite the fact that there is inter-ethnic contact and interdependence between groups (Barth 1969). According to him it is, therefore, crucial to analyse the social boundary and not the cultural content of the ‘ethnic vessel’. While the cultural characteristics of the group and even its organizational form may change, the border still remains. Therefore, “the critical investigation [...] becomes the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (Barth 1969, 15). Thus, while we should also look at the cultural elements of ethnic groups, it is crucial to understand the mechanisms of the construction and maintenance of borders. The central part about Barth’s argument is that ethnic groups do not primarily define themselves independently on their own characteristics but by exclusion of ‘the others’.

Thus the identity of the group only functions if there is another group they can distinguish themselves from. If members of a group have to define themselves, they do find it easier to say what they are not, than to state what they actually are.

This is especially interesting in the case of the men and women pipers at the National Piping Centre. Although certainly not a bounded “ethnic” group, they nevertheless form a community of pipers; a National Piping Centre community where the institution of the National Piping Centre in turn represents the ‘bounded’ region. The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology defines the term ‘community’ as “a set of societal relationships based on something which the participants have in common – usually a sense of identity”¹, a definition that is broad enough to encompass geographic or traditional communities, as well as what Benedict Anderson refers to as “imagined communities” (Anderson 1991). Since communities must have boundaries (tangible or imagined), in order to distinguish members from non-members, and that a social structure must exist to define the ways in which members are to interact, it seemed that the National Piping Centre as an institution allowed for the above-mentioned criteria; it serves as a primary organization in which pipers, piping enthusiast and visitors can enter and exist as ‘members’ of this space. Moreover, through the practices and habitus of their occupation as pipers, they also represent an imagined community of Scots. For while the pipers might not represent an ethnic group bounded by geographical borders, they do, nevertheless represent a group or community bounded by the perimeters of a piping circuit whose home base is often the National Piping Centre. This is what I intend the following thesis to show. Also the extent to which, as a group they can be seen to be

¹ Gordon Marshall, Oxford Dictionary of Sociology. Oxford University Press, 1994, p.322

bounded by an imaginary territorial border that links them to 'Scotland' the place, as a whole.

As Cohen points out, a boundary is not just a physical marker of territory it can also be a symbolic marker of identity as well (1985). However, unlike Barth's opinion that suggests that "*the critical investigation [...] becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses*", it is in fact the 'cultural stuff' enclosed within the centre that serves to emphasize the boundary created by the National Piping Centre walls. Although piping exists outside of the National Piping Centre and can be found amongst the streets of Glasgow, its pubs, as well as outside of Glasgow and in most of Scotland, and internationally, it is never as prominent or as saturated as within the walls of the National Piping Centre.

Scottishness

In considering Barth's concept of boundaries and boundary maintenance, Scottishness, like any identity, is often most visible at its boundary of difference. As mentioned above, Cohen points out that a boundary is not just a physical marker of territory, it can be a symbolic marker of identity as well (1985): he places greater emphasis on the symbolic than on the physical. Furthermore, the use of symbols is important. For example, the Gaelic language used to be a symbol of Highland culture and identity, but Gaelic medium education has now made Gaelic more widely accessible. Therefore, individuals of non-Highland descent may wish to have their children educated within the Gaelic system, thereby symbolically appropriating the idea of Scottishness through this idea that Gaelic culture equals that of Scottish culture. This notion is most

likely derived from the nationalization of Britain that began in the thirteenth century where the many cultural groups living were quickly incorporated into the area that is now England. The Celts, residing in the outlying regions of what is now Wales, Scotland and Ireland, maintained their distinctive identities; identities that differed greatly amongst those residing in the Scottish Highlands, say versus those found further south . The distinction in culture and identity amongst the lowlander Celts in lowland Scotland eventually amalgamated into a much more English culture and identity thereby created an opposition and cultural border between the Highlanders and Lowlanders; the Celts and the English. Nineteenth century Scottish Nationalism ignored this distinction and placed the Scots in opposition to the English. However, the Celtic revival Movement which began in 1903 drew on such symbols as the kilt and bagpipes to represent their identity thereby re-engaging the cultural distinctiveness of the Celtic Highlands to that of England.

In terms of creating or maintaining traditionality, different groups will choose appropriately from the distinctive historical elements to properly symbolize their culture and identity. With this idea of maintaining a 'Scottish' tradition or culture, often times, this is attempted with the use of symbols such as the kilt or bagpipe. The same can be observed with piping; not all pipers are Highlanders, nor are all pipers Scottish, however all who become pipers and materially appropriate the culture through dress and music can also be said to be symbolically appropriating the idea of Scottishness. This is not to suggest that they are all also appropriating a Scottish Identity, however, to the unknowing observer, this person would certainly be displaying aspects of Scottishness that might encourage the notion that this piper was thereby displaying a Scottish-like

identity. Symbolic appropriation, a term relating to Malcolm Chapman (1978), occurs when a 'thing' becomes symbolic through the shaping and reinterpretation of it by those 'outside' of it. Specifically, in his work, Chapman was writing of the symbolic appropriation of Gaelic and all that it encompasses by non-Gaels, and the repositioning of Gaelic culture as central in representations of Scottish culture. However, Chapman also suggests that there is a re-appropriation where the categorised reconstruct their own identities.

Similarly, when speaking of 'identity', McCrone insists that it is something that cannot be treated as real or unreal, but should be thought of instead as a social space in which history, society and culture come together (2001, 3).

By subscribing to these notions and concepts, I am reinforcing the idea that identity is not primordial and fixed, but fluid and diverse. Consequently, to aspire to define identity for any one individual, is to understand that it is, and will continue to be a process that is on-going, constantly re-engaging and re-negotiating with the 'Self', the 'Other' and the world in which we live. By the very process of people imagining a Scottish identity for themselves, they add to the fluidity and diversity of what Scottish is.

However, returning to Anthony Cohen's work, it seems the individual may in fact be more influenced by local identity than by national identity - "local experience mediates national identity, and therefore, and anthropological understanding of the latter cannot proceed without knowledge of the former" (Cohen 1982, 13). This serves as a reminder of the importance of immediate environment and locality in personal identity ascription.

Imaginary Scotland

“Scotland is not simply what you want it to mean. It is a complex theatre of memory in which different ways of ‘being Scottish’ are interpellated and handed down, constructed and mobilized by social and political forces” (McCrone 2001, 3).

When speaking of Scotland, there is a powerful iconography attached to its culture. Although this stems from a sort of ‘reinvention of tradition’ (Hobsbawm 2003 [1983]; Trevor-Roper 2003 [1983]), it is nonetheless one of the most powerful imageries that has generated a steadily healthy tourist industry. David McCrone, in his work ‘Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Nation’, light-heartedly describes Scotland as land of mountains and flood; a vision regularly captured in literature and mobilized by the tourist industry, and suggest that this social representation of Scotland is in fact no more than ‘a powerful landscape of the mind’ (McCrone 2001).

Jane Nadel-Klein, in her article entitled ‘Crossing a representational divide: From west to east in Scottish ethnography’ (1997) discusses this idea of a ‘mis-representation’ of Scotland. Although in her article, she focuses mostly on the impact of the choice of regions within Scotland where ethnographic fieldwork has taken place, she is certainly touching on what David McCrone is suggesting in regards to the dominant vision of Scotland that seems to subsist. However, whereas McCrone discusses it in terms of the outside looking in, Nadel-Klein makes the point of demonstrating how ethnographies, which are researched within but taken out literally to an ‘outside’ audience, to some degree play a pertinent role in misleading the popular understanding of what ‘being Scottish’ means, and certainly impacts the international vision that exists of Scotland.

Malcolm Chapman (1978) demonstrates that in the late 18th Century, the Scottish Lowlands, which were becoming much more urbanized and industrialized, appropriated the symbols, myths and tartans of the Highlands in an attempt to distinguish themselves as a distinct culture, one in opposition to England. Writers like Sir Walter Scott exploited and promoted this social construction within his work. Therefore, it is arguably correct to say that since this social representation is what was and continues to be captured in literature and mobilized by the tourist industry, the representation that exists of Scotland is in fact at times ‘a powerful landscape of the mind’ (McCrone 2001). Thus, the image of Scotland is in many respects, the image of Gaelic or Highland Scotland. As Anthony Cohen sums up, “people construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity” (1985, 118).

This representation of Scotland is also inadvertently advanced by the men and women who play the Great Highland Bagpipe. On most occasions, pipers dress up to pipe in attire that includes a tartan kilt, a sporran, knee-length socks (with a Sgian Dubhs (small knife) tucked in the right one), black brogues and a Glengarry or Balmoral Hat. The Great Highland Bagpipe itself is also a powerful symbol of Scottish culture. While bagpipes do not originate from Scotland, they were appropriated and transformed into the Great Highland Bagpipe within the Highlands, and have now become an icon of Scottish culture throughout the world. Consequently, when the pipers’ dress is combined with the instrument, and its unique sound is produced, there is a very powerful image that is constructed and appropriated by the public and an understanding of Scottish Identity defines itself from the visual and aural imagery that is taking place.

The Highland Games and Scottish Fairs, weekend gatherings and festivals held throughout the year in Scotland and other countries as a way of celebrating Scottish and Celtic culture and heritage, especially that of the Scottish Highlands. While centered on competitions in piping and drumming, dancing, and Scottish heavy athletics, the games also include entertainment and exhibits related to other aspects of Scottish and Gaelic culture², are usually an area where this sort of reinvention of tradition takes place, where a 'simulated' Scotland comes to life. For North Americans, these sites are often an occasion where Scottish Canadians and Scottish Americans can gather and rediscover their roots, or get a taste of what it is to be Scottish without actually having to set foot in Scotland. No matter the accuracy of these sites, what is important to appreciate is that the public appropriates certain symbols and icons from these sites and equate them as being typically Scottish. These Highland Games and Highland Gatherings, represent in an exaggerated way, a popular mindset that exists among many, especially outside of Scotland. Kilts, Bagpipes, Tartans are all highly symbolic of Scotland and Scottishness, as much part of the geographical landscape that is Scotland as the actual earth and rocks that constitute make up its territory. But they are also all icons of an imaginary "Scottish" place that resides in a social *imaginaire* constructed and derived through a highly lucrative tourist industry and an ever so popular image of Scotland so often depicted in movies, novels and song.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highland_games

Expressive Culture

“Expressive culture is created in practices of production, received and made meaningful in interpretive practices and tied to the rest of social life as one of many domains of practice through which society is constituted” (Del Negro and Berger 2004, xi)

When speaking of the music of the bagpipes, few words can truly articulate its character or convey the sentiment it evokes. It is an old sound that resonates across time. But as my own personal experience has enabled me to appreciate, it is also a modern sound that when combined with other instruments, or new methods of play, can create an auditory experience that is unbelievably rich and engaging.

I would like to look into this aspect of bagpiping music; its ability to speak of and preserve history and tradition, its ability to bring to life a time centuries old and its impact on the construction of an imaginary “Scottishness” that is ever so present in the minds of so many. Although this last statement is made with some level of generality, it is not by any means unsupported. In fact, individuals such as David McCrone (2001), Eric Hobsbawm (2003 [1983]), Anthony Cohen (1985) and others speak of the imagined character, community or identity that lives in the minds of so many. In the case of the Highlands of Scotland, its history, traditions and sounds have been utilized for so many centuries, first by lowlanders, then by writers such as Sir Walter Scott, the movie industry (Braveheart) and so on in such an inaccurate way that its romanticized version is what resides in the minds of many and is what materializes mentally with the sound of the Great Highland Bagpipe. It is for this reason, above all others, that I believe this instrument to be quite unique and powerful in character.

According to Jeff Todd Titon, every human society has music (1996, 1) and quoting John Blacking, music is defined as ‘humanly organized sounds’ (1973).

Considering this, it is essential to recognize the variety of ways in which music can be constructed, performed and interpreted by humans, and for humans, and how these sounds are therefore highly symbolic and associative in the evocation of cultural memory, nostalgia and in the construction of complex social and physical boundaries. Paul Moore (2003) and Sara Cohen (1995) have written about particular soundscapes (Shafer 1977) in relation to cultural memory and have followed a similar frame of thought. Through their writings, it is evident that music can play an important role in the expression of identity, whether through a self-identifying banner or through a separation of 'us' and 'them', specifically in relation to cultural collectives generated by religious affiliations, political beliefs, and communal ties.

Paul Moore, Professor of Media Studies at the University of Ulster, explored the sectarian sounds of Belfast in relation to cultural identity in Northern Ireland. In his work, Moore speaks of the multiple visual iconic representations that exist in Belfast and Northern Ireland. The Free Derry Wall remains a recognizable Republican landmark which resonates with visual cultural memory. Yet in a work entitled 'War and an Irish Town', Eamon McCann, an informant of Moore's, expressed that 'one of [his] abiding memories of those early revolutionary days was hearing an 'Incredible String Band' album played on a pirate radio station from the roof of Rosville flats'(Moore 2003, 265). For McCann cultural memory was prompted by sound. Similarly, when speaking of their culture, Protestants of Belfast speak of pride, honour and aggression, -'the auld blood rising'- whenever they hear the sound of the lambled drums or the swirl of the pipes in a marching band (Moore 2003, 266). This provides another example of cultural memory evolving and being reinforced through sound. These two examples serve to illustrate that

sound is a key symbol in the construction of identity in Northern Ireland, in that it underlines matters of power and the relations between people (Buckley 1998) and in this instance between religious affiliations. In the case of my own research, it speaks to the notion of identity ascription that is often generated by the general public vis-à-vis piping.

Although, according to Moore, the role of sound as a symbolic signifier does not carry the same weight as its visual counterpart, it is important to keep in mind that Cohen (1987) believed symbols to be much more complex than we imagine. In fact, the very value and importance of symbols lies in this characteristic ability to convey multiple meanings (O'Reilly 1998, 50). In the context of Northern Ireland, sound is such a symbol and the meanings it conveys are culturally specific and socially constructed. Particular sounds are designated as sound marks to construct complex and social physical boundaries. In the case of the population of Northern Ireland, these boundaries are easily erected; when the Protestant marching bands walk and play their tunes right up to the limit of their perceived territory, they are in fact delineating through sound the boundaries of their community vis-à-vis another.

Soundscapes

Sara Cohen examines how sound can become descriptive of a place or referent to a physical landscape such as the city of Liverpool. In her works entitled "Identity, Place and the 'Liverpool Sound'" (1994) and "Sounding Out the City: Music and the Sensuous Production of Place" (1995), Cohen highlights the discourses of place and authenticity surrounding the notion of an identifiable Liverpool Sound. It is with the issue of identity

and the construction of locality through music that both articles are primarily relevant to my research.

The term 'Liverpool Sound' has been commonly used within and outside of the Merseyside region over the past twenty-five to thirty years (Cohen 1994, 117) and, along with the 'Liverpool identity', was placed on the world map by the Beatles and many other Liverpool bands during the 1960's (Cohen 1994, 119). In her second article, Cohen expresses that music plays a role in producing place as a material setting comprising the physical and built environment; as a setting for everyday social relations, practices and interactions; and as a concept or symbol that is represented or interpreted (Cohen 1995). Therefore, 'Liverpool sound' is particular to Liverpool, reflecting a range of social, economic and political factors peculiar to the city (Cohen 1994, 117).

Social practices involving the consumption and production of music can also draw people together and symbolize their sense of collectivity and place. Cohen's informant Jack described through memories how music played an important role in the rituals, routines and discourses of everyday life for most of the immigrant Jews of Brownlow Hill. Music can frame particular events, setting them apart from other daily activities, heightening their symbolic significance (Finnegan 1989). Cohen demonstrates how music brings individuals together and symbolizes their collective identity. Therefore, music does not simply provide a marker in a pre-structured social space, but is the means by which this space can be transformed (Stokes 1994a, 4). For the pipers at the National Piping Centre, their music and their sound socially situate them in a territorial fashion to a place, at times a historical timeline, and certainly to culture by a greater public— however, as I will defend in this work, this very same sound is also what

enables them to converge their soundscapes into a new map for themselves and the piping community as a whole.

According to Cohen, discussions of the 'Liverpool Sound' could imply imagined differences between sounds from different places, however, what is apparent from these discussions is that the notion of a local sound does reflect the desire to symbolically assert difference and a sense of local identity. Nevertheless, her two articles serve to indicate that people create an image or sense of place in the production and consumption of music. Music can therefore be used to distinguish people and places according to class, and ethnicity, thereby underlining the emphasis of Stokes (1994b, 6) on the importance of turning from;

"...defining the essential and 'authentic' traces of identity 'in' music...to the question of how music is used by social actors in specific local situations to erect boundaries, to maintain distinctions between us and them."

All of which indicates the effectiveness of music in stimulating a sense of identity, in preserving and transmitting cultural memory and in the sensuous production of place. "The sense of place and embeddedness within local, mythical, and ritual landscapes is important. These senses of place serve as pegs on which people hang memories, construct meanings from events, and establish ritual and religious arenas of action." (Stewart and Strathern 2003)

Thesis

Pipers at the National Piping Centre in Glasgow are often categorized as "indigenous" individuals because of their practice– the playing of Scotland's National Instrument - the Great Highland Bagpipe. It can be argued that the playing the pipes gives these

individuals somewhat of a Scottish essence making them representative of a "Scottish" place, or at least this is how they might be interpreted in a greater social context. This thesis argues against this notion and demonstrates that through their individual appropriation of Scottishness as a set of symbolic forms and social spaces and through their indigenous practice of playing the pipes, these pipers instead disrupt and challenge these categorizations and "move" into a more cosmopolitan individuality.

The purpose of this research then is to examine the multifaceted aspect of negotiating identities amongst pipers who teach at the National Piping Centre. This thesis shows that while they all demonstrate a strong sense of individual identity as musicians, they are continuously engaging in a "negotiation" of their identity vis-à-vis the Scottish identity imposed upon them due to widely held perceptions that the sounds and activities of piping are symbolically Scottish. This calls into question the abstractedness of identity as a concept and demonstrates how the varying domains of Scottishness and its popular perceptions impact the piper's construction of his or her identity.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY, FIELDSITE AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Welcome Back To Glasgow

I landed at Glasgow International Airport in the early afternoon of Tuesday September 5th 2006 tired, groggy and very sore from having to deal with two very large backpacks that were checked into “oversized cargo” at Pierre Elliot Trudeau Airport in Montreal. I wasn’t a total stranger to Glasgow or its airport and knew my way to the baggage claim without having to follow the signs; however, the mere thought of having to lift either of those bags again was enough to keep me from setting foot in baggage claim.

Walking down the corridor, I contemplated the different ways in which I could actually lift my luggage off of the conveyor belt and onto a cart without hurting myself or innocent bystanders. My main collaborator, Simon McKerrell had suggested in an email that he would meet me at the airport but had not guaranteed it. I left Montreal without any confirmation from him. “What should I do if he isn’t here” I wondered, “Should I wait a while or just find my own way to where I am staying?” I had two choices really: to take the bus or hail a cab. At this point of the journey I simply wanted to get myself settled and briefly contemplated the idea of jumping into a cab for a stress free, albeit expensive, ride rather than dragging my monstrous luggage onto a bus. However, the currency exchange of 2.25 Canadian dollars for every British pound weighing heavily on my mind brought me back to reality and I soon found myself leaning towards the bus option.

My discouragement grew with every step I took towards the descending escalator, until, in absolute and genuine relief, I recognized Simon, standing casually at the bottom

of the escalator with a sign bearing my name. In a twist of irony, it suddenly dawned on me that he would be witness to my luggage and that might not be such a good thing. He would certainly feel obligated to help me lift at least one of my bags and would think me such a nut for bringing so much stuff. Poor Simon! He had no idea what he had gotten himself into by showing up at baggage claim.

Once the luggage properly dumped onto a baggage cart and the few minutes of commentary from Simon on the weight of my luggage concluded, we made our way towards the exit, stopping shortly to order a take away coffee from the Starbucks counter. Minutes later, after a new string of luggage related comments, I made myself comfortable in the passenger seat of Simon's white, early 1990's model, Volvo four-door sedan. As he negotiated his external plug-in CD player and I held onto his coffee, I reflected on my first hour back in Glasgow. The luggage issue had been circumvented and I had been treated to and was enjoying a steaming cup of coffee, but best of all, I was finally back in Scotland; this was going to be a great fieldwork experience, I could tell!

METHODOLOGY, FIELD SITE AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following chapter, as a primary focus, analytically considers the concepts examined within my research and throughout the four months of fieldwork spent in Glasgow Scotland. My own personal interest, outside of any academic endeavours, greatly informed my research choices and the location in which I chose to conduct my fieldwork. To that end, it seems highly relevant to communicate that my field experiences were greatly affected by my existing familiarity of the field site as well as my genuine affection for it.

In order to properly situate the field site within the context of the themes discussed, as well as the pipers who created meaning within it, the following chapter also provides for a succinct overview of the area and community in which most of my fieldwork took place, that of the National Piping Centre in Glasgow, and introduces some of the key individuals with whom I shared this space during the length of my stay.

Finally, this chapter serves mostly as an introduction to the many flavours of my fieldwork experience, all of which will be elaborated upon in ensuing chapters. Mostly, what I aimed to achieve within this section is to present a short overview of the site, people, politics and music that have coloured my days and evenings and created what culminated into a highly interesting four months of fieldwork.

METHODOLOGY

Identity Politics in Context

I find great interest in the ways in which individuals choose to answer the questions “who am I?”, “what am I?” Often times, a name might serve as an initial answer, followed

perhaps by an age or a hometown; I am Genevieve; I am thirty years old; I am from Montreal; I am from Canada. However, in certain circumstances, instead of a name, it is one's role or occupation in society that serves as the marker; I am a student; I am a mother; I am a lawyer; I am a piper. In both instances, answers such as these serve only to provide a minuscule glimpse (shallow glimpse within the many layers that make) into a person's sense of self and provide even less insight into a person's sense of individuality. Being Genevieve as opposed to Catherine does not permit for another individual to better understand me as a person; in fact all that it permits for is a textual and/or aural label to affix to my physical person. However, when "Genevieve" is followed by "the student from Montreal", as opposed to "Genevieve" as a stand-alone answer, I am then allowing for others to gain insight into my person by revealing some aspects of who I am, and what constitutes the "I" in Genevieve. To be fair, the following examples are really just scratching the surface of the sort of inquiries I have chosen to undertake in terms of my own research, while the aforementioned examples efficiently demonstrate are the multidimensionality of the issues surrounding such questions as; "who am I?", "who are they?", "how is 'I' defined?", and give an idea about the ways in which people begin to construct portraits of themselves for others to see, through the answers they chose to affix to such questions.

What happens when you throw nationalistic ideologies or cultural markers into the mix – how do these begin to affect the ways in which we construct a sense of self, or the ways in which others come to see us? Nationality can provide for a somewhat tangible marker of identity in that it often reflects a real territorial or geographical area one can designate on a map, however, at the same time and in a completely opposite way,

it can also make for a very abstract construct of who one might be, especially in instances where the idea of Nationality is highly politicized, religiously influenced or as in the case of Scotland, all too often stereotyped and/or romanticized. As a French speaking Canadian, I am often labelled a 'Québécoise' and because of my mother tongue, assumed to be Catholic and probably a supporter of the Party-Quebécois. However, when someone asks me from where I come, or to what Nationality I identify with, my answer normally is "I am Canadian", which in itself mostly implies to others that I am an Anglophone Canadian of Protestant denomination. Interestingly enough, if I choose to answer that I am from Montreal instead of saying that I am Canadian, then although I am saying this in an English tongue, it is often the case that I will be asked if I speak French, thereby indicating how strongly place is attached to language, and how, in the case of Quebec especially, language is also attached to religion and political ideologies. In terms of my own existence, I was raised by both French and English parents; a Catholic mother and Protestant father, and have never truly or significantly identified with either tongues or religious affiliations in any concrete or primordial way. Consequently, having been afforded these choices, this dualism between two languages and the political connotations involved in identify with one or the other in the province of Québec, I have instead instrumentally meandered my way back and forth between the varying identities offered by my bilingualism and religious influences, or lack thereof, choosing to draw meaning from each and identifying more strongly with one or the other according to the varying circumstances of my realities. My own inability to assert a fixed sense of self vis-à-vis a place of birth, a bilingual family heritage and dual religious affiliations as well as my

multifaceted ancestry has significantly impinged on the ways in which I have come to see others and their choices of self..

According to David McCrone, identity politics provide a space in which history, society and culture interrelate with one another and inform the debate about what it is to be something as opposed to something else (McCrone, 2001). In the case of my research, it is the amalgamation of these that stimulate and inform the debate about being Scottish and the different versions of being Scottish. The questions usually remain the same; what does it mean to be Scottish, what is 'Scottish', what informs Scottishness? It is the superfluity of responses and meanings derived from such questions that suggests this issue, especially in the Scottish case, to be one of great intellectual interest.

Bonnie Bonnie Scotland

'Scotland' is not simply what you want it to mean. It is a complex theatre of memory in which different ways of 'being Scottish' are interpellated and handed down, constructed and mobilized by social and political forces which seek to naturalise them. There is a complex interaction of social process and cultural meaning. (McCrone 2001,.3)

In the above quotation quote McCrone stipulates that "'Scotland' is not simply what you want it to mean", suggesting perhaps that individual romantic aspirations about the place that is Scotland, or the idea that is Scotland cannot solely be relied upon in defining and identifying Scotland as a nation, as a people, as a place, as an idea or as a landscape.

Evidently, there are many popular symbols attached to and applied to the idea that is Scotland; tartans, kilts, whisky, bagpipes are just a few of these key symbols. Similarly, there are also many stereotypes that exist about Scotland and its people.

“The 'typical' Scotsman is often thought of as: a red haired, surly, penny-pinching Highlander who speaks with an impenetrable accent. He would be pictured strutting around the windswept, heather-clad moors in a kilt with a sprig of thistle on his breast, perhaps blowing a merry tune on a bagpipe before going home for a spot of whisky and haggis. When the Scotsman gets really tipsy, he becomes extremely maudlin and sentimental, singing the praises of his favourite football team and heaping curses on the despicable English.”³

While all such stereotypes and or symbolic representations of Scotland affect the ways in which people construct an image of Scotland, the bagpipe and its sounds are the most relevant in the scope of my research. Bagpipe players, pipers, are equally symbolic of Scotland and are often part of the stereotypes that have been applied to the idea of Scotland, of being Scottish and Scottishness. Although somewhat general or even reductionist in many ways, the stereotypes attached to Scotland the land and Scotland the imagined are often what constitute the overall idea of Scotland as a place. Kilts, Bagpipes and Tartans are all highly symbolic of Scotland and Scottishness, dare I say as much part of the geographical landscape that is Scotland as the actual earth and rocks that make up its territory. But they are all also icons of an imaginary “Scottish” place that resides in a global social imaginaire constructed and derived through a highly lucrative tourist industry and an ever so popular image of Scotland all too often depicted in movies, novels and songs. Unfortunately, it is also these stereotypes that shape the ways in which others have come to regard citizens of Scotland and inform other’s conception of what it means to be Scottish.

The representations of Scotland that exist broadly in tourist brochures and postcards have created a market for ‘Scotland the brand’, an idea and product to be promoted, marketed and sold to a greater public. Regrettably, these representations of Scotland, what one is told to expect while visiting Scotland, are incredibly misleading

³ Dispelling the Scottish Stereotype - http://www.holidaycityflash.com/uk/scotland_stereotype1.htm

and only offer the potentially interested tourist only a small glimpse of what the country has to offer. However, what is highly problematic about these stereotypes and symbolic representations of Scotland and what it means to be Scottish is that they completely omit the urban centres of Scotland, found mostly within the Lowlands and central belt.



Picture taken from front page of Destination Weddings Scotland Website.⁴

Unfortunately, this 'misrepresentation' of Scotland also exists within the realm of the social sciences, where the majority of ethnographies about Scotland, reflect mostly the realities found amongst the crafting and fishing communities of the Highland and West Islands in a somewhat localized fashion, neglecting aspects of modernisation, urbanisation, industrialism and globalism that necessarily affect these studied communities. This phenomenon has impacted greatly my choice of fieldwork locations and has lead me to centre my work amongst a group of pipers in Glasgow, Scotland, allocating a much stronger focus on the urban and (post-) industrial, also the individual versus the community, in attempt to give strength to the voice of the contingent and individual in regards to this ever so complex topic that is Identity.

⁴ www.destinationbride.com/files/scotland.jpg

On a more personal level, Scotland as a country, as a people and as the imaginary (as stereotype) has enticed me for years. I remember being completely taken as a child, by the beautiful landscape that filled the large pages of my books on Scotland and Britain. I was twenty-five years old when I finally made it overseas, first to Ireland and then to Scotland for a few months of backpacking. From the very first instance that I set foot in Scotland, I felt a distinct and overpowering sense of being at home in, what was for me at the time, a foreign land. However, from that point on, I knew that Scotland would always be a place to which I would return, and have since, three times over the course of the past five years.

It was this feeling of being at home in Scotland that initially triggered my ambiguity about how one identifies with a place and especially, as in my case, when this particular place might feel like home but is not 'home' in the general sense of the term. I slowly began to appreciate the multiplicity of ways in which individuals identify with a place or identify others through and according to place, and alternatively, how much a place could in fact impact one's sense of self in regards to locality and community and so on. As a Canadian in Scotland, I felt my 'Canadianism' much more strongly than within Canada, yet this feeling continuously engaged in a sort of melee with my sense of 'being at home' within Scotland. I identified myself as Canadian but from Quebec, a distinction I always highlighted and one that is interesting in itself in that I never identified myself as 'Québécoise', but as Canadian or French Canadian. Yet, although continuously expressing my 'national' self to others, and constantly recognizing the differences between myself and 'Scottish' others, the land beneath my feet continued to feel like home in a very surreal manner. These feelings often guided the ways in which I

interpreted individuals with whom I came into contact throughout my fieldwork, and having dealt myself with the confusing aspect of expressing to others the Self that is Genevieve, I quickly realized that even after four months of working closely with the individuals who have informed a great part of my research, I could only at best, infer and propose interpretations of who they were as individuals.

I Pipe Therefore I Am...

If one were to visit the website of the National Piping Centre, one would find the following statement on its front page;

“The Great Highland Bagpipe, perhaps the best known of Scotland's musical instruments and an ambassador for Scotland throughout the world...” – The National Piping Centre⁵

And if one would visit the alternative College of Piping website, one would also notice the following statement as part of the title of the front page;

“Serving Scotland's National Music...” - The College of Piping⁶

Both institutions blatantly utilize the idea of ‘Scotland the brand’ to market their institution, and in an attempt to attract as many visitors to their centre, both institutions equally use Scotland the brand to market bagpipes to the general public. On the one hand, by marketing Scotland the brand, both centres are in fact competing with each other in an attempt to attract the most funding from the Scottish government and private donors to gain the strongest foothold within the piping education circuit for Scotland and the world; A greater number of students and visitors to the centre enables for a greater majority of share holdings in piping education thereby suggesting perhaps greater control over the whole centre of piping knowledge, education and influence. On the other hand,

⁵ <http://www.thepipingcentre.co.uk/>

⁶ <http://www.college-of-piping.co.uk/>

by also hosting such events as Burns dinners and céilidhs, offering pipes for hire for various events, and maintaining solid ties to organizations like the St. Andrew's Society, Scottish Enterprise, Event Scotland, Scottish Arts Council, as well as bagpipe manufactures across the world, both centres are also using the idea of Scotland the Brand as a way to also market the bagpipe to Scotland and the world. Whether one institution is succeeding in reaching a greater number of pupils or visitors is not the relevant issue for this section; however, it is worth mentioning that both share a common goal, to keep piping alive within the community, the country and the world.

According to these two leading and competing piping institutions, the bagpipe is not only an ambassador for Scotland throughout the world; its music is of National character as well. The bagpipe, *'perhaps the best known of Scotland's musical instruments'*, is a very popular symbol of Scottish culture across the world. As mentioned earlier, when speaking of Scotland, one of the icons highly attached to Scotland is the bagpipe. Piping has been part of the Scottish culture and tradition for centuries now and although its place in society is not at all what it once was, the fact remains that piping is as much part of Scottishness because 'Scotland the brand' is an imaginary constructed place based off of historical and romanticized versions of Scotland. Conducting research amongst a group of men and women pipers therefore makes for an interesting project because of the highly symbolic aspect of their identity as pipers.

FIELD SITES AND SUBJECTS

Glasgow, Scotland

Glasgow is the largest city in Scotland and has an urban population of 1,171,460 and a city population of 578,790.⁷ It is situated on the River Clyde in the country's west central lowlands and is home to many of Scotland's main cultural venues: The Theatre Royal (home of Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet), The Pavilion, The King's Theatre, Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, Glasgow Film Theatre, RSAMD (The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Dance), Mitchell Library, the Centre for Contemporary Arts, McLellan Galleries and The Lighthouse Museum of Architecture, Design and the City. The city centre is also home to four higher education institutions: The University of Strathclyde, RSAMD, Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow Caledonian University and the University of Glasgow.

In addition, unlike the Edinburgh Festival (where all Edinburgh's main festivals occur in the last three weeks of August), Glasgow's festivals virtually fill the entire calendar, from January through to December. Major festivals include the Glasgow Comedy Festival, Glasgow Jazz Festival, Celtic Connections, Glasgow Film Festival, West End Festival, Merchant City Festival, Glasgay, Piping Live and the World Pipe Band Championships. In addition, Glasgow has many live-music pubs, clubs and venues, and is renowned for its vibrant music scene.

Glasgow is especially fascinating if you are a piper or piping enthusiast; as mentioned, the city houses two centres for piping within its city centre and it's West End. The College of Piping, founded in 1944 sits cosily at 16-24 Otago Street, in a newly

⁷ (<http://www.scotland.org/about/fact-file/population/index.html>)

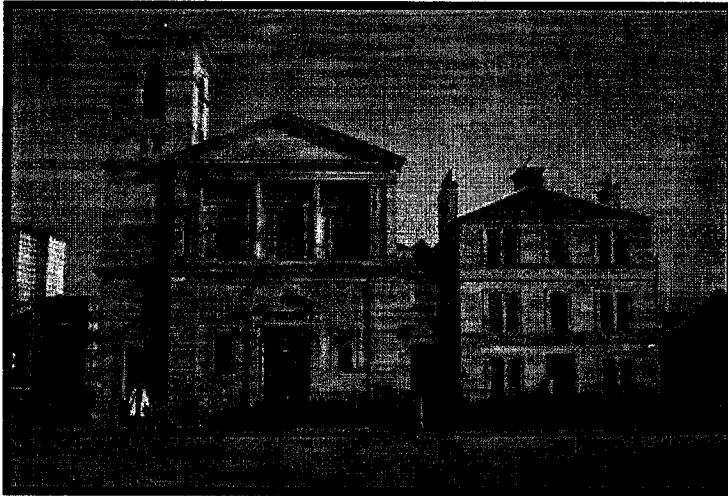
renovated building that houses both the school of piping and the college's museum. Its director and editor of the college's monthly edition of Piping Times, Robert (Rab) Wallace, had held this position since 1999. He is one of Scotland's leading professional pipers and has enjoyed a successful solo piping career. The College's founding Director; Seamus MacNeill had at one time been involved in a project that would have enabled the College of Piping to become a bigger and richer institution. This project had for a goal to recreate the College into an institution fitting of Scotland's National Instrument and reinvent itself into what would have been called the Piping Centre, where guest would find not along a piping school and museum, but a hotel and restaurant as well. Although the project fell through, Glasgow nevertheless saw the creation of its second piping school in 1996, where the Piping Centre planted its roots firmly into Cowcaddens Road in city centre and had since become The National Piping Centre.

I approached both centres and received positive and welcoming responses from both in regards to my fieldwork, however I soon realised that a rivalry existed between the two schools and opted not to conduct research in both. My decision to centre my research amongst the staff at The National Piping Centre was based mostly from the information I received from pipers in Montreal and Ottawa, Canada, who all insisted that The National Piping Centre was the better of the two institutions, in that it offered a much more diversified influence on the piping community through its piping instructors and teaching methods. Firstly, the staff included a greater number of piping instructors, from as young as twenty-five to as old as seventy-five, from countries such as South Africa, Ireland and New Zealand. Secondly, what the enabled the National Piping Centre to stand out amongst the two institutions was its attitude towards a much more

individualised style of play, allowing students to move away from a rigid traditional style of play so highly emphasized at the College of Piping. Thirdly, the National Piping Centre was a much bigger institution, attracting a greater number of students from around the world, through their seasonal piping schools, intensive week programs and especially through their affiliation with the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Dance. Fourthly, the instructors at the National Piping Centre came from very different piping backgrounds. A few had acquired their piping instruction through the Army School of Piping in Edinburgh and maintained piping related careers through the ranks of the army either as pipe sergeant, pipe major, director of piping or as instructor at the School or in various regiments. However, the majority of instructors at the Centre initially obtained their piping education through a family friend, private tutor or through the public education system. Many elementary and secondary education establishments in Glasgow and its surrounding areas, as well as elsewhere in Scotland, offered and continue to offer piping lessons to students, and a few of the piping instructors at the Centre benefited from this program. Meanwhile, piping instructors originating from outside of Scotland, in areas where piping education was not offered in schools, usually found instruction within the civic pipe band circuits or private tutors. However, most of all instructors at the Centre were thought through the influence of the College of Piping's Tutor Book, which until the publication of the National Piping Centre's Tutor Book had been the standard for piping instruction worldwide. Finally, after having spent a few weeks fraternizing with the administrative staff and instructors, I realized that I had found within the National Piping Centre, a community of significantly interesting pipers who offered

themselves willingly and happily to the mercy of my research and in turn enabled me to discover a completely different and unexpected reality within the piping world.

The National Piping Centre, Cowcaddens, Glasgow



In my final month at the National Piping Centre, I sat down with Roddy MacLeod, Director of Piping and Principal of the NPC School, and discussed with him the creation of the National Piping Centre, I was a little confused as to why a second piping school had been created in Glasgow when the College of Piping had been there since the 1944. Roddy, a piper in his mid-forties had gained a majority of his piping instruction during his teenage years and early twenties, under some of the most influential pipers and long time instructors at the College of Piping. The following information was taken from this particular conversation with Roddy MacLeod⁸.

In May 1996, The National Piping Centre first opened its doors with a promise to a new beginning for piping; it opened with a new school, a new hotel, new instructors and

⁸ Although written as a narrative, the following text was taken from a lengthy interview with Roddy MacLeod, MBE. Except for a few transition phrases and the exclusion of my questions, the words used to explain and describe the creation of the National Piping Centre were all taken from my interview with Roddy MacLeod.

more importantly a new influence on piping as a whole. Above all else, the centre opened its doors as the new home to Scotland's National Instrument; the Great Highland Bagpipe.

The creation of the National Piping Centre came through an explicit need to find a new home fitting for the Bagpipe, Scotland's national instrument. Although the College of Piping had been in existence for many years prior to this project, the site at which it sat had become quite decrepit and small, and was in need of a facelift, if not a full scale renovation project. The important and key figures in the project were Sir Brian Ivory, his wife Lady Oona Ivory and Andrew McNeill, a prominent and sought after piping judge. Sir Ivory, a very successful business man well connected with operational businesses throughout Scotland as well as within an elite social circuit teamed up with Andrew McNeil who promulgated the idea of finding a new home for piping in Scotland that would be linked to the College of Piping. At that time, the director and principal of the College of Piping, Seamus McNeil was also involved with both Sir and Lady Ivory in setting up what was called "The Piping Trust", a project aimed at getting funding to set up a new site for the College of Piping. From there, the whole piping trust and funding campaign was set up and funding came through Glasgow City Council, European Development Funding and Scottish Enterprise. Furthermore, Sir Ivory succeeded in obtaining further founding through various Trusts and as Chairman of Highland Distillers, through many whisky distilleries. Private donations were also received from individuals interested in supporting the project.

Seamus McNeill was meant to be Honorary Principal of the new Centre and directly beneath him would sit a director of piping and a director of administration.

However, Seamus McNeill disagreed with this and felt that 50 years of running the College of Piping made him very capable of running the new Centre without either director. What differed with the new Centre however was that it would not only be a piping school, it was also meant to hold a hotel and restaurant, a business endeavour meant to attract a greater number of individuals to both the Centre and Glasgow. Unfortunately, this caused a falling out and Seamus MacNeill backed out of the project and kept the College of Piping as it was. However, the College of Piping was not only a school; it also carried with it an existing group of students, instructors, a tutor book, a shop, a museum and a magazine publication. All of these were meant to follow to the new Centre but remained with the College of Piping. Nevertheless, on May 19th 1996, the National Piping Centre opened its doors with no business, no students, and no tutor book – absolutely nothing but a will to become.

Ten years later, the NPC is now the heart of piping for a majority of the international piping community and finds within its walls a very special group of hard working individuals who enable the Centre to maintain its importance, its influence and its appeal for pipers and piping enthusiasts around the world. I walked into the National Piping Centre for the first time on September 6th 2006 and walked out of the National Piping Centre for the last time (to date) on December 23rd 2006. My time at the centre, amongst its staff and instructors, is one that has not only triggered my appetite for piping, but that has changed me in many ways.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Making Contacts

In February 2006, I initially communicated, via email, with the director of the National Piping Centres piping school, Roddy MacLeod in order to introduce myself and to express my eagerness to conduct research in the area of Glasgow and amongst the pipers at the NPC. Although a reply did not arrive until a few months later, and came through the correspondence of Simon McKerrell, head of Piping Studies and a piping instructor at the National Piping Centre, it nevertheless informed me that I would be very welcomed to pursue research within the Centre's school, museum and amongst its instructors. Prior to my arrival in Glasgow, Simon and I had communicated via email multiple times and spoke on the telephone once briefly. I met Simon for the first time upon landing at Glasgow International Airport.

From the very first email, Simon became my most important collaborator, primary informant and good friend, and it is through him that I eventually met many of the other instructors, met important individuals in the piping circle such as world class solo pipers and sought after judges and instructors, discovered the Vicky Pub and it's many talented musicians, attended the Glenfiddich Championship, the top piping solo competition, and a recent PhD in Ethnomusicology recipient, someone who kept me on my toes with his many research-related questions and suggestions.

Methods and Notable Activities

In order to gain as much insight as possible about the National Piping Centre and its group of instructors and staff, I offered my services as a volunteer in any capacity that might benefit the National Piping Centre. This turned out to be one of my most

important 'fieldwork' related decisions; through my volunteering, I firstly gained access to a multitude of 'piping' material offered at the National Piping Centre through its museum, the shop, the instructors themselves and on-going gossip from both staff and instructors. In fact, I was given free range of the Centre in its entirety, and worked alongside the administrative staff for most of my volunteering. In my capacity as 'administrative assistant', a position I eventually fell into with the leaving of an employee, I worked directly for Roddy MacLeod and effectively managed the everyday tasks of running a piping school. As a result, I became very well acquainted with students, magazine subscribers, overseas students, and the instructors. I dealt with inquiring individuals by phone and in person and even met some very popular pipers. As a key player in the everyday functions of the National Piping Centre, I was quickly given many responsibilities that kept me highly involved in important aspect of the piping school such as organizing the overseas school in the USA and participating in the creation of the National Piping Centre Radio Show. Finally, it gave me the opportunity to work alongside of Margaret (Houlihan) Dunn, one of the greatest female pipers of our times, which not only allowed for a much more personal relationship to develop but also enabled me to meet her husband, Alistair Dunn, a very influential piper in the piping circuit today and a key piper of the Field Marshall Montgomery Pipe Band, 2006 World Champions. Margaret, originally from Cullen, County Cork in Ireland and Alistair, from Northern Ireland, are two of the youngest, yet best players of our time.

Jamming Sessions

Another aspect of conducting fieldwork in Glasgow, one which could certainly not be overlooked, was the music scene it offered. Two weeks into my fieldwork, Simon

suggested I meet up with him on a Friday night at the “Vicky Pub” (Victoria Pub) down by the river, in a part of town called the ‘Brigades’. The Vicky Pub was a typical little drinking establishment that looked as though it should have closed its doors to business decades ago. It stood completely decrepit at the corner of a very dark and narrow street and offered no real curb appeal to individuals walking past. As I stood across the street from it, mist falling softly from the darkened sky, I was dumbfounded that such a great music scene could take place in such an establishment. However, as I stepped in through its low doorway and into its brightly lit entrance, the cosiness and warmth offered by its low ceilings and dimmed orange lighting gave the place a much more welcoming feel than its exterior appearance. Within half an hour, a hand full of musicians had arrived, including Simon and I heard, for the first time in my life, a true Glaswegian folk/traditional music session.

Thus began my weekly Friday night outing at the Vicky Pub, where regular patrons seeking fantastic live traditional music and a beverage could come and sit in its small and cosy narrow room, decorated with a multitude of band posters, red vinyl benches and wood stools around small round wooden tables filled with carton coasters and enjoy a chat with the barman or friends. It was during my very first session at the Vicky that I met Robin the concertina player; a fellow Montréaler (of British decent) and professor at McGill University. Other regulars included Richard the bouzouki player, Christina the fiddler, Christina’s mother the flute player, Catherine the fiddler, Pdraig the box player, Alistair the fiddler/banjo player, Martin the fiddler, Simon the uilleann pipes player, Jean-Luc the small pipes player, Veronica the Bodhran player and Oliver also a Bodhran player. This same group, plus or minus a few individuals depending on

the night or local, could also be found jamming on Monday nights at Sharkey's Pub in the South End of Glasgow, Wednesdays and Thursdays at The Ben Nevis Pub in Glasgow's West End, Saturday afternoon's at Babbity Bowser in Merchant City and Sunday evenings at the Uisge Beatha also in Glasgow's West End.

All sessions were open to anyone interested in playing or just listening and although some seemed more 'clicky' than others, the general atmosphere and attitude found within the groups was a very welcoming one. The Ben Nevis usually attracted a much younger crowd of musicians, mainly students from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Dance, whereas pubs such as the Vicky, Babbity Bowsers and Sharkeys attracted a much older crowd. Most importantly, every session usually had one individual on either the small pipes, border pipes or Uilleann pipes. Attending these sessions allowed me to get to know pipers outside of the National Piping Centre, although most were usually connected either through instruction or friendship with the NPC.

Glenfiddich Piping Championship

On Saturday, 28 October, I had the opportunity of attending the Glenfiddich Piping Championship at Blair Castle in Perthshire. As an eager and curious newcomer to the world of piping, I jumped at this chance to attend such a highly esteemed event. I also confess to the enjoyment of making a few of my friends back home in the Black Watch (RHR) Pipes and Drums of Canada a little envious.

In a mood rather like that of embarking on a religious pilgrimage, Alex, Mike and I — all of us Canadians — set out for Blair Castle in Blair Atholl. We left Glasgow's grey skies and rainy weather for a horizon that suggested clearer weather. Arriving at

Stirling, we were immediately embraced by the beauty of Scotland's landscapes and historical architecture. Flat lands slowly transformed into a hilly terrain embellished by deep shades of green and the rich warm colours of autumn.

Although the sun had kissed our cheeks a few times during the voyage, when we got off the train at Blair Atholl station, the skies turned grey once again and a cold mist instantly dampened our faces as we walked along the main road leading to the Castle.

Blair Castle's distinctive white walls eventually appeared through the tall trees and then, seconds later, the castle was fully in view. We entered from the side entrance located on the eastern side, which opened into a glass-enclosed dining area and food counter where hot and cold meals could be bought. The room was abuzz with men, women and children, and the sound of pipes could clearly be heard coming from behind the closed doors to the left of the room.

To one side of the dining area, flat-screen televisions were set up, enabling those outside the competition room to observe the performances. I scanned the room quickly and noticed a few faces I recognized: Dr. Simon McKerrell and Gareth Rudolph from the National Piping Centre, and Dr Gary West from the University of Edinburgh. Although I recognized many others there as important figures in the piping world, I could not remember their names. I had been told to particularly look for Angus MacColl and Jim MacGillivray by Pipe Major Cameron Stevens of the Black Watch (RHR) Pipes and Drums of Canada.

Other pipers I had been told to watch for were Gordon Walker, Greg Wilson, William McCallum, Euan MacCrimmon, Iain Speirs, Murray Henderson, Allan Russell and of course Roddy MacLeod and Alastair Dunn. Alastair Dunn, Roddy MacLeod, and

Gordon Walker were the only three I recognized: Alastair Dunn whom I had seen at the National Piping Centre, Roddy MacLeod, of course, and Gordon Walker, from my National Piping Centre Tutor Book. Nevertheless, I was well aware and acknowledged that I was standing amongst many of the world's great pipers.

The actual performances took place in the castle's great hall behind closed doors to the west of the glass-covered dining area. A ticket table sat near the entrance into the great hall, whose doors had just opened. It wasn't until we had found seats and I had organized my 'researcher' material that I took the time to look around and take in all that the room had to offer. Sitting seven rows back from the stage, we had an excellent view of both the judges and the competitors. A huge stuffed Highland cow's head hung from the wall directly facing us and overlooking each competitor. Surrounding the cow, and on every wall of the room, deer skulls and antlers covered just about every square inch of the room. The ceiling itself consisted of dark wooden fixtures, huge wooden arches. It was a "great" room indeed, with fireplaces on both eastern and western walls.

The judges — Iain MacFadgen, Dr Jack Taylor and John Wilson for the *piobaireachd*⁹ and Pipe Major Jimmy Banks, John McDougall and Jim McGillivray for the March, Strathspey and Reel — sat to the left of the stage and the players entered from an hallway on the right. We settled seconds before Alastair Dunn's *piobaireachd* performance and watched every performance that followed.

⁹ (*noun*) Used to describe the traditional music of the pipes, sometimes referred to as "the classical music of the pipes." Composed of a ground (or "urlar") which is the first part of the tune, followed by doublings and or variations which substitute embellishments or phrases for those that appear in the ground, then the tune returns to end with the ground or a portion thereof. (Some *piobaireachds* call for the urlar to be played between each doubling/variation movement.) Complete *piobaireachd* tunes typically run 6 to 15 minutes in length. Sometimes referred to as "ceol mor." In Scottish, the term "*piobaireachd*" roughly means "bagpipe music" or "bagpiping." Pronounced "*pee-brock*."

Apart from at several Highland games, I had never attended a piping competition, and certainly had never had a chance to hear such highly ranked players. As we took our seat, Alastair had already begun tuning his pipes and I eagerly awaited my very first piobaireachd performance. Several times I leaned over to Mike and ask if the tune had begun yet. Mike, annoyed with me, eventually leaned over and said, "Once he starts you'll know." I thought to myself: "Great! How will I ever figure this one out?" But by the following piobaireachd performance, I had it figured out, and eagerly waited for that moment where I could hear the switch; my first small lesson of the day. Never in my life had I heard pipes sound so good and I still cannot get over the powerful effect of the piobaireachd I heard.

During each piobaireachd performance, the sound produced by the drones¹⁰ seemed to float from the stage and over the audience like mist rolling in off a foggy sea. Eventually the warm and heavy sound would slowly envelop us all in its rich and powerful sound, like a thick heavy blanket. In contrast, the firm, strident sound of each note produced by the chanter¹¹ created a strange disturbance to the soft humming of the drones but then blended into the soundscape. The feeling that grew within me when I would close my eyes during a piobaireachd was what I found truly magical and was most fascinated by. It was as though I could feel myself being transported away by the music.

Gareth Rudolph once spoke to me of the hypnotic effect of piobaireachd and, although I thought I had understood what he meant at the time he said it, I finally felt and experienced fully what he had tried to describe. In fact, I found it more than hypnotic; it

¹⁰ The three large wooden "tubes" tied together by cords on a set of great highland bagpipes, each continually plays a single note.

¹¹ The portion of a set of bagpipes upon which the piper produces the melody of a tune by opening and closing holes with his/her fingers. Sometimes called a "pipe chanter."

was like a going back in time. I am certain that my perception of the music was highly skewed by the romanticism that pervades this realm; nevertheless you can feel and understand how the music fits in with the sea, the glens, and the lochs. It is, as Neil Munro once wrote, “music to stir the blood and reach the inner soul of man.”

The March, Strathspey and Reel competition was just as exciting as the piobaireachd competition but, more upbeat. And, as little as I might know about piping, I knew I was hearing some fantastic playing and I remained completely mesmerized by each and every performance. I quickly realized that I could not even begin to appreciate this experience in the same way that a piper from back home would, especially one who has never had the opportunity to come to Scotland. I did, however, appreciate the immensity and importance of this event for myself, as an anthropologist and researcher, but also more personally as a newly committed and eager student of the pipes. I appreciated wholly that I was standing amongst some of the greatest pipers of the generation, great and accomplished individuals, and sought-after instructors.

I must admit, it certainly felt quite strange standing in a room rubbing shoulders with some of these individuals — especially since I recognized so few of them until their appearance on stage. Strangely enough, it felt completely ‘normal’ and ‘ordinary’, while at the same time completely surreal. The thought of being so close to so many famous pipers, stars in their own capacity, was awe-inspiring.

National Piping Centre Events

Throughout the four months in which I conducted fieldwork at the National Piping Centre, I had the opportunity to take part in a variety of events held by the Centre.

Three of the bigger events were the “Exotic Piping Night”, organized by Simon McKerrell, a RSAMD Piobaireachd recital, organized by Gavin Stoddart and Simon McKerrell and an office Christmas céilidh organized by the Centre’s hotel catering staff.

Exotic Piping Night

The Exotic Piping Night, held Wednesday 22nd November, consisted of a series of mini-concerts where the bagpipe was the main focus of attention. The concert opened up with Simon as the first act, with a MSR¹², followed by a few more traditionally styled tunes. This was shortly followed by an Irish Uilleann player, Sean McKeon, one of today’s leading Uilleann pipers, who entertained the crowd with jigs and reels played by unbelievably talented hands. Finally, the heart of the show, and what I eagerly waited for all evening was the Indian Alba, where players Ross Ainslie on border pipes, Gyan Singh on Tabla, Sharat Srivastave on Violin and Nigel Richard on Cittern combined traditional Scottish and Indian classical music to create a unique and exotic sound.

Piobaireachd Concert

The Piobaireachd Recital was mostly a concert organized by Simon McKerrell for the students partaking in the Scottish Traditional Music Degree at the RSAMD, whose performance option is the Great Highland Bagpipe. In fact, this concert was really their final performance exam where each of the students played a piobaireachd tune as they would in competition or on performance. Although it was not required of them to dress up for the performance, two pipers chose to wear the kilt, dress shirt and jacket.

¹² March, Strathesby, Reel. Common combination of tunes played in competition.

Christmas Céilidh

The Christmas céilidh was an event originally organized for an outside company. The auditorium of the NPC can always be hired out for events such as luncheons, dinners, céilidhs, weddings and so on. Throughout the Christmas season, many companies chose to hold their annual Christmas lunch or dinner at the NPC with the addition of a céilidh band. This particular day, December 22nd, three tables remained empty and so the manager to the Tryst hotel and bar invited the administrative staff of the NPC to partake in the Christmas fun. This was my first 'real' Scottish céilidh.

A Céilidh (pronounced "kay-lee") is a social event, typically with Celtic music and dancing. The music is provided by any assortment of fiddle, flute, tin whistle, accordion, bodhrán. The music is cheerful and lively, and the basic steps can be learned easily; a short instructional session is often provided for new dancers before the start of the dance itself.

The general format of céilidh dancing is the "Set". A Set consists of four couples, with each pair facing another in a square or rectangular formation. Each couple exchanges position with the facing couple, and also facing couples exchange partners, while all the time keeping in step with the beat of the music. However, about half of the dances in the modern Scots céilidh are couple dances performed in a ring. These can be performed by fixed couples or in the more sociable "progressive" manner, with the lady moving to the next gentleman in the ring at or near the end of each repetition of the steps.

Piping Instruction

During my first month of fieldwork, Paul Warren offered to give me piping lessons during the length of my stay at the National Piping Centre to which I gratefully agreed. It

seem most appropriate for me to familiarize myself as much as possible with the Great Highland Bagpipe and what better way to do so then by actually learning to play the instrument. The Centre provided me with a Tutor Book and I had brought a practice chanter¹³ with me from Canada. My lessons ran on a weekly basis and were conducted by Paul on all occasions except for twice with Finlay MacDonald. This was especially interesting because of the huge differences in teaching methods of the two piping instructors. Paul, a piper who gained most of his piping experience within a military context, offered a very rigid lesson. Finlay, on the other hand, whose personality is very easygoing and fun, offered a much more relaxed hour of instruction based less on method and more on emotion. As a general rule, I would not suggest to the avid learner to switch between instructors until a certain level of playing has been achieved; such difference in teaching techniques actually caused more confusion for me and hindered my progress as a piper.

Qualitative interviews

I conducted formal qualitative interviews with all piping instructors at the National Piping Centre, and the majority of these interviews were digitally recorded with written permission from the interviewee. One interview, which happened par hazard, was not recorded and another did not get recorded because of a faulty recorder; therefore all information found within this thesis pertaining to these two discussions comes from notes and memory. All interviews were conducted at the Tryst Hotel and bar and usually lasted between forty-five minutes to an hour and a half. Consent forms were provided to all

¹³ A small simple mouth blown double-reed instrument (similar to a recorder) with the fingering of a full set of Great Highland Bagpipes. Used for practicing fingering and learning new tunes. Often seen abbreviated as "PC."

interviewees, although two collaborators chose not to sign the form. The names of my piping interviewees have not been replaced by pseudonyms because all interviewees requested that their actual names be used within my thesis. Consequently, I also obtained permission from the National Piping Centres directors to use the actual name of the Centre as opposed to a fictitious one, since, as it was made evident to me that anyone familiar with piping would obviously know of whom and what I was speaking regardless of the change in names, and that after all, my research seemed purposeful and important to the Centre in many ways.

Informally, I gained much of my data via unpredicted conversations with individuals whom I met while volunteering at the National Piping Centre, at the various Pubs around Glasgow, in my daily conversations with the piping instructors at the National Piping Centre and generally throughout my everyday activities. Although the formal interviews that I conducted with the instructors at the National Piping Centre enabled me to acquire data to pre-conceived questions, the many informal conversations shared with many of these same instructors inevitably allowed me to get to know them on a very different level, and therefore also enabled me to understand them in much greater depth and in a nonchalant way, in a much less rigid and structured atmosphere than the formal interviewing process. Since the majority of the instructors had been interviewed at great lengths in the past for varying reasons, it seemed important to gain this informal access into their lives. During formal interviews, answers came quickly and often seemed rehearsed, whereas while sitting at the pub enjoying a pint and having a laugh, their banter offered a very different glimpse into their individuality and their sense of self as pipers, musicians, individuals and so on. Nevertheless, the blending of information

acquired through formal interviewing and that obtained through unanticipated conversations facilitated a full immersion into my field site.

Chapter Three: The National Piping Centre

“The NPC is much more than a place, a teaching institution. We operate all sorts of initiatives and schemes, we have a much wider capacity for teaching; currently we have around 167 evening class students, 200 students in schools a week, 20 individuals coming for lessons every week and more than that counting holidays. We run nine or ten week long schools every year and internationally as well; two in America, one in Prague, six here. Also we have the piping festival; Finlay and Roddy really devote a lot of time and it’s a massive way to promote piping to Scottish people who aren’t pipers, the National Youth Pipe Band, the degree program who will hopefully soon form a new partnership with the University of Glasgow, the CLASP, there is just so many things going on in the building, to me the National Piping Centre, plus we have restaurant and hotel; I really think it means we have this role that stretches far beyond the role of teaching, and if it wasn’t here piping would be much poorer...” (Simon McKerrell – Interview)

Standing at the top of Hope Street, at it’s junction with Cowcadden Street, I felt a little disappointed at the sight before me. I cannot say for certain what I had expected, except that the National Piping Centre would have the look of an institution in which piping was the main focus. What would that look like exactly? I was expecting something a little more “Scottish”, though I am uncertain of what that might look like. I was completely taken aback by my reaction and with my expectations of this institution. In all seriousness, how would an institution geared towards the teaching and promoting of the bagpipe manifest its purpose through its exterior structure? I had no idea and felt a little perplexed at my initial reaction of the National Piping Centre’s exterior. This, however, did not prevent me from feeling thoroughly enchanted at the sight that filled my vision. Lacking the look of a “piping” institution had certainly not taken away from its majestic physique.

The unopened umbrella held in a ‘cane’ like fashion stood to my right as I lightly leaned on it and watched the sun’s rays illuminate the front façade of the National Piping Centre. It glowed as freshly polished gold would from such intense attention from the

sun. It radiated warmth and beckoned to be touch. It was indeed a superb building, surely quite fitting of its position at the top of Hope Street, rising dramatically from the Clyde to Cowcaddens ridge, standing like a beacon of hope for those pedestrians climbing the slow incline of Hope Street. Resembling that of an Italian style church, its Tuscan tower, Greek elements, and simple pedimented façade with a side campanile and clerestory glazing gave the National Piping Centre great stature.

Its walls were built of cream sandstone laid in ashlar that when illuminated with the sun, polished the façade in a soft sun kissed glow. A strong central door and two side doors composed of birch coloured wood, set in channelled pilastered quoins gave the front façade a rustic base.



Three carefully designed stained glass windows characterized this section of the front façade. Unfortunately, in clear daylight, the intricate detailing of the artist's work was not immediately visible to onlookers. The building's size and stature encourage its



likeness to a Greek temple, yet its slated roof and Tuscan Tower gave it a classical Italian caricature.

I learned from different sources that the building served as a Free Church of Scotland building from 1872 to the mid 1900s. For the past 10 years

however, it has been the new home of one of the country's most identifiable symbols and an ambassador for Scotland throughout the world; the Great Highland Bagpipe. Since it opened its doors in 1996, the National Piping Centre has become a world wide centre of excellence attracting pipers from all over the world and placing Scotland, once again, at the heart of the piping tradition.

I quickly crossed Cowcadden Street and descended the 4 stairs that led onto McPhater Street, a quirky narrow road made of cobblestone that ran south alongside the western side of the NPC and curved sharply around the building's front to find it's end a mere 100 feet or so away. I was extremely curious about the buildings interior; surely I would find inside the "Scottishness" not found on the outside, or at least get a sensation that I had in fact, stepped into a "piping" institution.

Scottishness; What Does It Mean?

I quarrel with this idea of Scottishness¹⁴; what exactly does the term "Scottishness" mean, and how would "Scottishness" become something tangible and concrete that I could point my finger to and say "this is definitely an example of Scottishness"? Would it have a specific look, a smell, a flavour or a sound and would it be instantly recognizable by a greater public - should it be instantly recognizable? The term itself seems highly problematic; first of all, it boxes in as a category all aspects of being Scottish. Yet being Scottish is in my opinion something that cannot be primordially defined or categorized; what are the requirements for adhesion to this group?

¹⁴ According to Webster's New Universal unabridged Dictionary, based on the second edition of *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, the Unabridged Edition*, the term Scottishness (n) refers to the term Scottish (adj) which is defined as "of or pertaining to Scotland, it's people, or their language."

Is being born in Scotland the only sure way to be Scottish? What about the multitudes of individuals, who immigrate to Scotland every year, will they never become Scottish? What about their children born in Scotland, are they necessarily more Scottish than their parents even if they might associate more with their parent's culture? Many Canadians of Scottish descent, who have never set foot in Scotland, identify themselves as being Scottish; are they less Scottish than those who reside in Scotland but who were not born there? Should they be corrected when they speak of themselves as being Scottish? Some might say so, I suppose. There are of course varying opinions on such questions, and these would depend greatly on one's understanding and opinion of identity as a concept. "Identity is not a "thing" that can be treated as real or unreal, but a social space in which matters of structure and culture come together" (McCrone, 2001). First of all, is one's identity always to be negotiated vis-à-vis ethnic or national boundaries? Can it not also be negotiated in terms of personal beliefs, group adhesion and personal interests? I believe that it can, and that individuals engage in a plurality of relationships on a daily basis that require the negotiating of multiple identities. Therefore, when individuals search for Scottishness, what is it that they are truly expecting to find? How is Scottishness to be articulated and is it in fact definable? Might it simply be too personal and individualistically appreciated to actually bear the weight an overarching meaning that is meant for all? Wouldn't one have to define what it is to be Scottish in a very concrete way before finding a solid meaning to Scottishness? Defining 'being Scottish', isn't that unfortunately nothing more than just a pipe dream?

Having said this, how does something then become Scottish, like a building, merely because its physical foundation is completely implanted solidly into Scottish soil?

Isn't it Scottish by default without necessarily expressing it in its character? And again, when speaking of the National Piping Centre, I question, how would it look more Scottish than it already is, and more importantly, why should it look more Scottish? Would its connection to Scotland's national instrument, a symbol of Scottish culture, imply that its exterior should also be fitting of its role as a centre of excellence and tradition?

The term "Scottishness" at times, can also invoke a certain consciousness of Scotland; a landscape of the mind imaginatively captured in literature and mobilised by the tourist industry (McCrone, 2001); as well as a discourse of authenticity that might only be found at Highland games and Scottish fairs all across North America. (Nadel-Klein, 1997)

Entering The National Piping Centre

It was clear that the exterior of the building represented a plethora of architectural styles that, at one time, had been fashionable in Glasgow, and therefore were characteristic of a certain Scottish essence per say. Conversely, its grandeur and beauty should be seen as representative of the Great Highland Bagpipe. Therefore, there were no reasons why this actual structure could not represent the home of Scotland's National Instrument. Upon reflection, I supposed it wasn't so much the lack of Scottishness that stunned me but the mere sensation that the building's exterior gave no hints of its importance within the piping community. There were no apparent signs of it being a piping centre created for the purpose of becoming the new home of the Great Highland Bagpipe.

Still unsure of what these signs should be, or how I would characterize this *look*, I pushed the heavy glass doors of the National Piping Centre's main entrance and stepped into the heart of my field site. Over time, these glass doors became symbolic of my entering and exiting the field; stepping in meant engaging with an environment made strange by a culture I knew very little of, whereas stepping out meant engaging with an environment that resembled home. Stepping in also meant becoming immersed within a piping community and piping culture reified by an institution constantly engaged with the maintenance, promotion and survival of piping. As a non-piping individual, I was continually engrossed in a sort of strangeness within its walls. Even though I shared great commonalities with a majority of pipers at the National Piping Centre; age, gender, language, I still felt unfamiliar around them in the National Piping Centre. Subsequently, when in the company of members of the piping community outside of the National Piping Centre's perimeter, I also felt outside of my unfamiliar field site, and within a cultural milieu that I could identify with. The National Piping Centre glass doors became the boundary between the outside world and that of the piping world.

A Piping Environment

I use the term culture loosely here to designate an environment not necessarily defined by ethnicity, identity or belonging, but more so defined by an activity and knowledge base. The city of Glasgow, although quite different to Montreal superficially and in population, resembles it greatly in that it is a western cosmopolitan environment where both cities share a common language, belief systems, immigrant population and so on. The National Piping Centre is a community that shares a culture, the culture of piping. As an

individual who does not play the Great Highland Bagpipe, who does not have a grasp of piping terminology, who cannot tell the difference between the types of piping tunes, I felt like a foreigner in a strange land within the centre's walls. I recognized the music but could not speak of it technically and I recognize the language but could not understand the majority of it; I felt culturally displaced.

The Mecca of Piping

I appreciated the sense of welcome that the glass doors bestowed; except for the stainless steel handles, no other structures obscured the view into the National Piping Centre. Their grandeur and visual openness gave the massive front entrance softened appeal and engaged passer-bys to step in and have a look and see.

The tranquility of the space I had just stepped into genuinely caught me off guard. I had anticipated being welcomed into this building by the loud hum of a bass drone and two tenor drones blended with the stringent blows of the chanter. Instead, it was the soft sound of a female voice singing in a Gaelic tongue to a slow melancholic melody that welcomed me into the National Piping Centre. The softness of her voice blended with the warmth of the sun rays that shone through the glass windows and doors, and joined as one in exuding a sensation [or sense] of peace and calm. Specks of dust floated melodiously to and fro across the warm light swaying with the mesmerizing sound of the harp. Goose bumps covered my arms and I shivered not of cold but of feeling like I had just entered a very sacred place – the “Mecca¹⁵” of piping perhaps?

¹⁵ I chose to use the term Mecca because it was the term used most often by pipers in Montréal who knew I would be spending time at the National Piping Centre.

It struck me as highly significant to have engineered this sort of entrance to the National Piping Centre. If you look at the centre from a structural point of view, all of the doors that lead into the centre are made of heavy wood. There are three sets of double doors on its front façade and a few more around the sides and back. All doors are kept shut except for the front entrance where the wooden doors are usually attached to the side walls of the channelled quoins. The closed wooden doors give the building a very strict unwelcoming appearance: they made the building seem very stern and isolated. Thankfully, it is rare to see all three sets of front doors closed. Therefore, there is most often a sense of amicable openness attached to the National Piping Centre's exterior and this is mostly promulgated by the disappearance of the severe wooden doors and the invisibility of the glass doors at the main entrance. It is as though the centre is promoting a strong notion of sociability with the public and implying it's accessibility through an unobstructed view of the inside of its core.

This sentiment, I discovered, was often mirrored in the attitudes of the men and women pipers with whom I spent time throughout my fieldwork. As representatives of the piping community, these pipers instilled in me a sense of welcome that I felt was not reserved for me alone, or because of my research. My time among them enabled me to understand that the community welcomed with great pleasure the interests of many and usually truly enjoyed the attention. For the most part, I was always made to feel very welcome amongst them, and often felt as I though I stood out amongst other curious onlookers because I had chosen to focus my research interest on piping and pipers.

Therefore, throughout the length of my fieldwork, I quickly began to associate the sensation expressed by the openness of the front entrance to the general attitude of pipers and the piping community.

Inside the National Piping Centre

I stood in the passageway that spanned the width of the National Piping Centre building and the adjacent Tryst Hotel, Café and Bar and looked around from right to left. The reception area stood at a 45 degree angle to my right and comprised an L shaped desk and counter area, accessible from the passageway and from the front entrance of the shop which stood directly in front of me. All the walls were blue, a strong blue, not the sort of blue you would use to paint a bathroom or kitchen, certainly not the soft blue one might use for a baby's room. No this was a strong patriotic blue; the blue of the St. Andrews Cross, the blue of Scotland's flag. A deliberate choice of colour, I wondered or simply a poor decorating idea? This was a piping institution after all, and the Great Highland Bagpipe belonged to Scotland, I was certain these walls meant to express the sentiment that you had just walked into a Scottish place and a piping community. I wondered however, if this place might be considered a little more Scottish than the urban environment I had just walked out of when I entered through the boundaries of the NPC?

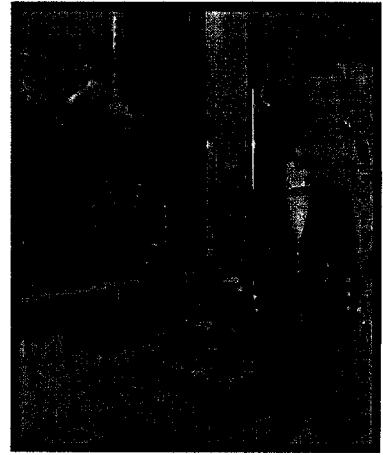
It is important to consider my reaction and confusion regarding the National Piping Centre's physical presence where my assumptions and my expectations of this physical place highly mirrored those of tourists arriving in Scotland for the first time.

"For many people, the North of Scotland epitomizes their image of the country as a whole. Mountains, heather, kilts, & whisky are just some of the ingredients that contribute to the magnetic charm of the Highlands." ('Golf Vacations in Scotland Brochure')¹⁶

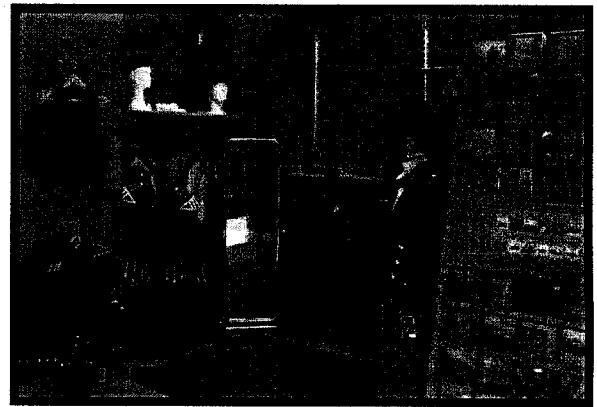
I had visited Scotland in the past and knew better than to expect what many first time tourists sought in their travel to this beautiful country. My first visit to Scotland was certainly promulgated by this popular vision of Scotland that is highly marketable for the tourist industry. I can't say that I ever found in Scotland what is so often depicted in literature or films; I did however discover a place where I felt at home. I had spent the majority of my time in Glasgow, a city I had come to know well. Therefore, upon my return to Scotland for the purpose of my research, I did not feel the strangeness, or unsettlement that many anthropologists feel upon setting foot for the first time unto their field site. I had however, never stepped foot inside the National Piping Centre in all of my previous visits, nor had I ever even known of its existence prior to the beginning my research. My experience and my interaction with the building as a concrete space and as an abstract concept completely mirrored that of first time tourists. Since it was a "piping centre", and since piping is so often associated with Scotland, I had expected to hear, see and breath Scotland upon seeing the building and entering its perimeter. More importantly, these expectations emerged unconsciously; I had in fact expected to feel very at home at the National Piping Centre because of its location in Glasgow.

¹⁶ Quote taken from Jane Nadel-Klein's article *Crossing a representational divide: From west to east in Scottish Ethnography* in 'After Writing Culture; Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology, edited by Allison James, Jenny Hockey and Andrew Dawson.

I traversed the few feet that led to the shop entrance, an area designated by a wide opening and the shop/reception counter. I was welcomed by a standing kilted wooden structure bearing the Stewart of Fingask tartan and a black formal jacket. There were other kilts hanging from hangers along one of the wall but were less in evidence then this wooden structure. In this corner,

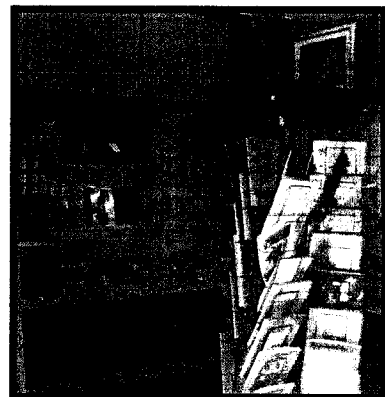


shirts and jackets also hung from hangers and a few pairs of black shoes laid atop shoeboxes remained somewhat visible to those inclined to look downwards. There were a handful of catalogues on a counter area near the kilted figure – these displayed



the many varying tartan styles available to those purchasing a kilt or simply researching their “family” tartan. In a moment of total tourist envy, I browsed through the catalogues and found the ancient MacDonald Clan tartan that my stepfather so often mentioned to me during my previous travels to Scotland.

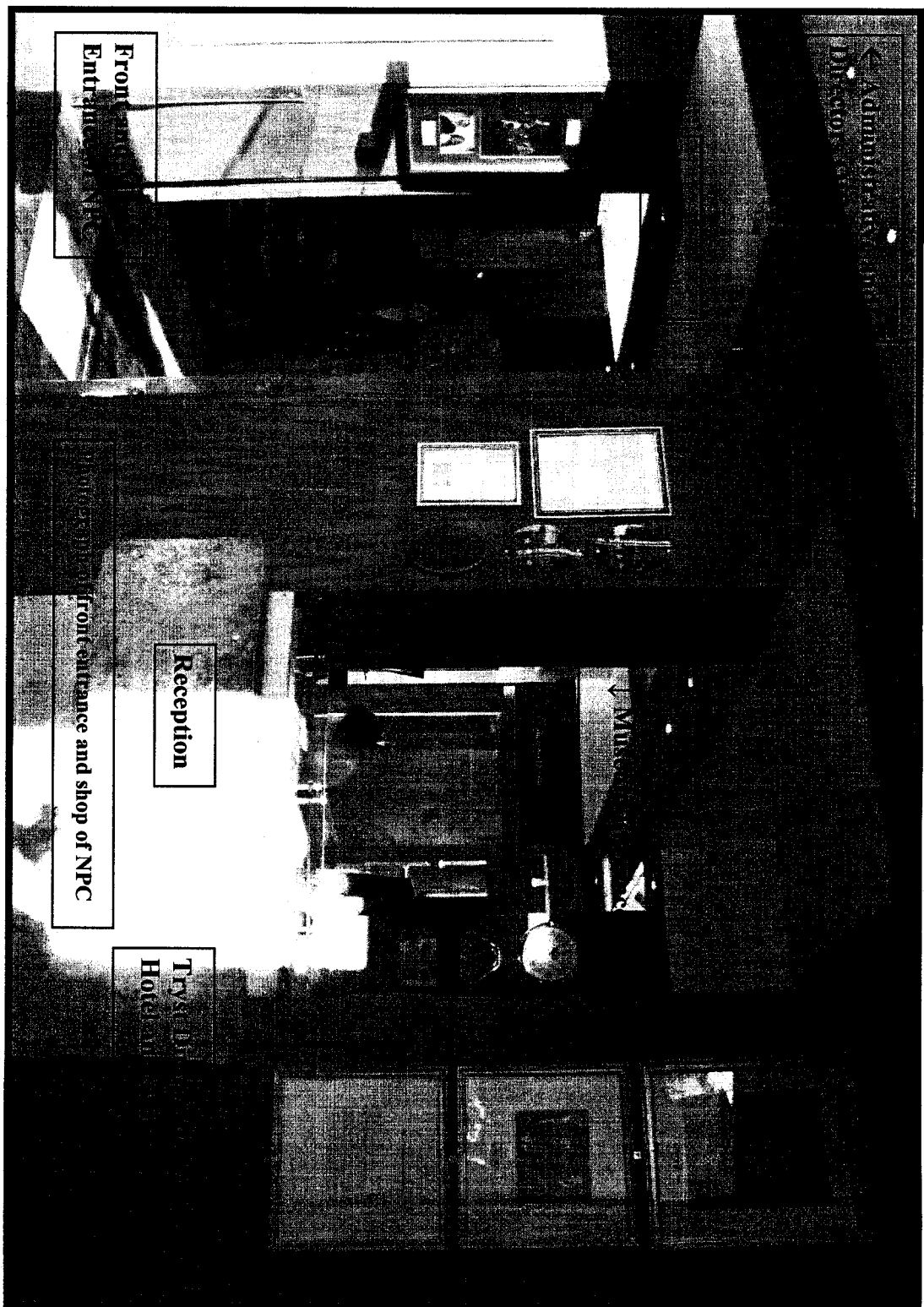
Further to the back were piping supplies; practice chanter, tutor books, music books, waxed hemp, chanter reeds, drone reeds, etc. On the rack to my right, piping books displayed in a vertical manner caught my attention; one of them had the Canadian flag as its front cover. Against the back wall separating the



shop to the museum were old bagpipes on display in old display cases. They were haggard looking, their wood faded and lacking its original lustre, the bags seeming to have blown their last breath. Beautiful in their dilapidations, these bagpipes were simple, organic and old. I looked up at the glass doors leading to the museum and wondered what else I would see upon entering it. I decided to wait to see the museum.



I found myself wandering toward the “gift” shop area and skimmed the multitudes of CD’s for sale. Although a majority of these were of pipe bands, a great number of them were also of solo pipers. Many band names I recognized; The Simon Fraser University Pipe Band (Canada), Field Marshall Montgomery Pipe Band (Northern Ireland), 78th Fraser Highlanders Pipe Band (Canada), and many solo pipers as well; Gordon Duncan, Angus McColl, Gordon Walker, Chris Armstrong. There were CD’s of recorded pipe band competitions such as the World Pipe Band Championships as well as piping events such as the ‘Piping Live’ festival and ‘Celtic Connections’ festival. There were compilations from shows held within Glasgow, Scotland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States. I even discovered a pipe band named “red hot chilli pipers” – I had to laugh at the play on words. There was so much to take in, from the CD’s and DVD’s of piping event, solo pipers, concert and so on, to the multitude of tune books – this room held an incredible amount of material “piping” culture.



I had noticed on the left wall of the entrance, a frame where a picture of a piper dressed in full dress¹⁷ holding his bagpipe and regimental pipe banner in his left hand and a sword in his right. I returned to it and read the little card placed above the picture. The picture was that of late PM Angus MacDonald, a piper of great influence I supposed.

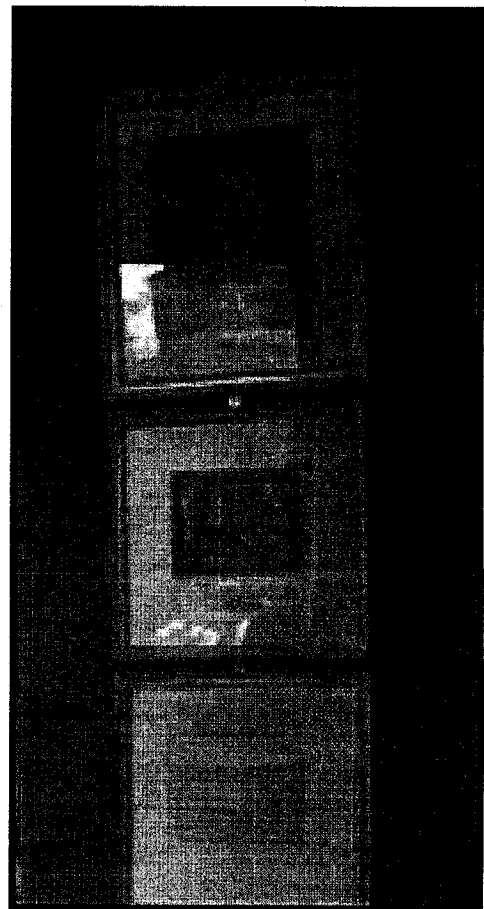
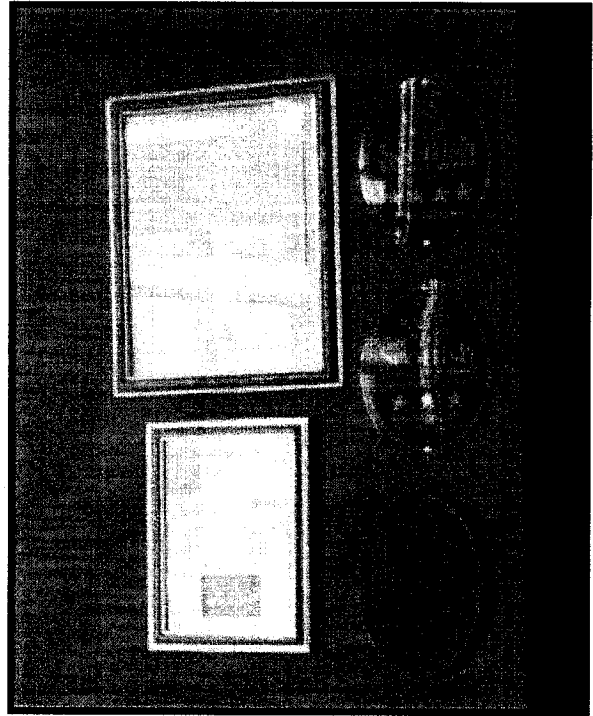
PM Angus MacDonald was the first principal piping instructor at the National Piping Centre when it opened its doors in 1996. He was a highly regarded piper within the piping community and held an impressive track record in competition that is unsurpassed. His death in 1999 was devastating to the Piping community and left a void that has been difficult to fill. Subsequently, in the hopes of immortalizing his influence, the NPC set up the "Pipe Major Angus MacDonald Piping Scholarship" in order to encourage and assist young pipers to learn the art of piping. The scholarship is especially significant in that it offers an outlet for tuition and growth for pipers outside of a military capacity. Like many other pipers of his time, PM Angus MacDonald carved out a piping career through the ranks of the military with the Scots Guard, where he served as Pipe Major of the 1st Battalion, Pipe Major at the Scots Guard Piping School and as Senior Pipe Major of the British Army over a period of little more than thirty years.

On the right wall of the shop entrance, but to the left of the reception desk, two plaques from the Scottish Tourist Board, one awarding four stars to the Museum of Piping and the other awarding three stars to the "restaurant with rooms" stood in contrast with the blue of the wall. Directly below these plaques sat a darkened copper plaque from "Historic Scotland", a heritage and historical institution devoted to safeguarding Scotland's Historic environment. Among these items was a framed document explaining

¹⁷ The most elaborate piping uniform called "Full Dressed" or Number 1 Ceremonial Dress.

the creation of the National Piping Centre, as well as Sir Brian Ivory and his wife Lady Iona Ivory's involvement with the project.

To the right of the reception desk, three gold frames held a picture of Patron HRH the Prince Charles, Duke of Rothesay, a picture of himself with Sir and Lady Ivory, two of the three founders of the National Piping Centre and the musical notation of a piping tune called HRH Prince Charles' Welcome to the Piping Centre composed by Roddy MacLeod.



Entering The Field

It is 11:30 am Wednesday morning, not yet 24 hours since my arrival in Glasgow. Simon McKerrell suggested yesterday that I come by the centre today and meet with him at around 11:30 am to discuss his involvement with my research and my involvement with the NPC. A male employee of the NPC had finally returned to the reception desk by the time I reached the picture of Prince Charles. "Hi, I'm here to see Simon." I stood totally taken aback when to my surprise, the man replied to me in a Canadian accent. "Where are you from?" I asked. "Alberta" he said with a smile. His smile was a dead giveaway that he had also figured out I was Canadian; he never asked me where in Canada I was from, he simply picked up the telephone and within seconds spoke to Simon, informing him that I had arrived. "Simon will be up in a minute, he says to go wait for him in the Tryst". "Thanks" I replied and headed into the hallway that led to the Tryst Hotel, Bar and Café. Now this place definitely held more of the Scottish essence I had been expecting to see. Although the tables and leather chairs were all of an espresso shade of brown, the cushioned benches that served as seating against the walls were all of a predominantly burnt orange and cream tartan.

On the western wall, a row of whisky bottle boxes decorated a shelf that took up the width of the wall. Above the whisky display were black and white portraits of pipers in full dress, framed in beautiful gold cases. These portraits were hung on every wall of the room. A small bar sat in the north western corner and a young girl dressed in black trousers and black fitted blouse stood wiping dry newly cleaned pint glasses. Without looking up she suggested I take a seat wherever I liked and informed me that she would be with me shortly. I chose the table nearest me and sat down opposite the entrance.

Although the chatter in the area behind the bar was quite loud, the room was filled with the sounds of piping music playing on the sound system. I checked my watch and realized Simon was twenty minutes late.

Simon arrived shortly thereafter, sat down across from me and ordered lemonade.

"I felt uncomfortable today during my meeting with Simon. I felt inadequate, unprepared, (academically) immature and not confident. My meeting with Roddy went much better – he seemed really nice and sort of surprised with my offer to volunteer my time for nothing in return." (Notes from field journal)

- "How's it going Genevieve? I see you found your way here!"
- "I did, thanks, your instructions were easy to follow."
- "Fantastic – so tell me, how can I be of assistance to your research?"

I suggested some ideas and he agreed to help me in any way he could all while suggesting I speak to Roddy MacLeod about doing some volunteer work for the Centre. We briefly discussed my research and fieldwork and Simon offered his thoughts. I asked if he would let me read his doctoral thesis on Piping Aesthetics in competitive piping and that seemed to please him greatly. With one last swallow of lemonade, he stood, thanked me for coming, wished me luck and was gone.

Truth be told, I had expected a lengthier meeting and the offer of a tour of the Centre at the very least; instead I had just enough time to ask Simon some very basic questions before he was off. This seemed like a bad start to my fieldwork and I became suddenly very nervous about meeting Roddy McLeod.

I ran into Roddy MacLeod on my way back into the NPC. I did not need to introduce myself, Simon had already warned everyone of my presence in at the National Piping Centre. We spoke briefly and Roddy asked me how best he and the NPC could

help further my research. I made him aware of my intent to interview pipers and he immediately informed me that I was more than welcome to spend as much time as I felt necessary at the NPC. In order to spend as much time in and around the NPC, I decided to offer my services as a volunteer for the length of my stay in Glasgow, an offer that was graciously accepted by Roddy.

I began my volunteering two weeks later where I was entrusted with the sorting out of the National Piping Centre's huge database of students, visitors, magazine subscribers and customers. At the time, the administrative assistant to both directors was taking a month of "sick leave" which meant that I was also filling in for her. However, it was not long that I had taken over her position and was succeeding at it quite well. This employee did return for two months before surrendering her notice. Since I had become very accustomed to her duties, both directors invited me to stay past my departure date to replace this employee, which I did. From that point on, my volunteer position became a temporary full-time administrative assistant position, where I worked under the supervision of Roddy McLeod and Alberto Laidlaw. Since most of my days were filled with the operational task required of her position, as well as with the maintenance of the tuition diary, National Piping Centre website and magazine subscriptions, I gained an in-depth understanding of the ways in which a charity based organization functions and formed important contacts and friendships with many of the other employees. During this time, I also participated in all staff meetings, the creation of the National Piping Centre Radio Show and many other National Piping Centre events.

A Day in The Life Of The National Piping Centre

It was a day like any other. I woke to the sound of my mobile phone's alarm, set to ring at 7:30am precisely. Though my blind was shut, I could tell it was dark out, probably rainy as well, it had been for the past few days. I sat up and stretched, yawned and looked at the time, 7:38am; time to get moving. I stood and went to my closet, decided what to wear and laid it out on my unmade bed. I then grabbed my towel and headed for the bathroom just steps from my bedroom.

Once my hair dried and I fully dressed, I headed to the kitchen where I ate breakfast and checked email quickly with my laptop. Grabbing an apple, a fruit smoothie, I hurried down the stairs to the front entrance where my coat, shoes and bag were all waiting for me. Once outdoors, I locked the door, made sure my practice chanter was well secured in my bag and walked away from the townhouse where I stayed. It was a 7 minute walk to the bus stop and as long as I caught a bus heading to city centre by 8:30am, I knew I would make it in to work for 9am.

Descending the bus at a stop directly facing the back entrance of the Sauchiehall Street Marks & Spencer, I made my way eastbound on Cambridge St., passing in front of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Dance and turned Northbound on Hope St. From this point on, the National Piping Centre dominates your entire field of vision. I hurried up Hope St, caught the green light at Cowcaddens, crossed it at a jog and ran up the National Piping Centre's stairs. I walked into the shop where I often take five minutes to chat with people or have a quick browse at the new CD's in stock. This morning I have no time for browsing, it's five minutes to nine am and I have yet to settle myself in at my desk in the administrative office of the National Piping Centre. I need to

check recent emails, get my morning cup of coffee at the Tryst, make sure there are no problems with the tuition diary and deal with a woman who is scheduled to call me about a Russian film crew landing in Edinburgh and wanting to see some “real” Scottish pipers.

The Russians Are Coming



The call came through at 11 am. Could a Russian film crew come to the Piping Centre in a few hours to do some filming for a small montage they want to air back in Russia about the National Piping Centre and its pipers? The National Piping Centre is always eager to please curious tourists, and this is certainly a great way to get international exposure. However, the request was not to be that simple. In fact, this film crew was trying to find what this woman kept referring to as a ‘real’ Scotsman; someone who regularly dressed in full highland gear, who spoke Gaelic, who played the bagpipe and most of all whose last name began with “Mac”. Not only did the film crew expect to find this person here at the National Piping Centre, they wanted to interview him and use him as their host for the day. I stood baffled by the request and considered that I might be at the receiving end of a bad joke. “I’m sorry, I am not sure if the National Piping Centre will be able to accommodate all of these requests, in fact there are no pipers here today whose last name begins with ‘Mac’. It’s Friday so we are short of staff and the three pipers that

are here have lessons all day. Do you have an idea of the time at which they plan to arrive in Glasgow?" The crew had been on a sightseeing tour of the Highlands in search of "true Scots", following the whisky trail and looking for anyone with a last name that began with "Mac". They apparently had not found him yet and sought to find him here at the NPC. They did not want to return to Russia without finding him, the woman expressed to me many times, it would be simply unacceptable. "Well, if the crew arrives anywhere between 13:00 and 16:00, I can guarantee that there will be a piper here to show them around the centre, unfortunately, as I said before, he will not have a last name that begins with 'Mac', nor will he be wearing his kilt." "Why not?" she questioned. "Well because unless there is a special event, or need for the kilt to be worn, most pipers will not come to work with it. Normally we would accommodate your wishes, wearing the kilt is not a problem, we would have needed some advance notice though." "Well shouldn't they wear their kilt if they work at Piping Centre?" she continued. "Well that's not for me to say, but generally the uniform here is dark blue trousers and a light blue dress shirt with the National Piping Centre logo on the upper left chest" "So no one has kilt then?" she pursued. "I'm sorry, not on a few hours notice, no. We do have bagpipes though and your crew could record a piper playing his pipes..." "Oh it's not the same" she cut me off, "We wanted to find real Scot." Irritated I quickly interrupted and told her "the three pipers that are here were all born in Scotland, from Scottish parents; they are all highly regarded pipers and important individuals here at the piping centre. They are sought after instructors and have international recognition. How are they not acceptable?" "Well maybe you have cassette of pipers in kilts playing then?" Exasperated I responded that we did have a few VHS tapes and many DVD's of solo pipers playing the bagpipes

against a typically “Scottish” backdrop. “You could give this to crew, and they take that back to Russia no?” “We could, but they are for sale, so the crew would have to purchase the tape or DVD.” “What you mean, why can’t we keep just one tape, it’s for Russian Television and it would promote Scotland!” She seemed frustrated with me. “I’m sorry, but we are a charity-based organization and cannot simply give away things like that. We offered to give your film crew access to the whole centre, to let them film in our museum, to have one of the instructors play for them, but this is something we cannot accede to. Furthermore, the tapes are not expensive.” “Ok, I understand, so they give lessons you say, could film crew watch and record lesson?” “I’m sorry, that will not be possible either, all the lessons of the afternoon are with minors, individuals under the age of 18. Without consent from their parents, this is something that we cannot permit, and it is too late to organize this at this time.” Needless to say, the Russians never came.

Although a little “out of the ordinary”, this specific event is an exaggerated version of the popular mindset of certain individuals outside of Scotland. A typical Scot speaks Gaelic, wears a kilt, plays the bagpipes and usually bears a name like Macdonald, MacLeod, or MacKenzie. The film crew’s inability to find this typical Scot should have been highly indicative of the absurdity of their search. A minority of Scots speak Gaelic today, and it is certainly not because they play the bagpipes that more Scottish than those who don’t.

- “The Russians wanted what? For one of us to dress up in a kilt and play the pipes?”
- “Ya, pretty much”
- “Well, where are they, will they be coming then?”

- “No, I really don’t think so – we couldn’t fulfil all of their requirements. They were looking for Real Scots.” (I spoke this with a smile)
- “What? What do you mean? I’m a real Scot for Christ sake? What did they want?”
- “Oh my god, this is kind of funny, they wanted a man, who played the pipes, who had his kilt here, who spoke Gaelic, and...”
- “Gaelic?!?!”
- “Yes, but wait, they also explicitly wanted someone whose last name began with ‘Mac’! Sorry Paul. I guess Warren doesn’t cut it as a real Scottish name!”
- “You’ve got to be joking! Well you know what I think of this...bollocks!”

The incident nevertheless raises interesting questions. Firstly, why and how did the Russian Film Crew develop this notion of what a true Scotsman is and how did they ever get the funding for such an enterprise? Obviously there must be a greater population who share this view or belief to have created a demand for this sort of footage in Russia. Secondly, who was this footage aimed at; the general public, primary school children, high school children, a museum exhibition? Is this what is being taught about Scotland and the people of Scotland to the Russian population?

It seemed highly problematic, the suggestion that all ‘true’ Scots were kilt wearing, Gaelic speaking individuals who played the pipes and whose surname began with ‘Mac’.

CHAPTER 4: THE NATIONAL PIPING CENTRE PIPERS

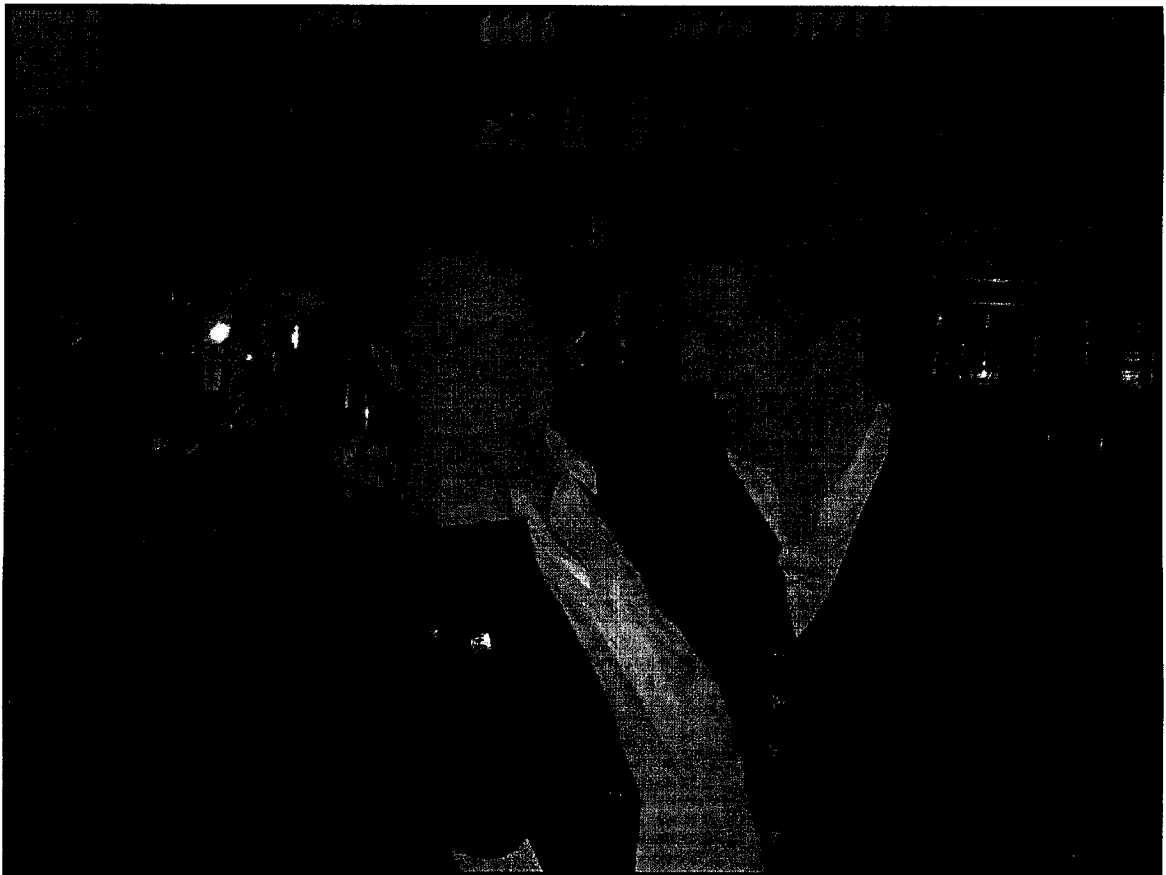
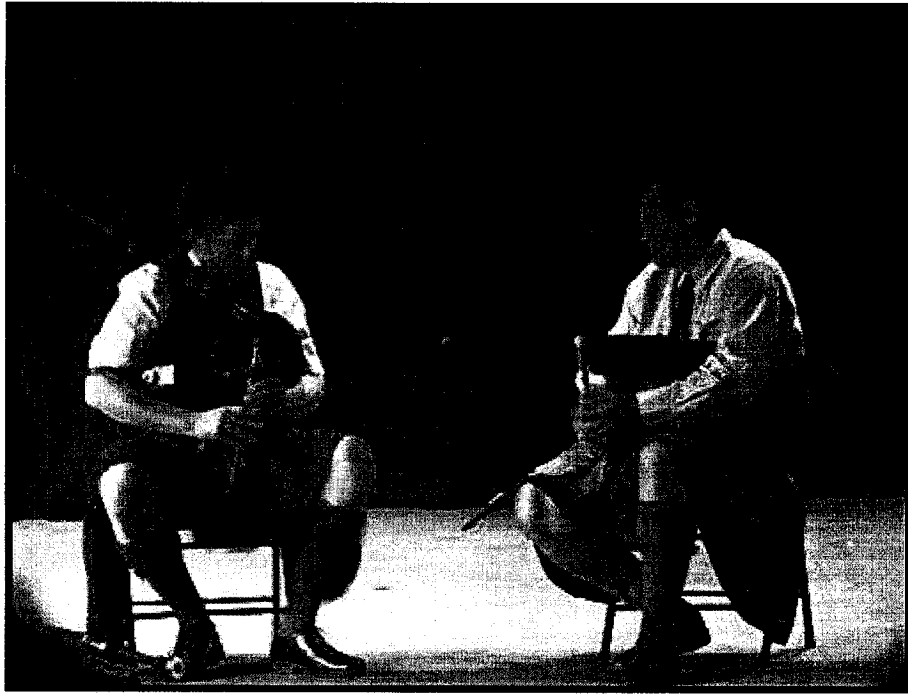
"To the make of a piper go seven year..... and at the end of his seven years one born to it will stand at the start of knowledge, and leaning a fond ear to the drone he may have parley with the old folks of old affairs. Playing the tune of the 'Fairy Harp' he can hear his ancestors plaided in skins, towsy-headed and terrible, heaving at their sodden oars or snoring in their hidden caves. Playing 'The Desperate Battle of the Birds' he will see the white-haired sea-rovers on the shore and a red stain on the edge of the tide. Linger over a lament he can stand by the cairn of Scotland's past kings, ken the colour of Fingal's hair and see the moon glint on the sickle of the druids. This truly is music to stir the blood and reach the inner soul of man!"

Neil Munro (1864 - 1930)

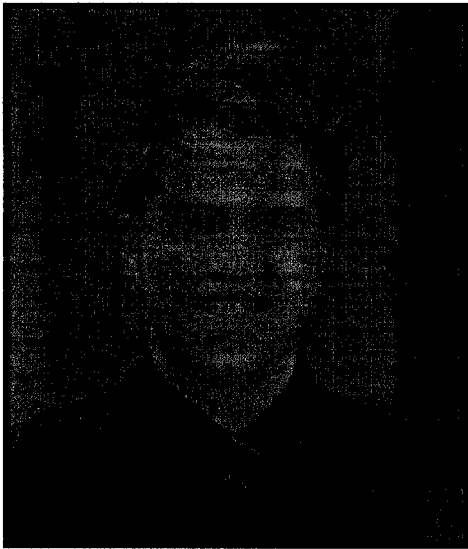
Introduction

There are popular stereotypes attached to the terms piping or piper, stereotypes that have equally been applied to the idea of Scotland, being Scottish and Scottishness. The following chapter re-engages in part with some of these stereotypes attached to Scotland the land and Scotland the imagined place, through the narratives of two pipers from the National Piping Centre who refuse to fall prey to these stereotypes and instead maintain strong cosmopolitan individuality in the face of their 'indigenous' practice that is so highly romanticized, geographically situated and imagined. This chapter is based solely on formal and informal conversations shared with these pipers during my time in Glasgow.

The key individuals discussed for the sake of this thesis and chapter, are probably the pipers I came to know best during my 4 months of fieldwork in Glasgow and at the National Piping Centre. Finlay MacDonald and Simon McKerrell are two piping instructors at the National Piping Centre who have taken their passion for piping to new heights.



Finlay MacDonald



Finlay MacDonald is amongst the youngest group of piping instructors at the National Piping Centre and is in very high demand with a majority of the international students that sign up for the week long intensive sessions, or attend the summer school sessions. He is a piper for the Scottish Powers Pipe Band, and is also the creator and leader of the Finlay MacDonald Band, which has released two albums since its 2003 debut and has toured throughout Europe and North America. I came to know Finlay a month into my fieldwork and formally interviewed him in my second month of fieldwork. Although the setting for the interview was quite ‘informal’, the common room remained empty and quiet for the duration of the interview.

Finlay is one of the Centre’s most contemporary pipers. He very seldom follows the (obligatory) National Piping Centre uniform of dark blue trouser and a light blue shirt, but chooses instead to wear grubby jeans, tight t-shirts over dress shirts, or grungy shirts, and in between lessons, can usually be found out back enjoying a cigarette and good chat with either Simon McKerrell or Chris Armstrong. He is an extremely attractive man, which might explain his popularity amongst the younger female pipers, but I will not presume this as fact, just observation. Nevertheless, Finlay is one of the most genuine and friendly pipers I had the opportunity of knowing while doing my fieldwork and his openness and general attitude towards me and my research made my experience much more interesting and enjoyable. He is a unique individual and

instructor, and represents modernity to a traditional music culture that has remained quite still over the past few hundred years!

I chose to centre a great portion of my attention on Finlay because of his influence within the piping circuit. Since he is well known for his modern style of play and musical genius, I felt he would certainly bring an interesting aspect to my research. Having spent most of my time in Canada surrounded by men and women pipers who seem bound to stick to the rules of tradition and never break away from them, Finlay turned out to be a breath of fresh air and enabled me to engage with a completely new form of piping. In essence, what I gained from Finlay completely turned my thesis around and opened up a new direction to follow, one that continued to focus on how pipers negotiate their own sense of Self through piping, but that also demonstrated how in doing so, they enabled a new influence on piping as a whole, thereby offering a perhaps a new look for Scotland to espouse.



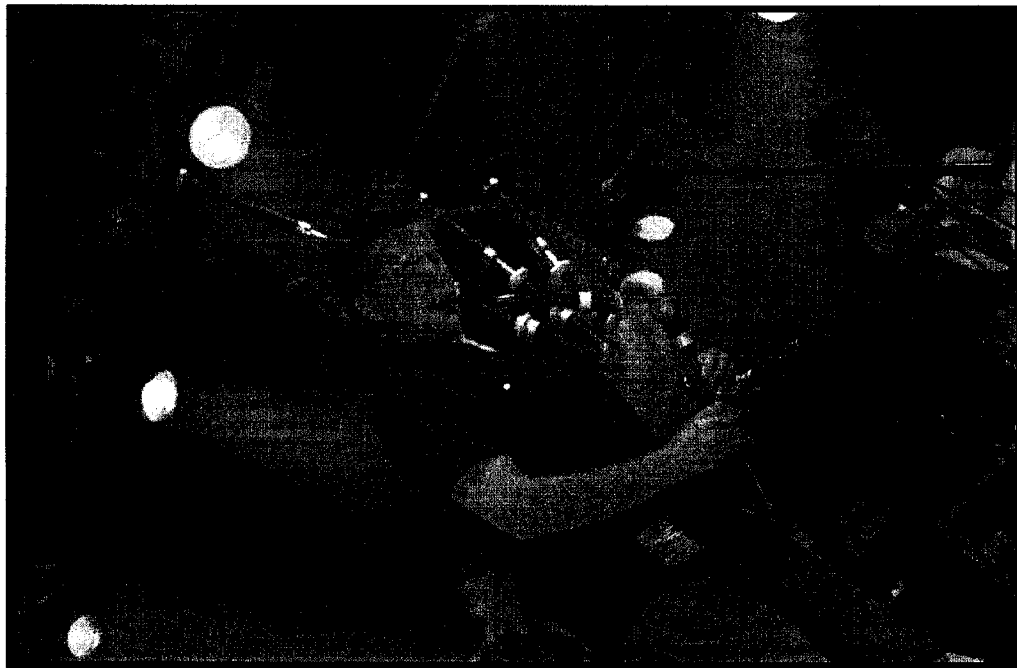
While conversing with Finlay, I brought up the subject of perceptions and question Finlay about the ways in which he perceived himself in terms, as well as the ways in which others might perceive him in terms of his occupation as a piper. He expressed the following;

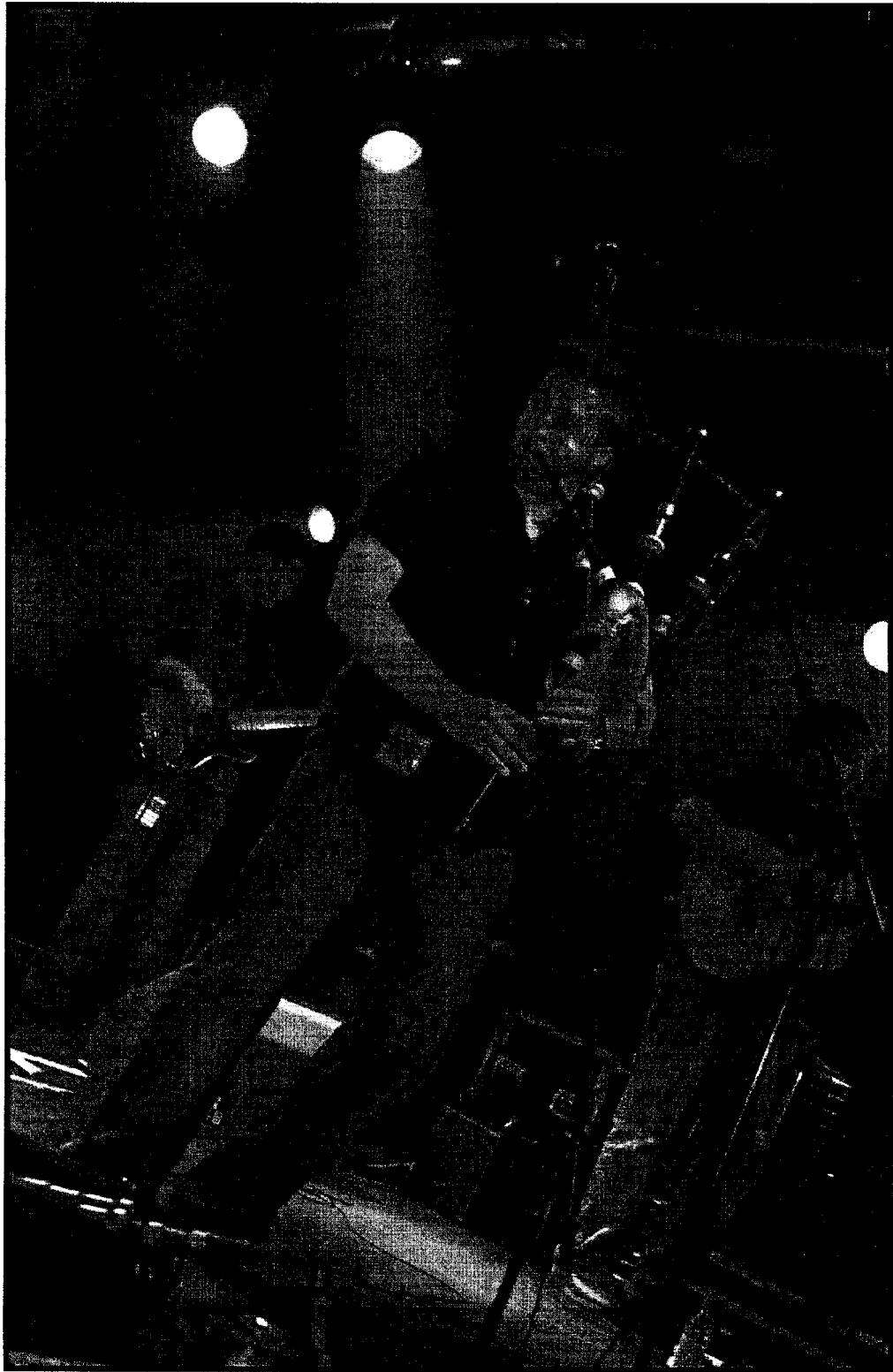
"It's funny that one, I suppose, the perception of what I do, umm, I would hate to think that people thought all I did was this modern contemporary stuff. [...] But also, I love traditional piping as well and traditional music in its basic form and I enjoy playing that as well but I think the thing I am most known for would be the kind of modern stuff and, again, I hesitate to say modern, a lot of the tunes, at least thirty percent of the tunes I play are all ancient tunes, it's all how we arrange them and how they are played. I suppose a little of the setting has something to do with it as well, um when the players don't wear kilts, they just play in jeans and t-shirts, the band is drums, bass, guitar, pipes and fiddle – it's very much the setting I think, if we are playing gigs, it's big stage, PA and lights that gives that impression of modern stuff which is great. But how do I see myself, I guess I see myself as a...a piper, and without sounding egotistical, I, what I try to tell my students is ok you are a piper but try to be thinking along the lines of you are a musician who plays the pipes. You know, that's the most basic form of what we are doing, musicians that have to have pipes as a mere instrument, ah I suppose that is how I like to think of it – playing music on the pipes."



It is clear that Finlay certainly has not turned his back on tradition to focus solely on what he calls the modern stuff, however what I have come to understand from my time spent with Finlay, is that often times it is the traditional (music) stuff learned in his earlier years as a student that has come to influence the way in which he composes his 'modern and contemporary' tunes. However, it is also his choice of setting that often infers

to the audience this sense of modernity. It is certainly not a setting that suggests that of a traditional piping performance, nor does it contain any of the typical ornamentations found at a piping performance, such as the stuffed highland cow's head or tartan on display everywhere. The band in itself is unusual in terms of a piping performance, and the specific instruments that accompany Finlay's pipes, such as the drums and guitar, encourage the assumption of modernity versus traditionality. Finlay's posture is also very different from what one would normally expect to see during a piping show. Most pipers, normally fully dressed in kilts and jackets, would play their bagpipe standing tall with shoulders back and glances fixed on a distant point in the room. They would never engage with the public, nor would they sway to the music. They would instead march back and forth across the room, or stand still, with one foot tapping out the beats for the duration of the tune. Finlay and his band mates continuously engage with their audience and always give the sense that they are having fun on stage. They laugh amongst themselves and joke about between sets. Often times, sets are decided on the spot or are simply improvised as the music goes along.





However, Finlay is aware of the heavy baggage that is carried when playing the pipes, because they are not like many other instruments in the world; more often than not, people will associate them with Scotland, or simply assume that whom ever is playing them must be Scottish. The discipline itself has also carried with it this baggage of keeping piping within this rigid traditional box, which has not allowed individual pipers to spread their wings and experience with the music on a personal level. We discussed this aspect of piping and the ways in which Finlay's music might or might not be accepted by those who believe that piping should remain fixed in time.

"There is baggage, but I think it's quite good baggage in that if it was just a guitar or something, how, I don't know how unique that is. Using the pipes in the context I used them most is a bit unique and it's not done that much in traditional piping and in a way I think it's probably helped me because there's not been a lot of guys that have done what I do. It is baggage I suppose, and I also get people that hate it, I do get the traditionalist that hate what I do, I am fine with that, there are not, I do what I do, I also do traditional stuff and if you don't like it that is fine, I don't expect everyone to like it. A lot of people get threatened, but it's changed as well, it used to be a lot worse but I can accept what they do and appreciate what they do, and if people don't like what I do, that's fine for me, I don't have a problem with it. But I think there is a thing where, I don't know if it's only with piping, it's most known with pipes then any other instrument, there's like ah , people feel a kind of ownership over it and they have to have it done the right way – you know a lot of people would just think you can't do that, you must do this, you must stick with the tradition cause it's the tradition, you have to do this. My point to that is, if we all did that, the music would never evolve, we all have to put our own bit in, still respect the tradition thing, but take it, you know I think it should go where music would let it go"

I questioned Finlay about whether or not he agreed with the opinion held by some that the sound produced by the Great Highland Bagpipe is quite a distinct and unique sound.

"Absolutely [...] I agree that it probably is associated to Scotland but I don't think it should be solely to Scotland. The bagpipe – there's bagpipes, say, in most countries of the world. The Highland pipes are certainly – the sounds of the pipes are certainly Scottish, definitely I would say so"

[...]

“Hmmm, I guess I am like a lot of guys who, its almost like an obsession now, that sound you know, and working for that, half of the challenge is working with the reed and the bag to created that good sound of instrument, it’s not like a guitar where you put a new string on and tune it, you know, you got to work with the reeds, work with your bag , you got to set the drone reeds, constantly tuning, so there this kind of constant challenge that is definitely a big part of it, I just love, I don’t know what it is about the sound, I love the scale of it, I like the tone, the pitch, the richness of when it’s all balance and really in tune like you heard over the weekend, in a nice room, it fills the room – it’s the overall balance, it’s everything, that is when you can tell when a pipe is really well maintained and tunes, it does really project, hum...ya I mean, I suppose the more I think about it, the pipes for me, it’s something I do relate to my family as well and my dad who taught me and he was really into and I suppose it takes me back to the kind of when I was younger and listening to the pipes and loving the sound.”

If the sound of the bagpipe is so highly associative of Scotland, how then does a piper begin to move away from this constant symbolic association to a place and culture? Finlay, a Scottish piper, negotiates with this aspect of piping on an on-going basis, both in public and on a more personal level as well. When questioned about his own experience vis-à-vis this phenomenon, his thoughts seemed conflicted.

“I suppose because it’s the pipes, I feel as if it is a Scottish thing that I’m doing, again it’s a musical style – it’s...I haven’t ever really thought of that – I don’t know if I would say I am one of the most patriotic guys around, you know what I mean, I am not really like that, I am proud to be Scottish and proud to play the pipes but I am not into that, kind of in your face, you must listen to me cause I am Scottish and I play the pipes, and this is the best thing ever. I think the pipes are a great instrument and they have a great heritage in Scotland and worldwide but I kind of get, sometimes, a bit annoyed with that whole overlaid patriotic sort of thing.”

[...]

“I think it’s interesting if you look at it, humm say from the Breton point of view – they are playing very much Highland bagpipes, like that’s what they play, along with bombard and binioù, and drums, they are by no means playing Scottish music, they are playing Breton music on Highland pipes, um have done so for the past 60 years, have taken on the Highland Pipes – yea it is, I think people generally relate it to Scotland but I think also the instrument has kind of

seeped out and developed in other countries and traditions, but I think the overall view is that they are Scottish.

Although Finlay recognizes the highly associative link that exists between bagpipe and place, it is not this phenomenon that drives his passion for piping. In fact, in this particular conversation, he emphasized the use of the Scottish pipes elsewhere, such as in Brittany, where pipers utilize the bagpipe to create a Breton sound. This is highly interesting especially if you consider the notion of the great highland bagpipe finding some of its uniqueness through its sound. How then do Breton pipers succeed at producing a Breton sound with an instrument that is always assumed to produce a Scottish sound? Can the tunes have an impact in the way the sound is appropriated and defined into a cultural sound? Many of these questions were brought to the forefront of the conversation at this point but none were really given concrete answers. According to Finlay, much of what a piping sound *sounds* like is very dependent on the individual taking it in. Therefore, as a Canadian listening to the “The Maple Leaf Forever” played on the pipes, I might argue that this tune, written by a Canadian, is reflecting a Canadian sound. However, as a Canadian who is not aware of the specifics of the tune, the likelihood of it being associated to Canada would certainly be quite minimal, as for most cases, tunes played on the pipes are often thought to be ‘Scottish’ and the sound produced by the pipes, also ‘Scottish’.

Just like many of the other pipers at the National Piping Centre, Finlay was quite open about his annoyance at ‘all the patriotic stuff’ that often came with the territory of piping. Although very proud to be Scottish and equally proud to be a piper, Finlay did not necessarily link the two: they were completely separate and individual aspects of his person. One had nothing to do with the other; he did not play the pipes because he was

Scottish, nor did he feel the playing of the pipes made him *more* Scottish. Nevertheless, having said this, he recognized the difficulties in moving away from this sort of categorization because of the symbolic aspect of the pipes, yet it was exactly this sort of challenge that pushed Finlay to disrupt the norms surrounding the pipes and develop a different kind of association for the pipes.



Keeping with this idea of sound identity, I remembered a short and unexpected conversation with a piping student at the National Piping Centre, where I learned that one of the ways in which Roddy MacLeod distinguished his sound from that of other pipers was in the way in which he ‘blew’ his pipes. I didn’t quite understand what this meant at first but later found out that the strength at which you blow air into the blow pipe, and the constancy maintained while blowing, all affect the sound produced by your pipes. It seemed Roddy had developed a ‘blowing’ style that had become his distinguishable signature to most trained ears, and his sound had in part, become his own through this blowing technique. I spoke to Finlay about this aspect of creating a personal sound, or constructing a sort of musical identity for one’s self through the pipes and questioned how he expressed his sense of Self through his music.

“Ya...definitely, it’s quite a conscious thing, sound wise, for me the big thing, when I’m playing with my band I have to be in concert pitch [...] I have to compromise the true pipe sound to fit in with the other musician, it still has to be good, so you know I have to work with that, lower the pitch [...] stylistically, I suppose, I’ve got, I don’t know if I made a conscious decision, I just kind of fall into this style that I play, I think what’s happened is I’ve listened to lot of music I love and the things that I like about it, I just try to put into my music when I am playing, so energy, control of rhythm, hum good technique, improvising, not being...I play my best and I don’t have to play the same all the time, I like changing it, improvising, that is where I feel I play at my best, that is the thing that a lot of pipers can’t really get their head around cause they are taught from an early age that they must play like this, you must get it right, you must do this, and they are scared a lot of the time to kind of think outside the box a bit – I suppose that is how I base my style on, listen to other musicians and take in, whether it be another piper or a fiddle player or piano player, whatever I take in as good music, that is what I try to put out when I play.”

Having been accustomed to the military pipe band setting, Finlay and his band were definitely something ‘out of the ordinary’ for me, and I would like to assume, for many others. In my years of attending Highland Games in Canada, or parade where both

military and civic bands join to march, I had never been witness to such performances as those offered by the Finlay MacDonald Band. I wondered about what sort of reactions the band generated internationally.

Generally, it's always been doing really well, I think its that people think of Scotland as the kilt and all that but when they see my band playing they don't think that as any different really, its just pipes and a band, you know I suppose they don't know about the dos and don'ts of the traditional side of it, they just know of the pipes and they've heard Amazing Grace or Highland Cathedral, but then they hear what we do, we've never, touch wood, never had a bad experience playing abroad.

They [Europeans] don't read into it as much – there's pipes and a band – cool. Over here they are more, you should be playing in a pipe band, why are you not wearing a kilt. They ask all these questions more in this country. But abroad, we've played mostly in– I will rephrase that, in Europe I found nobody really bat an eyelid, they just – cool that's the pipes and they see it as the music and pipes are the musical instrument, but I'd say certainly in the States, why aren't you wearing the kilt, why...where's your kilt but that's the only thing we've had people ask, you know, not challenging but just asking why you're not wearing a kilt, why the guitar and bass, but in Europe, we've played numerous times over in Europe; Spain France, Italy Belgium Italy and it's always been - cool that's pipes and that's music but in the states, that's where you get the most questions.



I had been made aware, during my many conversations with Simon McKerrell and other members of the National Piping Centre, of the great differences found between the North American Highland Games and those found in Scotland. Although both shared the common aspects of pipe bands, piping competitions, drumming competitions and performance, only the North American one, and especially those held in the United States seemed to constantly endeavour to recreate Scotland. My own experience with the Highland Games exposed me to more tartan, kilts, and 'real' Scottish fudge than the accumulation of all my visits to Scotland. In a parallel manner, my own experience amongst pipers in Montreal and at the National Piping Centre lends support to the assumption that those away from Scotland might engage in a very different way with the idea of piping and being a piper than those who reside within Scotland. This is not to say that pipers in a country outside of Scotland take piping more seriously than the pipers within Scotland; there is just this heightened need to maintain and preserve a culture or tradition, a longing almost for authenticity.

"I think if I think of putting the shoe on the left foot and for example if I was learning the Bulgarian pipes, I would be very reluctant and scared to do any other than the traditional stuff that I had been stuff because I wouldn't want to disrespect the music or the culture or the people – you know I am just thinking right here, I suppose maybe that's how it works, they are thinking this is a very special thing and so I don't want to disrespect it, I'll do it exactly as I've been told and I'll get as good as I can at that – but I think because I've just grown up with it, that comes as second nature, and it's not that I disrespect it anymore, I probably respect it as much if not more than anyone else so I have that freedom with it that I can, I can change it and the traditional stuff is always there, like an old friend and it's always there and I wouldn't want it to be any different but I think I was because I was steeped in that, I am fine to get away from it and come back to it – I feel completely at one with it, and if I do go off the rails a bit and come back on, it's always there, I was steeped in there."

Tradition is something that is passed down, usually orally, from one generation to the next.¹⁸ When you consider a piece of tradition such as a tune, for instance, it is in its transmission process (being passed on from teacher to pupil) that this particular aspect of tradition gains weight and importance. However, transmission implies movement, and with movement comes change; can piping tunes evade this process in order to maintain this idea of authenticity? According to Finlay, pipe tunes are more often played by pipers in the way in which their piping instructor taught them, although many would like to believe they are playing specific tunes in their original setting, this is something he finds hard to accept.

“The thing is, I don’t let it get to me anymore, but the thing that people say that this is not the way to play it, that is not the way it was written – well how the hell do you know, were you there 300 years ago when it was first performed? No! So you don’t know exactly what it should sound like so you are just going by who taught you, and that’s fine. But you know, that’s not necessarily the way it should be played, and there not such thing as the way it should be played.”

Three camps seem to exist amongst those who play the pipes: those who are of great talent, those who are constantly struggling, and the ones who sit at the centre of the two extremes. Finlay’s opinion is that most of the issues concerning change within the piping tradition usually emerge from this middle group, which he believes, feel threatened by their inability to achieve the same level of playing as those who strive to break out of the box.

“I find the people [pipers in Scotland] who have the most problem with change[in piping] are the insecure ones who can’t really do anything with it [the pipes]. They feel threatened by it [change]. The problem comes from the narrow-mindedness of ppl who can’t do that..[play in a free-style manner].”

¹⁸ Oxford English Dictionary

This rigidity to change and freedom of expression through music seemed a little contradictory to the idea of the bagpipe being a folk instrument. In all of the jamming sessions I attended, where bagpipes were included, they were always played, along with all the other instruments, where the music played maintained a Scottish or Irish traditional sound to it. Finlay agreed with the fundamentals of it being a folk instrument but insisted that *“Now for most people, I don’t think they see it as a folk, they see it as a militarist instrument.”* This however, is often engendered through the ways in which individuals come into contact with the bagpipe. As mentioned earlier on in the chapter and thesis as well, a majority of individuals who are not members of the piping community will normally only come into contact with the pipes in either a pipe band setting where the band is on parade, or at weddings and funerals. Pipe Bands in general give the impression of being a military entity simply in their structure and uniform; without any knowledge of the various pipe bands, they are very hard to distinguish. My own knowledge of piping still does not permit me to make this comparison.

What is interesting about The National Piping Centre is that, although two of their primary instructors come from a military background, you are never exposed to any sort of militarist settings where you might confound any piper or any of the existing pipe bands at the centre as being militarist. It is much more a milieu of expressive culture and appreciation for piping than a centre of unbending traditionality.

Within my position as administrative assistant, I had been directly involved with the tuition bookings for individual lessons, as well as overseas school sessions and so on, and had clearly notice a high demand for Finlay as an instructor. His influence on the younger students was evident in their desire to learn from him. I am pleased to have

taken a few lessons myself and did in fact find great differences between his approach in teaching the pipes versus that of Paul Warren, a military piper. Along with his fame in Scotland and abroad, his popularity as a piping star of the Centre led me to assume his impact on the younger generations of pipers did not go unnoticed by him.

"I hope I am leaving an impact. I have a great relationship with the young players, it sounds quite funny me saying the younger players since I still regard myself as young. I am just very much, with the boys just starting their degree, Keith, Ally, and Kyle, I would like for them to see me as a friend first and foremost and also as somebody who can help them out musically."

"I've had moments I really enjoyed; hearing my tunes played by the younger kids or by pipe bands. Like Field Marshalls playing my tunes – that was quite good. I love to be encouraging, if someone wants to be traditional, I will never say don't...t would be encouraging."

In the following conversation with Finlay MacDonald, key points were brought to the forefront: people's perception of him as a piper, the distinctive and unique sound produce by the bagpipe, sound identity, nationalism and traditionality. I learned many things about Finlay throughout the interview; interestingly enough, he never made the conscious decision to learn the pipes. Having been surrounded by them because of the many members of his family who played them, he had just 'sort of grown up with them' and always had access to them. His father taught him initially and then when Finlay decided to take them on seriously, he was taught by Duncan Johnston from the ages of fourteen to nineteen. During one of my lessons with Finlay, he let it slip that he had only learned to read music years after having learned to play the pipes; "I learned must of my tunes by ear and only started reading music when I started writing it."

I found this aspect of Finlay's musicality to be something that set if off from the rest of the pipers, who along with learning how to blow their chanter, had also learned to read music. Playing music, for Finlay, had become much more of an emotional process,

where expression and feelings need to be reverberated in your sound. The majority of the music written by Finlay reflects this side of his personality, and the way in which he performs his tunes, works in conjunction with the emotion he is trying to convey.

Nevertheless, there is no mistaking that disassociating the bagpipe from Scotland is not an easy task. For the most part, it is seen by others as being 'Scottish', an aspect of piping that may never change. Although Finlay did not feel more Scottish through playing the pipes, he recognized that for some, whether in Scotland or internationally, playing the pipes was an extremely patriotic symbol. Suggesting only mild annoyance at this phenomenon, he admitted to understanding why some might choose to feel that way. His greatest annoyance though came towards those who rebuked change. It is impossible for the piping tradition to stay still; there is no absolute way to know how tunes were played hundreds of years ago. Tradition only becomes tradition if it is passed down and in passing it down, aspects of it are left behind, while other are emphasized more greatly. In short, tradition changes with time, and so with piping tunes.

In all of Finlay's tunes, there is a glimpse of traditionality slipped in here and there, yet what he manages to do with the pipes is fantastic. Although considered modern, I discovered Finlay to be much more of an explorer in his music. It is the traditional sounds of other localities that he comes away with and pools his influence from. From these emerge beautiful pieces composed by Finlay for his band. More importantly, in most of his tunes and in the way he presents them on stage, the 'Scottishness' so often expressed through the sound of the pipes is usually kept in the backdrop of the soundscapes produced by the band.

Simon McKerrell



Simon McKerrell is also a highly interesting piper and musician. Simon was the first to graduate from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Dance (RSAMD) with a PhD in Ethnomusicology that centered on bagpiping – pipes are his number one passion. He plays the Great Highland Bagpipe, the Uilleann (Irish) Pipes and Border bagpipes and is in regular demand as a session musician and recitalist. Unlike Finlay, Simon does not play with a civilian pipe band¹⁹ so it is rare that you will ever see Simon dressed in full dress unless he is playing at a recital or for competition. In as much, the recital or competitive setting is the only setting in which you will find Simon doing only traditional piping.

As an artist, Simon will often lend his talents to many folk groups, performing artists and radio shows all while remaining more of a background influence on the music. Simon is constantly trying to blend the sound of the Great Highland Bagpipe in ways that enable other instruments to remain at the forefront, while the ever so loud and overpowering sound of the bagpipes remains more of a spice in the background. Unlike Finlay who gets his influence from across Europe, Simon has often focused his attention to the sounds of Irish Traditional music and Indian music. During my time at the National Piping Centre, Simon organized a night of music entitled “exotic piping night” where he, alongside traditional Indian musicians, morphed sounds into a truly exotic

¹⁹ Finlay MacDonald plays in both a ‘pipe’ band and a ‘music’ band – Simon has just recently formed with two other musicians a ‘music’ band, not a ‘pipe’ band.

experience. In fact, although an instructor and head of piping studies at the National Piping Centre, Simon is usually the one who finds ways to involve the centre in international endeavours such as the exotic piping live.

In his free time, Simon can always be found jamming away with his pipes at the Vicky Pub in Glasgow, as well as other drinking establishments, where he usually plays his small pipes or uilleann pipes alongside a variety of other musicians. This is how Simon chooses to be a piper – by mixing its sounds with the sounds of other cultures and by blending it into the pub culture of Glasgow and Edinburgh.



In his mid-twenties, Simon is also part of the younger piping instructors at the Centre and has managed to amass such an enormous amount of success for himself both academically, musically and career wise through piping. For these reasons, amongst others, I chose to focus the second portion of this chapter on Simon. Although not as

contemporary as Finlay, Simon's musical influence on the piping world is as important as that of Finlay. He is a great figure at the National Piping Centre as well as an esteemed solo piper who is not only well known within Glasgow, but across Scotland and Internationally as well. Furthermore, he is one of the main piping instructors of the international piping schools that have travelled to the United States of America, Prague, and Italy. Finally, Simon remained the most involved with my work throughout the length of my stay, both in an informant capacity but also as a fellow academic.

Prior to my arrival to Glasgow for the purpose of my fieldwork, I had taken the opportunity to accustom myself with a few of the piping instructors and especially Simon, my main collaborator, as a piper and with his role at the National Piping Centre. Initially, most of my information came from the Piping Today magazines published by the National Piping Centre, where a few articles revealed some interesting facts about Simon's solo playing results, his recent travels to Italy and Prague and so on. However, *googling* him proved to be the way in which I gained the most knowledge about his present role at the National Piping Centre, his academic endeavours, articles about his thesis, and so. I really wanted to know as much as I could about my collaborators; especially how they had began piping. I had become incredibly curious as to how Simon discovered piping; whether this had happened in a similar fashion to Finlay, through family influence. Or had piping come to Simon through a different medium?

"I didn't grow up in a family where there was any piping, there was only western art music in my family but then my brothers became involved in a school pipe band, and I was already playing I think piano and clarinet...i just fancied having a go at the pipes, I must have heard a band, I must have been 10 or 11..as soon as I tried I just took to it, like a duck to water, I just knew it was right for me, you know – I don't have any particular memory of hearing the pipes as a sound and that sort of sonic memory actually inspiring me or whatever to take it up, I just remember, I guess in the first instance it would be more because my brothers

were both in the school pipe band and I wanted to try it and I just tried the chanter, but I remember, as soon as I did get into it, that was me hooked."

Like most American and English Canadian high schools, Scottish schools also had music bands, however, unlike the North American Marching Band tradition that I am familiar within the educational setting, Scottish Schools instead engaged their students into a Pipe Band setting, with pipes and drums, a pipe major, a pipe sergeant and a drum major.

"Yes, the schools, the school I went to, I went to two different schools, both of them had serious pipe bands, and newly in Scotland, there is, well there is a long long tradition of independent schools having pipe bands, that goes back a long time, 19th century in some case...both my schools did, and that was how I learned, and in the non-private or state school sector, piping has only been provided since the late sixties, early seventies, when that kicked up. I was lucky I was at school in the 80's and 90's where piping was very strong."

[...]

"From the age of eleven, I was in a school pipe band at Glasgow Academy, and when I went to school in the east coast, a boarding school, I was in a pipe band there for five years. I left school, I went straight from there to a degree in traditional music at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Dance, an undergraduate degree, and that was 3 years, and also, that was 3 years of intensive study of traditional Scottish music, and particularly piping, it was my main instrument, and I did flute and voice as second study, but I began my development of Irish piping through a friend and taught myself."

A great majority of a piper's technique, style of play and understanding of the music is established through the influence of his relationship with his instructor(s), at least this is what I have been told by a majority of the pipers with whom I spent time with in Glasgow. In fact, the instructors are usually primarily responsible for how a piper comes to develop his own sound and eventually distinguishes it from others. I derived from this that the milieu where you became acquainted with piping and the person with whom you learned the pipes directly impacted the sort of piper you were to become.

Therefore, it seemed to me that great importance lay in the choice of instructor that were being hired as piping instructors in the school systems.

“Generally now, what is emerging, the state schools, the govt has, is employing quite high calibre of players and teachers in schools and that has been the way since the early sixties, when some of the very top players at the time, like Ian MacFadgen and John MacDougall were involved from the start, particular in the Highland region, the Highland regions traditionally had better provisions than the central belt in Scotland and again that is changing, Edinburgh has recently announced that they are taking on two instructors and Glasgow has had an instructor Peter McKinnis for the Glasgow schools for a long number of years, I don’t know how long, but the independent sector has often employed ex-military pipers and that was the case at my school, my secondary school and that is the case still quite widely at most of the independent schools.”

I questioned Simon on the importance of this sort of instruction and wondered about the National Piping Centre and the Royal Academy of Music and Dances’ attitude towards the pipers they were in fact producing through their degree program offered jointly through both institutions. If instructors held such strong footing within a student’s capacity to grow, and if both institutions had a direct influence on the sort of knowledge imparted on future performers, what sort of pipers were they endeavouring to produce?

“For a long time, the pipers in Scotland, and there is nothing wrong with this, have simply been taught how to play, and I really hope there is people who continue to do that, of course there is, everyday there is pipe bands teaching and people teaching, but that is a different thing from producing a performer who is so expert at not only their playing but also expert in your sort of holistic understanding of the tradition that you can actually lead the field and I think, and it is emerging to be the case that we are producing people who can lead the way and actually take the art in new directions whilst also knowing where it’s come from. You know, and I think also it’s nice to produce people who are informed about traditional music and piping and who then go on to work in other fields, maybe who aren’t going to be performers but actually take all that background and all that knowledge into other careers, in parts administration and policy management, in the recording industry, in the promotional market, even in the heritage institute, you know so I really think it has, you’ve got, in terms of the wider Scottish society, I think the degree program is absolutely crucial in really getting much higher quality of knowledge and, and also, divergence in the performance field as well out there into Scottish Society as well, and I think it’s

part of our new awareness of our own cultural history and our own culture as it is now. There's a definite going fend for that, if you read the press, almost every week there is new material, we've got new publications, new awareness of Scotland, not just you know today but it's past as well."

[...]

"Having a better understanding of the history makes for better player"

Both the National Piping Centre and the Royal Academy of Music and Dance have been at the forefront, academically, in producing high calibre performers, such as Finlay MacDonald, Simon McKerrell and Margaret Houlihan through their degree program, and although most of what is learned within these institutions, for the purpose of the degree, seems to remain quite traditional, these students and *"divergent players and bands are starting to push the boundaries a bit and it's beginning to change piping, and in ten to fifteen years we will really start to see that"* (Simon McKerrell)

"Those people (students) have to have an awareness of their tradition which is fundamental if you (they) want to go into a new direction."

[...]

"Piping is expanding, and I think a lot of that, I think the National Piping Centre can take credit for a lot of the good things that have happened in piping, for youngsters, for adult learners, particularly the Glasgow area and nationally as well. And I really think it's important for Glasgow and Scotland as well, to have somewhere that's recognized as an institution to promote the instrument, I mean it is totally associated with Scotland and it's a very important part of our culture the pipes."

In words rechoing Finlay's, Simon's emphasis on this association between pipes and Scotland, instrument and place, as well as its importance to a society's culture, seems according to Simon to reflect a reality within Scotland at the moment.

"It is our national instrument, there are other traditions which are indigenous to Scotland, for example Gaelic songs, for example particular fiddle styles, but there

are others things as well which are intrinsic to Scotland, piping is so, I mean its not just that piping is, I mean to me obviously the most important things about piping is the music, but I think for a lot of Scots, it's also very important as an icon, you know and that is that side of things as well."

However, the imaginary Scotland that I have spoken of throughout my thesis is also very associated with this perception of piping as Scotland and still very present within the piping circuit. And this is certainly something that has come to upset individuals within as well as outside of Scotland.

"I think, my honest opinion is that has gotten a lot better over the recent years. I think that, it's quite a complicated scene this and to me, it's a very personal feeling about it but I think, there are a lot of people out with Scotland, who when they come to Scotland, they are attracted by the romanticism of that tartanry that you are talking about, now that actually does exist, I mean you can't deny that, that romantic imagery and sort of iconism of the pipes and the hills and all that stuff, that really began in the 19th century you know. And that does exist and it does have a significance, more then anything else, it's got a significant economic benefit for Scotland through tourism. At the same time as that, I noticed through speaking to people that visit Scotland, through speaking to people in professional cultural industries that there is a feeling in Scotland that we want, there seems to be two camps, there used to be the people who want to dump tartanry stuff and I don't agree with that and the whole, I think you can't just ignore that part of your culture. I think what you've got to do is try and create an image of Scotland that really reflects a contemporary Scotland. And I think that does include the pipes and that does include good Scottish writing and that does include this cultural vibrancy that we've got happening at the moment in Scotland. And I don't think that to reject all that tartanry is a very feasible or sensible way of going forward. I think it is interesting, when you speak to people that particularly visit Scotland, they, I certainly sense from them that they want to reject that particular, and they are the ones who are marketing Scotland abroad you know, so I think it's a shame really."

Simon's opinion of holding on to some of the 'tartanry stuff' is significant in that it enables you to remember in some way, some aspect of a culture, and through that knowledge, or collective memory, you can then move into a more contemporary Scotland that reflects what Scotland is for you as an individual, and for others around.

Furthermore, rejecting tartanry as a whole, seems not a real possibility, especially since, as Simon mentioned, the tourist industry is benefiting from the phenomenon.



"In fact its becoming more popular now to have a piper at your wedding, because it's beginning to be accepted, that Scottishness, and people don't cringe at it anymore. People are beginning to actually, it's actually ok to be Scottish and to have the pipes and wear tartan."

Although not completely taken aback with Simon's suggestion that people cringe at examples of Scottishness, I didn't realise that some of the Canadian traditions that I had become familiar with in Canada, such as having pipers at school

graduations, soccer tournaments, weddings and funerals, had for some time in Scotland, lessened in popularity.

"That has a sort of, that has a long and quite complex history that is to do with the media – the mass media in Scotland and also the Anglicization of Scotland. [...] first of all, you take people like my father's generation, they were, the people, the baby boomers after the Second World War, they were all actually, you know, there was a complete rejection of what you might call tartan type things like Scottishness, even their accents, people were told to lose their Scottish accent if they wanted to get ahead in business –similar to what happened in the Gaelic world, totally anglicized...that in one sense is because the media has, particularly BBC in Britain, has for so long been controlled by people in London. Now that has changed since BBC Scotland obviously have been around, and also, there was a kind of, you know, there has been a change since the parliament came in as well, in terms of what it means to be Scottish, these are quite sort of, theoretical

questions in a way, they are quite difficult to pin point but personal views of what counts in this, my personal view is that people have accepted it certainly more recently."

Most of the piping I had heard from Simon had been in the form of Irish piping down at the Vicky Pub in Glasgow's west end, where he spent most Friday's jamming with fellow musicians. I had spent many Friday nights with Simon, and truly enjoyed the experience of hearing raw live traditional music. However, having spent most of his time playing in this manner, I asked Simon what he derived from these sessions and what kept him coming back?

"Primarily because it is musically satisfying and good fun, and I mean, it's really relaxing in one sense playing in a session, its actually a relief in a way to just, you know, and it's also a social thing, meet people, friends, you know, but musically I think it's the first or primary reason musically would be that it's just really enjoyable in the session particularly when you are playing Irish pipes, or border pipes."

It seemed strange to me that Simon, being such a distinguished Highland piper, would favour Irish sessions over Scottish ones, and asked him why he chose to play the Uilleann pipes versus the small pipes or border pipes, which are both much more closely related to the Highland pipes and Scottish music?



"To me the Irish pipes, for me, allow me, they are really a musical vehicle for me to play with other musicians, non-pipers, whereas the Highland Pipes for me are quite clearly defined as a solo piping instrument and that's a kind of position I've arrived at after about 10 years of playing and experimenting and really it's an emphasis of the strengths of those instruments and perhaps my performance strengths, so that I also like to keep those different musical worlds quite compartmentalised. I mean the Irish pipes, I also do play more formally with, I've played at new commissions, I've played in bands, professionally on recordings, and the whole context for performance is not

competitive and therefore allows me to do more improvisation, allows me to, you know, to be a bit more free I suppose [...] it's a much less rigid, it's a much more fluid tradition. And it's a much more, umm it's a much more broadly defined tradition for the individual to make their mark, although I would never say that solo piping isn't, it's just that the parameters for solo piping performance are very tightly defined by the context of competition. But it still allows for individuality, particularly in terms of phrasing and sound.

From this conversation I now derived that Simon, although passionate about the Great Highland Bagpipe, something that was clearly demonstrated through his involvement both academically with the RSAMD and the NPC, and personally with competition, sought this freedom of expression found within the Irish tradition, a freedom that enabled Simon to construct a much more individually based musical identity through his playing of the Uilleann pipes.

We further discussed this idea that pipers consciously create their own sound, and I asked Simon's opinion on the matter. According to Finlay, this was certainly something that most pipers tried to achieve, and definitely something he did, but were most pipers aware of this?

"I think they do, it's a conscious thing, I am sure that they do, and I am sure that they specifically seek out instruments, materials, reeds, and blowing techniques to emphasise their individual sound."

Having focused mostly on solo pipers, I wondered if this idea of sound identity could also be maintained by a pipe band, in a way that their sounds could also distinguish them from other pipe bands.

"In a pipe band the sound and the style even everything is controlled by the pipe major and/or the pipe sergeant whereas in the solo piping field it's much more, obviously it's one person playing so it's much more individual. But I mean, yes the pipe bands also do create their own and develop their own individual sound in a collective way but it's really quite tightly controlled based on the military model of a pipe band by the people in charge and everybody submits to that as a sort of informal contract if you like when they join the band. But solo piping for me is

and for what I would imagine a lot of solo pipers, is a much more individual thing."



Therefore, if piping is conceived by Simon as being a much more individual thing, how much influence is derived from instructors and, on that same token, how does it affect an individuals piping style?

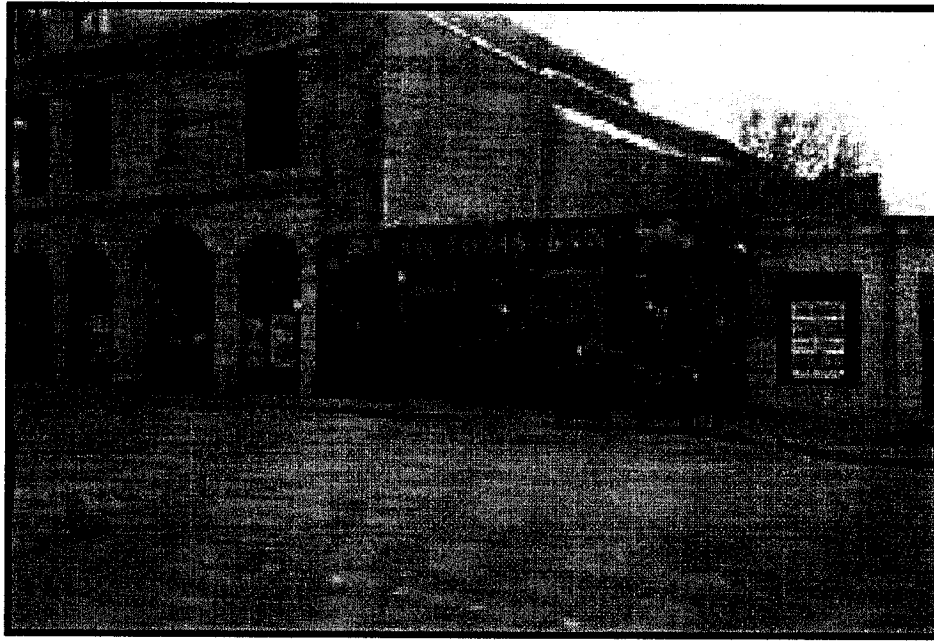
"Absolutely, your teaching lineage, I've had quite a variety of teachers but for the last seven years or six years, I have been going to Murray Henderson. That's not to say that I would only emulate Murray's sound, I also look a lot at pipers, particularly pipers like Roddy MacLeod, Angus McColl or Willie McCallum for a sound and I hope now that my particular sound is a product of what I think the best is in piping. And also what works for me competitively, you see the sound is also controlled by competition in a way because for example, over the last two years or three years, I have been experimenting with sheepskin bags, now I've now come to the conclusion after about three or four years of trying them and cutting them off and then going back to a gortex bag and then putting one back on again that I can't actually play the sheepskin bag because it had too much moisture problems. [...] so for me, that's the sort of competitive reason why I have to play the gortex bag, although I would, if it was just purely on a sonic basis, I would much rather play a sheepskin bag because there's a much richer sound. I also have some problems with my arm when I play a sheepskin bag."

Although, through my many conversations with Simon and other pipers, I eventually came to grasp the importance of the physical materials used in piping, in terms of creating a specific sound, this aspect of piping still remains quite foreign to me due mostly to my lack of knowledge about piping technology and my lack of musical knowledge.

We did however, speak at lengths about this idea of individual sound, in part because of my genuine interest in this notion but also because some of what Simon touched upon in his own doctoral thesis dealt with this idea as well. How important was it then for pipers to create their own sounds?

“I think it’s inevitable for the solo piper, if you talk about, if you move away from timbre for a minute, the quality of the sound to intonation, recently I’ve been experimenting with my ‘D’, the note ‘D’, which I like to have a little bit sharper in tune than some other players, and I’m not quite sure why I’m doing that, it just means that it’s slightly less consonant with the drone [...] it’s something that I am actually experimenting with at the moment and I think, I’ve established my scale, the intonation of my scale quite well, so far, for example I like the more dissonant ‘B’ that other pipers favour, like I mentioned Willie McCallum uses that, and my teacher and I had a discussion about the note ‘B’ and which I took from that...and he said of course it’s up to you, you know, but I used to play the very consonant and almost straight ‘B’ with a small frequency ratio, you know, against the drones, it’s only a second away from the drones, but now I’ve gone for a slightly more dissonant sound because in piobaireachd I think it gives a better affect. And now actually after several years of experimenting I’ve settled on something that I feel gives a really nice effect in piobaireachd particularly. It’s just an aural thing; I just like the sound of it.”

Returning then to session playing and the sound produced within these sessions, I questioned Simon about the types of music played at the various sessions I had attended, in part because I could not always tell the difference between Irish and Scottish sound and in part to get his views on both.



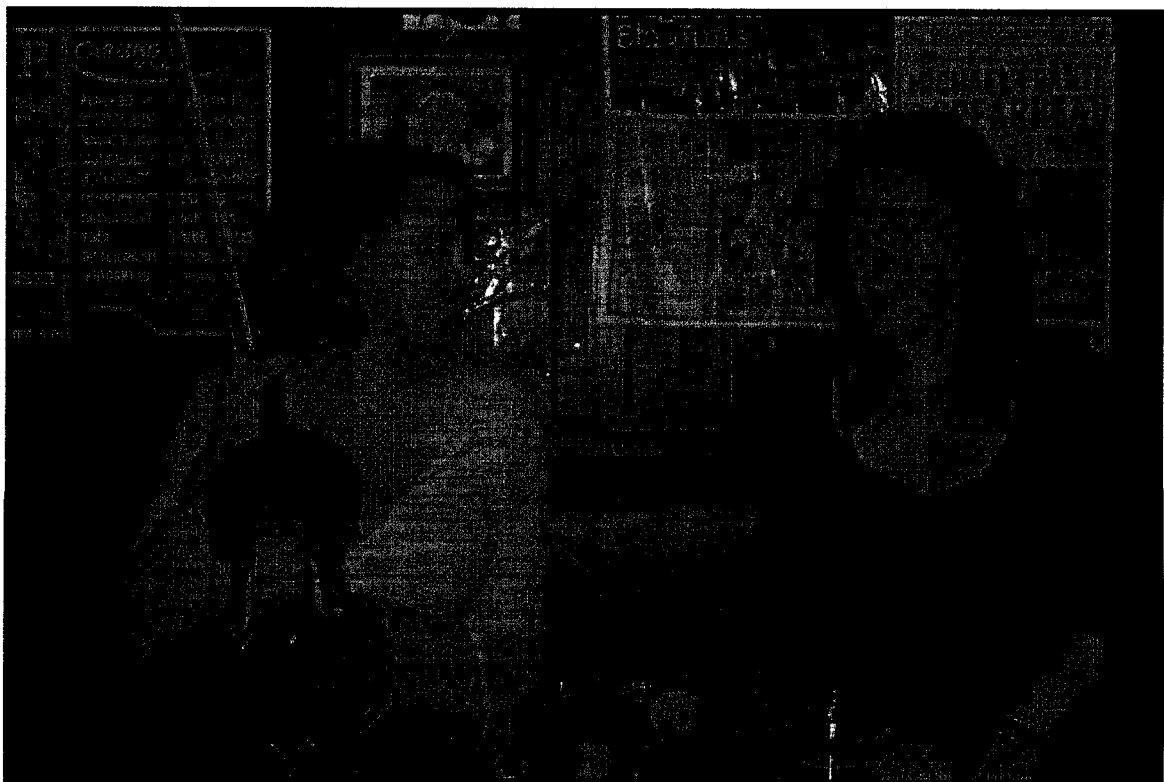
The Victoria (Vicky) Pub, Glasgow, Scotland 2006.

"My experience of sessions in Glasgow specifically is that the majority of the music played is a mix between very traditional Scottish music and very fashionable modern traditional tunes if you like composed by known composers. There's one or two sessions that, well if we just go through them specifically; Babbity Bowsters has always been a Scottish music session, and it's an old pub with a history that is related to the folk revival in the sixties and the instrumental revival in the seventies and eighties, so mostly Scottish music that is played there, some Irish music as well, the Halt Bar has had a session for a long time and that is a mix between Scottish and Irish, the Ben Nevis is largely young musicians playing Scottish music and more recent Scottish music, The Lismore had a session for a long number of years, I don't know if they still do, maybe they have a singing session I am not sure, and that was largely Scottish music, traditional Scottish music, Sharkey's on the south side is Irish music because that's the Irish communities bar, the Vicky bar is obviously clearly an Irish session, and that's established, interesting to note that the Irish sessions are actually located much closer to the areas of town where the Irish immigrant settled. For example east end of Glasgow is where most of the Irish Community lives and the south side where a lot of the Irish...well not Irish immigrants but the Glaswegian Irish live, you know. And the sessions in the West of the town have, or the North of the town, have more of a Scottish feel to them. There are of course other session, and of course sessions throughout Scotland which would be much more Scottish. Glasgow is, because of its history, the influx of Irish immigrants in the 19th century, and in the 20th century actually, has adopted a lot of Irish music, but interestingly for me, there is still a very, a strict division, I see anyway, a strict division between the Irish music in Glasgow and the rest of the traditional music which is largely Scottish or much more, I suppose what you might just call, I mean Scottish music anyways, at the sessions, that term makes you think of

Scottish tunes, but a lot of the music being written in Scotland and in the traditional music scene now uses unusual rhythms that have been adopted since Planksty and the Bothy Band brought in eastern European rhythms in the ninety-seventies. So, you know, if you want to retain a descriptor of a music as being Scottish, I think the best place is to find that music or in the Gaelic songs, Scot songs, the piping and fiddle traditions, where that music is kind of, there is a protectionism about that music which exist particularly in the competition circuit and in the solo recital and concert type circuit. But in the sessions, I would say that there is a still a clear distinction between Irish and Scottish music and I would say that the majority of music still in Glasgow is probably Scottish."

The Vicky Pub Session Musicians







CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

"The 'people' themselves play the part of the theoreticians in the field"
(Ardener, E 1989, 67)

Throughout the thesis, I have explored through ethnographic example, the factors that come into play that lead to pipers at the National Piping Centre in Glasgow being often categorized as "indigenous" individuals because of their practice– the playing of Scotland's National Instrument - the Great Highland Bagpipe, and the individual responses to this categorisation.

"The problem for people living within the much studied and romanticised peripheries was that they could find themselves 'museumised', turned into quaint exemplars of outsider's vision." (MacDonald 1993, 10)

I have surveyed the literature on identity politics and applied it to the concept of Scottishness considered throughout my work. I argue that the playing of the pipes makes these individuals representative of a "Scottish" place and essence, or at least this is how they might be interpreted in a greater social context. This observation is derived from my experience of how certain individuals come to interpret the practice of piping as indigenous to Scotland, and the habitus that exist within this occupation as one purely Scottish as well. This thesis argued against this notion and demonstrated that for some pipers, through their individual appropriation of Scottishness as a set of symbolic forms and social spaces and through their indigenous practice of playing the pipes, these pipers instead disrupt and challenge these categorizations and "move" into a more cosmopolitan individuality.

My reasoning for using the phrase 'cosmopolitan individuality' when speaking in particular of Finlay and Simon, and especially in conjunction with the suggestion of a National Piping Centre 'bounded' community, stems from the idea that pipers such as

Finlay and Simon, in their activities within and outside of the National Piping Centre, step out of this 'bounded' community and into a more global community, representative of not only Great Highland Piping and Scotland, but of one overarching single musically constructed community of musicians and fans. However, this in no way excludes non-musical communities; in fact, moving into a more cosmopolitan individuality truly implies stepping into one single, global community.

In my thesis, I compared the National Piping Centre's physical boundaries to that of a bordered region on a map. This comparison served mostly to illustrate a representation of how piping and pipers are often attached to a territory, often imagined as Scotland. For most pipers and piping enthusiasts, the National Piping Centre serves as the 'home' of piping and its physical space doubles as a territorial place that one can designate on a map as a place of Scottish culture and tradition. This is derived from the idea that symbolical forms such as the bagpipe, tartan and kilts, are collectively appropriated by individuals and linked to Scotland. However, in parallel fashion, piping and pipers are also symbolically linked to Scotland. The National Piping Centre encloses within its interiority these symbolic forms; they are found amongst the décor, the materials sold in the shop, the aural experience and through its instructors and students.

The purpose of this research then was to examine the multifaceted aspect of negotiating identities amongst pipers who teach at the National Piping Centre. In order to adequately situate them within this space and community, thorough ethnographic survey of the Centre seemed appropriate for the goals of my project.

"The Ethnography of locality is an account of how people experience and express their differences from others and of how their sense of difference becomes incorporated into and informs the nature of their social organization and process." (Cohen 1982, 3)

Furthermore, as a piping institution, the centre is the single most important place for the majority of pipers worldwide and for that reason, as an ethnographer, and according to Cohen, I wanted to make the culture, as well as the locale I was studying, intelligible to me through the terms in which it was meaningful to its members. Finally, it is the specificity of the National Piping Centre that makes it possible for individuality to be practiced for those who work and study within its boundaries. As mentioned earlier, there are two institutions for piping study in Glasgow; the College of Piping and the National Piping Centre, however, it is well known within the piping circuit that the College of Piping embraces a much more rigid and strict style of tuition, where individuality and taste for contemporary sound are never encouraged. The National Piping Centre, on the other hand, is a milieu where this individuality is constantly encouraged and welcomed. Although many of its instructors derive from a very rigid lineage of piping instruction, they all share a common sense of openness towards the piping tradition.

My choice to focus on Finlay MacDonald and Simon McKerrell enabled me to show that while they both demonstrated a strong sense of individual identity as musicians, through their musical careers and teaching careers, they were nevertheless forced to continuously engage in a "negotiation" of their sense of identity, vis-à-vis the many ways in which being Scottish has been portrayed and the Scottish identity imposed upon them due to widely held perceptions that the sounds and activities of piping are symbolically Scottish.

What emerges from my research is the realisation that whilst there is a strong sense of a push for modernity existing amongst a greater majority of the younger piping

generation, the importance of tradition, history and culture within the piping environment is just as prevalent. In fact, through most of my conversations with Finlay and Simon, it was clear that without having the knowledge delivered through tradition and history, the art cannot move forward, and so there is this great emphasis on looking back to then step forward. I found this extremely interesting especially since piping in itself seems highly infused with history and cultural iconography; how would one not be immersed in this aspect of tradition and culture. However, it was in an interview with Gareth Rudolph, also a piping instructor at the National Piping Centre that I realised the importance of piping instruction in the transmission of tradition. Gareth, a South African, had learned to play through the school pipe band system and eventually with private instructors in South Africa. While interviewing Gareth, he made it clear that he knew nothing about the history of Scotland, nor was he all that interested. It is not something that was taught to him within his lessons; he learned the techniques of playing, producing sound and interpreting music. Interestingly enough, while discussing piobaireachd tunes (the more ancient and classical piping tunes), it became clear that, in order to adequately interpret these tunes; some level of historical and traditional knowledge had been imparted. Consequently, it proved inevitable with piping; traditionalism and culture are simply part and parcel of the realities of piping.

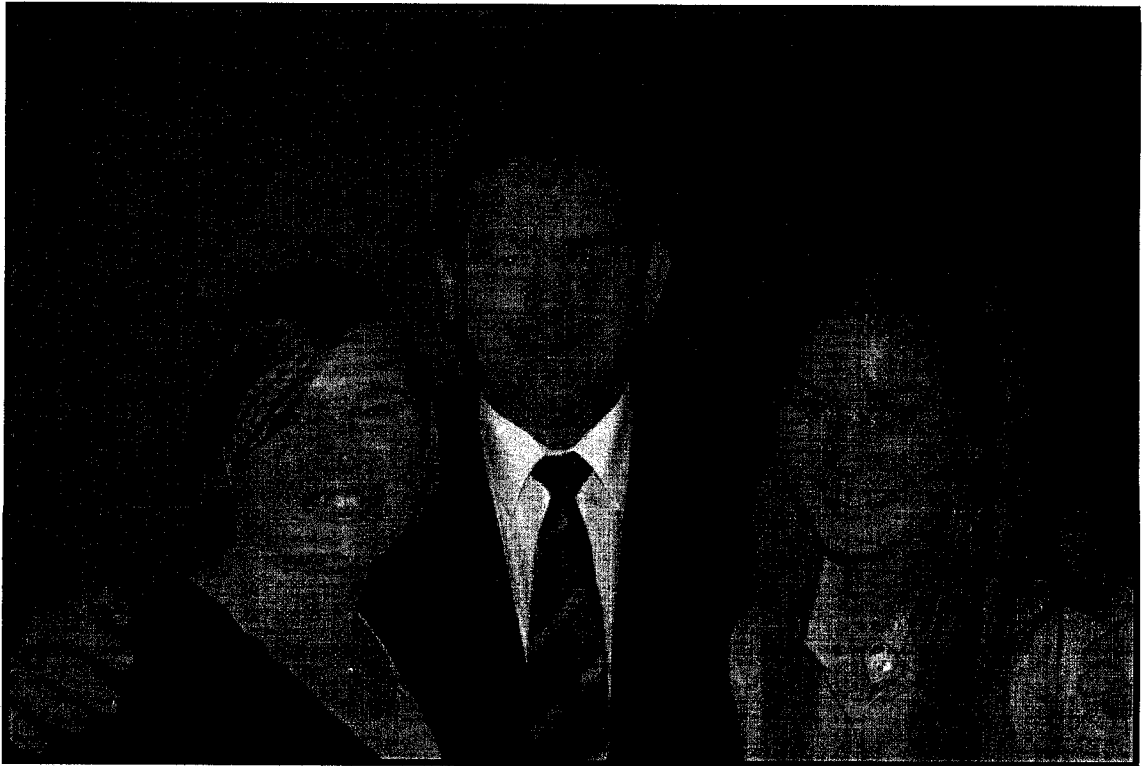
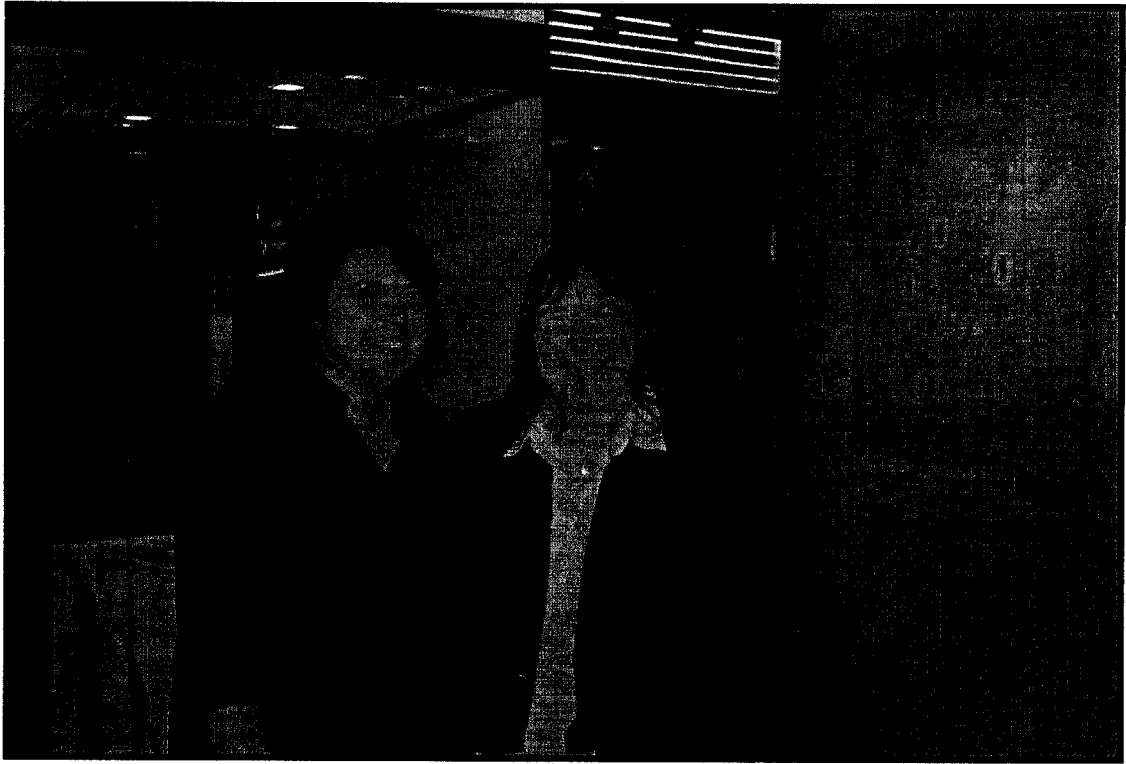
I find it extremely difficult to conclude my thesis, in part because I hold this project very close to my heart, but mostly because my time spent in the field enabled me to fully appreciate the extent to which the subject of identity politics remains highly ambiguous and fluid within the social sciences. The issue is (also) that ambiguity does not go away. After 4 months in the field or a few years, an ambiguity remains concerning

the processes and the meanings of individuals' identity-constructions. There is a gap between, a tension between, what is symbolically expressed in a public (social and political) arena and what is experienced by individual actors. People reflect on their identity positions and claims and change them; it's hard to 'know' informants because they cannot be fixed, and our being with them in the field is part of what changes them, perhaps. Furthermore, it is this ambiguity surrounding human identity that permits for its continued importance within the academic field and allows for projects such as the one I undertook in Glasgow to maintain its space within anthropology. My time spent amongst the men and women at the National Piping Centre in Glasgow taught me that human identity should not be easily theorized and assumed to be understood in just a few months of fieldwork. I came away with the knowledge that, as a researcher, one must not assume to be the authority on a subject of research if one wants to truly appreciate the information and wisdom imparted by his or her informants and collaborators. For these reasons, I felt it inappropriate to attempt a closing to a research that I feel I have just begun to scratch the surface of. It was important for me to accurately represent the physical surroundings of my field site, as well as the individuals with whom I shared this space; however, I honestly feel that the four months I spent with my informants and collaborators permitted limited access to what I could honestly learn from them.

Many new points of inquiry emerged throughout my research, subjects that I will hopefully revisit in future; how is sound utilised socially in defining a sense of self through piping? What sort of impact does an institution such as The National Piping Centre have on the future of piping? How will piping traditions change with the influence of academic institutions such as the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and

Dance, and so on? All of these, as well as the many more that exist around the subject of piping all demonstrate the extent to which there is a place for ethnographical research in such an urban setting.





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APPENDIX 1



Wednesday 22nd November 8pm, Exotic Piping Night
The National Piping Centre Auditorium
Tickets available from the NPC £5/8
Tel: 0141 353 0220



Sean McKeon is one of today's leading Uilleann pipers and we are proud to be hosting him at the NPC. In recent years Sean has performed with Noel Hill, Robbie Hannan and Sean Keane as well as forging an exciting duet with fiddle player Liam O'Connor. He has toured Europe performing and teaching music. Sean plays a full set of concert pitch pipes made by Cillian Ó Briain and released a recording in 2005 that features both his own music and that of his brother, Conor, and his father, Gay. Sean was awarded TG4 Young Traditional Musician of the Year in 2005.

Supported by: **Na Piobairi Uilleann** www.pipers.ie
Lowland and Borders Pipers Society www.lbps.net



India Alba:

Players: Ross Ainslie (border pipes), Gyan Singh (Tabla), Sharat Srivastava (Violin) & Nigel Richard (Cittern).

These leading Scottish and Indian musicians combine traditional Scottish and Indian classical music to create a unique and exotic sound.

Simon McKerrell: The National Piping Centre's own Simon McKerrell will start the evening on the pipes and introduce the various acts.

APPENDIX 2

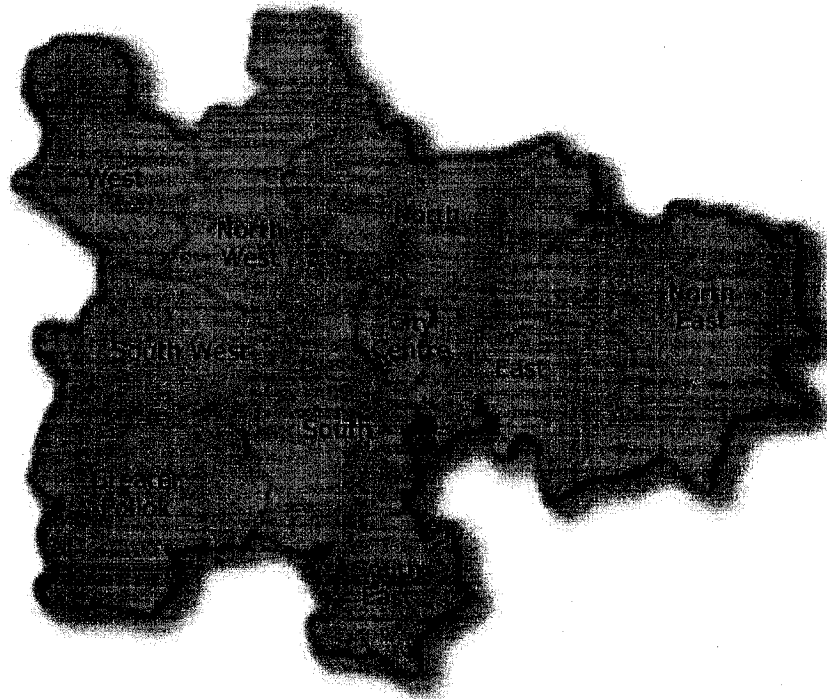
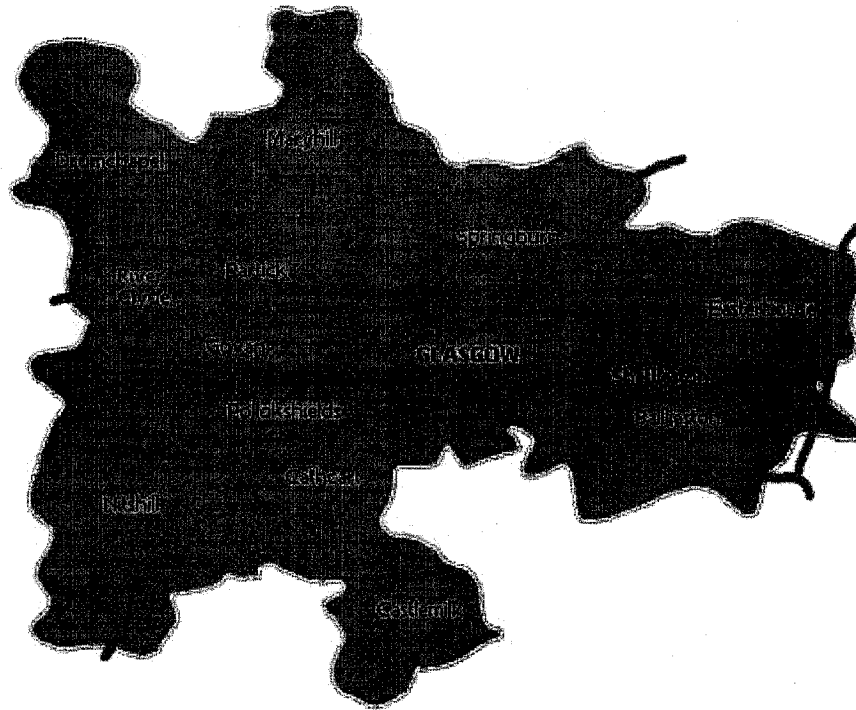
MAP OF SCOTLAND²⁰



²⁰ <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/mapimages/europe/scotland/scotland.gif>

APPENDIX 3

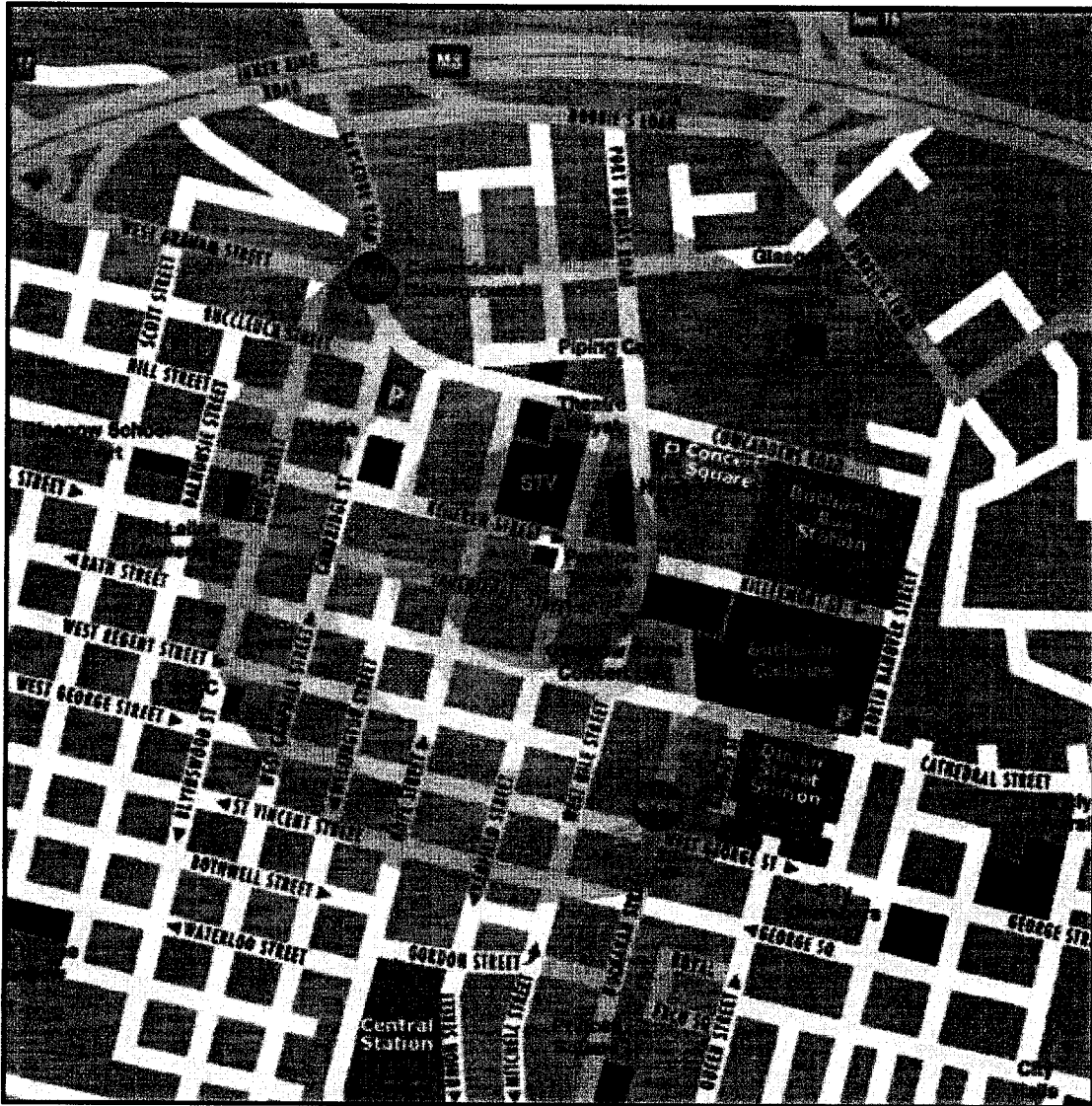
MAPS OF GLASGOW²¹



²¹ <http://www.scotland.com/images/maps/glasgow.jpg> and <http://www.easglasgow.com/images/glasgow-large.gif>

APPENDIX 3

MAP OF GLASGOW CITY CENTRE²²



²² http://www.paviliontheatre.co.uk/new/images/pavilion_glasgow_map.jpg