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Regional and National Cultures in North-Eastern Scotland: Tradition, Language and Practice in the Constitution of Folk Cultures

Daniel Leonard Knox

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

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University of Durham
Department of Geography
2003



31 MAY 2006

Regional and National Cultures in North-Eastern Scotland: Tradition, Language and Practice in the Constitution of Folk Cultures

Daniel Leonard Knox

Abstract

This thesis examines the processes of the formation and re-formation of folk cultures in north-eastern Scotland. Focusing on the area surrounding Aberdeen, I am interested in the historical and contemporary relationships between Highland and north-eastern versions of Scottishness. During the 1990's, a burgeoning north-eastern regional and cultural self-awareness, centred on the "Doric" dialect, was evidenced in the founding of the Elphinstone Research Institute at the University of Aberdeen, and in the founding of an annual Doric Festival. This institutionalisation has taken place in a situation in which Scottish national traditions have remained popular in the region and the Scottish nation has experienced a greater degree of political autonomy. The continued reproduction of both Scottishness and north-easterness is resultant of the ways in which culture and language have been mobilised, politicised and legitimised through the erection and operation of institutional frameworks. The role of expert and enthusiast knowledges in the propagation of cultural trends is analysed here through an exploration of the spectacularisation *and* banalisation of tradition. In particular, I unpack the tensions that claims for authenticity create with regard to the ballad and literary traditions of the north-east, and to the Highland Games and Gatherings of the same region. Exploring joint actions and knowledges, I demonstrate the efficacy of performative language and embodied practice in communicating, stabilising and normalising rhetorical ideas concerning Scottish cultures. As the contingent factors that give language and practice variable meanings become fixed through citation, the formation of dominant readings is enabled. The normalisation of spectacular events is crucial in the communication of authenticity and the establishment and recreation of national or regional identities. As perceived authenticity substitutes for objectivity in the popular imagination, everyday apprehensions of Scottishness and north-easterness are both made more durable *and* infused with a strong legitimacy by their very performance and naming.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Knox', written in a cursive style.

Daniel Knox
November 2003

Acknowledgements:

The production of this thesis has been a reasonably long process, but not one without reward etc. Thanks, in a general sense, to all those that have helped me in any way during the last four years or so. In particular, I would like to thank Mike Crang for his excellent playing out of the role of a supervisor and for his good cheer. Particular thanks also to Joe Painter, and other academics in the Department of Geography, University of Durham for maintaining a fairly stimulating environment. Similarly, thanks to all my friends in Geography at Durham that have ensured my time here has been fun, and in particular to Alison Quirk, Amanda Smith, Jacqueline Rae, Damien Laidler, Alison Scott, Kay McManus etc. Thanks also, of course, to those good friends of mine in Durham that lacked any formal relationship to the Department of Geography – Karen Dumolo, Emma Hoerty, Ellie Kingdon, Gemma Blackler and anyone else I forgot to remember. Much time during the production of this thesis, not to mention prior to embarking upon it, was spent in Aberdeen, so a special shout out to all my people in the Dyce Junglist Massive, to Jason Morrice and Andrew Moir, to Phil Milne, and to the now sadly defunct McIntosh of Dyce (especially Mabel). Having been at the University of Sunderland for the last year, I would like to thank Kevin Hannam (in particular), other colleagues and all my lovely students. Respect is due, as ever, to Misty, Tam and TJ. Finally, and most importantly, I could not have done this without the support (in all sorts of ways, not only financially) of family members. Special thanks, then, to Mum, Claire, Dad and Jim-Bob – and a dedication to those that did not make it through to this point in time (Nan and Caleigh).

Chapter 1: Introduction: The performance and practice of Scottishness

Early in 1999 the now defunct, but then newly founded, North East of Scotland Heritage Trust publicised its intention to ensure that the Doric language and culture of the north-east achieved a status comparable to that of the Gaelic language and culture *before* the Scottish Parliament assumed its full, if rather limited, powers in the July of that year (Harris 1999). A Gaelic Highland culture is employed throughout Scotland, both Highland *and* Lowland, and by agencies within both the public and the private sectors, to represent Scottishness (Bennett 1992; Buchan 1984; Beresford-Ellis 1999). The operation of such an essentialised vision of Scotland is evidenced in the ubiquity of discourses of tartan and 'tartanry', the popularity of Highland Games/Gatherings and in Gaelic television and radio broadcasts. While some mention of an undifferentiated Scots language is made in documents produced by the Scottish Parliament and Executive (2000), Gaelic language and culture boasts a more mature and established institutional framework, one that annually attracts some £13 million of direct government funding (Scottish Executive 2003). While nothing as bold as this has been achieved, a north-eastern Scottish cultural community, distinct from the rest of Scotland, has continued to be claimed by a growing number of people in recent years.

In a 1997 referendum, the people of Scotland voted overwhelmingly in favour of the re-establishment of a Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, and for such an institution to have tax-varying powers. In 1999, the first Scottish Parliament for 300 years was formally opened by Queen Elizabeth II in a ceremony that displayed all the pomp and grandeur of the British nation-state. The institutional reorganisation that has taken place in Scotland since this date has been dramatic and has had far-reaching implications. The weakening of the old Scottish Office following the establishing of the Scottish Executive has shifted much of the day-to-day governance of the nation from London to Edinburgh. The Scottish Executive is responsible for education, health, housing, local government, social



services, development and legal matters, while some reserved matters such as foreign policy and defence continue to be dealt with at Westminster.

The self-confidence of this new Scottish legislative framework is perhaps best illustrated by examples where the Scottish Parliament has defied government policy emerging from England and abolished student tuition fees or provided free personal care for the elderly. Further, the Scottish Parliament is elected under a system of proportional representation, involves coalition government and 37% of MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament) are women (Harvie 2001). These examples, however, are simply the manifestations of something more important and more fundamental that has taken place. The internal political affairs of Scotland have moved up Scottish news agendas, and more substantive political stories now regularly feature on the BBC's *Reporting Scotland* or ITV's *North Tonight*. The confidence and the self-belief that Scotland can be governed by Scots themselves is widespread. Despite the devolving of powers to Edinburgh clearly being a move within a *British* political system, it is undeniably the case that such a move towards devolution and possible future independence continues to take place against the backdrop of a strong popular consciousness of Scottish cultural identities. The processes of the strengthening of the institutions of governance and the swelling of cultural identities feed off of each other providing feedback loops, as in the case of the National Cultural Strategy for Scotland produced by the Scottish Executive in 2001.

A marked resurgence in cultural identity is to be welcomed as a possible antidote to the historical cultural inferiorism suffered by the Scottish nation (Beveridge and Turnbull 1989) but needs to remain as broad and thus inclusive as possible. A national resurgence in Scottish cultural identities, for instance, does not include all possible configurations of Scottishness and, most importantly for this thesis, certainly not the contemporaneously strengthening regional identity of the north-east of the country. It is in the nature of nations, and particularly of nation-states, that the development of a nation-wide will towards political autonomy and/or a reassertion of cultural identity will be at the expense of internal diversity to the extent that some stories get elided out of national narratives. Thus the apparently quite sudden will of the majority of the Scottish nation to politically

cement a cultural distinctiveness necessarily ignored some of the complexities of the ever-changing and geographically as well as temporally variable content of Scottish cultures. Similar resurgences in, or new formations of, cultural nationhood are taking place across the 'Celtic periphery' of Europe, and in this respect Scotland reflects events in Wales, Ireland, Brittany and Cornwall (Beresford-Ellis 1993; Gruffudd, Herbert and Piccini 1999; Harvey et al 2002). Complicating matters further, at the same time as Scotland experienced a reawakening, some in the north-eastern region around Aberdeen turned to promote their own cultural distinctiveness with a renewed vigour, building on the strength of regional dialect, literary and folksong traditions.

This introductory chapter illustrates a series of emergent social, cultural and political trends, both within post-devolutionary Scotland and within the academy, and explains the conceptual issues, structure and content of the thesis. The interplay of the developments within these differing social and cultural contexts contributes to the interest of this thesis and to the dynamism of both the north-east of Scotland and the Scottish nation. My original interest in the identities of the north-east of Scotland stems from my own experiences of living in the region and observing the operation and importance of both Highland Scottish and north-eastern Scottish identities. As I critically examine the social construction of local, regional and national identities in the north-east of Scotland, I will additionally assess the relationships between these different identities.

Essentialised Scottish identities

The idea of a unifying and unitary culture lies at the heart of many nationalist arguments and many ideas of nationhood. Scottishness tends to be discussed in implicitly essentialist terms and many authors (Beveridge and Turnbull 1997; Davidson 2000; Donnachie and Hewitt 1989; Ferguson 1998; Finlay 1997; Harvie 1978; McCrone, Kendrick and Straw 1989; Mitchell 1997; Pittock 1991, 1999) apparently take it for granted that Scottishness and Britishness are the fundamental territorial or ethnic identity choices open to the people of Scotland. However, McCrone (1992) implores us to look for alternatives to inadequate, stereotypical and popular notions of Scottishness, and this thesis is intended

to respond to that still unsatisfactorily answered call. Contemporary Scottish nationalisms, and particularly political nationalisms, are predominantly civic and institutional in their nature, and hinge on conscious participation in a Scottish polity and society rather than on ethnic attributes (Lorimer 2002; MacLeod 1998a, 1998b). Popular nationalism in Scotland, however, does have a basis in perceived ethnic, cultural or racial distinctiveness. The generation and regeneration of a Highland and Celtic vision of Scottishness through a series of rhetorical manoeuvres ensures that the reconstructed culture of parts of the Highlands is represented and largely accepted as that of the entire Scottish nation (Hague 2002; MacDonald 1998; Robb 1996; Trevor-Roper 1983). The continued reproduction of an essentialised Scottish culture does not take account of the possibilities for, nor the nature of, differing experiences in different localities within the nation.

Cohen (1982) has argued that "local experience mediates national identity" (1982, 13). The question, however, is how and in what ways? Here, I want to look at the local experience of north-eastern Scotland and to assess its capacity for organising community identity as compared to or alongside the concentric scales of belonging that are the Scottish nation and the British nation-state. In particular, I will examine the institutional framework through which Scotland and the north-east are maintained. MacLeod and Jones (2001), in discussing Paasi's (1991; 1996) institutional approach to the analysis of territorial formations, tell us that "Scotland represents a *nation* where actors can draw on a definitive territoriality, a deep reservoir of civil, political and administrative institutions, an impassioned political memory, and a kaleidoscopic symbolic shape" (2001, 673). While the role of institutions such as the Scottish educational system, Scots Law and the Kirk in the forging of a Scottish *nation*, and the contemporary role of governmental and civil societal institutions, is relatively well documented, the unique position of the north-east has not to date been commented on and this thesis explores some facets of the institutions of that *region*.

Different place-related identities need not be, and are not in practice, mutually exclusive, as during the era of late modernity and the globalisation of culture, people have

increasingly taken on hybrid forms of identity (Fortier 1999; Hall 1990, 1996; McCrone 1992, 1998; Schlesinger 1991). Susan Smith (1993, 1996) has looked at the cultural politics of local festivals in the Borders region of Scotland to assess how people create their own territorial identities through such practices. Smith (1996) concludes that while the Borders Ridings represent a highly localised cultural form, the people of the Borders also see themselves as members of the Scottish nation and the British state. The dual or multiple identities of the people of the Borders region, however, do hint at the complexity of identity in contemporary Scotland and, further, at the way in which such regional variations have tended to be ignored in the construction of a national culture. Similarly, accounts of the locally specific sense of identity and distinctiveness that exists on Lewis (Agnew 1996) in the Outer Hebrides has been pointed to as constitutive of an alternative identity that sits outside of the major conceptual delimitation of Scotland that posits a neat divide into Lowland and Highland areas (MacLeod 2002; Symon 2002). Indeed, this Lowland/Highland dichotomy tends to write many areas that do not fall readily into either category out of both the cultural history *and* the cultural present of Scotland. Thus, one important intention of this thesis is to demonstrate some of the vitality and heterogeneity of one particular, and largely ignored, variety of Lowland Scottishness.

North-eastern Scottishness

The area that I am defining as the north-east of Scotland, following others, is that centred on the City of Aberdeen, constituting the north-eastern knuckle of mainland Scotland (see figs 1.1 and 1.2). The region has long been argued to be culturally distinctive in terms of dialect and folk tradition, and in the general outlook of the inhabitants of the region (see Chapter 5 for regional definitions, boundaries and fuzziness). At the outset of this thesis, it seemed to me that the north-eastern region had a very strongly developed and developing regional culture, the nature and processes of which needed to be documented both to destabilise a Lowland/Highland binary *and* to problematise that cultural reinvention at the time that it was gaining currency in the region. The increased prominence of a north-eastern or Doric culture represents the work of academics, commentators, publishers, writers and performers. These groups are very explicitly

promoting a sense of the difference of the region. Those not involved in the organisation and promotion of vernacular culture may claim their identity by other means.



Figure 1. 1: Scottish Regions (Railscot 2002)

In line with other accounts of Scottish identities (McCrone 1992) and Smith's (1996) account of Border identities, a strong association with the north-east complements a Scottish national identity and *vice versa*. In addition to specifically north-eastern cultural traditions and practices, strong popular cultural and political nationalisms manifest themselves throughout the north-east. Burn's Night, St Andrew's Day and Hogmanay - cultural events common to all 'Scottish' communities - are all vigorously celebrated in the north-east and the popular iconography of Scottishness is much in evidence. I have chosen in this thesis to undertake a particularly detailed analysis of Highland Games and Gatherings, and the essentialised Highland culture that surrounds those events. While a

Highland Games meeting may well be an established national and international form, each particular games carries directly relevant significance and meaning for the locality in which it is staged and for many of those taking part as competitors and spectators. Highland Games events constitute stages for the performances of variously inflected Scottishnesses and an opportunity for us to witness the enactments that make Scotland Scottish. Similarly, Doric Festival events in the north-east are public demonstrations of cultural affiliation and of the existence and significance of particular cultural forms. By undertaking an in-depth and critical programme of fieldwork at the Highland Games meetings and the Doric Festival, I aim with this thesis to augment existing accounts of the production of both national and regional cultures in the north-east.

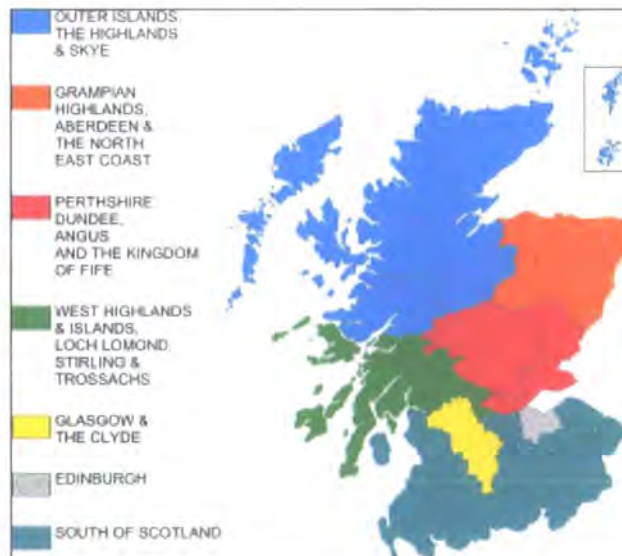


Figure 1. 2: Scottish Regions (Taste of Scotland 2001)

Representations of north-eastern Scotland

There are a number of accounts already in existence of the historical development and performance of the ballad traditions of the north-east of Scotland, and a body of literary criticism concerned with regional poets and authors. There is also a wealth of popular and social historical material available in the north-east of Scotland that discusses the

nature of the region, the people of the region and regional culture. Very few of these writings move beyond the unquestioning documentation of manifestations of regional culture to reflexively explore the production of that culture. Classic accounts of the north-east look at the harsh agricultural landscapes and the even harsher working lives of those that once worked that land before moving on to examine the cultural forms that apparently emerge from these landscapes. In such accounts there is an intimate and dependent relationship between such a harsh life on the land and the cultural forms of the region, principally the Doric dialect of the Scots language, dialect writing and the folk song tradition. The north-east is not alone in this and there is, more generally, a very real lack of writing on the regional identities of Scotland and certainly a dearth of academic treatments. The hegemonic visions are of a unified Scottishness and it is these views that recent and current academics have busied themselves in deconstructing (Chapman 1978; Donnachie and Whatley 1992; McCrone 1992; Withers 1992; Womack 1989). This unified Scottishness is focused on the Highlands and Islands, and the Lowlands, it seems, have generally been assumed to be either less worthy of comment or not significantly internally differentiated. I have conceptually divided accounts of north-eastern Scottish culture into two distinct, though at times overlapping, categories:

- 1) Unproblematic presentation of north-eastern culture
- 2) Unproblematic analysis of or commentary on north-eastern culture

The first category comprises unadorned and apparently unproblematic presentations of regional culture including ballad performances, books of poetry, north-eastern novels, dialect dictionaries, books of local proverbs, comedy sketches, newspaper columns, cartoons and all other non-academic presentations of accounts of a regional culture – these are the artefacts that document north-easterness. The second category includes all academic, pseudo-academic or “expert” analyses of the materials of north-eastern culture. My major reservation about such accounts does not rest on the fact that they lack analytical depth – which is not necessarily always the case – but rather that they lack explicit theorisation. Academic accounts of north-eastern culture tend to be couched in the same unproblematic representational rhetoric as popular accounts, and are complicit

in the (re)production of the particular visions of north-easterness detailed in Chapters 5-7. It is as if the slew of reflexive and theoretically informed, or driven, accounts of a general Scottishness or Scottish identity (Devine 2000; Donnachie and Whatley 1992; McCrone 1992; Withers 1992; Womack 1989) have failed to impact on notions of the authenticity of north-eastern cultural practices. It is almost as though the accounts of the inauthenticity of a Scottish national identity or culture leave a conceptual space within which the north-eastern region can remain as a last bastion of the genuine and the authentic. While I am not suggesting that academic practitioners in or interested in the north-east who commentate on or organise regional culture are entirely unreflexive, it is the case that their publications differ substantially from those concerned with Scotland as a whole and the Highlands in particular. The rhetorical approach of this work will circumvent some of these shortcomings in accounts of the north-east and north-easterness, as well as supplementing other works on Scotland that fail to fully explain the day-to-day emergence of culture.

From representation to banality

Following Billig's (1995) account of the everyday referencing through which a nation is symbolically maintained in the minds and lives of national subjects, this thesis will explore the local press, community groups and the institutional framework as manifestations of the region and the nation to examine the banal ways in which the north-east has been constructed. Just as a nation can be constituted through discourse and practice, so can a region, and this project is concerned with the discursive and practical performance of north-easterness as well as of a more mainstream Scottishness. Through an interrogation of embodied practices and language-in-use, the constructionist and performative theoretical approach (see Chapter 2) adopted here enables the demonstration of the discursive and bodily performance of territorial identities. The discursively performed region does not pre-exist its own performance and is thus not simply represented through linguistic practice, but actively crafted through practice. It is thus vital that we develop an awareness of the ways in which language does things and works to achieve outcomes. Velody and Williams (1998) suggest that by demonstrating the

contingency and constructedness of social categories and knowledges, we can, to some extent, circumvent the traditional politics of difference to look at the constitution of categories. As Bondi (1993) suggests, the adoption of a constructionist stance enables many of the unhelpful essentialist tendencies of identity politics to be avoided and this thesis uses such a stance to unpack the apparent essences of north-easterness and Scottishness.

The structure of the thesis

So, as this introduction shows, there are a number of important impulses driving this investigation into the poetics and politics of the organisation of Scottish cultures. Chapter 2 details at length the development of the constructionist and performative thought about language and practice that I will apply in later chapters, and positions this work within that broader body of literature. The key contributions this thesis is intended to make to this theoretical terrain are to explore more fully the interrelationships between the discursive and the extra-discursive, the processes of communicating "ready-made" ideas and the power of citation. Stemming from my use of constructionist thought is the notion of "banality" and the normalisation and stabilisation of ideas or practices. This I explore more fully throughout the thesis through an ongoing comparison between the banal and the spectacular as I draw on what I consider to be the useful elements of the works of Baudrillard and Debord. Both of the two main theoretical strands of this thesis - performativity and banality/the spectacle - are concerned with the nature and processes of signification.

Chapter 3 works to position this study within bodies of work concerned with folk-cultures, nations, nationalisms and traditions. That chapter looks at the historical and contemporary processes of the formation of national consciousnesses and the role of public tradition in enabling nascent nations to come to fruition. Also covered in Chapter 3 is the notion of authenticity, which is crucial to both the formation of the nation and the practice of tradition. Section 1 of the thesis is closed by Chapter 4, which outlines the research methods that I have made use of in conducting this research.

Section 2 of the thesis is my case study of the regional, localised culture of north-eastern Scotland. Chapter 5 introduces the region and the Doric dialect, the institutions of regional culture and the key individuals operating within those institutions. Then, Chapter 6 explores the history and forms of regional dialect literature and performance traditions before Chapter 7 does the same thing with the Bothy Ballad traditions, detailing their creation, the work of ethnologists and contemporary performance.

The Highland Games and the broader Highland Culture of Scotland are the subject matter of the third section of this thesis. Chapter 8 explores the reasons for the rise and continued deployment of a hegemonic Highland culture, the contemporary manifestations of this culture in the north-east and the cultural location of the region vis a vis a Highland/Lowland division of Scotland. Chapter 9 is concerned with the origins, organisation and events staged at the games and gatherings currently held across the north-east each summer and the notions of authenticity inherent in the founding and repeated staging of these events - both those of nineteenth century origin and those of more recent vintage. Chapter 10 is concerned with the work of two different events at the Highland Games and Gatherings in the production of Scottishness - the regulation of bodily activity and thus the relationships between the physical embodied activity in the games arena, and the discursive materials surrounding and controlling those activities.

Section 4 of the thesis is the main discussion section, though discussion occurs throughout the text, and also contains the conclusions I have drawn from the research. Chapter 11 draws together the materials from sections 2 and 3 and begins to make some sustained thematic observations. Chapter 12 forms my conclusions and thus my sense of how language-in-use and embodied practices reconstruct both banal and spectacular visions of Scotland and the north-east of Scotland.

Chapter 2: Banalities and fatalities: Language-games, performative utterances and joint-actions

‘To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life’ (Wittgenstein 1953, no. 19).

Wittgenstein (1953) asserts that linguistic practice and modes of existence are intimately connected. Language-in-use structures, enables, constrains and facilitates those social practices that it has, traditionally, been said to represent. Historically, much of the philosophy of language has been concerned with a representational view of linguistic practice and action. However beyond merely reflecting and representing realities, the work of discourse actively constructs and creates lives, meanings and knowledges. Moving beyond a representational and referential model of linguistic, bodily and social practice we can begin to explore the constitution of society as an outcome of human action. The proposed correlation between a particular language and a form of life seems logical enough but needs unpacking. People engaged in either conversation or thought require the capacity to represent. People develop understandings and negotiate meaning when representing their forms of life and the worlds they inhabit. Work is taking place in rationalising and justifying activities, knowledges and events when people talk to each other: what they believe, or come to believe, will then affect their future behaviour and their justifications of it which will, in turn, re-affirm those beliefs.

The focus of this thesis is on the practices and processes of joint action and knowledge, the performativity of language and the tracing of how items of rhetoric move, solidify and change. As such, this chapter, the “theoretical chapter” of the thesis, illustrates the contingent factors that give language and practice variable meanings between (and within) different contexts by developing ideas of images and symbols into a performative sense of language. This chapter is concerned with the outlining of a constructionist and performative theory of the effects and processes of language and practice. It is particularly concerned to argue about the ways in which ideas are figured into broader

discursive blocs through the operation of contingent, unique utterances and the implications this has for the forming of ideas about both historical and contemporary times and places. The chapter will lay the ground for the later empirical demonstration of the performative effects of language-in-use by emphasising key concepts such as performativity, language-games, joint-action, social causation and notions of complex chains of causation.

Recent calls, both beyond (Radley 1995; Deleuze 1986) and within cultural geography (Dewsbury 2000; Harrison 2000, 2002; Thrift 1997; Thrift and Dewsbury 2000; see also Nash 2000), for non-representational forms of theorisation echo the earlier moves towards practice and the lived and experienced body of phenomenology (Heidegger 1949; Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1974). Such a turn to embodied practices does not, by any means, in itself, necessitate a radical break with post-structural textual or discursive analyses. Non-representational theories do, however, challenge the currently hegemonic status of such deconstructive and constructivist apprehensions of cultural activity by flagging up some of the limitations and inherent problems of these approaches. In particular, these calls force, or rather encourage, us to examine in greater detail those practices that are difficult, maybe even impossible, to talk or write about as well as those that *might* not be *wholly* governed by discourse. The extra-discursive aspects of signification, experience and meaning have been largely ignored in academic writings focussing on the discourses surrounding, infusing and enabling such extra-discursivity. What I want to argue, however, is that a more sustained focus on the practical and the performative acts as a useful supplement or addition to an intertextual analysis of intersecting discourses that may or may not carry the label “social constructionism”. There is much still to be taken from a constructionist engagement that should not be ignored in favour of the extra-discursive (Nash 2000; Witz 2000). One of the intentions of this thesis is to attempt to work through a rapprochement between the two bodies of ideas that privileges neither the discursive nor the non-discursive as well as leads towards a better understanding of socio-cultural processes.

In attempting to do this, I make use of a rhetorical-responsive (Shotter 1993a, 1993b) constructionism in conjunction with performative and non-representational understandings to explore everyday practice. The category of the everyday is used in this paper for an explication of both the everyday *and* the more dramatic events that punctuate quotidian practice. Everyday practice is, of course, embodied and, while by no means wholly linguistic, is intimately tied in with the everyday practice of language use. Linguistic practice conceived of as merely one type of embodied practice sheds much light on the building and circulating of knowledges but cannot, and *must* not, be reasonably considered independently of more bodily concerns. Notions of performativity and practice have much to tell us about the figuring of representations in everyday life whether or not every stage in the processes of signification can be uncovered or meaningfully commented on. It is hoped that the approach outlined in this chapter begins to make some useful moves towards both a re-energised politics of representation and a sustainable cultural politics of the everyday and the banal.

A non-representational theory of the banal and the spectacular

Everyday in everyway

“The ‘diverse figures of the True’ have tended to rely on the unequivocal determinations of the remarkable, the extraordinary, the momentous, the memorable, the unfamiliar: in short, the eventful” (Clucas 2000, 10).

Philosophy has had a tendency to overlook that which does not cry out for observation, classification, categorisation and explanation. The omission of the vast majority of social actions and signification leaves us, at best, with a deeply inadequate understanding of the world. The everyday has tended to be ignored as somehow less significant and less meaningful – if apprehended or problematised at all. I am interested in this chapter in exploring the boundaries and intersections between the everyday, the not so everyday and the decidedly *not* everyday. I assert that attention must be paid to the everyday both as a realm of practice in its own right *and* as the background against which the non-quotidian

might be illuminated. Fundamental to an understanding of the spectacular is a firm grasp of the apparently less remarkable banality that underpins and facilitates such categorisation.

Philosophy, of course, is not the sum total of intellectual endeavour and we can point to examples in the social sciences of work that demonstrates a concern with the quotidian. Much anthropological work, particularly that in the ethnographic tradition, has been avowedly interested in the everyday knowledges and practices of peoples as well as politically committed to the poly-vocal “thick description” (Geertz 1983) of and engagement with those everyday practices. Even, however, where these works have not been preoccupied with the spectacle of dramatic ritual, they have often been about the everyday of groups of people spectacularly different to anthropologists, ethnographers and their audiences. These everyday practices are objectified as the social actors are spectacularly Othered. Often the turn to the everyday has had something of the remarkable about it as a move within academic discourses – accounts of the “unremarkable” have often been situated as remarkable in themselves (see De Certeau 1984; Jackson 1987).

Inspired by George Herbert Mead (1964), some of the earliest stirrings of a call to the everyday came with the work of the so-called Chicago School sociologists (Bulmer 1984) from around the 1920s onwards. Chicago sociologists such as Robert Park (1952) and Louis Wirth (1938) were engaged in what they called a microsociological project that pioneered urban participatory fieldwork. Their work was intrinsically about the everyday lives of twentieth century urban dwellers. This work and the later symbolic interactionist (Blumler 1969; Manis and Meltzer 1972) work that they inspired was avowedly about small scale interactions and the (re)production of meaning through symbolic exchange in a marked break with the macrosociological tradition of producing grand narratives about class or bureaucracy as in the work of Durkheim or Weber (1949).

Emerging from, and further developing, symbolic interactionism, Erving Goffman’s later accounts of institutions (1961) and the presentation of the self (1959) are very much

concerned with the detailing of everyday social conduct and interaction. Goffman is concerned with interpersonal relationships and the ways in which these are negotiated and sustained rather, however, than with the reproduction of the social world that provides the contextual settings for such activity. Goffman's work is about the individual social transaction rather than the broader discourses and communities of practice that enable or force such activity to take place. The later ethnomethodological writings (Heritage 1984) and research of Harold Garfinkel (1967) and Harvey Sacks (1995) expand the analyses of the ways in which meaning is made, communicated and understood in interpersonal communication and have been influential in the development of conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis (among other things). What the works of the symbolic interactionists and the ethnomethodologists have in common is their attention to language and the role it plays in the shaping and living of everyday lives. Those everyday lives are very explicitly shown to be made meaningful through the use of language. What, though, do we mean by *everyday life*?

The banal and the spectacular

One way of conceiving of everyday, potentially unremarkable, practice is as an unremarkable banality. The notion of the banal expresses all of the flow of everyday and commonplace activities and occurrences that are neither highly dramatic nor unusual. Both the banal and its opposite term, the spectacular are built up out of, and enacted through, the constant linguistic and bodily activity that constitutes the socio-cultural world. David Pinder (2000, 361) points out that the term 'spectacle' has, in the words of Crary (1989, 97), become a "stock phrase in a wide range of critical and not-so-critical discourses". Perhaps, then, it might prove profitable for me to take a few moments here to attempt to define *my* use of the terms 'the spectacle' and 'the banal'. Now, the etymology of the term spectacle points to the predominance of the visual in these accounts. Obviously, there is more to life and sensual or sensory embodied experience than sight and this thesis sets out to demonstrate the role of corporeal acts and experiences in the production and consumption of the spectacular *and* the banal. The two terms, the banal and the spectacle, operate, in this thesis, as conceptually alternative, though never mutually exclusive nor definitely bounded, discursive genres. In problematising the everyday, it has to be remembered that, despite their very banality,

such knowledges do not pre-exist their, often unnoticed, enactment. Banality is a precondition of the spectacle and the spectacular works best when drawing on, and in turn bolstering, that background noise of the everyday. Part of the process of the spectacularisation of the quotidian is that practices are problematised, regulated and resignified in ways that divorce them from the realms of the commonplace (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991). The spectacle is, of course, less opaque in terms of the visibility of its conditions of production and consumption. The unusual leaps out and demands observation, classification and categorisation in a way that the everyday does not.

Debord (1967) offers a fairly bleak account, from a broadly Marxist revolutionary position, of what the spectacle (note the definitive article) is and does (Gotham 2002; MacDonald 2002). Privileging the visual, Debord's (1967) *Society of the Spectacle* is about the distancing and alienation of people from their everyday lives, desires and requirements through their bombardment with ubiquitous and misleading images (Debord 1967; Jappe 1999). For Debord, the worker within the modern capitalist system is alienated as consumption becomes more conspicuous, frivolous and removed from production and, as a result, the subject moves from being to having and from having to appearing. People become observers or spectators as "all that once was directly lived become[s] mere representation" (1967 #1) or, at the least, the spectacle mediates and seriously distorts reality. The mass media is thus merely one of the more obvious manifestations of the spectacle as it works to continually reproduce itself through "real activity" (1967 #4). Baudrillard (1990), in drawing on Debord, of course, goes considerably further in his accounts of the hyper-real, the fatal and simulation. Divorcing the theorising of the spectacle from any political project, Baudrillard delights in describing the over-signification and thus the relative meaninglessness of heavily image-mediated existences. The spectacle *is* banality itself for Debord – the spectacle is the everyday that constantly asserts its appropriateness and "seeming incontrovertibility" (1967 #12) in ostensibly very benign ways. Baudrillard (1990) takes this banality further while, additionally, appearing to approve of the cynicism inherent in Debord's account and in the potential meaninglessness of everyday life. Baudrillard uses the term the 'fatal' to crank up the rhetorical pressure on the category of the spectacle – the notion of the

death of meaningfulness is several steps beyond the idea of the spectacle. Side-stepping the potential nihilism in these accounts, I prefer to think through the spectacle as those events or moments, emerging from an underlying banality, that capture imaginations, demand attention and encourage reflection on everyday knowledge and practice.

What, then, of this banality? Billig (1995) demonstrates how the ideologies of nationalism and the nation are banally created and sustained by way of rhetorical ideas: iconography, language and practice constantly reassert the membership of particular people to particular categories. The performance of spectacular public rituals, and the symbolic work involved in such performances, identifies both performers and spectators as members of a particular culture and enables them to position themselves within a broader 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983; Palmer 1998). Banal events are undifferentiated and unremarkable while, in contrast, fatal events are spectacular, unusual and heavily infused with meaning (Baudrillard 1990; McKee 1997). Billig (1995) thus contrasts the everyday 'flagging' of the nation with more emotive and spectacular 'flag-waving' incidents that take place when, for instance, a nation goes to war or a popular festival is celebrated. So, if the banal and the spectacular are both intrinsically about the processes of signification, we need to explore some of the ways in which communicative acts take place and make things happen.

Discourse of course

Discourse is a practical, social and cultural means through which participants achieve action (Fairclough 1992). This action includes the construction, display and ascription of identities, social relations and knowledges, as well as the construction of the contexts in which such can occur (Day 1998; McIlvenny 1996; Van Dijk 1993, 1997; Zimmerman 1998). Among the many accounts of the nature and effects of discourse, there are four key ways in which discourse analysts and other authors have conceived of discourse (Fairclough 1992):

(i) Extracts of spoken dialogue or written language: Historically, distinctions have been made between the spoken and the written word. Saussure (1960 [1916]) attempted to

differentiate between written and spoken language and asserted that writing existed only to represent speech which is the primary expression of language (De Beaugrande 1991). Derrida (1967) introduced the notion of the 'trace' to suggest that writing reflected both the absence and the presence of language: the presence of one thing (e.g. written language) highlights the absence of its direct opposite (e.g. the voice of speech) (Lechte 1994; Sampson 1989). In this investigation, the primary difference recognised between spoken and written accounts is contextual. For example, different rules and linguistic practices are likely to dominate the production or consumption of particular utterances in particular dialogic situations: both the spoken and the written, however, are conceived of as speech acts or utterances with potential effects. There is not necessarily any greater difference between speaking and writing an utterance than there might be between two spoken utterances, and the same ideas and knowledges can exist in, and move between, both forms. The spoken becomes the written as surely as the written can be spoken.

(ii) Any interaction between people (especially conversation): Any interaction between human beings can be described metaphorically as discursive in that practices other than language *can* be said to follow 'grammars'. There are, of course, some difficulties inherent in the application of such figurative language to practices beyond language and such textualising of the extra-discursive is, of course, anathema to those turning to the body and to practice. As a part of the avoiding of the dangers of privileging language, we must remain on guard against providing over-simplistic, or overly complex, explanations that might be inappropriate outwith the realm of language-in-use, and aware of the dangers of reducing the subject to discourse.

(iii) Particular types of language used in different social situations: Different social situations require the use of different ways of speaking. Speech must be appropriate to the context in which it is used to enable the language-user to be accepted as a legitimate and competent member of a particular social category. In these accounts the content of speech or writing is tightly connected to the context within which it is produced. This relationship between content and context, however, is one which is largely conceived of as being an outcome, rather than producer, of social context. There is some sense here of

the enablement of action but, largely, this is about conformity, rule following and constraint in ways which reify and inadequately account for contextual settings. Conversation analysts tended (and still tend) to focus on the discursive processes and rules of conducting conversation. Much time has been, and continues to be, devoted to the analysis of such things as turn-taking patterns in conversation with little attention paid to broader, socio-cultural concepts such as class, ideology and power (Fairclough 1992; see Sacks 1995). More recently, following a long overdue critical turn, discourse analysis has begun to focus in on some of the social effects of discourse with a particular emphasis on the reproduction of hegemonic ideologies (Kelly-Holmes 1998; Kleiner, 1998; Phillips, 1996).

(iv) Ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice: Discourse here is the structure of particular kinds of interaction and we might talk, for instance, about a discourse of science, a discourse of domestic work or a discourse of whatever (e.g. Foucault 1972, 1979). The implications are, again, that the nature of the discourse has some effect on what actions are undertaken and thus what outcomes are likely. Within these accounts, however, there is additionally a sense in which the discursive context is constantly refigured and recreated through the individual utterances and acts. The discursive formations (Foucault 1972) and the objects of knowledge have distinct genealogies (Clark 1998; Colwell 1997; Nietzsche 1998) that we can attempt to trace a route through to reveal the workings of power. The discourse here is held to be constituted of more than simply language and includes embodied practices regulated through discourse (including, of course, the embodied practices of others).

Language-in-use

Billig (1997) tells us that a Foucauldian theory of language and ideology is about discursive totalities whereas constructionist thought and discursive psychology are about the production of these totalities through individual utterances. We must, of course, ask to what extent a “discursive totality” constitutes a practical, social or cultural totality. The writings of Foucault (1977, 1979) with their accounts of the regulation of the body and technologies of the self, are assuredly about more than merely linguistic practices. Much

of the constructionist work to which Billig refers, however, does feature the body, practice and embodied practices predominantly as absences. Discursive practices 'systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1977) and knowledges and practices are formed, reformed and interpreted through written and spoken accounts. Speech and writing are of fundamental importance in constructing and enabling thoughts, memories and perceived realities: we contest meanings through discourse both with others and through our own 'dialogic inner-speech' (Shotter 1993a, 44) to reach understandings which are always-already intersubjective.

Constructionists (Billig 1987, 1998; Black 1989; Edwards and Potter 1992; Gergen 1994; Shotter 1993a, 1993b) have focused much on the movement of ideas between actors and their subsequent transformations. These accounts are about the ways in which the forming of shared understandings takes place and the structures and principles of debate. Billig (1987) writes about two-sided 'traditions of argumentation' as a key process through which meaning is negotiated, while rhetoric (the art of arguing) is widely discussed as a key feature of discourse and the effects it is able to achieve (see also Kleiner 1998 for 'pseudo-argumentation'). As some of this work shows, or at least begins to suggest, it is vital to explore the reciprocal relationships between broad discursive ideologies and the unique and contingent utterances constituted by, and constitutive of, such discourses. Thus, the theorising of linguistic practice used in this paper is performative, dialogical and constructivist rather than reflective, representational or referential, and seeks to deepen understanding of how social outcomes are achieved through linguistic, although not only linguistic, means.

Performative utterances

Notions of the performative functions (Austin 1962; Bell 1999a, 1999b; Butler 1993, 1997; Lloyd 1999; Parker and Sedgwick 1995; Rostas 1998; Scheim 1999) of language expand analyses of performance to look at the ways in which language itself can produce, or inspire production of, certain actions or identities (Ahmed 1999, Bell 1999c). Performative thinkers explore the functioning of language within social and cultural context in an attempt to understand how particular utterances result directly in, or at least

partly shape, particular outcomes. The question “When does saying something become doing something?” simply and effectively summarises a central tenet of performative thought and the opposition of the performative function of language to the more general iterative role of speech/writing. An example commonly used to demonstrate this is that of the marriage ceremony and the performative work of the phrase “I do” (Austin 1975; Butler 1993, 1997; Parker and Sedgwick 1995) through which the act of joining is both enunciated and, in a very real sense, performed, happens. The utterance becomes the key determining moment in that event and in the actualisation of potentialities.

Some performatives work by directly enacting that which they speak of (“I pronounce you man and wife”) while others move (Shotter 1993a) people to perform other actions. A key distinction is made between those performatives with immediate effect (termed illocutionary) and those with less easily perceived or indirect outcomes (termed perlocutionary). Performative thought is about the playing out of potentialities and the tracing out of complex chains of causation in examining outcomes. In this paper, these ideas of performativity are used to explore the social construction of particular visions of the world through particular practices. I am interested in the social production that performative utterances enable and constrain as well as the ways in which the potential power of an utterance might be realised.

Ready-mades and rhetoric

Shotter (1993a; 1993b) labels his work a “rhetorical-responsive” version of social constructionism within which arguments and knowledges are transmitted through rhetorical “ready-made” ideas and all communication takes place in non-isolated contexts. This rhetorical-responsive version of social constructionism (Shotter 1993) highlights the performative functions of language to explicate the constitution and functioning of the contexts within which meanings are contested in dialogue and understandings are always-already intersubjective.

Shotter’s (1993) constructionist account additionally makes much use of the performative role of the ‘ready-made’ or rhetorical idea in the establishment of realities for particular

groups of people. Similarly, Judith Butler (1997, 1999) outlines the ways in which the repeated use of the same items of rhetoric leads to an accumulation of citational power through which ideas are fixed. Phillips (1996) thus showed how a Thatcherist discourse was disseminated throughout the U.K by way of the movement of key rhetorical phrases; ready-made ideas which although transmutable, remained intact. The ready-made functions as a useful way in which to describe something and will circulate through multiple media, not necessarily unchanged, if attractive or broadly agreeable to a number of people. An accretion of citational power increases the effectiveness of each successive utterance in fixing meaning. The idea of the ready-made carries with it something of the effect unleashed both in the original forming and in subsequent reiterations, trailing behind it a complex history of causation and thus agency. This citing and reciting can be seen to be building the foundations on which particular language-games are stabilised, legitimised and normalised. Citation is the accumulative, incremental process whereby contexts are constructed, actors are enabled and constrained, rules are concretised and the ideal consequences of different moves decided or predicted.

The model of the social world outlined by John Shotter (1993a; 1993b) is one in which all interaction is necessarily responsive. All activity is embedded within broader and deeper flows in such a way that no individual event is independent of those either before or after it in time. Bauman and Briggs (1992) suggest that a performance based approach to social interaction enables us to position all activity within such a conceptual framework. Their analysis outlines the way in which individual manifestations of particular social or cultural phenomena are related to both prior and subsequent renditions of what appear, ostensibly, to be the same act. Of course, individual events are related to *all* other events rather than simply those that might be identified as being to some extent identical. Echoing Austin's (1962) call for an apprehension of the "total speech act" that includes acts and utterances outside of the individual text, these constructionist ideas give us an indication of the importance of the context within which a speech act is enacted or an utterance uttered.

The context of language-in-use

Wittgenstein's recognition of the fact that 'an ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in *every* case' (1953 no.28) represents a major shift in the philosophy of language. The *Philosophical Investigations* insisted that the meaning of utterances cannot be understood outside of the context in which they are made. Rorty (1989) calls this the contingency of language - it is related to the unique intersection of circumstances. In his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Wittgenstein revolutionised thought about language and social practice by rejecting the search, to which he had previously been party (1961[1922]), to find a coherent logic of language (McGinn 1997). In eschewing this search, Wittgenstein (1953) insisted that the meaning and thus the effectiveness of an utterance is always dependent upon context and established the language-game metaphor as a means of conceptualising discursive activity and the ways in which such is regulated. It was this, then novel, interest in context that characterised and distinguished Wittgenstein's later writings. A concern with context is amplified in the works of critical discourse analysts who systematically examine many different characteristics of a discursive event (Van Dijk 1993, 1997; Fairclough 1992). Van Dijk (1993, 1997) has been key in the creation of a systematic discourse analysis that is able to take account of variable contexts. A few of the many aspects of context to which we need to pay attention include; speech genres, location, style and lexicon, participant roles, rhetorical features and the rights of people to gain access to, and participate in, such discourse.

Wittgenstein makes clear that the notion of the language game is simply a metaphor that should not be taken too literally but it does, as Shotter (1993a) asserts, provide us with a useful tool with which to examine language. The conduct of language-in-use is not bounded in any definite way into individual transactions, and it is perfectly plausible to imagine many different language games being played out at any one time or in any one interaction. Similarly, Bakhtin (1986) writes about 'speech genres' within which the linguistic conduct of individuals must operate with reference to the norms and conventions of particular audiences (Bakhtin 1986; Shotter 1997). These norms and conventions are what Wittgenstein calls 'rules' in an extension of the language-game metaphor. These rules, however, are not merely constraining – they are always open to

interpretation and can, of course, be broken or bent as well as followed. The following of the rules of the game, or operating within a particular speech genre, ensures that a person is a knowledgeable and credible cultural insider. Such knowledge-from-within (Shotter 1993) goes largely unquestioned and operates at a level of 'practical consciousness' (Curry 2000; Giddens 1984; Stirk 1999). Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1991) suggests that particular patterns and conventions of behaviour within certain "fields" are internalised, such that social life is almost self-regulating. Wittgenstein writes about implicit knowledge as 'something that we know when no one asks us, but no longer know when we are supposed to give an account of it' (Wittgenstein 1953, no. 89). Practical and internalised, habitual activity does not operate on the level of the discursive and is extremely slippery in terms of being represented in language. These are rules we follow without needing to be prompted to do so.

Rules and rule following

Wittgenstein (1953 no.85) wrote that "a rule stands there like a sign-post" - i.e. it is open to interpretation and does not have to be followed. Bourdieu (1977) argued that people may well be aware of a rule but that this is unlikely to be the determining factor in their practice. Taking the rejection of rule governed behaviour further, Bourdieu attempts to destabilise the very concept of the rule by referring to the "polysemous nature of the word rule" (1977, 27). The existence of a rule can influence peoples' constructions in both positive and negative ways - i.e. it can serve as a model of what *not* to do as much as of what *to* do. This is in contrast to the work of conversation analysts such as Sacks (1995) who tried to formulate a system of rules for human conversation, rather than highlighting the contingent nature of rule following or breaking.

Some sets of rules carry implications in their breaking that are so broad, internalised and fundamental that they are rarely challenged or perceived of as limitations. Such ideologies institute the norms, conventions and values of whole societies while also informing the many smaller games that take place within those social territories. The above account of rule-governed language games, the social construction of knowledge and ready-made ideas is, however, despite some of the qualifications, an overly idealistic

and deterministic model of a world in which things never go wrong. Naturally, this is not always the way in which the world (unlike, for instance, this chapter) works – sometimes things do not go to plan, the obvious does not occur, and chains of causation appear to become broken.

Unhappy performatives and joint action

It is commonly recognised that the performative utterance might not actually achieve that which the author required and performatives are often referred to as having an ‘unhappy’ status (Gould 1995). The fact that individual members of language communities do not exist in isolation but are embedded in a number of social and cultural contexts means that intentions cannot always be met. Bourdieu tells us that intended outcomes cannot be achieved without the correct institutional setting and authorisation for a performative utterance (1991). The likelihood that the performative will work is contingent upon the situatedness of both the author and the audience, and the legitimacy that inheres in the relations between them.

Shotter (1993) introduces the concept of joint action to account for events that are not necessarily intended by any particular individual. Joint action retains a notion of intentionality in that outcomes are formulated as being the result of the agency of many individuals, rather than only one (Thrift 1997). This constitutes a model of *social* causation. Similarly, Rom Harré (1991) offers us accounts of complex chains of causation involving multiple actors - chains from which it proves very difficult to trace causation (Scott and Stam 1995). Within this network of intentionality and causation certain nodes, certain people, remain more or less to blame. There is no attempt here to absolve blame from anybody or to entirely dissolve the concept but simply to recognise the inherent difficulties in attribution in a complex social world. The individual's embeddedness in multiple language-games makes it difficult to decide whether action was unavoidable or not and what scope individuals had for knowing decision making before acting in particular ways.

Some caveats

Having outlined the basic theoretical premises of this work, I would like to tackle briefly four particular problems that are commonly encountered with constructionist and performative work and to suggest some ways in which I will work through these in the empirical exposition of the production of north-eastern Scottish versions of Scottishness. Four interrelated problems emerging from these literatures that I would like to address are (1) relativism and the confrontation between realism and constructionism, (2) the problem of accounting for personal agency in a socially and discursively constituted world, (3) the inadequate accounting for bodies and embodiment and, finally, (4) the focus on presences in the text at the expense of absences.

(i) Relativism

“Most of reality is indifferent to our descriptions of it” (Rorty 1989, 7).

An accusation that has often been levelled at social constructionism is that it is given to extreme forms of relativism. In exposing the contingent and arbitrary nature of belief, knowledge and action, it becomes difficult, unnecessary and unattractive to make value claims regarding competing ideas or discourses. Constructionism also represents a fairly radical form of idealism that can be set up in strong opposition to realist modes of thinking. A subtle and sophisticated form of social constructionism, however, need not be about the undermining of the values, societies and realities of particular groups of people. We must, as Latour (1995) suggests, be cautious in our targets and not become either over dramatic or overly self-satisfied in our iconoclasm. A demonstration of the contingency of all knowledge and all realities need not and does not devalue or make particular visions or notions of the world less meaningful or less useful.

Part of the difficulty lies in the perhaps overzealous application of either realist or constructionist models. It may even, perhaps, lie in the misrepresentation of the work of other thinkers. For example, Bhaskar (1993, 1989) questions Shotter’s (1993a) repeated assertion that social constructionism and a critical realism are incompatible. As Gergen (1994, 78) writes “all constructionist analyses engage in a form of ‘selective realism’,

privileging certain 'objects of analysis'". Critical realists largely take on board the key ideas of the constructionists but retain a notion of an underlying, or an elsewhere lying, reality that our thoughts and language cannot necessarily retrieve or represent. The realities constructed operate as realities for those implicated in their production but do not match up, in any precise way, with an absolute and observable Reality.

Shotter asserts that "most of the time, we realise, we do not fully understand what another person says" (1993a, 1). If we accept the importance of context and question the ways in which the same context (as we perceive it) might vary for different people, as well as recognising the non-specific meaning of words, we come to see that shared understandings ought to prove difficult to negotiate. If people *do* share understandings, and people certainly believe that they do, it is because they negotiate them in discourse. Shotter presents twin notions of the '*imaginary*' and the '*imagined*' to deal with ideas or objects that are not observable material facts in human lives. Shotter suggests that much of what we talk about does not actually exist, in a material sense and that people believe in things they have not directly experienced. People will use the explanatory force of such concepts, values and belief systems to justify aspects of their practice that would otherwise make little sense (Shotter 1993a, 1993b).

Arrington (1991) asserts that thought and reality agree because they both operate on the same grammar; i.e. they are both conceived of in the same language which results in us believing in and thinking about a particular reality and thus perceiving it that way. This hints at the ways in which language is the primary medium through which we perceive the world as well as a key way in which we practically take part in it. Although unwilling to accept that there is an underlying 'Reality' that we should strive to find ways of explaining, I am prepared to accept that simply because we believe that some things are wholly socially constructed, we do not necessarily *have* to posit that *everything* must be. We must allow conceptual space to allow for different things, even different instances of the same thing, to be constituted differently. The recognition of language processes as a constructive force does not necessitate that things cannot exist either before or outside of language games.

The work of actor network theorists (Haraway 1991; Latour 1993, 1995) has attempted to circumvent and preclude such unproductive confrontations between naive realism and dogmatic constructionism by radically extending agency to non-human entities (Instone, 1998). This work recognises that events can and do take place over which humans and their use of language have little or no control. The extension of creative, and destructive, capacities to the material world of artefacts illustrates the probability that non-human entities, whatever they might be, are a part of the same social milieux as humans which, in turn, raises the possibility of hybrid forms (Whatmore 1999). Actants within networks of agency, causation or power are not simply abstract or disembodied utterances and are capable of taking a role in the construction and circulation of knowledges. This circulation of knowledges through actants other than humans is often mediated by humans as in the case of the production of the broadcast or print media. We are still, to an extent, left with the uncovering of processes of the communication of meaning but have the potential to deepen understanding of this by developing thoughts about the ways in which bodies, practices and the material world of artefacts and nature might be involved in this. This, of course, begins to throw up difficulties of its own related to the unwillingness of practitioners of actor network theory to attach value judgements to nodes within networks or to privilege human beings or human action. Not, of course, that they should especially be privileged. However, constructionist and performative thought does have some inherent problems when it comes to accounting for personal agency given the power they assign to discourses external to the subject.

(ii) Agency

Individuals and their cognitive processes often get elided out of the stories or narratives of constructionist and performative authors. What does constructionist thought tell us about the nature of human existence or what it might be to be, or to act? Gergen (1994) asserts that social constructionism is based on an *ontological mutism* and that, as a result, 'whatever is, simply is' (1994, 72). Obviously, this is somewhat unsatisfactory but as both Gergen (1994) and Ree (1999) have suggested, the social constructedness of categories does not preclude the possibility of ontological depth nor meaningfulness.

Ansoff (1996) argues that there is no room for personal agency within social constructionism, because of this lack of a satisfactory ontology of the individual.

While Ansoff (1996) is merely suggesting that constructionism is simply not dealing with the agency and existence of the individual, stronger criticisms have been made of performative thought. Nelson (1999), in critiquing the application of performative thought to geographical work, suggests that such work focussing on discourses tends to subjugate the subject leaving no room for reflexivity, conscious action or agency. Nelson (1999) considers the work of Judith Butler (1995) in particular and argues that this work is haunted by foundational assumptions related to the ways in which the repetition that constitutes particular subjects is regulated by, through and in discourse. It is hoped that the theoretical approach outlined in this chapter can begin to overcome some of these limitations by conceiving of the subject as intimately connected to multiple discourses, sometimes voluntarily, at any one moment and, therefore, that some scope for personal decision making might lie in the negotiating of intersecting language-games. Nelson (1999) is, of course, performing a useful service in outlining these concerns but, sadly, appears to be asking us - while denying the validity of such a move - to reassert the sovereignty of the knowable and wilful subject of humanistic and phenomenological approaches. This work attempts to find some middle ground between the determinism of constructionism / performativity and the unruly and unregulated capacity for free thinking, non-discursive (or even pre-discursive - assuming that were possible) action of competing sets of ideas.

Mancuso (1996a, 1996b) attempts to build links between social constructionism and personal construct psychology in an attempt to overcome the shortcomings of both bodies of literature. Although both share a focus on the constructive nature of the text, commentators have pointed to the major difficulties inherent in trying to reconcile the individualist ontology of personal construct theory with the social ontology of social constructionists (Burkitt 1996; Wortham 1996). Social constructionism takes inadequate account of the individual, while personal constructivism lacks sufficient theorising of the social domain.

Mancuso (1996a, 1996b) uses the notion of bipolar constructs to attempt to explain the inner workings of the minds of individuals by positing that thought centres around dualisms (e.g. good and bad, hot and cold etc). These constructs apparently operational within the minds of individuals are, however, of course, at least to some extent socially derived. Individual values are, of course, possible but not independently of social interaction and the associated knowledge of the values of others. Shotter's (1993a, 1993b) (practical-moral) knowledge *from within* social contexts informs the construction of more personal value judgements. Herein lies what I consider to be one of the key values and most useful tools of socially constructionist thought – the shifting of agency from the individual to the social world.

(iii) Bodies and embodiment

Such a shift in the placing of agency, however, needs to be cautiously made as it leaves all knowledges and agency essentially disembodied or, rather, claims to demonstrate the contingency and constructedness of embodied values entirely in relation to discourse and without reference to the very bodies in which such agency inheres. It is not that constructionism could not say anything about the body but rather that, more often than not, it fails to do so or manages only to say very banal, or even trite, things about bodies. We know that bodies are racialised and gendered (Butler 1993; Grosz 1994) and that social practices underpin and perform these categorisations (Colebrook 2000; Witz 2000). We do not, however, know an awful lot about the processes through which these categories come to be applied. Accounts of bodies tend to be separated into those that view bodies as natural and those that see the body as *entirely* cultural (Casey 1998) although there is much useful work exploring the relations between sex and gender and the application of cultural meaning to biological knowledges (Butler 1993; Grosz 1994; Witz 2000).

Shotter (1993a) writes about what he calls prosthesis. Using this term, he begins to explore the complicity of artefacts other than human consciousness in our understanding and recreation of the world. This account leaves the body as an abstracted object within

discourse(s) in perceiving the body to be merely something that might enable us to further or deepen our understandings of our surroundings or in generating knowledges. There is no impression in Shotter's writing of these bodies (human or otherwise) contributing to the reproduction of discourse or actually being a part of the playing out of particular language-games.

Talk of bodies, however, of course, does not properly deal with the materiality of the body or the experience of living in, or with or through a body. Radley (1995, 1996) outlines his major disagreements with constructionist accounts of the body that tend to underplay the value of the body and the individual agent as a creative force that might operate independently of discursive constraints. Certainly, there is much more to the role of the body in society than as a simple receptacle for knowledges produced externally or as a simple vehicle for signification. Radley (1995), however, proposes too radical a break with constructionist takes on the body that seems to propose the leaving behind of much useful work that has already been done on the regulation of bodies through discursive practices (Colebrook 2000). Judith Butler (1993) shows us that the extra-discursive body is always conceived of within discourse, remaining a 'posit' of discourse, even if not entirely an outcome or an effect of the discursive (Casey 1998). The accounts of bodies-in-use or in practice offered in this thesis will attempt to deal with the materiality of the body, as well as its role in signification, by thinking through what the outcomes of regulation of physical action might be, how bodies produce meaning, what it might feel like to produce meaning and ways that embodied subjects might negotiate discursive constraints and enablements.

(iv) Absences and presences

The writings of Shotter and Billig (2000; see also Billig 1997a, 1997b, 1999) ascribe not only agency but also consciousness to the social rather than the individual. Collective rememberings or collective knowledges require not only that memories be created in particular ways but also that other alternative knowledges are forgotten, repressed or denied. Billig talks about a dialogical unconscious as an important flipside, or complement, to a dialogic consciousness – the consciousness of a society. Billig (1997a,

1999) has recently proposed that much of the work in constructionist or discursive psychological vein has tended to focus too much on the presences of the text to the exclusion of the absences or the silences of the text. Whenever something is said there are, of course, always a number of alternative things that might have been said either as well or instead. In maintaining apparently coherent shared discourses it is vital that inappropriate or “incorrect” things do not get said. Saussure's (1960 [1916]) distinction between *langue* and *parole* suggests to us that always in any instance of *parole* the whole system of possibilities that is *la langue* is available to the author. Each and every discourse is intimately embedded within a larger system full of possible contradictions as well as possible supportive utterances. While Derrida (1977) suggests that every discourse *contains* the conditions of its own undoing, I would prefer to think of these alternatives that fail to be actualised as utterances as being, by definition, outside of the discourses in which they do not inhere. Billig's (1997a, 1997b, 1999) notion of the dialogic unconscious is attempting to push these potential utterances and their potential effects back into the same discursive arena as the ideas they contradict or fail to support.

Billig is suggesting the direct opposite of the processes that much of constructionist thought is concerned with. He is concerned with the utterances that do not even make it into the arena of public debate regardless of what their rhetorical power might be. Certain ideas that contradict hegemonic visions need to be, or will be, suppressed, ignored or denied if problematic accounts are to be seen as credible. So, while Shotter talks about deliberate selection, Billig is outlining the possible effects of unconscious *de*-selection. How unconscious, though, can we allow the actions of social groupings larger than the individual to be?

A partial closure?

The theoretical position laid out in this chapter enables human and non-human actants considerable social agency within particular, but highly flexible, bounds as a result of the idea of multiple intersecting language games. This chapter has explored the works of a number of the key thinkers and ideas that will inform the arguments of this thesis in the

examination of the co-production of knowledges as a social outcome. Having demonstrated how a concern for the everyday might help deepen understanding of not only those practices that might be described as banal but also the less unremarkable events, the chapter also develops a coherent set of ideas that will, hopefully, enable us to reach these understandings. The role of language in everyday life and the role of language in the spectacular is best explicated through an examination of the structuring of linguistic practices which in turn, as a result of the close association between language and other practices, structure occurrences beyond language.

Language-in-use within social contexts is vital to the re-establishment of those contexts and the meanings made and shared within them. This will be done in this work in a way that sees not only action within contexts but also contexts themselves as dynamic co-performed social products that do not pre-exist their performance. I do not consider anything to be pre-discursive - extra-discursive perhaps but never entirely beyond or before language. All social actions, whether linguistic or not, are responsive to previous events in some way whether this be directly or indirectly. As the above should make clear, the body is very much present in this account and embodied practice (of which language use is one example although, of course, language-in-use is not always embodied) is key in signification and representation. In dealing with representation, the non-representational offers us another way in in terms of thinking about how meaning is made and understood. In the next chapter, I want to begin, through an examination of existing literatures on folk practice, the formation of nations and the performance of identities and traditions, to develop these ideas of a performative and constructionist conception of language for application to the social reproduction of a folk, folk traditions and folk practice.

Chapter 3: Keeping it Real: Invention, imagination and authenticity in the everyday nation

This chapter examines the role of the performance and practice of tradition in the constitution of the nation. Building on the performative theory of practice as detailed in the preceding chapter, my intention here is to explore some of the existing literature on the performance and display of cultures, and the ways in which such objectification builds and sustains a folk, a people or a nation. Now, for those of us within the contemporary academy, it is hardly terribly novel to simply suggest that nations do *not* reflect an underlying reality of human organisation nor aspiration. Traditional or national practices do not simply reflect the characteristics of a folk or a nation. The performance of traditional song and dance (Davies 1999; Matless 1999; Symon 2002) or the wearing of traditional costume (Crang 1999; Bauman and Sawin 1991; Ridler 2002), even the maintenance and consumption of traditional landscapes (Barnes and Duncan 1991; Cosgrove and Daniels 1998; Daniels 1993), actively create and re-create the peoples and nations from which they are held to originate. Nations, rather than being in some sense constructed of, and differentiated through, objective differences between groups of peoples, are created in the processes of the subjective rationalisation and codification of both difference and similarity. Further, both supposed differences and internally shared characteristics need to be constantly asserted and re-performed. Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) collection was concerned with the production and stabilisation of the major nationalisms of the Western world but, as this chapter shows, we can see similar processes occurring in the manufacture of nationhood in countries outside Europe. Commentators (e.g. Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1983aa, 1983b, 1992; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; McCrone 1992; Smith 1991; Trevor-Roper 1983) have had rather more to say on how a national consciousness initially came to fruition than they have about precisely why such consciousness is so ubiquitous and the next section explores some of the key literatures on nations, nation building and nationalism.

Imagining the nation

While the nation and nationalism, with the nation-state as an identity framework, might appear to be world-wide and universal phenomena, all nations are not built on the same bases. The terms 'nation', 'state' and 'nation-state', are frequently assumed to be unproblematic reflections of political, social or cultural realities. However, Nations, rather than being in any sense given, are formed through the active recognition or construction of difference and through that difference being seen to be constitutive of different nations (Gellner 1983, 1994, 1997; McCrone 1992, 1998; Smith 1986, 1991, 1995; Van der Veer 1995). Work to date in the social sciences and humanities has tended to be concerned with the initial processes of nation building rather than with the later day-to-day work required to maintain a coherent nation. Discussion of the subsequent re-assertion of the national identity within the nation-state, usually the unit of analysis, has regularly been focussed on spectacular pageantry or ceremonial events. More recently, some (e.g. Billig 1995; Cooke and McLean 2002; Matless 1995, 1999; McLean and Cooke 1999; Palmer 1995; Sharp 1996) have begun to shift to examine the banal, everyday underpinning of nationalisms and to attempt explain the continued reconstitution and becoming of the nation. In such work, the earlier stages of the invention and adoption of a national culture remain crucial as they potentially illuminate the ideas and ideology underlying particular events or practices during both historical and contemporary times.

As Anthony Smith (1991) tells us, it is not that the 'ethnic attributes' of people are in themselves the basis of nations, but rather it is the 'subjective values' attached to these attributes that are of prime importance. Benedict Anderson's thesis of the nation as an 'imagined community' (1983: 15-16) has gained considerable currency in the contemporary social sciences. Anderson posited that a nation, as imagined, consists of four clear and distinctive elements:

- (i) **imagined community**; the feeling that one member of a nation is in some kind of relationship with all other members both past and present.
- (ii) **limited**; an element of exclusivity in that membership is not open to all.
- (iii) **sovereignty**; the nation is independent and self-determining.
- (iv) **community**; the assumption of shared beliefs, values, aspirations and culture (1983: 15-16).

This conception of a nation is consistent with the assertion of Gellner (1983) that the recognition of a shared culture, or of any other defining attribute, is of far more importance than the material 'fact' that such exists. Similarly, Smith (1991: 14) considers the "fundamental features of national identity" to be a core of shared culture around which nations can be built:

- (i) an historic territory or homeland;
- (ii) common myths and historical memories;
- (iii) a common, mass public culture;
- (iv) common legal rights and duties for all members.

Smith's (1991) ideal group of foundations is based on a combination of what he calls 'Western' and 'non-Western' nation building. The 'Western' model (1991: 9) is based on community, laws and territory while the 'non-Western' model (1991: 11) emphasises genealogy above all else. The performing of particular rituals, and the symbolism that is attached to such performance, identifies a person as a member of a particular culture and enables that person to imagine themselves into the broader 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983). The belief in group affiliation and shared history is an important part of establishing an identity for the individual. The possession of a particular territory by a particular group is also crucial to the forming of a national consciousness and the continual renewal of such. David McCrone has called the nation a "landscape of the mind" (1992, 16) while many others (Cooke 2000; Edensor 1997; Johnson 1995, Martin 1997) have explored the role of material landscapes in the representation and performance of the nation. Tim Edensor (1997) talks of a 'landscape of memory' in his

account of the contemporary uses of sites related to the Scottish Wars of Independence in Central Scotland. In a similar vein, Nuala Johnson (1995) sees war memorials as points of physical and ideological guidance within material 'circuits of memory'. For Martin (1997), a nationalist sense of place in Ireland is closely related to particular types of landscape and to lived experience within culturally defined spaces – experience she links with Bourdieu's (1977) notion of the *habitus*.

Smith (1991) and Gellner (1983) have both proposed that the creation of a national community is in some way functional to the operation of industrial society. However, the suggestion that the nation-state is essential to the organisation of an industrialised society does not and can not explain the origins of all, if very many at all, modern nation-states and certainly not those of established nations that are not co-extensive with nation-states. Neither does it explain the African and other nationalisms formed in contact with, and later opposition to, Western Colonialism. Certainly, the institutional infrastructure of the state assists in large-scale organisation and a 'nation' may well be a frequently successful basis for the founding of a state. It does not follow, though, that a *nation*-state is a prerequisite of a successful economy, loyal community or, indeed, anything at all. However, state institutions wield a considerable legitimacy and successful nationalism provides a strong basis on which to demand the loyalty required of a state. Habermas (1998) has posited the existence of a model of post-nationalist state sovereignty in which people identify with a set shared of institutions and practices rather than ethnic categories. If we now have some sense of what a nation might be, how, then, we need to ask how it is that the nation is formed.

The practice of the nation

Invented traditions

"A scrim of myth has come to veil our view of the past, misleading by pleasing" (Prown 1992, 3).

Löfgren (1989) asserts that 'the national project cannot survive as a mere ideological construction, it must exist as a central praxis in everyday life' (1989, 23). Key ways in which the nation is lived in the everyday is through the internalisation of ideas about the nation and in the practice of national 'traditions' as a part of a national community (Anderson 1992; Bruck 1988; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Massey 1995; Neeman 1994; Palmer 1995; Tilley 1997; Ulin 1995). Uncovering the origins of a tradition can help us to understand more clearly the multiple, variable and highly contingent processes of signification. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), and other contributors to their collection, took the initial steps along the road of recognising traditions as invented phenomena. What, however, they failed to note among their discussion of 'facticious' (Hobsbawm 1983a) relationships to the past was the constructed nature of *all* traditions. Handler and Linnekin (1984) effectively 'radicalised' (Ulin 1995) the notion of invented traditions by asserting that all tradition should be examined as a 'wholly symbolic construction' (1984, 273) which, while usually bearing some important symbolic relation to past practices, is primarily concerned with, and oriented towards, the present. In examining the invention of a tradition we glean vital information regarding the intentions of earlier and current organisers, originators or performers. These traces of temporally distant intentionality can provide some useful leads through complex webs of causative effects in an examination of contemporary tradition. The 'authentic' and the 'inauthentic' are neither mutually exclusive nor definitively bounded categories, and are both capable of performing the same work in representing, creating and performing the past *and* the present of any community defined through practice. The perceived degree of authenticity that is ascribed to individual practices is a question of the extent to which the supposed invention has been masked or elided from the discourse of tradition. All publicly displayed traditions have, at one point or another, made a move away from unproblematic, private everyday worlds into the public domain. Does such a move, we may ask, even where it involves traditions that had previously fallen into abeyance, necessarily compromise their status as traditional practices?

Authenticity

If we accept that all “genuine traditions are spurious” and, further, that “all spurious traditions are genuine” (Handler and Linnekin 1984) we can see that the tracing out of the processes by which some practices have come to be regarded as traditional does not end with a simple assessment of ‘authenticity’ or ‘inauthenticity’. The debunking of the myth is a means to an end but not an end in itself. Latour (1995) calls for caution in our attempts to undermine traditional beliefs or practices, and suggests that we should temper the all-too-easily reckless abandon of the iconoclast with a more sympathetic understanding of alternative systems of belief. Similarly, Rekdal (1997) has warned that “anthropologists should keep in mind that the invention of tradition is a contradiction in terms for most people, especially for those whose traditions are involved” (1997, 31). Such analysis, while merely a knowing gesture of the academic practitioner, is iconoclastic for the public but remains a necessary first rhetorical move in any analysis of a culture and its traditions. However, demonstrations from on high of the various stages in the invention and adoption of novel traditions do not and can not even begin to explain the significance and usefulness of tradition. It is the fact that stories about traditions and nations are believed that is important, rather than whether or not they are in accord with some notion of ‘reality’ that we might, or might not, hold.

Authenticity as an idea has historically relied on artifice, contrivance and performance, in the narrowest sense of the word, as a partner in various dualisms. Recognition of the constructed and performative nature of all knowledges, however, means that not only is authenticity non-recoverable but also that such a recovery is no longer desirable. The recovery of the lost realm of authenticity is, however, valuable to some in the process of providing an effect of stability in unstable times (Appadurai 1993). Those more committed than I to the recovery or the preservation of reality or truth suggest that authenticity has become impossible to discern as a result of the ubiquity of image production in contemporary society (Kingston 1999). A notion of information overload complicating the communication of meaning echoes Baudrillard’s (1995) account of fatal over-signification and the concomitant loss of both meaning and reality. Baudrillard (1990; 1995), however, remains wedded to the possibility of a universal reality lying

beyond, behind or below the multiple simulacra that substitute for reality in his work. Ulin (1995) writes that authenticity is often simply that which is not invented. Authenticity and reality, of course, remain powerful rhetorical forces and continue to hold as much relevance, within the discourses within which they operate, as the nation or tradition themselves. What I am attempting to do with this thesis is to take the recognition of invention further and to deconstruct the category of the invented and the concept of invention at the same time rather than just decrying invention and celebrating authenticity.

Tilley (1997), in recognising the inherent difficulties in an economy of 'authenticity', argues that "the entire discourse on the invention of tradition is clearly predicated on a notion that while some cultural practices are invented or objectified, others are not" (1997, 83). Dundes (1985) explores the notion of 'fakelore' (Dorson 1950), essentially invented folklore, and dismisses many of the ostensibly folk products he considers, namely the Finnish Kalevala myth and Scottish Ossianic legend, on the grounds that it has been substantially changed in the process of communication to a wider audience. Even Dundes, however, must concede, albeit grudgingly, that "fakelore can in theory become folklore" (1985, 15) and that the belief of the people is sufficient to allow the Finnish Kalevala myth to prosper.

Crang (1999, 462) writes that the "critique of authenticity often itself presupposes unchanging folk culture, unselfconscious and opposed to external influences". Folk practice is a malleable and dynamic cultural form that is capable of undergoing change, either in material terms or in symbolic meaning, to fit ever-changing circumstances. Handler and Linnekin (1984: see also Handler 1988) outline the ways in which reproductions of folk culture have become folk culture themselves in Quebec, having been practised for a considerable period. Sight should not be lost of the fact that cultures and traditions are not static but can, and do, change in many, sometimes substantial, ways. What instead is at question is why change occurs, how and for whom?

National song and literary traditions

Song traditions in a changing world: Does the song remain the same?

Oral traditions and folksong undergo changes, sometimes in quite fundamental ways, as the folk themselves take account of contemporary social and cultural circumstances (Fanon 1997; Hobsbawm 1983a). For instance it is argued that during the Mau Mau armed struggle with British Imperial forces, Kenyan “freedom fighters rediscovered the old songs - they had never completely lost touch with them - and reshaped them to meet the new needs of their struggle” (Ngugi 1972, 30). Michael Shapiro (2000) details contemporary hybrid music forms in Hawaii and tells us that lines from earlier protest songs are sometimes included in hip-hop compositions. Through mimicry and citation, earlier cultural forms are absorbed into later forms in such a way that those earlier forms are transcended. Despite these consistencies, both heroes and villains, and their methods of combat, are all liable to change in the process of bringing oral tradition up-to-date. However, as well as the content itself of folk song or oral tradition, there are also significant transformations in the ways in which content is presented and the meanings that apparently identical, or similar, practices attempt to signify successfully or not. It is perfectly possible that while the apparent lyrical content of a particular group of songs might remain the same, the meanings those same words are intended to carry can be altered radically.

During the English folk revival, extant song and dance gathered by collectors were made to carry additional meaning relating to a vision of a rural and historical English countryside (Boyes 1993; Judge 1993). Lyrical content was changed only to the, admittedly considerable, extent that alternative versions were stitched together to produce standard texts for individual songs. While an important element of the localised variation in folk culture may have been lost, it was also the case that those now nationally-standardised folksongs were then able to powerfully evoke romanticised notions of a uniform rural English heritage. Here, songs that had previously only unselfconsciously and incidentally documented the everyday lives of rural communities were now, even though retaining their original content, signifying something else all together. Similarly,

in north-eastern Scotland, as later chapters of this thesis demonstrate, the collecting of folksong and later performances of that folksong have led to a radical shift in which the ostensible meaning of particular songs has become less important than the conditions of the performance of those songs.

In all of the above examples, folksong is not simply being used for entertainment purposes in the everyday lives of everyday people but rather pulled out of the hat as something 'spectacular' that can evoke a regional or national identity on special occasions. It makes sense that oral and song traditions should change with circumstances as language is the key way in which people rationalise and make sense of their lives (Shotter 1993a, 1993b). With the movement from oral culture to written culture a further shift in tradition takes place as content becomes fixed as a result of the effect of the production of standardised texts and the concomitant changes in patterns of thought (Ong 1982)

Written traditions: National narratives

"The rise of the modern nation-state in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is inseparable from the forms and subjects of imaginary literature" (Brennan 1990, 48).

Benedict Anderson (1983) has pointed to the pivotal role that the establishment of a vernacular printing tradition plays in the imagining of a community in terms of circulating ideas that become shared knowledges. A national press and a national literary tradition are key in generating and regenerating communities spread across vast distances (Amuta 1989). As Lerner (1993) puts it, "for both the novel and the nation, the telling of the story about the community itself creates the community". Homi Bhabha (1990a, 1990b) takes a broader approach and has explored the role that narrative form, not just content, plays in the constitution of the nation, with particular reference to the newer nations that were once colonial outposts of the European empires. Similarly, Srivastava (1998) suggests that discourse manufactures rather than reflects the nation. Srivastava

(1998) writes about a post-colonial community in India who derive their feelings of community through the printed word. Spread as they are across the nation, with little chance of face-to-face contact, the written word is a very powerful tool for the communication of ideology. Moving beyond the written word to look at electronic communication, the communications that sustain any community can be either mediated or unmediated as he exemplified in the role of the internet (Stubbs 1999) and video-diaries (Kolar-Panov 1996) in the maintenance of a world-wide Croatian Diaspora.

Myths of Origin

‘At the origin of every nation we find a story of the nation’s origin’
(Bennington 1990, 121).

Myth are power narrative devices (Barthes 1993) that structure our comprehension and myths of national origin legitimise particular polities by suggesting that groups of people share a common ethnic background. Rhys Jones (1999) examines the use of such foundation legends during the medieval period in the territories that make up present day Ireland and Wales. Jones (1999) suggests that such stories reflect the political landscape at the time of their creation and telling rather than during the times they purport to tell about. Myths of origin in Scotland are similarly part fact and part fiction and tend to contain elaborate genealogies connecting then contemporary rulers with figures from myth, legend and the Bible. As Jones (1999) argues for Wales and Ireland, the key effect of these myths was to legitimise the rule of certain people over certain territories containing certain named groups of people. However, the work of James (1999) and Chapman (1992), by detailing the invention of a ‘Celtic’ past for British nations, throws into doubt even the very premise of Jones’s analysis and problematises the practice of considering Wales and Ireland together as ‘Celtic nations’. As James (1999) points out to us, any moves to discredit the idea of a Celtic antiquity for the British Isles impacts on contemporary senses of nationhood in Scotland, Wales and Ireland (as well, of course, as Britain as a whole).

Moving to the New World, Lonsdale (1989) tells us that the earliest Christian converts in Kenya adopted the Exodus story and that, at the time of his writing, many would cite Egypt as the ultimate origin of their people. The majority of the Christian tribes of Kenya apparently make reference to the creation story of Genesis in recounting their histories and Lonsdale reinforces his point regarding the colonial origin of these myths with his assertion that most of these tribes had not even existed as conscious communities prior to the European presence. "Colonial officials imagined tribes and then penned them into districts" (1989, 135) as part of a process similar to the construction of 'ethnic' identities in colonial Rhodesia (Kaarsholm 1989).

By 1980, when Zimbabwe became an independent country, the ethnic identities constructed by the colonial administration of Rhodesia had gained a considerable rhetorical force or currency among those such categories sought to define (Kaarsholm 1989). The creation and promotion of these ethnic categories lent them a legitimacy that would only be strengthened by their constant re-citation. The colonial governmental policy of standardising both Shona and Ndebele languages and encouraging publishing in both (as well as in English) made 'languages' proper out of a continuum of dialects. These newly solidified and stabilised languages helped to solidify and stabilise a sense of each of the two ethnic groups sharing internal characteristics that they did not share with each other. In the forming of languages proper, difference and similarity are often stressed to make one language internally cohere and to differentiate it from another, similar language. The ethnic categories thus created through language came to assume significance through their repeated use in colonial discourse - Kaarsholm sees their forming and constant reforming as part of a policy of 'divide and rule' operated by the British in Rhodesia. Similarly, Spivak (1996b) argues, the British in the Indian sub-continent attempted to influence the ethnic self-perception of people by stressing the Indic-Hindu elements of Bengali while simultaneously underplaying Arabic influences on the language. In 1971, when Bangladesh separated from Pakistan, cultural and linguistic reasons were cited as a key justification. Again, the ideas of the colonisers had been adopted, and given significance to, by the colonised (Spivak 1996). As well as

imposing ethnicities on contemporary inhabitants of Africa, British colonisers in Rhodesia hypothesised the former presence of a group of Caucasians in the region and suggested that the Negroes were recent immigrants. The ruins of Great Zimbabwe were deemed to be too sophisticated to have been built by negroes and so were assigned to others (for whom no evidence existed). When archaeological work dismissed these ideas it was instead decided that the ruins were not particularly impressive after all (Kaarsholm 1989). Archaeologists also discovered similarly impressive remains in Tanzania, and it was again decided that such 'civilisation' could not be attributed to Africans and so it was established that the native people of that area were in fact of European origin (Rekdal 1997). Rekdal (1997) traces the movement of this idea from the first written instance to oral tradition through an unpublished anthropological paper from 1955 and a collection of folktales published in 1978 that have been widely used in both teaching and preaching in the region.

New Zealand Maori have also adopted origination myths offered by the European colonisers of their ancestral lands (Hanson 1989). The idea of a Great Fleet of canoes setting out from Polynesia and reaching New Zealand around 1350, which was originally scorned by Maoris around 1870, is now accepted as authentic history by the great majority (Hanson 1989). Later scholarship has cast doubt on whether or not this tradition predates the European presence while archaeologists now maintain that the islands were probably settled by around 1000 AD. (Polynesian migrations after this time are not, of course, ruled out).

The intentions in the inventions

'Power differentials...codetermine the invention of the past' (Ulin 1995, 526).

The colonisation of the 'New World' by Western Europeans in the early-modern period represents a context for the invention of history with a very pronounced imbalance of power (Chatterjee 1986; Van der Veer 1995). In the above examples, the power relations inherent in the colonial encounter added to the legitimacy and effectiveness of the

colonisers' utterances concerning the colonised. Colonial institutions and colonial administrators initially used these designations as though they were significant and thus, eventually, they became significant through repetition as the colonised themselves adopted the same ready-made ideas about themselves. Fanon (1997) expresses his intense dislike of the role of Imperial powers in the historiography of colonised nations when he writes that "by a kind of perverted logic, it (colonialism) turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (1997, 54). While we may find little to surprise us in the fact that Imperial powers should have imagined sometimes less than favourable histories for the colonised, we might not necessarily expect that such stories should later be adopted and vigorously defended by those same colonised peoples. This represents the creative use of a cultural resource to positive effect and is in some ways an empowering practice - taking control of the discursive means of narrating the nation (Bhabha 1990a; Honko 1988). Western European notions of what constituted a nation or an ethnic group were imposed on unsuspecting peoples who eventually found them useful in breaking free from colonialism and in the forging, with varying degrees of success, of independent nations. These examples illustrate the complexity of chains of causation and intentionality in that ideas originally circulated for the better government of the colonies eventually gave colonised people some of the necessary tools with which to rebel, revolt and establish new nations. This, surely, had not been a part of the original intentions of colonisers. While many myths of origin may be of recent vintage and difficult to support objectively, they *do* operate as a *reality* for many, many people who hold such beliefs. Why, though, *have* people adopted such beliefs?

Ready-made beliefs and ready-made nations

Partly, the attraction of the ready-made idea is precisely the fact that it is ready-made and available for use: though, of course, it must at some point have been made and can always be rejected as well as accepted. The ready-made tradition or identity, however, cannot simply be ignored. Now, in terms of making statements concerning the need of people to adopt identities and particularly collective identities, I intend to remain, throughout this thesis, relatively cautious. Rather than blandly arguing that a national identity fulfils a necessary and universal existential desire in human beings, I will instead concentrate on some of the processes through which traditions and nationalities come to

be widely and adopted and the role that this plays in the functioning of the nation. In uncovering how Scottish and north-eastern Scottish traditions and identities have reached their current condition, I am liable, along the way, to make some plausible suggestions as to why I think whatever has arisen has indeed arisen. To not question the basis of national identity would be merely ignorant but the 'how?' is the key focus of this work rather than the 'why?' Explaining how desires or intentions cause things to happen does not explain those desires or intentions themselves.

The examples above represent the appropriation, re-articulation and re-use of colonial discourses for the ends of the colonised. If the forging of a national consciousness has indeed proved to be useful, these nations have merely made effective use of tools improvised by Others, and for other purposes. Work on post-colonial nationalisms is concerned with the obviously very deliberate invention of national cultures. A danger lies in the position of those of us in the West or in academia that might assume that these nationalisms are mere constructions, while the longer established nationalisms of Europe are somehow more natural, more rational or more reasonable. Van der Veer (1995) stresses that the same urge towards nationhood affected the people of south-east Asia at around the same time as those in Europe. The fact that anybody, let alone the vast majority of a given population, believe in what academic commentators debunk as myth makes such beliefs of unassailable importance and relevance.

Tilley (1997) echoes this sentiment when he says that 'to keep tradition alive it must be lived' (1997, 78) when writing of a group of natives in Vanuatu (formerly the New Hebrides) who have, since 1993, staged rediscovered rituals and practices for the benefit of tourists. This culture, however, is not merely being kept alive but wholly resurrected, perhaps even being born again, in the same way that Handler (1988) details for Quebec. Much as Handler suggested that the re-performance of folk tradition had become folk tradition itself in Quebec, the people of Vanuatu are involved in re-production that itself is becoming habitual and could, in time, come to be seen as traditional. That the traditions the people of Vanuatu are performing are not those of their own direct forbears but those of their nearest neighbours (Tilley 1997) does not even particularly matter. The

performing of these actions is important in establishing an identity for these Vanuatuan and certainly holds some symbolic import that goes beyond the simple earning of a few tourist dollars.

What appears to have taken place according to Tilley's (1997) account of the performance of tradition for tourists in Vanuatu is that the culture and traditions of one part of a territory has been spread to the rest of the territorial unit. Similarly, Crang (1998) details the ways that Dalarna is 'iconic of Swedishness' and others have pointed to the historical processes whereby the culture of the Highlands has come to be represented as that of the whole of Scotland (McCrone 1992; McCrone et al 1995; Withers 1992). Indeed, the importance that the performance of certain invented traditions can play is well exemplified in the case of Scotland and of fundamental importance to these performances and the related claims of authenticity is the perceived antiquity of particular practices.

Towards an understanding of tradition

What degree of antiquity is required to enable a practice to be reasonably called a 'tradition'? Is there some sort of arbitrary cut-off point beyond which anything of symbolic or ritual significance to a group of people is dismissed as a recent invention or some kind of meaningless charade? What this review has attempted to show is that the actual period of time for which a tradition has been continuously practised is essentially irrelevant as far as the symbolic importance of such is concerned. Discarding ideas about authenticity or inauthenticity, we are still faced with the task of discovering what the actual practice of performing such rituals and traditions achieves for performers and what their motivations might be.

Merely dismissing this or that tradition as invented does not tell us anything about the effects of these discourses or the discursive power that has been utilised by competing groups of people. It is in an analysis of culture as an ever changing set of practices, with ever changing meanings relating to ever changing circumstances, that we will begin to gain an understanding of the importance of tradition. Many now are looking beyond the

scepticism of historians such as Hobsbawm and Trevor-Roper to recognise that meaning is at least partially independent of the origin or history of a tradition.

Heritage tourism: Locating authenticity in the past

It is a paradox of Modernity, or even post-modernity, that at the same time as relentlessly seeking the Modern, people also hanker after something that is older, more authentic or traditional (Appadurai 1981; Cohen 1988; Gold and Gold 1995; Halewood and Hannam 2001; McIntosh and Prentice 1999; Urry 1990) and that offers security in a time of anxiety (Appadurai in Bell 1999a). An element of this desire can be ascribed to the fact that at the present stage of late-Modernity that which we mean by the Modern is commonplace, banal and everyday. While notions of progress and innovation remain important driving forces and goals towards which society aims, neither of these is, in itself, progressive, innovative or remarkable. New technology is rarely any longer realistically seen in terms of giant leaps. In attempting to locate a suitable Other, the perceived past is perhaps one of the most fruitful places in which to search. A key element of 'traditional', rather than merely 'national', practices is that they are presumed to have some incontrovertible relationship to the past and thus to something essential about the nation or community. The always-ongoing internal critique of Modern society sees contemporary society and culture as having slipped away from the authentic and the category of the True (Corner and Harvey 1991). The past is, romantically, seen as a time when things were simpler and such a vision can help to anchor people into a contemporary group of people that may at first glance appear to be wildly disparate and disjointed as a collective. Thus, the community becomes united through those practices flagged up as being indicative of a particular identity. Only those practices flagged up as being somehow 'national' or 'traditional', however, enable such an imagining of this sort of a community.

The notion of an apparently more meaningful and authentic past can be seen in contemporary heritage tourism and has been widely discussed by academic practitioners

working in that field (Crang 1994, 1996; Fladmark 2000; Fowler 1992; Löfgren 2000; Lorimer 1999). MacCannell (1973, 1976) believes that what people are looking for, above all, in tourism is an authenticity that can never be genuinely found. In getting away to the past, those randy for antique are often seeking something that they feel their everyday lives lack. The past, however, is not always, if terribly often for terribly many people, a *foreign* country (See Lowenthal 1975). Domestic heritage tourism is frequently very much concerned with the identity of the home nation and a sense of what it means or is to be a part of that nation. Despite the large numbers of American and English visitors, the largest number of people visiting the key 'national' heritage sites in Scotland are Scots (or descendants of Scots) discovering or re-affirming something about Scotland. The past is seen, no matter how different it might be portrayed as having been, as a crucial part of the present of contemporary Scottish nationals through the suggestion of continuity. While the general public rarely question the authenticity of the heritage establishment, they even less rarely question the authenticity of the past itself. The authenticity of the past is a key tenet of a belief system within which current times are seen as more and more inauthentic and divorced from reality. The past also has stronger echoes of community and society than the contemporary world which is seen to be about personal advancement. However presented, the past is seen as real and the unsuccessful heritage venture merely further highlights the loss of the real. Handler and Gable (1997) detail the moves made to demonstrate a commitment to the idea of authenticity, rather than authenticity itself, by workers at the Colonial Williamsburg heritage site. On tours of Williamsburg, workers point out to people modern features that are both hidden and necessary – the intention that the effort that has been required to hide them indicates an incredible effort to achieve accurate period detail. Taylor (2000) believes that within the epistemological framework of modernity, authenticity poses as 'objectivism' in heritage tourism. This trick of posing for objectivism is convincing precisely because people believe in the idea of authenticity and the possibility that it might be recovered through traditional practice. In the simulation of authenticity it is vital that particular practices are normalised to such an extent that they are entirely banal and can thus be figured as objectively genuine. Not all traditions, however, are sufficiently unremarkable as to pass as an authentic and unquestionable cultural heritage.

Banal and spectacular traditions

I would like in this section to explore some distinctions between different types of tradition and to relate these distinctions to banality and spectacle. Honko (1998) outlines Laaksoren's typology of tradition: i) dead traditions, ii) living but passive traditions and iii) living but active traditions. Dead traditions are those that would be most spectacular in their public performance in that an audience would not necessarily know how to respond or be able to decipher any personally meaningful content. The category of dead traditions would include those demonstrated by actors at heritage sites, in museums or at folklife festivals. Drawing on Cantwell's (1993) idea of 'ethnomimesis' to explain the imagining and performance of regional identity, Ridler shows how spectacular display works to solidify ideas of distinctiveness and community. Ridler (2002) details the public and collective mimesis of historical re-enactments in northern Italy. While they might bear some relation to past realms of quotidian practice, dead traditions are not related to contemporary everyday life. Living traditions, on the other hand, are closely related to everyday life whether this is because they are practised everyday or because they are spectacles that stand out against the flow of every day life. Whereas dead traditions can only be spectacular, living traditions can be either banal or spectacular. When living traditions are spectacular they are often underpinned by background banality. The very fact that a tradition is alive means that it figures within the mindset of at least some people. Although spectacular events or practices communicate meaning best when supported by a banal ideology of the nation, the status of any individual practice with regard to banality varies with the individual. One person's everyday event may be something another member of the same nation has only very rarely, if ever, seen.

Concluding and moving on

In none of the above am I, by any means, attempting to suggest that the invention of tradition is not an important consideration. Rather, I am suggesting that, while it remains worthy of gentle exposure, it is not the only important consideration and is not necessarily *that* important. Hobsbawm, Ranger and those that followed them made some important leaps in understanding that can continue to aid us in any analysis of the

performative power of 'traditional' practice in the flagging of the nation. Revealing the difficult to sustain assumptions upon which traditions rest does not diminish the importance of those traditions. They remain meaningful. This chapter has demonstrated that the fluidity and adaptability of tradition is not context-specific and, in particular, not confined to nations in the modern western sense of that term. Any changes in the way of life of a group of people changes the basis of the traditions of that community. Just as societies have always been dynamic, traditional practice has always been changeable both in form and content. Sometimes this dynamism results in a practice falling out of use, sometimes in re-signification and sometimes the bringing back of traditions no longer commonly practised. None of this need surprise us: Indeed, none of it does. Having introduced the thesis in Chapter 1, proposed a theoretical approach in Chapter 2 and explored some of the existing literature in this chapter, Chapter 4 moves to detail the methodological implications of the project and to suggest how I might best examine traditional practices in north-eastern Scotland.

Chapter 4: Reflexivity, irony and methodology

Escaping narrative entrapments

With Chapters 1, 2 and 3 having established what this research project is intended to examine and explored the pertinent theoretical and empirical literatures, Chapter 4 details precisely how the empirical element of this research has been conceived, justified and executed. This investigation of the politics of identity in north-eastern Scotland has been conducted through the strategic use of a variety of ethnographic and other methods. Having established a theoretical basis on which the region is seen as being created and re-created through the re-performance of a set of discursive and institutional practices, it was vital that a suitable methodology be chosen that would enable me to access language and practice in the field. The production of this thesis has similarly been enacted through a set of practices that produce and establish particular sets of knowledges about the north-east of Scotland and, as such, it was vital that reflexive research methods were used.

The difficulty in establishing a suitable non-representational method of research stems from the fact that methodologies are inherently about the journey from practice to representation of those practices. The entire set of practices that constitute research are predicated on a final representational research output: in this case a doctoral thesis. Given the intense and inseparable relationship between language and embodied action – between the discursive and the non-discursive – a non-representational approach to researching the social world needs to retain a strong element of ethnographic approaches.

Semi-structured interviews with key actors in the promotion of north-eastern Scottish culture and participant observation at cultural events (as well as in the life of the north-east more generally) are the main sources of primary data. The material thus collected will allow the establishment of the extent to which groups of north-easterners share the same or differing rhetoric concerning themselves, each other, their region and their nation. Rather than assuming that the content of various media is wholly absorbed by an

unquestioning, passive audience, this project is concerned to illustrate the contingent factors that give language variable meanings between or within different contexts.

Research methodology

From the outset, I have been keen to employ a methodology offering me the possibility of gaining direct access to *language-in-use* and the witnessing of the forming and morphing of ideas through discursive interaction. In addition, I am particularly aware of the need to be cognizant of the effects of my own *language-in-use* since the language games that we play, and the disciplinary discourses within which we operate, largely determine what we enable ourselves to know (Schoenberger, 1998: Shotter 1993a, 1993b). If as social scientists we do not actively engage theory and practice, we are in grave danger of passively playing out language games that entrap *our* own narratives. Critical self-reflexivity, the consideration of the researcher's role in the production of knowledge from a particular subject position, is an important concern of ethnographic work (Cook and Crang 1995: Eyles 1993: McDowell 1992: Pile 1991) as the "researcher acts as both a member of society, and as the major research tool in ethnographic research" (Dyck 1993, 53). The use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews will allow me to partially avoid presenting my own interpretations as the Truth (Demeritt 1994: Rose 1993) by allowing many Others to speak through my project. In fact, the fundamental aim of my project is to investigate what actually gets said about the north-east and, to this end, I have employed four distinct research methods.

(i) Interviews

The 36 interviews conducted as a part of this research project were semi-structured and non-standardised in their nature so as to allow ample room for both myself and the interviewees to introduce or develop particular themes as and when desired (Bondi and Domosh 1992: Cook and Crang 1995: Valentine 1997: McDowell 1992). Interviewees were selected for this project through a process of identifying from literature and word of mouth who some of the key players in regional culture and highland games circles were and approaching them directly. Locations of interviews varied with many taking place in

interviewees' offices, some in public houses or coffee shops, some in community centres, some in people's homes and some outdoors at Highland Games. Where possible, these interviews were tape-recorded: where tape-recording was not possible, detailed notes were compiled both during and immediately following the interview.

It was hoped that by arriving with only the briefest of interview checklists I would be able to explore the formation of inter-subjective understandings and witness the negotiation of meanings between interviewees and myself as the conversation flowed. Meanings and knowledges are socially constituted and I remained always aware that any such conversation would constitute only one instance of something being said and frequently not the first or only instance. Citation is the key way in which performativity works to establish categories and particularised entities (Butler 1993, 1997; McNay 1999) and the utterances recorded on my cassette or on my page were merely individual citations within a more complex web of utterances. None of the instances collected during my fieldwork were entirely discrete or unique events, not least because they were all a part of the conducting of this project. More fundamentally, though, these utterances were all related to broader bodies of practice (including language use) that work to realise an emergent regional culture. Thus, since each individual utterance was simply a node in a complex network extending off in all directions, it would be inappropriate to privilege particular instances of re-citation in presenting research findings.

From field encounter and anecdote to thesis

The use of in-depth semi-structured interviews allowed me access to some of these shared knowledges and to the flow of language-in-use. I would have been most interested in what my interviewees might have to say in my absence but since this was not possible and knowledge is always-already intersubjective, I settled on a fairly traditional programme of interviews. One of my aims was to remain relatively passive during interviews and to simply allow people to talk around the issues. Several of my interviewees, and particularly those with experience of public speaking, clearly had an established line on particular issues and were more or less happy to simply recount their knowledge in the rhetorical form of a narrative. This situation was in many ways ideal in

that it enabled me to collect another instance of the re-performance and citation (Butler 1997) of similar ideas. In interviewing academics, a key difficulty I encountered was in the contrast between what I sought from them and what *they* thought I was seeking. This, however, on occasion worked to my advantage in that because they imagined I was seeking a factual historical analysis they dutifully presented one to me. The fact that I was interested in what they had to say as series of rhetorical ideas and 'ready-made' utterances rather than objectively 'factual' material to transcribe before cutting and pasting into my thesis did not especially matter on a purely practical level. However, I must confess that I remained fairly secretive about the theoretical and methodological basis of my research, concentrating instead on the culture of the north-east of Scotland as though I were doing a contemporary and historical survey of the popularity of the Doric or the Highland Games and seeking their 'expert' advice. I certainly found the strategy of appearing to be more than a little dim very useful and deployed this sometimes purposefully and sometimes accidentally.

Now, as ethnographers we are not merely uncovering or recovering knowledges, but also taking an active role in the creation and circulation of those knowledges. Clifford feels that 'focus group discussions are social performances, or collective productions of ethnographic knowledge' (1986, 16). Although focus groups *may* allow us to witness the development of a consensus (Goss 1996; Goss and Leinbach 1996; Holbrook 1996; Jackson and Holbrook 1995), this consensus need not have previously been the opinion of any individual group members. While the dynamics of a group discussion are liable to some extent to mirror what we might expect in a more 'natural' setting, focus groups do *not* give us direct access to 'the way things are' and are not necessarily of terribly much more value than one-on-one interviews. Thus, the danger is that the focus group in its playing out and analysis becomes about the processes and sequences of conversation rather than about specific content.

(ii) Participant observation

A major claim made for participant observation is that it allows the researcher to interact with the researched within the context of their everyday lives (Bennett 2001; Cook and Crang 1995; Crang 1994; Evans 1988; Jackson 1985). Difficulties arise in terms of defining at which points the researcher is a genuine participant or simply an observer (May 1997) and my feeling is that I moved between these roles during the course of any one field engagement. There is no need to create a particular research setting for the exchange of information and once access has been gained the researcher has the opportunity to collect vast amounts of data in an attempt to understand the particular situation in hand. I kept a detailed research diary throughout my time in the field – including those times when I was simply present in the north-east of Scotland rather than involved in specifically identifiable acts of participation or observation.

The practices of participant observation are problematic in conducting research that applies a non-representational understanding of the world, in that they are the researcher's point of contact with extra-discursive practices. The observation of non-representational practices runs the danger, to some extent, of failing to understand what is happening – i.e. exploring what have been pointed to as extra-discursive practices through the processes of representation could potentially be entirely pointless. However, this is not at all the case. As Chapter 2 discusses, the non-representational and the representational are closely related modes of signification, and an understanding of each can aid our understanding of the other. Thus, as will later be shown in this thesis, there is a lot we can say about dance by examining the texts that govern such bodily activity, by talking to dancers and by watching dancing that does not in any sense detract from the difficulty of talking about non-verbal activity.

The ethical issues inherent in the prosecution of this project were, by no means, insurmountable but are certainly worthy of brief consideration. Related to the ethical choice of whether or not to remain covert were some critical practical issues that at times made this a choice I was not able to make. For example, when attending the *Traditional Song of North East Scotland* event at the University of Aberdeen, it would not

realistically have been possible for me to work 'undercover' given that I had already interviewed all of the staff of the Elphinstone Institute. Similarly, my attendance at a Sheena Blackhall book recital at Gordon 2000 in Huntly was anything but covert since I had previously formally interviewed Blackhall, bought a book from her at the University of Aberdeen and incidentally bumped into her when meeting someone else at the Elphinstone. My personal preference would have been to have remained covert but often the research setting itself dictated whether or not this would be possible. For instance, I would have been unlikely to have been able to get behind the scenes at a cultural festival without offering some suggestion as to why I would wish to do so, while it was very easy for me to attend that festival as a spectator or participant without revealing my 'true' intentions. I knew it was possible that once people knew I was undertaking research their behaviour might change in ways that would have the potential to affect the process of data collection and the nature (if not necessarily the quality) of that data. Thus, where it was absolutely not possible for me to avoid influencing the data I accepted a trade-off in the playing out of my methodology. An additional concern was the unusual figure I felt I probably cut at Doric Festival events. Anonymity was easier to maintain at a Highland Games meeting among thousands of spectators than at a folk concert attended by 15 locals in a small village hall. Thus, at times, it was likely that to reveal my identity would result in my being regarded with less suspicion and, again, my revealing of myself was not a policy driven by ethical concerns.

(iii) Textual analysis

One of the most important sources of evidence I have made use of in this research has been documentary. This element of my research has encompassed a multitude of sources including published collections of dialect writing, festival or event programmes, academic articles on the north-east and on Highland games, web sites, promotional materials and local newspapers. Documentary sources have been considered alongside other sources and are conceived of as a part of the same social milieux. Thus, ready-made ideas have been located in both written sources and in interview transcripts, and one of my key aims is to show the linkages between different sources. Even where I

cannot explicitly show the direct methods of communication, I can illustrate the widespread use of particular items of rhetoric. As I have used documentary materials in the same way as field-notes or interviews, I have also coded and analysed these sources in the same way that I have coded and analysed interview transcripts (see below).

(iv) Visual analysis

An important part of this project is the analysis of visual data and a particular focus is the representation of the north-east and north-easterness to the inhabitants of the area, to those from elsewhere. These materials have been analysed alongside the other data collected in recognition of the fact that, for instance, representations of the north-east in photographs are liable to have much in common thematically with written accounts or conversation. Photography, as a mode of representation, has a particularly strong claim to realism (Ball and Smith 1992: Berger 1989: Cook and Crang 1995: Crang 1997: Sontag 1979). Ball and Smith (1992) suggest that much of the appeal of photographic techniques to ethnographers, concerned with description, lies in “the precise record of material reality” that they can offer (1992, 6). Much as description does indeed play an important role in ethnographic work (Geertz 1983), we must not be content with mere description: we must attempt to wrestle some explanatory power from visual representations and reject any notion that they represent an underlying reality.

As Ball and Smith tell us, “photographic literacy is learned: Photographs are made sense of by a viewing subject and thus do not straightforwardly reflect reality” (1992, 18). As well as what it is that an image is apparently depicting, we need to have a full awareness of the context of the production and circulation of the image. These issues are of considerable importance in the analysis of both pre-existing representations and of photographs taken in the field. It cannot be assumed that anybody can simply represent reality without placing their own inflections on it, and we cannot put faith in the existence of an objective reality. The belief in an objectively real world with real and meaningful social categories and stable cultures, however, drives the promotion and organisation of the very representations of the north-east of Scotland that this thesis examines. The act of taking, manipulating and reproducing a picture requires a process of selection whereby it

has been decided such a subject is worthy of being photographed or such an image in need of recitation.

Transcription, coding and analysis

In common with the work of critical discourse analysts (Fairclough 1992; Van Dijk 1993, 1997), this project is conducted with a heightened awareness of the multitude of contexts within which communicative action takes place. We need to be aware of the importance of contextual matters at a variety of scales including the setting of each individual act of communication. Initially, all tape recorded interviews and recordings made at other events were fully transcribed in preparation for analysis. The system used for transcription was not as detailed as formal discourse analysis requires as my research is centred more on the *repetition* of rhetorical ideas and phrases than on the *way* in which things were said. Thus, pauses were not generally timed although significant hesitations or slippages are noted in the transcript.

All materials collected, including documentary and visual sources, were analysed qualitatively, using the technique of reading, re-reading and coding outlined by Cook and Crang (1995) – although there were some differences in the analysis of pictures (Rose 2001). Having first familiarised myself with the individual interview transcripts and artefacts, analysis progressed intuitively with some reference to the appropriate ‘how to’ literature on the coding and analysis of qualitative materials (Bryman 1988, 2001; Bryman and Burgess 1986; Cook and Crang 1995; Silverman 1993). Firstly, all transcripts and other source materials were broken down into sections which were open coded according to broad themes which were refined with each re-reading until a set of codes emerged identifying some of the most frequently recurring themes or utterances. It is vital that it is noted here that photographs, tourist leaflets, books of poetry, short stories, sections of novels, web pages, field diary entries and interview transcripts were all analysed using the same methodology and in the same way. No distinction was made between different sources at the stage of interpretation in view of the fact that artefacts are as important within a discursive context as the representations of the speech of

humans and I have attempted to not particularly privilege any type of source in the final thesis.

Writing the thesis

It is vital to consider the composition, genre and style of any publication (Crang 1992: Crapanzano 1986). Phil Crang (1992) suggests adopting polyphonic principles in our writing to attempt to redistribute the power of representing the researched and to instate those researched as co-authors of a piece of work. The intention here is to allow as many “equally weighted lines or voices” to be heard within the “coherent texture” of my thesis (Crang 1992, 530). James, Hockey and Dawson (1997) write that while the acceptance of multivocality is a very important step it is not likely to ever prove to be sufficient. “We must now consider who has generated the account - them or us - and for whom it has meaning” (James, Hockey and Dawson 1997, 8) rather than assuming that we can directly access and represent any individual’s reality. It could, of course, be that the account generated has meaning for all of those implicated in its production, meaning as a group consensus or only limited meaning to any one person. This account of north-eastern Scottish folk cultures is clearly by-and-large my production, but there are numerous leakages and intersecting points through which the voices of others can be discerned. It has, however, been a deliberate policy that the individual voices of this thesis remain difficult for the reader to trace, reflecting the uncertainty, even the impossibility, of tracing out the origins of rhetorical ideas. This thesis is clearly an important node in a network of citation (not least through the many formal citations of the bibliography) and it can never be clear from where ideas have emerged. Additionally, and crucially, there is a danger that in over-using quotations we return to a stage of over-privileging the discursive, even within a document that is avowedly about the extra- or non-discursive. This research project, then, aims to enable those represented some scope to represent themselves directly to the research audience as well as through my interpretations of them and their actions.

Reflexivity and irony: holding the project together

Some additional aims I have in this thesis are to firstly destabilise and secondly deconstruct and put back together both myself and my academic practices. My desire to perform these contortions stems from a perceived need to begin to try to close the gap between paying lip-service to reflexivity and actually reaching the point of successfully and adequately 'doing' reflexivity. Throughout the research engagement, from the forming of initial contacts to the presentation of the final written document, it is important that the researcher maintains a critical awareness of his/her own positionality. This awareness is crucial in attempts to counter the potentially stifling role of the narrative entrapments (Shotter 1993a, 1993b) that operate throughout, and can dominate, the research process. Too much reflexivity, however, and the carefully planned project might fall apart or collapse under the dead weight of the researcher's intellectual commitments. Ashmore (1989) has pointed to the way in which many sociologists of science have rather pragmatically adopted various forms of realist beliefs in order that their projects might advance. Too rigorous a sociology of sociological knowledge risks endangering any social science research project and is thus avoided by many. It is, instead, time that we enabled ourselves to engage in an ironic fashion with our research practices. An ironist is someone who is aware of the constructedness and contingency of their lives and ideals, and, more importantly, takes pleasure in this knowledge (Rorty 1989). Adopting such an ironic position, I remain at all times aware that my account is always and necessarily partial, contingent and deeply inf(l)ected – if not *entirely* pointless.

Reflexivities and situated knowledges

Gillian Rose (1997) writes of the way in which many feminists have advocated reflexivity as a 'strategy for situating knowledges' (1997, 306). In addition to recognising this need, Rose points to the inherent difficulties that she herself and others have found this process to be fraught with. Rose talks about what she calls 'transparent reflexivity' which is founded on a belief that agency and power can be adequately researched as part of a project employing reflexivity to overcome the messiness of social research (Rose 1997). Focusing on the performative work of language and practice, Rose highlights the

fragmentary and non-essential nature of identity that makes the research process constitutive, rather than merely reflective, of both researcher and researched. The space in which academics can situate their knowledges and power is a 'fragmented space, webbed across gaps in understandings, saturated with power, but also, paradoxically, with uncertainty: a fragile and fluid net of connections and gulfs' (Rose 1997, 317). Haraway (1996) asserts that objectivity 'turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility' (1996, 116). This points out to us the impossibility of achieving a properly objective analysis of anything - objectivity varies between individuals and as much as I might attempt to be objective it is I that is attempting this.

Reflexivities beyond the mirror

I want to use the work of Heidi Nast (1998) here as a point from which to begin to unpack some of the different meanings attached to the word reflexivity and some differing notions of what reflexivity as a research practice might actually be. Nast (1998) particularly draws out a distinction between reflexivity as reflection and reflexivity as an attribute of the living and lived body. She argues that the former, as the dominant model used by social scientists, is unsatisfactory and makes some moves towards "re-casting reflexivity as an embodied process of engagement and place" (1998, 29). Medical definitions stress the involuntary nature of bodily reflexivity and here is one of the subtle distinctions that I want to pull out and examine further: the difference between the reflexivity of before and after the field encounter and that which actually takes place in the field. Reflexivity planned before research and reflection following research correspond to the mirror model of reflection while our actual engagement in the field is the embodied kind of reflexivity that Nast is advocating. The challenge is in how to integrate reflexive concerns more fully into our work and writing - not a before and after exercise but a constant-throughout process. It is also, though, not only a matter of when to be reflexive but also how; a qualitative issue of what we allow to constitute reasonable reflexive practice. Nast (1998) writes about the body as a site for fielding difference. I would like also, turning Nast's conceptualisation around slightly, to think about the field as a site for embodying difference and for performing embodied difference. We frequently get little impression of the lived experience of being in the field or the

embodied practices of being a researcher, despite the constant bodily activity of fieldwork.

Everyday reflexivity in the field

Part of the problem with extending reflexivity stems from the fact that fieldwork often feels like everyday life - often because it is based on studies of the banal everyday existence of others. A challenge I hope to meet as this thesis progresses is in making reflexivity more about the body and the here and now than about reflection on the then and there. We are engaged in being reflexive in the field but tend to ignore this and simply reflect afterwards. Fieldwork is a very real, lived experience that tends to be written out of research output (or not written in at all). If the mirror model of reflexivity relates to thinking things through at a distance and at a different time, what can we say about the embodied experiences of the field? I am not suggesting that the reflective aspects of reflexivity should be ignored - they most certainly should not - but merely that we need to take account of our bodies in the field. The short-term, banal, everyday, responsive reflexivity through which we conduct our everyday social lives is the same as that we employ in the field and that which I aim to make this thesis speak of.

This chapter ends the first section of the thesis which has detailed something of the problem the research explores, reviewed appropriate literature, outlined my theoretical approach and justified an appropriate methodology. Having established the research methods I have employed in the production of this thesis and some of my intellectual commitments in applying them this thesis now moves to present some of the empirical materials collected to illustrate the performative utterances that contribute to particular visions of north-eastern Scotland, north-eastern Scots and north-eastern and Scottish traditions. Section 2 of the thesis deals with the mobilisation of ideas concerning the unique nature of the north-east and explores in detail the rhetoric surrounding the literary and song traditions of the region.

Chapter 5: How the Doric gets done: The everyday institutions of north-eastern Scottishness

This second section of this thesis applies the methodological, conceptual and theoretical approaches discussed in Section 1 through the detailed examination of north-eastern Scottish culture. This chapter and the following three illustrate the contingent factors that give language and practice variable meanings in the case of the Doric dialect and broader culture of north-eastern Scotland. Meanings remain variable but I will outline the ways in which particular ideas become stabilised and gain legitimacy without ever necessarily gaining dominance or permanence. Chapter 5 outlines the heritage of notions of the uniqueness and character of the north-east and highlights the key institutions that have created, and continue to construct, a culturally distinctive region. Chapters 6 and 7 draw extensively on empirical observations made during fieldwork between 1998 and 2001 as well as scholarly works. Chapter 6 concentrates on regional literary traditions while chapter 7 explores the Bothy Ballads of the region. These two later chapters show the institutions and persons discussed in chapter 5 in action, demonstrating just *how* the region comes to be reformed and knowledges recreated, circulated and re-signified. This section of the thesis, then, explores the historical antecedents of contemporary discussion of the north-east and outlines the genealogy of particular sets of practices and utterances. In exploring the cumulative practices of different groups of individuals over time, I identify and focus on particular items of rhetoric about the north-east that appear to endure: ideas that have been stabilised and have come to carry some legitimacy through repeated citation.

A north-eastern Scottish cultural community?

Dig deeper and find an area with cultural distinction. (Grampian Highlands and Aberdeen Tourist Board 1998)

Culturally and linguistically, the North-east diverges from the rest of Scotland. The native tongue, known as Doric (a form of Scots), sounds obscure to outsiders but many feel it is eminently more expressive than English. (This is North Scotland Website, 2000)

Crucial to our understanding of the meaningfulness and power of utterances concerning the distinctiveness of the regional dialect and culture of north-eastern Scotland is an analysis of the region itself. According to academic, media and popular cultural commentators, there is something, indeed many things, unique about the land, people and traditions of the north-east of Scotland (Buchan 1972; Kynoch 1995; McClure 1995; Milton 1983; Smith 2001). Today, a north-eastern Scottish cultural community as distinct from both the Highlands and the rest of the Scottish Lowlands is claimed by a growing number of people in the region and the term “Doric” functions to create the region rather than as a mere label. Symbolically, the region is represented as being located somewhere between the Highlands and Lowlands – historically both physically and culturally isolated (Buchan 1972; Curtis 2000). A distinctiveness that is often traced back as far as the Neolithic age is mobilised in the discussion of the building of a large number of the regionally distinctive “recumbent” stone circles (Burl 1976; Cope 1998; Curtis 1999). In the work of twentieth century Mearns-based author Lewis Grassie Gibbon, these same ancient stones serve as the signifiers of both a bond between the community and the landscape and the loss of traditional ways of life. The stones endure in the landscape and Gibbon’s work is intended to suggest that a cultural distinctiveness endures. Such a distinctiveness continues through history in the identification of the region as the northern Pictish kingdom, separated from the southern Pictish kingdom by the Mounth near Stonehaven. Arguments for a Celtic heritage for the region thus centre primarily on the mysterious, as far as phonology and history go, Picts and their missing language. There is toponymic evidence in the north-east for a form of P-Celtic speech in the region, large numbers of painted symbol stones of all periods and a tantalisingly impenetrable ogham inscription which might represent a language *not* of the Q-Celtic variety (MacAuley 1992; Nicolaisen 1999).

Contemporary north-eastern identity hinges on the comedic deployment of a (small) number of regional stereotypes tied in with notions of rurality and an agricultural inheritance. Conventional wisdom, in the north-east of Scotland at least, would have it that north-easterners are parochial, as illustrated by the oft-quoted *Press and Journal* headline: “NE Man Drowns – Titanic Sinks”. Additionally, the north-easterner is seen as fiscally tight-fisted with the rest of Scotland laughing at the tight-fistedness of Aberdonians. Most importantly, the average north-easterner is apparently possessed of an incredibly dry, sardonic wit. As the next chapter will show, the Doric dialect is often key to the presentation of these stereotypes whether this is because the dialect is used for humorous effect *in itself*, because the meaningfulness of some jokes hinges on the use of the dialect or, as is often the case, jokes are simply rendered in the Doric. The north-easterness of the region is built on the twin foundations of the Doric literature and comedy. What then is “the Doric”?

The Doric

Bound up with the conceptualisation of the region as a unified and separate entity is the application of the word “Doric” or the phrase “The Doric”. Such a contemporary cultural distinctiveness, however, no longer hinges on material culture but on the assertion of the separateness of the “Doric” dialect of the area, and literature and performance in that dialect. For much of the twentieth century, the word “Doric”, generally meaning vernacular language and not geographically specific, was in wide use to refer to any vernacular form of speech in Scotland – it is only in the last twenty years or so that it has come to be used almost exclusively with reference to the vernacular of the north-east of the country.

There are, and always have been, substantial differences between the dialect historically spoken in the north-east and the literary Scots language. The current Doric “movement” in the north-east, however, dates from the late 1970s and the arrival of a large number of immigrants from other parts of the United Kingdom (especially England) as a result of

the oil boom centred on Aberdeen (Harvie 1995). The region voted “no” in the devolution referendum of 1979 following a strongly anti-independence campaign by the Aberdeen based daily newspaper *The Press and Journal*. Immigration into the region is seen, along with the rise of mass popular culture, by cultural enthusiasts as one of the key forces working to erode the traditional culture and language of the region (Buchan and Toulmin 1989).

The twentieth century has given us the gramophone, radio, television, tape recorders, video and the compact disc; effective transport throughout the world, and most of all, the cosmopolitan effect of the oil industry, all of which have had a detrimental effect on Buchan speech and social habits. (Buchan and Toulmin 1989, 7).

Similarly, Sheena Blackhall’s short story “The Plague of Guffies” (1998) illustrates this fear by using mock biblical language in discussing the “swamping” of the “Doric tribe” by “guffies” (guffies being a vaguely insulting term for English people). “Let not the Guffies overwhelm the Doric tribe, for such is the Kingdom of Grampian” (1998, 24) writes Blackhall only semi-comically.

Doric, Scots and English: 3 languages or 1?

Doric is a recognised dialect of the Scots language – or rather northern Scots is (Dieth 1932; Douglas 1994; Gregor 1866; Kay 1993; McGugan 2001; McKinlay 1914; McRae 2000; Michie 2001; Murison 1963, 1976, 1981, 1997). Like many other of the regional languages or dialects of the British Isles, Northern Scots is of a Low German origin and thus forms part of a continuum of languages that encompasses both the Scots and the English languages (McClure 1987, 1988). Scots today is widely recognised as a language distinct from, but related to, English and moves are afoot to encourage the Scottish Parliament to recognise and support the language in the same way that Gaelic is used for the publication of parliamentary proceedings. It appears, however, that contemporary spoken Scots is too similar to contemporary spoken English for such proposals to be put into effect in any meaningful way.

While Doric or north-eastern Scots is constantly flagged as being distinctive, those concerned with the preservation and promotion of the dialect are also active in the institutions such as the Scots Language Society that promote and lobby for the Scots language. Thus, while Scots is seen as a language separate from English, Doric is recognised to be essentially a dialect form of the Scots language. As ever, the difference between a language and a dialect is subjective, hotly contested and definition is thus fraught with difficulty. Given that the north-east does not exist in isolation, the speech of the area has been influenced by the Scots language and, latterly, English (Fenton 1986; Nicolaisen 1999). These forms of Teutonic speech are all, to a greater or lesser extent, mutually intelligible and any notion of the separateness of the speech of a particular region will always be questionable – certainly the placing of boundaries remains always debateable.

It is common for people, Sheena Blackhall being one example, to talk of being bilingual – i.e. conversant in both English and the Doric. Derrick McClure (1999, 2001a, 2001b) suggests that it is probable that the language of the north-east of Scotland is closer than modern English to the “mother tongue”, of the original Germanic settlers in Scotland, that supplanted Gaelic in the region. This represents an argument for antiquity and an authenticity claim and, although the speech of the region retains many localised characteristics, it would be fair to say that much of the mass of contemporary speech in the north-east is not unproblematically Doric or characteristically regional and thus *could* be classified as regional English, Scots- English or Scots.

There is an ideology of survivalism surrounding and infusing such discussions of regional language use. The rhetoric of the Doric enthusiast is concerned at the loss of characteristic sounds (e.g. the replacement of “wh” with “f” common across the region) and words or phrases (McClure 1999, 2001b). Chapter 6 is concerned with the literature of the region and so, for now, it will suffice it to say that the Doric has tended to be the speech rather than the written language of the region. Vernacular publishing has tended to involve firstly English and secondly Scots – synthetic Scots during much of the

twentieth century in the wake of McDiarmid's literary renaissance. During the 1920s, the poet Hugh McDiarmid sought to reawaken Scottish culture from what he considered something of a slumber and set out to engineer what is now reflected upon as a rebirth in Scottish literature, language and national identity. McDiarmid's high cultural vision of a revival in the Scots vernacular expressed itself most markedly in his desire to construct a literary Scots language that could be used by writers across the nation. McDiarmid's 'Synthetic Scots' met with limited success although his writings have been influential on later uses and representations of Scots language in both poetry and prose. As Chapter 6 shows, however, it remains the case that there is no universally accepted model for the spelling and writing of the Scots language. As a result of this, there is little standardisation in the representation of the Doric dialect and texts tend to vary quite substantially which, Sheena Blackhall tells me, keeps the language vibrant.

Banal north-eastings: cumulative cartographies

This chapter explores the institutions of north-eastern culture and tradition and the role of these bodies in the establishment of a regional context or north-eastern *habitus* within which the dialect forms an essential part of the field. Chapters 6 and 7 explore the detailed functioning of and interaction between those institutions, and in particular the Doric Festival and the Elphinstone Institute, by way of a detailing of the re-enactment of north-easternness within the particular regional contexts created by those institutions. An early question we might ask ourselves with reference to any discussion of the north-east of Scotland might be, where and what exactly constitutes the "north-east of Scotland?" This would be an entirely reasonable question to ask. It would not, however, necessarily, be that easy a question to answer.

The banality (Billig 1995) that underpins north-eastern Scottishness is maintained by the functioning of a number of institutions such as the local media, other publications, the University of Aberdeen, the Doric Festival and a multitude of other private and public sector bodies. Constructionist approaches (Billig 1995; Paasi 1996) challenge the notion of the region or nation as a clearly bounded and unchanging entity, enabling the north-

east to be conceived of as shifting bodies of beliefs created and sustained through discursive and institutional practices. The embeddedness of popular memory and collective memory within everyday life enables narratives of and ideas surrounding the region or nation to be reproduced time and time again (Edensor 2002; Samuel 1996; Wright 1985). Popular memory is inherently about everyday life – the day-to-day hearing and telling of stories about the national past, or national present, is fundamental to the processes of remembering. The very act of the re-telling or re-citing of collective memories is important, as are the territorially specific institutions that enable such re-telling.

Paasi (1996) has detailed the ways in which the establishment and operation of institutions acts as the cement in the building of regions and in the bringing into consciousness of particular territorial entities. A relational approach to regional formation (Allen, Massey and Cochrane 1998) could similarly prove of some use in this analysis. Allen, Massey and Cochrane (1998) see the region in a constant state of flux, with ever-changing borders and ever-changing relations that both take place within and identified and named space, but also extend far beyond. In a hyperactive (Thrift 2001) world, the flows of information and knowledge are difficult to pin down and to locate in space with any certainty to the extent that it becomes incredibly difficult to bound or map objects or subjects with any degree of certainty. While this study continues to recognise the significance of the representations of the region and the re-citations of ideas about the region, it remains the case that I am aware that the relationships that help to constitute that region (or, indeed, nation) do not wholly take place *within* that region. The region, then, is dynamic and in a state of being constantly re-produced, or constantly remade, in such a way that it is difficult to capture and control as an object of analysis.

In this chapter, and this thesis more generally, the processes of regional formation - the formation of the object of analysis - discussed by Paasi (1996) and Allen, Massey and Cochrane (1998) are examined with a particular focus on the role of language in the structuring and facilitating of the institutionalisation and regionalisation of tradition. This chapter and the following two utilise the performative, non-representational and

constructionist theory of linguistic practice outlined in Chapter 3 to demonstrate that particular historicised notions of a rural and agricultural north-east are presented, and thus created, through the use of particular rhetorical devices and tropes. By using ballad and literary tradition to illustrate some of the rhetorical bases of north-easternness, I show the region to be in a constant state of becoming north-eastern through the deployment of these tropes, rather than being north-eastern in essence. This is thus ‘non-representational’ in the sense that it is about what precedes, infuses and follows representations, and the work of representations in the production of the intangible, as well as being about the representational work of ostensibly extra-discursive activities.

One important way of beginning to think through the banal constitution of the north-east is to examine the ways in which the region has been divided up and represented as a distinct area. The region has historically been divided into a number of subdivisions as well as recognised as “the north-east” or “Grampian”. These subdivisions include Buchan, Mar, the Mearns, the Garioch, Formartine, Gordon, Deeside and Moray. Currently, the majority of these areas are contained within the single-tier governmental county of Aberdeenshire. However, at various times, very recently in the cases of Gordon and Buchan, many have formed counties and have had institutions attached to them – indeed, some of these institutions continue to operate today. For example: Grampian Enterprise, The Aberdeen and Grampian Highlands Tourist Board, Grampian Regional Transport, The North East of Scotland Heritage Trust, Grampian Health Care, Grampian Country Foods, Grampian Television etc.

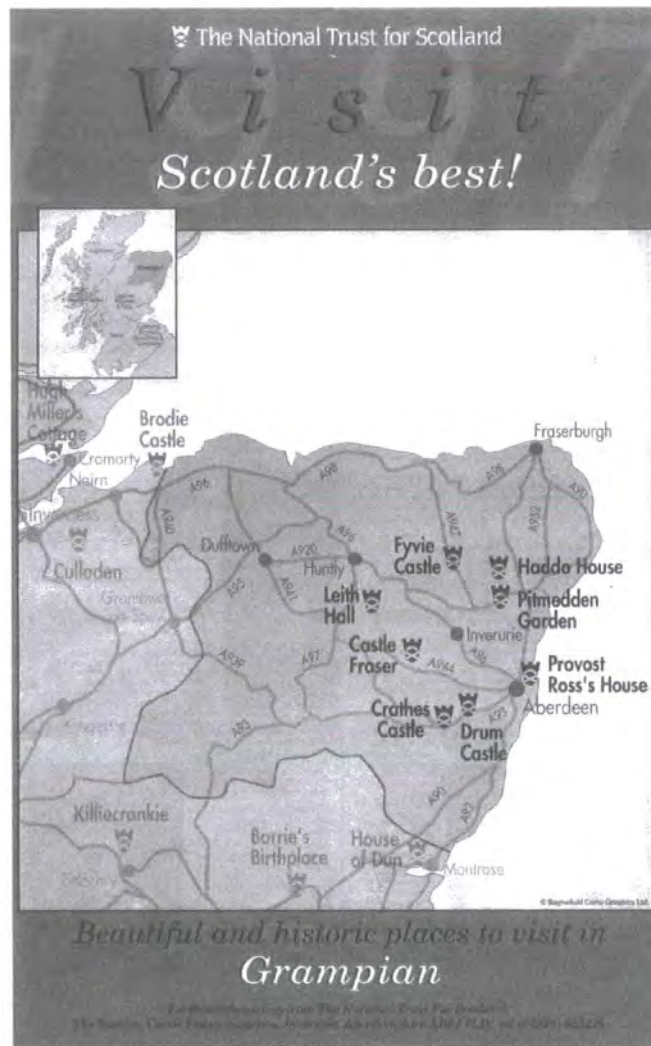


Figure 5. 1: National Trust for Scotland, Visitor Map (1997)

In some cases, the naming of regional or national institutions is, in itself, the key point. The repeated assertion that the north-east or Grampian is in some sense meaningful enables people to imagine themselves into the region or into a community of north-easterners. Regional institutions ‘flag’ (Billig 1995) the region in ways that often go unnoticed – whether intentionally or not. As well as specifically north-eastern bodies, there are many north-eastern regional branches, offices or sections of larger UK or Scottish institutions. The National Trust for Scotland’s Grampian administrative region represented in Figure 1 is the same as that which was an administrative area until local government reorganisation in the 1990s. Marren (1990) writes that “the adoption of two-tier local government has given ‘Grampian’ a new lease of life as the adopted name of

Scotland's north-eastern regional council". The map in Figure 1 bounds and contextualises the region both as a constituent part of Scotland *and* as a distinct territorial unit, while Figure 2 mobilises a notion of a Doric culture region. By illustrating the limited number of individual places at which the Doric Festival events take place, Figure 2 visually suggests to us that the area represented on the map is somehow internally cohesive.



Figure 5. 2: Your Doric Festival Map (Doric Festival Programme 1998).

The institutional framework

Although the north-east is no longer governed by the Grampian Regional Council or any single local authority, a large number of institutions continue to serve approximately this same territorial remit. This institutional framework is likely to prove to be of great importance in the construction of a specifically north-eastern identity over the next few years as definitions of Scots, Scotland and Scottishness are increasingly up for grabs in a post-devolutionary, and European, political and cultural environment. Since the establishment of a Scottish Parliament in 1999, debates regarding regional and cultural differentiation within Scotland have been re-energised in the north-east. North-eastern local authorities, strongly supported by the local press, have appointed people to lobby directly to the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh as a result of a distrust of the new extra tier of government based in central Scotland.

Local media and publishing

Local dialect and tradition in the north-east is promoted through both performances and publishing. The 1990s saw a substantial growth in interest in the vernacular oral and written traditions of the north-east of the country and, for a number of reasons, has seen the apparent distinctiveness of the region institutionalised. People living in the north-east have access to much of the same national and international broadcast and print media as the rest of Scotland as well as a local press, local broadcasters (*Grampian Television*, *Northsound Radio*, *North-East Community Radio*) and the local experience and knowledge that inflect these sources. The monthly *Leopard* magazine, two north-eastern daily newspapers (the *Press and Journal* and the *Evening Express*) and a number of more localised weekly newspapers (e.g. the *Deeside Piper and Herald*, the *Donside Piper*, the *Inverurie Herald*, the *Turriff Advertiser* and the *Buchan Observer*) feature regular dialect columns and carry vernacular poetry and prose. These dialect elements comprise a sizeable proportion of the *Leopard*, Robbie Shepherd's column in the *Press and Journal* and many humorous items such as the *Dod N' Bunty 'Far's the paper?'* sketches in the *Evening Express* or cartoons in the more localised publications. However, the region has not produced a sizeable and critically acclaimed literature able to speak to, for or about the contemporary north-easterner, Scot or Briton in *any* language or dialect (Hewitt

1995). And yet, there *is* a boom in writing, publishing and performance in the Doric dialect. Local libraries and bookshops have small, but growing, Doric and local sections as well as more generally available Scottish titles. A Doric dictionary (Kynoch 1996), books of proverbs (Buchan and Toulmin 1989; Kynoch 1997a; Wilson 1995) and even a 'teach yourself' course (Kynoch 1994, 1997b) have recently been published. The works of this 'renaissance' however are quite different in the main to literature with higher literary aspirations and pretensions emerging from the central belt.

The Elphinstone Institute and the University of Aberdeen

The [Elphinstone] institute exists to study, record and promote the cultural traditions and language communities in the North of Scotland and, in particular, of the North East. (Elphinstone Institute Newsletter 2001).

In 1995, The Elphinstone Research Institute, a specialist centre dedicated to the culture and traditions of the north of Scotland, was established, with much fanfare, as a part of the Quincentenary celebrations of the University of Aberdeen. The idea had been to establish a centre to research the traditions of the traditional hinterland of the University (i.e. the north of Scotland generally) and to name that centre after the founding father of the University, Bishop William Elphinstone. In 1994, the then terminally ill, and now sadly deceased, folklorist David Buchan was appointed as the first director of this exciting new enterprise, becoming only the second Chair of Scottish Ethnology in the United Kingdom. Buchan's doctoral thesis, completed in the Department of English at the University of Aberdeen, had been published in 1972 as *The Ballad and the Folk*. This volume, still to this day, represents the only full-length academic account of the ballad traditions of the north-east in relation to their contextual setting. Buchan's appointment to the Elphinstone Institute seemed to be the ideal outcome to the long campaign by several academics (see Aberdeen University Review 1990-1997) to see ethnology established at Aberdeen. His untimely death, therefore, provided something of a

temporary set back and generated some sadness at the fact that a native north-easterner had not been able to take up the post.

Who are the Elphinstone Institute?

Instead, James Porter, then a Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of California in Los Angeles, was recruited to fill the vacant Chair in Scottish Ethnology. Porter served in this role until Ian Russell, an ethnologist from the University of Sheffield, took over in September 1999. Porter arrived in Aberdeen without an especially strong background in northern or north-eastern Scottish tradition but has since conducted some archival research and published a book about north-eastern travelling folk singer and story teller Jeannie Robertson (Porter and Gower 1997). Russell, while having family connections with the north-east, in particular the City of Aberdeen, has a background in research on English Carol singing with particular reference to Derbyshire and Yorkshire (Russell 1994).

Alongside Ian Russell, Colin Milton serves as Associate Director. Milton is a graduate of the University of Aberdeen at both first and postgraduate degree level and has served as a lecturer in the Department of English there since 1966 (he is currently a Senior Lecturer in that department). Milton's research interests are in Scottish literature and, in particular, the vernacular literature of the north-east (Milton 1983, 1995, 1999). Mary Anne Alburger holds a Peter A. Hall Research Fellowship at the Elphinstone and conducts research on fiddle music traditions both worldwide and Scottish. Thomas McKean is listed (Elphinstone Institute 2000) as fulfilling an "Archives and Research" role for the Institute and has additionally been key in the establishment of the North Eastern Folklore Archive, funded by the Aberdeenshire Council, at Aden Country Park.

Since 1998, Sheena Blackhall, one of the most prominent authors of the contemporary vernacular literary scene in the north-east, has been funded by the Scottish Arts Council as a creative writing fellow at the Institute. As well as continuing to produce original prose and poetry in Doric, Scots and English, Blackhall has been currently involved in gathering prose and poetry for a collection of Doric writings, 'The Elphinstone Kist'

(Blackhall and Wheeler 2001), that will be used in schools throughout the north-east to promote the use of the dialect. Much of Blackhall's work for the Institute involves visits to schools and libraries across the north-east, such as those that form a major part of the Doric Festival each year. Additionally, Blackhall tends to win a number of prizes in the Annual Doric Writing Competition that also forms a part of that festival.

There have also been attempts recently to secure funding to enable Stanley Robertson, a story teller and balladeer of the travelling tradition, to undertake some research and become a "Tradition Bearer in Residence" at the Institute. The intention is that Robertson, nephew of Jeannie Robertson, would be involved in archiving his knowledge of oral tradition and, like Blackhall, make frequent visits to schools to interest the young. To date, insufficient funding has been raised for this appointment although an application has been made to secure monies from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

These five people (Ian Russell, Colin Milton, Mary Anne Alburger, Thomas McKean and Sheena Blackhall) represent the core of the Elphinstone Institute operation. In addition to these core members there are a number of Elphinstone associates – both in a formal and an informal sense. Naturally, as a new department or research centre at the University of Aberdeen it had always been desired by the wider academic community that the Elphinstone would forge links with other researchers at that University. Initially, many people at the University of Aberdeen were affiliated to the centre as Associate Fellows. During 2000, the numbers of these were reduced such that only two people currently fall into this category. These two Associate Fellows are Professor Bill Nicolaisen, a member of the Department of English, an eminent Scottish toponymist and *Leopard* magazine columnist, and Dr Caroline Macafee, also a member of the Department of English and the editor of a major bibliography of sources relating to the Scots language (Macafee 1999).

Former Associate Fellows today tend to be found in one of two relationships with the institute: some, such as John Smith of the Department of Geography and the University's School of Scottish Studies, are no longer *formally* involved while others, such as Professor Donald Meek of the Celtic Department, have become members of an Advisory

Board. This Advisory Board - like almost all others in the arts, social sciences and humanities at Aberdeen – does not take an especially active role. It also - again like other similar ones – includes among its personnel Professor Tom Devine of the even more recently established AHRB-funded Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies (RIIS). So, now that we know who works at the Elphinstone Institute, we ought to perhaps think a little bit about what it is that they, as an institution, actually do.

Elphinstone Activities

The Elphinstone Institute is located in a small house on the High Street in Old Aberdeen – at the heart of the main campus of the University of Aberdeen. From this house, the centre staff organise a programme of educational and social events open to members of the public interested in aspects of the heritage, history and tradition of the region. Events include an annual “Traditional Singing Weekend” at Cullerlie Farm Park, series of public lectures, an international fiddle convention and, occasionally, larger attempts at integrating town and gown such as a “Traditional Song of North-east Scotland” day conference / concert that took place in May 2000. These events tend to be more broadly-based than simply north-eastern tradition although the “Traditional Song of North-east Scotland” was, as the name suggests, very specifically about the traditions of the region and fuelled by a desire to involve and interest members of the public – both in their regional heritage and in the work of the Elphinstone Institute and the wider University. For similar reasons, the “Friends of the Elphinstone Institute” scheme was launched in March 2001. The Friends scheme is intended to establish networks of people interested in and potentially able to help the Institute “in fulfilling [its] cultural, community and academic remit” (Elphinstone Institute Newsletter 2001).

Institute staff are involved in researching north-eastern and Scottish culture and tradition, organising and staging conferences, publishing conference proceedings, and compiling anthologies such as the CD-ROM package, ‘Northern Folk: Living Traditions of North East Scotland’ (Porter 1999a, 1999b). The companion guide to the ‘Northern Folk’ CD-ROM is one of the major publications produced by the Elphinstone and showcases some of the work of the institute to a general audience (in the sense that members of the public

could access this material should they wish to). The guide, helpfully, reads something like a traditional regional geography, of the very sort from which many ideas about the region come, moving as it does from the geology and history of the region to human settlement and folk cultures. Similar characteristics are evident in the special Elphinstone

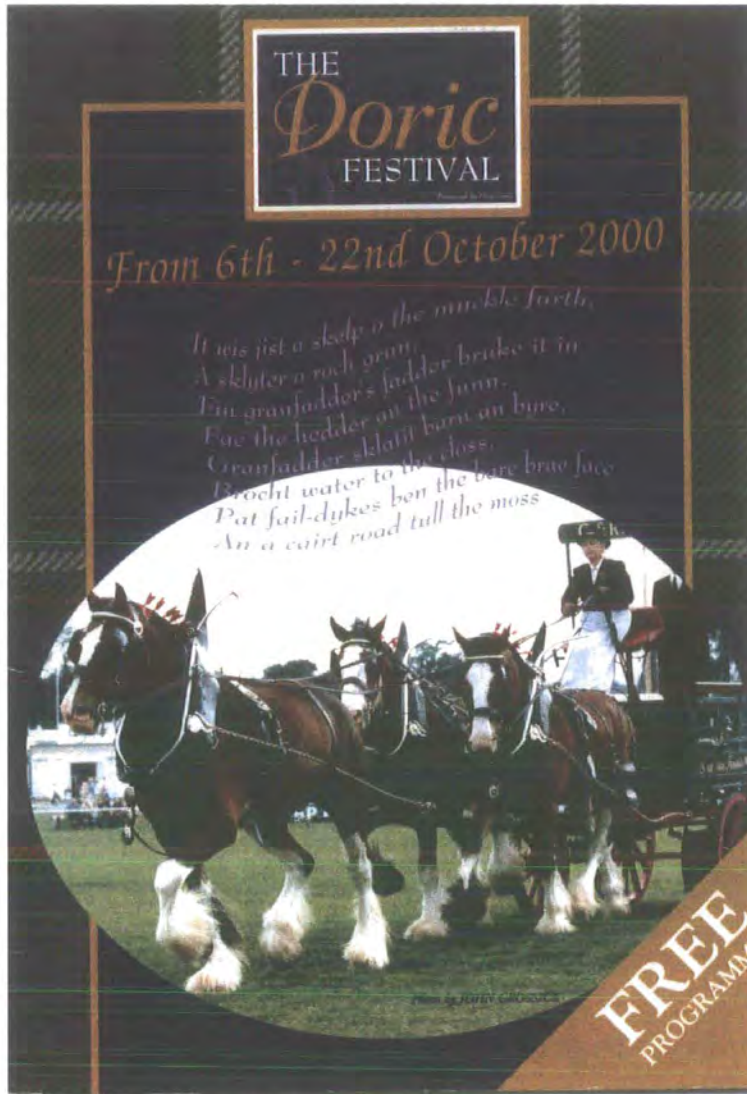


Figure 5. 3: Doric Festival Programme (Doric Festival 2000).

themed edition of *Northern Scotland* (1999), the journal of the University of Aberdeen's Centre for Scottish Studies, that was published in the year 1999. Major conferences have focussed on the north of Scotland generally, Calvinism and religious tradition in the north-east, education in the region and in regional identity, and the role

and nature of farming and fishing in the north-east. If the Elphinstone appears to be attempting to reach out to the public, there is only one other institution in the region that appears to be doing this more vigorously – the Doric Festival.

The Doric Festival

Festivals operate as means of mobilising collective identities through communion, participation and spectating (Knox 2001; Symon 2002; Waterman 1998). The Doric Festival has taken place in venues across Aberdeenshire each October since 1994. Established by enthusiasts, major sponsors include the Bank of Scotland, the Scottish Arts Council, Gordon Forum for the Arts, and the Aberdeenshire Council. The festival aims to preserve and develop local language, tradition and music through the staging of events organised by activists and performers in north-eastern communities. Festival events are a mixture of educational workshops and re-creations of, for instance, ‘Hairst Nicht’¹ celebrations or ‘Meal an’ Ale’ concerts.

In 2000, the Doric Festival became both a limited company and a recognised charity (Doric Festival 2000). The Doric Festival programme for the year 2000 tells us that the 12 person “Doric Board” of trustees of this company is made up of “people who support the preservation and promotion of the language, music and traditions of the North-east and who are prepared to take an active part in the aims of THE DORIC FESTIVAL” (Doric Festival 2000, 2. *Emphasis in original*). These changes in institutional structure set the Doric Festival on a slightly different and apparently more stable standing than previously, particularly in relation to attracting funding. While continuing to be organised in much the same community-based way as previously, this new status confers a greater legitimacy on the festival board, as though they bore the skeptron and were thus institutionally empowered (Bourdieu 1991) to speak for the north-east. This is due to the newly formalised relationships between the members of the “Doric Board” as well as the

¹ These events are said to recreate the traditional celebrations at the end of a successful harvest.

range of additional people the establishing of the board has enabled the festival to develop direct links with. Who, then, are these twelve board members?

Who are the Doric Mafia?

Jim McDonald, Chairman of the Board: Jim McDonald was the Director of Leisure and Recreation with the former Gordon District Council at the 1994 launch of the festival and, in that role, organised the first Doric Festival. Additionally Chairman of the Gordon Forum for the Arts.

Douglas Prosser, Board Treasurer: Douglas Prosser is a singer who “gives talks in and on the Doric” (Doric Festival 2000, 3). Acts as a judge at the Doric Writing Awards and at the Aberdeenshire Bothy Ballad Championship Final, along with Sandy Stronach.

Sandy Stronach, Festival Director: Sandy Stronach is widely recognised as the key organisational player, activist and enthusiast in relation to the Doric Festival. His entry in the festival programme guide to board members reads:

It wis his luv o e tung and e screivins in Doric aat gart Sandy yoke the Doric Writing Competition tae mak siccar aat e Doric language hid a neuk in e Festival. Fae sic a sma stairt he jist got mair an mair inveiglit. He feels aat we canna aye sit back, greeting aboot fits happenin tae oor culture, bit we maun mak siccar oor tung, music an traditions bi rollin up oor sleeves an getting stuck inta telling an shawin aabody e treasure aat is oor tradition. E festival is a richt guid wye tae dee aat! (Doric Festival 2000, 3)

Mr Stronach is additionally an SNP local councillor and stood as a candidate for that party in the Gordon ward in the 1999 elections to the Scottish Parliament.

Robbie Shepherd: Robbie Shepherd is a veteran broadcaster with *BBC Radio Scotland* in Aberdeen, a regular columnist in the *Press and Journal* and the compere for all of the

“official” Glenfiddich sponsored Highland Games that take place in the north-east. He is famed for writing and broadcasting in the Doric.

Steve Robertson: Steve Robertson is another famous Doric performer. He forms one third of the now retired comic trio “Scotland the What?” who are renowned for their comical sketches about the north-east in the dialect of the region. Additionally, co-writes the *Councillor Swick* cartoons in *The Leopard*.

Robert Lovie: Another performer who, we are told, has “since a ‘loon’...performed on stage singing and reciting Doric poetry” (Doric Festival 2000, 2). Acts as Master of Ceremonies at Doric Festival Grand Opening Concerts in Inverurie Town Hall each year. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, another keen advocate of “all things ‘doric’” who considers the Doric Festival to be “essential in keeping our traditions to the fore” (Doric Festival 2000, 2).

In addition to the above people, who I am identifying here as being key players in a language game of a Doric north-easternness, the board also has another six members drawn from across the north-east including story tellers, local historians, business people and a secretary (who is also, naturally enough, the secretary of the Gordon Forum for the Arts). All of those involved are people who already had an interest in the arts and culture generally or Doric / north-eastern traditions specifically. The board represents the formalisation of previous relationships and friendships in a way that relates directly to the organisation and funding of the Doric Festival and enables the festival to draw on the legitimacy of the past practice and reputations of people such as Robbie Shepherd and Steve Roberston as well as the organisational skills of other members.

How do institutions institute things?

The above discussion of some of the key institutions of north-easternness has been intended to set the stage for the forthcoming demonstration of the performances of both banal and spectacular north-easternness. As would be expected, all of the institutions

thus far mentioned appear perfectly benign and, almost, unremarkable. However, the point concerning their very everydayness is the key to their power – not, of course, that I am suggesting that the discourses they create and circulate are necessarily hegemonic or work to the exclusion of other viewpoints. There are always multiple potential versions of reality and the next two chapters will be considered successful if they merely demonstrate some of the contingency that works towards the sustaining of Doric, agricultural and rural visions of the north-east, north-easterners and north-easterness.

Now, of course, it might seem from the foregoing discussion that the use of the term “institution” is so broad as to be potentially meaningless. I would argue, however, that what local newspapers, publishers, local authorities, the sign outside the school or council office, the research institute and the folk festival have in common is what is important to us here rather than what the differences between such a vast array of institutions might be. All of the above are essentially public rather than private, all are discursive agents and all are thus, crucially, involved in the *instituting* of the region. Some are more everyday and more enduring than others but all carry a sense of permanency that belies their very contingency or the contingency of what they do. All, certainly, appear more permanent and stabilised than the flow of everyday life and language-in-use – not that they are, in any sense, separate from that everyday life despite the fact that sometimes some of them might appear to be far removed from the everyday concerns of the public (whoever they might be). All of these north-eastern institutions and all of their utterances, or those of the individuals that constitute the institutions, are a part of the flow of life in the north-east of Scotland (and beyond) and, while they may not ever achieve discursive dominance, the Elphinstone Institute and the Doric Festival do provide a useful paradigmatic example of particular visions of the region and the use of particular rhetorical tropes and devices in the promotion of such.

This chapter has introduced some of the key players *and* the stage(s) on which they perform (if I might be allowed to indulge in an extended performance or theatrical metaphor). It is now time to examine the roles that the Elphinstone Institute and the Doric Festival, in particular, take in manifesting the region against the backdrop sustained

by the other institutions of the north-east. It is time to explore the intersections and inter-relations between different institutions and their ready-mades and the ways in which these drive that repeated manifesting. How, then, *does* the north east become north-eastern? Or, rather, how does a particular Doric speaking, agricultural and rural region of the past come to be?

Chapter 6: A Dash o' Doric: Literary and publishing tradition in the north-east

It wis jist a skelp o the muckle furth,
A sklyter o roch grun,
Fin granfadder's fadder bruke it in
Fae the hedder and the funn.
Grandfadder sklatit barn an byre,
Brocht water to the closs,
Pat fail-dykes ben the bare brae face
An a cairt road tull the moss.

(Flora Garry, *Bennygoak* (1985)).

Having set the scene in Chapter 5 with regard to some of the institutions of north-easternness and the Doric dialect, I now move in Chapter 6 to explore the workings of those institutions and the role of Doric literature in the manifestation of the region. I am concerned here with briefly summarising a literary heritage before explaining contemporary publishing, writing, literary criticism and literary 'events' in the north-east. We are told by commentators (Hewitt 1995; McClure 1995, 1999; Milton 1983, 1999) that the north-east is the "linguistically most important part of lowland Scotland" (Wheeler 1985, xvi) and has the most well developed regionally-specific literature of any Scots language region. This chapter is concerned with what such "development" has entailed and the processes through which it has taken place and continues to take place.

Scottish Renaissance versus Doric Revival

The common opinion of the historian of Scottish literature is that there was a serious decline in the quality of Scots poetry in the wake of the dramatic and overwhelming contribution of Robert Burns (Aitken 1982; Dunn 1993; Glen 1991; McClure 1999; Milton 1999; Watson 1995). The nineteenth century is seen as a century in which large

numbers of Burns copyists produced large amounts of unremarkable verse. The north-east of Scotland was not, of course, entirely free of such Burnsian hauntings and substantial volumes of sub-Burns versification were produced in the region (Milton 1999). Additionally, however, as Colin Milton (1999) further illustrates, there was a strong tradition of verse making in the rural north-east that owed less to Burns or high literature and more to the everyday speech and lives of the north-easterner. Milton argues that such local poetical forms were an integral part of a rich oral folk culture that encompassed song, poetry, jokes, tales and lore. These rhymes only rarely reached the stage of publication and remained in the communities in which they had been coined. Vulgar and unliterary, such local dialect verse had little in common with the literary pretensions of those producing mainstream Scots poetry in the tradition of Burns. Such a tradition of versification, however, later fed, at times directly, into a revival of Scots poetry in the region as most clearly evidenced in the life and work of Charles Murray (Milton 1999). A late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century vernacular literary revival had some of its origins in the north-east and, crucially, in the Doric dialect of the Scots language spoken in that region. Charles Murray, Violet Jacob, Mary Symon, Helen Cruickshank and, later, Flora Garry, all purposefully chose to write in the dialect of the north-east of Scotland and were concerned with the preservation of their own ways of speaking.

So, Doric poetry and, to a lesser extent, prose were important in the rehabilitation of Scots as a literary language during the twentieth century although always somewhat marginal as compared to the literatures of the mainstream Scottish Renaissance engineered by Hugh MacDiarmid in the early part of that century (Lindsay 1991; Purves 1991; Reid and Osborne 1997; Scott 1993). The revival of vernacular poetry in the north-east was very much concerned with spoken Scots as opposed to the written Scots that Hugh MacDiarmid and his colleagues espoused. Derrick McClure (1995) tells us that, during the twentieth century, Scottish literature underwent a process whereby Scots poetry became divided into, on one side, a national tradition and, opposing this, a series of regional traditions. McClure (1999) equates a literary approach centred on MacDiarmid's synthetic Scots with a national tradition and a concern with local forms of

speech with the various regional traditions (of which he cites the north-east as the strongest).

Despite their involvement from an early stage, opinion is divided about the precise role of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century north-eastern poets in the revival of Scots vernacular literature. *Northern Numbers* (1920-1922) was an influential literary periodical edited by MacDiarmid and produced while he was occupied as a journalist in Montrose. Many of the major dialect poets of the north-east, such as Violet Jacob, Flora Garry and Mary Symon also contributed regularly during the short life of *Northern Numbers* (1920-1922). Like MacDiarmid, Scottish National literary history is not, by-and-large, interested in north-eastern regionalism or north-eastern dialect as anything other than simply the Scots language. Literary critics more directly concerned with the north-east (Hewitt 1982; McClure 1995, 1998, 1999; Milton 1993; Scott 1970; Wheeler 1985) tend to see Murray and the other early north-eastern dialect poets as an important driving force in the rebirth of Scots and Scottish poetry, and literature more generally. Milton writes that whereas Murray had once been seen as being of national significance, the north-eastern poets are now generally seen as being most significant regionally. MacDiarmid himself praised the work of Marion Angus and Mary Symon but was formidably dismissive of the work of Charles Murray. Murray's work remains to this day a notable absence in anthologies of Scottish poetry (Crawford and Imlah 2000; Crawford 1995; Dunn 1993; McQueen and Scott 1966; Young 2001) and has largely been written out of Scottish literary history. Violet Jacob and Marion Angus warrant inclusion only as having kept the Scots language, and poetry in that language, alive during lean times. MacDiarmid broadly welcomed the work of these poets as a stepping stone towards the full-blown synthetic literary Scots language he sought to (re)construct though remained scornful of the work of the pre-eminent north-eastern poet Charles Murray and, in particular, his successful use of a broad north-eastern dialect which represented a direct challenge to his own efforts to establish a unitary literary Scots language.

Historically, Scots and Doric writing have been largely poetry-driven and this continues to be reflected in much of the output today. The most popular north-eastern poetry is that of the early twentieth century when the prominent north-eastern poets Charles Murray, Mary Symon, Helen Cruikshank and Violet Jacob were writing and publishing (Wheeler 1985) although there are writers – such as Sheena Blackhall (1996, 1999), Bill Buchan (1998, 2001) and Charlie Allan (1988) – producing new dialect material today. It is argued, to this day, that north-eastern literature is more tightly tied in with the people of the region, their lives and their traditions than the Scottish national tradition is. Thus, Colin Milton tells us that while MacDiarmid may well have proved to be considerably more enduring with the “Scottish Intelligentsia”, Murray achieved a true popularity with ordinary members of the north-eastern public.

Keeping Doric Real versus Doric Tokenism

Although the business of writing in and commenting on or promoting the Doric are very closely tied in with notions of heritage and forms a cultural hegemony of north-easternness, there *is* some sense of a counter-argument in the north-east. Undoubtedly, the Doric dialect *is*, and *was*, deeply embedded in, and co-existent with, north-eastern forms of life but questions arise as to which particular forms of life. Press coverage surrounding a Scottish writing festival hosted at the University of Aberdeen in 1999 was critical of the dominance of writers from outside the region and the lack of literature produced within the region. It was suggested that the region as a whole and the city of Aberdeen in particular, had failed to produce any literature of any significance in recent years and that the local literary scene was dominated and devalued by “Doric tokenism” (Aberdeen Independent, April 1999). This newspaper article represents a disillusionment with both the message and the medium whereas Deborah Leslie’s (2001) poem “Dream fir Doric”, published in the re-launched and rejuvenated *Leopard* magazine of April 2001, is concerned primarily with the thematic content of Doric dialect literature.

Let's hear some new sangs;

Different tales te tell.

*Blawin in a fresh win'
Aneth Doric's sails.*

*Nae firgettin past times
Celebratin still.
Bit keep the Doric movin,
Keep the Doric real.*

*Nae jist stuck oan rewind;
Faist forrit, press oan play.
Young ains' wirds an voices –
Stan up an hae a say.*

*Resist the cry fir 'Nae Change!'
An the shout o 'Naethin new!'
At's the voice that teemed the kirk –
Syne greets ower impty pews.*

*Fit's firivir looking back
Can firget te look aheid.
Ye canna hae a hairst time
Wi'oot sawin some new seed.*

*Hauns that niver vrocht the grun
Nor kent a horse an ploo
Can haud a pen te write we,
Mak aul wirds sing wi new.*

*Young folk an auler folk,
Wirkin side bi side.
Respectin ain anither,*

Keepin an open mind.

Takin the best fae both worlds,

Mixin new wi aul.

Keepin the pottie bubblin

Fir fit biles dry, gangs caul.

Let's keep oor heritage livin,

Saved fae fadin awa,

New Doric, aul Doric,

There's room for it aa.

Leslie interestingly makes use of the Doric as a medium through which to issue an appeal for more dialect writers tackling a broader range of subjects with a renewed vigour. As the discussion of Blackhall's work with the Elphinstone later in this chapter shows, key cultural organisers in the north-east have tended to be satisfied in recent years with the fact that *anything* is written in the dialect with quality or relevance to contemporary north-eastern life being, at best, secondary concerns. Leslie appears to be more than aware of the unwritten and unspoken rules of the language-games of Doricness and, while making use of such legitimacy, aims to "keep the Doric moving, keep Doric real" by developing new directions for, and as, a dialect author. While we have yet to be deluged with new and conceptually innovative Doric writings, we may soon, however, find ourselves thus overwhelmed.

Prose, performance and comedy traditions

Scots, of course, is not a language of literary criticism nor of everyday writing, and thus difficulties arise in terms of vocabulary, grammar and spelling in the construction of passages of narrative. Perhaps because of the more problematic application of dialect to the writing of prose, the tradition has always been, and remains, considerably weaker than the poetic traditions of the region. Some of the earliest writings in the Doric,

however, were prose and the tradition continues today. An early example, William Alexander's (1871) collection of sketches published as "Johnny Gibb O' Gushetneuk" was culled from a regular column in the *Aberdeen Free Press* (forerunner to the *Press and Journal*). Alexander's work is often situated within the 'kailyard' literature that it preceded and with which it shared themes of fermtoun, village and small burgh (Morton and Morris 2001). 'Kailyard' literally means "cabbage page" and refers to an idealised vision of Scottish lowland rurality that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. 'Kailyard' literature was frequently based on sanitised versions of real places, and as a literary form was particularly reliant on sentimentality, whimsy, anecdote, caricature and humour (Gold and Gold 1995). The crucial thing about 'kailyard' writings was that they were primarily about community rather than landscape or the human/landscape relations that feature in popular north-eastern literature.

Alexander made use of dialect for dense passages of narrative but many others have stuck, instead, with the use of dialect only or principally for dialogue. This too, however, has its own particular political difficulties in as much as English is seen as the language of education and high culture while Scots is that of the apparently uncultivated. No author, or certainly very few authors, would wish to perform linguistic power manoeuvres over their characters or audience and thus, because of the lexical and grammatical difficulties of writing long tracts of prose in dialect, it has remained difficult to convincingly and comfortably use Doric for prose writing. Within a north-eastern Scottish context, the most successful use of the Doric in prose fiction is the example of Lewis Grassie Gibbon. Gibbon's works were very much a reaction against the political and literary inadequacies of 'kailyard' though still strikingly pastoral and community-oriented.

The figure of Lewis Grassie Gibbon

This man set the flame
Of his native genius

Under the cumbering whin
Of the untilled field;
Lit a fire in the Mearns
To illuminate Scotland,
Clearing the sullen soil
For a richer yield

(Helen B. Cruickshank, *Spring in the Mearns*, (1935)).

It would be impossible to discuss the literary traditions of the north-east of Scotland – indeed of Scotland as a whole – without making some mention of Leslie Mitchell who wrote his great Scottish novels under the pseudonym of Lewis Grassie Gibbon (1967, 1973, 1982, 1983). The above elegy, subtitled “In Memoriam, Lewis Grassie Gibbon”, by the poet Helen B. Cruickshank gives some indication of the esteem within which Gibbon has been held for some time in his native north-east. Lewis Grassie Gibbon never wrote or spoke of the “Doric” and referred always to Scots or Scotch. Mitchell’s concerns were with a national tradition rather than with regional dialect, literature or identity. Writing contemporaneously with MacDiarmid, Gibbon was broadly sympathetic with then current literary ideas and the need for MacDiarmid’s Renaissance ideology. In return, MacDiarmid clearly approved of *A Scots Quair*, and invited Gibbon to contribute to *Northern Numbers*. Grassie Gibbon was somewhat reticent, however, about the use of a synthetic form of Scots and used his own literary devices to suggest the speech of north-eastern Scots¹. Part of Grassie Gibbon’s success rested on his purposeful use of what he called the rhythms and cadences of dialect in his English narrative. As a result of his literary style, much of the narrative in his *Scots Quair* reads like the speech of his narrators. In *Grey Granite*, the third novel in his *Scots Quair* trilogy, two clues to Grassie Gibbons philosophical approach to language are given in the description of Marion Angus’ poetry as ‘awful broad’ and in the telling response of a character to a question as to why an author should chose to write in Synthetic Scots – “doesn’t he know the real stuff?” Gibbon is *the* key figure in a prose tradition that continues to owe more to

¹ Gibbon’s writing in *Sunset Song* was intended to try to capture the flow, idiom and content of north-eastern speech, largely without the use of dialect words.

speech than to writing – even if his writing has not tended to be emulated he remains an important and celebrated figurehead. Thus, as well, then, as the poetic tradition, the prose tradition of the north-east is more closely concerned with spoken language than written literature. However, the vast bulk of Doric prose written today has no pretension to literary merit at all and is in a popular vein and more closely related to oral culture.

Popular Doric tradition

IT'S FUNNY fou fan yer sittin cosy at yer ingleneuk on a winter's nicht, yer een closes, than e memories cam flooding back. Weel a sippose wi' some o' e rubbish aats on e TV nooadays wir memoires can be a lot mair inerestin an entertainin. Ae sic memory aat cam tae myn took m' aa e wye back tae m's simmer hoidays aat a eesed tae spen on m' Gran'mither's fairm at Quilquox aside Ythanbank, aye, aa e wye back tae e late 1940s an early 1950s.

William G. Johnston *Simmer holidays at Tappies* (2000).

The fact, of course, that those intending to work within and contribute to high literary traditions have shied away from the deployment of the dialect has not prevented others using the Doric for dense passages of prose in a popular tradition. These include short stories and personal opinion columns in the *Leopard Magazine* and the *Press and Journal*. Dunn (1993) suggests that the dialects of Scotland lend themselves to low humour rather more easily than to high literature. There are interconnections between such low humour and dialect use that are also mirrored in the bothy ballad traditions which will be dealt with in the following chapter. While it is not true that all of the humorous dialect writings of north-eastern Scotland need necessarily be termed what Dunn so disparagingly calls “low comedy”, it is the case that comedy – both written and performed - forms a vital element of the corpus of Doric dialect materials.

Even within popular traditions, it is difficult for authors not to produce something cloying, spectacular and remarkable, and it remains the case that dialect is most successfully deployed in dialogue. One example of where the reserving of dialect to speech is particularly effective and seems entirely reasonable and naturalised is in Buff Hardie's *Dod N Bunty "Far's the Paper?"* sketches in the *Evening Express*. The humorous exchanges on current affairs between a fictional Aberdeen married couple are conducted in contemporary Aberdonian Scots or Doric, and the sketches contain only dialogue with only the very smallest amount of contextual scene-setting. Similarly, Buff Hardie and Steve Roberston's *Councillor Swick* cartoons in the *Leopard* magazine successfully make use of a naturalised Aberdeen Scots. The use of local Scots by the vaguely corrupt and vaguely self-serving City Fathers of the *Councillor Swick* cartoons reinforces their small-mindedness and the parochialism for which, as discussed in chapter 5, the region and the City of Aberdeen are famed.

Buff Hardie and Steve Robertson, of course, both have a long involvement in regional dialect comedy dating from their days together at the University of Aberdeen and, more importantly, their work as two thirds of "Scotland the What?" The popular broadcast comedy team "Scotland the What?" are considered to be comic greats within the north-east. They make much play on the humorous potential of simply using dialect and the comedy of "Scotland the What?" thus hinges on the use of dialect and, in particular, in the use of the Doric by country dwellers. Despite the common usage of Scots in contemporary Aberdeen and the surrounding towns, the Doric dialect remains firmly rooted in a rural past. This rural past is populated with teuchters for whom the use of standard English would be deemed unnecessary or laughably grand. Much of the humour in such encounters comes from the interaction between a Doric speaker and a speaker of the English. The implicit assumption is, as ever, that the Doric speaker is more couthy, old-fashioned, natural and unaffected than the English speaker. An irony within such comedy revolves around the fact that not even the countryside from which the such idealised and romantic country dwellers are supposed to originate is genuinely as backwards as the "Scotland the What" team's material would suggest.

Another dialect comedy performance team is formed of Edie and Ethel, the Cleaners Fae Kemnay. Edie and Ethel are a duo of actors who perform across the north-east as Doric speaking school cleaners. Their act, like that of Scotland the What? before them, revolves around the humorousness, in itself, of speaking in a broad dialect. Again, much of the humour in this is based on the historical fact that stage performance has tended to involve the use of a standard English vocabulary and pronunciation, even among Scottish performers as seen in the White Heather Club. Related to this, there is comic potential in the clash of cultures that ensues when Doric speakers encounter the use of English.

Refiguring the regional tradition

An everyday tale of Doric folks

If, as I would contend has been shown in chapters 5 and 6, an in some ways distinctive Doric tradition has been constructed out of the disparate writings of the past, it is equally the case that this tradition as it manifests itself today requires constant delineation and separating out from other literary traditions that might have some claim over the north-east of Scotland. To such an end, the work both of dialect authors and their critics, however “critical” or not, is key. Authors, for their part, ensure that their writings are authentically north-eastern by operating within certain conventions – of language, theme, content, style etc. – while commentators, as is their wont, commentate on that very north-easterness.

The task of drawing boundaries – territorial, thematic and lexical – is always ongoing. On one of my visits to the Elphinstone Institute, Sheena Blackhall told me that in putting together “The Elphinstone Kist” she had been somewhat limited in terms of both the quality and the quantity of the materials. There simply was not enough dialect writing to enable Blackhall to spend undue amounts of time troubling herself with notions of relative artistic merit (within whichever system of merit). Now, while I do not claim to be a literary critic, is not conventional literary worth or credibility one of the attributes with which the anthologist of a particular literature ought to be concerned?

Undoubtedly, this would be my sense of how these things might usually proceed. Rest assured, then, that Blackhall is indeed concerned, as are others, about the necessity of accepting for publication pieces that do not fit in with particular notions of literature and expressed to me her disappointment at having to “take what you get” (Interview with Sheena Blackhall). At least these short stories and poems had been written in the Doric. Unfortunately, as far as Blackhall was concerned, some had been written in contemporary Scots – these included those penned in the urban speech of Aberdeen that some within Doric circles, distastefully, refer to as “Aberdeen Scots”. Even more difficult for Blackhall to negotiate was the submission of one piece from an author in Angus. Apparently, this writer showed some promise and some merit but, crucially, had chosen to write in the dialect of Angus which, problematically, is not within the conventional geographical or cultural boundaries of the north-east and, therefore, not an area within which “the Doric” is spoken (or, indeed, written). Again, as an anthologist of the Doric, you have to “take what you get” (Interview with Sheena Blackhall). Now of course, for those forced to take what they get, one possible solution would be to attempt to ensure that there is as much as possible to choose from and one way to ensure this would be to actively encourage new writing.

The Doric Festival Writing Competition Awards Ceremony

On 13th October 1999 I attended the Doric Festival Writing Competition Awards Ceremony at the Kintore Arms Hotel in Inverurie. The competition, originally established by Sandy Stronach, has since 1999 been fully integrated into the Doric Festival. Judges included Stronach himself, Douglas Prosser and representatives of the Aberdeen and Grampian Highlands Tourist Board office in Inverurie. The evening consisted of short-listed writers - or those that had turned up - reciting their works and the giving of prizes in the following categories.

- 1) Adult – Short Story
- 2) Primary – Short Story
- 3) Primary Poem

4) Adult Poem

Five pieces of writing had been short-listed in each of the above categories and those short-listed ranged from first-time authors to the professional writer Sheena Blackhall (one of those failing to attend the ceremony and instead sending the Secretary of the Aberdeen Branch of the Scots Language Society to read her work). There were noticeably no writers present in the 11-18 secondary school age group – possibly related to the lack of a secondary school category for prizes. Those primary age children making the short-lists had been engaged in school-based Doric writing projects. These projects had been inspired by or in conjunction with school visits by Sheena Blackhall to speak to children about dialect and to encourage them to use the Doric. Rather than individual child poets having written pieces and submitted them, schools or classes had tended to enter the competition en masse.

Similarly some of the adults had also been inspired to enter the competition as a direct result of their membership of Doric writing groups: some adults, however, had taken part under their own volition. Throughout the region, writing groups have been established for people who wish to write in the Doric, and seek the guidance and fellowship of others so inclined. Some of these are organised by individuals, some by organisations such as SCAT (Scottish Culture and Traditions) and some by the Elphinstone Institute. Thus, we have a competition that ostensibly exists to judge Doric writing which more realistically could be argued to exist to generate such writing and *then* to pass judgement on it. There seems to be something at least a little perverse in promoting grassroots dialect writing and establishing a competition to foster this further, and then allowing Sheena Blackhall to enter and win prizes each year. In 1999, Blackhall, an established writer, took both first and second places in the adult poetry competition. Certainly a healthy literature requires established and recognised authors but it seems rather strange to judge amateurs and professionals as a part of the same competition. Perhaps, of course, it would be better if Blackhall were to withdraw given her role in organising dialect writing in the region. An exclusively professional competition would, of course, make only a very few people eligible but would surely be more constructive and encouraging to new writers.

Such a problem does not, of course, arise in the primary categories as Blackhall is ineligible to enter, not being of school age.

The entry forms for the Annual Doric Writing Competition (Doric Festival 1999, 2000) state that entries must be written in Doric or "The Mither Tongue". The prize is not for the best writing from the region as such but for the best *dialect* writing. Having established a context for the production and evaluation of dialect literature, Blackhall remains always present as a key player and broker of power. The institution of the writing awards legitimises and encourages dialect writing by rewarding good dialect writing.

'The Guid Scots Tung' Reading Meeting

To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life. (Wittgenstein 1953
no. 19)

Through both 'expert' and popular accounts there runs an implicit, sometimes explicit, assumption that the Doric dialect and the Scots tongue are better suited to the emotional and personal self-expression of the north-easterner than the English language. It is argued that people can better relate feelings and provide more evocative and meaningful descriptions of the environment when using the Doric because of their rootedness in the landscapes, and the lifestyles lived out in those landscapes, from which the dialect is perceived to originate – or to have developed into its contemporary form(s).

A most striking manifestation of a rhetoric surrounding the contextual appropriateness of the north-eastern vernacular was at a reading meeting that took place in Hatton of Fintray, Aberdeenshire, during the 1999 Doric Festival. In introducing the evening, which consisted of six writers and enthusiasts reading and reciting dialect works to an

audience of twelve, the organiser read the following passage from Lewis Grassie Gibbon's seminal inter-war novel, *Sunset Song*:

...Rob was just saying what a shame it was that folk should be shamed nowadays to speak Scotch – or they called it Scots if they did, the split-tongued sourocks! Every damned little narrow dowed rat that you met put on the English if he thought he'd impress you – as though the Scotch wasn't good enough now, it had words in it that the thin bit scrachs of English could never come at. And Rob said *You can tell me, man, what's the English for sotter, or greip, or smore, or pleiter, gloaming or glanching or well-henspeckled? And if you said gloaming was sunset you'd fair be a liar; and you're hardly that, Mr Gordon.* But Gordon was real decent and reasonable, *You can't help it, Rob. If folk are to get on in the world nowadays, away from the ploughshafts and out of the pleiter, they must use the English, orra though it be.* (Grassie Gibbon 1982: 153-154)

Here, Grassie Gibbon's sentimental argument is re-mobilised to suggest relevance to contemporary north-eastern life. This passage demonstrates the same kind of rhetoric on which the very idea of a 'Guid Scots Tung' reading meeting, as a part of an organised Doric Festival, is premised. Interestingly, for reasons of communication to the widest possible audience, Grassie Gibbon chose to write in English with only a smattering of dialect words used largely in dialogue. Despite this, his work is considered to be characteristically north-eastern in his use of regional idioms and expressions in the novel: it is commonly argued that any native north-easterner would be able to render the text into dialect by simply intoning the words differently (Milton 1983). Grassie-Gibbon's argument is that the dialect is more descriptive of and in tune with the environment and forms of life of the north-east.

The rules, then, of what the Doric is for are well established and continue to be reinforced at the Doric Festival. A related notion to the naturalness of Doric usage is that of the



shame that north-eastern people *might* feel in not using the Doric as though such involved subduing and denying their true or real selves. This is clearly seen in the passage from Grassic Gibbon above and in the following poem:

There are among us those who fain
Wid treat wi scorn an great disdain
And, gien the slightest chance, wid hain
The Doric phrase.
To hear them spik, ye'd think that they
Were born five hunner miles away,
Instead o' tween Burhaven Bay
And Ugie's braes.

They think it impolite to say
When freen meets freen, "Fit like the day?"
Oh, no, that's not the proper way!
It's "How d'ye do?"
At phrases sic as oors they scoff;
They toss their heids and spik "Pan loff".
They dinna hoast. Oh no, they cough!
Their bleed is blue.

But drap a haimmer on their feet,
Or stick a needle in their seat,
Ye'll get the Doric pure and sweet,
Aye! Rich and rare!
If they were richt, they'd need nae shock
To gar them spik like Buchan folk;
They widna be the luchin-stock

That noo they are.

Peter Buchan. *Pan Loff*. (Buchan and Toulmin 1989, 9).

In Grassic Gibbon the dialect words are necessary to enable nuanced and meaningful talk about the everyday lives of the speakers while in Buchan's poem the Doric is an instinctive method of communication. In both, the sense is that to *not* use the dialect involves both some pretence and some personal loss. Interesting here is the fact that, despite the period of time that separates Grassic Gibbon and Buchan, the same relation continues to be reproduced in relation to somewhat different lifestyles. Certainly, I can go so far with the implicit argument that dialect words concerning the natural environment and nineteenth century farm work function very well in the context Grassic Gibbon was writing about but would question Buchan's assertion that the use of Standard English necessarily complicates the offering of a simple greeting.

The glimpses of banality offered in 'Pan Loff' do not require a dramatic leap of imagination for the people in the farming or fishing communities of Buchan. Coughing, meeting friends and undertaking D.I.Y. are perfectly everyday pursuits or events that might, indeed *do*, happen anywhere and can be discussed in any possible language or dialect containing the necessary terms. Evidently, similar language-games can be played out using different, if similar, languages. Doric *is* appropriate and adequate: so, however, are English, Scots English or, for that matter, Gaelic.

What is, however, crucial in both of these examples is the use of the Doric as a marker of an 'authentic' north-easternness. For the authors, the dialect is central to a north-eastern identity while for their fictitious speakers it marks them out as north-eastern. As this chapter has shown, the dialect is central to notions of a distinctive region and a distinctive way of life. Echoing the concerns of the early dialect revivalist poets and thus with the

potential threat to the dialect from the Education (Scotland) Act of 1872², one of Edie and Ethel's sketches is about the attempts to teach Doric speakers through the medium of standard English. Edie and Ethel's sketch is less concerned, of course, about the demise of traditional ways of living than with the comedic potential of misunderstandings arising between speakers of similar but different languages.

This sketch, performed at a concert in Westhill community education centre in Aberdeen and at the Mini Doric Festival at Gordon 2000 in Huntly, involves Edie and Ethel telling us about the homework assignments they had been set as mature students of English at Aberdeen College. Apparently, members of their class had been given paired poetry assignments which would require each of the pair to compose alternate stanzas for a poem about 'dukes' and another about 'nurses'. Assuming that we can suspend our disbelief, we hilariously discover that while one has written about dukes the other, in her inability to think outside of the Doric, produced a poem about "dyeuks".

Less amusingly, the confusion for their second poem is, somewhat less convincingly, between 'nurses' and 'horses'. Thus this Doric speaker is shown to be not only merely most comfortable communicating in the Doric but also inattentive and somewhat scatterbrained. Like the subjects of Grassie Gibbon's dialogue, one of our Kemnay cleaners is unable to leave behind the Scots language and move on to better things. The implication of this section is that those who can only communicate in the Doric are uncultured with English being the language of the educated and cultured elite. Attempts by teuchters – bearing in mind that Edie and Ethel are from Kemnay – to engage with high culture are liable to lead to hilarious confusions; hilarious confusions which they, to some extent, bring upon themselves by attempting to communicate in a language that is not their own and is not their native Doric. To say the least, it seems somewhat strange that elements of the Doric Festival seemed geared towards laughing at the Doric and Doric speakers. Things, however, are not as simplistic as that and partly such amusement hinges on the shared recognition that the Doric is of the past. All of this again echoes

² This act introduced primary schooling for all children in Scotland. The language of teaching was English and the same sorts of fears about the loss of dialect use were being expressed for the Gaelic language.

Peter Buchan's "Pan Loff" and the ideas contained therein of the Doric as the natural speak of the region and the people of the region. Thus, the rural Doric speaking comic – intentional or otherwise – is a figure rooted in the past but, above all, rooted in an authenticity. Such an authenticity hinges on its being the opposite to affectedness and showiness. Again, in the same way that Buchan's profane Doric D.I.Y. enthusiasts cannot help themselves from speaking in their natural register by reflex, neither can the north-eastern country folks of "Scotland the What?" and neither can Edie and Ethel. The rhetoric of north-easternness, however, is more complex than this (as the following section shows) and hinges on the use of dialect, thematic content and commentary on that very usage and content.

The rhetoric of north-easternness

Implicit in [Flora Garry's poetry] is the terrible and moving love of the soil.
The land was like that: its folk lived in that deep enthrallment, like the beasts
in the field almost, a part of the cycle of things. (Cameron 1995: 24)

An intense bond between north-easterners and the land of the north-east is an important part of the rhetoric of north-eastern identity and a central motif of the literature of the region (Hewitt 1995). The landscapes within which people lived out that 'deep enthrallment' were, of course, those of the rural *fermtouns* (Carter 1979). A naïve environmental determinism infuses these accounts in which people are figured as inescapably bound up with, or even submerged within, a landscape that gives birth to and shapes their lives.

The cycle of things and the hairst

Or lang ye're at the ploo again,

Sae roon the sizzens rin,
An' aye by tearin' oot the life
Ye try tae haud it in.

Doon at Nether Dallachy
There's neither watch nor knock,
But denner time an' supper time,
An' aye yoke, yoke.

(John M Caie, *Sair Wark's Nae Easy*, 1985, 19).

The poetry of John Caie is largely about the life of the agricultural labourer and agricultural life more generally. The above section of his poem "Sair Wark's Nae Easy" posits a dual structuring of the temporal aspects of an agricultural life. These two time frames, one within the other, are the annual cycle of the seasons and the daily routines of work. A similar relationship between the people and their agricultural lives can be seen in the bothy ballads as well as in the work of prominent poets such as Charles Murray, Voilet Jacob and Flora Garry, and in the novels of Lewis Grassie Gibbon. The narrative structure of many Bothy Ballads is the progression of either the working day or, more crucially for this discussion, the working year or the cycle of the seasons. Again and again, the same two temporal cycles are represented in north-eastern regional literature as the governing structures of peoples' lives and used as the narrative structure of poetry, prose, folksong (see chapter 7 on Bothy Ballads) and historical account. In Grassie Gibbon's 'Sunset Song,' the life of the central female character, Chris Guthrie, operates as a metaphor for changes in the landscape and the decline of the rural communities that Gibbon saw as traditional. Guthrie's passage from childhood through adolescence, marriage, childbirth and widowhood is metaphorically evoked through chapter titles running from 'The Unfurrowed Field' through 'Ploughing', 'Drilling', 'Seed-Time' and 'Harvest' to, again, 'The Unfurrowed Field'.

The high point in the agricultural year and the cycle of the seasons is the *hairst* (harvest). The *hairst* has an added resonance in the north-east resultant of the metaphorical use of

the term in relation to the harvest of Doric writings both past and contemporary (see for example: *A Doric Hairst* (Blackhall and Wheeler 1989); *A Hairst o' Words* (Matthews 1991); *Grampian Hairst* (Donaldson 1981) and *A Scots Hairst* (Grassic Gibbon 1967). As much, however, as there is to be celebrated in the successful hairst it is soon time to again give into the relentless cycle of things and to prepare the ground for sowing and ploughing all over again in preparation for another mythical hairst. The ending of a story or poem at the end of the day and hinting at the beginning of the next day, or at the end of the year and hinting at the beginning of the next year, has the effect of firmly locking the imagined north-easterners within a never ending cycle of work on the land.

Hewitt (1995) remains something of a lone voice in commentary on the north-east in his grasping of the less-than-straightforward relations between regional literature and regional identity. Hewitt's (1995) concluding chapter in 'Northern Visions' is in stark contrast to the rest of a volume within which the notion that regional literature simply reflects regional identity is dominant. However, Hewitt shifts the argument only slightly in his assertion that the literature of the north-east shows only a pre-occupation with rather than a love of the land. Without a doubt, the landscapes, and particularly the agricultural landscapes, of the region feature extensively in the dialect, and other, writings produced in the north-east. Many (Buchan 1972; Cameron 1995; Fenton 1986; McClure 1987; 1995; Wheeler 1985) have ascribed this to the very dominance of agriculture as a form of employment and way of life during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hewitt's minor change of emphasis is welcome but does not go far enough in questioning the series of relations between humanity and nature that are represented in this literature. Thus, while agriculture certainly was the dominant employer in the region and agricultural work a common everyday experience, it is only perfectly reasonable that some sizeable element of localised fiction should attempt to make sense of and account for this. What, however, does not necessarily follow from this 'reality' is that the conceptions that north-easterners and north-eastern authors have of the relationship between people and nature should be either as it appears to be or should be remarkably similar when seen from the point of view of different authors.

The nature/culture relationships presented to us in north-eastern regional literature, as well as in social historical accounts of the region, are by-and-large about the submersion of the people into a landscape that dictates their everyday lives, their every move and their personal character. The rhetoric of historians of a slightly earlier period in agricultural history is of the heroics of improving agriculture and the clearing of the land to enable farming (Buchan 1978; Cameron 1977, 1995). Regional literature in any language, however, does not concern itself with this pioneering period in the same way that social history does, and instead relates that, despite the very notable and important improvements in land management, the work on the land remained difficult and dominated peoples' lives entirely. So, while contemporary social historians are able to make the leap from a heroic subjugation of the earth, poets and prose authors came onto the scene only later once such a heroic period had apparently been forgotten.

The Living Doric: Doric Personified

He cut a sappy sucker from the muckle rodden-tree,
He trimmed it, an' he wet it, an' he thumped it on his knee;
He never heard the teuchat when the harrow broke her eggs,
He missed the craggit heron nabbin' puddocks in the seggs,
He forgot to hound the collie at the cattle when they strayed,
But you should hae seen the whistle that the wee herd made!

But the snaw it stopped the herdin' and the winter brocht him dool,
When in spite o' hacks an' chilblains he was shod again for school;
He couldna sough the catechis nor pipe the rule o' three,
He was keepit in an' lickit when the ither loons got free;
But he aften played the truant – 'twas the only thing he played,
For he maister brunt the whistle that the wee herd made!

(Charles Murray, *The Whistle* (1929)).

The young herd in Charles Murray's "The Whistle" is made to represent the folk tradition of the north-east and the threat to that culture from the Education Act (Scotland) of 1872 (Milton 1999). Murray explicitly makes his point in the fact that the boy's enthusiastic use of his whistle to play traditional tunes is curtailed by his attendance at school and in the symbolic destruction of his whistle by the school master (Milton 1999). The figure of the wee herd is made to stand for the organic vernacular traditions of the region – he is that tradition embodied. Similarly, Deborah Leslie's Doric Writing Competition short-listed story "'Doric', Alive An' Kickin' An' Aye on the Richt Side O' The Sod' uses organic metaphors and figures the author's father as the carrier of dialect tradition. Leslie's father becomes metonymic of the Doric speakers of the north-east, and of the dialect itself, in his very unaffectedness. Similarly, individuals, are made to represent the dialect tradition through dialogue and narrative in some of the work of some of the younger competition entrants who write, for example, about their grandmothers. These grannies and fathers occupy a similar position to the main character in Charles Murray's 'The Whistle'. What the intervening years have enabled is for the representation of the tradition to move from the young to the elderly, as something under even greater threat than Murray had feared. The rhetoric, of course, of the preservation and decline of regional culture and language has been a key driving force in the very existence of a Doric writing awards ceremony. And, such a driving force, is at least partly attributable to the perlocutionary effects of Murray's poetry. In opening the evening, Sandy Stronach said that he was 'glad to see so many kids, as it suggests we will have creative writing in the Doric in the twenty-first century'. The culture, broadly defined, remains under threat from many of the same forces but now such threats are even more crucial a century later.

Moreover, the shifting of the metonymic characters from youth to old age tells us something significant about the further perceived demise in dialect use during the twentieth century and goes some way towards explaining the recent growth of institutions such as the Doric Festival and the Elphinstone Institute. Earlier fears, and similar fears, inspired a flurry of activity in the north-east that included the vernacular poetry of Murray and his peers as well as the folksong collecting of Gavin Greig, James Duncan

and John Ord (as discussed fully in chapter 7). At the dawn of the twentieth century, the concern had been largely with collecting and documenting apparently thriving local and regional cultures. Concern today is, however, instead focused not only on preservation but also, more crucially, on encouraging the production of a particular regional culture. Trips into the field are no longer about collecting but about distributing and circulating the rhetoric of the Elphinstone Institute and encouraging people to write in the Doric. Whereas previously writers had begun writing – not independently of similar rhetoric from elsewhere – in regional dialect rather than Standard English, today, north-eastern literature is moribund with regards to Doric, Scots *and* English.

Conclusions

So, accepting Hewitt's (1995) crucial caveat, we are concerned not with a love of the land and not just a preoccupation with the land but with relations with the land figured in particular and unique ways by north-eastern authors. The north-east for Grassie Gibbon and the early Doric dialect poets is an 'organic' culture region in which the way of life, the dialect and the people are all interdependent – in other words a 'cultural whole'. The north-east of the Doric Festival and the Elphinstone Institute is also, more problematically, posited as such a cultural whole. No longer, however, are we talking about 'organic' cultures, if ever we were, but instead about reflexive attempts at re-creation and preservation by those with a certain amount of access to channels of public discourse.

As I have demonstrated, it is not that the institutions of Doric are necessarily entirely backwards looking, though they largely are, nor that they do not have an eye on the future, but rather that their efforts at preservation and promotion seem ill-thought out, indistinct and without specific goals. Naturally a Doric literary great cannot be legislated for nor wished in to existence, and it would be churlish, unfair and disingenuous of me to criticise the Doric Festival organisers or the Elphinstone Institute staff for not having found what may well not be out there awaiting discovery. It would not, however, be unfair to suggest that these institutions contrive, knowingly or not, to create a context

within which the use of the dialect is profoundly associated with an agricultural heritage rather than, for instance, an urban present or a rural future.

At some point, a transition has been made in which the regional and particularly the dialect literature of the north-east has moved from being a predominantly conventionally literary pursuit to being a predominantly popular pursuit of the amateur. Additionally, in moving from Gibbon's critique and rejection of 'kailyard' to contemporary popular writing, we seem to have come full circle and returned to the sentimentality and whimsy of the 'kailyard' vision of the parish, the *dominie* and the *lad o' pairts*³. These observations, however, has very little to do with literary snobbery or sneering on my part and more to do with the notable absence of north-eastern voices in the contemporary Scottish literary world. There has always been a tension in the north-east in the choosing between being overtly north-eastern Scottish or overtly Scottish in a broader sense. Some have feared the limited audience that a broad north-eastern literature might achieve and have opted instead for a more standardised form of literary Scots or standard English.

My contention would be that the sheer scale of the impact of the Renaissance engineered by MacDiarmid and, later, the home-rule and nationalist movements in Scotland has left regional cultural forms, including regional dialect literature, somewhat standing. While the ideology surrounding the early north-eastern poets of the vernacular revival was concerned with a close relationship to spoken language, prose writing – a tradition entirely without notable precedents – is even more closely related to speech. For someone like Grassie Gibbon this was a very conscious outcome, while for some of those writing today in the popular tradition the same result does not involve the prior adoption of such an explicit or deliberate stance. The lack of a formalised proper language means that spelling and punctuation, especially apostrophes, are variable. More popular writers tend to use a phonetic approach to the representation of the dialect which also produces variable results with variable degrees of effectiveness. Other poets make use of Doric

³ Scottish writing in the Kailyard tradition tends to be formulaic in terms of the characters and themes addressed. The *dominie* is the school teacher in the village school, for example. The notion of the '*lad o' pairts*' is concerned with the idea of opportunity in the Scottish education system – any lad, from any parish can, given the opportunity, make a successful life for himself (see McCrone 1992).

pronunciations while using a more formalised synthetic Scots spelling system so that the intended regional phonology is only revealed in rhyming schemes.

So, within a Doric north-eastern movement, there are those insistent on a proximity to spoken language as well as those who unproblematically produce non-standardised writing that owes rather more to speech than to literature. By the late twentieth century, the strong relation to speech is well-absorbed into literary and literary critical peer groups and the practice of writing in the dialect is well established. MacDiarmid witheringly suggested that Murray had “not one predecessor of any consequence” (See Milton 1999). This suggestion could no longer be said to be the case despite the continued failure of literary historians to adequately account for the role of north-eastern poets in the rebirth of Scots and Scottish literature. Arguably, those writing dialect prose today have the misfortune of having only one predecessor of any consequence – as well as from that person being the esteemed figure of the nationally significant author, Lewis Grassie Gibbon.

The practice of reading the writing of others and of listening to the public pronouncements of cultural organisers in the north-east combine to reproduce the practices of producing writing based on speaking. Thus, while many contemporary writers are not absorbing ideological ideas from Gibbon, MacDiarmid or Murray, some are told to write as they would speak - thus to express their true selves - by writing group organisers. Each reproduction of the same tropes and idioms reinforces the legitimacy of such rhetorical devices. For the purposes of this thesis, the medium of communication – the very style of writing and speaking – is simply another rhetorical device communicating north-easternness, the nature of north-easternness and, above all, an authenticity.

Fortunately for those arguing for the greater proximity to speech and thus reality of the regional dialect traditions, the national tradition of Scotland remains tainted, for them at least, by MacDiarmid's notion of a 'Synthetic Scots' language. In asserting the authenticity of writing in Doric, as opposed to a literary or Synthetic Scots, a key

argument is that the writing reflects the everyday life and speech of north-easterners. Part of the stance here is, very simplistically put, that Doric literature is less contrived and more Real than high literary traditions – even, as so rarely happens, where Doric literature shades over into high literature. The celebration of a major literary figure such as Grassie Gibbon is in spite of the suggestion that his lexical choices were often antiquated and unusual even when he first published *A Scots Quair* (Brown 1982). If this were the case with Gibbon, it was even more so MacDiarmid and his peers as they borrowed from many different dialects to reconstruct a mooted historical Scots national language. Part of the innovation still in contemporary Doric dialect literature lies in the recovery of unusual and unused words. Thus, while continually arguing for the authenticity of the practice of Doric authors, Doric authors are also involved in the reuse of words that are no longer current in everyday contexts. Again, authenticity lies in the past rather than the present. Thus progress within a Doric north-eastern vernacular literature requires authors to look backwards through time and these practices directly contribute to the sense that the Doric is stuck in an agricultural past. Having explored the form and content of the dialect literature, and elements of a tradition of performance, of the north-east in this chapter, Chapter 7 will examine the oral and folksong traditions of the region and, in particular, the collection, performance and promotion of the Bothy Ballads.

Chapter 7: Anither Dash O' Doric: The spectacularisation of the Bothy Ballad tradition

North east Scotland has a rich heritage of folk song and singers. The five songsters on this album...are perhaps the last of a generation of true Bothy Balladeers. (Highlander Music 1999)

Following on from the discussion of a regional literary tradition in chapter 6, this chapter also explores the heritage, changing nature and re-inscription of traditions and, in particular, the Bothy Ballad tradition of north-eastern Scotland. It highlights the processes through which the ballads have moved from everyday, unremarkable practice towards becoming 'tradition', public spectacle and performance. The Bothy Ballads are an important part of an institutionalized "organic" north-eastern culture in which life, tradition, language and people are held to be indivisible. This chapter follows the progress of Bothy Balladeering practices from everyday banal happening to spectacular manifestation of a rhetoric surrounding, and permeating, notions of a distinctive north-east. As outlined earlier, part of the intention of this thesis is to explain some of the work of banality in the making of the region, and here I detail a case in which recontextualisation makes the banal itself into a spectacle.

Key to the spectacularisation of Bothy Balladeering is the making and delineation of the Bothy Ballads as a subset of the rich traditional folksong and ballad traditions of north-eastern Scotland. The original spur to the collectors of folk song was the ethnological doctrine of survivalism within which it was thought that folk cultures as we find them today were mere shadows of earlier, fuller sets of traditions and practices. The Bothy Ballads, in some sense, originate from the bothy system where unmarried, male, agricultural labourers lived in shared bunk-houses between the early nineteenth century and the 1930s, during which period the establishment of a new agricultural system ushered in a time of great social and cultural change in the north-eastern lowlands. The advent of mass literacy, and the partly concomitant growth in publishing, contributed to

the fixing of content and meaning in a previously dynamic ballad tradition. In exploring twentieth century balladeering generally and contemporary Bothy Balladeering in particular, it is clear that the content of the ballads has become ever more fixed with the interventions of ethnologists and other academics while the performance and practice of singing the ballads has undergone a dramatic re-signification. While the lyrical content of the songs remains unchanged, there is now a degree of abstraction taking place through which these songs are forced to represent a north-eastern cultural heritage and to evoke particular ideas about the social, cultural and moral character of north-easterners. This is further complicated by the absorption into the current tradition of a group of songs, of later composition, originally performed in the music halls of the early to mid-twentieth century. This chapter traces out the processes of the spectacularisation of tradition and the movement of these ballads and the Bothy Ballad form from bothy, through field collection, archive and edited collection to contemporary folk festival and academic publication.



Figure 7. 1: Period picture of Bothymen, from North-east Folklore Archive

In what sense, then, do the Bothy Ballads form a *unique* or coherent subset of the rich folksong tradition of the north-east of Scotland? Any such uniqueness is an issue of

situating the Bothy Ballads within, or at least in relation to, broader Scottish and north-eastern ballad and song traditions. The coherence of the Bothy Ballad form, of course, is not only related to lyrical or thematic content or anything inherent in the songs, but is also intrinsically about the processes of collecting, the collectors themselves, the publications and their readers, and the performers, performances and audiences of the ballads. While “there are fears for the future of balladry” (Clark 2001, 18) generally in Scotland, the bothy tradition of the north-east, while by no means the most popular or commonplace Scottish musical tradition, seems to be somewhat more resilient. Here, I am concerned with what might lie behind this apparent resilience and the discursive processes through which the tradition of singing about ploughmen is made meaningful, as well as some of the ideas about the north-east that are repeatedly re-validated through Bothy Balladeering. Initially, though, I will attempt to answer a fairly important opening question: What is a Bothy Ballad?

Bothy Ballads as a cultural form

At Martinmas term I gaed to the fair
To see the braw lasses and to snuff the fresh air,
I feed wi' a mannie to ca' his third pair,
They ca' him John Bruce o' the Corner.

When I gaed hame to this man John Bruce,
He lives owre at Skene in a blue-sclated house,
Sae keen in the fair, but he lookit sae douce,
When I gaed hame to the Corner.

That first Sunday mornin', oor temper to tease,
Oot cam' aul' Johnny wi' a flagon o' grease
To rub oor horse legs frae the queets to the knees,
For they're a' cripple nags at the Corner

From "John Bruce o' The Corner" (Ord 1995, 229)

The Bothy Ballads are, very simply put, about the lives of those who lived in the bothies or chaumers and worked on the farms of north-eastern Scotland. These ballads emerged from the *fermtouns* of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and their content reflected, and reflects, the particular concerns and aspirations of the worker under the improved agricultural system¹. The balladeers cast wry, satirical eyes over north-eastern society and were often preoccupied with the conditions on the farms and in the bothies in which they lived. Bothies were the poor quality stone-built bunk-houses, with very few amenities, that housed unmarried young male labour on the farms. A bothy was, and is, a separate outbuilding used solely for the accommodation of people rather than animals. Chaumers (derivation being from the French *chambre*), on the other hand, were an alternative accommodation for the same group of workers and tended to consist of an upper level (such as a hayloft) in farm buildings furnished with a suitable number of beds. Some controversy exists in the north-east concerning the relative abundance of bothies and chaumers (Buchan 1972; Cameron 1995). Some argue that in the north-east the chaumer dominated whereas the bothies, from which the tradition takes its name, were more common in other parts of lowland Scotland. The songs of those that lived in *both* the chaumers and the bothies, however, are known, for whatever reason, be it simply alliterative or something more significant, as *Bothy* Ballads.

Buchan (1972) tells us that the term Bothy Ballads has been used in two different ways *viz*: 1) to describe all songs sung in the bothies and 2) to describe a particular group of nineteenth century sub-literary productions that address conditions in the bothies and on the farms. In this chapter, I am particularly interested in Buchan's second definition of Bothy Ballads. This focus may seem to fail to address other sorts of songs sung in the bothies or on the farms but this selectivity is related to the ways in which bothy traditions are currently manifested, as will become clear before the end of this chapter. The particular group of nineteenth century sub-literary productions with which this thesis is

¹ The improvement of the agricultural system was essentially related to the consolidation of farms into farmtouns following the clearing of stones from the land, and the building of consumption dykes.

concerned share a number of characteristics with each other that have enabled their grouping together as "Bothy Ballads".

The vast bulk of what are today known as the Bothy Ballads were authored between 1820 and 1860. They represent very personalised accounts of the social and economic networks of nineteenth century Aberdeenshire (Munro 1977) and contain references to particular farms, farmers and labourers. They represent an unspectacular knowledge-from-within (Shotter 1993) of the farming community: everyday knowledges that circulated with effect. The knowledges contained within the Bothy Ballads are, of course, multiple and varied but we can pick out a number of recurrent themes in their accounts of the lives of farm labourers and those surrounding them in rural Aberdeenshire. Four themes that arise again and again as we explore the collected songs are 1) references to work, 2) references to food (generally awful) provided to 'fee'd' labourers, 3) the quality of equipment or livestock on the farms and 4) love, courting and 'lasses'. Generally, each Bothy Ballad addresses one or more of these concerns though some address all four. The Barnyards o' Delgaty, a particularly popular and well-known ballad, is one of those that best illustrates the nature of the Bothy Ballads and, for these reasons, I reproduce below a substantial portion of that ballad.

As I cam in by Netherdale,
At Turra market for to fee,
I fell in wi' a farmer chiel
Frae the Barnyards o' Delgaty.

He promised me the ae best pair
I ever set my e'en upon;
When I gaed hame to Barnyards
There was naething there but skin and bone.

The auld black horse sat on his rump,
The auld white meer lay on her wime,

And a' that I could hup and crack,
They wouldna rise at yokin' time.

Meg Mapherson mak's my brose,
An her and me we canna gree;
First a mote and then a knot,
And aye the ither jilp o' bree.

When I gae to the kirk on Sunday,
Mony's the bonnie lass I see
Prim, sitting' by her daddy's side,
And winkin' owre the pews at me.

I can drink and nae be drunk,
I can fight and nae be slain,
I can court anither's lass,
And aye be welcome to my ain.

My can'le noo it is brunt oot,
The snotter's fairly on the wane;
Sae fare ye weel, ye Barnyards,
Ye'll never catch me here again.

From "The Barnyards o' Delgaty"(Ord 1995, 214-5)

Though we cannot be certain, the assumption in the labelling of the Barnyards o' Delgaty as a traditional Bothy Ballad is that the song was written originally in the first person by a man who had been fee'd² to that farm for a half-year and that the story is therefore

² To be fee'd means to be hired or contracted.

'authentic'. Cultural forms detailing the day-to-day lives of the folk are inherently a part of 'folk culture' (Henderson 1993; Porter 1999a). Naturally, not everybody singing this song, either today or in the 1850s, would have direct experience of working on the Barnyards with the people the song mentions. However, the knowledge that the working horses and cooking (oatmeal, oatmeal and oatmeal) at the Barnyards o' Delgaty, or elsewhere, were appalling would be important in swaying the decisions of people considering undertaking to live and work on that farm for a season or year. Thus, one potential performative effect of ballad singing was in the forming of knowledges held by north-easterners about other parts of the north-east. The reciting, as well as the re-siting, of utterances concerning conditions at the Barnyards, perhaps not independently of knowledge acquired elsewhere, would indirectly disincline labourers to work there and in this way contribute to the active imagining of a north-eastern (whether or not so-named) community. Historical accounts of the ballad tradition (Cameron 1995; Munro 1977) as well as the ballads themselves tell us that some farmers had to travel considerable distances to counteract these knowledges when recruiting new staff. The gathering of farm workers to sing and listen to ballads presumably enabled the exchange of news, stories and gossip as well as song. The lyrical content of the ballads, as well as the more general communicative exchanges at least in part facilitated by the desire for communion and entertainment that the ballads reflect, was responsible for the circulation of both specific knowledges concerning particular events or people *and* a general sense of what their lives and those of their peers were like, and a sense of community. The performative effects of the ballads today, however, are quite different as their continued performance reflects a more spectacular and creative imagining of community that is both more explicit and less successful than the relatively unproblematic reconstruction of a nineteenth century community of agricultural labourers. The ballad authors of 1820-1860 were not, in any way, interested in the creation of a distinctive regional tradition or voice.

The Bothy Ballads and everyday life

If the ballads do not represent the conscious or deliberate birth of a north-eastern identity they are equally not the protest songs of a heavily politicised or class-aware rural proletariat (Munro 1977). Bothy Ballads are not, on the whole, about the class position

of agricultural labourers, the wealth and greed of capitalist farmers nor the nature of wage labour in general, but instead about the highly specific personal relationships between particular people in particular places at particular times. The politics of the Bothy Ballads is intensely personal and at some remove from formal political systems. Certainly, the ballads *could* be read as accounts of more general conditions or used to illustrate broader concerns but, more often than not, the innocent intention of their production was not to attack an abstract capitalist system, but rather particular individuals within that system for the value of entertainment. Those individuals were not conceived of as a part of a broader class system and the language of the ballads was simple and unaffected, unconcerned with the preservation of regional dialect use. The innocence of the ballads contributes something to their contemporary appeal – a harking back to times when things were simpler and before “traditional culture” was significantly eroded.

The mid-nineteenth century represents perhaps the only period during which the composing and singing of the Bothy Ballads was an entirely naturalised and unremarkable occurrence, the only time when the lyrical content could be taken at face value and was practically, rather than figuratively, meaningful. However, to label the ballads produced at this time ‘banal’ might be to overlook the innovation inherent in the form that the bothymen produced. Bothy Ballads introduced strong realist tendencies into regional folksong representing a significant break with the epic ballad tradition of the region and they also herald a democratisation of the story-telling process. David Buchan (1972) points to one particular song, known variously as “Baron turned Ploughman” or “The Hireman’ Chiel”, as indicative of this shift in both content and practitioners, and the supposed ‘bastardisation’ of a more refined oral tradition. Unconcerned with fantasy and superstition, Bothy Ballads instead addressed everyday themes of vital importance to fee’d labourers – and addressed them in their own terms. The period of enhanced creativity for the bothymen, however, was relatively short-lived and within five decades it seem that those who wished to express themselves had done so and composition waned.

What is particularly interesting about the Bothy Ballads as a group of songs is that those

composed before about 1860 constitute the tradition with very little composition taking place in the years after this period – despite the continuation of ostensibly the same farming and labouring system. Composition only really appears to have begun again once the agricultural communities and their ways of life had undergone significant change later in the twentieth century. Then, during the second half of the nineteenth century, a particular set of ballads became standardised across the region as migratory workers carried songs to their new places of work and shared them, as literacy spread and as schooling became a more common experience (Buchan 1972; Fenton 1993; Milton 1999). Porter (1999a) tells us that once ballads were available as published texts there was less variation as particular versions became established. This transition period saw ballad texts circulated by travelling chapmen (on chap-sheets) and in popular collections as publishing became cheaper and reading more popular. This represents a period of movement from the traditional oral means of cultural transmission to a written means of communication – during the mid-nineteenth century the oral and the written co-existed and both contributed to the spread of standardised ballad forms. The language of publishing was often English or standard Scots rather than the dialect of the north-east and so it was that standardised forms contain many linguistic elements external to the region – however, to this day, lyrics are often pronounced in a decidedly north-eastern style rather than the ways in which they might be written on the pages of Ord or Greig-Duncan. By the end of this period, while the singing of the ballads remained a common, everyday event for many people, the meanings were beginning to become less directly significant as their currency changed from contemporary commentary to historical, and from innovative to traditional (not, of course, that traditions cannot be innovative).

Alongside these standardised songs there sprang up a new series of Bothy Ballads, composed during the twentieth century, that largely addressed the same concerns and seemed, in many senses, similar to the older ballads. Munro (1977, p197) calls these songs a “pastiche” of the Bothy Ballads. Their composers, men such as George Morris, Willie Kemp and George Bruce Thompson – whom contemporary balladeer Jock Duncan calls “my pop idols” (Duncan 2000) – were certainly north-easterners with rural connections, but they did not live in bothies nor subsist entirely on oatmeal or plough

with horses. Where their Bothy Ballads or cornkisters crucially differed from the older ballads they also performed and recorded was in their relationship to then contemporary agricultural life. Where it is assumed that the earlier “traditional” (i.e. those *without* named authors) ballads directly reflected ‘real’ lives and persons, the music hall ballads are assumed to be fictions and to *not* belong to folk culture – *mere* music hall. While their compositions may have owed something to their personal experiences and acquaintances, it is equally the case that they owed just as much, if not more, to the existing body of Bothy Ballads. They are the apparently less ‘authentic’ songs and thus excluded explicitly in the collecting of Ord (1930) and implicitly in the scholarship of Buchan (1972). While, however, these ballads were excluded from scholarly collections and remain largely absent from north-eastern ballad scholarship, they remain an important element of contemporary performance. The current tradition of performance has stronger connections with past performance and the canon of past performers than with academic practice. The notion of what a Bothy Ballad is contains important distinctions in terms of origin and date of composition and nothing has been more instrumental in the figuring and making of these ballads as north-eastern regional tradition than the work of folksong collectors around the turn of the twentieth century. While the songs had certainly been sung and known before they were collected, it was the process of collecting that enabled them to be put together and viewed as a coherent body of regional tradition.

Agricultural fieldwork and ethnological fieldwork

The work of the Elphinstone Institute and the organisers of the Doric Festival, experts and enthusiasts alike, is driven by an apparent *will to catalogue* that which survives and to record it for posterity. This, of course, is nothing either new or unusual as far as the study and propagation of traditional cultures is concerned. The collecting and cataloguing of folk tradition is, and always has been, important in the construction of a folk (Boyes 1993) and the north-east of Scotland has a particularly strong tradition of collecting. The region has played host to collectors and scholars from across the world and these scholars have been key in the formation of a discourse of north-eastern regional tradition as well as in the development of ethnology as an academic discipline more

generally.

The current general editor of the Greig-Duncan collection, Emily Lyle (1992), in recognising the necessarily partial process that always results of field (or any other) collection, has suggested that, at best, the process of collection has left us with a "bucketful from the ocean." Ballad scholars, of course, *are* aware that that which has been collected does not constitute a total tradition but, instead, imagine collections to constitute that which survives – or, rather, survived pre-collecting. However, while making this important recognition there is an implicit, sometimes explicit, tendency to assume that tradition could be, in some sense, bounded, is finite and could be fully recovered – or rather could have been fully recovered with either different techniques or more thorough 'scientific' collecting. This, of course, represents a fundamental misunderstanding in that it apprehends culture as a totality that can be retrieved, documented and known – even where lip service might be paid to the recognition of dynamism.

This thesis, instead, considers "north-eastern Scottish culture" to be essentially impossible to bound and, at the very least, significantly broader (not to mention deeper) than might be imagined from the writings of north-eastern cultural enthusiasts and experts. Not, of course, that experts and enthusiasts would necessarily argue that Bothy Ballads and the rural context of their origin are the only manifestation of a distinctive north-easterness – even less would they argue that these represent, or ever did represent, the cultural totality of the region. However, it remains the case that, little else in the north-east is constantly presented and represented as being quintessentially, or even distinctively, north-eastern. Why, then, is this?

The literature (Allen 2000: Hewitt 1982: McClure 1987) repeatedly tells us that the north-east has one of the richest regional ballad folksong traditions in the United Kingdom, Western Europe and even the world. Given the large numbers of collectors that have plied their trade in the rural north-east, it is difficult to tell to what extent this might be either objectively 'true' or the result of their vociferous collecting – i.e. those

that collect tend to find something worthy of collection. Collections have been made by both individuals working alone and by dedicated institutions. Certainly, however, we can be sure that much in the way of evidence to support these claims of a particularly rich and strong regional song tradition *has* been found in the region and that the processes of collection have been crucial in establishing the north-eastern song and ballad traditions with which this thesis is concerned.

The collecting of folk song in the north-east has involved both north-easterners and those from outside the region with broader concerns in folk cultures more generally. The great ballad scholar Francis Edward Child collected widely in the north-east and many of the alternative versions within his publication “The English and Scottish Popular Ballads” (1882-98) are attributed to singers from the region. Child’s influential work was premised upon a notion that particular versions of particular ballads were *better* or more ‘authentic’ than others. This relates to the close relationship between the then ascendant paradigm of comparative ethnology / folklore and philology, and a desire to trace stories, narrative structures and songs back to their ultimate origins. In much the same way that philology used a comparative approach towards vocabulary and shifting sound patterns to attempt to derive an ‘original’ Indo-European language, comparative folklorists sought to trace variations in story-types to establish what older, ‘original’ stories might have been. The assumption of such a ‘survivalist’ approach to folklore studies was that, rather than being always dynamic and creative, folk culture had decayed and been debased by Modern life – ideas such as those that drove the work of collectors such as Cecil Sharp in England (Boyes 1993) and those collecting in the north-east of Scotland. Within such a conceptual system typologies are drawn up and alternative versions are compared to establish which version is the most authentic or, in some cases, simply the ‘best’. Even today, commentators often proudly mention the fact that many of Child’s “best versions”, his so-called “A-texts”, were of north-eastern origin (Allen 2000: Hewitt 1982: Milton 2000).

One of the earliest collections made exclusively in the north-east was that known as the Glenbuchat MSS, held today in the University of Aberdeen and reputedly collected in the

Deeside parish of Glenbuchat sometime before 1818, according to inscriptions on the manuscript (Olsen 1997). The Glenbuchat manuscript is highly localised in content and was not intended to push any sort of regional cultural agenda, though this has not prevented later scholars from using it to illustrate the strength of the north-eastern ballad tradition. Another, slightly earlier and more influential, collector was Sir Walter Scott. While Scott did not himself undertake much, if any, fieldwork in the north-east of Scotland, there is evidence that he was in contact with a number of collectors in the area when putting together the three volumes of his “Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border” collection that appeared in 1802 and 1803 (Buchan 1972). Scott, of course, like Robbie Burns before him, was a prominent force in the forging of a Romantic Scottishness and the popularising of Scottish traditions (see Chapter 9 for fuller discussion). There are often cries of indignation from north-eastern specialists that many of the versions of ballads that eventually made it into his collection had in fact come from the north-east rather than from the Borders and, therefore, were not technically Border Ballads. Scott’s volumes, however, rarely reproduced any collected song without some re-writing by the editor and included many songs from all over the United Kingdom. Although the importance and influence of these earlier collections is undeniable, two particular collections are of special interest to this thesis – both being made somewhat later, and both having more direct influence on contemporary thought, than the above mentioned earlier forays into the lives and songs of north-eastern rural-dwellers.

In 1896, The New Spalding Club at the University of Aberdeen, a general antiquaries club that sponsored various forms of academic research and publication, commissioned Gavin Greig, A New Deer school teacher, and the Reverend James Duncan to examine the folksong traditions of the north-east and to collect together versions of songs and ballads from the region. This Greig and Duncan did and, despite selectivity in which ballads they transcribed, they gathered almost 3000 different versions of songs during the early years of the twentieth century. Another key collection is that made by north-east born Glasgow police officer, John Ord. Ord was, like his friends Greig and Duncan, selective in what he collected – for example excluding “music hall” songs such as “McGinty’s Meal ‘n’ Ale” and “The Mucking o’ Geordie’s Byre” that remain popular

today– but was unique in his focussing upon the songs of the bothies and farm kitchens of Aberdeen, Banff, Moray, Angus and the Mearns. Ord remains the primary source of Bothy Ballads. In north-eastern Scotland, the Greig-Duncan folk song collection, now held at the University of Aberdeen, and John Ord's "The Bothy Songs and Ballads" (1995[1930]) have been crucial in establishing and legitimising a regional Bothy Ballad tradition. Popular and academic discussions of the ballads tend to make use of these two sources as their raw materials – Ord has recently been republished due to public demand while the editing of the Greig-Duncan has recently been completed (2002) with the final volume published by the University of Aberdeen Press (a process begun during the 1980s (Fenton 1995). This later phase of preparing for publication, republication and scholarship is intimately tied in with the development of ethnology as a formal academic discipline in Scotland, and the associated shift whereby commentators have moved from being primarily enthusiasts to being primarily experts.

Scottish ethnology

The development of ethnology as a discipline in Scotland has been slow in comparison to many other nations, including England and, in particular, the Scandinavian countries. Scotland's first chair of ethnology was established at the University of Edinburgh's School of Scottish Studies in 1990; the second was at the Elphinstone Institute in 1995 (Fenton 1993; Olsen 1997). A key figure in the 1950s founding of the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh was Hamish Henderson, also influential in the Scottish Folk Music revival from the 1950s onwards and a field collector in the north-east. Interestingly, unlike during the folk revival in England (Boyes 1993), the early phases of the collection of folksong in north-eastern Scotland were not tied in with attempts to encourage public performance or wider participation. Collectors, returning from the field, felt that north-eastern Scottish folksong was a living rural tradition that did not need fostering in order to survive (despite the recognition that some songs were falling out of use).



Figure 7. 2: Bothy Ballad Albums

The work of ethnologists and antiquarians at the turn of the twentieth century, then, and the current work of the Elphinstone Institute has been vital in the framing of thought about north-eastern tradition and in framing a north-eastern culture. Collections of folksong and libraries containing dialect writings establish a broad tradition which acts as a legitimate institutional framework for the contemporary (re)enactments this chapter now moves to consider.

Ploughman turned showman

Ross Records annual “Saturday Night at the Auld Meal Mill” show in Aberdeen has remained a firm favourite with North East folk since its inception away back in 1982. (Ross Records 2000)

The late-twentieth century and early-twenty first century Bothy Ballad scene is comprised of a small number of balladeers performing at regular events across the north-east and recording albums and videos. The Bothy Ballads, however, are in no sense the most popular form of Scottish ‘folk’ music and have not enjoyed the popular, mainstream success of Gaelic song and musical forms. There are, however, commercial recordings available at specialised records shops, or at the Bothy Ballad events, that enable enthusiasts, fans even, to re-site elements of the rhetoric of an agricultural north-

easterness in their homes or cars. There are a number of record labels based in the region, and beyond, specialising in folk music generally and in Bothy Ballad recordings in particular. These include Ross Records, Greentrax (associated with the Centre for Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh), Sleepytown Records and Ythan Records. Albums and videos are often the work of individual artists (i.e. solo albums) or are compilations that feature a number of different balladeers performing a number of different ballads. Despite this market, the core of contemporary Bothy Balladeering, however, is performance and the next section outlines the nature of the live 'scene' before I move on to examine in detail some recent performances.

The Big Five of the Bothy Ballads

The scene is small and close-knit enough to be largely, though not entirely, dominated by a very small group of performers – the Big Five of Tam Reid, Joe Aitken, Jock Duncan, Gordon Easton and Eric Simpson. Many of the commercial albums mentioned above feature the five male artists widely known as “The Big 5” of contemporary balladeering although others, such as Charlie Allan, have produced a string of Bothy Ballad releases and more mainstream folksingers often incorporate one or more ballads into their albums. The Big Five, as the shorthand name by which they are known as a group hints at, are the most well-known, popular and established performers on the current Bothy Ballad scene and have each year, since 1998, been the five finalists in the Aberdeenshire Bothy Ballad Championship. Tam Reid, Joe Aitken, Jock Duncan, Gordon Easton and Eric Simpson are also, not least because of their seniority in years and connections with rural communities, seen, as the quote opening this chapter illustrates, as the last of a generation of authentic balladeers.

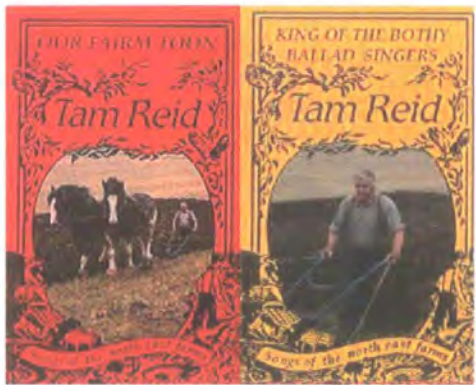


Figure 7. 3: Tam Reid Albums

Tam (or Tom) Reid was crowned “The Bothy Ballad King” in 1977 after a competition at the Turriff show. Tam has released many Bothy Ballad albums (see fig.7.3) and a video (fig.7.4) entitled “King of Bothy Ballads” during a long recording career. Tam currently runs the Cullerlie Farm Park and Heritage Centre, a farming museum, near Echt on the family estate that he and his father previously farmed “in the traditional way” (Elphinstone Institute 2001). As well as performing at events across the north-east, Reid is committed to the promotion of the Doric both at Cullerlie and through visits to schools, sometime under the auspices of the Elphinstone Institute.



Figure 7. 4: Tam Reid "King of the Bothy Ballads" Video.

In terms of contemporary Bothy Balladeering practice there are two different kinds of events that frequently take place across north-eastern Scotland. The Bothy Ballad concerts or competitions, or individual performances of Bothy Ballads within larger concerts, are the most common of the two with major competitions taking place each year at Cullerlie Farm Park, Echt and at Ellon Academy (as a part of the Doric Festival). The Bothy Ballad competition event at Echt is organised by the owners of Cullerlie Farm Park, Tam “King of the Bothy Ballads” Reid and his wife Ann, and is staged during the last week of each April. The Aberdeenshire Bothy Ballad Championship at Ellon Academy is staged each October during the Doric Festival. Ronnie Cairns and Maureen Bell of Ythan Music, a musical heritage association and recording company based in Ellon, revived this event in 1998 after a sixty-year hiatus. In addition to these major balladeering events, Bothy Balladeers make appearances to sing one or two songs during other folk music concerts in the north-east either as a part of a major festival - such as the Doric Festival or the Stonehaven Folk Festival – or as a regular turn at the numerous folk clubs that exist across the region.

At the Bothy Ballad concerts, individual balladeers perform alone, other than for grand finale sing-a-longs. The performances take the form of one man, dressed in non-current agricultural clothing, singing Bothy Ballads without musical accompaniment and with the additional offering of witty, earthy, couthy banter (naturally in the Doric dialect) before and between numbers. At some events these performances take place against the backdrop of a mock-up bothy stage-set that demonstrates the origin of, some of, the songs being sung. The very acts of building, assembling and performing in front of a stage-set separates these ballad performances from the everyday



Figure 7. 5: Joe Aitken

The second common type of bothy event in north-eastern Scotland is the “Bothy Nicht” concert or competition which involves teams of performers rather than individuals. These events seek to recreate the atmosphere of bothies and bothy entertainment beyond simply the Bothy Ballads and include dancers, fiddlers and other musicians, penny fustles (whistles) and the performance of other traditional songs. The groups of performers are known as Bothy “Crews” in a usage that echoes the use of the same term in the description of teams of agricultural labourers - as in the bitter final stanza of the Bothy Ballad “Drumdelgie” in which the protagonist sings “I leave ye as I got ye, A maist unceevil crew.” During the 1970s such performances featured regularly on Grampian Television, most notably in the show “Bothy Nichts”. Broadcasts such as “Bothy Nichts” are today very rare and have been replaced by what might be considered more mainstream folk music styles from within the Grampian Television geographical area. Despite this apparent decline in popularity, at least with those organising broadcasting, what is particularly striking about the Bothy Ballad circuit is the very vibrancy and popularity of the scene. Ian Russell, Director of the Elphinstone Institute suggested to me that if a folk concert in, for example, Cornwall had been put together once in a year, and had attracted 200 people, it would be hailed as a great success whereas “up here, they can do that 12 times in a year” in what is “the closest thing we have to a Grand Prix circuit” (Interview with Ian Russell, 2000).

In examining the Bothy Ballad tradition as practised today it seems that bothy conditions, hard labour and miserly farmers are still the primary concerns of the balladeers. The same ballads with the same lyrical content are still performed. Despite the regional decline in the importance of agricultural employment, the collapse of the *fermtoun* system from which the ballads are held to originate, and the embeddedness of both performers and spectators in very different social milieux, the ballads are still concerned with the specifics of an agricultural past when ploughmen and their Clydesdale horses worked the land. This remains the case when the songs sung are those composed during the twentieth century given that those compositions are very similar to the songs of the

bothies and the fact that, despite their apparently separate origins, these similar songs with similar lyrical content reproduce the same ideas about the rurality and agricultural nature of the region. These later creations also, of course, constitute a crucial and largely undifferentiated element of today's tradition of performance.

The Aberdeenshire Bothy Ballad Championship Final

The final of the Aberdeenshire Bothy Ballad Championship at Ellon Academy, Aberdeenshire, was the most heavily attended event that I witnessed while conducting field research during the 1999 Doric Festival, with in excess of 250 people in the audience. Each year, since the event was (re)established in 1998, the Big Five of the Bothy Ballads have been on the stage at Ellon dressed in period agricultural clothing singing songs about the lives of nineteenth and twentieth century farmworkers (See fig 7.6). The Aberdeenshire Bothy Ballad Championship was introduced and compeered by Les Wheeler of the North East of Scotland Heritage Trust and judged by Sandy Stronach and Douglas Prosser (see Chapter 5). Wheeler, something of a Doric enthusiast (see for example Wheeler 1985), delighted the audience with his jokes about the north-east and north-easterners as well as jokes and anecdotes, all told in the Doric, that did *not* especially hinge on anything uniquely north-eastern (e.g. fairly standard wife or mother-in-law jokes).

In Ellon Academy school hall there was an appreciation of the talent of the balladeers and the importance of their tradition – an appreciation palpable in the excited atmosphere prior to the concert, the reverence with which the performers were treated and in the fact that people had turned up at all. More importantly, people were enjoying themselves. Here the Bothy Ballads perform a similar to function, although on a different basis, to that they fulfilled in the nineteenth century bothies. People were being entertained in what is now a highly unusual manner that is inherently about the past rather than the present – but, entertained they were. The elevation of the balladeers to the stage, in spite of attempts to recreate the bothy on-stage, additionally move the practices of bothy balladeering tradition from banality to spectacle. The Bothy Ballads have not, in themselves, however, become spectacular: each performance constitutes a new spectacle

and a newly spectacular intervention into the banality of the lives of audience members. These are not chance encounters with impromptu performers and performances, and the staging of such concerts is neither unproblematic nor unreflexive. Now, as we know, nothing *just* happens but the key difference between the singing of ballads in the bothy at the end of a day's work and the performing of ballads on stage in a school hall as a part of a folk festival is in the degree of organisation required and the intent behind that organisation.

SATURDAY 14TH OCTOBER, 7.30PM - EVENT 33
"The Aberdeenshire Bothy Ballad Championship"
- The Concert Hall, Ellon Academy

Can Joe Aitken, winner of last year's sell out competition, defend his title against quality performances from Jock Duncan, Tam Reid and several other bothy champions?

Find out at this prestigious event, where other entertainment will be provided by top accordionist, Gordon Patullo and ballad singer, Maureen Bell.

North-east Heritage Director, Les Wheeler has the difficult job of deciding on the winner of the £200 first prize and compere Sandy Reid (formerly ane o The Twa Bobbies!) will mak sure that everything goes according to plan.

Tickets £5.50 Concession £3.00

Tickets from Ythan Music - 01779 841543, J.A. Innes (Electricians), 59 Station Road, Ellon and The Doric Festival Box Office



Figure 7. 6 Advert for Bothy Ballad Championship. Doric Festival Programme 1999.

If it can reasonably be suggested, and I believe this thesis proves that it can, that the community of organisers and performers is small and integrated, it is equally true that the community of spectators, which also includes those organisers and performers, is just as small. The people attending this final were those that had attended some of the earlier championship heats, previous championship finals and numerous other Bothy Ballad concerts. As detailed earlier, similar events do take place at other times and places but *not* everyday. Certainly the people at the Championship Final, already converted to the cause, were familiar with the performers and their ballads but the events still have not

achieved a sustainable banality. An *a priori* condition of the Doric Festival is that events that take place under that banner during that fortnight are not commonplace otherwise. If such events were commonplace, a Doric Festival would not have been deemed necessary or important enough to have been established. Elements of banality remain at such concerts, however, in the everyday north-eastern speech of Les Wheeler, the audience and the performers in their between-song banter. This everyday speech is in sharp contrast to the language of the ballads. Certainly, some north-easterners speak in a way that is quite like the language of the ballads but, and here I am hardly being controversial, the specialist terms relating to agriculture, horses and the delights of brose (for example) are not a part of their everyday lives or speech. Not, of course, that this especially matters since people attend such events not to hear the current news about events at the Barnyards o' Delgaty but to be entertained by that mysterious Other, the Teuchter. Like the Hill-Billy or the Country Bumpkin, the point of the cult figure of the Teuchter is that his (or possibly her) ways of life and speaking are different, impenetrable and archaic.

The competitors metonymically represented the historical agricultural system of the north-east and the social, cultural and moral codes that were, and are, bound up with that system. They suggested that these values underlie contemporary north-eastern life, that this heritage has been important in the shaping of the contemporary north-east and north-easterner, and that there is something enduring about the folk personality of the region. In that room in Ellon, on that evening, an imagined north-eastern community communed.

The Traditional Song of North East Scotland

One of the most interesting events that I have attended as a part of my fieldwork was a somewhat unusual, as far as my limited experiences go, conference-concert hybrid, "The Traditional Song of North East Scotland", staged by the Elphinstone Institute in May 2000. This consisted of four lectures, more properly talks, on folksong with frequent musical interludes during which the speaker would offer renditions of folksongs in order to illustrate their points.

Charlie Allan³, offered the members of the public, and the very few academics from the University of Aberdeen, present a heartfelt plea for the preservation of the Bothy Ballads as well as a potted history of the form. Charlie, who considers himself to be an amateur Bothy Balladeer in comparison to the “Big 5” of the current scene (Interview with Charlie Allan 2000), maintained the scholarly distinction between the early nineteenth century Bothy Ballads and the later popular songs, although with some important additional comment. Allan objects to the description of the songs of George Morris, Willie Kemp and George Bruce Thompson being labelled as *mere* music hall and maintains that they, like their forbears, constitute important social documents that provide a wealth of fascinating glimpses at rural life. These songs operate as social documents despite the removal of their authors from the ways of life they describe. Indeed, we might ask, in terms of performance and audience reception, what the difference between the two sets of ballads might be. Surely once the characters, heroes and villains of the songs are unknown to the singer and the audience, it need not matter whether the ballad originated during the nineteenth or twentieth century? Neither should the distinction between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ particularly matter. These distinctions remain matters of concern only to academics and other unduly concerned with ‘authenticity’ while performers and listeners / viewers freely chose from among the entire body of Bothy Ballads. All of these songs, and the practices of performing them, evoke notions of an agricultural past – a past of no particular antiquity – and a north-easterness of a particular sort.

Evoking the past and creating the present

Contemporary Bothy Balladeers *do* tend to hail from agricultural or rural backgrounds but, unsurprisingly given the passage of time, agricultural backgrounds significantly different to those of nineteenth century bothymen. Not that their chief concern is to recreate authentically nineteenth century rural dwellers lives. Audiences are aware that bothy conditions were hard and harsh and that the work on the farms harder and harsher

³ One time economic historian, farmer, graduate of Aberdeen University, Bothy Balladeer, saviour of the *Leopard* magazine and former World Champion Caber Tossler

still. The singers, none of whom have lived precisely the lives they sing about, are also aware of the need to evoke the conditions and the hard work of the bothyman. That such a form of life was a difficult and unpleasant one is readily acknowledged. This is sufficient: no discussion beyond the fact that it was simply hard work to plough fields with horses and to harvest without machinery is offered or sought. To suggest that bothymen were in some way the dupes of their employers, would be to undermine the amusing images of the bothymen as the moral, hardy, manly men of the region. It is ironic that, despite the realist properties of the Bothy Ballads themselves, spectators do not, on the whole, address the issues the ballads raise in any meaningful way. The bothy man was and is a loveable rogue. The hard-working, God-fearing, heavy-drinking (given the opportunity) and sexually promiscuous (given the opportunity) Bothy *loons* represent popular, heroic, rustic and comic characters.

Interestingly, although the revived tradition of the late-twentieth and early-twenty first centuries has been injected with additional meaning, ballads are not being used to make any explicitly political points. No moral judgement regarding the nature of the bothy and farmtoun systems is made, although comment on the appalling conditions and the relative wealth of improving farmers does tend to be made. The lyrical content of the ballads matters: it is just that it does not matter *that* much. Lyrical content is fixed at the time of an earlier production of the tradition. Certainly, performance is still, as ever, creative but little of that creativity is related to lyrical content. Although each and every performance represents a production in its own right, it seems self-evident that what we are seeing is a re-inscription of tradition. Stories of everyday lives are being re-signified to tell us something about the north-east and north-easterners: that the people are attached to the land, unique, speak in a distinctive manner and have a dry sense of humour. Here, the rhetoric of the balladeers and the academic practitioners being to merge though retaining important differences.

While, as detailed earlier, the major collections run to several thousands of ballads, it would be fair to say that the contemporary canon of frequently performed ballads does not consist of many more than about twenty widely known Bothy Ballads. This narrower

tradition of performance hints at some degree of personal agency for performers although their practice still draws on the legitimate credentials of the scholarly collections as well as more recent traditions of performance and recording. The performance of Bothy Ballads and academic archives or publications complement each other to co-produce, or co-perform, the north-east through practice. That the tradition is still practised legitimises the academic endeavour which has previously catalogued, archived and created that tradition: the figuring of the tradition through collection and archiving in turn provides the indirect links to past practice that legitimise contemporary traditional practice.

So, despite the balladeers' rural north-eastern backgrounds, contemporary Bothy Ballad renditions constitute performances in a very conventional sense of the word in that these re-creations evoke the lives of north-easterners engaged in a technologically and socially very different farming system. Boyes (1993) details the ways in which the standardisation of song and dance performances during the English Folk Revival came to manifest tradition as the repetition of perceived past practice. Each performance of each Bothy Ballad is very similar to another performance of that ballad: the creativity of folk practice has been lost with the fixing of lyrical content and the codification of practice (Buchan 1972). That fixed content is now used to mobilise more general notions of north-easterness rather than to describe particular events in particular lives. Still those particularities are described – it is just that they have become almost incidental. The (re)imagined past of the balladeers draws on rhetoric about the agricultural heritage of the region and the importance of this in the shaping of the people that circulates more widely in the north-east. The practices of dressing in farming clothing and singing these particular ballads is thus conceived of as one possible rhetorical device through which arguments about the north-east are imbued with legitimacy and apparent authenticity. These contemporary ballad performances work to re-institute the region through the restating of ready-mades that appear to be external to the explicit content of the ballads themselves. The dramatic re-contextualisation of the ballads enables them to be put to use for different rhetorical purposes while retaining their 'original' form. The lyrical

content does, however, importantly retain the agricultural references and, more crucially, remains largely expressed in the Doric dialect of the region.

The spectacular north-east

This chapter has outlined the ways in which the Bothy Ballads have been infused with extra cultural significance as they have moved from banal everyday practice to more spectacular public performance – as they have moved from the bothy to the stage. We have seen how what appear to be the same practices can come to carry radically different meanings at different times, and in different contexts, of production and consumption. Most significantly, we have seen the tensions involved in presenting the spectacular as though it *were* the banal – not of course that the programmes of events organised by the Elphinstone Institute or the Doric Festival represent the most sustained attempts at the enforced normalisation of folk traditions. The region is repeatedly figured and refigured through the practices of Bothy Balladeering although, in contrast to other bases of north-eastern identity, this process has something, indeed quite a lot, of the public spectacle about it. The next chapter draws together the materials presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 to examine the ways in which the banal and the fatal interact to reconstitute varied north-eastern Scotlands – both the everyday and the not-so-everyday. The Bothy Ballads and the “cultural whole” to which they are held to belong *do* relate to a north-eastern Scottish everyday. It is just that it is not *today*.

Chapter 8: Making Scotland Highland

“The whole concept of a distinct Highland culture and tradition is a retrospective invention”. Trevor-Roper (1983, 15).

This chapter introduces Section 3 of the thesis, which is about Highland Games and Gatherings, and the work of such tradition in the ideological and practical perpetuation of a Scottish nation. As such, I will demonstrate the processes through which a spectacular Highland vision of Scotland is manifested having first outlined some of the banality that underpins and makes possible such imaginings. I am concerned with the performative effects of language and practice and the ways in which words and actions actively achieve outcomes. To this end, I will examine the ritual re-performance and re-creation of Scotland and Scottishness through the enactment of codified, regulated and ordered social actions and the deployment of material culture at Highland Games meets. Before outlining the spectacular reproduction of Scottishness in Chapters 9 and 10, I will use this prologue to outline some of the characteristics of a hegemonic Highland culture and to briefly outline some of the banal underpinnings that enable events such as Highland Games to successfully imagine a particular Scottishness.

The production of Scottishness in Scotland has never been a simplistic process and Chapters 8, 9 and 10 engage with important questions surrounding what Scottishness actually is or might be. Recognising different visions of what Scotland might be or have been, I now examine the ways in which a Highland regional and Scottish national identity has been promoted in an attempt to find some of the reasons for the different degree of success this has achieved as compared to a Doric speaking north-eastern Scottishness. The story of the adoption of a Highland imagery by the broader Scottish nation and the conflation of this Highland culture with a national culture are by now well documented (Cameron 1998; Colley 1996; Davidson 2000; Devine 2000; Lorimer 1999; MacDonald 1998; Withers 1988). What is not so well documented, however, is the daily, even

momentary, (re)production and performance of this variety of Scottishness. Based on extensive fieldwork at Highland gatherings over the summers of 1999, 2000 and 2001, Section 2 of this thesis examines the discursive and embodied practices that enable the reconstitution of a Highland Scotland in the lowland north-east. This will then be contrasted, in Chapter 11, with the production and reproduction of a “Doric” culture region. The politics of the organisation, production and presentation of north-eastern vernacular literature and oral tradition has been less successful than a Highland culture in capturing popular and critical attention and I will show processes through which this situation has arisen and persisted in the north-east. This is achieved through an explication of the discursive and institutional settings both historically and in contemporary times that key agents operate in, and the roles these play in determining the performative power of particular utterances.

The Highland Culture of Scotland

The Scottishness, and especially the Highlandness, of Scotland is constantly reconstructed through the employment and circulation of a limited number of icons that have come to represent Scottish culture (McCrone et al 1995). These icons include “tartan, Glencoe, Bonnie Prince Charlie and Culloden, Bannockburn, Burns, Mary Queen of Scots, Whisky, Edinburgh Castle and much more” (McCrone et al 1995, 4). The proliferation of such a limited iconography of Scotland with such a Highland focus has come to be termed ‘Tartantry’ (Gold and Gold 1995; McCrone et al 1995). When it came to the building, if not rebuilding, of a Scottish nation in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Highlands were raided for their rich stock of icons and symbols for use in the representation and realisation of nationhood. Today, Scottish tourism and national consciousness rests largely on the telling and selling of an idealised and partial history and, through this, the construction of a mythical self from a mythical Other. Kilts, tartans and bagpipes have been and remain important artefacts of material culture employed in the conjuring up of a distinctive Highland culture and the ways in which these artefacts have been deployed in the field are vital in the recreation of the nation.

The basis of national consciousness in Scotland was laid after political Union with England in 1707 and principally between 1746 and 1820 despite the contribution to nationhood of earlier periods and events. While the Wars of Independence or the signing of the Declaration of Arbroath may not satisfy Davidson's (2000) rigorous definition of popular nationhood, they do hold an important place in the memory of the nation and do point to the early mobilisation of a shared Scottishness among certain sectors of Scottish society. While undoubtedly much of the contemporary importance of such historical episodes can be attributed to retrospective myth-making during and since the eighteenth century, much of it equally cannot. Davidson points to a failure, prior to 1746, to fully come to terms with the Highlands as a part of the nation as a key obstacle to the forming of a Scottish national consciousness and convincingly argues that, once the failure of Jacobitism enabled integration to take place, the Highlands and Highlanders were initially absorbed into a British nation-state and Empire rather than a Scottish nation. The rise of a Scottish national consciousness is impossible without an associated British national consciousness as the two developed in tandem (Davidson 2000; Devine 2000; Colley 1996). Despite the fact that Scotland, as a nation, displays a quite remarkable awareness of the inventedness of tradition in the ironic engagement with symbols of the nation (Lorimer 2002), Davidson (2000) suggests that contemporary Scottish academics have failed to fully expose the myths of the nation for fear of undermining cultural and political nationalisms dependent on such symbols of nationhood. Thus Davidson (2000) incites us *not* to continue to explore the meaning and significance of "Tartanry" to the people of Scotland but instead to reveal the duping that Scots continue to suffer at the hands of nationalists and that prevents the achievement of Socialism. A Highland culture is used throughout Scotland, both Highland and Lowland, to represent Scotland and Scottishness. In addition to the elements of a material Highland culture (tartan, formal dress, Jacobite imagery on shortbread tins etc.) there are popular song and musical traditions associated with the Highlands as well as the cultural forms of the ceilidh and the Highland Games.

Perhaps most emotively of all there is also the Gaelic language that attracts large amounts of public funding and support. The story of the Gaelic language in Scotland is one of

perpetual decline with the occasional halt. The number of institutions and the amount of public funding that attach to the language might suggest a well-supported minority language and, to some extent, this is true but decline continues. The information derived from the 1991 census showed that there were around 65,000 people, some 1.4% of the population of Scotland, able to speak, read *or* write the language. Contemporary figures relating to the numbers of people with some proficiency in the language, however, hide the massive decline that has taken place in the use of Gaelic as a first language in areas such as the Western Isles, and the growth in the learning of the language in the more populous parts of Scotland. Today, students can undertake examinations in Gaelic both as a modern language and as a native language at all levels of attainment, from standard grades through to university degrees (Thomson 1994: Scottish Office 1998: Scottish Executive 2003).

In 1984, *Comunn na Gaidhlig*, the Gaelic Development Body, was established and large amounts of the funding for the language have flowed through this organisation. Under an initiative entitled “A Fresh Start for Gaelic”, the Scottish Office in 2002 announced the found of *Bòrd na Gàidhlig (Alba)*, a new Gaelic Development Agency intended to take the language forwards into the twenty-first century and replace *Comunn na Gaidhlig*. Broadcasting acts in 1990 and 1996 established the duty of the government to fund Gaelic broadcasting (to the tune of £8.5 million in 1998-9), although it remains the case that such broadcasts are a minority interest. Another strong institution, *An Comunn Gaidhealach* which organises the Royal National Mod, is over 100 years old and has a world-wide membership demonstrating the international interest in the musical and dance traditions that attach to the Gaelic language and culture. How, then, did the culture of one region of Scotland come to dominate so, and to achieve such ubiquity in the representation and creation of the nation?

How the Highland savage became noble

The Romantic Movement and the cult of the noble savage were key in the popularisation of a Highland culture and dress. In the case of Scotland, one of the most notable factors in the romanticisation of the Scottish Gael are the “Ossianic” epic poems James

McPherson apparently rediscovered from oral tradition during the 1760s (Dundes 1985; McDonald 2000; Withers 1992). The dramatic and sublime nature of archetypal Highland landscapes has also been an important force in the romanticisation of the Highlander as evidenced in the literature of the Grand Tour and travel writings more generally (McDonald 2000) and the Highlands. In part, some of the discursive and romantic power of the Scottish Highlands comes from the fact that the region has always constituted an area more different to England than lowland Scotland, and particularly so in the period following the Union of the Crowns in 1707. This fact alone, however, cannot explain the remarkable turn around in fortunes that the public perception of the Highlander underwent during eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To fully understand such a dramatic reversal, we need to begin our account during the seventeenth century. The Highlands and Highlanders continue to be constructed as the Other: what changed was that this same Other became de-politicised, safe and more attractive as the dominant sectors of lowland Scottish society moved towards it under the influence of Enlightenment ideologies.

Now, the Scottish Highlands did not escape involvement in the ideological and dynastic disputes that characterised seventeenth century Britain, and Highlanders were frequently involved in military action both within and beyond the Highlands. Scotland and Britain were largely hostile towards Highlanders generally and the "Jacobite" clans in particular until, and in the immediate aftermath of, the Battle of Culloden in 1746. Since the protestant ascension of Queen Mary and William of Orange in 1688, which represented the end of the symbolically important Stuart line of monarchs, parts of the Highlands had been particularly troublesome. Many Highland chiefs, and thus by association and duty their clansfolk, remained loyal to the deposed James VII and II and, later, his heir Charles Edward Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie).

If the attitude of successive monarchs and the ruling classes of England towards the Highlanders varied between ambivalence and outright viciousness, sight should not be lost of the fact that the situation in Scotland was little different. General lawlessness and conflict in the Highland region had long presented a problem to successive Scottish

administrations and many Scots, among them many Highlanders, harboured feelings towards the people of this region that bordered on hatred. Popular notions of the Highlands and their inhabitants had not yet attained the romantic gloss they would following the final military crushing of Jacobitism at Culloden Moor in 1746, the proscription of Scottish Gaelic culture and the Highland Clearances. The noble savages of the eighteenth century had yet to be ennobled and were widely feared and despised if not actively persecuted.

Following the 1745 Jacobite insurrection and the disastrous Battle of Culloden, the Highlanders were ruthlessly persecuted by the British Government and their troops. In 1747 a Proscription Act was passed which outlawed the wearing of the Highland dress and the plaid fell out of favour in all but the most remote parts of the country in which laws were difficult to enforce. The invention of the *philibeg* (the small kilt) has been dated to around 1727 and the fashioning of a lightweight garment for forestry workers in Glengarry by their Lancashire Quaker employer (Devine 2000: Dunbar 1962: Jarvie 1991: Trevor-Roper 1984). Highland dress takes various forms of which the kilt is only one. The belted plaid or *breacan* tends to be pointed to as the traditional authentic version while the military have tended to wear tartan trousers (trews). The most commonly worn item and the epitome of highland dress, however, remains the kilt and it was around this item of clothing that the cult of 'Tartanry' was built (see chapter 9).

The highland regiments of the British army were exempted from the ban on highland dress. 35 years later when proscription was repealed, the small kilt had found favour as a national costume among the aristocracy. Highland Games and Gatherings are rich in a military imagery that infuses Highland culture more generally. A major factor in the post- Culloden rehabilitation and popularisation of highland dress was its adoption by army regiments such as the Black Watch and the Gordon Highlanders. Contemporary 'traditional' Highland attire owes much to military usage of tartan in the post-Culloden period. By the time the ban on highland culture and tartan was lifted in 1782, the people of the highlands, to whom those traditions, in some sense, belonged had moved on (Jarvie 1991: Trevor-Roper 1984). It was not considered desirable by the general populace, and

possibly did not occur to them having spent so long in trousers, to dress in such a manner any longer and many of the skills of manufacture had been lost or forgotten. As well as the role of the army, tartan became further codified when adopted by what was by then a sub-sector of the British aristocracy – the former clan chiefs. Highland chiefs had been reduced to the role of landowners in the period following the defeat of the Jacobite cause and the collapse of the older, traditional, paternalistic Highland society. The principal engineers of the collapse of Highland society and of the Highland Clearances were, of course, Highlanders themselves as they moved from paternalism to a kind of feudalism. Class divisions were at least as important as any alleged cultural or even racial differences in effecting the clearances of the land as, ironically, a Highland culture was re-created at the very same time as its remnants were swept away.

The role of Walter Scott and his *Waverley* novels (1776, 1786, 1795) in the romanticisation and popularisation of the Highlands has been extensively written about though McCracken-Flesher (1999; 2000) suggests that Scott has been unfairly depicted and demonised. McCracken-Flesher (2000) feels that Scotland in Scott's works and public actions remained always in production and dynamic despite the power attributed to his utterances. During a state visit to Edinburgh by George IV in 1822, Walter Scott acted as Master of Ceremonies. Scott arranged for grand processions and a Highland Ball to be held in the capital and invited clan chiefs to attend and pay homage to their King. This visit to Scotland, during which George donned full formal Highland dress (*and* pink stockings) was important in sealing the place of tartan in Scottish and British pageantry and the relationship between the Royal Family and the Highlands. This relationship, which persists until this day, was concretised in 1847 when Queen Victoria purchased the Balmoral estate, near Braemar on Deeside (now frequently referred to as *Royal Deeside*). From this time onwards, the Braemar Gathering and Highland Games was moved to the first weekend in September (from July) to accommodate the dates of the Monarch's visit – a practice which still continues.

The members of the Highland Society of London, founded in 1778, were additionally crucial in the development of differentiated tartan patterns tied to particular clans and had been active prior to the end of proscription and were instrumental in the repeal of the Act. The Society was partly responsible, through its patronage, for one of the most intriguing episodes in the history of the Highland dress: that of the Allan Brothers or Sobieski Stuarts. These two brothers, who claimed descent from the Stuart monarchs, circulated in 1829 what they suggested was a sixteenth century manuscript illustrating the many distinctive clan and family tartans of both Highlanders and Lowlanders. The Allan's *Vestiarium Scoticum* – or *The Garde-robe of Scotland* – was published to great acclaim in 1842, and followed by *The Costume of the Clans* two years later. The works of the so-called Sobieski Stuarts remained of great importance in the years following their visit to Britain and in spite of their work being revealed to be a hoax, the disapproval of Walter Scott and the damage their claims for the crown did their personal reputations, many later works were based on their 'ancient' tartans. These events are some of the key moments in the widespread adoption of a Highland culture by an emergent Scottish nation and a British nation-state.

Scotland Today

The situation in contemporary Scotland is that the Highland culture is taken to be the aboriginal culture of the nation and attracts much popular and institutional support, as outlined in chapter 1. The rest of this section of the thesis is concerned with one arena within which the ideological and material elements of this Highland culture come together: the many Highland Games and Gatherings that take place across the north-east of Scotland each summer. Highland Games or Gatherings consist of a variety of events such as piping, dancing and heavy athletics that are considered to be Scottish in their nature. Games take place in all parts of Scotland and, in this respect, the north-east has much in common with the rest of the nation. What I am keen to show in this prologue, however, is that the north-east occupies a very particular position vis a vis the Highland / Lowland division. The remainder of this prologue briefly explores the manifestation of

some of the discourses of Highlandness discussed above before detailing the position of the north-east with relation to the Highlands.

And still it is today that highland culture is preserved largely in the name of certain 'Scottish' aristocrats as well as the nation. The Marquis of Huntly, welcoming the crowds to the Aboyne Highland Games as chieftain, represents both the British aristocracy and a Highland society. Further, the spectacle of the Queen undertaking her duties as Patron of the Braemar Gathering and Highland Games each year represents the pinnacle of this system. It was notable that the armed forces were often in attendance at Highland Games and were seeking to recruit new members. Often Army, Navy or Air Force marching bands appeared at events and at Braemar many of the competitors were members of the armed forces. The most dramatic military presence I witnessed was at the Gordon 2000 event at Huntly which, while not a Highland Games, represents a major celebration of the Highland identity in the north-east. A key focus of the celebrations of the legacy of the Gordons at this event was the role that the Gordon Highlanders regiment has played, since their inception in 1794, in the various military conflagrations of the British Empire. Here, pride in Scottishness is very much embedded within the growth and defence of the British state and the British Empire as evidenced through the re-enactments of the battles of the Napoleonic Wars and World War I staged by Bydand Forever. The Gordon Highlanders, today, no longer exists as a distinct army regiment and were merged with the Queen's Own Highlanders in 1994 to form the Highland regiment. The very overt celebration of Britishness, through the indirect means of celebrating monarchy and aristocracy, is of little surprise given that Scottish and British nationalisms arose together and have always been closely inter-related (Colley 1996; Davidson 2000). Where military prowess is being celebrated, it is *British* military prowess that is being celebrated – how could it be otherwise in a contemporary Britain within which Scotland remains without sovereignty? There are no Scottish armed forces although there are regiments of the British forces identified as being, primarily perhaps, Scottish in some way.

Crossing (out) the Highland Line

The north-east is a key zone of transition with many and varied links to both the Highlands and the Lowlands of these traditionally conceptually differentiated parts of Scotland. In addition, although the north-east is distinct from the rest of Scotland there are many cultural similarities between the north-east and the highlands and the north-east and the rest of the lowlands. Most of the region is without question *not* highland but there are places within the north-east region where claims for a highland identity and heritage are much more hotly contested.

The only recently defunct administrative boundaries of the old regional councils and the power and legitimacy those divisions retain in the popular imagination institutionalised a Highland / Lowland divide in the naming of a 'Highland' Region. The assumption, however, that the area bounded as the old Highland region essentially represents all of those areas in Scotland that could be said to be Highland would be incorrect. Many of the areas that would historically, and even in contemporary times, be said to be Highland were never a part of this region while the Western Isles, Orkney, Shetland and the lowlands of Caithness were also within the Highland Region. We need also to think here of the sizeable highland areas of other administrative regions such as Strathclyde, Central and, most especially for our concerns here, Grampian.

The Grampian Highlands?

The tourist board for the north-east of Scotland is named the Aberdeen and Grampian Highland Tourist Board, suggesting to us the possibility that some parts of the region might be be more Highland than lowland. The north-east of Scotland has never been one of the archetypal Scottish landscapes, sites or icons that have been important in the imagining of the nation and those parts of the region that do figure in a consciousness of Scotland, such as Balmoral or Braemar, tend to be quite atypical of the lowland agricultural region as a whole.

When travelling along the main road through Deeside, a sign at the side of the road some one mile from the village of Braemar welcomes us to the Scottish Highlands. Now, Braemar was very firmly within the boundaries of the former Grampian region but still maintains a Highland identity. This Highland identity can additionally be seen at other places, closer in to Aberdeen, on the road through Deeside and, while it would be impossible to pinpoint exactly where on that road it might begin to take a hold, it is certainly an element of the perception of places such as Aboyne and Ballater. As will be discussed in chapter 9, the Highland Games and Gatherings at Braemar, Ballater and Aboyne are particularly rich in Highland imagery and notions of direct linkages to a Highland past. A cynic might suggest that this might be in some way related to the usefulness of Highlandness in the promotion of tourism. I, however, would concur that there is a point at which, when travelling along Deeside, the Highland/lowland distinction becomes significantly hazier as the mountains loom ever closer.

Again, in another part of the north-east, Strathbogie, the Gordon 2000 celebrations, which centred on the town of Huntly, indicate a struggle between lowland and highland identities. Gordon 2000 was billed as a millennium “Highland Homecoming” (See fig 8.1) despite the potential difficulties of actually taking place in the geographic lowlands and being largely focussed on a major lowland family, the Gordons. The Gordon family have historically formed an important part of the Scottish nobility and remain a major aristocratic family as well as a convenient provider of the right to wear tartan to many north-easterners with no clan connections of their own. Even a cursory glance through books on Scottish genealogy or Highland clans (refs) reveals that a very large number of common north-eastern surnames are considered to be septs of the Gordon family. A more likely historical scenario in the region would be that those families lived on and rented land ultimately owned by the Gordons. What the Gordon family is not, according to the rigid conventions of genealogists and historians, is a Highland clan. Even more assuredly, Huntly is not *technically* within the Scottish Highlands. Indeed, so assuredly is Huntly *not* Highland that even the organisers of Gordon 2000 invited potential participants to join them in “the foothills of the Highlands” for their celebrations (Huntly Ltd 1999).



Figure 8. 1: Gordon 2000, Huntly, Programme.

So, for the large majority of the north-east the material and ritual elements of this imagined Highland culture were never the cultural forms of native inhabitants. The Gaelic language died out much earlier in the anglicised lowlands and was already in serious decline in the north-eastern region by the early 1300s (Nicolaisen 1999). Not, of course, that the fact that these traditions were at some point introduced prevents them from being of significance to locals today. In fact, historically, the region has seen many immigrants from the adjacent Highland areas but, like much of the lowlands, folksongs and official documents tend to show ambivalence towards Highlanders that often shades over into outright hostility (Buchan 1972). There is, however, a blurring of the boundaries at the margins. Deeside, for instance, is an area in which native Gaelic speakers have existed within living memory and which boasts, while not ancient, some of the longest established Highland Games and gatherings in the whole of Scotland. While Highland traditions have been in practice in the north-east it was not during the period to which much contemporary thought about the Highlands is related – i.e. the Jacobite era. Highland dress was not worn, Highland Games did not take place and the clan system was not dominant in the north-east at the time, for instance, of either the 1715 or the 1745 Jacobite uprisings (Pittock 1995). The north-east was never historically an area of which a Highland culture could be said to be characteristic. Today, however, almost all regions of Scotland could be said to be characterised by a Highland culture that could be pointed to as ‘inauthentic’. As I have repeatedly asserted and illustrated in this thesis, however, such inauthenticity can be made to carry the markers of authenticity and I now move to explore how an authentic Scottish nation is recreated at the Highland Games of the north-east. Chapter 9 outlines the origins and development of games and gatherings in the north-east, details the nature of current events held across the region and explores the interplay of different elements of the Highland Culture during such public spectacles.

Chapter 9: On the scope and methods of Scottishness: Highland Games and language-games

Highland Societies and Highland Games

“The Highland Games of Scotland uphold a tradition going back to the mists of the past. The earlier games were held more than 1,000 years ago under the sponsorship of kings and clan chiefs” (Glenfiddich, 2000).

“Welcome to the 39th Aberdeen Highland Games!” (Margaret Smith, Lord Provost of Aberdeen, 1999).

One little examined element of an imagined, or real, Highland culture is the series of Highland Games and Gatherings that take place throughout Scotland each summer (Brander 1992; Hague 2002; Jarvie 1995, 1999). To date there is only one full-length academic account of the Highland Games, published in 1991 (republished in 1995) and written by Grant Jarvie, a sociologist. Despite taking place annually on a given and predetermined weekend, Highland Games, local festivals and street parades all represent unusual arenas for the performance of Scottish, north-eastern or local identities. Banal and spectacular performances of identity are both dependent on each other and so it is also vital to say something here about the banal, everyday creation and recreation of Highland Scottishness in the north-east. The Highland Culture that functions as a hegemonic National Culture for the whole of Scotland is as prevalent in the north-east as it is anywhere else in the country. The Highland Games of the region take place against a background familiarity with tartan, images of Jacobitism, popular histories of the nation and everyday encounters with the images and symbols of Scottishness.

As a result of the endless citation of key images of Scotland, a banal sense of nationhood is reinforced. A person attending a Highland Games, however, may find the entire collection of events witnessed constitutes an unusual spectacle even though the imagery

itself is largely familiar. To those people actually competing and performing at games, the collecting together of such an array of events and images is a commonplace happening. Athletes at the Highland Games compete at more than two games per week throughout the season whereas spectators may only see one highland gathering per summer – if not less. In general, spectators are local people, although the larger games with higher public profiles at Aberdeen, Braemar and Lonach attract larger audiences. An interesting insight into public attitudes, at least in Aberdeen, towards the Highland Games was contained in the *Evening Express* newspaper of August 19th 1999 in which a man suggests that he has “always wanted to go to one”. What remains unclear, given the large number of games taking place across the region every summer, is exactly why this wish has remained unfulfilled. Should this man ever decide to make his wish to attend a Highland Games come true, there are a large number in the north-east each summer and which I now take some time to introduce.

North-eastern Scottish Highland Games

One thing that is very striking about the Highland Games and Gatherings held across the north-east is that, as a group of events, there is considerable internal differentiation. There are certain events and cultural practices that are common to all of the games and gatherings, such as the heavy events, highland dancing, light athletics events, piping and spectating as a suite of practices. However organisation of these events varies from meeting to meeting and some have only solo piping competitions, some have only pipe band competitions and some have both while the Elgin Highland Games has neither. Elgin, unlike any other event in the north-east, additionally had only exhibition dancing while at all others the dancing was organised as a series of competitions. The professional games circuit in the north-east is sponsored by the Glenfiddich Malt Whisky distillery and constitutes the vast majority of Highland Games events in the region. Additionally, heavy athletes at all of the Glenfiddich events compete, across the season at every meet on the professional circuit, in the *Press and Journal* sponsored heavy events.

Differences between games are the result of their differing genealogies and ages as public events as well as their current organisational and institutional structures. The games vary

considerably in age with Braemar having been running for 180 years while Aberdeen for instance has only taken place for 42 years, Elgin an even shorter time at 31 years. For the purposes of this analysis, I have separated the games and gatherings of the north-east into the following three distinct categories:

- 1) **Highland Games of Nineteenth Century foundation:** These include Braemar, Ballater, Aboyne and the Lonach (Bellabeg, Strathdon), and are sponsored by Glenfiddich Malt Whisky. These games tend to be associated with local Highland Societies and are largely based in those areas of the region, such as Deeside, with stronger links to the Highland culture discussed in the prologue to section 3.
- 2) **Highland Games of Twentieth Century foundation:** Also sponsored by the Glenfiddich distillery, these games too are organised locally but by community councils or, as in the case of Aberdeen and Stonehaven, by local government departments. This category includes those held at Aberdeen, Drumtochty and Stonehaven, and the Meldrum Sports (Oldmeldrum).
- 3) **Amateur Events:** This category includes the Elgin Highland Games, an amateur event, as well as the performances of Highland traditions outside formal Highland Games settings such as, for example, at the Gordon 2000 event or during Doric Festival concerts.

An Aberdeenshire Summer Season

The Highland Games and Gatherings that take place across Scotland fall in the summer months of the year and each is held on the same weekend each year. In the north-east, the season begins with the Meldrum Sports in mid-June and ends with the Braemar Gathering and Highland Games in the first weekend of September. A competitor in any event takes part in perhaps two meets each weekend – some outside the region - as well as the few that take place on weekdays. Bearing this in mind, we need to remember the extent to which the annual games season in the north-east operates as a travelling

attraction with different spectators in each locality. The major athletes travel the entire circuit and it is only occasionally that a competition is restricted to local entries. I will now take the opportunity to run through the season and explore some of the Highland Games meetings that take place at various locations across the region.

Games in the North-east of Scotland 2000:

Oldmeldrum Sports and Highland Games	– 17 June
Aberdeen Highland Games	– 18 June
Drumtochty Highland Games	– 24 June
Elgin Highland Games	– 15 July
Stonehaven Highland Games	– 16 July
Dufftown Highland Games	– 29 July
Aboyne Highland Games	– 5 August
Ballater Highland Games	– 10 August
Lonach Highland Gathering	– 26 August
Grantown Highland Games	– 27 August
Braemar Gathering and Highland Games	– 2 September

Meldrum Sports

The Meldrum Sports open the Highland Games season in the north-east and, because of their status as part of the official circuit, are considered to be the opening games of the year, despite the fact that other games, such as those at Cornhill, are in fact earlier in June. The sports meet takes place on the first Saturday in June in the village of Oldmeldrum, around 12 miles to the north of Aberdeen, and is principally attended by locals from Oldmeldrum and the surrounding area. Festivities centre on a beer/catering tent in which a dance is held on both the Friday night before and the Saturday night after the games. Meldrum Sports is organised each year by an enthusiastic organising committee of local people. This event was founded in 1920 as a Highland Games

meeting although anecdote, at least, suggests that the event as seen today grew out of a longer established day of celebration or gathering on the same site (Interview with member of organising committee of Meldrum Sports, 2000).



Figure 9. 1: Press coverage for 1999 Aberdeen Games (Evening Express 1999).

Aberdeen Highland Games

The large municipal games at Hazlehead Park in Aberdeen were established in 1960 by the then Aberdeen District Council (See Figs 9.1 and 9.2). Today, the organisation of the Aberdeen games is managed by the Arts and Recreation department of the Aberdeen City Council and the events attracts between 15,000 and 30,000 spectators each year. The annual games is one of the major events organised by the city council and is seen as both a celebration of Scottishness for the people of Aberdeen and a potential tourist attraction. As at all the games I attended, there is an International Visitors tent to which all foreign

attendees are invited to sign a visitors' book. Given that the population of Aberdeen City is around 200,000, it seems inconceivable that all of those attending could be local residents. If 20,000 attended, as in 1999, this would represent 10% of the population of the city and, as a long-term resident of Aberdeen, I do not know very many people that have ever attended and certainly very few that have done so on more than one occasion. During the year 2001, the decision was taken that the Aberdeen Games would in future incorporate the *World's Strongest Man* competition and appearances by the *Glamazons* (Bon Accord, 2001). When it was initially announced that this event would be incorporated at the expense of the pipe band competition, there was a degree of local outrage (with extensive coverage in the *Evening Express* and the *Aberdeen Independent*) sufficient to secure a reversal of that decision, and the expansion of the games to two days in order to accommodate all events adequately.

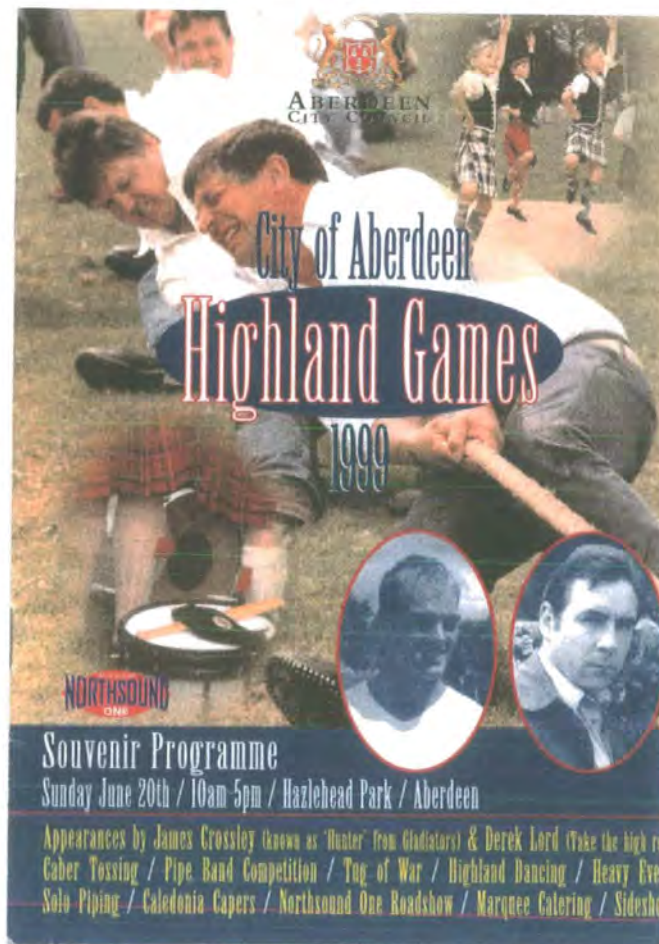


Figure 9. 2: Programme for Aberdeen Games 1999.

Stonehaven Highland Games

The games at Mineralwell Park, Stonehaven are organised and sponsored by the Aberdeenshire Council and a councillor fulfils the role of Chieftain of the Games while the council events officer operates as Games Secretary. Stonehaven is another small meeting that attracts primarily local people although there were some tourists in evidence. Stonehaven Highland Games is a part of the 'official' Glenfiddich circuit which means that Robbie Shepherd commentates while the heavy athletes are the same small group of men as featured at all of the other Glenfiddich / *Press and Journal* sponsored events throughout the region. Stonehaven has a busy programme of dancing events but there are only solo piping competitions, with the use of pipe bands being reserved only to exhibition playing.

Elgin Highland Games

At Elgin, it was not difficult to get the impression that the organisers and compere felt that they were struggling to keep the crowd entertained in terms of events and other entertainments on offer. The Elgin Highland Games, founded in 1970, is essentially a meet of the Elgin Amateur Athletic Club and is held on the sports field of Elgin Academy. The meeting is held under Scottish Athletic Federation and British Athletic Federation rules rather than those of the Scottish Games Association and there are no formal dancing or piping competitions. Instead a 'massed' pipe band, formed of the Elgin Pipe Band and the RAF Kinloss Pipes and Drums, parade around the arena every hour on the hour and dancers from the June Roy School of Dancing in Elgin provide exhibition Highland dancing. When I attended the games in 1999, the master of ceremonies announced, in what sounded like desperation, that even if spectators had failed to photograph the band the last time they had marched around the arena they need not worry as they would be back round soon enough. Light athletic events were, unusually, as much in evidence and clearly as important to the programme as the heavy events at Elgin and, even more remarkably, women competed in all events as a rule rather than an exception. While attendance at the Elgin Games in 1999 was in the low hundreds, there was present a coach load of Italian tourists who performed very well in the open races.

Aboyne Highland Games

The Chieftain of the Aboyne Highland Games is the Marquis of Huntly, Chief of the Gordon Clan and bearer of the honorary title “The Cock o’ the North”. These games are remarkably rich in addition to this remarkable pageantry, including the raising of the Marquis’s personal banner at the official opening of the games. Additionally, there was at one side of the Aboyne village green, on which the games are held, a row of 5 or 6 private clan tents within which members of the Scottish aristocracy entertained themselves and each other. Access to the enclosure containing these tents, as well as to corporate hospitality tents, was strictly controlled despite Robbie Shepherd having extended a general invite to all members of the Gordons, Leasks, Hays, Mars and other clans/families of the north-east and their respective chiefs.

Many of the dancing and piping competitions at Aboyne were open only to local competitors and many local people had turned out for the day. Additionally, however, Aboyne’s location on the main Deeside road and the timing of the games at the height of summer make this another important event for regional tourism and one of those at which the presence of an Overseas Visitors tent was repeatedly announced in the certainty that many of the crowd were overseas visitors.

Robbie Shepherd, the compere, described the area as the heart of piping country and the massed pipe band was comprised of 6 bands from within a 30 mile radius of Aboyne. This massed band played ‘Scotland the Brave’ during both their own and the Marquis’s grand entries. Later, they played a tune named ‘Games day at Aboyne’ and it was announced that a competition was being held to choose a new theme for the Aboyne games to mark the entry of the event into the new millennium. Aboyne is also the location, later in August, for the annual “Cock o’ the North” massed piping competition.

The Lonach Highland Gathering

The Lonach Gathering, held at Bellabeg in Strathdon, is another of the more localised of the events in terms of competitors but also, conversely, one of those that attracts the largest numbers of spectators (See Fig 9.3). The event is organised under the auspices of

the Lonach Highland and Friendly Society and dates back to 1823, making it one of the oldest games in the world. The Lonach is ostensibly a meet of the local Highland Society and many of the events at the Gathering are intended only for fully paid up members of that society to compete in. In recent years, public interest in the Lonach has been fuelled by the fact that television comic Billy Connolly has, through the purchase of land, become the Laird of Bellabeg. Thus, some of the attention focussed on these games and the high attendances can be attributed to the fact that Connolly's house backs onto the arena area as well as the very strong likelihood that he will be in attendance with Hollywood film-star friends. A newspaper report in the year 2000 (*Scotland on Sunday*, August 2000) reported that the Lonach Gathering had now become serious competition for the Braemar Gathering and was now likely to attract more visitors. As the Highland Society has such a strong role in the organisation and execution of this meeting, this was the only one of the official Glenfiddich sponsored Grampian events at which Robbie Shepherd did not act as commentator as a member of the society was required to fulfil this role (it should be noted, however, that Shepherd did march with the Lonach Highlanders as an honorary member).



Figure 9. 3: Lonach Highland Gathering.

The Braemar Gathering and Highland Games

The final event of the summer games season, on the first Sunday in September, is the Braemar Gathering. Braemar has been attended by members of the British royal family since Queen Victoria first attended in 1846 and is widely considered to be an established

date in the social Season of the British upper classes (*Daily Mail*, 2000). The Braemar Gathering is the oldest of the north-eastern games having been established in 1812 by the Braemar Wrights Society which later morphed into the Braemar Highland Society (see section below on origins of games). A notable feature of this gathering is the social segregation that is in evidence on the day of the event itself. The royal family, of course, are segregated from members of the public and driven into the arena to be seated in a green gazebo but more intriguing still is the series of other divisions. There are two divisions in available seating and grandstand tickets are only available in advance through the secretary of the Braemar Highland Society. Access to the grandstand is very strictly controlled and the dancing competitions and presentations of medals and trophies by the Queen can only be fully viewed from these most expensive seats. Stewards guard the entrance to both the grandstand and the cheap, uncovered seats that surround most of the arena, and behind which those paying only to stand are located.

Myths of Origin of the Highland Games

Having outlined something of the nature of the many annual meetings in the north-east, I want to now detail the origin of the cultural form of the Highland Gathering and Highland Games in the region. Now, the origins of the Highland Games as a public event and the origins of the individual events discussed above are not necessarily the same thing. Highland Games events are argued to date back at least 1000 years although in their contemporary form, i.e. as annual Highland Games meets, they date back to the nineteenth century at the most. The Braemar Gathering dates back to 1812 while the Lonach Gathering dates back to 1823 – these are the earliest dates that can be established for the meetings in the current form of a series of formal competitions held on a fixed date. The games of later, mostly twentieth century establishment, draw on the legitimacy and traditions of these older, though still fairly recent, events as well as on the same ideas about a highland culture and origins of the games that the older games cited and continue to cite.

Popular tradition would have it that the first ever recorded, if not the first ever, Highland Games took place at Braemar during the reign of Malcolm Canmore in the eleventh century. Apparently, Canmore, in the region fighting MacBeth, called a meeting of his soldiers to and challenged them to a hill run, much like that which currently takes place each year at the Braemar Gathering. Canmore's neither unreasonable nor unusual attempt to select the strongest and fittest of his fighting men does not, however, constitute a formal Highland Games in any sense and retains only very tenuous links with contemporary practice. Therefore, today's Braemar Gathering and Highland Games does not represent the continuous practice of a tradition for 800 years but rather a relatively novel series of practices, and certainly a novel unified event, adopted when the modern games were established in the nineteenth century (see later in this chapter). The story of Canmore's gathering lends legitimacy to the more recently begun tradition entirely independently of whether or not the story is in any sense 'true'. The power of the utterance remains beyond and untroubled by conventional notions of truth as long as people *believe* it to be true. The way in which the troublesome, and potentially contradictory, results of objectivity are circumvented is by making the games and the story of their origins 'authentic', and by figuring the authentic as the objectively true. The authentic needs to be made and performed as assuredly as does the inauthentic. It is the fact that this heritage has been claimed and utilised in the development towards the situation as it is today that is of concern here. We do, of course, need to discover the genealogy of cultural practices and, in recognising that this will never be sufficient, it is vital that we do not dismiss any particular practice as 'inauthentic' solely or perhaps even partly, on the basis of origins and age. We need to understand the contemporary significance of Highland Games as well as their changing significance over time. We must remember the power of notions of authenticity and inauthenticity outside of the academy.

The origins and development of the north-eastern games

As well as being inter-related, each and every games in the north-east of Scotland has a very distinct history relating to the circumstances of, and reasoning behind, its

foundation. In this section, I will explore these issues by firstly examining some of the older games before moving on to discuss those games of more recent origin. One of the most remarkable differences between those Grampian games of nineteenth century origin and those of twentieth century origin is in their organisational structures. The older games meets and particularly those on Deeside are the annual meetings of Highland Societies that exist for a broader purpose while those such as Aberdeen and Oldmeldrum are the events around which institutions are formed. Thus, the Braemar Highland Society predates the Braemar Gathering – established and organised by that society - whereas the organising committee of the Aberdeen Highland Games exists purely because it was decided, in the late 1950s, that it would be desirable to hold a games meeting in the city. With the older games, the games element grew from the institutional setting and the objectives of those institutions while, with the younger meetings, the event and the institution that organises the event were conceived of together with the institution being somewhat secondary to the objectives.

Perhaps, fortunately it is no longer the case that games might be the only day out that some people get all year. Historically, the meetings that developed into Highland Games worked in the same way as agricultural fairs at the end of the harvest and enabled workers to find employment for the forthcoming year or half-year, like the fee'ing markets of the north-east. The summer timings of the games, do not correspond with the celebration of the end of a successful harvest that some imagine the games originated in, and appears to be matched instead to the possibility of fine weather and, so, we need to look for some other possible explanations of the situation as we now find it. The early nineteenth century saw a dramatic growth in the institutions of civil society and in the organisation of people into guild, clubs, societies and trades unions. A part of this trend was the establishment of Highland Societies, the first of which had been established in London in 1778. The Highland Societies were concerned with the preservation of the Highland culture including dress, customs and the Gaelic language. Those formed in the north-east shared these concerns and arose because of the perceived continued threat to the way of life of the Highlander and the Highland dress in the period after proscription was repealed. The Braemar and Lonach Highland Societies were both formed in

marginal areas of the north-east that had close relationships with the Highlands and could even (see prologue) be described as Highland and both established Highland Gatherings early in their existence.

The first of the events I wish to examine in this section is the Braemar Gathering and Highland Games as one of the oldest and most high-profile events in the calendar. The Braemar Games began in 1812, before the founding of a Highland Society in that area. The gathering was begun by the Braemar Wrights Society which had become the Braemar Highland Society by 1826 although the exact date of this change is unclear (Jarvie 1991). The Braemar Highland Society was concerned with the organisation of the local community and the preservation of what they took to be the Highland Culture of Scotland. Similarly, the Lonach Gathering was instituted by the Lonach Highland and Friendly Society that was founded in 1823 to foster the preservation of highland dress and the Gaelic language, as well as promoting benevolent causes (Casely 2000). The Lonach is tightly tied in with the Forbes family of Strathdon with the tartan donned by Society members being that of the Forbes family, while members of this family have always served as patrons and chieftains of the games. The formal games element of this gathering did not begin until 1835 and the event had previously consisted largely of a church parade and festivities. A few other north-eastern games, such as those at Dufftown and Aboyne, were instituted in the nineteenth century but, by and large, the story of north-eastern games is a story of twentieth century origins and certainly of twentieth century origins drawing on what are, in fact, nineteenth century traditions. Oldmeldrum, Aberdeen, Stonehaven, Drumtochty and Elgin games are all of twentieth century, indeed mostly post-war, foundation and draw on what was by then a relatively long-standing tradition. Whereas the older games constituted new social forms striving for authenticity, the process of the founding of games in the twentieth century was able to draw on the authenticity achieved by the nineteenth century games.

Authenticity, rooted in the past, must be enacted in the present through the similarity of past and present practice. In relocating the authentic from the past to the present, an important rhetorical manoeuvre is to establish what the past was actually like.

Realistically speaking, the past cannot, with any degree of certainty, be verified by historians, cultural commentators or Highland Games enthusiasts. Thus, facts about the past, or of the past, are established within the context of the Highland Games through the deployment of the authoritative and supposedly objective language of the historian. The authoritative language of the historian, and the legitimacy wielded by the use of such language, as well as the institutional setting within which such utterances are made, contributes to the re-production of an apparent authenticity through simulated objectivity. Such objectivity is crucial in that the notion of authenticity is, as noted in chapter 3, very highly connected with notions of objective and rational thought. The removal of subjectivity and any potential artifice this might impute is vital to the establishment of a convincing authenticity and the dry, unspectacular historical account – whether given by a professional historian or not – is a key way in which to suggest Truth. Now, historians have said very many things about a lot of things. Rather more helpfully, historians have also tended to say a very few things very many times, and literature surrounding the Highland Games is full of accounts of the earliest “Highland Games” ever held in Scotland during the reign of Malcolm Canmore. What this popular literature of the games is not concerned with or fails to relate is the relationship between that early games and the contemporary games to which such literature refer. The 1999 souvenir programme for the Aberdeen Highland Games contains the following address from the Lord Provost of Aberdeen, Margaret Smith:

“Although the format for the Highland Games has changed very little in the last thousand years or so, in recent times the event has opened up to welcome competitors and spectators from around the world. In this respect the Games continue to be a microcosm of Scottish society, reflecting the desire to attract international interest while still representing the best of our traditions and heritage”

Clearly it is not deemed necessary that every step along the road to today’s events is accounted for as long as there is *both* a precedent for the event and the modern day event itself. None of the games currently held in the north-east – nor indeed any anywhere in Scotland - has a one thousand year history but they can and do claim an association with

ancient practice. There are implicit claims for an organic cultural whole in much of the discourse surrounding the Highland Games. It is assumed that the donning of tartan and throwing logs around is an inherent and authentic part of a particular kind of Scottishness which has, over the course of the last two centuries, come to be a mainstream Scottishness. Grant Jarvie (1991) writes that rather than dismissing Highland Games and Gatherings as invented traditions it “would be far more accurate to argue that there is a possibility that the modern Highland Gatherings might be descended from a number of antecedent cultural and sporting events some of which may date back to at least the eleventh century” (Jarvie 1991, 7). I feel, overall, however, that Jarvie too deeply embeds the practices of the Highland Games within a Highland Scottish milieu and fails to take note of the contemporary importance of games in areas that have never suffered the same degree of cultural or economic dependence on other parts of the nation that the Highland region of Scotland has. Jarvie’s (1991) comments indicate to us something of the difficulty in accounting for the origin of cultural traditions in general and, in particular, the Highland Games. The authors of the guide to the Glenfiddich sponsored Grampian games circuit for the season 2000 tell us that:

“Down the centuries, villagers gathered once a year, perhaps on their only holiday, passing the time exercising their strength in competitions based on the use of the tools of their trades: throwing hammers, tossing tree trunks, putting stones found in rivers and running races – all activities incorporated into the modern games”

None of this would, I imagine, necessarily prove to be terribly controversial. Elsewhere, it is suggested that the tossing of the caber originated in the tossing of the roof beams of Highland homes during summer sports events. We can be certain that the individual traditions that constitute the contemporary Highland Games do have historical antecedents and were not simply created at some point as entirely novel practices. They may have been novel practices in particular localities when first introduced but, as is usual, tradition tends to be selected and re-signified rather than made totally afresh. Novel or ancient, however, these practices *are* performed all over the north-east and I

now turn to the choosing of particular events, characteristic of the games, with which to move my analysis of the production of Scottishness forwards.

Highland Games Events

In examining the Highland Games and gatherings of the north-east, there are two formal events I wish to look at and will introduce here before exploring them in more detail in the following chapter. These events are featured in all of the games discussed above though sometimes in different formats or under different regulations. In addition to these two events, I will also be taking a detailed look at the practices of spectating.



Figure 9. 4: Highland Dancer.

(i) Highland dancing

The competitors in highland dancing competitions are mostly young girls, and a few young boys, clad in Highland Dress (See Fig 9.4). Each dancer undertakes a series of traditional, “folk” dances in a Scottish style and prizes are awarded for each dance and

for overall winners. My examination in chapter 10, thinks through some of the ways in which the body carries discursive markers of Scottishness and is regulated in particular ways. Dancing is a deeply conventional activity that is governed by complex sets of rules surrounding both the execution of each dance and the organisation of competitions as set out by the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dance. The piping that accompanies the dancers is also regulated by the Scottish Games Association and, again, competitors are



Figure 9. 5: Bruce Aitken. (Evening Express Focus on Fun 2000)

required to be dressed in a variation on Highland Dress. Through the sound of the pipes and the image of the piper or pipe band, Highland Scotland is evoked both visually and aurally as the dancers dance.

(ii) Heavy events

The heavy events, in which powerful strongmen compete in throwing events, are the biggest draw and attract the most attention at Highland Games meets (See Fig 9.5). Like dances, these practices are heavily codified and regulated in terms of particular physical

dispositions that need to be achieved to attain maximum distance etc. For instance, the object of the caber toss is to throw the log so that it flips completely over with the winner being the contestant throwing closest to the twelve o'clock position. In order that this is achieved, the caber must be gripped in a particular way, carried in a particular way and thrown in a particular way. The heavy events are regulated by the Scottish Games Association and participants are required to be dressed in Highland dress (in essence simply a kilt with a t-shirt and spiked boots).

Spectating

Many people at the north-eastern games are not tourists in the sense of people who have come from *elsewhere* to observe the exotic or the Other. The majority of people at a games like those in Stonehaven come from either Stonehaven itself or somewhere nearby. It is, though, still an encounter with the exotic. The traditions of Highland Games are not generally practised by members of the general public. Most people do not play bagpipes, toss cabers or perform Highland sword dances terribly often. These traditions are recognised as Scottish but for the majority not as something everyday – there is something of the spectacle about Highland Games meets and not least in that they only take place once a year (See Figs 9.6 and 9.7).

Much of the activity at the games involves the consumption of the spectacle. This does not necessarily involve actually watching what takes place within the arena. People mill around, chatting, eating burgers and chips, buying sweets and candyfloss or drinking beer and smoking cigarettes. We might imagine that people attend games to celebrate Scottishness – this may be the effect even though people have often simply attended for a day out. The event is on, so why not go to it? Still, however, in this situation, the spectacle works to imagine the nation – it operates as a banal backdrop to more everyday pursuits such as eating and chatting. Many spectators take photographs and video footage of the events – taking something of the spectacle home to look at later. It seems as though these events are partly about the display of the nation to the nationals, and the opportunity for them to capture and take home something Scottish or Highland. The

holding or display of an interest in these events and the collecting of such images, the consumption of Scottishness, is in itself constitutive of a particular kind of Scottishness. There are those who perform and there are those who watch (although, of course, being a spectator also constitutes a performance in some sense). The practices of visitors to Highland Games do follow very set patterns of behaviour that while specific to Highland Games are also generic to tourist encounters.



Figure 9. 6: Spectators at Stonehaven Highland Games. (Evening Express 2000).

Conclusions – A Highland Society of the Spectacle

Participants and spectators at Highland Games are not, on the whole, concerned with the invention or even maintenance of tradition or “authenticity”. They simply want a day out. This chapter and the preceding prologue have demonstrated the processes through which the spectacle has been normalised and banalised in such a way as to allow for later re-spectacularisations that remain unremarkable. The Highland Games operate as the spectacular manifestation of a Highland vision of Scotland and their success in representing, or rather creating, Scotland rests on the ways in which such a Highland

image is commonly used everyday throughout Scotland to represent Scotland. Thus, if we think of shortbread tins, tartan wallets or the piper in the High Street as the everyday, banal conditioning of people to accept certain notions of what Scotland is and what it is to be Scottish, the Highland Games work as the more spectacular manifestation of this. The games are thus a more spectacular manifestation, the success of which is highly dependent on the familiarity of particular images and symbols, their normalisation, their everydayness.



Figure 9. 7: Spectators at Braemar Gathering 1999 (D. Knox)

Chapter 10 will explore what exactly is going on at these games, how they create a Scottish nation and what sort of Scottish nation they create. Highland dancing and heavy events offer the opportunity to explore very particular ideas of both masculinity and femininity, and the ways in which these are bound up with the broader practices of representing and constituting the Scottish nation. Success in these events is contingent on the knowledgeable and skilled performance of specific ritual and symbolic manoeuvres - the rules of the game must be closely followed by participants. These rules, however, are

about more than simply the conduct of these games themselves. Important work in the construction of gender roles with particular reference to a Highland Scottish culture is taking place in the performance of these traditions and in their reception by particular audiences. The games represent an arena within which the sights and sounds of Scottishness are put on display and objectified. Not only do many competitors don Highland dress, it is generally the rule that, to compete in highland dancing or heavy events, people must wear kilts. Chapter 10 will explore in depth the role of embodied actions in the field and the regulation and codification of such extra-discursive activity and the relation of such to discourse through an investigation of piping, throwing and dancing traditions as well as the work of the spectators.

Chapter 10: The highland society of the spectacle

Highland Dancing

Traditional Highland Dancing performed at its best is a delightful spectacle. No other event encompasses such verve and enthusiasm and what better sight can there be than kilted dancers swaying and pirouetting to the traditional airs on the Scottish Bagpipe?" (Scottish Games Association, 1992).

Dancing is a ritualised practice that is abutted by and infused with multiple instances of the discursive, as well as being in some sense extra-discursive in its enactment (Carter 1998a, 1998c; Copeland 1998; Desmond 1997; Malbon 1999; Nash 2000; Siegel 1998). While I would not seek to deny that dancing is an inherently and predominantly physical and bodily performance, I would additionally argue that dance is at no time entirely independent of the discursive. In saying this I am not simply refusing to let go of inadequate constructionist accounts of the body as a discursive marker or a blank slate onto which discourses can be written. What I am doing, however, is retaining elements of such accounts (see sections on highland dress, dancing and heavy events) and adding substantially to them. It would be unrealistic, however, to imagine that non-representational theory alone could tell us everything we wish to know and, for this reason, I maintain a commitment to a more traditional politics of representation: though tempered by an awareness of the performative and rhetorical role of language. By its very nature, the extra-discursive or the non-discursive is difficult to get a firm analytical hold of and there is certainly much that non-representational theories *could* tell us.

Even where we have abandoned notions of representation, it remains the case that representation in a traditional sense continues to be effectively and purposefully staged within national communities and that meaning is effectively communicated in this way. Representation works in the social world. All of this, crucially, is a matter of conceptualisation: where I might see Scotland being made others might see a ready-made Scotland already happening, or an objective Scotland that just simply *is*. This distinction

between a rigid and permanent reality and a stable apparent reality formed of the redeployment of ready-made ideas may not be terribly important in practice, in the field, but is fundamental to this thesis. In what senses, then, is “traditional” “Scottish” Highland Dancing *not* entirely, if at all significantly, independent of the discursive? My contention is that discourse precedes, infuses and follows on from contemporary Highland Dance, and this chapter details why I would contend so.

Linking notions of performance and performativity, this chapter details the regulated ways of deploying the body on the games field, and how they actively perform Scottishness. This chapter seeks to explore the close linkages between national identities and gender roles as they are (re)constructed and enacted at Highland Games meetings in Scotland, and stresses that the flow of bodily activity is highly structured with reference to the 'official' codification of Highland Games practices. Focusing on highland dancing competitions and heavy throwing events, the ways in which particular gender and national performances are achieved, as well as the ways in which this achievement is figured as desirable, are examined in this chapter. I have selected these two events as those most characteristic of, and unique to, Highland Games meetings, and because of the distinct gendering of both events. Highland dancing competitions and displays tend to be heavily dominated by females while the heavy throwing events are almost exclusively male. This is not to say that males do not take part in the dancing as young boys often dance in competition. It is, however, to say that adult, or even teenage, males are much rarer participants. Likewise, there was a female competitor at some of the 1999 Highland Games in the north-east of Scotland, and the amateur event at Elgin has a womens' heavies competition.

Rules and rule-governed behaviour

Throughout this thesis, I have employed the language-game metaphor (Wittgenstein 1953) to explore linguistic practice and the intersections of language-in-use and physical practices. In chapter 10, it may seem as though this metaphor is being applied in a more literal manner in that I am now explicitly addressing conventional games, or events that

form part of games meetings, with particular sets of established rules. I should assert, therefore, that I continue to apply the language figuratively and remain careful not to over-extend the metaphor. This section of the thesis is far more concerned with bodily practice and the extra-discursive than section 2 was, and thus is interested in the influence the practices of language have on embodied practices and corporeal deportment. In exploring bodily practice in more detail, I am interested in the relations between materiality and language, and in particular in the differences between language as performance, non-representational practices and representations of cultures as performative utterances that reconstitute those cultures.

It is self-evident that the heavy events and dancing competitions readily lend themselves to the application of the language-game metaphor as a descriptive or literal account. More than either Doric dialect literature or Bothy Balladeering, the example of the Highland Games is easily conceived of as a series of competitive and rule-governed games. Certainly, the Bothy Ballads Championship is a competition but one that feels more like a series of performances with a somewhat arbitrary outcome in terms of who actually wins the Championship. The events at the Highland Games hinge on a greater number of measurable factors, not least precise and correct performance, in the awarding of trophies or accolades. In part, we can ascribe the greater sense of competition at a Highland Games or Gathering to the way in which these events have been institutionalised and are managed, and the fact that dance is a more sophisticated system of bodily movement. The rules of particular events in the Highland Games have been established by a group of sporting or cultural bodies, and through the application of these rules individual competitors or performers are strictly regulated. Highland Games events are strictly and officially codified, whereas rhetoric surrounding balladeering, and oral folk cultures in general, asserts the importance of innate ability and a feeling of the folk for the material performed. The rules and regulation of Bothy Balladeering and dialect writing are implicit rather than explicit, but both remain highly codified and regulated activities drawing on the legitimacy of past practice. Naturally much of what goes on in terms of signification and identity formation during a Highland fling or the tossing of the caber is not accounted for in an examination of the rules governing their conduct. In

considering the inter-relations between discourse and the non-discursive in the performing of the nation, it is vital to first know the content of those discourses and what the extra-discursive practices are. Much of the process of the embodied performance and reproduction of Scottishness *is* accounted for in the rules governing dancing and athletics events, and I now move to examine the role of the Scottish Games Association and the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing, exploring the workings of these institutions in relation to the discussions. Firstly, though, I would like to take a brief detour through the regulation and codification of the Highland Dress and the various forms in which it can be seen at games and gatherings.

Highland Dress

One of the most important rules at Highland events, and certainly in terms of the visual production of Scottishness, is the requirement that all dancers, pipers and heavy event athletes are clad in the appropriate form of the Highland dress. The donning of the tartan, the kilt and accessories is crucial to the mobilising and manifestation of Scottishness to the extent that, before the events begin, people and their costumes already betray something of their Scottishness. National costume and pageantry are important elements of both the spectacular and the banal display of the nation, and at the Highland Games, the usually banal tartan takes on a spectacular appearance as many different setts worn in different ways are paraded around the same arena. Each pipeband, some of which are military, has adopted one tartan or another as its own and is identifiable through this pattern. Similarly, the Lonach Highlanders, a private army, have adopted the Forbes tartan and dress in that design at their annual gathering and at any other events they attend. Illustrating the strict codification and rule-based nature of Highland Dress, a trophy is awarded each year at the Lonach Gathering for the Best Dressed Highlander.

The Lonach Highlanders are joined each year at the Lonach Gathering by the Atholl Highlanders, a private army maintained by the Duke of Atholl to protect his Perthshire estate¹. Both of these private armies are very popular and are invited to take part in

¹ The Atholl Highlanders were founded in 1839 as a sanctioned under Scottish and English (UK) law sys

ceremonial or public occasions across Scotland and further afield. Only men and only men who are fully paid up members of the Lonach Highland and Friendly Society are eligible to enter the Best Dressed Highlander Competition. Entrants line up on the games field and are judged on the correct wearing of the plaid and bonnet, and on the condition and presentation of their weapons (swords or axes). All entrants to this competition must, earlier that same day, have taken part in the March of the Lonach Highlanders, a key element of the pageantry of the Lonach Gathering. The Men of Lonach set off early on the morning of the Gathering and march around the homes of the patrons of the games, in which they receive “traditional Scottish hospitality”, before arriving at the arena in Bellabeg at 1.00PM. This tradition draws explicitly on the notion of the “gathering of the clans” (Hopkins 1986; MacDonald 1965; Prebble 1996) in earlier times and the raising of small, localised forces of fighters. The march, unique to the Lonach, is a dramatic spectacle that has, in recent years, been exported in part to other gatherings, games and civic events in the Deeside area (and beyond). Similarly, at the Aboyne Highland Games, a prize is awarded each year for the best dressed dancer, and both this event and the Lonach Best Dressed Highlander event tell us that there are degrees of proficiency in the authentic and correct wearing of a particular form of the Highland dress. Thus, as well as being inherently Scottish, the wearing of such an outfit is a matter of both pride and of great attention to correct detail. It remains debatable, however, what difference the rules of the Highland Dress might make to spectators without knowledge of the detailed conventions in general and the Aboyne dress in particular. The Aboyne dress was established in an attempt to make post-war competitors at Aboyne standardise their clothing and to prevent women dressing in what would be considered men’s Highland costumes.

While the rules regarding the wearing of the Highland dress for the heavy events are very simple (i.e. a kilt must be worn – see Fig. 9.5) they are hugely more complex for those involved in the dancing. Female dancers wear kilts, tartan socks, a white shirt with a ruffled neck, black laced soft-soled gillies (dancing shoes) and a velvet jacket with gold or silver edgings and buttons (see Fig 10.1). Men wear the kilt, with sporran (ladies must not wear sporrans), a jacket and a bonnet, and should wear a *sgian dubh* (or *skean dhu*,

small knife) in their socks. Most probably, the wearing of tartan and the kilt to perform the dances I now move to discuss is sufficiently significant in itself for spectators who know little of the genealogy of the dances or of tartans. The spectacle of the dancers and athletes, and judges and pipers, dressed in tartan is significant in itself as a public presentation and performance of a group identification with Scottishness. What I want to argue now is that crucial to the progress and playing out of such ritualised forms of display are the formal sets of rules that govern them, *and* the informal rules that are necessary to act within those regulations. Thus, not only are Highland events important as sacralised displays of Scottishness, but they are also heavily codified to the extent that the strict regulation of such practices is vital to their enactment at Highland Games and Gatherings. The rules and regulations that lay behind these public performances of the nation are crucial in their coming to fruition – the making of the nation is too important to be left to chance or, indeed, to be left to the nationals themselves.



Figure 10. 1: Dancers in full dancing costume. (D. Knox)

Scottish Official Board of Highland Dance

The Scottish Official Board of Highland Dance, based in Edinburgh, was established in 1950. The Board are at pains to point out that they are not merely a governing association but rather a representative body drawn from the many clubs, associations, dance schools, Highland Games, teachers and dancers that have an interest in or concern with Highland dancing (SOBHD 2001a). The board was set up as the result of an impulse towards standardisation and regulation that was driven by a concern for quality

that many dancers and organisers had felt (SOBHD 1978). At the time it was felt that many competitions were potentially unfair and that costume at times bordered on the outlandish. Despite the Scottish origin and name of the organisation, the SOBHD is an international body with organisers and dancers from around the world looking to the SOBHD for guidance in the staging, performance and judging of Highland dance competitions. The SOBHD approves dancing teachers and trains judges who must firstly be qualified dancing teachers and then undertake a rigorous examination on the theory and practice of Highland dancing. The SOBHD sets, by democratic vote of committee, a substantial body of legislation enabling standardisation of the techniques of dancing, regulation Highland dress and the staging and conduct of dancing competitions or displays. The regulations covering the Highland dress were revised during the year 2000 and run to very precise detail on the materials, colours, weight and style of particular garments and the occasions on which they must or must not be worn. All entrants to competitions under SOBHD rules must hold current registration cards with the organisation. SOBHD competitions are split into 5 different ability levels, with subdivisions according to age in each category. These categories are:

- 1) Primary (Under 7 years of age)
- 2) Beginners
- 3) Novice
- 4) Intermediate
- 5) Premier

Dancers advance through this series of levels according to placements in competitions or particular periods of time that must elapse (e.g. Intermediate cannot be attained until a full calendar year after Novice competition). Thus, as with many highly codified practices, there is a structure whereby participants must demonstrate their proficiency and ability to follow the rules in order to be considered credible practitioners. This proficiency is achieved through repeated competition and training.

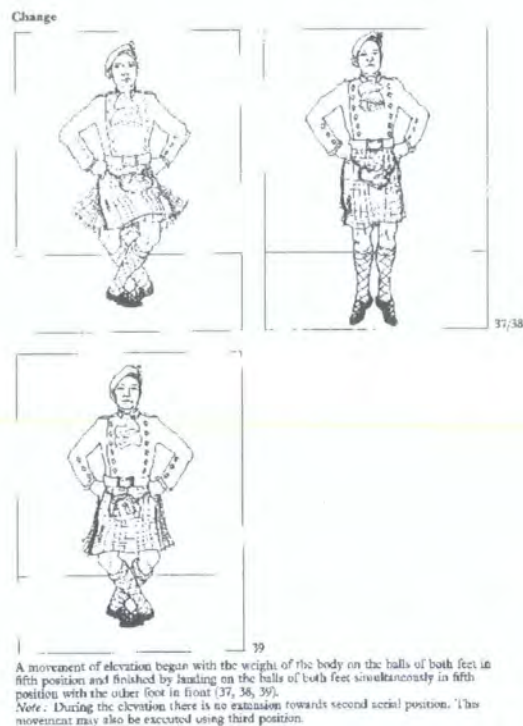


Figure 10. 2: Excerpt from SOBHD Highland Dance Textbook (SOBHD 1978).

Dance textbooks named “Highland Dancing” (SOBHD 1978, 1990a: see Fig 10.2), “The National Book” (SOBHD 1990b) and “Jig and Hornpipe” (SOBHD 1990c) book are produced by the SOBHD to enable such training and teaching. These textbooks contain very detailed instructions on the performance of the dances, permissible steps, the order of the steps and musical accompaniment (usually bagpipes, possibly accordion). Because of the way the SOBHD has standardised dances and selected from the broader tradition, many dances have fallen out of favour or common use. The four Highland dances that the SOBHD has seen fit to include in competitions are now, of course, more popular and widely known than ever before, but this is at the expense of other, fairly similar, dances. An element of creativity in the Highland dancing continues, however, because of the fact that while the types of dances and the permissible steps are set by the Board, the actual order in which they must be performed is not. Thus, it is a common sight to observe the four dancers on the platform undertaking different steps at different times in their expressive performance of the same dance. Obviously, some steps are more complex

than others and points tend to be awarded for the correct execution of steps rather than the level of difficulty of the steps themselves.

The large majority of the games and gatherings in north-eastern Scotland feature dancing competitions held under SOBHD rules and judged by SOBHD approved judges. The exception to this rule, in the north-east, is the Elgin Highland Games, an amateur athletics event, which featured exhibition dancing by the June Roy School of Dancing in Elgin. SOBHD judges, sit at the side of the dancing platforms with their clipboards or notebooks carefully observing the dancers on the podium. Points are awarded or subtracted for the following three main reasons.

- 1) Timing: The dancer must carefully follow the rhythm or beat of the music, with feet, arms, legs and head in the correct positions at the correct moments.
- 2) Technique: All steps should be completed correctly and in co-ordination with head, leg, arm (there are 5 arm positions) and hand (one finger tucked inside the hand) movements. The height above the dance platform achieved during leaps is additionally important and must be combined with graceful landings.
- 3) Deportment: Legs should always be pointed outwards and dancers hop (on one foot) or spring (from one foot to the other) on the balls of their feet. The balance, appearance and deportment of the dancer. Despite the physical demands of the dance, dancers must be supple and appear to effortlessly glide through their chosen steps. The apron of the kilt must remain flat at all times and the appropriate dress must be worn correctly (HighlandNet 2000; See also SOBHD 1990a).

Who, then, are the people that do Scottish Highland dancing? Overwhelmingly, highland dancing is female-dominated and competitors are largely teenaged or younger. Like ballet or gymnastics, competitors begin training and entering competitions at a young age (6 years is common) and, as a cohort approaches adulthood, many discontinue the dancing before adulthood. At Highland Games meetings in the north-east there are

approximately 10 girls taking part to every boy in competition, and very few people over the age of 18 (I witnessed only one middle-aged woman dancing at the Aboyne Highland Games). Individual Highland dancing has been feminised with the passage of time as male participation has become less and less prevalent (Shepherd 1993) – historically competitions were only open to men and some of the Highland regiments used the Highland dances as a training method to improve physical dexterity, coordination and fitness (Devine 2000; Linklater 1977). The youth of the competitors suggests the possibility or inevitability of the future of the nation and of the new nationals these youngsters will eventually be expected to bear. The Scottish nation and its future vitality, hopes and aspirations are embodied by these youthful, potentially fertile, female Scots. The ritualised dances present a particular vision of the Highland woman and, by association, the Scottish woman, as subservient and driven by a need for display. These dancers and their stylised femininities are vehicles for gendered visions of a Highland culture and are never more subservient than when purposefully hitching up their kilts to show their petticoats to the (usually male) judges. Highland dancers become a spectacle that reinforces the banal underpinnings of Scottishness and Highlandness. They are judged to a degree on their proficiency but primarily in terms of appearance and aesthetics. Beyond the formal judging of the competitions, appearance and visibility are even more important to the viewing public. The correct wearing of the Highland dress and the correct movements of the body are essentially visual cues to spectators. The competitions themselves and their work in representing and creating the nation are conceptually quite distinct to many, with competitors focussed on winning, and whereas the competitive element matters not to spectators observing the representation and constitution of Scottish culture. Highland dancing is a far from spontaneous expression of Scottishness or of Scottish nationhood.

The Origins of Highland Dancing

What I am calling “traditional” Highland Dancing is shrouded in many competing myths of origin. I will shortly detail the individual genealogy of some of the major dances but would first like to examine something of what unifies them as a group of dances and as a

competition event at Highland Games meetings. Highland dances form a distinct category from Scottish Country dancing (Newman-Sanders 1952; Milligan 1968) in that they are performed as solo dances rather than as a part of a group of dancers. In this respect, Highland Dancing is more of an event for public spectating than for participation – at Highland Games meets dances traditionally undertaken by groups are still danced in formations but judging is based on individual performances. Robbie Shepherd dates “the emergence of the artist as a solo-dancer” to the nineteenth century and the formation of Highland Societies and their associated games and gatherings. Shepherd (1993) goes on to write:

Over the past few decades, with many innovations into (sic) the teaching techniques and methods of handing down the skills, Highland Dancing has been honed and polished into the ‘artistic’ and bonnie spectacle we now see on those dancing platforms (Shepherd 1993, 202).

There is much to unpack in this statement including the nature of the teaching of dancing the notion of tradition, the related notion of the “improvement” of tradition, the spectacle of dancing and the material culture that surrounds and enables the dancing which Shepherd’s (1993) mention of the dancing platforms hints at. The use of the dancing platform very explicitly and pointedly illustrates to us the staged nature of this tradition in current times. In the very elevation to this stage, the tradition has been made a spectacle of and re-contextualised. Before examining the teaching and regulation of dancing and dancing competitions in the next section, I would like to conclude this section with an account of the material and embodied elements of Highland Dancing. As many commentators (Desmond 1999; Nash 2000; Thrift 1997) have noted, there is something intangible and difficult to represent in writing about the flows and movements of dance and the communication of meaning through dance.

Considerably more has been written on the communication of messages and meanings through bodily activity (Adshead 1998; Desmond 1999) than about the personal, embodied experience of undertaking dance training, practise and performance. Similarly,

this thesis is principally concerned with the social performance and social meanings of highland dancing – topics which also remain slippery and tricky to capture with anything like precision. The most simplistic thing that we can say about Highland Dancing is that in its very naming it is suggested to be of, about and originating from the Scottish Highlands. Furthermore, since the Highland culture has been so successfully and repeatedly conflated with Scottishness, Highland Dancing is inherently Scottish (i.e. national) in its nature. This point is reinforced in the wearing of the regimented and regulated Highland Dress for the dancing of the majority of the dances that constitute competitions at Highland Games events. There is a very real need to, at least attempt to, say something more than to make the bland and banal observation that the donning of the highland dress to perform a highland dance presents an image of the nation. In addition, there is the embodied nature of the dances and the ways in which the physical movements of the dancers relate tradition and nationhood in concert with prior ideas and practices. At the Aboyne Highland Games, it is additionally required that dancers wear a particular form of the Highland dancing dress that is known as the Aboyne dress. At Aboyne, the Aboyne dress must be worn for all Highland dancing competitions, whereas at all other games this particular outfit is required only for the National (rather than Highland) dances. The National dances, also regulated by the SOBHD, form a distinct category and separate competitions from the Highland dances (SOBHD 1990b) and are not danced at all games events in the north-east.

The Aboyne dress works at figuring the national tradition as a local tradition through inflection. A similar effect is achieved at other games in the regulations that all participants in particular dancing contests must come from within a well-defined local area. By thus demonstrating the localised strength of the Scottish national traditions, the localities of the north-east fix themselves as points within the broader Scottish nation. Claims of authenticity and of a greater proximity to a mythical past and present Highlandness, as compared to other parts of lowland Scotland, stem from such demonstrations of the local strength of national cultural forms. Implicit in this is the knowledge, widely held, that the Highland culture was not historically that of *all* of the

modern Scottish nation and, equally and following on from this, an assertion that *this* area (whichever area it might be) *was* and *is* Gaelic, Celtic and Highland.

Highland Dancing Competitions

Highland Dancing competitions at Highland Games and Gatherings across Scotland, including the north-east, take a standard form within which six different dances are performed and prizes awarded for each individual event and for the overall contest. Historically, only four “Scottish” dances were included but the repertoire was later expanded to include the Irish Jig and the Sailors’ Hornpipe (SGA 2000). While each individual dance obviously has a heritage and origin of its own it is difficult to establish, as with any tradition, with any certainty the early practice that led to the contemporary dances (Grau 1998). What we can establish with some degree of certainty, however, is what the myths of origin surrounding particular dances and the rhetoric surrounding their contemporary practice are. The next section now describes the six key Highland dances that form the Highland Dancing competitions at most Highland Games and Gatherings in Scotland (and certainly at all of those that take place under SGA rules):

The Highland Fling: Seen by many as the quintessential Scottish dance, the Highland Fling is probably the most widely known Highland dance, and the most commonly imitated by people without a formal dance training. The Fling, often danced to the tune of Tullochgorm, is said to have been devised by young boy attempting to imitate the graceful movements of a stag (an important element of the iconography of Highland Scotland). The Fling is danced entirely on the same spot of the stage or ground and involves lots of jumping into the air and the bending of the arms and legs, with arm movements intended to represent the stag’s antlers. The fact that the dance is performed on a fixed spot is attributed to the past tradition of Clansmen of dancing on their targes (shields) or, alternatively, to the fact that the dance evolved from the reel (danced by a group). The necessity of keeping to one spot while dancing on a targe is brought home

by the fact of the large spike that such shields have protruding from their centre (Kaleta 2001; SGA 2000).



Figure 10. 3: The Sword Dance

The Sword Dance: The sword dance (Fig 10.3) is also known as the *Gille Chaluim* or the *Ghille Calum* and is danced within an area designated by two crossed swords. Like the entire concept of a gathering or a Highland Games, the Sword Dance is attributed to

the exploits of Malcolm Canmore. Apparently, Canmore following success against MacBeth at Dunsinane in 1054, crossed his sword with that of a vanquished enemy and danced a victory dance around the swords. It is, however, much more probable that this dance, like all contemporary Highland dances, dates from some time during the nineteenth century. The swords are, of course, crossed in the shape of a cross and Highland folklore suggests that, following Canmore's example, Clansmen would often perform a sword dance prior to battle with the belief being that being able to complete such a dance without touching the swords was portent of forthcoming victory. Equally, touching or kicking the swords at this time was considered bad luck and could, given that the swords were sharp, be injurious. The modern formal sword dance is similarly based on the dancers moving around the swords without touching them in an anti-clockwise direction. The SGA (2000) maintain that the tradition was to dance clockwise prior to 1850 though gives no reason for such a change in direction.

The Sean Truibhas: The Sean Truibhas is named after the trews that Highlanders found themselves compelled to wear during the period of the post-Culloden proscription of Highland culture and dress – the phrase “sean truibhas” means “old trousers” in the Gaelic. The dance is performed slowly, with pirouettes, and is considered to represent the attempts of the Highlanders to shake off the then-hated trousers (we should bear in mind that post 1782 and the lifting of the act of proscription, Highlanders did not return to the wearing of kilts or plaids). The leg movements are thought to depict a Highlander attempting to kick off the trews but it is more likely that this myth was later attached to the already extant dance. The dance is danced in two separate, though related, parts to two different tempos: initially showing the restriction of movement created by the trews and, then, the freedom and near-jubilation of the wearing of the kilt. Men do in fact often dance the sean truibhas in trews, though to my knowledge it has never been danced initially in trousers with a change of costume half way through.

Reels: Reels originated as group dances and are generally considered to be Scottish country-dances rather than Highland dances as such (Milligan 1968; Newman-Sanders 1952). At Highland Games, Reels and Strathspeys are danced by groups of four dancers

but, crucially, are judged and scored individually. The myth of the origin of the Reel of Tulloch is very widely known and runs something like this:

The Reel of Tulloch originated in the North East village of Tulloch one winter morning long ago when the minister was late in arriving. The assembled congregation, waiting outside the church doors, stamped their feet and clapped their hands to keep warm and as someone began to whistle a Highland Air, some people started swinging by the arm and dancing their reels steps (SGA 2000).

This myth, however, is not about the origin of the reel as a form itself but of the founding of a particular variant of the form and thus about the dynamism, innovativeness and creativity that once inhered (and indeed may well still do so) in Scottish folk culture.

Sailors' Hornpipe: The Sailors' Hornpipe is the first of two apparently non-Highland – nor even particularly Scottish – dances that form part of Highland Dancing competitions. A dance common to many parts of the British Isles, the Sailors' Hornpipe is particularly associated with sailors as they adopted the ducking and arm-rolling dance, and the moves of the dance depict some of the tasks that would be carried out on a naval ship. This dance has historically been danced to the hornpipe but at Highland Games is, of course, danced to the bagpipe. Appropriately, the Highland dress is discarded for this particular dance and replaced with white or blue sailors' outfits.

Irish Jig: The second apparently non-Scottish dance at the Highland Games is a variation on the Irish Jig. The Scottish version of the Irish Jig differs considerably from Irish traditional dancing in that arm and hand movements are incorporated in addition to a turning out of the feet also absent in Irish dancing. The dance represents an Irish washerwoman in a raging bad temper at her errant husband. It is widely held this comic version of the Jig is intended to be a humorous pastiche of Irish dancing that pokes fun both at the Irish and their dance traditions. Again, as this is not a Highland dance, a costume change is required and Irish outfits are worn rather than Scottish ones. The Irish

outfits consist of a red or green shirt and bodice, white petticoats, a white blouse and apron, and red or green jig shoes (hard-soled shoes).

The above, then, are the six dances of the competitions at contemporary Highland Games and Gatherings. In thinking these dances through further I would like to leave the Sailors Hornpipe and the Irish Jig to one side to discuss further the four Highland dances and their role in the (re)creation of Scottishness and Highlandness in contemporary north-eastern Scotland. I would, however, like to quickly point out that the inclusion of these two non-Scottish dances positions the events of Highland Gatherings firmly within Great Britain and, with reference to the Irish Jig, the British Isles and, in particular, the Celtic Fringes of those Isles. The Hornpipe reinforces some of the other military imagery at the games and thus, indirectly, the positioning of the Highlands and Highland dress within not only Scottish national but also British national, state and military history. As well as giving us an immediate contrast to Scottish dancing and cultural forms by setting up an opposition to Irish and British dances, the jig and the hornpipe additionally give us a sense of a dancing competition being a competition in which Scottishness is not necessarily everything.

The Highland Fling, the Sean Triubhas, Reels and the Sword Dance taken as a group of dances are seen to represent something about Scotland. They function as living traditions (whatever their antiquity) and operate as a national culture for a Scottish nation. That traditions exist is crucial to the nation and that they are kept alive is crucial to the understanding of national subjects of what it means to be a part of that nation. The vigorous and graceful movements of the Highland dancers are, in some sense, quite arbitrary in terms of their performance of Scottishness. Certainly, they suggest a particular vision of Scottishness and they do so effectively. The material elements of the Sword dance are crucial in that the Claymore is seen as the historic national weapon of Scots and gives credence to arguments concerning the authenticity of the dance. There are, however, elements of wishful thinking in the linking of Malcolm Canmore to the origin of this dance. For historically minded Scots, Canmore represents the first King of something at least vaguely representing modern Scotland in his uniting of the Scots and

the Picts; it is to this reason that I credit the popularity of Canmore in myths surrounding the Highland Games.

Dance, of course, is more explicitly performance-based than dialogue or literature but remains performative in the sense that a multitude of meanings are communicated and recited through the (re)performance of traditional, and especially, national dances (Carter 1998d). Thus, dance remains, at least metaphorically, dialogic and discursive as well as being tightly woven in with discursive tools such as textbooks of technique and books of rules for competitions (Nash 2000). It would be ludicrous to attempt to pinpoint the exact moment at which, during a Highland dancing competition as a formal part of a formal games meeting, Scottishness is achieved or could be said to be thoroughly and successfully done. Instead, I conceptualise each dance as a citation of an apparently already existing (i.e. ready-made) Scotland. Each use or deployment of a 'ready-made', even where the complexity of the message might be lost or grossly simplified, adds to the citational effect of the performative utterances, or bodily actions, of both the past and the future. Thus, the staging and viewing of such a competition is a culmination of the many utterances concerning rules and technique, the training and learning of the dancers, and the knowledge of all present of what it means to be Scottish, though it is not a culmination but rather a notable event in a chain (or web) of events, that is neither without precedent nor the end of a chain of causation. The spectacle of the competition is preceded by other similar competitions, the everyday training of the dancers, and the commonplace banal sense of nationhood that both dancers and spectators have. The spectacle is collected, like any other, by the spectator as a further instance of Scottishness: an instance that recites a known and knowable Scottishness and that enables the banality that is Scotland to become ever more banal, normalised, stable and unproblematic. Through repeated viewing or reciting, the spectacle itself becomes the banal further strengthening the effectiveness of the banalisation of nationhood and national identity in an age of mass communication.

Heavy Events

I now turn to examine a different embodiment of Scottishness that can be witnessed at a Highland Games or Gathering. Piping, dancing and light athletics are all minor attractions as compared to the antics of the athletes that compete in the heavy events at Highland Games and Gatherings. Arguably the greatest spectacle at the games, and without a doubt that attracting the largest number of spectators, the Heavy Events are a very important part of what defines a Highland Games and an important signifier of the Scottishness of such meetings. A Highland Games heavy event competition today consists of five or more events in which all entrants must compete to be scored in the overall competition, although prizes are awarded for and records set in each individual event. All of the events are throwing events designed to demonstrate raw strength and requiring a mastery of technique as well as no small measure of ability. It goes almost without saying, of course, that, as professional athletes, heavy eventers are highly trained and dedicated men (or sometimes women) – it is certainly no longer the case that people can simply turn up and throw with no prior experience. Games do, however, remain open in that people wishing to participate can still usually enter the competitions on the field on the day of the meeting, assuming they are appropriately attired. Judges reserve the right to disqualify or not allow to take part any person they feel cannot meet the necessary standard or who cannot compete in a controlled and safe way without, for example, launching a caber into the throng of spectators lining the arena. Only professional athletes registered with the Scottish Games Association can compete in the major professional competitions that attract prize monies – although amateur competitions are open to SGA athletes. In the north-east of Scotland, the Grampian Games Association runs an annual regional heavies competition at ten games: competitors take part at all ten of these games but not to the exclusion of events in other parts of Scotland, or the world. At the height of the summer season, athletes compete at between 2 and 3 games per week across Scotland, with many travelling to North America and anywhere else that might host games.

Heavy events programmes tend to start fairly early in the day with youth, amateur or local competitions but the climax to the professional competitions is usually timed to take place after the official opening of the games and in the afternoon when the largest numbers of spectators are expected to be present. Curiously, much action has already taken place before the general public ever arrive and much of what does take place, as the following discussion of the organisation of heavy events competitions shows, is never seen or understood by the spectators.

The organisation of the Heavies

The Scottish Games Association was formed in 1946 to rationalise and standardise the many localised, varying and idiosyncratic sets of rules that were then in use at games across Scotland (Jarvie 1995: SGA 2000). The SGA acts as the governing body of the professional games in Scotland as well as playing a role in the recording, notification and maintenance of world records in the heavy events. Each year, in May, the SGA publishes a yearbook (SGA 1999, 2000) listing dates, venues and location of all SGA registered games. Additionally, this yearbook contains the many rules that govern the heavy competitions and details of the best performances of the previous season's events. In addition to SGA games, the Scottish Athletic Federation rules are used at amateur games (such as those at Elgin) and there are a number of independent games in some regions (although none in this thesis and none in the north-east) that, while not formally under SGA jurisdiction, adhere generally to the established SGA regulations. What the SGA has enabled with the heavy events competitions is the standardisation, across venues and localities, of competitions that might previously have been difficult to meaningfully compare on equal terms. The founding and continued operation of the SGA enabled the Highland Games and the heavy events to become truly national forms as opposed to a series of similar but independent local happenings. Although, as discussed below, the origins of the individual heavy are as difficult to uncover as any other traditional practice, it would be fair to say that activities that might previously have been competitions based entirely on boulder or logs locally available, and in no sense formal competitions, have been regulated and made less spontaneous.

Grant Jarvie (1992) writes that the SGA, since its founding has rationalised, bureaucratised, commodified and professionalised the Highland Games: this, I would argue, is particularly the case with the heavy events, which are the most recognisable element of the games. It is no longer, if ever it truly were, the case that local men meet up on holidays and high days to throw logs, stones and improvised weights around in a test of their competing masculinities. Now, before looking in detail at individual events, I would like to examine the history of heavy events competitions and those that compete in them. The heavy events, like the Highland Dancing, do not escape discourse or discursively expressed and communicated rules. While the actual acts required in adhering to rules may be physical, it remains the case that the rationale and existence of those rules is communicated linguistically – even though they may be internalised and operating at a level of practical-consciousness for individual, experienced competitors.

Heavies competitions and Heavy athletes



Figure 10. 4: Donald Dinnie (Picture from Northeast Folklore Archive 2001).

In examining the cultural history of the Highland Games and particularly the heavy events, a key character we must discuss is that of Donald Dinnie (Allan 2000; Webster and Dinnie 2000). Nobody, either previous to or since, has achieved the levels of local, national and international recognition and celebrity that Dinnie (Fig 10.4) did. Perhaps the only person ever to have come close while competing in the Highland Games would be English Strongman Geoff Capes who retains world records for the 16 and 22lb balls that he set in 1982 at a Highland Games meet. This is not to detract from the successes and abilities of today's athletes, but rather to point out, despite this and despite the fact that they are highly recognisable to some, Dinnie was something of a case apart. Born in 1837 in Aberdeenshire, Donald Dinnie was an all-round sportsman and athlete who competed at a multitude of events all over the world. At Highland Games meets, Dinnie entered and won competitions in heavy athletics, light athletics, wrestling and even Highland dancing. Dinnie is most widely known for his lifting of the Dinnet stones on Deeside and his subsequent carrying of them across the River Dee – a feat which has never been matched. It would be fair to say that during his peak years in the 1890s, Dinnie dominated the heavy events at any Highland Games he chose to attend. A recently published biography of Dinnie (Allan 2000) tells us that he was the “first international superstar of sport”: a sentiment also seen in an article in *Scottish Memories* (1999) magazine.

Dinnie came to prominence at a time when the Highland Games were growing in popularity and attracted greater media attention, as well as during an era of the amateur sportsperson. Additionally, at the close of the nineteenth century, interest in physical culture was high and this was, at least partly, fuelled by the popularity of strongman acts and myriad styles of wrestling. The cultural climate within which today's heavy eventers operate is considerably different and the great majority of them specialise in the Heavies to the exclusion of all other events. The Highland Games and the heavy events are marginal concerns in Scotland today, although there is more interest among ex-patriots and Scots-descended peoples in North America (which boasts a Highland Games institutional infrastructure more developed than the one this thesis deals with in Scotland). Interestingly, the link between heavy events and strongmen has recently been

re-established with the expansion of the Aberdeen Highland Games to two days (as of 2001) to enable the inclusion of the Worlds Strongest Man tournament. Aberdeen City Council felt that the accommodation of such a prestigious international event would swell attendance at, and raise the profile of, their municipal Highland Games. Press reaction in Aberdeen was aghast at the original suggestion that piping competitions would be removed from the programme to make way for the Strongman contest and eventually nothing was withdrawn from the usual programme of events.

The heavy athletes at the games in the north-east of Scotland are a small and, with regular visits to regional games, recognisable group of men. We can see the emergence and playing out of some stereotypes of Highland masculinity and identity in that the heavy events are traditionally competed by men (and dancing largely left to women in recent times). The displays of strength required of the heavy athletes and the apparently ancient origins of some of the events hint at the mythical Highland past of fearless and immensely physically powerful Clan warriors taking time out to demonstrate their prowess. In the same way that the Highland dancing is about the public and ritualised display of femininity, the heavies are about the performance of a particularly physical masculinity. Thus, these two very different types of performances ensure that an imagined Highland Scotland is populated entirely by big strong men and beautiful, objectified women.

In the north of Scotland, including the north-east, heavy event competitors tend to emerge and progress from the junior and local competitions held at their local games, whereas in other parts of lowland Scotland they often progress or move on from more common athletic throwing events such as discus or shot put. Despite the many rules and regulations produced by the SGA for the playing out of heavies competitions, the SGA does not play a role in the organisation of coaching. Instead, those seeking to participate in and train for heavy events need to locate either general throwing coaches or former heavy athletes themselves either through the SAF or by approaching heavies at games meets.

These men spend large periods of time everyday strength training in preparation for the heavy events and conditioning their bodies for maximum performance. Athletes take part in between 2 and 3 games per week at the height of the summer games season. Having trained, with reference to the rules (both official and unofficial) of technique, all that remains is for the athletes to put their kilts on and enter the arena. Individual games require that “all male competitors must appear in Highland dress” (Aberdeen Games 1999; Stonehaven Games 1999; see Fig 10.5). I now move to discuss the five main heavy events and the techniques and regulation of their practice in greater detail with the intention of providing a detailed account of the bodily production and reiteration of ideas related to Scottishness and the relations between embodied action and discursive flow. If by this stage in the thesis we can accept that the heavy events at the Highland Games signify Scotland and particular visions of Scotland, it will be instructive to examine in closer detail the processes of such signification and how such ready-mades are re-performed. What I am concerned to show here is that the regulation and control of the body of one person can communicate meanings to others and that some of those meanings are about the nation. Now, while it may not seem that important precisely how a caber is tossed by a man in a kilt, my contention would be that the precise technique matters as it enables us to say something about the performative chains of causation that enable particular things to be cited as well as shedding light on the act of citation. Thus, the way the athlete tosses the caber is a direct result of the instruction he has received in doing so and is additionally, indirectly, crucial as a perlocutionary effect in the representation of the nation that takes place at the Highland Games. SGA rules in Scotland, and NASGA (North American Scottish Games Athletics) rules in North America, precisely govern the conditions under which a caber might be tossed and how this might be done. Thus, the context of the heavies is strictly controlled and limited, and every bodily movement measured and observed as the athletes perform their throws. Arguably, simply saying that Scotland or Highland Scotland is signified and constructed when men in kilts throw logs around would be a good place to start but would hardly, in itself, constitute a thoughtful and useful analysis.

STONEHAVEN HIGHLAND GAMES
RULES AND REGULATIONS

1. Entry Fees: There will be no entry fee but competitors must pay admission to field. Entries close quarter an hour before events take place.
2. At all competitions there must be more competitors than prizes, otherwise part of the prizes will be withdrawn. Competitors are warned that the Committee shall not be responsible should competitions clash.
3. Upon completion of each competition, the successful competitors will be given a card and this should be taken to the Secretary's table.
4. Three tries will be allowed for jumps, hammers, weights, stones and caber. Hammer will be thrown without turning. No device of any kind - e.g. the taping of fingers - which in any way assists a competitor when making a throw shall be allowed in Heavy Events competitions. 2.74 metres will be allowed for weights and 2.28 metres for stones.
5. All male competitors must appear in Highland Dress except in running and jumping events for which they must be appropriately attired.
6. All competitors, when not competing, must retire to a place appointed for them and if refusing to do so when ordered will forfeit the right to further competition.
7. The Stonehaven Traders Association Trophy will be awarded to the best Juvenile Piper.
8. The Stonehaven Pipe Band Cup will be awarded to the Best Piper between the ages of 16 and 18.
9. The Motorscot Trophy will be awarded to the best piper over 18 years.
10. The Donald Morrison Trophy will be awarded to the best local Piper (Local = Resident within the Kincardine and Mearns Area).
11. The Mearns Leader Trophy will be awarded to the winner of the Open Tug of War.
12. The Scottish Clubman Trophy will be awarded to the winner of the Light Tug of War.
13. The Tennent Caledonian Challenge Trophy will be awarded to the overall winner of the Heavy Events.
14. The Nigel Thornton-Kemsley Trophy will be awarded to the best local in Heavy Events.
15. All the above trophies are for a period of one year.
16. In all questions of dispute the decision of the judges will be final.
17. The Council accept no responsibility for loss, injury or damage which the public may sustain.
18. These Games are run under the rules of the Scottish Games Association.
19. All Trophy winners must remain in the field and be on hand for the presentation of such trophies at close of Games.

Figure 10. 5: Stonehaven Highland Games Rules (Aberdeenshire Council 1999).

The disciplines and material culture of the heavy events

As noted earlier, heavy events competitions at Scottish Highland Games are made up of five different events including the weight for distance, weight for height, hammer throwing, the putting of the stone and the tossing of the caber. Since the games in the north-east are primarily professional and involve only males, I deal in this section exclusively with these competitions (females took part in heavy events at the amateur games at Elgin). All of the events featured in this section took place at all of the games I attended as the ten principal games in the region are all administered by the Grampian Games Association and all are stages in the same heavies competition (sponsored by the *Press and Journal*). The athletes are attired in regulation kilts as well as t-shirts or vests, support belts and whatever they might wish to wear underneath their kilts (rarely, according to my observations, would this be nothing). As some of the events have rules stipulating that the feet must not be moved (see below), heavy eventers also wear boots with large points or spikes on the front that enable them to partially dig themselves into and anchor themselves to the ground while vigorously exerting to achieve a throw (See Fig 10.6). The throws are made within a restricted and demarcated area that is of variable length for each events but always 4ft 6inches wide. This throwing area is generally positioned close to the edge at one side of the show ring to enable people to watch and to ensure non-heavy competitors remain out of the way of airborne hammers etc (See Fig 10.8). Competitors commit a foul if they step outside of the area by crossing the sidelines or the backline (in some cases a foul is conceded if one foot leaves the area, in others if both do). Weights, hammers and stones are released from a “trig” at the front of the throwing area with a run up or spin having been commenced from the appropriate backline. As a matter of safety, a cage or fence like structure (naturally advertising the Glenfiddich and *Press and Journal* sponsors) is erected behind the backline to prevent any misthrows endangering spectators (who are reminded frequently that they should not enter the arena as the heavy events are dangerous).

Putting the stone: The putting of the stone is one of the heavy events that most closely resembles more mainstream athletics and is, in essence, a very similar event to the shot put. There is no standard weight for the stone but it must be between 16 and 22 lbs. The stone is simply a polished and flat stone selected for its appropriate shape and weight. Athletes are allowed a run up to the trig of 7 feet 6 inches, must hold the stone firmly against their necks before release, put with only one hand of their choosing and can throw in any style they wish that the judges deem safe. Less commonly an additional stone putting contest, sometimes known as the Braemar Stone, with a heavier stone (20-26lbs) takes place and this stone must be put from a standing position with no movement of the feet. In some amateur events under SAF rules it is permissible to put the stone, or to throw weights, with both hands.



Figure 10. 6: Shoe spurs (Aberdeen City Council 1999).

Weight for distance: The throwing of the weight for distance can take place with either a 28 lbs or a 56 lbs weight which must, again, be thrown one-handed in professional mens' competition. A run of nine feet from the backline to the trig is allowed in this event in which, as the name suggests, athletes attempt to throw the weight as far as they possibly can. A remarkable and dramatic swing of the body is required of the heavy events athlete in order to successfully propel the weight a credible distance. The athlete spins on his approach before letting go at the trig and feet are allowed to move after release. The weight itself must be metal but can be bullet, ball or box-shaped with a variation of handle styles permitted. The games I attended in north-eastern Scotland all

made use of a box-shaped weight with ring-style handles attached with a length of chain to the box.

Weight for height: The putting of the weight for height usually makes use of the same 56 lbs weight used for distance – provided it is suitable. The weight is thrown from a standing position with the athlete facing away from the crossbar the weight must be thrown over. The athletes swing the weight between their legs using one hand, to gather momentum, and release the weight over their shoulders and – ideally – over the cross bar (the height of which increases after each successful or unsuccessful round). Each contestant is allowed three attempts at each height and is eliminated on the third failed attempt at any one height. It is ideal, athletes told me, if the total length of the weight is less than about 1ft 6inches (as is NASGA regulation) to prevent it dragging on the ground when swung between their legs for launching!



Figure 10. 7: An athlete spins, preparing to unleash the hammer.

Throwing the hammer(s): The throwing of the hammer is another event similar to conventional athletics meets with the key difference being that in the heavy events the hammer has a solid wooden or plastic shaft. The hammer head must be spherical and made of metal, and total length of the hammer should not exceed 50 inches. The weights

at which hammers are thrown are 16 and 22 lbs. The hammer is picked up and swung, two-handed, around the athlete's head and body and thrown from a standing position, although it is permissible for the athlete to move his feet following a throw (See Fig 10.7). Athletes wear shoes with large frontal spikes for this event to enable them to fix themselves into their desired position before building up the momentum to throw the hammer.

Tossing the caber: The four events so far discussed are all throwing events in which the object is to achieve the greatest distance or height possible. The last heavy event considered here, however, the tossing of the caber (See Fig 10.8) is perhaps the most radically different to contemporary athletics and certainly the most famed event at a Highland Games meeting. Crowds notably grow around the heavies section of the arena when the caber tossing begins and the event is a popular and widely seen element of the iconography both of the games and of Scotland. Given the particular importance of the tossing of the caber, I wish to explore the logistics, dynamics and practices of the event in more detail than I have any individual throwing events before moving back to discuss the heavy events competitions as a whole, the Highland dancing, games and gatherings in general and the role of all of these things in the mobilisation and performance of Scottishness.

Most simplistically put, a caber is a big log. A caber, however, is not simply any old unmodified tree trunk. While there is no standard size or weight of caber, they tend to be between 16 and 22 feet in length and to weigh between 100 and 180 lbs. It is required that a caber should be of such a size and weight that more than half in any given field of heavy events athletes can successfully complete the toss. Trees being made of wood and cabers being tree trunks, the stipulation that a caber should be made of wood need not detain us for very long, if at all, and we can instead busy ourselves with the shape of these particular pieces of sports equipment. The caber should be thicker at one end than the other and the small end is rounded off to enable athletes to cup it in their hands once a turn is commenced.



Figure 10. 8: An athlete tosses the Braemar Caber, (Braemar Highland Society 2000).

The caber is placed upright, with the heavy end at the top, for the competitors to grasp and the attempt begins officially once they have lifted the caber from the ground. So, the heavy athlete lifts the caber up, cups the small end in his hands and commences to run, then runs before stopping to pull the caber up into the air so that the big end lands on the ground and acts as a pivot on which the entire caber can turn through a full 180 degrees to land with the small end pointing away from the athlete. The competitor is allowed to take any length of a run he might desire, in any direction and can release the caber from anywhere on the field. It is the job of the judge behind the tosser to judge the direction of run (which is allowed to be changed once the run has begun) rather than the direction in which the athlete faces when letting go of the caber. From this deduction the judge must call the accuracy of the throw using the “clock face” method of judging. Within this method of judging, a throw landing in the 12 o’clock position would be considered to be a perfect throw while any throw between 9 o’clock and 3 o’clock would be considered to be a valid effort. The judgement is passed on the position of the caber as it lands rather than where it might roll or bounce to after hitting the ground. If the caber is not successfully turned, and it must pass through the 90 degree angle with the ground, a side-judge will call the number of degrees of the angle the caber formed with the ground at its

most advanced state during the attempt (these figures will be used to break ties where two athletes achieve similarly good throws).

The rule-bound creation of the nation

How then do these rules that govern the practices of throwing make a difference in the presentation and maintenance of visions of Scotland? The bodily, though discursively governed, rules of the heavy events and the Highland dancing are of great importance as they are the processes through which particular visions of Scotland are enabled to manifest themselves at contemporary Highland Games and Gatherings. Neither the dancing nor the heavy events could be said to be entirely spontaneous happenings but both are crucial in the relation of meaning about the Scottish nation and both are held to be National traditions. Thus, the context within which that nation is performed at games meets is carefully managed and strictly limited in its scope. Certainly, the ideas about the Highlands and about Scotland that are in circulation here are the same ideas and images that can be seen throughout the shopping malls, supermarkets and sports grounds of Scotland (and on the shortbread tins) but also, here, they are highly stage-managed. This fact is the reason that we need to try to fully grasp the conditions of the production of Scottishness so that we can say something substantive about the complex webs of causation that govern such manifestations of the nation. The layers and matrices of effects that come together at a Highland Games, no matter how briefly, all contribute to the (re)establishment and strengthening of ready-made ideas about Scotland that through their citation here enable the banal nation to remain banal (no matter how spectacular a games meet might be in itself). Key in all of this is the display of masculinity and, relatedly, militarism. I have introduced the militarism of the games in chapter 9, but chapter 10 further demonstrates this by way of the military origin of some of the dances and the apparently originally military intent of preceding types of gatherings. I feel that one of the clearest examples of the military imagery that prevails at Highland Gatherings is the March of the Lonach Men in full Highland dress and carrying weaponry.

So, the direct effect of cupping and turning the caber is, of course, the turning of the caber in mid-air and its landing somewhere between 9 and 3 o'clock on an imaginary clockface. The indirect effect of the caber toss is the physical and public display of Scottish tradition and, therefore, the Scottish nation. Thus, how the caber was tossed does matter in this instance because it is one of the contributory factors in this manifestation of nationhood. Nations are most easily mobilised and identified through traditional practices, however they might have been figured as traditional. In tracing out the causation of the Scottishness we see before us at the games it is not enough to say that people in kilts dance Scottish dances or throw things in a Scottish way. This, in itself, does not entirely account for what happens in the field. Certainly, the way in which Scotland is viewed generally and the repeated citation of ideas about the Highlandness of Scotland can tell us a lot about the processes of the figuring of the nation, they do not tell us enough and it is this uncovering of the banal and the bodily that I think can tell us something more. How the caber gets tossed might not tell us how that flying log translates into ideas about the Scottish nation: how the caber gets tossed however does tell us, in detail, about how one of the spectacles that best represents that nation is performed. The spectacle is underpinned by very banal and apparently benign activities that do not appear to matter. While the rules of dancing or of heavy events may not matter to the spectators they do very much matter to the competitors and performers: they are the basis on which the contemporary sports or arts can take place as organised competitions and, often, the basis on which such practices have been popularised. We might conceptualise each little movement in the completion of a dance or a throw as a performative gesture that has both illocutionary and perlocutionary effects in the real world. Each small motion has a contributory effect to the final outcome – whatever that outcome might actually be. We can be certain, however, that the final outcome is substantially more than merely the execution of a Highland Fling or the propulsion of a hammer through the air. Chapter 11 will outline precisely what the consequences, as well as the causes, of Highland Games and the events that constitute them are, as well as bringing the earlier material concerning a Doric vision of north-eastern Scottishness back into the discussion of the performance and practice of the region and the nation.

Chapter 11: Ready-made Scottishness and north-eastern Scottishness

This thesis is the story of the successes and failures of two competing regional identities in Scotland, and the reasons for their differing degrees of success. My concerns in chapter 11 are thematic and relate to legitimacy, authenticity, banality and the spectacle: More detailed discussion of the processes of joint-action and citation can be found in the following chapter, chapter 12. The institutions of north-eastern Scottishness and those of a Highland Scottishness both need to create their own legitimacy by drawing on notions of authenticity that work best against a banal backdrop. Thus, the everyday manifestations of a hegemonic Scottishness, rich in the iconography of the Highlands, ably support the institutions of the Highland Games in ways that they cannot fully support a Doric or north-eastern regional identity. Furthermore, the cultural materials that should sustain Doric visions of the region are neither sufficiently mainstream nor popular to genuinely hold the attention of the public – ultimately the institutions of the region do not hold the power and thus the legitimacy of the instruments of statehood. Scottish popular nationhood, identity and nationalism are built around the symbolism of Highlandism to the almost total exclusion of a lowland identity. We get little sense of Scotland as a developed, industrialised and urban nation in an engagement with the rhetoric of Highlandism, though even the Lowland identity of the north-east is rooted in the non-urban and non-industrialised past. This chapter brings together the materials presented in the previous two sections to discuss in detail some of the rhetoric of the region and the nation, and the ways in which these twin identities are figured.

The Elphinstone Institute and the Doric Festival have drawn and continue to draw on a legitimacy that both predates their founding *and* to which they now contribute as they create, re-create and sustain the traditions of the north-east by providing forums and ideological settings for their performance. This is most explicitly so in the desire to educate the young in the vocabulary and structure of the dialect and to encourage more people to take up dialect writing – it is hoped that a literary great will be discovered, or

perhaps created. This is a very explicit aim of the Doric Festival and of campaigns such as ‘Ballads for Bairns’ that circulate materials in schools. James Porter, former director of the Elphinstone Insititute, makes the claim that:

Ethnology can increase public awareness of traditional culture – not just as a historical curiosity but as a living and dynamic way of thinking and feeling, within local communities, that is transmitted through the generations by habit and custom rather than formal learning. (1999b).

There is a difficulty in the distinction between culture being something handed on and not formally learned and the ways in which the Elphinstone goes about ensuring that such handing down takes place. It seems naïve, however, of anyone linked to the Institute to suggest that in their efforts to keep north-eastern culture living and breathing they are simply allowing tradition to be handed on rather than remaking that tradition. Certainly, there was Bothy Ballad and literary activity in the region before the Elphinstone or the Doric Festival were founded but both of these institutions were founded with an educational remit. Thus, there is something of a tension between a model of living and dynamic cultures transmitted orally and the perceived need for the existence of a centre such as the Elphinstone Institute or an organised Doric Festival. Now that authenticity is located in the past it is not possible for Deborah Leslie (1999) to use a child in current times to personify and embody the Doric tradition and she must, instead, deploy an elderly man. At the time of Charles Murray’s writing “The Whistle” it was possible to use a child to represent the threat to tradition in a way that would no longer be convincing and certainly would not match the rhetoric of a fight to save a dying culture.

In looking at the Highland Games of the north-east we find a quite different institutional role and very little talk of the need to fight to save national culture. In part, there is no need to fight to save Scottish National culture because it is perceived to be strong and resilient, alive and enjoyed. For whatever reason, ethnologists have tended to shy away from the Highland Games and Gatherings of both the past and of the present day. The discipline has played no role in the establishment of the games meetings nor in the

regulation of dancing and heavy event competitions. The games would have attracted little interest from ethnology because they were perceived to be a strengthening cultural form at the time of the English folk revival and the later Scottish folk music revival.

Ethnologists, of course, were key in the collecting and canonisation of north-eastern folk song at the turn of the twentieth century but those that we might loosely term ethnologists today have signally failed to examine contemporary manifestations of north-eastern culture as anything but objective surviving elements of a once dominant culture. While the workers at the Elphinstone Institute may well be aware of their role in the buoying of north-eastern traditions, they would be the last people to give us any sense of this.

In advertising a drama workshop for children or teenagers, and a subsequent public performance, the 1999 Doric Festival Programme reads:

It is with today's youngsters that tomorrow's culture rests and it is essential that we encourage them in their efforts to keep the North East Culture as a living tradition. You cannot afford to miss this presentation. (p. 15)

The suggestion that I could not afford to miss this performance seemed promising and, as a diligent researcher, I found myself at Garioch Community Centre in Inverurie one wet afternoon being told by staff surprised that anybody had turned up that the event had been cancelled due to a lack of interest in participation. Now, while the generally small audiences of the Doric Festival surely hint at a culture in some difficulty, a lack of performers suggests a perhaps even more critical situation that challenges the rhetoric of north-eastern institutions and the reality of the north-eastern cultural region they have sought to (re)build. These language-games of north-easterness are not fully instituted in the everyday life of the bulk of north-easterners.

The Highland Games and Gatherings, while still a long way from being mass participation events, do not have the same sorts of difficulties in attracting younger people to take part. In fact, in the Highland dancing events, it is rather the reverse – there

are very large numbers of young people performing and competing and progressively fewer in each older age category. The choice of sending children to Highland dancing lessons is much like the choice of sending those same children to ballet or tap dancing classes, or to pony trekking or gymnastics, or whatever. Neither is there a problem, it seems, at the Highland games in attracting young spectators. Highland games and gatherings are, as I have said before, ideal as family days out, not least because they take place in the afternoons. Not, of course, that I am suggesting it as simple as moving Doric Festival events to earlier in the day to attract more people. It is, however, the case that Doric Festival concerts and recitals tend to be in the evening: it is also true, however, that those attending such events would be of such an age that their children have long since left home or at least able to be left home alone rather than dragged along to a folk festival they have little interest in attending.

If, as Deborah Leslie (2001) writes, “Ye canna hae a hairst time, wi’oot sowing new seed”, the sowing of such new seed is what events such as the Doric Writing Competition and Awards are about. Indeed, encouraging the participation of young people is one of the key objectives of the Doric Festival more generally. Colin Milton (pers. Comm. 2001), however, tells me that there is no desire to discover or create a literary great at the Elphinstone Institute but, while this may well be the case, there is in the work of the Institute a marked concern with getting more people to do more writing in their native tongue.

The new seed of the Highland games and gatherings is copiously sown at the many dancing schools across the north-east and beyond that train new Highland dance performers. This is significantly aided by the fact that Highland dancing is a widely seen and well-known cultural form – to a certain extent the games and gatherings merely accommodate the dancing activity that is already taking place elsewhere, although, of course, such popularity of the Highland dancing is not independent of the games themselves (and certainly not historically so). The young dancers at the games stand as a metonym for all of the youth of the nation, the potential of the nation for the future, and for future generations. Thus, while the institutions of the north-eastern culture are largely

involved in the promotion and encouragement of that culture, the SGA and the SOBHD are instead involved in the regulation of activities. It is not, of course, that the Highland games events are any more authentic or worthy, but rather that the processes of their invention are further back in time and they are supported by the banal iconography of a Highland Scottish culture on the television, in the newspapers and on the shortbread tins of the nation.

Much of the work of the Institute, and in particular that of Sheena Blackhall, is concerned with the collection of materials from the field. This collection from the field, however, additionally involves active creation *in* the field rather than the simple collection of materials already extant. The field trips of today's Elphinstone Institute, unlike those of the folk song collectors of the past, are primarily about the distribution of culture rather than its collection. This is not to suggest, of course, that school children in the north-east do not speak in a way that might, or might not, be termed "the Doric" but rather to point out that they do not tend to write in their spoken dialect until encouraged to do so by Sheena Blackhall's visits. It is the practice of writing in the dialect that is the novel practice being distributed through visits to schools, the setting of dialect assignments, adult reading groups and, ultimately, the Doric Festival and the Elphinstone Institute. And, of course, the practice of writing rather than speaking the dialect is anything but naturalised and everyday, and requires considerably more application on the part of the author than unproblematic everyday speech. Further, the field investigations of the Elphinstone Institute reveal that while the spoken language of the north-east remains rich in local features, the language of north-easterners also contains many elements of Standard English or Scots that could not realistically be argued to be north-eastern in their origin. Writing in the Doric, of course, is not so much about the accurate representation of the speech patterns of contemporary north-easterners as about the accurate representation of the speech of idealised north-easterners of yesteryear (whether that yesteryear be 1932, 1842 or any other year). Even more remarkable in this respect are the Bothy Ballad workshops, run by Sheena Blackhall, in which people are taught how to compose songs about daily life within a historical agricultural system. The

spoken language of today being deemed less authentic, a turn is made to the past in order to retrieve an elusive, if not illusory, authenticity.

Cyclical time and linear time

Time is structured in very particular ways within a Doric north-eastern Scotland as represented by the major institutions of the region. As detailed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, the time of Doricness is very much in the past. The Bothy Ballads and the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century poetry of the region are not so much stuck in the past as *of* the past – those particular compositions stand as documents of life in the past created in that past. There is not, of course, a problem in the fact that current traditions are rooted in the past and intimately connected to past practice given that tradition is, ideally, expected to be based on the past in some sense. Where the problem arises is in the circumstance in which the very same ballads and poems remain as the contemporary tradition – the north-eastern folk culture of today is far from dynamic in that even contemporary pieces tend to be concerned with the past. While the time of “Doric” is shown to be in the past, despite protestations to the contrary, reference to contemporary times is tied up with the notion that current time is structured in the same ways. The organisation of time is based around the regular cycles of the day and of the year. Such a cyclical arrangement of time is additionally, however, always subject to linear time in that the cycles are entirely contained within the particular days, seasons or years to which they relate. Thus, while, one day or one year may involve the same work patterns and the same events taking place at roughly the same time as another, each constitutes another step towards the future; i.e. today. This journey towards contemporary life is not one that is made in its entirety within the narrative of those discussing north-eastern culture. The natural and normalised cycles of the life of north-eastern rural dwellers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are interrupted and disturbed at some imprecise point – imprecise to the extent that rather than a detailed and reasoned discussion of decline we are left simply with a present quite unlike the past. The implication is that something dramatic has happened that has changed the life of the average north-easterner and that this something dramatic has detracted from the authenticity of the experience of the north-easterner. The progression of linear time enables both the laying down of layers of

tradition and practice and the decay or erosion of an apparently earlier whole folk culture – such a vision of decay informs the survivalist tendency in ethnology. Tradition as practiced today is something quite different to the totality of a cultural whole seen as constituting the past and it is in these relations through and in time that the spectacular nature of north-easterness is formed and reformed.

Tradition in current times is about the repeated and stylised performance of a small number of practices rather than the experiencing the entire culture of the past. With regard to the Highland games and the Highland culture of Scotland, relations of time are far more simplistically linear in their nature. It is, for example, supposed that the tradition of holding gatherings to test the strength of men and the tradition of the sword dance were both originated by Malcolm Canmore. Now, while the likelihood of this being verifiable is unlikely, it is the case that such a proposed link between the practices of the past and the practices of today is more straight-forwardly about the progression of time and the possible changes in tradition. So, we have a progression of linear time with the games and additionally a far longer period of time with which to imagine back to a Highland culture. The Bothy Ballads are perhaps a century and half old, about as old as contemporary Highland games meets, whereas, by mystifying the practices, it is difficult, indeed impossible, to pinpoint a moment in time at which the Highland games came to be anything like they currently are. Scholarship and intellectual effort has been expended on the culture of the north-east but not on the highland games. Not even the Elphinstone Institute, with its remit to examine the culture of northern Scotland, has spent any time, thus far, examining the very large numbers of games that take place every summer in the north-east and the north generally.

Within discourses of modernity, cyclical time represents something more primitive than the apparently rational or logical belief in the forward movement of simple linear time. Thus there is something of a double structuring of time in accounts of north-easterness within which notions of linear progression and progress are impossible to ignore and retain a momentum of their own. This momentum - the always forwards motion of linear time – presents a narrative within which, while the dominant structuring of the everyday

lives of historic north-easterners, the cycle of things is steadily undermined by the advance of a different sort of time that is less involved with agriculture and with production from the land. Thus, while the rural north-easterners live out their lives in thrall to the cyclical motions of natural time, there is, external to those lives, external even to the region, an additional time – a time that does not allow any return – ticking away, destroying the basis of their simple, unproblematic lives. The daily routine of yoking and lousing or the annual cycle of sowing through harvesting both enable a return to an earlier part in the cycle and the playing out of the entire cycle all over again. Linear time in which time runs, for example, from the 1820s through to the 1990s, does not, within the perception of cultural commentators in the north-east and more generally, allow for any going back or playing out of events again. Once something is gone and no longer figures in contemporary times it is necessary to recreate or attempt to re-stabilise it. I would like, however, to conceptualise some of the temporal aspects of the production and presentation of north-eastern Scotland slightly differently and, to enable me to do this, I will now explore the appeals to the linear past that are made in the name of authenticity.

Authenticity

As I discussed in chapter 4, authenticity tends to be located in the past for those concerned with national identities and traditions. Tradition is seen to come from the past and to maintain a close relationship to that past and to something of the essence of a nation, region or community. Going back perhaps as far as might conventionally be seen to be reasonable, we are told that Doric is closer to a mythical Germanic “Mother Language” (McClure 1995) and it is this earlier language – the forbear of both English and Scots – that is held up as an ideal of authenticity. The search for an authentic north-easterness looks to the past and the rediscovery and reuse of words and terms that have fallen out of use. There is an interesting tension in the move towards the reuse of words that have fallen out of use and the contrary argument that the Doric dialect is the more natural expression of the feelings and emotions of late twentieth and early twenty-first century north-easterners. Doric is, through a series of rhetorical manoeuvres, prevented from being about the everyday experiences of contemporary north-easterners

and instead forced to continue to be about the apparently more authentic past. There is a division in the collection of songs known as Bothy Ballads, between those authored in the years 1820-1860 and those of a later period, that echoes this language-game within which older things are more authentic than innovation could ever be.

The simulated authenticity of the Highland Games is also located in the past, but in a much murkier past that is harder to pin down. We do not know for certain when or where the practices of tossing cabers or performing Highland Flings began, nor why. There is a difficulty to sustain sense that the games of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries have a direct relationship to previous cultural forms but we do not have anything like a straight and direct evolution of events from Canmore's alleged gathering to, for instance, the Braemar Gathering and Highland Games of last year. We do, however, have the necessary materials to explain why a games has taken place at Braemar for the last 190 years, leaving us with only 900 or so years unaccounted for in any way satisfactorily.

The Doric language or dialect needs to be as 'pure' as possible to operate as an authentic marker of north-easterness. The absorption of the speech patterns or vocabulary of standard English or American English is seen as a diluting of authenticity and thus of north-easterness. Partly, this relates to the vision of the Doric language and the world view of the north-easterner emerging organically from the lives of north-easterners in the landscapes of the north-east. Such an environmental determinism has not, by and large, allowed for the changes that have taken place to the environments in which the average north-easterner has lived in more recent times – indeed have not even taken account of major changes that have taken place in the agricultural system with which the language is seen to tie in. Whether given the name "the Doric" or not, the speech of the region, obviously, forms a continuum over the years – something not too dissimilar to the Doric would have been spoken in the region before being named as such in much the same way that something not entirely unlike the Doric of the past continues to be spoken by large numbers of people in the region. The appeal for a particular form of the Doric as a cultural marker and the natural register of the region is not, in itself, entirely unreasonable

– it is just that it requires some qualification and the recognition that as circumstances change, so too can a natural register. As the language-games within which north-easterners lives are played out change, so too will their techniques of talking about them and the nature of the moves they make within them. There seems little space within the ideology of the Doric Festival or the Elphinstone Institute for an authentic present centred on the contemporary lives of people in the region – i.e. the descendents of earlier ‘authentic’ Doric speakers. The human-environmental relationships within which culture is entirely submerged within and subject to the controlling influence of nature remains the dominant view of the historical north-east. No shift has taken place to allow for the diminished role of the natural environment (itself contestable) in the everyday lives of north-easterners.

The north-east as the context of north-eastern and Scottish cultures

This thesis has discussed two aspects of north-eastern culture as featured in the annual Doric Festival, both in relation to their enactment during that festival and their broader contextual setting within a north-eastern Scottish *habitus*. It is inconceivable that people would commit time and energy to the promotion of a Doric north-eastern culture if they did not believe in the reality of such a vision. Indeed, the very fact of their belief in such a situation is an important driving force in the creation of that reality. The language-games that constitute a north-eastern cultural context are created through the joint-actions of individual actors, and the institutions that encompass those individuals, rather than being related in some way to a territorially determined north-east. The Doric Festival organisers, the Elphinstone Institute staff, and dialect authors and performers recite ideas about north-eastern traditions that systematically form both those traditions and the region.

A reciprocal exchange takes place whereby the Elphinstone Institute and the Doric Festival draw on the established position of such popular north-eastern celebrities as Robbie Shepherd and Buff Hardie who in turn attract further legitimacy as the custodians of north-easterness through their association with an academic institute or a folk festival celebrating north-eastern culture. Thus, the institutions, while themselves being

predominantly concerned with popular rather than high culture, draw on the legitimacy of even more popular cultural forms while, at the same time, non-academics find themselves in the hallowed surroundings of the University of Aberdeen lecturing about folk traditions or lauded as tradition bearers.

These institutions, with the mid-1990s as the key moment of Institutionalisation, have been key in the contemporary mobilisation and deployment of particular historical cultural forms with particular sets of values attached. We can certainly point to substantial differences in the literary and ballad traditions of the north-east as now practised as compared to those of the past. Further, now that we can decipher additional layers of meaning being communicated in ballad performances, or in dialect compositions and recitals, we can also begin to unpack the ways in which the significance of such practices has also changed. Where both the form and content of the ballads were naturalised, everyday and banal they now represent unusual, exotic and spectacular events deployed to symbolise and encourage a 'fight' to save north-eastern culture. The rhetoric of these practices suggests that much more is at stake in contemporary ballad performances. No longer are we simply thinking about the lives and concerns of individuals: instead those individuals are made to stand as a metonym for all north-eastern people, their character and their heritage.

As popular publishing boomed in the late nineteenth century, ballads became available as published texts, variation declined and particular versions became established and the Bothy Ballads became more likely to be communicated in written rather than oral form (Buchan, 1972; Porter, 1999a). Thus at the same time as popularising particular songs, the growth in published versions of ballads also served to stifle the form and its development. As a result of this, we get to a situation today in which, while the major collections run to several thousands of ballads, it would be fair to say that the contemporary canon does not consist of many more than about twenty widely known Bothy Ballads. This narrower tradition of performance hints at some degree of personal agency for performers although their practice still draws on the legitimate credentials of

the scholarly collections. The Greig-Duncan collection contains many alternative versions of the same ballads. Today, the performance of Bothy Ballads and academic archives or publications complement each other to co-produce, or co-perform, the north-east through practice. That the tradition is still practised legitimises the academic endeavours that have previously catalogued, archived and created that tradition: the figuring of the tradition through collection and archiving in turn provides the indirect links to past practice that legitimise contemporary traditional practice.

While the ballads and dialect literature themselves might not be disseminating as widely as possible, similar ideas about the agricultural heritage of the region and the importance of this in the shaping of the people *do* circulate more widely. The gritty realism of the comic-satiric Bothy Ballads is more popular with the general public than the more complex and fantastic ballads and literature of the regional and national traditions and is seen to be more authentic, although, not *that* popular and we must bear in mind that the very 'reality' to which that realism appeals is, at the very least, questionable and deeply problematic. However, this is neither to undermine nor to criticise the contemporary practice or the Elphinstone Institute or the Doric Festival. This thesis has shown that tradition is always contingent and reconstituted through performance and, in this way, the traditions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries mirror those of the late twentieth and twenty first centuries. What this chapter and the three preceding it have highlighted is the shift of north-eastern tradition from the banal to the spectacular and the ways in which this has happened as well as the temporal relationships and appeals to an authentic past involved.

Banality is a precondition for the spectacle and the spectacular works best when drawing on, and in turn bolstering, that background noise in ways that do not tend to take place where north-eastern tradition is concerned. Part of the process of the spectacularisation of the quotidian is that practices are problematised, regulated and re-signified in ways that divorce them from realms of the commonplace (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991). Events become spectacular not only through a gradual process whereby the banal is actively

made into the spectacle but also as the result of a decline in the efficacy of banality and the consequent substituting of spectacle for the banal. As the Bothy Ballads have become less commonplace and north-eastern Scotland has been opened up to broader cultural influences, so the ballads have become more and more unusual and abnormal to the extent that any proposed 'organic' north-eastern cultural region has been weakened. Thus, the spectacularisation of north-eastern culture occurs through both the strengthening of the characteristics of the spectacle *and*, at the same time, though separately, the failure of the bases upon which banality and normalisation stand. It is vital that this distinction between these two processes is established and taken account of since while they undoubtedly reinforce each other they need not necessarily operate together.

A fatal north-easterness emerges during the public spectacles of events such as the Bothy Ballad Championship Final, the Doric Festival more generally and at meetings organised by the Elphinstone Institute. These dramatic and spectacular events carry with them something of the exotic due to the fact that they are not substantially underpinned by the everyday banality that the formation of the nation or region requires. Such contexts are formed of rhetorical practices and 'ready-made' ideas but resist normalisation because of the essentially unbounded nature of language-games. The banal, quotidian realms of north-easterness are not sufficiently stabilised and legitimised as language-games to enable Bothy Balladeering or dialect writing to pass as the everyday. Contemporary everyday life for north-easterners, whatever it may be, is assuredly not about ploughing fields, dining exclusively on variations on the theme of oatmeal nor flirting with *kitchie-deems*¹. Neither, other than for a handful of people, is it an everyday experience to dress as nineteenth century farm labourers and sing about these topics.

Now, while it is also the case that it is not an everyday experience for people in Scotland to dance Highland dances (although many do regularly do so) or to toss a caber, it is undeniably the case that the wider Highland culture that these practices symbolize is something that people in Scotland are very familiar with. Images of tartans, the kilt,

¹ Female servant, kitchen dame.

caber tossing, Highland dancing and the Highlands in general are ubiquitous. Everywhere you go in Scotland, the iconography of a national identity based on a Highland culture is visible. Scottish people have a confident and assured nationalism, within which the notions of the Highlands as the cradle of the nation and national tradition are taken for granted. At a very simple level, people know more about the tossing of cabers and the clan system and Gaelic language that such is presumed to tie in with than they do about the historical songs of agricultural labourers of the past. Or, rather, the historical songs of agricultural labourers are less like conventional forms of entertainment and not sufficiently spectacular enough (despite the fact that they are anything but banal). People do not walk up and down the streets of the north-east finding manifestations of a north-eastern regional identity on a day-to-day basis – there are no north-eastern flags hanging, gently flagging the region. The institutions are seen to be local or regional rather than national. And, yet, the institutions of the region are more unified in the sense that they cover the whole of the north-east whereas individual Highland Games or Gatherings are very firmly rooted in the local communities in which they take place. Games and Gatherings are staged independently of each other and the general public would get no sense of the role or presence of the SGA or the SOBHD at any particular meeting. The SGA and the SOBHD are not directly involved in the organizing of games events as this is overseen by local committees and community councils. Thus, the Highland Games scene of the north-east features far more localized institutions than the north-eastern cultural scene does with a crucial difference being that these smaller, particularized bodies of people have significant interaction with national bodies regulating their practice. Nobody regulates or controls what the Elphinstone Institute and the Doric Festival do – the rules of writing in the dialect or performing a Bothy Ballad are not written down nor formalised. As yet, it is not the case that potential balladeers are required by diktat of the authorities to wear dirty old trousers, tackety boots and a “pair o’ nicky tams”.

Now, this is not to say that very large numbers of north-easterners do not recognise an agricultural legacy nor that many do not speak in a characteristically north-eastern way – whether or not we are prepared to go as far as to label this “Doric”. It is simply to say

that these contemporary north-easterners are engaged in different north-eastern lives during different times that do not involve the use of antiquated dialect terms so much as the use of terms related to a more global way of modern life. The very real lack of resonance between the subject matter of the Bothy Ballads and literature of the region and the lives of the intended audiences creates tensions in their presentation as an everyday north-easterness. The language-game in play is one with only a very few players such that these particular visions of north-easterness function as realities for only a very small number of experts and enthusiasts. What is interesting in this respect is the fact that the traditions of the north-east that have been considered in this thesis are very close to the practices, and at least concerning the practices, of the recent forbears of contemporary north-easterners in a way that Highland traditions could not be said to be. Thus, the attendance at Highland games, as far as it contains a strong element of nostalgia, contains an element of non-specific longing for the nation rather than for the lives and lifestyles of predecessors.

The rhetoric of both the expert and the enthusiast views of north-eastern culture suggest that this (distinctive) culture covers the entire north-east constituting an 'organic' and unique cultural community. More correctly, it has the *potential* to operate across this space – through a series of discursive manoeuvres it is legitimised as one possible language-game concerning the traditions of that region. The repeated citing of these ideas about a historical agricultural north-east accumulates to (re)establish the contextual and institutional settings within which those ideas are key. The performative power of each re-citation is dependent on the accretion of power to the ready-made through previous citations. This view of north-eastern culture, however, cannot and will not achieve discursive stability until the ready-made ideas through which it moves are more widely adopted and thus legitimised and normalised. The mobilisation and circulation of certain key arguments, and their widest possible communication is vital to enable north-eastern institutions to "keep the tung, sangs and music as 'living traditions'" (*Doric Festival 'Freen O' The Festival'* 1999). Indeed, enthusiasts and institutions, more than being merely commentators, are vital in (re)creating those 'living traditions'.

Chapter 12: Conclusions: Tradition, language and practice in the constitution of folk cultures

This thesis has explored the processes of the creation of two competing regional and national identities and folk cultures in the north-east of Scotland. This final chapter now moves to reassert the theoretical framework proposed earlier to stress the importance of tradition, language and practice in the constitution of folk cultures and to make some conclusions. Though recognising that identity remains always fluid and that hybrid forms of identification are common, this thesis has demonstrated that the relative uptake of particular identities is contingent on the citation and recitation of key ideas, and that repeated citation is key in the simulation of authenticity and objectivity. It is not, of course, that either a Doric-based north-eastern identity or a Highland-based mainstream Scottish identity is more authentic than their alternatives. A Highland Scottishness, however, does, through citation, carry a greater legitimacy and an apparently greater stability. Indeed, what this thesis has shown is that legitimacy and authenticity are built up out of a series of rhetorical moves that ensure that particular cultural practices can stand as absolutely genuine and objective reflections of the past. Practices thus connected in time to a national or regional community past are then mobilised in the claiming of a contemporary distinctiveness or a contemporary essence. Whether or not such practices neatly correspond with an imagined past, and this in itself does not especially matter, it is the repetition of 'ready-made' claims and the re-performing of particular acts that enables a banal notion of the nation to become established. The manifestations of folk cultures witnessed at the Highland Games and Gatherings on the fields of the north-east are, no matter how conventionally spectacular, considerably less remarkable than the Bothy Ballad concerts of the school halls.

Looking at and listening to the nation

"Enjoy the Spectacle" (Highland Games Programme, Elgin Athletics Club 1999, 1)

The above quote from the programme for the Elgin Highland Games of 1999 implores us to enjoy the visuality of the day as well as pointing to the apparently exciting nature of the events on that field. Now, despite all the talk in this thesis of the importance of the regulated ways of deploying both the body and language, it remains the case that at public festivals such as the Doric Festival or a Highland Games meeting, the visual reception of such performances is vital in the reproduction of nationhood or a distinctive region. The practices of attending such an event are primarily visual and aural as far as the reproduction of the nation goes in that the embodied experiences are largely those of looking at and listening to the performances of the nation. While the Highland Dancer must carefully ensure that their feet are at all times turned out and the apron of their kilt remains flat, the precise way in which this is done is of little direct importance to the viewing member of the public. The bodily practice of the dancer or the heavy eventer is conceptualised here as being implicated in the production of the discursive *and* in the extra-discursive re-production of ideas of the nation. Through the actions of these athletes, the nation is evoked. An idealised and romanticised Highland culture and region are *the* key icons in the economy of visual representations of Scotland, and the supposed traditions of that region work to produce that nation even where dramatically re-contextualised outwith a Highland zone.

Normalisation and spectacularisation

Many of the institutions that provide the background noise that normalises the Highland Games and Gatherings are not actively, if at all, concerned with the practices of dancing, or caber tossing, or whatever practice we might pick out from the games. The hegemonic nature of the Highland vision of Scottish culture enables the Highland Games, regardless of the pageantry involved in such an event, to seem an entirely logical and plausible occasion in a way that a Bothy Ballad championship is unable to manage. The day-to-day encounters with pipers, tartans, shortbread tins etc. ensures that the Highlands are not, in themselves, terribly interesting. The institutions, both formal and informal, of the Scottish nation enable the Highland culture to be reproduced as Scottish culture, while the specifically Highland Games-oriented institutions get on with the business of organising and managing the dancing and the heavy athletics. There is nothing strange

about seeing a field full of bagpipers if you regularly see a piper playing on Union Street in Aberdeen. A room full of Bothy Balladeers, however, is likely to offer the average spectator a sight and the experience of something they have only very rarely, if ever, come across. Again, it is not that Bothy Balladeering is strange in itself; it is just that it continues to *seem* so.

Partly, this is because Bothy Balladeering has been spectacularised in the move from everyday practice to the stage. Having been elevated to the stage, the ballad traditions have been dramatically re-contextualised in such a way that the relationship between the performances of the songs and the ostensible subject matter of the songs has been complicated or severed. The form and content of the Ballads has been taken and re-signified to represent the north-east in a process of the reflexive production of that region. The stage acts as an arena for the display of tradition that is beyond the original context of the practice of those traditions. Bothy Balladeering has made the move to an elevated platform independently of a genuinely popular resurgence in regional identity, and has thus lacked the institutional setting that would make such performances legitimate. Highland dancing, on the other hand, did not make the transition to the stage until *after* the Highlands of Scotland had become an important element of the iconography of Scotland. Thus, the dances are recognisable elements of a culture that is meaningful to spectators in a way that the Doric Festival is not. Except, of course, Doric Festivals, or rather their constituent parts, *are* a part of a meaningful and recognisable culture: it is just that this is for a very small group of people.

Embodied practices and citation

Although a Highland Scotland seems an incontrovertible fact to many, still the complex and sophisticated movements that constitute the Highland events discussed in this thesis are required to re-perform the cultural possibility of the Scottish nation. The nation does not simply exist, and even less so as a Highland or Celtic nation. The practices that the Scottish Games Association and the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing regulate work to produce the nation and, because of the now highly formalised nature of these events, the very fine detail of how those practices are regulated and codified is vital

in the actualisation of the nation. It is only in and following the standardisation and formalisation of, for example, the Highland dancing traditions that such dancing has come to be held up as an ideal of national culture. The strictly regulated forms are those with which the public are familiar and are the only forms sanctioned for such formal public display. The SGA and the SOBHD are responsible for enabling the heavy events and the dancing to become sufficiently stabilised that they can coherently represent the nation in their playing out. These two institutions are also the key players in a language-game that is played out in performing or observing the Highland events. Without the SGA and the SOBHD, practice would vary across Scotland to such an extent that there would be no *formal* tradition to be learned or watched. Thus, *exactly* how a highland fling or a caber toss is performed is *exactly* what we need to know as it tells us a lot about both the discursive and the extra-discursive mobilisation of images of the nation, and about the interrelations between those two realms of practice.

Non-representational theory need not, of course, be *anti*-representational. Representation still has important effects in the world and in understandings of that world, and where we might find some useful intellectual terrain might be in the idea that the simulation of representation is the direct result of the success of the citation of ready-mades in the creation of banality. In this conceptualisation, representation remains a tool of production that, while not representing objective reality, *does* demonstrate the efficacy and importance of stable or dominant readings that constitute realities for particular groups. Only through such banality can representations make sense. What we are getting at with non-representational theory however is the fact that nothing pre-exists its repeated performance or citation. The language-games of north-easternness and Scottishness are normalised through the circulation of ready-made ideas about those places, those cultures and those peoples. The citation of knowledges is crucial in the maintenance and operation of the social contexts within which those knowledges are meaningful. Thus, the folk cultures examined in this thesis are both re-created in their very performance, and those performances re-create the context of performance. Each performance is a citation in a chain of citations and is both preceded by similar activity and will have similar antecedents.

Joint-action

The literature, historiography, newspapers, broadcasters, local governmental organisations and other bodies outlined in this thesis all work together, whether by design or not, to recreate the banal backdrop against which more spectacular instances of north-easternness and Scottishness can be played out, and work to offer a legitimacy to such spectacles as the Doric Festival and the Highland Games, although, as the discussion in the rest of this thesis has demonstrated, the distinction between the banal and the spectacular is never this simplistically clear-cut. One person's spectacle may prove to be perfectly banal to another and vice versa. And, of course, some of the institutions we are thinking about here, such as the Doric Festival, exist explicitly to promote the region. Other institutions, such as regional public services, appear to exist merely to serve some bureaucratic convenience in the governance of parts of Scotland or the United Kingdom. Anyhow, the specifically north-eastern cultural institutions explored in this thesis are of recent origin and may, conceivably, be argued to have not yet had the time to dramatically normalise their practices and their rhetoric. Certainly, the rhetoric of the north-eastern literary scene, or of the Bothy Ballad or academic scenes, can be seen to have manifested itself prior to the founding of the Elphinstone Institute and is, in that sense, enduring. However much the Elphinstone Institute is simply re-performing and re-stating ideas that can be shown to have an element of temporal longevity, however, it remains the case that to many in the region these ideas are either new or strange. Somehow, Bothy Ballads and dialect poetry are not capturing the popular imagination, though imagined they are.

The relative success of the Highland Games and the Highland culture, on the other hand, is attributable to the practices of joint-action. The SGA and the SOBHD are fortunate to have behind them two and a half centuries of myth making concerning the Highlands, and almost as long since the Scottish nation adopted the culture of the Highlands. The Highland image is entirely banal to the people of Scotland. The joint-actions that

recreate a Highland Scotland, then, are more successful in meeting their intentions because there are a greater number of joint-actors undertaking more joined-up action. There is a residual intentionality lying underneath the citation, citation and recitation of the tenets and practices of Highland Scotland that contemporary enthusiasts are able to tap into. A representational power has been built up through the deployment of a ready-made notion of a Highland nation, and this representational power remains available to be re-presented. Even where the intention may be simply to flip the caber as close to the 12 o'clock position as possible, the intentionality of earlier actors in the founding of Highland Games or of the SGA in the formulating of rules for caber-tossing is still having perlocutionary effects. The power of those perlocutionary effects is picked up and redeployed in the playing out of the heavy events on any one day, adding another citation and enabling further feedback into the acts that perpetuate the nation through the process of recursion.

The Celtic and the otherwise inclined

In the generation of a Highland vision of Scotland, the Celtic heritage of the country is celebrated at the expense of that of all other groups of settlers in Scotland. Crucially, those excluded include the Germanic settlers that originally introduced the most widely spoken languages in contemporary Scotland: Scots and English. Scotland is not an inherently or exclusively Celtic or Highland nation but must continually be made to be both of these things. Simplistically and provocatively put, the Celtic is more glamorous and popular than anything of a supposedly different origin. The centrality of a Highland, Gaelic or Celtic identity for modern Scotland does not, however, preclude the holding of alternative sets of traditions or identities. Vernacular Scots literature has been fairly lively since the early twentieth century as a locus of identity and nowhere more so than in the north-east of the country. The traditions of north-eastern Scotland, however, are not usually promoted in opposition to other sets of practices but rather as an additional localised facet of Scottishness, tightly interwoven with other Scottish traditions. By and large, a north-eastern identity is supplemental to an awareness of a Highland heritage and a Highland present. The Highland Games satisfy a desire for Scottishness while the Bothy Ballads satisfy a desire for something more localised and perhaps personally

meaningful. That many people in Scotland are aware of the recent invention of Highland dress and the relatively recent founding of Highland Games/Gatherings does not lessen the enthusiasm with which Scottishness is celebrated, albeit casually, at such events. The Bothy Ballads and dialect literature for north-easterners hint at something more 'authentic' and more directly related to the lives of the immediate forbears of their audiences. As vehemently as Hugh Trevor-Roper (1983) tells us that the entire Highland Culture of Scotland is invented, thousands of Scots feel a very genuine and sometimes immense pride in the donning of Highland dress for a ball, a wedding, a graduation or a football match. Invented as the kilt might be, it has considerable symbolic import in Scotland. However, for every person unproblematically celebrating both Burn's Night and their own Scottishness there is likely to be at least one other going through the heavily codified motions less willingly or entirely failing to mark either the 'occasion' or their Scottishness in this way. In contrast to these national traditions, the regional culture of the north-east remains of the region and primarily for those in the region that wish to celebrate it.

Intentionality

I wish in this section to draw out a distinction between those events that set out explicitly to celebrate an ethnic group, nation or community and those that appear to do so only incidentally. I am interested here in the differences in the organisation, production and consumption of 'tradition' and, flowing from this, the nation. While a Highland Games may simplistically, despite the careful organisation and planning required for the staging of such an event, appear to just happen, a Doric Festival is far more explicit about the conditions of production of the events themselves as well as the reasoning behind their organisation – it requires justification, in some sense, in a way that a Highland Games does not. Partly, this is about the numbers of people that can be expected to attend these events and the reasons for which they attend. A Highland Games or Gathering is part of a broader economy of public, often municipal, events that also includes fairs, galas, organised picnics, and Christmas parties and fireworks displays. The vast majority of visitors attend Games simply for the purpose of a family day out and there would not, necessarily, be a problem in replacing dancers or heavy-event athletes with, for example,

motorcycle stunt teams or prize livestock. These alternative attractions would probably still achieve the end of getting people into a field for an afternoon.

A concert or reading as a part of the Doric Festival, however, is more likely to attract a committed audience of interested and engaged followers for whom the event has more direct personal significance. The rhetorical language of the Doric Festival is additionally, and crucially, couched in terms of the saving of tradition and heritage, and the celebration of a north-eastern variant of Scottishness. Highland Games are rarely advertised or discussed in such terms – they are held to be “living” traditions that coincidentally celebrate Scottishness. They do not need to be explained to their audience. A Highland brand of Scottishness is sufficiently stabilised in popular discourse and so generally accepted that a large number of annual events can be staged throughout the north-east and attract large audiences that simply do not materialise for the Doric Festival or for Elpinstone Institute events. While the Highland Games are a genuinely popular though not terribly engaging form of entertainment, the Doric Festival seeks to be populist while also requiring a deeper engagement on the behalf of the spectator in order to understand what it is that they are seeing or hearing. Bothy Ballads and dialect literature, we are told, need to be kept alive and brought to new audiences while Highland Games are very much alive and have a large ready-made audience. A Highland Games or Gathering, then, appears, to all intents and purposes, to be something that a) just happens and b) just happens to involve the display of an overt Scottishness.

Now, of course, nothing simply just happens or just happens to purport to be this, that or the proverbial other: things or events are *made* to signify and meaning is never entirely confined to the individual instant or artefact. The meanings or significance of traditions, however, is never as simple as a direct correspondence between the intentions of organisers and the impact on spectators. Intentionality and purposefulness are far more slippery than this direct chain of causation would allow as a result of the interconnectedness of multiple and unbounded language-games, and the relationships between historical and contemporary utterances that may or may not be concerned with tradition. The intentions of Highland Games organisers are more easily met than those of

people promoting north-eastern culture because they are bolstered by the banal current of everyday speech, writing, representation and material artefacts that support notions of a Highland Scotland that both precedes and is contemporary with the events themselves.

Folk cultures and popular culture

So, as this chapter is stressing, the established Highland tradition does not require the participant, organiser or spectator to make any great leap in understanding or to contribute much in the way of reflexivity. In this respect, a Highland Games could be said to be a more-or-less spectacular manifestation of an everyday and banal “reality” for a great number of Scottish, or even non-Scottish, people. People know what they are getting and, in fairly large numbers, they go out and get it. And, although they do not go out and get it everyday, they can go out and find (or stumble across) similar images of Scottishness. In contrast, those traditions promoted as characteristically belonging to the north-eastern knuckle of Scotland do not have the same relationship to mass culture or established and recognised institutions. As such, attendance at events during a Doric Festival programme is very explicitly about an active interest in regaining or retaining (depending on your opinion) a distinctive north-eastern culture. The organisation and funding of such events is certainly an attempt to build the kind of banality that so successfully underpins Highland Games and enables those events to thrive. Simplistically, we might say that Games and Gatherings are things that happen in Scotland while the Doric Festival looks more like something that is made to happen: the strings are much more visible. And, such visible strings do not make for an appearance of authenticity. Objective truth and authenticity are difficult to convey through novel practices or through practices that are not underpinned by everyday experience. Thus, while there may be a strong popular local consciousness in the north-east, it is no longer the case that this is based around an agricultural lifestyle – nor, even, is it necessarily based around an agricultural *heritage*. Now that the bulk of the populace live at some remove, though not necessarily geographically, from the practices of ploughing and harvesting it seems somewhat bizarre to celebrate such lifestyles. Not that it is, in any sense, bizarre to celebrate such lives and practices. It is just that it *seems* bizarre, odd, jarring and spectacular precisely because it has not been made to be otherwise.

Conclusions: A final thesis

This thesis has demonstrated that through performative talk and writing about tradition and the enactment of those traditions, discourses are formed and folk cultures emerge. In conceiving of the discursive and the extra-discursive as overlapping and inherently interrelated realms of practice, I am not putting the body back into a discursive analytical framework, nor failing to entirely remove it from an inadequate one. Of course, seeing bodily action as discursive or representing bodily practice in discourse reinforces a dualism in which the mind is privileged over the body. In so privileging the mind it remains difficult to say anything meaningful about bodies and bodily practice. Equally, the compensatory move of *over*-privileging the body does not provide an adequate solution either. Non-representational theory posits that there are realms of practice and experience that it is not possible to get at through representations. What I have argued is that representations themselves are formed through non-representational *and* representational practices that work at the level of practical-consciousness. Representations here, then, become a matter of reflecting stabilised, normalised, dominant and legitimised ideas, knowledges and practices. So-called non-representational practices are often learned through discursive interaction and, for this reason, discursive accounts of the body and its role in meaning making still have much to offer us. Methods of bodily movement learned through the use of, and in contact with, language can become internalised and work at a level of practical-consciousness in the same way that rhetorical or ready-made ideas do.

The ready-mades of the Highland Games language-games are successful in achieving the reproduction of the Highland culture largely because of the complementary institutional structure within which they operate and that has enabled them to become banal and everyday. The ready-mades of the language-games of north-eastern Scottish do not operate either within, alongside or against a mature institutional framework that enables them to be widely cited. As a result of the lack of opportunity for citation, the ready-mades of north-easternness still carry with them something of the spectacular or fatal.

The majority of formal institutions in the north-east are concerned with government or civil society, rather than with folk cultures. Thus the intentionality that underpins and drives the joint-actions and citations of the Doric Festival and Elphinstone Institute staff is dissipated as their ready-mades fail to circulate terribly widely. The utterances of north-easterness remain, for now, largely unhappy performatives because of the lack of a suitable medium of communication and the absence of popular interest. The joint-actions of those promoting, organising and discussing a Highland Scottishness, however, have been far more successful in achieving their intentions, and in simulating authenticity, because of the intense banality that underpins and reinforces their actions. Highland culture has become popular culture in Scotland, while north-eastern folk cultures remain the concern of the enthusiast and the expert.

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