

**ANTI-MODERN PERFORMANCE IN  
THE SOCIETY FOR CREATIVE ANACHRONISM**

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## ABSTRACT

This is an ethnography of the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA): a group of people devoted to the re-creation and re-enactment of life in the Middle Ages. The ongoing debate in Anthropology about representation, authenticity and performance is mirrored in the romanticization of history and self which lies at the center of SCA re-enactment. At issue are the ways history is appropriated and re-constructed to satisfy the subjective needs of groups and individuals. I examine how people in the SCA (Scadians) selectively construct a modernist simulacrum of the European Middle Ages and how they interact, according to popular tropes, at calendrical “events” sponsored by this organizational structure. Theories of the “invention of tradition” and nostalgia are discussed with special attention to the performative aspects of these cognitive models. Analysis of Scadian performance will focus on persona creation, medieval sensory “sedimentation” and “imagery”. These issues of cognitive construction will be contrasted with participant “forgetting” of inappropriate anachronisms. I address the issue of romanticism as a critique of modernity through the quest for the authentic individual in defiance of the disembedding systems of modernity. This combined approach can serve as a cognitive model for future discussions of identity formation and subjective understanding.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Issues of authenticity, tradition and nostalgia lie at the heart of the Society for Creative Anachronism's (SCA) anti-modern performance. These issues also exist at the center of anthropological debate over the issue of "authentic" tradition (Handler & Linnekin 1984) in the face of a world of increasingly disembedded meaning as experienced by the individual (Giddens 1990). While some theorists (e.g. Lyotard 1984) view this disembedding as generative and a source for positive intellectual play others (e.g. Allan 1986; Giddens 1990, 1991) identify this process as a source for existential anxiety and previously (historically) unknown risk-taking. The SCA resists this disembedding by drawing from the European Middle Ages those tropes which serve to relieve modern anxieties. These tropes are then assembled in such a way that they construct an experiential anti-modern alterity.

In brief, the Society for Creative Anachronism is a society dedicated to re-creating and living the Middle Ages "as they should have been." Through forsoothly speech—speech which sounds appropriately medieval—and the creation and performance of medieval personae members strive to achieve the "dream" of the SCA. The "dream" is that of a place where people can perform their "true selves" (see Appendix A) as opposed to the modern, or "mundane," world where members experience existential anxieties (Giddens 1991) which prevent this blossoming inner, authentic, self. Much of the "dream" involves forgetting the modern world during SCA events because the "glamour" of the successful SCA event is vulnerable to such intrusions. Successful events become nostalgia made "real" but such transformations demand the collective effort, both cognitive and in labour, of all members to maintain their medieval "simulacrum" (Baudrillard: 1984)

The SCA is a dynamic body politic reflexively embodying and enacting alternative

values in response to the disembedding values of modern discourse. SCA society<sup>1</sup> constitutes a trans-individual subject which engages contemporary North American society in a coherent manner. (Rousseau 1995) No individual “thinks” the SCA in its entirety; the SCA constantly thinks itself from day to day and year to year. The SCA “dream”, to be discussed in greater detail below, is a transcendental enterprise without strict individual human loci yet also existing within the cognitive experiencing subject. The “dream” is explicitly stated in the SCA mandate, elaborated in the *Known World Handbook* as well as in other SCA documentation, actively pursued, and only achieved through the intense labour of its members. The ways Scadians envision, embody and enact the “Current Middle Ages” are diverse but centre on the “dream”. Just as the Bible, or any written creed, cannot account for people’s diverse textual interpretations, so the extensively documented mandate of the SCA cannot account for the diverse activities and experiences of its members.

This thesis addresses the complex ways SCA members (Scadians) reflexively construct and adopt anti-modern personae to facilitate personal and inter-personal cognitive transformations: I call this Scadian transformation, “glamour”. These transformations can be ephemeral or profound but each member experiences one, or seeks to have one, in the course of their SCA experience. I discuss these issues with special attention to the ways SCA members enact this resistance to modernity and how they then subjectively experience their re-created selves within this stylized milieu. This paper deals with the ways in which certain North Americans negotiate their consumption of their collective memory and history both as a form of protest and a sphere of identity formation. The consumption of history is diverse within the SCA

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the term “society” is one of convenience. Societies as such are never well defined autonomous entities but there is no other useful shorthand for the larger social system of which we are all a part. Later in this paper I will use the word “Society” in reference to the SCA. “Society” as a proper name refers only to the SCA. Once again it is a useful rhetorical short form.

community but manifests itself in semi-coherent structures (or anti-structures, cf. Turner 1986) which serve the common goal, or "dream", of creating a world, an altered consciousness, where the modern world of variable and unstable values is replaced with a chivalrous one where honour and equality within a subjectively meaningful context are desirable and achievable goals. Much cognitive labour goes into these re-creations: the physical labour of creating medieval artefacts must be accompanied by Scadians' reflexively authentic interaction with them and with other Scadians. Through these labours, the Society for Creative Anachronism is an example of the way some people choose to recapture some transcendent meaning in their lives. In this way, though they actively resist what they perceive as "modern" values, they create not a medieval but a modern alterity which is, to paraphrase William Blake, like innocence regained.

### **Positioning One's Self in the SCA**

Positioning oneself in ethnography has been problematized by the acceptance among anthropologists that neutrality, panopticon-like vision (Foucault 1977) and essentialism are an illusion (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Strathern 1991). For anthropologists working in so-called developing countries these issues emerge straightforwardly as issues of power over representation, identification and interpretation. Ethnographic research uncovers these same processes while also presenting the problem of diminished ethnographic distance: a distance more subjective than geographical. Turning the ethnographic eye closer to home involves engaging a subject who could very well be you. In this sense ethnography is the study of one's self as the other or the other as one's self.

In less abstract terms, this engagement of the familiar-as-unfamiliar is the substance of my engagement with the Society for Creative Anachronism. Joining the SCA facilitated my research and in the process I uncovered many understandings of it as an ethnographer, a man, an outsider and an insider. Ethnographic distance varies from position to position. As an

ethnographer my understanding mind analyses what I see, hear, smell, taste and touch and renders into forms which can be understood by fellow anthropologists and a knowledgeable readership. As an analytical outsider I perceive the alterity of the SCA while as an insider I have indefinite perceptions regarding the success or failure of SCA performance according to the understanding of the collective as delineated from a shared oral tradition and printed manuals. Perceived irony from the “outside” becomes a profound reality when understood from the inside. Though I share the same common culture and am shaped by a similar habitus, my position relative to the SCA is anything but simple.

The most interesting position of all, from a scholar’s point of view, is that of confronting the exception to one’s expectations. When I first considered the SCA as a possible area of anthropological inquiry I saw it as a complete society unto itself with its own customs and material culture. Contemporary anthropological literature, however, no longer supports this proposition in the case of peoples in conventional field locales who appear to be linguistically and culturally distinct. (Kuper 1992). The same is even more true for a sub-section within the population of an industrial economy. “Society” and “culture” can no longer be treated as essentializing terms as they were in the early years of anthropology. In the modern, or if you will postmodern, world, boundaries and transcendental demarcations of identity and cohesion come apart through economics, travel and instantaneous communication. Societies are reconfigured discursively as loci, geographical or trans-national, as economic and cultural activities without definite boundaries but having cohesion as defined by the researcher, often somewhat arbitrarily, and the people studied. “Culture” constitutes the ideas and understandings of people within social systems. Cultural systems, because they exist more in the ideational realm, are more theoretically unstable and subject to the ebb and flow of cultural data.

The Society for Creative Anachronism is arguably more affected by these forces due to

its "First World" membership demographic. As I will discuss later, the SCA is in a dialogue with modernity. This dialogue exists at the level of the very idea of what it means to be a "modern" person and, because the SCA is anti-modern, or romantic, it offers interesting solutions to this condition. These solutions are inherently temporal and cannot hold the imagery and disembeddedness of the modern world at bay for more than a week, a day or even an hour at a time. Scadians, as they call themselves, have a fragmented yet collective notion of the purpose of the SCA; each person pursues their own cognitive and performative needs within the unified "dream" of the SCA. Anachronistic conventions selected by each member establish alternatives to perpetually negotiated modern identities. Each member chooses from the repertoire of historical memory more or less independently as they fashion their anti-modern identity. This freedom engenders feelings of empowerment but can evoke discord and rancour between groups in the Society. There is an inescapable tension at the heart of the SCA dream and yet while such tensions produce consequent ironic social interactions (under the rubric of the SCA's explicit mandate) irony is precisely what Scadians are trying to avoid. Irony, even the irony of resisting irony, is a major facet of Scadian performance and identity construction. We shall see how Scadians deal with these manifest tensions in my ethnographic work detailed later in the paper.

My research blasted apart preconceptions I had about how the SCA functions for each member as a forum for individual identity re-creations and performances. The work of Turner (1976, 1974, 1986) and Schechner (1988) both predisposed me to an understanding of the performance of the SCA self as one performed in a ritualistic segregation from one's everyday life not unlike acting on a stage. Through my research I learned that the SCA works more as a performance of a reconstructed and maintained everyday self (Goffman 1959) or, more importantly, an everyday self performed within a different milieu. The SCA is not so much a culture of conscious performance, as in the theatre, but one of unconscious performance, as

much as this is humanly possible. This unconscious performance can only come about through active historical re-invention and the re-creative labour of the members. Generalisations such as this hold even if all Scadians are considered individually; my conversations with Scadians illuminated the existence of a large population of non-prestige seeking individuals who put as little effort as possible in maintaining and performing their SCA personae.

If Scadians are not performing alternate selves then what are they doing when they put on handmade costumes and talk forsoothly? As we shall see, some do it for recreation, some out of anti-modern rebellion with a love for more "romantic" and still others for the relaxed and non-judgemental social atmosphere. This last aspect attracts people with alternate lifestyles as well as those who feel out of place in their mundane communities. Within the SCA people strive for acceptance. At the very first SCA event the participants felt they did not "fit in" with the rest of the community, or with the modern world, so they created a space which was subjectively meaningful (Paxson 1998). Present day Scadians share a similar attitude. Scadians do not seek each other out to perform alternate selves but to play at performing their "true" selves as they wish they could in "mundane" society. Playing one's "true" self is the ultimate performance and for Scadians they are the most important audience.

### **Plan of the Thesis**

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter I is this introduction. The second chapter surveys the literature of "living history" and invented tradition supplemented with a discussion of modernity. The SCA will be discussed with reference to other examples of "living history" and its unique characteristics will be highlighted. Modernity and postmodernism will be examined and compared in order to establish which aspects of the SCA are modern and which are postmodern. Finally, I will discuss those aspects of "performance theory" which are germane to my discussion of Scadian anti-modernism.



Chapter II also gives a description of the SCA: its membership, its origins and its organisational structure. The third and fourth chapters are the ethnographic centre of the thesis discussing the various SCA meetings and events. In the cases of day events and “Pennsic War” I apply two specific theoretical perspectives to the analysis of SCA performance. For day events I discuss Bakhtin’s (1968) theory of the carnivalesque and for Pennsic, and to a lesser extent for day events, I look at theories of forgetting and sensory sedimentation in the creation of SCA “glamour.” Chapter V discusses Romanticism as a position for understanding the choice of tropes in SCA society. In it I also address the inherent nostalgia in the SCA’s performances and how this romantic nostalgia acts as a Scadian critique of modernity. My conclusion discusses the inescapable postmodernism of re-inventing the self and the implications of my paper for future research.

Primary research for this thesis was carried out over the period of May 1995 to August 1997. This consisted of attending approximately two dozen SCA meetings in St. Catharines; twelve day events around the Niagara Peninsula; and three extended camping events, two in Freelton, Ontario and Pennsic War in Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania. My research consisted of observation and participating in SCA performance as a member of the Baronial Guard of Rising Waters (Niagara Peninsula). I supplemented my participant observation with personal interviews, both structured and unstructured, with Scadians exploring SCA performance and the SCA “dream”. Library and textual research constitutes the secondary resource for my paper. The library research involved many sources: academic texts, published SCA material, and researching the SCA on the Internet, along with other re-creation groups, as there are many such web sites.

## CHAPTER II: MODERNITY, INVENTED TRADITION, AND PERFORMANCE

### THEORY

#### Introduction

This chapter discusses the three central theoretical positions which inform my thesis. In Chapter IV I will bring these ideas together as a framework for understanding the SCA's anti-modern performance. First, I address modernity and the possibility of an anti-modern position within modernity. This discussion will position the SCA within modernity and address the question of postmodernism as it relates to the SCA (cf. Giddens 1990, 1991; Lyotard 1984). "Invented tradition" is the second perspective I address. There is considerable discussion in anthropology about "authentic" tradition and the "invention" of culture (Wagner 1975; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Handler & Linnekin 1984). The SCA "invented" itself in 1967 and continually re-invents itself through the agency of local groups and by the individuals within those groups while recognizing the greater goal of the global organization (i.e. the "dream"). Thirdly, I address "performance theory" with special emphasis to how one theorizes SCA performance incorporating its multiple levels of performative activity (Goffman 1959; Turner 1986; Schechner 1988; Palmer & Jankowiak 1996).

Each one of these positions begs greater analytical depth than is possible in this paper. The SCA represents the locus of many culture-making processes each of which can be addressed as part of a larger debate within anthropology and culture theory. I am concerned primarily with the way Scadians perform a romantic, anti-modern, medieval tradition as a critique and resistance to modernity and thus I confine my inquiry to specific theoretical positions. I recognize the fecundity of my subject matter but one must reflexively set theoretical boundaries so that the links of signification do not stretch to the horizon of inquiry, thus becoming unmanageable.

## **Modernity and Anti-modernity**

The Society for Creative Anachronism is an international organization encompassing the entire world within its fanciful topography, the “Known World”. Membership within the SCA is centered in the “First World” primarily in North America, Europe and Australia. This paper will make no authoritative claims about the ways people outside North America experience the SCA but it is useful to recognize the common European intellectual heritage among Scadians.<sup>2</sup> At the other end of the theoretical spectrum is the level of performed personae. Just as it is appropriate to examine how Scadians perform it is important to look at how modernity informs such performance.

Modernity as discursive field is massive and complex. Because of its complexity, the history of modernity cannot be adequately covered in this paper. Modernity and identity are intimately entwined and theories of modern identity (e.g. Tocqueville, Marx, Weber, Dumont, Marcuse) also span huge intellectual territories. Because of the immensity of modernity I address one specific problem within its scope, that of how people in the period of late modernity reflexively construct identities and to what subjective ends. Specifically, this thesis delves into the relation between romanticism and modernity, how romanticism as a modern phenomena is used by Scadians to critique modernity.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, I am interested in the ways SCA members as individual and trans-individual subjects reflexively engage modernity. Jerome Rousseau (1995) challenges the existence of the individual subject within a postmodern framework. Thus I cannot claim either the individual or trans-individual subject as “natural”. Individuals create and perform personae and the SCA as a greater whole “thinks” the SCA “dream.” Because these two levels of subjectivity interact within SCA performance I therefore

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<sup>2</sup> Not all Scadians are of European ancestry and not all personae are European. Parallels in chivalry and class structure make Japanese personae widespread.

must incorporate both ideas into my discussion of the SCA.

Theories of the individual subject emerge from the writing of the French enlightenment (Jean-Jacques Rousseau) while the recognition of the dissolution of traditional value structures can be traced to the writings of the Romantics and the Materialists/Existentialists: Byron, Hugo and Hegel on the one hand and Marx, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer on the other. With the rise of the individual subject (Foucault 1973) the connection between the individual and a larger cosmos dissolves (Taylor 1991). Nietzsche states it best when he proclaims the death of God, not as a metaphysical fact but as an epistemological fact; he was not writing of the death of a supernatural deity but of the transcendental signifier which the figure of God stood for in human consciousness. With the death of God “traditional” values lose their meaning thus we must engage the world with our own individual values. Modernity on these terms is the recognition that not only may humanity generate its own cosmology or realise that there are no greater truths; it has no other choice.

Concurrent with the death of God was the death of the human-as-symbol: the basis for human value became wage labour not as a position in the “great chain of being” (Marx). Humans were no longer tied to God or to *der Volk* (Baumann 1992:29) because the death of the transcendental also wrenched people from their communities (Taylor 1991). If we are no longer within a cosmic order or linked to our communities, then what are we and what can we be?

Post-enlightenment thinkers, such as John Stuart Mill (1859) and Alexis de Tocqueville (1863), subscribed to the idea of the “authentic” modern individual. The “authenticity” of the individual-as-subject could be judged by how one “realised” oneself through inner motivations. The authentic individual is theorised as someone who is motivated to action through the “natural” tendencies within the human psyche.

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<sup>3</sup> Romanticism will be discussed in Chapter V.

In the industrial world of the late twentieth century, the dominant theory of human identity formation in the wake of the death of an order-giving deity involves the analysis of consumption patterns. Friedman (1991) discusses consumption of symbols as the "consumption of otherness." He likens the process to cannibalism, a lurid analogy but one which establishes a distinct relationship between the consumer and the producers of symbols. In most "traditional" societies identity "depends on the continuous flow of life from the cosmos via the network of ancestors and kin, and his [the individual's] life project is centred not within himself but is vested in the authority of the group." (156) In modern societies, the authority of the kin group is greatly reduced:

The development of commercial capitalism is related to the dissolution of a cosmologically based system of social positions and involves a series of separations: wealth from fixed status, individual from role, private from public, nature from cosmos. (158)

All these separations have occurred with the transformations of symbols with fixed meaning to signs of malleable meaning (Baudrillard 1973). Profundity of experience must be greatly reduced if the loci of meaning are negotiable and vulnerable to continual re-evaluation. My discussion of the modern individual subject is informed both by discourses of an internal, "natural," authentic humanity and one of the consumption of commodities and symbols external to the individual.

Consumerism can be a useful model for understanding human identity formation but it does not contribute directly to an understanding of how people perceive their own actions. Coupled with the quest for an "authentic" personhood, identity construction and maintenance become increasingly stressful. For some (Giddens 1991a, 1991b; Kellner 1992) this is the existential result of modernity. Increasingly unstable roles and ontological stress characterise the advance of modernity through the twentieth century. This instability results in the destruction of

“meta-narratives” (Lyotard 1984) which “traditionally” lent subjective meaning. Thus we have what Lyotard calls the “postmodern condition.” Increasingly unstable identities become fully dislodged from traditional referents within postmodernism.<sup>4</sup>

Where does modernity become realised as postmodernism? For Kellner (1992), the state of pre-modernity, as portrayed by anthropology, is one where identity is “fixed, solid, and stable” (141). Overlooking the idealism of this statement he goes on to state that: “In modernity, identity becomes more mobile, multiple, personal, self-reflexive, and subject to change and innovation” (141). Identity is grounded in various roles and partial identities which are still externally determined; these roles usually conform to traditional concepts of gender, age, politics and ethnicity. Postmodernism is the state where such traditional sources of identity cease to be meaningful. Kellner attributes postmodern identity formation to popular culture, especially television. The “postmodern identity is an extension of the freely chosen and multiple identities of the modern self that accepts and affirms an unstable and rapidly mutating condition.” (158) Postmodern identity is not after-modern but is another stage in the progression away from traditional, stable identities. Kellner asserts, however, that this instability does not in fact erode the creation of subjective identity: which, if the postmodern condition were to curtail forming subjectivity, humanity would only be resolved into disparate masses.

Popular culture does offer, on the other hand, a profusion of different ideas and tastes which are consumed by postmodern citizens. Kellner asserts,

Rather than identity disappearing in a postmodern society, it is merely subject to new determinations and new forces while offering as well new possibilities, styles, models, and forms. Yet the overwhelming variety of subject positions, of possibilities for identity, in an affluent image culture no doubt create highly unstable identities while constantly providing new openings to restructure one's identity. (174)

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<sup>4</sup> For Lyotard, modernity represents authority and convention (Fischer 1986:194). This paper incorporates Lyotard's conception of postmodernism but not of modernity.

Identity, and one's subjective power to play with the same, is no longer determined by traditional forces but by one's access to images and ideas conveyed by media. One exists in a vast marketplace of signifiers which can be consumed, played with, and discarded for something new. In the "contemporary orgy of commodification, fragmentation, image production, and societal, political, and cultural transformation," (174) identity is something "off-the-rack" and not a profound part of one's subjective experience. It is here the reflexivity of identity construction comes into sharp relief.

This concept of identity choice must be expanded slightly to account for the "taste culture" of the SCA. Bourdieu (1984) examines how different people will have different "tastes," or cultural preference, because of their social class. The SCA is an example of the synthesis of the random postmodern process and the cultural reproduction of Bourdieu.

Scadians do not come to the Society based on class, though there are few affluent members, but on a similarity of taste. Scadians have a "taste habitus", to borrow Bourdieu's use of the term, where if one is a member of the SCA one will likely also have certain preferences in film, books, leisure, or be no older than a certain age. Because of the systems of modern identity formation, fixed value structures must erode. However, most every SCA member's cultural tastes overlap in significant ways with every other's. Most, but not all, Scadians read fantasy/science-fiction literature, enjoy Monty Python's Flying Circus, many play role-playing games, have at least a passing interest in history, and own a computer as a locus for leisure activities—outside of the SCA.

So far we have seen how modernity affects people on a macro-sociological scale. While the previous discussions about modernity and postmodernism address the external forces at work in the creation of subjective identity I must bring the issue down to a more personal, experiential, level to understand how SCA members engage modernity and work at resisting it.

For the subject, individual or otherwise, modernity creates ontological uncertainty. Giddens (1990, 1991) describes this particular form of anxiety as the result of “disembedding.” He describes disembedding as “the lifting out of social relationships from local contexts and the recombination across indefinite time/space distances” (1991:242). Identities are unstable thus creating “ontological stress” for the subject. Without a transcendental worldview the subject engages the world according to the “risk” of certain activities. Thus the modern world of disembedded values is increasingly one of risk as well. Giddens posits an alternative to this process of disembedding with what he calls “post-modernity” (1990) but for the purposes of this paper I must deem this speculative “answer” to the problem of modernity as inconsequential; though I do posit that the SCA does enact an “answer” to modernity.

For Giddens (1991), the core of existential understanding is “self-identity.” Self-identity:

forms a *trajectory* [author’s emphasis] across the different institutional settings of modernity over the *durée* of what used to be called the ‘life cycle’, a term which applies much more accurately to non-modern contexts than to modern ones. Each of us not only ‘has’, but *lives* a biography reflexively organised in terms of flows of social and psychological information about possible ways of life (14).

The modern individual makes choices unknown in the period of pre-modernity. There is no “ontological security” for the modern subject. One’s relationship to the community, the family, the nation or the cosmos is reflexively determined according to “internally referential” criteria. Nothing is pre-determined and everything is possible, to paraphrase the great modern novelist Dostoyevsky (1880).

The modern subject, as the locus of different discourses of power (Foucault 1977), has many choices regarding the resistance of modernity. Postmodernism offers one avenue for resistance, anti-modernity another. While Giddens (1990) describes postmodernism as an aesthetic movement not as the culmination of his theory of disembedding, this paper engages



modernity as the process of increasing disregard to any transcendental referent while postmodernism is the *complete* reflexive disregard to such a referent. Thus postmodernism, as it is understood in this paper, is one important aspect of the larger process of modernity but it is not the only one.

The Society for Creative Anachronism is explicitly anti-modern in its mandate and as the way it functions for its members; this will be seen in Chapter III. The SCA actively resists the modern tendency toward ontological disembeddedness. Because it re-embeds social and individual values it cannot be considered, on an existential level, as a postmodern discourse against modernity. Yet its reflexivity at all levels of its organisation show it to be fully grounded in modernity. Thus it is a modern organisation, despite efforts to the contrary, and if we consider Debord (1967) and Baudrillard (1983) the postmodern qualities of the SCA emerge. While I cannot claim the SCA critique of modernity is postmodern, its structure, as a society of spectacle and simulation, is. SCA re-creative activities create simulacra of medieval culture: hand-made metal armour and clothing, heraldry and devices, medieval personae. These re-creations trace their modern genealogy back to nineteenth century romanticism and claim an unbroken genealogy to the Middle Ages. The next section discusses claims of historical authenticity and my discussion of romanticism in Chapter IV will explore the SCA's anti-modern strategy.

The ideal modern subject is an "authentic" one. I use the word ideal to make an important point. Authenticity as an existential category is unstable and vulnerable to postmodern critique. The SCA "dream" is an ideal category. Thus my discussion of authentic personae, both here and later, is idealised but legitimate within the *oeuvre* of SCA performance. As discussed above, Scadian subjects, both individual and collective, are modern; thus, they are reflexive in their identity construction. Ideally, Scadians play "at who they really are" (Appendix A) so we are "grounded" in the cognitive, experiential realm and not in objective categories. The

following section addresses this framework for establishing a theory of subjective authenticity.

### **Inventing Tradition and Living History**

Anthropological literature abounds regarding the nature of tradition and the application of tradition as a useful idea within the discipline. Some (e.g. Marcus 1995) would discard the idea outright for its lack of “heuristic value” (McDonald 1997). Tradition as an absolute, authentic, naturalized discourse does not exist but tradition can be understood through the practice and experience of people living their lives. The “invention of tradition” allows the anthropologist to address issues of subjective authenticity while acknowledging the inescapable irony of such an assertion. Keeping this in mind, I will discuss the concept of “invented tradition” and how it applies to SCA culture.

Tradition is a central concept in understanding cultural knowledge. It is what people *do* and *think* when they engage the world. Tradition has dual connotations; it is “both the process of transmission of an isolatable cultural element through time and also the elements themselves that are transmitted in this process” (Baumann 1992:31). This definition offers an analytical description without addressing the genesis of such practices. Such a “naturalistic view of tradition” (ibid.) ignores the cultural processes which show “tradition to be symbolically constituted in the present” (ibid.). The past is a cultural artifact defined in contemporary terms to suit the exigency of the present (Lowenthal 1985; Hansman & Leone 1989). The past is a discourse reflexively delineated by the modern subject.

“Invented tradition” is a phrase coined by Eric Hobsbawm (1983) to address this temporal nature of tradition. Traditions—such as the Scottish kilt and tartan (Trevor-Roper 1983)—can often be traced to a particular point in time and are not naturalized, organic

outgrowths of a given culture.<sup>5</sup> This runs counter to common sense understandings of tradition which place such a genesis into “time immemorial.” Hobsbawm challenges this naturalistic conception of tradition with regard to groups grounded in the modern (1984:2). Conversely, he makes an exception in the case of “custom” which is the invariant aspect of “traditional” cultures:

‘Custom’ in traditional societies has the double function of motor and fly-wheel. It does not preclude innovation and change up to a point, though evidently the requirement that it must appear compatible or even identical with precedent imposes substantial limitations on it. (ibid)

Tradition must “appear compatible” according to the pre-conceptions, perceptions and understandings of the people adopting it. Authenticity aside, the invention of tradition is a powerful paradigm to describe the process of orienting oneself with the past.

It is a false dichotomy to differentiate “traditional” from “modern” cultures within a state of modernity. So-called traditional cultures must be considered fully reflexive on a global level simply because knowledge systems are globalized (Borofsky 1994:334). Theories of modern and traditional modes of understanding must implode. Contrariwise, modernity does not preclude modern subjects identifying themselves with particular places and eras which represent their reflexively determined ideological origin. The modern Scottish traditions of the kilt and clan tartan are subjectively “authentic” because the Scottish subject maps his/her identity over the continuum of what it means to be Scottish and not as individual items of invented lore. The modern subject may “feel” rootless (Taylor 1991) but still has as “legitimate” a claim to an “authentic” history as does a person in a traditional society.

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<sup>5</sup> Culture and tradition are problematic terms for an anthropologist. Presupposing culture to tradition elevates culture to a higher level by an implied “authenticity” of which tradition is only a shadow. Wagner (1975) in addressing the creation of symbolic meaning at the level of culture challenges the notion of “authentic” culture. This paper makes little distinction between culture and tradition recognizing both as changeable and under continual re-invention by cultural participants.

It is this creation of tradition to establish a factual “continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1983:1) which informs the subject’s *existential* relationship with past eras. This perceived continuity is reflexive and its conscious re-embedding of an ego continuum creates new meta-narratives for lived experience. Since modernity disembeds the subject from meta-narratives of self and society, the invention of tradition is anti-modern and, I argue, romantic though it is grounded in modernity. This romantic attitude to the past can be an extremely powerful generative motivation for the individual or group to re-invent themselves.

Though I will go into greater detail in Chapter IV, I must touch briefly on the inherent romanticism of tradition. Baumann (1992) discusses folklore from both a modern and romantic viewpoint. Modernity has rendered much of what could be termed Western “traditional” knowledge as “folly, superstition, and falsehood, anachronistic leftovers from an earlier stage in human social development since transcended by the scientific rationalism of modern civilization” (ibid.:31). The romantic view of tradition sees it as “attractive, colorful (sic), emotional, natural, and authentic” (ibid:31). Both represent intellectual “traditions” of the nineteenth century; the latter Baumann attributes to the works of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1774). The romantic view of the past is modern in its reflexivity but anti-modern in its resistance to ideological disembedding and scientific rationalism. The irony of reflexive—modern—anti-modernism is inescapable.

In a general non-nineteenth century European sense, romantic anti-modernism can be seen in nationalist movements worldwide; nationalism being an anti-modern, re-embedding of collective values.<sup>6</sup> As an example, I turn to the invention of tradition in the Hawaiian nationalist movement. Keesing (1989) and Trask (1991) engaged in one of the more notable exchanges

over this issue and their debate raises issues of subjective authenticity. Trask called Keesing's analysis of the Hawaiian nationalist movement "a gem of academic colonialism" (1991:159). Trask's argument is anti-modern, perhaps romantic, because the tactic he uses to challenge the legitimacy of Keesing's arguments is based on the Hawaiian "understanding of the cosmos" (ibid.: 164) which informs Trask's worldview. Trask claims an unbroken connection with the past which Keesing, as a scholar engaging modernity, sees as a disjunction. Whether or not Keesing is expressing inveterate colonialism when he claims "ancestral ways of life (are) being evoked rhetorically" (1989:19) within Hawaiian nationalism, he is identifying a social movement which has arisen at a certain time and place. Keesing does not challenge the legitimacy of Hawaiian nationalism; instead, he places the Hawaiian nationalist movement firmly within the scope of modernity. The inherent irony of this is offensive to people who experience their traditions authentically<sup>7</sup> but this does not make Keesing's argument factually incorrect. Inventing tradition cannot be consciously ironic or it loses its transformative power.

There are other examples modern nationalist movements at play in the world representing reflexively authentic tradition (e.g. Morgan 1983; Chun 1995). Along with these are invented, non-nationalistic, traditions of knowledge which claim an unbroken connection with the past. The birth of the Wiccan church is one such example of an tradition which has antecedents but lacks an unbroken transmission of knowledge through the period of modernity

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<sup>6</sup> This statement on the structure of nationalist movements deliberately ignores the content of such movements. Such a debate over the social ramifications of nationalism is outside the purview of this thesis.

<sup>7</sup> I leave the diacritical quotation marks off deliberately as a show of respect for Trask and others involved in creating nationalist tradition.

(Marron 1989). There are many Wiccans in the SCA who understand their faith as a genuine cultural inheritance from Medieval Europe.<sup>8</sup>

Invented tradition brings together two problematic ideas: authentic community (collective identity) and authentic personae (individual identity). No claim can be made that “authenticity” is a meta-narrative which people can transparently appropriate. However, “authenticity” perceived subjectively does not amount to a meta-narrative yet it remains profound for the knowing subject. Nationalistic Hawaiians, ideally, experience their heritage and nationhood without intellectual distance. This claim can also be made for the Scottish who trace their tartans back hundred of years though the tradition can be traced only to the eighteenth century. Irony and distance render authenticity in this limited sense impossible. Social actors inventing authentic tradition, in an interestingly ironic fashion, must be both reflexive and naïve at the same time regarding their inventive acts.

Above, I have discussed the ways subjects reinterpret the past to address the existential needs of the present. These needs do not represent explicit mandates or, strictly, political motivations. Obviously, nationalistic movements are political on the level of collective social change ; but, the authentic experiencing subject identifies with the movement emotionally, not rationally. This does not implicate nationalists as irrational people, it states that tradition is engaged foremost at the emotional level. This implies a kind of organic justification for tradition which, in a postmodern world, is untenable. Yet, because no authoritative claims are possible within postmodernism, tradition cannot be deemed inorganic either. This discursive uncertainty creates the critical space for my assertion that tradition, as the opposite of scientific rationalism,

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<sup>8</sup> Performing one’s religion, even in character, is actively discouraged at events. As one person told me. “We don’t want to make anyone uncomfortable. Showing a cross and praying at events offends some Wiccans because during their period they would be persecuted by Christians.” Wiccan practices are also discouraged.

is anti-modern, though not necessarily pre-modern, and has some claim to subjective authenticity. At this point we must turn our attention to invented tradition in the service of re-created history.

Invented tradition can come about either authentically through the experiencing subject or through an explicit mandate. An explicit mandate need be no more than an expressed intention to engage in re-creating a particular epoch. The SCA stands as one among a number of associations in the West which display “living history” (Anderson 1985). Living history, as defined by Anderson, is “the simulation of life in another time” (ibid.:3,459). Those who perform living history can be categorized into three groups: museums, archeology and reenactments (Handler & Saxton 1988:242). As my interest in the SCA involves its reenactment activities, this paper is concerned with the third of these groups.

Reenactments are of two distinct types. The first is the living museum, such as Colonial Williamsburg (Handman & Leone 1989), EPCOT Center in Disney World (Wallace 1985), New Salem, Illinois (Bruner 1994) or the Ontario Renaissance Festival.<sup>9</sup> These are sites where actors play the part of period townsfolk for the enjoyment of tourists. The second type is the reenactment group which performs historical events for the enjoyment of the reenactors themselves.

Each audience engages the reenactment for different reasons. Reenactments fashioned for a wide consumer audience key into people’s “cultivated nostalgia” (Wallace 1985: 309). Living museums, such as Colonial Williamsburg and New Salem, appeal to tourists in a number of ways. These ways include:

- 1) learning about their past, 2) playing with time frames and enjoying the encounters, 3) consuming nostalgia for a simpler bygone era, and simultaneously 4) buying the idea of

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<sup>9</sup> One former SCA member I with whom I discussed the two reenactments said, “Here they *pay* me to act medieval.”

progress, of how far we have advanced. Finally, they are also 5) celebrating America,... the values and virtues of small town America.

(Bruner 1994:398)

The simplicity and nostalgia of the past is juxtaposed with the affirmation of modernity. One can visit New Salem and leave feeling spiritually refreshed with his/her worldview intact. Nostalgia for the past becomes a celebration of the present.

The second form of reenactment, of which the SCA is one, involves re-creating history for the consumption of the reenactors themselves. At Colonial Williamsburg, New Salem and Disney World, actors portray roles which are assigned to them for the purpose of creating an “authentic” historical setting for tourists. “An authentic piece of living history is one that *exactly* simulates or re-creates a *particular* place, scene, or event from the past. [author’s emphasis]” (Handler & Saxton 1988:243). Tourists consume authenticity, though there are modern amenities (e.g. washrooms) to cushion the culture shock of another era. Scadians, or Civil War reenactors, are also concerned with authenticity but of a kind not meant for external consumption.

Reenactors re-create historical periods, in the case of Civil War reenactors these can be specific battles down to the last casualty (Anderson 1983), to satisfy their subjective criteria of authenticity. Handler and Saxton (1988) describe this personal type of authenticity beautifully:

This implicit conception of authenticity concerns the privileged reality of individual experience. An authentic experience, to be achieved in the practice of living history, is one in which individuals feel themselves to be in touch both with a ‘real’ world and with their ‘real’ selves (243).

Living museums display “authentic” artifacts manufactured with “authentic” techniques, enacted by actors to create an externalized “authentic” experience for tourists. Scadians, and other reenactors create “authentic” artifacts and perform period personae to evoke an authentic



experience within themselves. They consume their performances for themselves so that each can then experience an authentic “self”.

On the surface, modernity and authenticity are mutually exclusive. Here I make a difference between the “authentic” modern individual as theorized in the nineteenth century and modernity’s progressive existential disembedding. Modernity increasingly challenges claims of authenticity; this is explicated in many postmodern texts (Baudrillard 1973, 1983; Lyotard 1984; Eco 1986). Challenging authenticity through theories of perpetual *differance* (Derrida 1974) not only extends the chains of signification to an unreachable horizon, it de-legitimizes weak forms of Cartesian rationality. When the self cannot signify the self, existential anxiety becomes overwhelming. One cannot theorize subjective understanding when the subject’s, or subjects’, understanding of themselves must be, according to *differance*, false.<sup>10</sup>

Writing about how people fail to understand does not address the issue of understanding. Bruner (1994) addresses this tension between postmodernism and authenticity. New Salem, the site of Abraham Lincoln’s “transformation” into a heroic figure, exists as a reconstructed 1830s village in Menard County, Illinois. Bruner discusses the conflict between academic historiography and the personalized experience of the tourist:

New Salem is a contested site, not in the sense of a grand political conflict between say, the colonial powers vs. the colonized, or between state power vs. the revolutionaries, or between privileged social classes vs. the oppressed, although the story of Lincoln contains all of these elements. The contest is between the museum professionals and scholars on the one hand who seek historical accuracy and authenticity, vs. the peoples' own popular interpretation of Abraham Lincoln's heritage as it is manifested in a given site in contemporary America. (Bruner 1993:2)

As an anthropologist engaging the “invented tradition” and “authenticity” of SCA reenactments, I must privilege the lived experience of my subjects over disembedding theories of meaning.

Handler and Linnekin (1984) cast light on the profound difficulties involved when discussing the authenticity or spuriousness of tradition. Spurious tradition can be genuine and *vice versa* when we examine the conditions which brought about a particular set of practices (288). Baudrillard (1983, 1988) writes that authentic culture in the late twentieth century, especially in North America, has been replaced with successive simulacra which obliterates the original. The question is: Is there an original to obliterate? Bruner (1994) denigrates the postmodern arguments of Baudrillard and Eco (1986), saying that this view consists of “elitist politics blind to its own assumptions” (411) Modernity and postmodernism are transformations of consciousness, mostly academic consciousness in the latter case, not of the external world. Colonial Williamsburg, New Salem, and the SCA create what can only be called authentic simulacra. Their referents are irretrievably displaced so my discussion of authenticity must be grounded in the acknowledgment of the irony of authenticity while embracing the potential for experiential authenticity in the subject.

#### **A Brief Note on Irony**

As an anthropologist studying the ways Scadians use a romantic ideology to theorize an idealized past it is easy to fall into the alluring trap of superimposing my own “modern” penchant for finding multiple layers of irony and paradox in SCA historical re-creation. Such irony is there and I discuss it a number of times within this paper, but if we are to understand the SCA at all we must accept that irony, and to a lesser extent paradox, is that which SCA performance strives to avoid. There is implicit irony in the ways Scadians use SCA medievalism to empower themselves though they rely on the Internet for long distance networking and still allow “nobility”

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<sup>10</sup> This gives rise to theories of “false consciousness” and ideology which, while useful in describing social relations of power, are of little use when people’s understandings are the discursive artifact in question.

to “rule” them.<sup>11</sup> Juxtaposed medieval battles and modern churches, flamboyant feasts and gray painted concrete walls, garbed lords and ladies outside smoking cigarettes while leaning on pick-up trucks; all these things are clear examples of textual irony. The greatest irony of all lies in the very postmodern nature of the society and the pre-modern personae Scadians adopt.

For example, if we examine the arguments put forward by Paul Willis (1977) regarding the social reproduction of working class values in a system which does not explicitly curtail upward class mobility—recognizing that such cultural performativity is profoundly different from SCA performance—we see case after case of how young boys are enculturated with what can only be understood by a Marxist as the ideology of the working class but what I perceive as existential irony. Those boys internalize the values of their parents and their friends thus blinding themselves to the “real” social mechanisms keeping them in the working class. “The lads” do not perceive the disjunction between their perception of self-empowerment and their objectification within a system of labour commodification. Willis goes on to describe the mechanisms which instill these values but for our purposes we need only consider the role of existential irony in people’s lives.

The SCA presents a unique example of existential irony in that Scadians are often very aware of the irony implicit in the forms they adopt when performing an idealized Middle Ages. Scadians join the SCA to empower themselves in terms alien to modernity: period persona, martial prowess, social charm and craftsmanship. In modernity, empowerment is increasingly achieved through capital and fame (often as a form of capital). Scadians perform anti-modern personae which many members feel represent their true, authentic selves. My not setting the word—true—ironically apart is self-conscious. As an anthropologist analyzing Scadian

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<sup>11</sup> Such diacritical marks (“”) serve as inter-textual irony. The author uses them when s/he wishes to set a phrase apart within a text which they do not endorse. This gives the author some measure of

performance culture I must acknowledge this irony, but to describe SCA performance as ironic in itself is incorrect. Scadians are conscious of their performance as such but through their performance they are recognizing and releasing an anti-modern self which cannot be performed and maintained successfully in a modern context. Diana Paxson told me that within the first year of the SCA's inception the person crowned king spontaneously received symbolic fealty from those people who attended those first few tournaments. For many people—modern people—this might seem like a naïve acceptance of authority. Performing fealty invokes relationships where authority is legitimate and worthy of trust. Even groups which have as their common bond a disdain for the ruling bodies within the SCA—royalty, chivalry, the Board of Directors—give fealty to the leader of their group. Fealty engenders a belonging to something greater than the individual.

In this light we can see that reducing the experiencing subject as an instrument which reproduces existential irony creates a problematic argument. Paxson in her essay “The Last Tournament” (*The Known World Handbook*:24) writes that irony is not appropriate when describing what participants experience as “incredibly real.” Scadians perform their “true” selves (observed with unavoidable irony due to my position as anthropologist) and perhaps succeed. Is there a true self? Cooley, Mead and Goffman would probably disagree but they discount the experiencing subject as merely the reflexive, self-monitoring, conscious mind incapable of realizing an essential self. All such subjective understandings are inescapably flawed, therefore they are false; the self is intrinsically ironic.

### **Performance Theory**

Performance theory represents the third theoretical underpinning of my thesis. Above, I have shown how the anxiety of modernity and the experienced authenticity of invented tradition

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control over the reader's ability to assign ironic connotations to a given text.

combine, offering an interesting perspective regarding the knowing, experiencing subject.

Existential anxiety on the one hand and the desire for authenticity, personal and historical, on the other, drives Scadians to perform an alternate, anti-modern, reality. Above all, the SCA is a site of extensive performative activity; it is necessary to understand the ways Scadians perform when they are acting medieval.

Performance theory addresses the ways in which personae are presented and negotiated between actors and audiences. Through active performance, meaning is reproduced in the observer which in turn is re-interpreted by the performer (Hymes 1975). Ritual (Turner 1967, 1969), festivals (Bakhtin 1968; Stallybrass & White 1986), theatre (Schechner 1985, 1988; Turner 1986a), everyday life (Goffman 1959, 1967, 1974; de Certeau 1984) all constitute arenas of performance across multiple social contexts and levels of interpersonal discourse. These “micro” and “macro” theories of performance make necessary assumptions about what constitutes performance. Interpersonal performance occurs at the most existential level of reflexive self-monitoring while professional actors, concurrent with their audiences, engage in performative activities which require structures outside the immediate conscious maintenance of each individual self. For my thesis, I need to bridge the gap between theories of ritual/entertainment and theories of interpersonal interaction in everyday life; I need a middle ground of theory which addresses both the group and individual at the interstices of cognition and interaction. As will be seen in the next chapter, this is a slippery business in the SCA as there are both formal and informal spaces of performance (e.g. events and practices): ritual and everyday life<sup>12</sup> are in constant juxtaposition. Even in the SCA, to *arbitrarily* designate discretely

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<sup>12</sup> Everyday life, in the context of this section, refers to the quotidian acts of each person's life. This is an operational definition due to the multiple layers of SCA performance. Scadians designate their quotidian lives, “mundane”, in contrast to their SCA personae.

the limits of medieval performance, for whom and for what purpose, is difficult because of the overlapping contexts which complicate any definitive segmentation of SCA activity.

An important consideration in the paragraphs which follow, an issue introduced above, is the possibility of *authentically* performing one's true self. Such an essentialised idea is sociologically problematic and I will not avoid this problem in this paper. The only assertion I make, here and in greater length in the section about Pennsic War and "glamour", is that despite objective theories of self which define the self as a reflexive mechanism anthropologists are obliged to study how people subjectively experience their performance of self. From the works of Mead (1934) to the present day (de Certeau 1984), theories of self as an inauthentic and unknowable construct permeate the social sciences. As an anthropologist I choose to resist this poststructural impulse to posit an unbridgeable gulf between the performed self (signifier) and an essential self (signified). The "essential" self cannot be observed, but I do admit to the possibility of a subjectively experienced "authentic" self.

The most important consideration in the paragraphs which follow is the broad range of performances Scadians carry out and the ways one can theorise them. Performance theory must address issues more complex than the liminal/liminoid or entertainment/efficacy spectrums can explain; as well, individualised existential performance is also inadequate in this case. Scadians engage in many activities which involve little or no "acting" *per se* yet their acts are often explicitly performative. Performing the self and performing the "other", or the "other" as self, are often delicately intertwined in SCA performance. Also, we must recognise the subtle differences between the reflexive maintenance of self-identity inherent in the "modern" self and the reflexive maintenance of "the other" for those actors obliged to enact a "role" other than the self. I argue, outside of the aforementioned role-playing, that performing "the other" in SCA performance is an attempt to perform an authentic self.

Identity formation and performance in the SCA consists of two distinct layers. The first type of identity formation is that of the person her/himself by virtue of living under the auspices of a modern global society and subject to a certain class habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 1984); this amounts to a person's "mundane" persona. The hyper-reflexivity associated with *choosing* one's identity from the flood of available images in postmodern culture—creating an SCA personae—comprises the second (Kellner 1992). These processes are intertwined because the modern subject is both the conjunction of socio-economic factors and agency. It is not redundant to assert these processes are of special interest in the SCA because of the expectations for a minimal level of spectacular (of and pertaining to spectacle) performance on the part of Scadians. One would only have to imagine the amount of self-regulation incumbent on an individual required to maintain a character beyond that person's mundane persona and their *real self* in the SCA.

Erving Goffman (1959, 1974) must be my starting point because his theories of performance deal with identity formation at the level of the individual cognitive subject. SCA events are, in Goffman's terms, a specific performance *frame* requiring attentive self-monitoring on the part of Scadians to prevent *slippage*. Frames for the SCA subject are no more complex than for other people except that there is an expectation to perform, however minimally, in an explicit way. The SCA has a frame which obliges Scadians to maintain identity and mental imagery in a more conscious manner than people outside an event as it is all too easy to break the frame of SCA imagery and performance. Frame analysis is outside the purview of this paper but this subjective foundation to SCA performance and identity formation and maintenance is indispensable to the analyses which follow.

A more contemporary theory of performance is de Certeau's theory of everyday performance (1984). People produce meaning within the lacunae of cultural text. Everyday life

for de Certeau is less individualistic than for Goffman; everyday life is performed through the cognition and activity of the collective. People are always in the position of resisting the dominant ideology of meaning in their attempt to find their own. The everyday can be extremely alienating within this framework:

Escaping the imaginary totalizations produced by the eyes, the everyday has a certain strangeness that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible. (93)

Everyday life is complex and incompletely understood by those living it. This theory of everyday performance allows one to theorise the performativity of the trans-individual subject. The inherent irony of everyday life is more problematic. Ideology and the perceivable world considered this way renders authenticity, especially experienced authenticity, impossible. While de Certeau's schema are compelling, irony is precisely what Scadians wish to escape.

Turner's theories about liminality and performance (1967, 1969, 1986b) are cogent to any discussion of the SCA. Liminality, being in the limen or interstices of quotidian existence, is at the heart of Turner's theories of ritual and performance. In the SCA, event space is quite literally between the activities of everyday life while practice space and meeting space constitute some measure of their mundane lives. Participants leave their domiciles or places of work, drive sometimes hundreds of miles to an event, live as a different person, and return. Local meetings, which also compose a great deal of performance time, require little or no deviation from one's regular schedule. Theories of the liminal, though useful when describing the carnivalesque aspects of the SCA, cannot encompass the different levels of identity formation at work in SCA performance.

Schechner (1985, 1988) gives a more flexible account of how such formal performance structures work as laid out in his "efficacy-entertainment" paradigm. Schechner identifies various processes which operate within any ritual context including such performances which



could be considered theatrical. Performance is experienced along a spectrum bracketed by pure efficacy and pure entertainment. The former refers to ritual processes which serve as profound transformative experiences for the participants. Efficacious performance involves the audience's, and the performers', absolute emotional and spiritual investment in the proceedings. Members of the audience lose their critical distance from the performance. Efficacious performance can reaffirm the participants' worldview, act as a stable reference point during an epoch of community transition or it can resolve conflicts which threaten to sunder the community (Turner 1977). The other end of this spectrum is performance which is pure entertainment. In this instance the actors<sup>13</sup> and audience invest none of their emotions or worldview in the performance. Schechner's scheme is one of infinite gradations of profundity. No ritual is completely efficacious and no entertainment medium is completely desiccated of profound, embedded, meaning.

Performance of this formal sort is a significant part of the SCA. From the moment one dons medieval garb at an event until the end, that person is assumed to be "in persona". An SCA persona is supposed to be different from an everyday persona, but this not always the case. Each person is performing their alter-ego, or true self, to others who are doing the same. On the other hand, many social dramas unfold for the players during an event which have a significance beyond the boundaries of event time and space: marriages can end, business deals are finalised or friends can just socialize as they would on any other night. This flexibility of how the SCA is experienced, both as a social drama and as a formal performance, must be considered when looking at how members create, perform, and develop their personae in the SCA.

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<sup>13</sup>Here I use the term not merely to refer to actors, possibly professional, who are self-reflexive about their performance (e.g. stage performers). Those who perform in efficacious ritual also are actors but with limited, though not absent, reflexivity.

Schechner discusses how we, as North Americans, are entering a period of greater profundity/efficacy and less entertainment in our performances, that is the performances which are labelled explicitly as performances. Turner's (1977) description of the liminoid is useful because bound up with liminoid processes is the rise of modernity with industrial reproduction. In Kellner's (1991) writing on postmodern identities, this process goes further by eliminating all naturalized roles which define the postmodern individual<sup>14</sup>. Thus performances are efficacious based not on naturalised roles one occupies but based on one's consumption of certain intellectual commodities which transform the consumer into an identity of their own choice, as much as this is possible given the engulfing activity of capitalism in North American society.

In the state of modernity, all living human beings are modern beings and those in North America often, reflexively, use postmodern processes in their identity formation. This kind of postmodern reflexivity was first theorised by Friedrich Schiller who, paraphrased, stated: the comparison is not between genuine, profound, real, naturalised, essentialised identity and artificial, transitive, simulated, contextual, provisional identity; it is between naive and sentimental identity formation. Schiller (1796), writing at the onset of the period of high German Romanticism about art and its different forms, identifies the cognitive processes of romanticism and concurrent modernity. Romanticism is the ideological and aesthetic transformation from cognition as spontaneous act to an act primarily of remembrance and, ironically, forgetfulness. Modernity and postmodernism are the culmination of this transformation of which romanticism was a precursor. As will be discussed in Chapter V, European romanticism figures greatly in the ideological genealogy SCA historical re-creations. Schiller's categories are purely arbitrary—art cannot spring forth as Athena from the forehead of

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<sup>14</sup>The ultimate postmodern process is the volitization of the individual. Even the concept of individual is too "romantic" for postmodern writers, especially Rousseau (1995).

Zeus without reflection—yet his focus on the reflexivity of art, and by extension drama, throws into relief the difference between art which reflects contemporary aesthetics and art which reflects the conscious intentions and obsessions of the artist. Romantic processes thus include “sentimental”, or reflexive, considerations on the part of the cognitive subject while still permitting the authenticity of the reflexive subject.

The "scopic regime" (Jay 1992) refers to the elevation of sight during the Enlightenment--an illuminating term--as the primary truth-sense; thus, visual coherency, or observable coherency, has been the yardstick for objective, measurable fact or truth. In diacritic relation to this idea of "seeing is believing" is the necessarily fragmented and incomplete understanding when only one sense in one time, place and perspective is reified as the truth. Little (1993) writes about the effect the scopic regime has on actors who are expected to conform to the coherence imposed by the "perspectival gaze"; actors are obliged, at least nominally, to reinforce tropes brought by the audience to the performance. The perspectival gaze delimits all our performance in the "world-as-spectacle."

Mental and sensory imagery form the performative medium of the SCA rather than the “scopic regime”. Imagery and sensory stimulus create cognitive sedimentation for the Scadian subject. SCA performance cannot be completely understood without a cognitive model discussing how it works within the thinking subject. Palmer and Jankowiak (1996) discuss a synthesis of performance theories incorporating Goffman’s reflexive subject and the spectacular theories of Goffman, Turner, and Schechner. Palmer and Jankowiak place this middle ground in the nature of subjective cognition. The term they use for this kind of subject-centred performativity is “imagery”:

The term “imagery” refers to particular construals of scenes. Scenes are situated activations of cognitive models. Cognitive models comprise and are constructed of both specific, “concrete” impressions and image schemas (abstractions from sensory

experiences often, but not necessarily, visual in origin). (ibid:228)

Imagery can evoke “feeling states” which comprise emotional responses to specific stimuli which are culturally appropriate. Much of a person’s social performance can be shown to be based on the habitus of the performing group. The SCA in this sense is the performance of a nostalgia which is already cognitively mapped in the collective subjectivity of the modern North American. Thus people will have an understanding of SCA performance though they will not necessarily engage in such a performance.

“A theory of performance based upon imagery as defined above permits a view of meaning as conventional, culturally patterned, socially situated, emergent in performance, and often improvised... The meaning of experience is its own imagery.” (ibid:229) This creates a recursive experiential loop which creates patterns of performance which, while historically and culturally bound in modernity, also create the cognitive space for alternative “improvisations”. It is here we find the subject experiencing and engaging the performative SCA. Alternate personae, forsoothly speech and medieval dress, all contribute to a performing subject which does not need to perform in the explicit sense because SCA imagery transforms an exotic performance into performing the medieval as everyday life.

The SCA re-creates the Middle Ages both *performatively* and *poetically*; there are established codes with the fluid space to interpret them in creative ways. Sensory anthropology (Seremetakis 1991, 1994) can describe how new meanings are created when pre-existing meanings are “refracted” through the sensory experience of the individual.<sup>15</sup> As we have seen, the SCA is patterned both after European medievalism and the “romantic” interpretation of the

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<sup>15</sup> Seremetakis defines this refraction process as “the mutual insertion of the perceiver and perceived in historical experience and possibly their mutual alienation from public culture, official memory and formal economies.”(1991:7) As this is remarkably close to Bourdieu’s definition of “habitus”

Middle Ages. In modernity, disparate subjects are created through complex formation processes. Commodified knowledge and history are endemic and ubiquitous. Medieval imagery and the ideology of chivalry are common knowledge because they have been successfully commodified in the form of motion pictures, television, and popular literature. Yet, even commodified knowledge has its historical antecedents. This combination of commodified knowledge and hermeneutic genealogy give Scadians the mental imagery to interpret the sensory signals given at SCA event in a way which reinforces their own feelings and intents.

Theories of modernity, tradition, and performance combine to cast SCA performance into sharp relief. The Society for Creative Anachronism performs medievalism on multiple levels but primarily to one end. This will become clear in the following chapter as I go “forward into the past”.

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(1977), I use this term as a convenient shorthand for the cultural materialist construction of the individual as it informs agency.

## CHAPTER III: THE SOCIETY FOR CREATIVE ANACHRONISM

### Introduction

In this chapter, I shall present most of my ethnographic material about the Society for Creative Anachronism. I will discuss the Society's origins and its corporate structure, as a medieval re-creation and mundane entity, will be described. In my discussion of day events and Pennsic War I will introduce two important ideas which are better explained in the context of the ethnography rather than in the previous section on theory. The first is the issue of the "carnavalesque" and the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin's seminal work *Rabelais and his World* offers an interesting synthesis of a medievalist performance theory and the ways the carnivalesque is a critique of the status quo; for Bakhtin, this is a critique and inversion of historical medieval values but when applied to the SCA the carnivalesque becomes a critique of the contemporary, not the medieval, world and an evocation of an authentic medieval experience. The second concept, which was introduced in Chapter II, is the notion of "glamour" and the transformative qualities of SCA performance. Handler and Saxton (1988:244) describe these perceptual and cognitive transformations as "magic moments" when describing the experiences of Civil War reenactors. While this is similar to the description Scadians give for their experiences, there are some different processes at work in the SCA than in other re-enactment groups.

The material presented in this chapter is a combination of first-hand ethnographic research, interviews and information obtained in SCA documentation as it pertains to the mandate and organization of the Society as a whole. Both types of cultural information inform SCA performance and re-creation. Members' subjective understandings comprise the bulk of the Society's written record regarding how to achieve accurate persona and successful medieval performances. Articles in *Tournaments Illuminated*—an officially sanctioned SCA publication

dedicated to the transmission of medieval knowledge to the general SCA populace to further their labour at re-creation—and other unofficial publications by local chapters constitute a vast repository of knowledge. Practice is supplemented by the written word which in turn informs practice. Scadians, always striving for personal and historical authenticity, use the SCA's vast network of printed and hyper-text (web-site) materials as a kind of collective memory which each member can use to evaluate and improve their own performance. Knowledge shared in this way contributes to maintenance and achievement of the SCA "dream". A great deal of cognitive labour goes into the SCA's re-enactment of medievalism and written guidelines help to channel that labour toward the achievement of the SCA's common goal of individual, personal transformation.

### **The Origins of the SCA**

Once upon a time, specifically May of 1966, there lived together a group of graduate students in the city of Berkeley, California. One day, while sitting in the students' living room, one person noticed a pair of medieval shields hanging on the wall. A conversation ensued where the group began wondering how those shields were actually used in combat. On a lark, one student decided that it would be fun if they dressed up in medieval clothing and/or armour and held a tournament to decide who was the best fighter. The party was held on May Day, inaugurating what was to become the Society for Creative Anachronism. Diana Paxson, the host and later popular fiction writer, chronicled this first event in a science fiction fanzine (1966).

Within the first year this group of students crowned their first king and held regular events attracting more and more participants. By 1968, the SCA had formally been created, due to the necessity of having an organizational name so that their group could reserve a local park for their tournaments. In 1968, the SCA held a tournament at the World Science Fiction Convention in Berkeley; this attracted attention from people all over the United States. That year

the SCA was incorporated as an educational organization by the State of California. There were four recognized kingdoms by 1970—West, Atenveldt, Middle and East—and by 1976 there were six kingdoms including areas of Canada. At present there are fifteen kingdoms with Ontario (Ealdormere) soon to become the sixteenth. There are approximately twenty thousand paid members and perhaps 2-5 times that number in unpaid members.<sup>16</sup>

Dates within the Society are counted from that first May Day celebration. Presently, the year is A.S. (Anno Societatus) XXXIII. The Society is in its 34th year and it is continually growing. Most of the present institutions—royalty, chivalry (both the practice and the knighthood), armed combat, etiquette, artisanship—were in place within those first few years. Some of the more successful science fiction/fantasy writers of the last quarter-century: Diana Paxson, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Poul Anderson and Robert Asprin were involved those first few years. They did not suspect the SCA—a name coined by Bradley—would attract the great numbers of like-minded individuals as it did.

Diana Paxson told me that the impulse which inspired her group of friends to embrace medievalism was not so different from the protest movement at the University of California, Berkeley campus. This era of protest, primarily of the Vietnam War, also gave rise to the protest of the SCA. Though this paper cannot adequately discuss the ramifications of the intellectual movement of the period, we must consider the SCA as a marginal yet unmistakable part of the zeitgeist of that decade, the 1960s. Paxson, both in text (1966:25) and in our conversation, refers to the SCA as a “protest of the twentieth century”. For her, the mimetic reconstruction of certain aspects of the medieval period embraces positive values lacking in modernity. Medieval Europe represents, for Paxson and for many Scadians, a “coherent” model for human relations.

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<sup>16</sup> I will use the terms “member” and “membership” throughout this thesis. I refer to participants regardless of their paid status.



Admittedly the SCA makes no attempt at re-creating the Middle Ages as it was but as it “should have been”.

### **Underpinnings of Scadian Performance**

This wistful attitude toward the past manifests in the aspects of the Middle Ages Scadians choose to re-create. Medieval personae are the most important adjuncts to the recreations Scadians perform. Each Scadian adopts an alternate personal history which s/he portrays at SCA gatherings. This results in a collective medieval alterity which forms a foundational performance which helps transform event locales from modern to medieval. The living history of re-creating medieval artefacts through authentic techniques also supports the performativity of the SCA as a collective. Scadians have many sources of period knowledge at their disposal: libraries, other Scadians, and the many SCA publications. Many branches within the SCA publish works containing information on how to perform mediievally. The labour of constructing a persona and learning medieval crafts acts as sedimentary imagery (Seremetakis 1994; Palmer & Jankowiak 1996) for the inter-subjective performance of SCA re-creation. Above all, SCA performance is primarily for the benefit of SCA members, others come second or not at all.

As part of the SCA’s medieval re-enactment, each member must adopt an alternate persona. That persona should be one which could possibly have existed during the Middle Ages. A person first chooses an appropriate name, one which sounds appropriately medieval or is accurate and possible for the time and place in which the persona is based. Names do not have to be well researched but they do have to be *believably* medieval. The first king of Ealdormere will be Duke Sir Thorbjorn Osis. His original name was Osis of the Livery so when he was knighted he became Sir Osis of the Livery. This joke did not amuse many in the SCA who thought this name too frivolous and jarring to the SCA’s medieval re-enactments. He

subsequently changed his name. Names such as Lady Rosalind of Castle Rising or Miguel Diaz de Valencia are believably medieval though not necessarily historically accurate. Naming is an important part of personae creation because, once someone is a member, that name will become their primary identity within the Society.

Persona history, while less important than naming oneself, is still a significant aspect of overall SCA performativity. Less important because one rarely tells others about their medieval persona unless asked. Thus persona history affects an individual's experience of medieval authenticity rather than the performed medievalism of the collective. This being stated, Scadians are encouraged, both by other members and by the official mandate of the *Corpora*, to develop a well-researched persona including place of origin, date of existence, and life history. Individuals choose how detailed their persona's history will be. Some people research theirs to the precise date and place of birth and their exploits along an alternate medieval timeline. Others do not research their personae at all, preferring to just *act* mediievally without employing a detailed character conception.

Over time, personae develop around exploits in the SCA. One's persona can change into something which has more historical foundation in the lived history of the SCA than that persona's ostensible historical origin. Thus, those people with well-researched personae, and those who do not, often acquire well-developed personae through their participation in the SCA over time. Duke Sir Osis, as a fearsome fighter and two-time king of the Midrealm, has acquired a mythology around his persona which has nothing to do with his original conception. He has won many tournaments, he is known to like his beer (his tankard must be held with two hands when full), and he is recognised as a courteous and chivalric member the SCA. Where his name was once a joke he is now accorded great prestige and respect.

Another aspect of persona creation is the creation of a personal, group, device. Coats of

arms, or devices, are extremely important in the Society for a number of reasons. They are unique to each person and group, thus they confer a symbolic identity apart from a Scadian persona. Rules for SCA heraldry are modelled after the medieval European tradition. No SCA device can be identical to one existing in the modern world, including those in historical documents which may not be used in the present-day. Each device is unique in the Society and the process of getting a device approved can be an arduous procedure. Devices, either for an individual or for a group, must be approved by each level of Scadian bureaucracy to determine if the device has been registered before. There are thousands of devices registered in the SCA and often, because there are a limited number of variations available in heraldry, they have to be re-submitted many times before they are approved.

Creating a device, because it is an arduous and time-consuming endeavour, represents a deep level of commitment to the SCA dream. The creation of a personal device re-embeds identity in an anti-modern fashion. Devices, as a symbolic form, are simulacra in that they are reproductions of an original medieval custom, but each device contains an original design representing a *real* person or group. The form is duplicated but the content is new. Scadians assert their personal authenticity by re-embedding identity using this symbolic form, ironically using modern individualism to resist the disembedding processes of modernity.

Along with creating a persona, learning a medieval craft assists members in their SCA performance. Diana Paxson makes reference to the allure of period craftsmanship as one impetus for studying the Middle Ages. Most Scadians study one or more crafts which facilitate their personae creation; members practice medieval crafts as a kind of living archaeology (Paxson 1998). Angus, a man with a blacksmith persona, studies the craft of smithing and owns his own forge. Fighters of either sex often learn how to make their own SCA weapons and armour, though there is a large support network within the Society to help people who wish to

build their own armour. Scadians proudly display items they create themselves, or purchase within the Society: items that are not mass-produced.

All Scadians are encouraged, but not required, to learn an “appropriately” medieval skill. “Appropriately” in this sense refers to the utility of the skill both as an authentic skill within the purview of the SCA’s medieval theme and as a skill which enhances the overall performativity of the Society. For example, some firearms fall within the time period of SCA performance but because they are seen as modern weapons, gunsmithing is not an appropriately medieval skill. On the other hand, writing and performing melancholy songs and ballads is appropriately medieval yet they do not enhance SCA performance (e.g. as entertainment during a feast) because such works interrupt the loud, jovial atmosphere Scadians prefer. In this latter case, bawdy songs or songs about the glory of battle are considered more appropriate entertainment, though the subject matter usually refers to Scadians’ exploits and not those of historical figures.

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Most medieval skills are more subtly performative than entertainments at feasts. Many ladies<sup>18</sup> in the Society practice needlepoint, embroidery and dress-making in keeping with their personae. Wine and beer making, calligraphy, woodworking, and metalworking are all common SCA crafts that are rarely learned or practised in the modern world yet enhance one’s medieval persona because of their period authenticity. Scadians resist mass-production, anonymity, and alienation by personalising goods and services. These crafts serve both as protest and as performative/cognitive prop in SCA culture. By actively engaging in the personal production of

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<sup>17</sup> This is an important difference between the SCA and other re-enactment groups. Scadian personae are medieval but they cannot, by Society regulations, be “real” historical figures. No one can be Henry Tudor but one’s persona as Henry’s unknown and illegitimate offspring is acceptable. Similarly, large-scale battles are not re-creations of actual historical battles though they re-create authentic medieval ways of fighting.

period goods, Scadians invest themselves in the workings of the Society. The SCA becomes very “real” to them because they have helped to *make* it real.

Scadians’ curiosity about medieval crafts can be likened to the curiosity many archaeologists express when theorising about the manufacture<sup>19</sup> of Palaeolithic tools. The living history of the SCA is enhanced by the existence of many artefacts of the period. Documents describing how such instruments were fashioned, be it an authentic loom of the period or a set of twelfth century knight’s armour, are rare. Scadians, like Civil War reenactors (Anderson 1983; Handler & Saxton 1988), learn what it is to be an authentically medieval person by *doing* medieval things.

The fantasy/science fiction literary genre is a more immediate influence on the tropes in the SCA than any other single source. Many times throughout this paper I have and will make reference to the literary nature of the SCA: not as text precisely but rather as a hyper-literate community. Most Scadians I know read as a leisure activity and the subject matter is very often science fiction and fantasy. Most Scadians first encountered medievalism in the pages of J.R.R. Tolkien, Robert E. Howard, or David Eddings: people influenced by original medieval texts, the later Romantic writers and other twentieth century fantasy writers<sup>20</sup>, original sources that Scadians have not read themselves. Remembering this genealogy of influence helps one to understand how some Scadians can adopt personae which have no basis in medieval reality (e.g. vampires, elves) and yet envision themselves fully within the Scadian dream. The sources for medievalism in the SCA have been filtered through the schemas of other eras; Romanticism had

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<sup>18</sup> The term “ladies” is a deliberate use of the Scadian feminine title. All Scadians are considered to be at least minor nobility. Men and women are called “lords” and “ladies” respectively.

<sup>19</sup> “Manufacture” means creating something by hand. Mass-produced items may be said to be manufactured but are not in the strictest sense. In the SCA all Scadians are encouraged to learn the skills which will keep them clothed and in armour.

its own episteme and fantasy fiction, which incorporates many of the same tropes, is the creation of twentieth-century marketing. Medievalism informs the SCA in similar ways to those it did the romantic writers of the nineteenth-century, but because modern readers are further removed from the Middle Ages, they must engage medievalism through the works of those romantic writers and their literary descendants, fantasy writers.<sup>21</sup> Medievalism's literary antecedents act as a filter and a lens to clarify and focus the SCA's re-creative activity.

Anthropologists have conventionally studied people with primarily oral traditions. The SCA also has a rich oral tradition; any "newbie" (newcomer) at an event in the Barony of Rising Waters, or in any other area, can expect to be regaled with Scadian exploits from the moment they enter the re-decorated church hall (which happens to be the site for that event) to the moment they are asked politely to help with the post-revel cleanup. Most any member will acquaint a newcomer in the proper etiquette during events, what the different titles mean, and to whom one should speak for more information.

Along with oral transmission, Scadians engage in culture-making through the production of text. This can be seen in their documentation, which is voluminous, exhaustive and ongoing. In Rising Waters, the baronial newsletter *The Cataract* gives information about events within the barony including essays about medieval crafts and stories about personal SCA experiences. Newsletters for the principality (*The Tidings*), and the kingdom (*The Pale*) also have regular articles teaching members different crafts and ways to make their re-creations more authentic and more fun. These other newsletters also announce events but cover a larger geographical

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<sup>20</sup> Fantasy in this context is that genre of fiction focusing on alternate realities where the supernatural drives much of the action, but which often has a pseudo-medieval theme and feudal setting.

<sup>21</sup> During my interview with Peter S. Beagle for this paper, he stated that he does not view his work as "genre" fiction. I recognise these distinctions as invented and arbitrary. When I single out fantasy fiction as a genre I do so because it is the conceptual offspring of the fantastic writing which came out of the nineteenth-century, not because it is a less important form of writing.

area. *Tournaments Illuminated* is a quarterly publication distributed throughout the Society and almost exclusively contains articles about medieval crafts. Handbooks, such as *The Known World Handbook* and *Corpora*, describe the different offices Scadians can hold, the duties of each office, the structure of the corporation and the “order of precedence”, how tournaments are to be run, protocols regarding chivalry (chivalric offices as well as courtesy) and how to develop the many medieval interests members have to enhance the medieval experience for everyone.

With the preponderance of Society publications, there are also dozens of SCA web-sites each giving information about particular groups. There are far too many sites on the Internet for me to go into exhaustive detail. Visiting [www.sca.org](http://www.sca.org) allows one to follow hypertext links to hundreds of SCA-related web-sites.<sup>22</sup> Many Scadians are computer literate, computer gaming and “surfing” the web being common leisure activities. All kingdoms, principalities, shires, baronies and some cantons and households have their own web-sites. This use of advanced technology, while ironic in the context of medieval re-creation, facilitates information distribution and allows Scadians to network in ways unknown at the SCA’s inception. These types of textual production assist with two important aspects of SCA performativity. One, Scadians use this information to stay apprised of Society happenings so they know where to go, who’s on the throne, how to get to a particular event, etc. Two, the literature assists Scadians in their personal re-creative activities; this is very important in the more remote area of the SCA where sparse membership means a limited repository of local medieval lore. Without these kinds of post-medieval technology the SCA could not exist. The collective medieval “dream” can only work with an infrastructure of modern communication technology.

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<sup>22</sup> Other important sites for SCA members in Rising Waters are: [www.midrealm.org](http://www.midrealm.org), [www.ealdormere.midrealm.org](http://www.ealdormere.midrealm.org), [www.iaw.on.ca/risingwaters](http://www.iaw.on.ca/risingwaters).

Though modern technology is important, individuals must actively create a medieval setting at events. Scadians do this by speaking forsoothly. Forsoothly speech is speech which is appropriately medieval. Obviously, if this meant speaking as one's persona would speak then people not only would not be able to understand each other but they would also have to be experts in medieval languages, though there some Scadians who are. Speaking forsoothly involves several language conventions which are late period and English (e.g. Shakespearean language). For example: "thee" replaces "you", "Hail" replaces "Hi", "Fare thee anon" replaces "Goodbye", etc. There is no room for an extensive exploration of Scadian's adaptation of archaic-sounding English but the best way to understand forsoothly speech is to remember that as long as a word or phrase *sounds* archaic then it is acceptable. Double negatives are used to express compliments: "She does not look unlovely" or "He is not lacking in his skill with a sword" are good examples.

Forsoothly speech can also be employed to discuss modern anachronisms in a way which is not disruptive (e.g. using "my steed" to stand for "my car") but this is discouraged. In practice, Scadians drift in and out of forsoothly speech over the course of events. During my time in Rising Waters I found forsoothly speech to be the exception rather than the rule. Myself, I found it difficult to keep in medieval character throughout an entire day. Others express the same sentiment; Randwulf Wydefarer told me that this kind of explicit performance is not always important for enjoying the SCA:

There's no difference between Randwulf and me. If there's any difference its that at an event I'm there to have fun. I don't really put that much effort into playing a persona. There are people who are there for authenticity and those who want to have fun. That's why I'm there.

For Randwulf, and for many others, the SCA is a hobby which they enjoy. While Randwulf does not play an alternate persona, he is very knowledgeable about the Middle Ages and has received



several awards for his service to the Society. Forsoothly language, at its best, is an ideal worthy of the dream. In practice, because Scadians like Randwulf are there to play at being themselves; forsooth speech is not always useful in this performative sense.

### **Scadian Organization**

SCA organization exists on two distinct levels. The corporate level of organization is headed by the Board of Directors who are SCA members of high symbolic rank and are recognized for their administrative acumen. Within every kingdom, principality, barony, and canton are officers charged with specific duties pursuant to the smooth running of their district. Each officer is responsible to their superior right up to the Board of Directors. The second, or symbolic, level is organized according to the "Order of Precedence" with kings and queens at the top of the hierarchy through other titled positions (Princesses, Princes, Baronesses, Barons, Ladies, Lords) to the majority of untitled members, or to use the appropriate medieval term "gentles", at the bottom. The corporate organization works behind the scenes to facilitate the authenticity of the symbolic organization. For example, the baronial exchequer will be part of the Baron's court during events but is responsible for keeping accurate financial records which will be delivered to the principality exchequer.

The titular heads of the Barony of Rising Waters are Baron Malik ibn al-Rahman and Genevieve Chastellain d'Anjou who gained the posts through a barony-wide election. Barons and Baronesses of territorial baronies, as opposed to court Barons and Baronesses who are granted the title by the Crown, are the only democratically elected posts in the Kingdom of the Middle of which the Barony of Rising Waters is one district. Under the Baron and Baroness are posts held by members of the barony who have shown the knowledge and skill necessary to execute their tasks. Each post represents both an administrative responsibility and the commensurate medieval role the title designates; these posts combine corporate and symbolic

organization to evoke a mediievally structured administration which will not disrupt symbolic roles of authority. The posts are as follows: Seneschal, Chatelaine, Exchequer, Marshall, Pursuivant (or Herald at higher levels in the SCA), Chronicler, and Minister of Arts and Sciences. At the Principality level these posts indicate greater responsibility and more again at the Kingdom level. Through these posts, the directives of the *Corpora*, the SCA constitution and mandate, are administered. With the expansion of the SCA throughout the world the Society relies increasingly on the labour of their officers to ensure that members are served adequately and are not alienated from the SCA as a body, though many Scadians with whom I talked have misgivings about the autonomy and power of the Board of Directors, or “the BoD”. Despite qualms about the corporate structure, the Society must run smoothly to facilitate the cognitive labour of the members; the spirit of courtesy and honour must never be forgotten or the dream will fade away.

Although Society officers are a mere fraction of the total paid membership, one must be a paid member to hold an office, thus officers demonstrate a minimal but essential commitment to the running of the SCA. The administration of the SCA is detailed in a document called the *Corpora*. The *Corpora* sets out how the Society is to be run as an administrative body including the roles of royalty and duties of the heads of offices. Individual kingdom variations exist but the major tenets of the society—dressing in pre-1600 garb, courtesy, chivalry, peerage, nobility—are all explained in full. As my research concerns one district of the “Known World”, there is no space to illustrate the organization of the SCA in its entirety so I will confine my discussion to the Barony of Rising Waters, the events sponsored by this group, and Pennsic War.

The Barony of Rising Waters (Niagara Peninsula) is in the Principality of Ealdormere (Ontario, Canada). Ealdormere was founded in A.S. XXIII (1988) and will become a kingdom in the fall of 1998. There are five baronies in Ealdormere of which the oldest is Septentria, now

comprising Toronto and the surrounding area but once representing the entire province. Skraeling Althing (northern Ontario), Rising Waters, Ramshaven (south-western Ontario), and Ben Dunfirth (Hamilton) were each founded as Ealdormeran membership grew. Each has a democratically elected Baron and Baroness and a full complement of baronial officers, those posts having been detailed above. Each barony is in turn comprised of cantons representing communities with local chapters. Rising Waters has four cantons: Pont y Saeth (Burlington), Drachenfaust (Stoney Creek), Dragon's Gate (Fort Erie), Wasserstrasse (Welland) and Dinas Gardd (St. Catharines). Events are sponsored by local groups—cantons, baronies, and even kingdoms when the event is very large (i.e. Pennsic)—whose members volunteer to run each event. Hierarchy is very important; event organizers are “autocrats” and have complete authority during an event except when their authority runs counter to the wishes of attending royalty (e.g. kings and queens, princes and princesses, barons and baronesses). Even then, autocrats gain great sympathy from other Scadians, including royalty, because many know how stressful and difficult it is to run an event.

Regular weekly canton meetings are held in St. Catharines. These weekly meetings allow local members to keep in touch with each other and stay apprised of the operations of the local group. As the canton is the most local of the SCA administration, most Scadians identify their membership primarily according to their canton or barony. Cantons are directly responsible for the administration of their area and answerable to the barony. Meetings are often planning sessions, especially when there is an upcoming event sponsored by that canton. People within the group are found to assume the responsibilities of running the event. Members also discuss the latest medieval projects they have been working on and show them off to other members.

Every year the Barony “demands” its annual taxes. This demand is both symbolic and administrative. These taxes are usually collected in the form of articles which will decorate the

baronial campsite during camping events or are items which enhance the prestige of the barony—thrones, banners, ceremonial garb—consequently enhancing the prestige of each member. The Barony of Rising Waters recently commissioned “walls” for the baronial encampment. These walls are mere sheets of cloth which the individual cantons of the barony must, by order of the Baron, emblazon with their coats of arms. These walls are meant to lend the illusion of a solid enclosure during camping events. At Pennsic, the ultimate camping event, one can see how far Scadians take this idea with the erection of wooden walls around the most “authentic” royal encampments.

Local groups are not necessarily defined by geography. There are groups in the SCA called households and are often fashioned according to models like the Scottish clan, mercenary group or medieval household, but they can be formed around fictional concepts. Cantons are official administrative districts and do not generally have defining themes uniting the local group. Households are defined by the themes which unite them.

One of the groups with a fictional theme is Clan Kindred. The central concept around Clan Kindred is that members are “creatures of the night”. Clan members are not strictly SCA members though they go to Pennsic every year where their encampment among the trees is one of the most mysterious and beautiful in the entire War. Their personae are more playfully “barbaric” than most at War, with the exception of the Tuchuks.<sup>23</sup> The men and women wear stylized animal skins, as well as more traditional SCA garb. Many Clan women wear chain mail tops in conformity with their more “fantastic” personae conceptions, inspired by the fiction of

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<sup>23</sup> Tuchuks (pronounce two-chucks) are another group loosely affiliated with the SCA. “Legend” has it that the original Tuchuk membership consisted of doctors and lawyers who found dressing in animal skins and swinging swords a relaxing diversion from their high stress jobs. Most of those original members are said to have left the group leaving people whose mundane lives are more working class. My research did not involve the Tuchuks so my information is based on tales told to me around the campfire to beat of drums.

John Norman and Robert E. Howard. Byron, the former baron of Rising Waters, later granted the honorary title of Court Baron, told me that in spite of Clan Kindred's dark character they are among the most dutiful households in the Society. They arrive early at Pennsic, which can mean up to two weeks before it officially opens, and assist with the site preparations. According to Baron Byron, Clan Kindred volunteers for many jobs around War, garnering for themselves respect and a degree of autonomy.

Households come in several forms: service, fighting and families. Service households like Blackpatch or the Baronial Guard, groups within Rising Waters, offer organized assistance to autocrats who need help during an event. The Baronial Guard also lent, as it was dissolved during the preparation of this thesis, pomp and ceremony to the position of Baron and Baroness by accompanying them in Court and at camping events acting as gate guards and helpful servants within the baronial campsite. Scadians count service among the most honourable activities in the Society and often give awards for service. Sometimes service groups will change their character if their labour is unappreciated.

Blackpatch has undergone the transformation from service household to theme household back to service. Their defining character is that of a generalized denial of royal (official) authority eschewing Scadian awards of prestige instead establishing rank and privilege within their own group. They count it a badge of honour that none of their membership has been given an Award of Arms.<sup>24</sup> At one time they assisted at every event, much like Kindred to which they are affiliated, but over time they felt they were being taken for granted so they withdrew their services altogether. Moon, the leader of Blackpatch, told me:

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<sup>24</sup> Awards of Arms are given to Scadians by the King and Queen for exceptional skill or service. Once awarded the person in question can then use the title "Lord" or "Lady". Every Scadian is considered at least minor nobility and courtesy demands that every person be addressed as "my lord" or "my lady", but the title of Lord must be bestowed before one can call oneself a Lord or Lady.

It got to the point where everyone expected us to do the work at events. One event, the feastocrat [the event cook] needed help in the kitchen and someone said, 'Blackpatch is here, they'll serve.' That was it, we all left. Since then we don't serve at events and everyone thinks we've done something wrong. They took us for granted.

Many groups disapproved of this withdrawal and to this day there are some who actively dislike Blackpatch.

There is another side to this story, however. Women with whom I have talked express another reason for disliking Blackpatch. Male Blackpatch members, as part of their group persona, adopt the custom of having multiple wives calling them "first wife, second wife" and so on. Female Blackpatch members play a subservient role within the group, often simply called "slaves". In the SCA, chivalry is even more important than hierarchy. Blackpatch, as a group within the SCA, enact mores which are very different from modern Canadian values of gender equality, thus they could be understood as anti-modern, but they also enact values which are explicitly anti-medieval and anti-chivalrous. Not all Scadians hold negative opinions of Blackpatch; some find their "night" theme appealing. Mostly, Scadians accept Blackpatch because the SCA accepts everyone; it is the modern world which categorises and excludes.

Along with service households are groups based on a theme of familial relations. Family households tend to devote themselves to service as well, but membership takes the form of fictive familial relations rather than a shared interest in a specific theme. One example is Baroness Fiona Avryle O'Connor's household whose membership consists of those people who have shown great service to her in her office as Baroness and Information Officer to the Principality. She commands great respect due to her vast knowledge of medieval crafts and history. Baroness Fiona's personal library contains many volumes which are centuries old; almost old enough to have been printed in the period of SCA re-enactment. Family households are common but tend to be more loosely organised than the other two types. Membership in a

family, or any kind of household, does not generally proscribe membership in others unless that particular group marks exclusive membership as one of its pre-requisite for prospective members.

Fighting households are the third common type. These groups usually have a mercenary character because they fight as a group rather than as part of the barony or other constituency. Two such groups in *Rising Waters*, but not confined to the barony, are the Rozaki and House Weiselburg. As houses they practice fighting together, both individually and in melee groups of five to ten. Each official household—because not every household need be official—has its own coat of arms which all members wear over their armour when they fight. At events, attending households will hang their banner as a declaration of the group's presence and as further medieval decoration to hide evidence of the modern world.

Many Scadians spent their leisure time practising their medieval crafts so that they may better portray their persona at the next event. Of all the crafts Scadians learn, sewing and dress-making are the most important. Many female Scadians make dress-making into a celebration by holding bodice-making parties. Though I have not attended one of these gatherings I have been assured that the following is an accurate description. Each woman brings the material she wishes made into a bodice. A bodice is a figure-hugging garment that accentuates a woman's figure. Bodices function much the same as corsets, including the use of ribbing to ensure it does not lose shape when worn. Bodices are not worn as much to hold a woman's figure, though they do this well, but to help better display her breasts. Bodices are one of the many ways women flirt in the SCA. Each woman present strips to a tee shirt and then has her upper torso wrapped around in duct tape. The tape and the tee shirt are then cut off with scissors. The shape of the tape and fabric make a pattern which will be used for making the bodice. These are sometimes called 'atomic' bodices because the pattern is formed to the woman's shape while altering it

enough to give her a classic hourglass shape thus making a woman's figure very appealing. After the patterns are made the bodices are made with the assistance of the best seamstresses in the group. Heterosexual men are not allowed at these parties.

Men get together in much the same way to assemble armour, where, once the pieces of metal or plastic are fitted, the construction becomes like an assembly line with each person performing one job until one or more sets of armour are finished. These parties are not gendered, though men make up the majority of fighters. Co-operation and support, both with time and labour, are extremely common in the SCA. It is very difficult for an individual to "go it alone" because few people, especially if they are new, have all the knowledge necessary to equip themselves to enter the current Middle Ages.

Between SCA-only events cantons will often sponsor public events called "demos". I do not count demos as typical events because though they involve re-creation, demos, or demonstration events, are educational exhibitions of Scadian handicrafts meant for the consumption of non-Scadians. However, in this context the SCA is more like the performers at New Salem or Colonial Williamsburg than at any other time. These exhibitions take place at schools, shopping malls, or anywhere the autocrat thinks there will be an audience for the work of the SCA. Demos are the only events which are pure spectacle directed at an audience external to the SCA. They can be as simple as a display of armour and weaponry in a shopping mall thoroughfare, or they can be as complex as reproducing an authentic medieval encampment at a cross-border festival.

The Friendship Festival is an annual summer event in Fort Erie, Ontario and Buffalo, New York, celebrating the close relationship between Canada and the United States. The SCA sponsors one section of the festival ground for a demo where Scadians perform an authentic medieval community. Often a court is held for the benefit of onlookers. These demos are in



many ways more authentically/historically medieval than regular events because Scadians are strongly discouraged from displays of modern culture (e.g. aluminium cans, beer bottles, food wrappers, wristwatches, etc.): displays which might be ignored at an SCA-only event.

Under the gaze of mundane spectators, Scadians play their roles with more self-consciousness than at other events. Personae are maintained and forsoothly speech is used when in view of the spectators. The SCA encampment is large, numbering several hundred, and attending Scadians are encouraged to display their skill at medieval crafts. Authentic tents are positioned along the perimeter of the encampment, shielding those made of nylon from public view. The Festival is large and there are many attractions, not just the SCA. The pressure to perform is not as great as it would be if it were the only attraction, actors in New Salem or Colonial Williamsburg are paid performers who should not break the “frame” (Goffman 1974) of their performance. However, as I will write in the following sections concerning day events and Pennsic, the Friendship Festival is a more explicit performance than others to which Scadians are accustomed. Scadians are not used to spectators because at an event everyone is a performer as well as a spectator. Demos like the Friendship Festival draw public attention and potential members. Onlookers consume the spectacle of the re-creation and participate in the nostalgia of the time period. Medieval Europe is a familiar set of tropes for most North Americans; thus the SCA encampment is a popular aspect of the Festival of Friends. The SCA is invited back every year.

Demonstration events offer an interesting variation within SCA performance. Despite their being more historically accurate re-enactments, instead of being exercises of internal transformation, Scadians’ personae are presented for the consumption of a modern audience and not for each other. Demos display the educational aspect of the SCA mandate; the Society for Creative Anachronism was incorporated in California as an *educational* organization, but they do

not facilitate the “dream”. However, demos do show the SCA at its most “spectacular” because at demonstrations there is an “audience” and there are “performers”. Scadians at other events perform their “true” selves and fulfil the SCA “dream” while at demos they perform their personae, perhaps even their “true” selves, but the modern world constantly intrudes in the form of curious spectators. The “dream” is an ideal difficult to achieve except through great expenditures of time and effort and it becomes more difficult when Scadians are not able to “forget” the modern world surrounding them. Some people enjoy demonstration camping events but many feel the effort of maintaining medieval personae explicitly as spectacle and they cannot achieve the inner transformation, the “magic moment”, for which Scadians strive.

### **The Scadian Calendar**

The SCA holds events year-round. Demonstration events are common but do not represent the majority of SCA events. Most events are meant for the enjoyment of Scadians alone, thus members are obliged to adhere to certain guidelines regarding comportment and behaviour. *The Corpora* details the requirements one must meet to attend an SCA-sponsored event. One must make a “reasonable” attempt at period clothing and act in a chivalrous manner. People who do not perform at this minimal level will not be allowed at events. Thus, as shown with demonstration events, because spectators do not meet this baseline of performativity their presence is inherently disruptive and unwelcome. However, the SCA is very welcoming to new members but it requires those “newbies” to participate at this minimal level. Rising Waters keeps a collection of medieval garb for the expressed purpose of outfitting new members so they will not be out-of-period, thus visibly disruptive, at events. Scadians are performing for other Scadians and not for others. Performing mediievally as a group helps both the individual and the group to evoke an anti-modern medieval setting.

Events have many different themes. The most significant are those which determine successors to the throne. Twice a year, the Middle Kingdom holds a “Crown Tournament” to determine who will become king. Kings, less often queens, are granted their position by winning these tournaments. Royal reigns are six months long and a person may become king many times, though never twice consecutively. Queens, less often kings, are the winner’s consort for the six month period. The monarch who gains the throne via combat is considered the ruler and the consort has less symbolic prestige. A “Coronet Tourney” is held twice a year in Ealdormere to determine the Prince’s, or Princess’s, successor.<sup>25</sup>

Many SCA events are annual gatherings at specific times of the year. Each barony or canton has an event which is traditionally theirs and held the same time every year. During my period of research there were five annual events in Rising Waters. Now there are four because the canton of Ben Dunfirth (Hamilton) has since become its own barony. In January, Dinas Gardd hosts “Twelfth Night”, though the event is held in Welland, Ontario. This event takes place on a single day and for the last three years has been held in a Tudor style banquet hall in Welland. “Twelfth Night” celebrates the end of the Christmas/Yuletide season. It is often called the “Feast of Fools”. The “Lady Mary Memorial Tournament”, named after Her Ladyship, Mistress Baroness Fiona Avryle O’Connor of Maidenhead’s late mother and hosted by the canton of Dinas Gardd, was once held on the Saturday nearest to May 1<sup>st</sup> but is now held every year at the end of May. The site for “Lady Mary” is a church in downtown St. Catharines. September is the annual “Grape & Wine” parade in St. Catharines. Dinas Gardd hosts “Bacchus” the same day as the parade. The Baron and Baroness, with other members of the barony, sponsor a float which they ride in the parade. After the parade, “Bacchus” begins. It is

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<sup>25</sup> Recently, a lady knight won the principality coronet (crowns are only worn by kings) and her partner assumed the role of consort. He became the Prince of Love and Beauty.

a small event but because St. Catharines is in the heart of Ontario's wine country; celebrating Bacchus, god of wine and revelry, is a short conceptual leap in keeping with SCA re-creation. In November, Drachenfaust sponsors the "Baronial Birthday Bash" which celebrate the anniversary of the creation of the Barony of Rising Waters. There are other events, focusing on medieval arts and sciences (artisanship), research and heraldry, but these do not have regular sponsors and are not annual traditions. In the next section, I will describe the "Lady Mary" tournament as an example of a typical SCA event.<sup>26</sup>

For people in Rising Waters, the two most important summer events are "Murder Melee in the Meadow" and Pennsic War. Both of these are camping events and last from four to nine days, respectively. "Murder Melee" is sponsored by the Barony of Ben Dunfirth every year during the third weekend in June. It takes place in Freelon, Ontario at Hoover Park. Until Ben Dunfirth became a barony, "Murder Melee" was a regular event for Rising Waters. Nevertheless, it is the most important summer event in the Golden Horseshoe with approximately 400 participants each year.

Pennsic War is sponsored by the Kingdoms of the Middle and East and is hosted by the Kingdom of Æthelmarc. It lasts from the second weekend through the third weekend in August and is the largest event on the SCA calendar with approximately 10,000 participants each year. Many people from Rising Waters attend Pennsic each year asserting that it is the ultimate SCA event and the culmination of the "dream". I will discuss Pennsic, both as an event and as a site for personal transformation, in a later section.

### **The Lady Mary Tournament**

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<sup>26</sup> With the sheer diversity of themes and locales, this statement is problematic but unavoidable. Day events all share many characteristics but, because locales change and events occur at different times of year, no two events are exactly alike. My discussion of a "typical" event will incorporate that single event in its entirety though I recognize this limitation.

For analysis of a day event I have chosen the Lady Mary Memorial Tournament. There are several reasons for choosing this event over others held in the Barony of Rising Waters. “Lady Mary”, or May Day as it was originally called, occurs at about the same time every year; the event I write about took place on April 29, 1995. Since then, the date has changed to the end of May. Nevertheless, May Day symbolises the end of winter and the beginning of spring; May 1<sup>st</sup> is the beginning of the Scadian calendar as well.<sup>27</sup> With Ben Dunfirth assuming responsibility of Murder Melee in the Meadow, Lady Mary is the largest event in Rising Waters, and Scadians come from all over the Barony to attend it. It also attracts people from as far away as Toronto and Buffalo, New York. Lady Mary is also Rising Water’s first major tournament of the year, the winter being too cold for outdoor fighting, thus many fighters participate. All these aspects of the Lady Mary Tournament make it an appropriate example of the SCA day event.

The naming of this event sheds light on the ways Scadians invent tradition through performance. First, as a May Day celebration, it recognizes the turning of the seasons rather than the Gregorian calendar, recalling a profound (yet re-created) relationship between Scadians and the burgeoning Earth. It evokes a profound relationship with the land. Scadians are discouraged from performing their religion during events yet this very “pagan” theme both signifies a particular spiritual orientation with the world and an invented antiquity which serves as an alternative to Easter celebrations, being the equivalent Christian celebration for that time of year. Nothing during the event is explicitly anti-Christian but the theme is definitely *non-Christian*. Also, by celebrating the beginning of the year in May instead of January there is a cognitive break with the modern system of time-keeping.

Second, changing the name to the Lady Mary Tournament changed the emphasis from the relation between Scadians and the earth to their relationship with their own past. As stated

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<sup>27</sup> This date also having been the anniversary of the first SCA event in 1966.

above, May Day was later renamed after the death of Baroness Fiona Avryle O'Connor's mother, whose name was Mary. This new name was chosen to honour both the memory of a well admired and respected lady and the importance Baroness Fiona has within the Barony.<sup>28</sup> After the name changed, the event date changed. May Day recalls antiquity while the Lady Mary Tournament celebrates the interpersonal history of Rising Waters and, by extension, the SCA. May 1<sup>st</sup> still marks the beginning of the SCA calendar and May Day celebrations are still held by other SCA chapters; but, in Rising Waters, the Lady Mary Tournament represents a conceptual realignment. Both celebrations evoke an historical continuity but only the later celebrates the SCA as an internally referential sphere of activity and cognition with its own alternate history.

This particular Lady Mary Tournament (Lady Mary) took place at the Mount Hope Community Park in Mount Hope, Ontario. Ben Dunfirth was elevated to the level of barony at this event, a new Baron and Baroness were installed, and a new Prince and Princess of Ealdormere were invested.

Mount Hope falls within the boundaries of Ben Dunfirth so this was the last time Rising Waters would sponsor an event in the Hamilton area. I point this out to highlight the dynamic geography of the SCA. Borders change and branches can form and dissolve, growing and shrinking dramatically over time. When I started research on this thesis, Wasserstrasse (Welland) was an important canton in Rising Waters. The canton's core members moved out of Welland over a period of two years, thus the canton could no longer exist. Afon Araf (Stratford, Ontario) suffered this same fate during my research.

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<sup>28</sup>The Baroness at the time of the event was the Baroness of Rising Waters, the barony including most of the golden horseshoe area of southern Ontario. After resigning as Baroness of Rising Waters she assumed the rank of court Baroness which accords great status without the ceremonial responsibility.

While the SCA embraces tradition and authenticity, at the local level its geographical instability is undeniable. Local branches which wish to be elevated to the next symbolic/administrative level must demonstrate a large, knowledgeable, dependable, diverse, and committed membership base to the Board of Directors before their elevation can occur. Ben Dunfirth was allowed the elevation to barony because it meets these requirements. Ealdormere has been petitioning the SCA to become a kingdom for the past five years and only this year, 1998, was their desire fulfilled. This deliberate, methodical protocol for branch elevation prevents the above instabilities at higher levels of SCA administration. Continuity lends stability not only to Society administration but to individuals' experienced connection with the wider SCA. Lady Rosalind of Castle Rising and Viscount Sir Belgar, a former Prince of Ealdormere, worked hard to maintain their canton of Afon Araf but their small membership base forced the SCA to close their chapter. Since the time of its dissolution, another chapter has formed in Stratford, Ontario but it cannot be called Afon Araf; names are individual, unique, and non-transferable in the SCA. That small part of the SCA "dream" vanished two years ago. Without a local chapter, the few Scadians in Stratford were forced to go to another, more distant, SCA chapter until the more recent chapter started. Even now, there is no guarantee this canton will survive.

Conversely, there are also important consequences to geographical changes due to a branch's elevation. Ben Dunfirth was the most important canton within Rising Waters and many of their baronial officers were lost with its elevation. Since this event, Dinas Gardd has become the centre for Baronial activity. Ben Dunfirth itself met the requirements for baronial status but its elevation co-opted many talented members to its own activities thus negatively affecting Rising Waters. Many people in Rising Waters mark the Ben Dunfirth's elevation as a period of readjustment and re-evaluation. A person from Dinas Gardd said to me:

Most of the baronial offices were held by them (people in Ben Dunfirth). It was the most important canton in Rising Waters and now Dinas Gardd has to pick up the slack. They have most of the fighters and a lot of the baronial officers. It (Ben Dunfirth) has a lot of enthusiastic, motivated people; they were the centre of Rising Waters and now we have to get along without them.

Since this time of anxiety and reflection, Rising Waters has gained new members and regained its administrative stability. When administrative problems dominate Scadians' thoughts, the SCA as re-creation, and recreation, suffers. Baronial officers perform the labour—keeping financial records, organising meetings, appointing autocrats, publishing the monthly newsletter, handling device submissions, orienting new members to the SCA—which allows other members to participate with little conscious awareness of the SCA as an administrative body. Such awareness cannot be completely denied but Scadians work hard so that modern corporate concerns do not infringe on members' quest for the “dream”.

My description of the event will be somewhat chronological with analysis where I deem it appropriate; though I recognise this is arbitrary it is necessary nonetheless. Events, even those of short duration like day events, are dynamic and involve hundreds of people interacting in complex ways in many different contexts. Other than a basic schedule, activity has a flow determined by the actions of the revellers as a collective. As an ethnographer, I can only see what is in front of me, hear what is in earshot and smell that which is upwind of me. What I do not experience is much greater than what I do. No anthropologist is a panopticon (Foucault 1977), nor can anybody be; thus my authority is limited to what I experience, as are the accounts of those of whom I interview. I cannot duplicate in words the event in its entirety, but my experience is authentic inasmuch as anybody's can be. It is necessary to recognise this limitation as unavoidable, yet, because it is unavoidable (thus ubiquitous), it is not a particular handicap. We cannot see what is behind us but maybe someone else was looking in that direction. By



piecing together different experiences, the anthropologist can arrive, not at the truth, but a more accurate subjectivity.

Because of its size, Lady Mary had two autocrats overseeing the event. They were Lady Genevieve Chastellain d'Anjou, soon to become the Baroness, and Lady Briend Molyneaux de Shanacashel. As stated above, responsibility for the event falls on the autocrat but there are two other important organizational positions at a day event: the feastocrat, and the troll.

Put simply, the feastocrat is the feast cook. This variation on the word autocrat reminds people that feast preparation requires great labour and that the feastocrat is the final authority in the kitchen, even above the autocrat. Day events such as this one mean that the feastocrat must prepare a period menu for dozens of people; in this case, the number was over two hundred. Volunteers assist with food preparation and with serving at the feast. The feast is the most important single scene of the day event. Because it deserves greater attention, in the next section I will discuss the feast with reference to the writings of Bakhtin.

“Troll” represents the third important occupation at the day event, and camping events as well. The troll—recalling the legend of the troll under the bridge who demands money for safe passage—collects money from arriving guests for their site admission and the cost of the feast. Troll is also responsible for site waivers which every attendee must sign because of the potential danger for guests, even if they are not fighters. Accidents can, and do, happen and the site waiver is a modern contrivance to absolve the SCA of liability in case someone is injured. Aside from the name, troll is a purely administrative position, though necessary, and serves more to remind members of the modern world than to distract them from it. At day events, Troll will close before feast allowing that person, and possible volunteers, to forget site administration and participate in the SCA carnivalesque. At camping events, Troll only intrudes when one first enters the site. Once inside, Troll no longer plays this cognitively disruptive role.

Another role, though not one explicitly required for the event, is that of herald. Heralds serve two functions: first, they are responsible for examining and approving heraldic devices submitted by other SCA members; and second, they are the primary communication system during events. At a given event a person (or persons), hopefully someone who has been trained as a herald but anyone loud enough will do, will be designated the event herald(s). Heralds announce official event happenings by shouting, "Oyez (pronounced oi-ay), Oyez," followed by the announcement. Heralds are not message couriers or go-betweens for the general populace. Their duty at events is to transmit official SCA information during an event.

Once one has paid their site and feast fees, they then must change into their medieval garb. Once changed, a person is free to mingle and socialise with other Scadians. Modern language is left behind with modern dress and social interaction is conducted through forsoothly speech with chivalry, "courtesy, honesty, fairness, and generosity" (*TKWH:9*). Chivalry, in action rather than as reference to peers, involves treating all men and women as persons of honour worthy of respect and consideration. In this way people are imbued with a greater degree of social standing and worth than in a modern setting. Thus, where in the mundane world a stranger would likely be ignored or sloughed off in social interactions, in the SCA strangers are to be treated with even greater honour than friends and acquaintances. Service and courtesy are their own rewards. Through chivalry, Scadians create an environment which resists anomie and alienation.

Gatherings like Lady Mary usually have only four scheduled participatory performances over the course of the day; these are the Tourney, Court, Feast, and period dancing once the above are finished. Fencing and archery are also common competitions but are not regular parts of day events. Lady Mary this year had two sessions of Court because of all the momentous changes happening to Ealdormere and the Barony of Rising Waters. The time between these set

pieces is spent flirting, discussing medieval crafts, gaming, fighting (independently of the Tourney), and drinking.

The day for this Lady Mary Tournament dawned clear and bright, auguring well for the day's fighting and revelry.<sup>29</sup> As I drove into the community centre's parking lot, I noticed the Baronial Guard, the Baron and Baroness of Rising Waters' ceremonial retinue, helping people find parking spots. As it was a well-attended event, the Baronial Guard (the Guard) volunteered to assist in the running of Lady Mary. Over the course of the day this amounted to: helping organise the parking lot to avoid congestion; carrying their Excellencies' (the Baron and Baroness) belongings around the event so that they were free to interact with their subjects and other royalty without concern for their personal effects; setting up chairs for court as well as the thrones of the Baron and Baroness, the incipient Baron and Baroness of Ben Dunfirth, and the Prince and Princess of Ealdormere; attending their Excellencies of Rising Waters at court: and, helping to set up the basement for the evening feast. To co-ordinate these activities, the Guard used headsets with microphones so they would be in communication with other members of the Guard and the autocrats. To hide these anachronisms from public view, those members of the Guard wearing the headsets also wore Middle Eastern burnouses.<sup>30</sup> With the burnoose wrapped around the head, only the small microphone was visible.

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<sup>29</sup> In Scadian terminology, events are called "revels", an appropriately medieval term, but most members refer to these gatherings as "events"; thus, I will use the word "event" instead of revel when referring to Lady Mary. Gatherings after events are called "post-revs" (post-revels) and are informal with no persona or clothing requirements. Most events are followed by post-revs but attendance is by invitation only: thus performativity is stressed no more than it is for the individual living in modernity.

<sup>30</sup> This is an interesting example of appropriate versus authentic medievalism for the sake of utility. Of the members of the Guard, only Miguel de Valencia had a persona which could allow for Arabic headgear. His persona's history is set in 12<sup>th</sup> century Spain when there was considerable Moorish cultural influence. For others in the Guard, Moorish dress is against their personae but it is appropriate because it is period dress and looks anti-modern. Ironically, what the SCA deems a period anachronism, as in this instance, is still contemporary dress in certain areas of the globe.

Once I parked my car, I made my way to troll where I paid the site and feast fee. Then, I went to the “Lords” changing room where I divested myself of modern clothes and donned my medieval garb. As a newcomer, I had been assisted in my clothing by Lady Elenya Anatolejevna Pavlova, keeper of the Baronial garb and talented clothier. My garb for Lady Mary consisted of an oversized black robe with hood held at the waist by a leather belt. SCA garb is usually more elaborate than this but, as I am a large man, she only had one piece that would fit me. Typically, men wear tunics with breaches, long tunics which hang past the knees, or doublets with hose. Women wear dresses, often these are enhanced with bodices (even of the atomic kind as discussed earlier). Men’s and women’s garb are very colourful, using colours not often used by people outside the Society. Clothing is often trimmed with fabric containing patterns, often a floral design, around the neck and sleeves. Fabric is natural—linen, cotton, or silk predominate—but velvet is also common. The most important aspect of SCA garb is not strictly its authenticity but its appropriateness. The simplest garb is a tee-tunic, made of two pieces of cloth shaped to an individual’s form and sewn together along the edges, and loose fitting sweat pants. The most elaborate garb can be a reproduction of Elizabethan court dress with ruff, detailed embroidery, puff and slash sleeves and period footwear. Simple garb is more common than the latter and at Lady Mary this proved true.

Along with garb comes a certain amount of essential SCA accessories. One wears a belt to hold the garb at the waist. Blades, pouches, dags, favours and site tokens are then hung from the belt. I discussed blades earlier in this paper. Pouches are the medieval equivalent of pockets. They are used to carry watches, money, keys, cosmetics, medicine, etc., anything which one needs during an event but which should be concealed because it is modern. Dags and favours are tokens of either group membership (i.e. household, barony, etc.) or the favour of another Scadian, usually one of the opposite sex. They consist of a small piece of fabric hung on

the belt and show the device of the group or person who bestowed it upon them. Site tokens are distributed to paid attendees to show one, that they paid to enter, and two, to show that they should be there and are not outsiders, though this latter case is rare and I have not heard of it happening when I have attended events.

Jewelry is the final accoutrement which Scadians, men and women, don for events. For both sexes this is an anti-modern custom but for different reasons. Women wear jewelry in North America but in the SCA jewelry styles are much different. Dragons, unicorns and snakes are common figures in Scadian jewelry. Torcs<sup>31</sup> and armbands are forms of jewelry found in the SCA but not normally outside of it. Men also wear jewelry of this sort. Scadians hold that during the Middle Ages, men wore jewelry and that it is only the modern age which prohibits this type of self-expression.

Of course, men wear jewelry in the 1990s which would have resulted in derision fifty years before; thus the Scadian critique is not one of content but one of scale. Scadian jewelry is ostentatious and elaborate using themes which, even in a postmodern culture, are unusual and startling. Garb can also be shocking in its flamboyance or, in the case of women's dress, sexual overtones. In these ways, clothing is used as a celebration of the self. Jewelry and garb are thus primarily expressions of their "true" selves instead of their period personae.

Once suitably outfitted, the Scadian is now ready to re-enter the site in persona. Persona names are used exclusively during events and often between events as they are the names most members know. This particular day was mild so most people were outside in the sunshine

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<sup>31</sup> A torc looks like a necklace which does not form a complete circle around the neck. It is made of a loop of metal with metal knobs on the ends. According to one Scadian, "The Celts only used chains around the neck to denote a slave. Wearing a torc meant that you were a free man (or woman)." Ironically, knights are given chains to wear as symbols of their chivalric rank: the *Known World Handbook* states, "Anyone looking for perfect consistency and logic in our structures is doomed to frustration."

talking and waiting for the fighting to start. The tournament began at 11:00 am and involved approximately fifty fighters who fought a double elimination tourney to determine the winner of the Lady Mary Tournament. The award holds prestige but no rank as with Crown and Coronet tourneys.

Fighting in the SCA is another example both of lived archaeology and self-transformation and fulfilment. Fighters wear armour made of metal or plastic (once again suitability is more important than historical authenticity), and fight using rattan weapons. The armour must meet minimum safety requirements and the weapons must also meet specifications which limit their deadliness while not hindering their utility. Scadians re-enact medieval fighting by doing it. Much like Civil War re-enactors (Handler & Linnekin 1984; Handler & Saxton 1988) the authenticity for the participants lies not in the details of the action, though Civil War re-enactors show a greater concern for this sort of authenticity, but in the feelings created by fighting like medieval knights.

In the end, however, realism must be subordinated to safety and self-fulfilment. Rattan weapons are edge-less facsimiles of metal ones thus there is no danger of one losing a limb or head, though without the required armour one could easily be hurt or maimed. Weapon hits are judged by the person receiving the blow according to their power and location. If a blow, in an interestingly subjunctive mode of thinking, would have severed a limb or killed a combatant outright then that fighter must concede that the blow was a maiming/fatal one and act accordingly. Thus, if a fighter “would have” lost a leg, then that person would have to fight the rest of the battle from the ground. A show of chivalry would be to go down on the ground to fight an opponent so wounded, thus showing gallantry. Other fighters, ones who do not acknowledge the blows they receive, are called “rhinos” or “rhino-hides” denoting their thick

skin and seeming imperviousness to sword blows. Rhinos are considered unchivalrous but they are often victorious.

Another notable aspect of SCA combat is its speed. Fights rarely last one minute and can be as short as a few seconds if the fighters are of vastly different skill. Some fighters train with two swords, this is called fighting “two-stick”, which is the fastest mode of fighting. The best fighters train in this mode because of its speed and its emphasis on offence, as there is no shield to stop a blow. One fighter, Gilchrist, fighting a knight told me:

I didn't know what happened. All I know is he rushed me and then I was lying on the ground. People told me after that (Sir) Cordigan (Baron of Ramshaven) hit me so hard in the stomach he lifted me off the ground. I don't even remember the blow. I can't believe I got a chance to fight him, though.

The fight was over in almost the blink of an eye but one bystander took a photograph of the fighter in mid-air. Losing to a knight can be honourable in itself.

As stated above, this was a double elimination tournament which meant that each fighter needing two losses to be eliminated from the competition. The fighting area is called the “lists field” and is sectioned off into discrete portions for individual fights with yellow rope. Lists comes from the medieval term “the woven edge of a strip of cloth” (*TKWH*:16). This usage extends to the fighters themselves and the person who organizes the tournament is called the “Minister of the Lists”.

The tournament lasted approximately three hours before a winner was decided: Viscount Roak of Ealdormere. This was no surprise to the spectators who knew that he was the best fighter in the field. After the fighting, the Lists were taken down and the spectators drifted away to find other amusements at the event.

The basement of the Community Centre was set up for “Merchant's Row”. Most every event sets aside space for Scadians with merchant personae, or who just want to make some

money, to set up a table and display wares for sale. Items are usually period but one can often find books on period themes and SCA handbooks for sale. Merchants usually sell period utensils and tableware for Feast, candles, incense, massage oils, fragrant oils, garb, jewelry, pouches, and the like.

Authenticity is less important than alterity in Merchant' Row. Most items may not look like they have been mass-produced but they have been. Incenses, oils, and candles are rarely made by the merchant but are rather part of the product lines of modern companies. Merchant contribute to SCA performativity by supplying other Scadians with the materials they need to look and feel authentic, both in the medieval and personal sense. At Pennsic, one is more likely to find merchants who sell items made by themselves. Merchanting, as it is called, is necessary despite the inauthenticities which creep in through their merchant performance. Many of the items they sell can be found with difficulty in the "mundane" world; merchants are like cultural lenses which bring into material focus those aspects of the modern world which best suit the performativity of the SCA.

On the ground floor of the building, chairs had already been set up for court and in the back of the room games had been set up for people to play if they wished. Of all SCA activities, gaming is the easiest to perform mediievally. Chess is very popular as is a game called "Cathedral". Cathedral is a game of strategy where two people place buildings within a walled enclosure until one or the other has claimed the most area. Nine holes; Three, Five, Nine, and Twelve Men's Morris; Tablero and Go are all found at events. Medieval games are well documented and enjoyable, thus Scadians can engage in appropriate medieval games which happen to be authentic without sacrificing their recreation at the expense of re-creation.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>In my research, I found that most people in the SCA do not value authenticity as much as their own self-fulfillment. There are those people, called "authenticity mavens", who enjoy historically



Flirting comprises a significant amount of the social interaction at events and occurs at all times during an event. Medievalist flirting is a combination of historically authentic modes of flirting combined with more modern expressions of sexual interest. Of the former, the two most prevalent are kissing a Lady's hand and the passing of the cloven fruit. Hand-kissing is a period way of showing respect or sexual interest. The man takes the woman's hand lightly by the fingers, bends down, and brushes his lips against her knuckles. Kissing higher on the hand means the man is more interested but kissing too hard is rude. Sometimes the kiss is accompanied by a surreptitious caress of the palm or underside of the wrist. A hand-kiss can be a greeting, statement of interest, compliment, or proposition.

The cloven fruit is a fruit, usually an orange, studded with whole cloves imbedded in the rind. The "proper" way to use the fruit is for a person to pass it to another person of the opposite sex, that person then takes the fruit and takes one clove between their teeth. The recipient bites down on the clove, thus sweetening their breath, and then kisses the first person. Scadians modify this practice slightly. First, the clove is rarely bitten because of the sharp flavour. The medieval custom of biting the clove, as explained to me at an event, is not as important because of modern hygienic practices. Second, the recipient does not have to be of the opposite sex and a kiss does not have to be given in return. A handshake or hug is an acceptable form of response, whichever the recipient prefers. The recipient may also respond with more ardour than in the medieval custom; it is the individual's choice how to respond when presented with a cloven fruit.

Forsoothly speech can also be used for medievalist flirting. Compliments given in a suitably medieval fashion (i.e. "thy beauty puts the moon herself to shame, see how she hides

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authentic re-creation and view the recreational aspect of the Society with derision. In my interview with Diana Paxson, she indicated that historical authenticity is valued very highly in northern California and showed some disappointment other groups' lack of commitment to authenticity. Historical authenticity is more the exception than the rule in Rising Waters.

behind a cloud for thou hast eclipsed her”) show appreciation and interest while maintaining the overall atmosphere of medievalism. Most often, this form of flirting is performed by men toward women. “Favours” are a form of flirting performed by women primarily and directed toward men. Favours are items, usually made of coloured fabric, which women give to men to show their interest. Often, a Lady will bestow a favour on a fighter who will then be fighting for her. Other times a fighter will ask the Lady if he may fight for her. In any of these flirting scenarios there is no implicit sexual subtext, though there can be an expression of interest or attraction. As a rule, Scadians view all flirting, while at an event, to be just another aspect of medieval performance and not as an overture for further attention once the event is over.

Flirting after an event draws out the prevailing modern mores that Scadians suppress while on-site. Post-revel flirting is considered more “real” and therefore more consequential when compared to the formal and stylistic during events. Discussion of this “real” flirting is beyond the scope of this paper but the contrast between frames of performance bring the differences between SCA performance and the performance of mundane life into focus. Flirting plays an important role in SCA performance because of its ostensible formality and adherence to an accepted, albeit subjective and amorphous, code of chivalry. Mundane identity performance is increasingly stressful (Giddens 1991) thus performing established rules for conduct, while modern in their reflexivity, are anti-modern in their stabilising function. Scadian flirting and chivalry is a milieu which provides structure wherein a person can both reflexively explore self-performance without the inherent existential risk entailed within modernity.

In writing this I must admit that while the principle of “harmless” flirting was in evidence at Lady Mary, as it is at all events I attended, many long-term sexual relationships start through personal associations made in the SCA. Many members have partners in the Society and others are married couples, some of whom have “open marriages”. Earlier I wrote a

footnote regarding one woman's response to an overly attentive admirer illustrating how flirting can be checked when it is unwanted. Contrariwise, flirtation can become extremely demonstrative during an event so that others can find it distasteful. For example, back and neck massages constitute flirting at SCA events but according to people with whom I have talked, this tactile flirting often becomes what might be termed colloquially as "making out" and during events is often perceived as "taking (flirting) too far". For Scadians, playful flirting is not synonymous with sexual license. "Medieval" sexual by-play is ubiquitous at Rising Waters' events and, presumably, in the rest of the SCA if Pennsic War is an indication. Medieval flirting maintains the frame of the overall medieval performance but more exhibitionistic flirting brings modernity into the centre of SCA performance thus marring the medieval imagery which allows individual members to play at being themselves. Many Scadians complain about this modern sexual intrusion at events because it undermines the chivalric ideal of Scadians' society, an ideal which formalises relations between genders while also creating the space to explore sexuality within a modern interpretation of medievalist framework. "Swinging" and "open marriages" exist among Scadians but these are mostly mundane concerns because much of this activity is outside SCA event time. When individuals and couples engage in this "beyond the pale" flirting at events the effects are felt more widely than the people immediately involved and create performative stress for other Scadians.<sup>33</sup>

With the tournament over and victor named, it was time for afternoon Court. In this paper I address SCA feasts as worth special consideration but the performance of a simulated medieval court is the explicit ideological centre for SCA re-creation. Court is one of the few

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<sup>33</sup> There is a rumour, substantiating it might do a disservice to the parties involved so I elect to keep it in the realm of speculation, that one Lady gained her AoA by having sex with an important member of the royalty. In this sense both the licentiousness and the sycophantic nature of the act

times, individual performances during feast or elsewhere being the other instances, when Scadians are explicitly obliged to engage in period performance and where there is a demarcation within the Society between stage and audience.

For Court—I capitalise the word because it embraces a specific performative type within the SCA—thrones are placed, sometimes on a dais, facing the rows of chairs which make up the audience viewing area during the ceremony. An aisle is left in the middle of the audience for the royal procession and to allow access for those people who will receive awards during Court. When one hears: “Oyez, Oyez, Court will begin in fifteen minutes!” then it is either time to attend court or to avoid it. Attendance is voluntary and some people, Blackpatch members for example, rarely attend. Most Scadians attend for two reasons: one, out of respect for royalty and Scadian tradition; and two, curiosity about who will receive awards or who will perform “shtick” during Court.

“Shtick” refers to performed set pieces during Court. These can be elaborate or simple and can involve any number of people. This afternoon Court had one of the more interesting pieces of shtick I have seen. Prince David and Princess Elina held Court to honour Roak because of his prowess and chivalry for winning the fighting tourney. After his award was given and he bowed out of their Serene Highnesses’ presence, David and Elina were then presented with a goblet of wine as an anonymous gift. They each took a draught and within moments both clutched their throats croaking, “Poison!” A cry rose in the hall. “The Prince and Princess have been poisoned. Someone must find the assassin! Who can we trust to do this?” At that moment a yell was heard outside the hall. With measured steps the Rozaki enters carrying their red and black banner before them. Roak, now wearing his Rozaki colours, approached the throne and

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drew much complaining from other Scadians. Such dissatisfaction was never formally expressed and soon the furor died down.

said, "I claim the throne on behalf of our foully murdered rulers. As Prince I will keep the peace and find the assassins. Are there any here who dispute my claim?" Silence. "Then I shall take the throne and Tarkwyn shall be my consort. The thrones are in good hands and the principality will be kept whole until the time we must leave Ealdormere to our heirs." With that Roak and Tarkwyn assumed the thrones and a cheer went up among the Rozaki soon to be followed by a cheer from the rest of those in attendance. Roak then ordered the bodies of the dead Prince and Princess to be removed. Stretcher bearer came forward and took their serene recumbent forms from the hall.

High drama like this makes Court more enjoyable for all those present. Sometimes Court can last for hours, like the one after Feast. I have been a spear carrier during a Principality Court and know how monotonous and boring it can be. Miguel de Valencia told me:

You're there to make the Court look good. If it means you have to carry a spear and hold it straight for two or three hours then that's what you do. Of course, there are ways of leaning on the spear so it takes most of your weight and you're going to need that after an hour or so. The most important thing is to make the Baron (referring to baronial Court) look good because if he looks good, we look good and the Barony looks good.

Just standing around contributes to the drama of Court. One becomes a human prop within the greater re-creative endeavour. For another Court at a Twelfth Night event, I and two others carried Baron Malik into Court on a litter to show his exalted and pampered station. Court performances are playful without disrupting or challenging the symbolic importance of royalty in the SCA.

The audience plays an important role in Court performances. They are foremost witnesses of the perpetuation of Scadian tradition. Diana Paxson told me that Court as a performative form was there at the first SCA event. Without royalty and Court, the SCA has no ideological centre, without feudal values the SCA could not exist. People present gifts to attending royalty, sometimes to help them in their duties as explained above in the baronial

“taxes”, sometimes to have an audience if the person is a performer (i.e. Pankratz Pugge, a performer I will discuss in the next section), and still others present gifts at Court to curry favour with attending royalty. Courts are also where awards are bestowed by royalty upon “deserving” members of the populace. Because awards in the SCA are granted only at Court, personal recognition must come through this symbolic channel. Administrative work is often rewarded at Court reaffirming the strong symbolism of royalty and the feudal order over the practicalities of running the Society. After every award, title, or other presentation during Court the herald restates the person or group being honoured and the audience responds, “Wassail!”, a Celtic cheer. Courts are not only celebrations of royalty and feudalism; they are celebrations of Scadians’ work toward the dream.

The ceremonial and symbolic power of Court performances positively enhances the overall cognitive sedimentation of the “Current Middle Ages”, a common Scadian term for the period of Scadian performance. My use of the term “sedimentation” is a synthesis of Seremetakis’ (1994) use of the word for her description of the cognitive accumulation of sensory experience and the words of Hugh Trevor-Roper in his valedictory address at Oxford University (1980). Trevor-Roper, in his description of the allure of history, discusses the way England tangibly impinges on his consciousness:

In that country—that island rather, bounded by hill and wall and moor and sea—layer after layer of English history lay visible to the eye of imagination. (3)

This cognitive sedimentation exists in the thinking subject and not in the empirical world. I prefer the word “sedimentation” to “ideology” because the former avoids the issue of “false” consciousness. It should be obvious to readers, though perhaps it is not, that I cannot hold consciousness to be false if I am to engage the experiential authenticity of the Scadian “dream”. If I were to address the “ideology” of SCA performance I would be discursively obliged to focus

only on the ironies inherent in Scadian re-creation and not how they experience it, or if I did discuss their experienced reality I would be obliged to be dismissive of their understandings.<sup>34</sup>

There is an experienced reciprocity between the feudal order of the SCA as affirmed by Court and the possibility for recognition and achievement which Court bestows back onto the populace. This reciprocal nature of Court reinforces the bonds between Scadians but it also highlights another inescapable irony in SCA performance. Scadians join the SCA to enjoy an alternative to the modern world. Where modernity gauges value according to market value, feudalism represents a system which assigns value strictly on birth and ability. Ideally, awards are granted according to these criteria but in practice this cannot be the case and, upon reflection, historically unlikely. The politics of Court are undeniable and distasteful to many people in the SCA. Politicking and sycophantic insinuation are an unplanned and unwanted intrusion on the SCA “dream”. One former member told me:

I’ve worked ever since I joined the SCA and I’ve only got my AoA (Award of Arms). If you suck up to royalty you get awards. It’s not that I’m in it just for the awards, I just want some recognition for what I’ve done. Sometimes I don’t even get a thank you. I’ve had it with the SCA.<sup>35</sup>

Another former member had much the same sentiment:

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<sup>34</sup> There is an exercise in drama workshops called “park bench”. A person sits on the facsimile bench and a second actor walks into the scene and makes a statement establishing the performative boundaries of the improvisation. Trust and cooperation are necessary for this exercise to work properly. If the second actor says, “Hi Uncle Frank!” and the first actor replies, “I’m not your Uncle Frank, I’m your cousin Hal,” then there is an irreconcilable breach of the scenes performative boundary because the scene can only be one of mistaken identity and misunderstanding. “Ideology” in the SCA would be like this disrupted improvisation. Scadians admit themselves that their values are inconsistent and impossible to rationalize. As I wrote in my discussion of irony, these inconsistencies exist and are sometimes telling with regard to the way the SCA “works” but I cannot become caught in an “ideological” spiral which would render Scadians experienced reality illegitimate.

<sup>35</sup> Though I have been using SCA names instead of “mundane” names to give some anonymity to those people with whom I have spoken, in this instance I will not do this because these complaints might create problems for them in the Society. During the writing of the paper, one of these speakers has become involved in the Barony again. I do not wish to create problems for anybody in Rising Waters.

You get tired of the bullshit. I've been doing this for ten years and all I have to show for it is my AoA and I only got that two years ago. I've worked hard for the Baron and the Barony and you just get tired of seeing all these people who stroke the "tin hats" (a derogatory term for royalty) egos and then get awards in Court. Sometimes I ask myself, "Why do I bother?"

The Middle Ages is understood, within the context of the "dream", as a time of merit based on individual achievement. Court, as an explicit performance of romantic medieval values, *should* transcend politics, but it does not.

This is a source of great discouragement for the Scadians who would like recognition but do not socialise with royalty. For other Scadians, Blackpatch for example, this hypocrisy fuels their disdain for Scadian hierarchy. While the structure of the SCA is not often a contested discourse, many individual Scadians see structures, as they are enacted, to be extremely flawed. Awards can only be granted through the royal offices, thus access to those offices facilitates this form of material recognition. This tension between the romantic mandate of the SCA and this structurally inevitable power abuse can result in the SCA experience becoming unfulfilling for many SCA members.

My discussion of Court leads me to another aspect of SCA culture: the "grump". Here I am borrowing a term used in unofficial SCA publications which addresses both the proper ways to participate in the SCA and what is invariably wrong with it<sup>36</sup> (Grump 1985). During my research, when I asked Scadians to tell me about the SCA, their responses often addressed the shortcomings or faults of the Society as it operates in Rising Waters. Complaints dealt primarily with two subjects: the lack of authenticity and the lack of fun. Ideally—ideals in the SCA are important touchstones for appropriate performance—authenticity *is* fun but often when Scadians

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<sup>36</sup> Specifically, I am referring to Folump Enterprises, an independent publishing company devoted to the culture of the Current Middle Ages. The anonymous author goes by the name of "A. Grump" and his/her books humorously discuss some of the more ridiculous and ironic aspects of SCA performance.



are of different minds about the importance of authenticity, conflict is inevitable. There are a lot of “grumps” in Rising Waters but these are balanced by those who work hard at running events, perform in an entertaining manner at events, and execute baronial offices; “entertaining” performance at events encompasses performing personae, skill at craft, court presentations, and fighting ability.

While this discussion may seem like a digression, my conversations after afternoon Court dealt with stories about the shortcomings of the SCA. Some people say the fighters do not participate enough in events outside of the tournaments. Others complain that some members, the “authenticity mavens”, are too critical of members who are there for recreation not recreation. Still others complain, people who do not consider themselves “authenticity mavens”, that Scadians do not exert enough effort in their personae or that their personae are not medieval (i.e. vampire personae). One universal complaint I heard at Lady Mary, and have heard from Scadians throughout the writing of this paper, is that the Society has become a “sex club” and that people only join to find sexual partners. I deal with issues of authenticity and medievalism throughout this paper but this last complaint deserves some space.

The shortcomings, or failures, of SCA performance often increase members’ experienced stress while attending events. Scadians relieve much of this stress by complaining. Complaining about the SCA is common in the sense that I have heard complaints of many kinds at all events but complaining is not of one type nor have all Scadians expressed complaints when talking to me. Many people find fulfilment and do not experience this existential tension but the tension is there nonetheless. Perhaps this reflexive tension is the ultimate modern intrusion the Society must deal with. Though the structures in the Society are ostensibly hierarchical, individual members can do something their historical counterparts could not: they can leave. This matter of choice is the indelible mark of modernity which no medievalist performance can

erase. Complaining in the SCA is a performative act but its inherent reflexivity brings into relief the SCA's position within larger modern reflexive identity systems rather than increasing the medieval atmosphere at events.

My role as an anthropologist, as I see it, is concomitant with an operational neutrality towards the "subject", since "actual" neutrality is impossible. Yet, Scadians' dissatisfaction emerges from my research and must be addressed. The SCA "dream" involves the conjoining of two modes of thought which superficially exclude each other: one is the goal of an experienced authenticity and the other is the physical and mental labour which is necessary for the SCA to "work". Scadians must be both reflexive and ignore this reflexivity: a kind of Orwellian "doublethink". In my section on Pennsic I discuss how fleeting the "dream" is due to this tension of experiential opposites. Complaints emerge when the two modes of thinking are in the most conflict and cannot be ignored; complaints are the emergent reflexivity which Scadians endeavour to suppress through medievalist performance.

The SCA recalls the medieval festival and its juxtaposition of different levels of social strata. Among the carnivalesque forms in SCA performance I have chosen to discuss the role of the "Feast" during the Lady Mary Memorial Tournament because of its importance as fixture within the structured day event. "Feast" is a central carnivalesque performance within the SCA. There are other carnivalesque aspects to the SCA (i.e. the SCA's possibly carnivalesque relationship to the greater mundane community) but such considerations are outside the scope of this thesis.

Mikhail Bakhtin, in his breakthrough work *Rabelais and his World* addresses the role of the popular medieval festival in the works of François Rabelais. Using Rabelais as a window into the experience of these festivals, Bakhtin discusses the carnivalesque inversion of high/low and concern with the "lower bodily stratum" and the *communitas* created by the medieval

festival. The SCA is carnivalesque in this sense but the SCA is not a medieval festival but a festival of medievalism in a modern context. Further, Bakhtin is writing about the medieval festival as seen through the writing of Rabelais. Our distance from the elusive “authentic” medieval festival is discursively great but the experiential authenticity of the festival remains. Carnavalesque performance in the SCA evokes a visceral, bottom-up, perspective regarding the lived experiences of the medieval subject.<sup>37</sup>

Bakhtin defines the carnivalesque as

temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it(sic) marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed. (Bakhtin 1968: 10)

The carnivalesque festival challenges the boundedness of established community norms.

Carnival is the realm of cultural play; symbols are turned upside down or evacuated of traditional meaning. Official feasts and celebrations reaffirm the social order while the festivals of the common folk allow the free play of signs and bodies within a universal setting, opposing the official world-view which is institutional and particular. Grotesque images abound in the popular carnival: images of gluttony, flatulence, corpulence, emaciation, incontinence, and promiscuity. The carnival represents the generative powers of the uncompleted universe. The medieval carnival is a place where rank and privilege are mocked; “(p)eople were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations.” (ibid:10) Orthodoxy cannot be permitted during the carnival. Bakhtin pre-figures the anti-structure in Turner’s (1986) monograph about Carnivale in Rio de Janeiro, but goes further by extending the significance of carnivalesque anti-structure

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<sup>37</sup> Once more we must address the eminent textuality of history-making that blurs the edges of academic discourse. Bakhtin writes within the Russian formalist school of literary theory. This school, briefly defined, concerns itself with the internal structure of texts under the assumption that texts are bounded, organic objects. We must keep in mind that although Bakhtin lends us compelling

to all forms of unofficial medieval celebration. These festivals achieve an idealized community impossible within the strictures of the Catholic church.

As it is in Rabelais, the SCA feast is one of the most important arenas for analogous carnivalesque social activity.

Banquet images play an important role in Rabelais' novel. There is scarcely a single page in his book where food and drink do not figure, if only as metaphors and epithets. These images are closely interwoven with those of the grotesque body. At times it is difficult to draw a line between them, so strong is their original tie. (279)

Popular feasts dissolve the differences between individuals, creating a great corporate mass of social humanity. Differences between bodies dissolve as shown in the grotesque bodies associated with medieval feasts. Bodily orifices gape in their consumption of food or their expulsion of materials. Birth and eating, reproduction and consumption are linked in the acts of incomplete bodies participating within an undifferentiated congregation of revelers.

Feasts, as semi-structured regular episodes during SCA day events, share some characteristics with Rabelaisian popular feasts and thus with medieval feasts. There is a head table where the attending nobility sit while other Scadians sit either at other, less prestigious, tables eating "Feast" or they eat off-board; those eating off-board bring their own food and sit apart from the paid revelers. Food fights, singing, toasts, flirting and magic tricks (illusions) are common diversions during feast. There are minimal expectations for decorum during impromptu entertainments so one will often hear singers drowned out by the din of conversation while at other times people will lend the performer their rapt attention if the revelers feel it so merits. The nobility are rarely the butt of any serious jeering but some groups, such as the Rozaki or Blackpatch, make a point of regularly ignoring decorum in their disregard for the noble's privilege. This chaotic mix of chivalry and ribald mockery typify the feasts I have

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insights regarding the carnivalesque he is also talking about a specific text separate from any

attended and were present at the Lady Mary Tournament. Those eating off-board do not participate directly in feast activities and act primarily as an audience. For them, the feast can be a spectacle within the spectacle of the SCA or it is something to avoid and is thus ignored. Scadians also perform as servers during feasts as expressions of the “low” spectrum of medieval society. Servers at feast do not pay for their food; in return they play the parts of stewards and wenches. Often high ranking nobility will take their turns as servers enduring the jibes of other Scadians in the performance of this seemingly servile duty. Scadians tease and flirt with servers but I have not seen degrading displays during feast. Servers contribute greatly to the feast-as-performance by their assistance in creating the mental imagery (Palmer & Jankowiak 1996) of the medieval feast. This imagery is the expectation held by each Scadian as to the proper form a feast should take. The figure of the wench or steward acts as the interlocutor within the feast-as-performance. Servers do not serve people eating off-board because they are not part of the performance. Servers help to maintain *flow*. (Turner 1986)

One hears good-natured jibes and laughter fill the air during feast but even then there is tact and decorum. Mockery is expressed discretely and, hopefully, out of earshot of the attending nobility. It is an exaggeration to say that feasts reify performed power structures within the Society but it would be inaccurate to portray, or position, the feast as a source of social abandon as it is in Rabelais. Each feast has its set of roles and its cast of characters. As with the rest of the event, most play the roles of fellow-revelers.

In *Rising Waters*, there are people who make regular appearances at feast as entertainers. One such person is Pankratz Pugge, magician extraordinaire. Pankratz is a talented illusionist and member of the Brotherhood of Magicians, an exclusive guild open only to professional magicians. As such, he more than most has a well-sustained medieval persona

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historical concerns.

during events. His demeanor is that of the jester who acts like he knows a little bit more than you, and he is often right. Many of his illusions are familiar to North Americans as standard magician's fare but in the context of the feast<sup>38</sup>, Pankratz acts as the people's entertainer possessing skills unique among the people of Rising Waters. Though there is little originality, in Pankratz's illusions there is great skill as well as shared feeling of the novelty and "rightness" of his performance.

Toasts are also common opportunities for individual performance. They usually adhere to a royal protocol; toasts for the king and queen come first all the way down to presiding nobility. After the nobility, the autocrat and feastocrat are often toasted followed by toasts for any other personages deserving of special attention. Compared to presentations made at court, toasts observe both an official, deferential tone while also allowing Scadians an opportunity to celebrate persons and ideals other than the official ones.

The above examples illustrate how "Feast" demonstrates the carnivalesque within the SCA; however, the carnivalesque manifests itself at other strata of members' lives. Many Scadians have low paying "mundane" jobs and see the SCA as a form of recreation, rather than re-creation. The urban landscape is gray and alienating but SCA events abound with bright colours—garb, banners and armour with a myriad designs—create a sensory sedimentation which acts as a spiritual tonic for Scadians tired of a drab world. The food served at feast, eaten with accoutrements provided by the Scadians themselves each according to their taste or persona, defies the homogenizing packaging common to most North American meals. One will often see products bearing brand names at an event but Scadians are encouraged to hide and/or dispose them to maintain the medieval imagery. In these ways, the SCA turns the modern world, if not upside-down, at least on its ear.

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<sup>38</sup> Pankratz often performs during Court but these performances have a different tone.

Bakhtin describes seemingly chaotic systems of inversion and transgression which resolve social tensions between people of different classes. The SCA acts in a similar way for its members. The key differences between the “authentic” festival and the SCA lay in the realm of the reflexively modern. Carnivale in Rio or the Feast of Fools in Rabelais are for “all the people” but the SCA is not. People seek out the SCA to resolve these tensions as *they experience them themselves*. There can be no moment of universal/mundane carnivalesque social inversion because for many Scadians those people to whom they are of a lower station do not participate in the SCA. Bakhtin’s Rabelais writes of the utopian efficacy inherent in popular festivals but such festivals, which include people of all classes in a given community, simply do not exist in modernity. Modernity and technology discursively separate individuals within a community to the extent where such *communitas* is impossible. Community feeling is often existentially absent in modernity and Scadians feel the want of community and the performative efficacy it brings. Popular festivals serve to unite communities and eliminate class differences between individuals. The Society for Creative Anachronism, as a culture which reenacts the structure of the popular festival, is carnivalesque within modernity. SCA culture enshrines hierarchies while embracing people from all mundane walks of life. The king of the Midrealm can be an unemployed blue-collar labourer because high-prestige professionals do not necessarily gain privilege as they would mundanely. Rank and status is often turned upside-down in the Society. The carnivalesque SCA, as represented by Feast, is a re-creation of the authentic experience of medieval festival and not of the festival itself.

Evening Court began at approximately 9:00 p.m. and lasted over two hours. Whereas afternoon Court dealt primarily with the “death” of the Prince and Princess, evening Court dealt with several important matters already mentioned in this paper: the investiture of the new Prince and Princess of Ealdormere, the investiture of the new Baron and Baroness of Rising Waters,

and the establishment of the new Barony of Ben Dunfirth. Awards were also granted as per afternoon Court.

The ceremonies for the various investitures comprised the majority of the time taken for Court. Each kingdom has its own ceremonies for investitures and the elevation of district branches. Investitures involve the newly installed royalty taking oaths of service and/or loyalty to the Crown and of responsibility to their subjects. Each ceremony lasted about twenty to thirty minutes: thus, evening Court proved to be a very long affair. Once the investitures were completed, further Court business proceeded until the end of the evening; there would be no period dancing after Court at this event. For the sake of space, I will discuss two of the more interesting pieces of shtick which occurred during Court.

The principality portion of Court awarded Awards of Arms to certain Scadians. Each award, or “scroll” as they are called in the SCA, is a sheet of parchment covered with calligraphy and medieval-style illumination. Scrolls are hand-made and are personalised for each recipient. Angus Fulord, blacksmith of Rising Waters, received his AoA at Lady Mary. Angus is a large man and a fearsome fighter but off the list field his is a gentle, helpful and cheerful persona. Most awards are written on large sheets of parchment or high-quality paper to denoting their importance as symbols of recognition within the Society. For Angus an exception was made. His AoA was written on a slip of paper the size of a credit card. It was completely legible, albeit with a magnifying glass, and most people found this playful irony extremely amusing, a large man receiving such a small scroll. Though the SCA formalises these ceremonies to create a sense of continuity and community among Scadians, there is room within these structures for play without breaking the medieval frame.

The second piece of shtick during evening Court involved the establishment of an envoy between Rising Waters and the new Barony of Ben Dunfirth. Melissandra, a prominent citizen



of Rising Waters and resident of Drachenfaust, was called before the Court and asked if she would stand as a symbolic emissary between the old barony and the new. She was taken aback but agreed to the post. Once she accepted the position the “duck” was brought forth and presented to her by the Baron and Baroness of Ben Dunfirth. The duck was carved of wood and came with its own carrying case. Melissandra accepted the duck, with its case, and retired from the Baron’s presence.

This exchange played on the symbolic geographical change created by the establishment of Ben Dunfirth, formerly the most important canton in Rising Waters, as a barony. Envoys, diplomacy, and ambassadors evoke the concept of geographical distance though the two baronies are contiguous. Geographical boundaries are important in that one’s fealty is to the local sovereign but when the distance between groups is only a few kilometres, boundaries are not important entities in SCA performance. An “emissary” between Rising Waters and Ben Dunfirth plays on this irony of conceptual versus practical distance.

The duck is pure nonsense. It serves no other purpose than to take up space. Since Lady Mary, the duck has passed hands several times during successive Courts and disappeared for a time. Each time the duck has been passed between the baronies to the amusement of Court spectators. More ingenious ruses were devised each Court in order to dispose of the duck. The duck is a burden in that it is large and coupled with its case becomes a bulky curiosity, thus no one wants to keep it. Over the years, this joke of passing the duck back and forth has achieved its purpose of tying the two baronies together. The sheer ludicrousness of it bridged some of the loss incurred by the elevation of Ben Dunfirth.

After Court, people started to change back into their mundane clothes and leave. A few people—often those who are unrecognised for their labour—stayed behind to clean up the community centre. It is an axiom in the SCA that Scadians leave sites better than when they

arrived. By one in the morning the site did indeed look at least as good as it did at the beginning of the event. The last person there, the autocrat, turned off the lights and locked the doors. The Lady Mary Memorial Tournament was over.

## CHAPTER IV: PENNSIC WAR AND GLAMOUR

Pennsic War was the primary site for my research into SCA camping events. Because of its size, this event above all others deserves special attention within this paper. Due to issues of pragmatism, I cannot delve deeply into Pennsic's scope or its complex makeup of international attendees and their interrelationships. Pennsic is different every year and it is impossible to experience Pennsic in its entirety in any given year. Murder Melee in the Meadow, the most important camping event in Ealdormere, cannot match the otherworldly atmosphere of Pennsic; thus, I chose to discuss Glamour, a concept introduced earlier, within the purview of Pennsic. Much of what I discuss below regarding subjective experience applies to Murder Melee but to a lesser degree.

In my ethnographic description I make claims to the persistence of certain elements which are repeated each year at Pennsic (e.g. the marketplace, field battles, campground geography). Pennsic is different every year yet these elements are not. A Buddhist metaphor would be that the Pennsic flame is carried from year to year but the candle is different. Pennsic, as an annual event, has a structure which persists though the participants are different every year. What appears as the "ethnographic present" is more closely akin to my assertion of the persistence of these elements from year to year. From my conversations with Scadians, Pennsic has not changed appreciably in the last several years except in attendance which has increased.

For most Scadians east of the Mississippi River, Pennsic War is the "ultimate" SCA event. One Scadian told me it is like Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving all rolled into one. Months after Pennsic War he would still have dreams about Pennsic and, I must confess, so did I. Some Scadians go every year, scheduling the same week annually to spend their vacation at

War. Arguably, no other event has more seminal importance in the SCA than Pennsic.<sup>39</sup> For Scadians, going to Pennsic is a pilgrimage of devotion to the SCA dream.

Nineteen ninety-five signalled the twenty-fourth Pennsic War between the Kingdom of the East and the Midrealm over the Disputed Lands (Pittsburgh). Pittsburgh is about 130 km south of Pennsic which takes place in the township of Slippery Rock. The site combines geographic accessibility, being at the cross-roads of two Interstate highways, with the isolation of being nestled in an Appalachian valley. The terrain of western Pennsylvania lends to the other-worldly atmosphere Scadians endeavour to create when retreating from the mundane world. Other than the sounds of highway traffic, which are unavoidable in certain locations around the site, and the electric lights around the Cooper's Lake general store, there are few blatant signs of quotidian life on the Pennsic campground to disrupt the "glamour" Scadians have laboured to conjure in the intervening year.

Cooper's Lake, normally a public campground, is laid out during Pennsic as a combination of medieval military encampment with a market at the centre. The Pennsic camping area can be geographically divided roughly in half. The south is wooded with campers pitching tents under the trees and around the Lake from which the campground derives its name. The north is a flat field without any foliage at all. Scadians refer to this area as the Serengeti because on a hot day you feel the sun like a hammer and the incessant foot traffic kicks up choking clouds of dust. Between these two extremes lay the merchant's area, the Barn where Great Court is held, and the field of battle.

Pennsic War begins the second weekend in August and the event officially lasts for nine days, though some arrive one to two weeks ahead of time. Pennsic's long event time entails

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<sup>39</sup>Other "War" events are held throughout the year across North America, most notably Estrella War in Arizona which serves the Western U.S.. These events are not as well-attended as Pennsic is nor

isolation from the outside, modern, world. Due to Scadians' efforts at maintaining an anti-modern site, campers at Pennsic are subject to the elements to a greater extent than they would experience in their mundane homes. When it rains, the Serengeti becomes mud and washes downhill south toward the woods where people can be flooded right out of their tents. Scadians' charity and understanding are pushed to the limit as food, camping equipment, clothes and especially sleeping materials can be completely ruined requiring the whole camp to work together to ride out the calamity. These "acts of God"—rain, wind, cold, snow (in May)—at SCA events often become the basis of mythopoesis for identifying a camping event when talking about it after the fact. The late Spring event, Murder Melee in the Meadow, held in Freelton, Ontario has been called many names in successive years (e.g. Murder Muddle in the Puddle, Murder Melee in the Tundra, Murder Melee in the Microwave<sup>40</sup> etc.). Extreme weather often intensifies Scadians' experience of verisimilitude at camping events. Thus, weather often becomes part of the bunting which lends glamour to an event.

Daytime activities at Pennsic include: going to market, socialising, taking classes in Society skills, relaxing, swimming in the Family or Classic Swimming Hole (clothing optional) and fighting in the daily battles. As typical, but not exhaustive, examples of day activities which embrace an anti-modern ideal I will look at going to the Pennsic market and fighting.

The merchant area at Pennsic was situated at the center of the campground. More than at day events, the Pennsic market is carnivalesque in its chaotically dynamic flow of social interaction; though it is not as much an arena for coarse language and behaviour (Bakhtin 1968:145-147) as it is a cacophony of competing cries and voices hawking wares. Though chaotic with the mass of humanity, the Pennsic marketplace is an orderly construction. In the

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do these events last for as many days.

<sup>41</sup>Mythopoesis in the SCA is often more important than strict authenticity.

merchants' area, a food court was set up much like at a suburban mall. Ostensibly like a period plaza, the foods were of questionable authenticity. For example, modern-style pizzas and sandwiches were popular items for sale. The types of food are of less importance than the context in which they are purchased: an open air plaza with little evidence of modern technology.

Pennsic merchants sell many items, from reproduction medieval weapons to period garb to books on the Middle Ages, and some provide services, such as massages and fortune telling. Pennsic injects millions of dollars into the local economy but for SCA merchants, Pennsic is the opportunity to make a living while performing mediievally. There is an overwhelming smell to Merchant's Row: a mixture of sawn wood, musky perfume, roasting meat, and dust. Shopping at Pennsic is unlike consumerism in the "real" world. There are no brand names and prices are subject to haggling. The needs of Scadians do not conform, when on site, to conspicuous consumption as in the mundane world. People shop for items according to their persona or according to novelty.

Goods purchased on Merchant's Row possess significant meaning to Scadians. They perform two functions, each extremely important. First, they help Scadians assemble accoutrements which allow them to flesh out their SCA persona. Pennsic's market facilitates persona creation and consumption like no other in the SCA calendar. If a person's character were poorly defined, a dagger here and a cavalier's hat there inspires one toward better personae crystallization; also, if the persona were well defined, that person could probably find the specific plaid broadcloth of the appropriate tartan for their Scottish persona. Objects bought at Pennsic bring with them something of the magic of the SCA dream. Period goods evoke the moods and impressions Scadians need to make medieval re-creation meaningful. There is a sensory sedimentation when one is immersed in this sometimes frenzied consumption of pseudo-authenticity, combined with the smells and sounds, that further evokes the medieval marketplace.

While medieval imagery is impressed on the experiencing individual, there are unavoidable signs of modernity at Pennsic. In the marketplace I found a bank of pay telephones. Most merchant transactions were conducted with modern currency, though the barter of goods and services is common. Above all, the presence of the Cooper's Lake store with its modern wares and the modern shower facilities betray the Scadian quest for an authentically medieval site. However, if the site were "primitive" (i.e. without any modern amenities), the ease of personal transformation would be impaired. The SCA is the Middle Ages as it should have been, not how it was. This subjunctive loophole excuses blatant modern anachronisms which facilitate Scadians' separation from the modern world.

The central action at Pennsic, in the sense of medieval re-creation and recreation, happens on the Battle Field where the armies of the East and Middle meet to decide who loses and gets Pittsburgh. Each year, a different number of scored battles are fought. The kingdom with the most war points wins War. Each battle has a different theme. Battles are fought in woods (the only battle not on the Battle Field), simulated bridges, mountain passes, and towns. Some battles have special rules such as resurrection where a fighter can die and come back to life by leaving the field and entering the resurrection zone. In any battle there can be upwards of four thousand fighters on the field. The battles are fluid and fast: men and women wearing over fifteen kilograms of armour chasing each other around the field with only as much order as the field generals can muster. Fighting skill and organisation more often than not wins the day though as a bystander the battles looked chaotic with only a barely discernible line in the mass of undulating humanity where the battle lines were drawn.

The field, woods, and Champions battles are held on terrain which can superficially pass as medieval; for the woods battle, the fighting occurs in a wooded area north of the main Pennsic campground. The mountain pass and bridge battles are confined to areas on the Battle Field

marked off with hay bales representing the boundaries of the simulated terrain. Those fighters who end up outside the boundaries are either resurrected or they are considered dead. The battles can take upward of two hours and under the August sun the temperature inside the fighters' armour can reach in excess of forty degrees Celsius. Heat prostration is a serious danger during these prolonged battles, a common occurrence during mass battles in the Middle Ages.

The field battles are a mass of contradictions on the surface: unconvincing simulacra of mountains and bridges, and resurrection points are landmarks where authentically armoured warriors fighting with palpable combative energy and camaraderie generated by intense melees executed with great skill. Thus, while the battles were of a large scale with tension and drama, as a spectator I was somewhat disappointed with them as medieval. Field battles demand a spectator's suspension of disbelief.

However, the fighting is convincingly brutal and, I am assured, fighting on the field brings a level of subjective authenticity denied the spectator. Angus, Rising Waters baronial Champion, told me that there is a moment after you walk out on to the field,

"... and you form a line opposite the other side and you see on either side of you people in armour as far as you can see. That's when (you) say 'I'm really here!' Then the signal goes and the two sides rush each other. The crash hurts your ears. After that the world closes in around you and you just start fighting."

Angus goes further talking about when a fighter dies on the field:

"I fell and I hoped no one would step on me. With all the people going back and forth I really didn't want to be trampled before I could get out and go back to the resurrection point."

These moments of intense reality mirror the experiences of participants in re-enactments of the American Civil War (Handler & Saxton 1988). These "magic moments" occur through the combined labour of all the fighters on the field. Each person striving to fight well gives the



battlefield experience a subjective authenticity for each combatant. Even as a spectator I found the field battles, awesome in their scope. The Battle Field is about two square kilometres and one can see the fighting mass of bodies flow across it like a single amorphous organism. Identity is subsumed in the greater collective experience. After the battles, aerial photographs of the fighting can be purchased in the marketplace. On the surface, this is a modern anachronism, but the photographs allow fighters, unconscious perhaps of their actions during the battle, to see themselves in the context of the battle as a whole. Where the fighter experiences a primal dissolution of self during the battle, the photographs, and stories told of the battle, re-affirm an authentic individual identity. One can say, "I was there! I did that!" The battles are superficially medieval but the experiences are viscerally real, viscerally authentic.

Bright sunshine and vivid colours can both help and hinder medieval re-creation. Daylight allows Scadians to display their garb and devices but it also highlights modern anachronisms. Many of the tents used by Scadians are nylon and cannot pass for anything but modern shelter. Scadians use plastic coolers to store their food and other perishables. During the day, a tractor-pulled trailer acts a public transportation system for the campground. These conditions remind Scadians of the immanent modernity of the site, even if their camp is authentically medieval. At night, Pennsic emerges as an important site for internal, cognitive transformation. Night-time facilitates an experiential authenticity which is difficult to achieve, outside of fighting, during the day.

Night obscures modern anachronisms allowing Scadian imaginations a freer reign to tease medieval imagery out of the fabric of the Pennsic campground. In a Romantic sense, the night is where the more "sublime" cognitive re-creations can occur. Nylon tents, running shoes, and wristwatches are more easily ignored at night than during the day. Night allows people to forget the day, and the modernity it exposes. At night other senses become ascendant, most

notably hearing.

Throughout the Pennsic night the drums beat...and beat...and beat. No one can escape the pounding drums as they filter through conscious thought and create an aural backdrop evoking a time and place where people gathered to sing and dance because tomorrow they might die on the battlefield. After an hour or so of drumming one ceases to notice it, much like the noises one hears in a city; the difference lies in the meanings the two different sound worlds embody. The white noise of a city at night—cars passing by with the occasional siren denoting an anonymous crisis—embodies the essential alienation of modernity. At Pennsic, greater opportunities exist for engaging others in social discourse as pedestrians than there are in the modern city. Where sirens in a city are a warning, the drums of Pennsic are an invitation to come together, to eradicate the alienation.

Concurrent with the collapsing of bodily distance is the simultaneous collapse of territorial distance and establishment of symbolic territorial boundaries. An open gate at a campsite is an invitation to visit often with guards standing by to assist with inquiries and to cater to the needs of visiting dignitaries. People are generally welcomed on this intimate scale all over Pennsic. Such community feeling is common throughout Pennsic; the incessant nocturnal drumming is an unconditional invitation if one wants to engage the community on a greater scale. Where there are drums, there is a party and night-time parties are at the heart of the non-combative SCA experience. Drums are usually of the African or Celtic sort, made of wood and skins, and the drummers are often very skilled. Drummers have prestige because their performance adds to the other-worldly aspect of Pennsic. Where the drums beat there are often dancers. Dancing at day events is organised and formally medieval. At camping events, dancing is wild and intoxicating. At the centre of the dance is the campfire. Some dancers are belly-dancers while others are swept up in the pounding of the drums and dance around the fire in a

kind of ecstasy. Night-time also brings out performances which are more anti-North American than explicitly anti-modern. On a given night one would be likely to see men led around by their slave-collars. Scadians with vampire personae are also common sights. Most Scadians at night wander Cooper's Lake in their best garb until they find something that strikes their fancy—or until something finds them.. Groups of people will sometimes gather as a wandering amorphous body chanting "amoeba, amoeba, amoeba." As the Amoeba approaches along the dirt road anyone who gets in their way joins with the amoeba. The Amoeba then breaks apart only if it becomes so large it cannot move or if someone has the presence of mind to rush at the Amoeba shouting "Paramecium!" This will destroy the Amoeba until it re-forms again to torment passers-by.

Some campsites play at personae that have no historical basis. Clan Kindred, as discussed in Chapter III, has a subtle sado-masochistic, wolf (werewolf?) theme in their camp. Kindred has affiliated houses which must also have this night theme (e.g. Blackpatch). Leather, animal skins and chainmail are the common clothing materials when playing these personae. As with vampire personae, these pseudo-historical camps play at the boundaries of acceptable SCA performance. Some of these groups are considered model Scadians, as discussed in the previous chapter, despite their lack of medieval authenticity.

Genuine attempts at authenticity are also present at Pennsic. Duke Cariadoc, a legendary figure in the Society and professor of economics in Ohio, sponsors a campsite which is considered "enchanted ground". Only people wearing authentic period clothing and drinking from the proper receptacles are allowed within his camp boundaries. Only forsoothly speech is permitted in Cariadoc's campsite; those who do not or cannot adhere to his performance specifications are asked to leave. Vlad, an accountant from Detroit, runs another authentic campsite. His pavilion consists of three connected yurts, Mongolian-style tents, with a central

foyer at their juncture. Vlad has possibly the greatest collection of period weapons in the SCA. Many people come to marvel at his work creating an authentic campsite but Vlad's primary fame comes from his parties.

Vlad's parties are very popular at Pennsic. His parties each have a novel theme. One is the "men without pants" party where men cannot enter if they are wearing pants, thus men wear long tunics and kilts. Another party of special interest for this paper is the "Poodle Burning" party. At the "Poodle Burning" party, a stuffed poodle is sacrificed to the flame amongst great cheering and celebration. Cooper's Lake is a mundane campsite all year round and even during Pennsic there are sections which are used by non-Scadians. One year, when Pennsic was not as large, these sections closely abutted one another. Vlad's mundane neighbour had a poodle which barked all day and all night. When Vlad complained about it the owners refused to do anything. One day the dog went missing and the owners immediately blamed Vlad. The story goes that Vlad was not responsible, but that night he held a party where something fluffy was burned on the campfire to the rejoicing of onlookers. This was the first poodle burning party.

The poodle as a breed symbolizes two things for Scadians: one, it represents the orderly and oppressive modern consumer society and two, as a breed associated with the wealthy, it allows the Scadians in attendance, demographically young and working class, to participate symbolically in setting afire a world dominated by the wealthy--a world with transient and empty values. The "poodle burning" is the destruction of a symbol of civilised society though the tradition came about without the explicit intention of burning modernism in effigy. Burning the poodle is a ritual to bring good luck for the performative success of Pennsic as a whole. As the poodle burns year after there is a feeling of spontaneous catharsis which continues well after the artificial fibres of the stuffing are finally consumed by the flames. The modern world is kept at bay for one more year.

In my experience, Pennsic and, to a lesser degree, other camping events such as Murder Melee bring out the role-playing element of Scadian performance in ways day events cannot. The sheer length of War and the mythologies created through isolation and shared experience mean that by the end Scadian separation from the mundane world is nearly total. Current events, which are virtually impossible to ignore in the mundane world due to pervasive mass-media, are ignored when one camps for a week or more. The outside world is never totally forgotten but the isolation allows Scadians to establish different internally (within Pennsic) referential frames of reference. News and terms of reference are based on the battles, parties, and Pennsic gossip. The year I went to Pennsic, 1995, a conflict arose between Vlad and the Tuchuks resulting in both camps being ordered off the site by Cooper's Lake staff supported by the local police. Despite the rare instance of the mundane world intruding on Pennsic, the separation Scadians experience at Pennsic is indispensable in pursuit of their dream. Scadians may not always play their personae in a historically authentic way, often a Scadian's personae is so unlike them that they never do play it well, but they do play another person, sometimes merely their modern selves in a strange setting dealing with a medieval-like world in novel ways. Pennsic is the stage where Scadians play at who they really are (Appendix A).

Pennsic War is a prolonged liminal period where Scadians exist neither truly in the modern world nor in a historically accurate medieval recreation. Whereas the limited seclusion of a day event could be considered liminoid (Turner 1977) because of its limited duration and separation, time spent at War is more liminal because of its prolonged detachment from the modern world. The liminal-liminoid paradigm is useful in describing the profundity of experience for the actors stepping outside of quotidian life. Turner distinguishes between the two poles in this way:

In the former (liminal), the whole group is engaged in this process, directly or through its

representatives. In our society, it seems that the small groups which nourish *communitas*, do so by withdrawing voluntarily from the main stream not only of economic but also of domestic familial life...to seed the glow of *communitas* among those with whom they share some cultural or biological feature they take to be their most signal mark of identity. (ibid:47)

Voluntarism and class habitus denote group participation in a liminoid experience—the norm in industrial societies, Turner argues. Pennsic demands that each person sacrifice the trappings of modernity in favour of a different set of meanings and values brought to the fore by period costume, prolonged (voluntary) isolation, and shared mental imagery. Scadians separate themselves from many of the physical aspects of modernity in a different way even from those people who go camping "get away from it all." Pennsic is not merely an alternate community; it is a anti-modern space; it is an explicit rejection of modernity. One could argue that the contradictions of SCA performance—lack of well-defined personae and consumption of the Society's values for recreation rather than re-creation—betray the omnipresent structuration (Giddens 1979: 69-73) which constitutes modernity. It is too easy to discuss the SCA in an ironic tone. Scadians find the "other" in their engagement with the past and strive to embody it in their performance. The result is the merging of the reconstructed past with the experienced present resulting in an authentically experienced self which is denied to them in the mundane world.

From my conversations with Scadians there is one desire they have from the SCA: that of creating a more enjoyable and more free environment to be themselves. In more analytical terms, they want a discursive space free of dominant modern tropes so that they may engage in authentic personae creation and management. The purpose of the spectacle, the isolation, all the preparation is to this generalised end. Scadians work toward the goal of a better (i.e. more personal, emotional, spiritual) way of doing things, either as recreation or re-creation, knowing full well that no matter what they do the "real" world lurks as an unavoidable construct with

which they must eventually engage again. Until that moment, Scadians want to be internally transformed by the "glamour" all their work has hopefully created.

Glamour, in its original meaning, denotes enchantment rather than charm and beauty. It connotes magic and the entire SCA is devoted, at different levels by different means, to this transformation of the mundane to a heightened, glamourised, state. The concept of glamour as the implicit project of the SCA came to me through the writings of Peter S. Beagle, author of *The Folk of the Air*. Those in the group to whom I talked often referred to this book as an intriguing depiction of the SCA in a fictional form. (Many thought it was "neat" that someone had written a fantasy novel about them.) The novel is about how an outsider comes home to San Francisco and has adventures with old friends who just happen to be members of the League of Archaic Pleasures.

As a long time reader of fantasy novels myself I found Beagle's novel compelling. The author presents members of the League in mundane and League personae in rapid-fire fashion, the former in familiar prosaic language in everyday contexts, the latter in fantastic, mythological, imagery. Beagle invites the reader to participate in the play, re-creation, and recreation joyfully. He writes of the SCA as a prelude for truly fantastic action--magic, illusion, witchcraft, pagan goddesses--any Scadian can achieve. Certainly I am conflating the fiction with the "real" but in the SCA such conflation lies at the core of Scadian mythopoesis. Fantasy/science-fiction, historical fiction, and non-fiction historical texts inform this mythopoesis. My reading of Beagle's novel completes a recursive loop: my understanding of the novel is inextricably informed by my association with the SCA which is informed by literature of which Beagle's novel is an example. The Society creates the audience for its own mythology.

Fantasy literature is only one source used in laying the sedimentation for the creation of SCA glamour, a theme upon which I elaborate in the section on Romanticism. Many Scadians

have read extensively within the realm of fantasy and medieval period literature. These cultural tropes allow this transformative glamour to exist as does the extensive Scadian labour at every event. Each Scadian carries these ideas as an imaginary arsenal which is used to fill the spaces in where modernity intrudes. Intentionality mixes with imaginary sedimentation to create the potential for experiential, subjective, transformation.

Glamour, in this paper, is the transformation of perception and understanding through anti-modern identity performance. One does not have to suspend disbelief to see that this possibility exists in all performances but is usually found only in those involving an efficacious goal (i.e. religious invocations, blessings, curses, divinations, etc.) (Schechner 1988).

Performance in the SCA encompasses the spectrum from simple abstract performance with little spiritual investment to performances which embody a person's complete identity. Personae have their own sedimentation in heraldry, martial skill, craftsmanship as well as a period identity and history. On a trans-subjective level SCA performance and labour create the cultural sedimentation necessary for glamour to accrue collectively. Glamour is implicit in the SCA dream but is only epiphenomenal in SCA performance.

And yet, Scadians are conscious of the need for glamour for a successful event. Modernity must be only be allowed at events where it cannot interfere with one's internal transformation. Glamour is an experienced, profound, subjunctivity. In this sense, glamour is related to the subjunctivity of ritual (Turner 1986) and it would be misleading to imply SCA events did not contain repetitive, ritualistic elements. In ritual, it is the community's subjunctive mood which is expressed while in the SCA both the individual and the community participate in this ludic spectacle. Isolation, pageantry, decoration, costumes, accoutrements, period food, gentility of language, the richness of Scadian mythology and night after night of transforming darkness all combine to create glamour.



Pennsic is awesome in its scale and as a symbol of commitment to the SCA dream. Scadians' collective will achieves this abstract goal through faith and forgetfulness. Though the camp consists mostly of nylon tents and tarpaulins, the plethora of camp facades, costumes and the daily battles on the list fields allow the days to pass as medieval. Night is when the magic begins. With dusk comes invisibility. All modern anachronisms are swallowed up by the night. No longer does fluorescent nylon distract you from your conversations with some baron or baroness; wristwatches become innocuous bracelets (unless someone is crass enough to light their Timex Indiglo and thus spoil the mood); and thus the most unassuming person, in the dark, can become a Roman praetor or Viking jarl. Light is not absent at night but the light sources are anti-modern—lanterns, candles, torches, campfires. The absence of glaring light allows the scopic regime to recede allowing imagining minds to make the final step toward the belief that, "Yes, where I am, there is a vast horde of men and women ready to do battle against the East and I am really here." The Baroness of Rising Waters told me that was the most important part of Pennsic, why she goes every year, "There's a moment, maybe only a second or two, when I feel I am really there. You only get that at War."

This 'magic moment' is the pinnacle of SCA performance but the authenticity is unlike that of pure historical re-enactors. Civil War re-enactors also experience this 'magic moment' but theirs is an experienced authenticity grounded in modern interpretations of history. This quest for historical authenticity is common within groups like these (Anderson 1984) where the members have a common goal. The SCA differs in this instance because the SCA does not engage in the re-enactment of any specific historical battle or circumstance. Scadians engage in a romantic quest for the authentic individual, not for authentic historicism (though authentic historicism is common among Scadians).

The final pre-requisite for these cognitive transformations is the act of *forgetting*. Of all

the textual ironies I have decried in this paper this is one which cannot be denied. Forgetting refers to many things not the least of which is the modern world itself. Courtesy in the Society demands that one not converse about mundane/modern subjects during events. Mass-produced articles are hidden or actively ignored. At camping events, especially Pennsic, one forgets the modern world by prolonged absence. With your ears filled with the regular beating of the drums; your nose filled with the smell of burning wood and your brain filled with the knowledge that the mundane world is far away, a profound sense of separation falls on you. Pennsic as a protracted event possesses some of the qualities associated with traditional healing rituals in this sense of separation. Neher (1961, 1962) writes of the effect rhythmic drumming has on listeners; EEGs have monitored how percussive rhythms can affect brain-wave patterns. Jilek (1982) writes of the “de-patterning” aspect of Salish healing rituals which use powerful drumming to induce healing. These rituals induce sensory overload and apply disorienting body manipulation and to facilitate the de-patterning of the patient. ‘Forgetting’ in Pennsic is like Jilek’s ‘de-patterning’ in that the mental imagery and sensory input of Pennsic facilitates an obliteration of one’s modern, alienated, self and allows one to perform a ‘true’ self in its place.

Forgetting also addresses one’s modern roles with their concomitant responsibilities—in other words, Scadians’ mundane identities. This aspect of forgetting might be termed the ‘escapist’ aspect of SCA performance, a term frequently used by Scadians to describe what they get out of their membership. Scadians are dissatisfied with the modern world and actively seek to forget it. Pennsic, or any successful event, allows one to forget modernity. Whatever Scadian labour cannot imbue with sensory and imaginary sedimentation, the individual must then do the remaining work by forgetting. Only through all of these processes can inner transformations occur.

For those whom I have interviewed, these inner transformations are very brief, but many

try to return every year to feel that way again. The glamour is not the evocation of sympathetic feelings amongst Scadians but the transforming of the world around them *as they experience it* so that they are actually "there" as authentic persons. While Pennsic performance facilitates the maintenance of medieval personae and provides Scadians with the means to play at being medieval in an appropriate setting, the importance of Pennsic lies not in how it mirrors the explicit mandate of SCA performance but how it facilitates these underlying subjective transformations which are rarely possible except under these specific conditions.

Being 'there', or being 'real', is experientially different from reflexively wanting to feel like being there. William Blake wrote of innocence, experience and innocence regained and glamour for Scadians can be likened to innocence regained. For those "one or two seconds" there is no difference between the real and the imagined. The dream is the reality. We have seen the lengths to which Scadians will go to achieve their dream. As I stated in Chapter II, modernity is an ideology of perpetual existential irony. Poststructuralists, especially Derrida, evade a central issue when they assert the inability to "know" or to "understand". They do not address how we *do* understand and *do* know even if such understandings exist outside the individual body (Rousseau 1995). Earlier I wrote about irony because irony is a discursive black hole in the wake of late modernity. Glamour can be dismissed as delusion or denial and Scadians can be labelled "escapist" but if one accepts the possibility that while modernity is totalizing its processes allow cognitive resistance in the form of anti-modern performances and schemas. The SCA is fully modern in this sense while also standing against modernity by offering an alternate perspective regarding identity and the performance of self. Glamour, as the transformation into authenticity, is the realization of the SCA dream. Personae in the postmodern world may be flexible, slippery, and differentially constructed but Scadians resist this slipperiness in favour of self-realisation through anti-modern performances. Pennsic creates

the opportunity to experience an alternate modernity, a romantic alterity where the authentic self is an achievable, if reflexive, goal. Each layer of sensory and imaginative sedimentation contributes, sometimes obliquely and at other times directly, to this imaginary transformation. The SCA as a collective labours toward this end but the achievement of the authentic self is the culmination of the SCA mandate. The shared discourse is the labour; the experience is the ideal world of experienced authenticity. Glamour, the ultimate 'magic moment', is the catalyst for this transformation.

## CHAPTER V: ROMANTICISM AND NOSTALGIA

The core of the SCA dream is the quest for authenticity. This takes two forms: historical authenticity and experiential authenticity. The former is explicitly stated in the SCA mandate while the latter is implicit yet it is perhaps the more important of the two. Unlike Civil War reenactors, Scadians are not interested in the re-creation of a specific time or place. Those people reenacting the Civil War strive to achieve a feeling of “being there”. Scadians also work toward this end but that moment of transformation is more diffused. The ‘glamour’ of transformation is more a realization of a romantic quest for the authentic person.

Scadians work at re-creating an idealized Middle Ages which in turn allows them to re-create themselves in an idealized form. This romantic view of the individual is coeval with the tradition of medieval romanticism; both spring from a reaction to the disembedding processes which typify modernity. Along with their nineteenth century European counterparts, Scadians valorize the individual in a medieval milieu because that was a time of heroism and meaningful individual action.

Romanticism is a nostalgia for a time when meaning was more fixed and experience was more profound. When Alura the Twin (Appendix A) writes about the SCA as the real world she challenges the very status of the quotidian world as a meaningful frame of reference. Many of the Scadians with whom I have talked remember their experiences in the SCA with greater vividness and immediacy than they do their ‘mundane’ experiences. Their nostalgia is not so much for the Middle Ages as such but for a time when roles, rewards, accomplishments, and abilities were valued as things in themselves and not as commodities.

And yet, romanticism itself is inextricably modern. Authenticity and tradition as discourses arise from the existential anxiety of modernity. The modern individual or group is reflexive in different ways than their counterparts of centuries earlier. Romanticism is anti-

modern in substance but it is modern in form. This unavoidable juxtaposition of the modern and the anti-modern informs Scadian re-creation and performance.

Understanding the SCA dream requires an understanding of the historical roots of medieval romanticism. Readers of this paper may well be familiar with the tropes at work within the SCA because they prevail in much of the popular literature consumed outside the Society (stories of King Arthur, Robin Hood, Brother Cadfael, etc.). Scadians, as subjects of the modern world, have inherited these understandings through cultural reproduction and actively apply this knowledge in their *mythopoesis*. Such meta-historical activities are not peculiar to the SCA but they are interesting when compared with others' reflexive positioning within modernity. In a modern social space without foundations (Faubion 1988), Scadians engage in building their own social and ideological as a network of like-minded subjects, in reflexive, deliberate defiance of modernity in order to create a critical space for individual transformation.

Romanticism, as a hermeneutic, must be carefully applied. Much of early anthropology is criticized for its "romantic" representation of "exotic" peoples which represented, in the anthropologist's opinion, either prehistoric portrayals of authentic prehistoric populations or examples of utopian social harmony. While I address this aspect of idealization, this paper deals with romanticism as realized by the subject as a cognitive map for interpreting and improvising performance for the transformation and elevation of the experienced self.

The Romantic period arguably began with the French Revolution and ended with the ascension of Queen Victoria. In literary terms, the roots of European Romanticism are found in the genre of the "Gothic" novel of England and Germany.<sup>41</sup> Gothic novels center around three important themes: a medieval setting, the supernatural, and an anti-heroic/heroic protagonist. The conspicuous founder of Gothicism is James MacPherson. MacPherson "translated" the

work of a third century Scottish poet named Ossian. Ossian wrote of noble warriors, doomed love and those great heroes—among whom were Fingal, Ossian’s father—who were killed in titanic battles. The poems of Ossian were, according to MacPherson, the remnants of an oral tradition among the people in the Scottish Highlands. It was later discovered that MacPherson was the author of the Ossian poems thus discrediting him. Though his name is no longer counted in the Western canon, MacPherson’s influence extended across Europe. The centerpiece of Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, a seminal romantic masterpiece, is a recitation of Goethe’s translation of Ossian the power of which seals the fate of Werther’s love. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) identify the works of MacPherson as an example of the way invented traditions come about. While romanticism is a modern perspective, its power to transform is lessened when its authenticity is directly challenged. MacPherson touched an important chord in the European psyche, despite his fall from grace. The stories of heroes and heroic deeds offer an anti-modern alternative for a modern subject who is alienated and powerless. Romanticism lies here in the intensification and evocation of a past which did not exist except in the interpreting mind of the present.

The Ossian poems inspired the Gothic revival which gave rise to the work of Walter Scott who with *Ivanhoe* firmly grounded the romantic interpretation of Europe’s medieval past which exists to this present day. We have only to look at Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* to see a fully realized romantically ideal medieval past, however historically suspect it may be. In Germany, Wagner’s operas were inspired by European legends, especially those pertaining the Holy Grail and the Grail knights (e.g. *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal*). This romanticization of history is also seen in the construction of modern “medieval” ruins in Western Europe during the

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<sup>41</sup> The Gothic period is often understood as synonymous with the medieval period.

nineteenth century. Ruins, often a subject in German Romantic paintings, evoke a connection to a past which will never return.

In a sense, SCA personae are analogous to those newly constructed ruins; their personae are modern constructions based on ideal types. It is both the idealization of a past, unattainable except in mimesis, which underlies an important facet of the romantic worldview. Ruins offer the barest of outlines around which an observer is free to superimpose his/her own completed image of the edifice it once was. Scadian personae are also constructed as the barest of outlines, though for many members their persona is thoroughly researched and historically plausible. Such medieval personae can only approximate the living, evolving identities of their historical counterparts. Even those Scadians who choose not to enact a well researched persona engage in this performative activity. Successful SCA performances involve an active forgetting as well as an active performative imagination. Those in the Society who participate primarily in authentic medieval re-creation are often labeled, disparagingly within the SCA, as “authenticity mavens”, usually by those who are more interested in recreation than re-creation. Yet those “authenticity mavens”, by virtue of their knowledge and skill in arts medieval, apply layer upon layer of medieval sediment through their physical and mental labour allowing other Scadians, reluctant to dedicate themselves to such labour, to freely consume their work thus facilitating the completion of their imaginary re-creations.

A great part of romanticism is an attitude toward nostalgia which renders it a cognitive position for *poesis*. Nadia Seremetakis (1994:33,41) likens nostalgia to a form of exoticization akin to romanticism. The nostalgia of the individual arises through memory. Seremetakis addresses the ways individuals remember, create memories, and reflexively reorder their world according to their recollections.



The sensory landscape and its meaning-endowed objects bear within them emotional and historical sedimentation that can provoke and ignite gestures, discourses and acts—acts which open up these objects stratigraphy. (ibid:7)

When one remembers, one recalls the meanings of objects and their relation to the subject. Such recollections are often “nostalgic” and romantic. Seremetakis embraces the possibility of a romantic hermeneutic. Nostalgia, “is the desire of longing with burning pain to journey.” (ibid:4) For Seremetakis, this “desire... to journey” is individual and existential, but it is also romantic because of its nostalgia.

In Europe, and to a lesser degree in England, romanticism arose from a nostalgia for a time which would never come again. Paralleling this sentiment is the trope of the returning king, giving hope for a future embedded with the values reflexively cherished by the romantic subject. It is from this sensibility that artists embraced the figures of Arthur in England and Barbarossa in Germany. Both figures, drawn from the same root myth, are not dead but merely waiting to come again when their nations need them. This is not the utopianism of the Enlightenment thinkers who sought a rational and achievable utopian future. The nostalgia of European romanticism looks forward to the re-embodiment of the past. Arthur and Barbarossa offer the most tenuous of hopes for a future which embraces these reflexive ideals. Hope and nostalgia are intertwined inextricably in the romantic process. The past is gone but one can hope beyond hope that it will come again.

One romanticizes one’s past through the desire to reconcile historical experience (ibid:7). This reconciliation is performative and is an act of completion. The past constitutes the lingering impressions of the senses transformed by present reflection rendering it new and immediate. Thus an individual can exoticize her/his own past according to the forms of local “romanticisms” (ibid:41). In the case of the SCA, one chooses a persona, creates a personal device, and then proceeds to forge alternate experiences through an immersion within SCA

culture. The creation of tradition and the making of history are grounded in nostalgia and romanticism. Persona creation and maintenance are romantic in that one's identity and accomplishments are tied to the experiencing subject in ways which are anti-modern.

Allen (1986) describes how he experiences the past as an extension of himself. The past creates order through which one may find comfort in the face of modernity. Culture and tradition can be seen as a trans-subjective truth: "What transcends an individual can also transcend *all* individuals" (ibid:251) As an example of his personalized experience of the past, Allen cites the Arthur legend. The past is an antidote for the meaninglessness of modernity. This view of the past combined with that of Trevor-Roper (1980) addresses how a personal relationship with the past can imbue the subject with authentic experience. Identifying oneself through a relationship with the past is romantic.

These processes of history/identity making and nostalgia are latent in most SCA events and Scadian identities. I have traced the filaments of nineteenth century European romanticism to forms readily recognizable by the modern subject. Scadians reflexively embody their relationship with the medieval past through their personae. However, the romantic endeavors of the SCA must be positioned within the wider scope of cultural reproduction with its inherent partiality. As anthropologists, we are interested more in how we understand than how we fail to understand. In the case of discontinuity and partial knowledge transmission, we can either identify unsuccessful instances of cultural reproduction under the rubric of the truism of complexity or we can find how people achieve and maintain shared understandings.

The reproduction of knowledge involves constant reformulation through a dual process of subjectification and externalization. What is transmitted is not the kind of abstract systemics which Western scholars see as summative of their endeavors but the specific meaning that specific imagery has for particular experts. (Strathern 1991)

In the case of the SCA the experts could be anyone growing up in the West. Scadians work at achieving their dream collectively. Misunderstanding and miscommunication is the norm but much of the SCA is about *forgetting* the discontinuities in a conscious, reflexive way. This forgetting is achieved through the romanticization not only of the past but of the present.

One is obliged to forget discontinuities for the sake of others' *poesis*. This is why nighttime and darkness, at Pennsic and at Feast, are important for Scadian re-creation.

Seremetakis describes how the engagement of the sensory world is a creative act:

(T)he mode and content of completion/connection with the sensory artifact is not determined in advance, it is not a communication with a Platonic essence, but rather it is a mutation of meaning and memory that refracts the mutual inserticn of the perceiver and perceived in historical experience and possibly their mutual alienation from public culture, official (sic) memory and formal economies. This *performance is not 'performative*—the instantiation of a pre-existing code. It is a *poesis*, the making of something out of that which was previously experientially and culturally unmarked or even null and void. (7)

Scadians use their environment as an outline for their creativity. Event sites are modern and personae are often sketchy yet the cumulative labour of the SCA—decorations, period dress, armigerous devices, music, dancing, fighting, archery, etc.—is enough for Scadians to engage in the *poesis* of authentic identities. The moment of *poesis* is also the moment of *forgetting*. Each complements the other.

Chivalry, virtue by right of arms, courtly love—all these values are consciously embraced by Scadians. These defining characteristics are chosen reflexively given all the vast knowledge we have of medieval European history. Scadians choose to simplify rather than complicate their relationship to the Middle Ages. This simplifying element of romanticism gives it its power. Romanticism stands as a reflexive cultural tool in opposition to the disembedding effects of modernity. Modernity is a condition of textual irony; all actions, thoughts, ideas, ideals, religion, relationships, genders are increasingly and ineluctably separated from fixed

meanings. Modernity disembeds meaning, while reifying certain kinds of reality; romanticism is the process of re-embedding meaning through the reflexivity of modernity. Unfortunately, for those who are questing for transcendent meanings, the very reflexivity of romanticism inevitably undermines its power.

However, this irony does not deny the experienced authenticity of the Pennsic fighter on the battlefield or the person who dances ecstatically around the campfire. The pretense of re-creating the Middle Ages allows the individual Scadian to explore what it means to be a person outside the modern frame. As one Scadian told me:

I started out going to events playing out someone who I wasn't. Before too long, I found my SCA persona and my mundane persona becoming more and more similar. Now both are the same person. I used the SCA to play at who I wanted to be and slowly incorporated that into the way I was outside events. Now I am the person who I always wanted to be.

This profound transformation is the culmination of the Scadian dream. Playing how one truly is flies in the face of modern theories of the self, but as an anthropologist I am obliged not to complicate the matter with my own preconceptions. Playing one's true, romantic, self is the pinnacle of Scadian performance.

## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

### Modernity and the SCA

The Society for Creative Anachronism is an organization explicitly dedicated to the re-creation of an idealized past. Through the performance of personae and the invention of Scadian tradition the SCA creates a performative space for individuals to construct and experience their 'true' selves. This experiential authenticity is anti-modern but the processes which Scadians use—nostalgia, romanticism, invented tradition—are inescapably modern. Scadians engage in a *poesis* where they actively create their own understandings through the completion of the cultural sedimentation which surrounds them. Where the modern world intrudes, Scadians must then forget the intrusion for the *poesis* to be successful. Only through *forgetting* this reflexivity can Scadians achieve the profound transformations for which they strive. Where modernity can be understood as perpetual existential irony, the romanticism of the SCA functions best when this irony is minimized or completely eliminated on an experiential level.

Irony can be extremely useful in anthropological analysis because it throws cultural inconsistencies into sharp relief. However, this approach elevates rational modernity above experience. Experienced reality cannot be equal to a possible objective reality, but it is "real" for the subject. When a Scadian, or anybody, makes a claim to knowledge according to personal experience, this cannot be dismissed as false consciousness or ideology. I have resisted this impulse, albeit sometimes unsuccessfully, within this paper.

The SCA is inescapably modern because of its reflexivity. Yet, its endeavour to create a facsimile of the medieval world is explicitly anti-modern. This paper has been an attempt to show the ways the SCA succeeds in its purpose because in this way I remain faithful to the spirit of the people with whom I have developed a relationship. It is true that the experienced transformations of which I have written are not universal among Scadians, but the goal of

authenticity, personal or historic, is. By engaging the past romantically, the SCA creates the performative space for people to explore what it means to be “themselves” in way impossible within the constraints of modern commodification.

Many processes are at work in the SCA. Along with romantic anti-modernism are issues of performance, gender identity, historiography, and simulation. Each of these issues could be the subject for further study. The SCA’s complexity cannot be adequately served by a paper of this length. With members throughout the world, any discussion of the SCA must be tempered with the understanding that one can only look at one small piece of the overall picture and that much will be overlooked. The SCA occupies an interesting liminal position within modernity. It is both modern and anti-modern. It is also a culture of performance and a culture of escape. Contradictions abound in the Society for Creative Anachronism and this paper is not meant to gloss these over. Instead, I have chosen to focus on the ways the SCA “works” for all its members: the quest for the authentic self.

### **A New Romanticism**

This paper proposes that romanticism as an act of cognitive reflexivity, idealism, and transformation is an appropriate perspective for anthropological analysis. In this sense, the romanticism must stem from the subject and not the anthropologist. Such a distinction is difficult to make if the anthropologist is the one performing the idealization and not the subject. In this paper, I show how the SCA sometimes succeeds and at other times fails at their romantic pursuit of authenticity. The “dream” is theirs and I have tried to illustrate it adequately. It is my conclusion that Scadians sometimes achieve their ‘dream’ and that this dream is empowering and profound.

Where the romanticism is local, the anthropologist is justified in borrowing it as a springboard for analysis. Nadia Seremetakis does not directly address the value of romanticism

as an analytical perspective but within her work on the senses and anthropology I see the potential for a new romanticism, a romanticism of the senses and of memory. Seremetakis (1994:41) mentions how people can exoticize their local knowledge in a way which can be seen as a “local romanticism”. For the SCA, medieval Europe is a local romanticism and the imagery of the medieval period, as laid down as sedimentation by popular culture, acts as the sensory input for their *poesis*. The authenticity lies not in the historical reenactment but in the continual creation of spaces where Scadians can work at discovering and performing their authentic selves.

Romanticism as a process of internalized idealization can be applied to analyses of the nationalist movements of Hawaii (Trask 1991) or Taiwan (Chun 1995) as a means of understanding the subjective experiences of the people involved. As an analytical approach, romanticism can bridge the gap between the analytical, colonial anthropologist and the experiencing, rational, subject. The most important concern for the anthropologist when faced with issues of authenticity is the temptation to denigrate nationalistic/idealistic experiences as merely another form of modern irony. Nationalist movements, and other idealistic endeavors, are examples of romanticism and as such cannot be accurately understood except through the consciousness of the experiencing subject. As anthropologists, we should place the experience of the subject above the analytical complexities we see when we engage these same issues. Understanding the subject can only happen through a respect for local interpretations.

Romanticism is an attempt to reflexively re-embed meaning where modernity has eroded it. This re-embedding creates the possibility for an authenticity which challenges modernity. Authenticity is a discursive product of modernity but one’s experience of it can be anti-modern in profound ways. In this sense, romanticism is also a critique of postmodernism as well as modernity. Romanticism is an attempt at re-creating meta-narratives where postmodernism is the process of dismantling those narratives (Lyotard 1984).

Finally, romanticism as an approach toward history allows the subject to enact self-empowerment. Scadians play at being their true selves and they use the vast annals of European and Asian history as tools toward that end. This flexibility of form and content is postmodern in structure but the goal is anti-modern. Scadian labour is unevenly distributed among members but the aggregate labour allows even those members who do not work at it to achieve a measure of empowerment and self-determination in spite of their indifference to historical authenticity. Unfortunately, such transformations are fleeting because each person must eventually re-enter the mundane world. However, for one or two “magic moments”, Scadians live the way they wish to live: a life full of profound personal meaning gained through achievement, where alienation, dissociation, and emotional distance are the dream and the ‘dream’ is the reality.



## Appendix A

From *The Known World Handbook* p.245

### The Last Word: To Play at Who We Really Are

Again and again, from newcomers and even from oldtimers caught in touchy situations, I've heard the same lament: "I thought the SCA was supposed to be *fun!*" The SCA is fun. It's a special kind of fun that is found in very few places in our modern culture. It encourages us to play at who we really are.

The SCA recreates the Middle Ages "as they should have been." In the SCA, therefore, we try to recreate ourselves as we should have been, in a fantasy world where nobility, honor (sic), and courtesy are the ideals of everyone. We speak to each other in the language of high fantasy, a language spoken in story by heroes larger than life.

We're not really heroes. To heroes, only nobility, courage, honor, courtesy and the other dramatic virtues matter. Heroes endure hunger, pain, loneliness, even ridicule with fortitude as long as they know they are living up to their ideals. Every day in what we call the mundane world we compromise, tell white lies, and avoid rocking the boat. We're not really heroes, are we?

Could we be heroes if we dared to try? The SCA lets us play at being our best selves, the selves we could be in a perfect fantasy world, perhaps the selves we really are and never dare to show. In the SCA we're supposed to act nobly and to say we're acting nobly. In the real world I feel uncomfortable saying that I did something because it was the right thing to do. I'd certainly never say I did it because it was the noble thing to do.

SCA members don't like to use the phrase "the real world." The SCA is the real world. That other place where we have to live between events is only the mundane world, the everyday, dull world where nothing we do means anything, where they don't let us be heroes, where we can't be the people we really are.

But the SCA is play. In the real world, and it is the real world, you can really die. When you get fired, you lose money. When you take risks, you really get hurt. In the SCA there are risks, of course, but the risks aren't quite so dangerous.

So in the SCA we play at who we really are. But sometimes I think we take ourselves too seriously to play at who we really are. There are two mistakes we make. Either we forget it is play, or we forget it is real.

New members need to know, and old members sometimes forget, that the SCA is a special kind of fun, that we're playing with thoughts, feelings, and ideals that are real and important. Some new members once shouted, "Blood, blood, we want blood!" at a tourney. Of course, somebody jumped all over them and they didn't understand. We're just having fun, aren't we? I told them later that the person who criticized them had seen the same fighter break his arm at two different tourneys. We *don't* want blood; blood is too real to be fun. We aren't joking or pretending when we talk of nobility, honor, and courtesy. And the nobility, honor, and courtesy are real, as anyone who has ever cleaned the hall until 3 a.m. after an event, for the honor of the SCA, can tell you.

Later on, we begin to forget it is play. Just because we're trying to play at being superhuman, we start expecting each other to be superhuman. We say a king is dishonorable when he may be only young and lacking in judgment. Someone told me once that if, as an

autocrat, I loan money to get an event going, I shouldn't feel bad or angry if I don't get the money back. Maybe heroes don't mind losing money, but I do mind. I'm only human.

Playing at who we really are is risky. It causes problems and misunderstanding. While we're playing, the SCA can suddenly get too real and surprise us. Hurt, we say, "I thought the SCA was supposed to be fun."

Nevertheless, this opportunity to try out the heroic mold is a privilege I will fight to preserve. When we play at having real virtues, we really are led to develop them. Sometimes we will find we take ourselves too seriously—but let's play at who we really are anyway.

Alura the Twin

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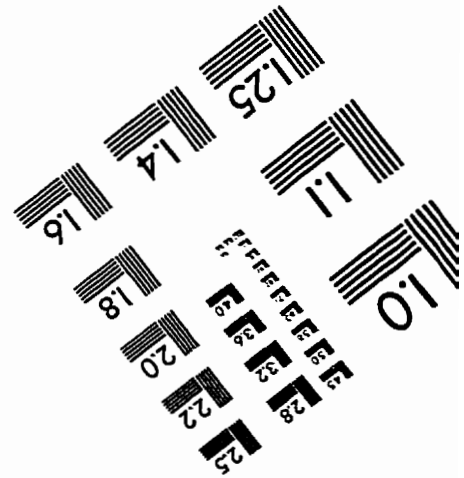
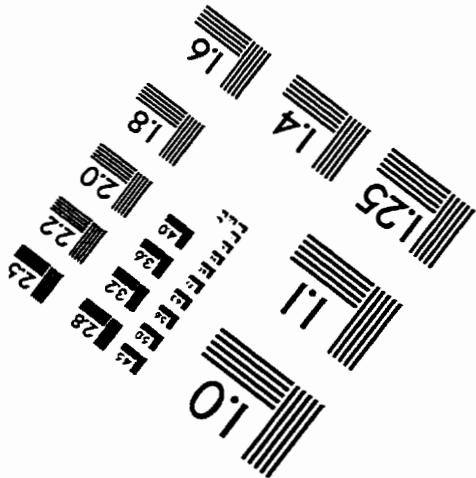
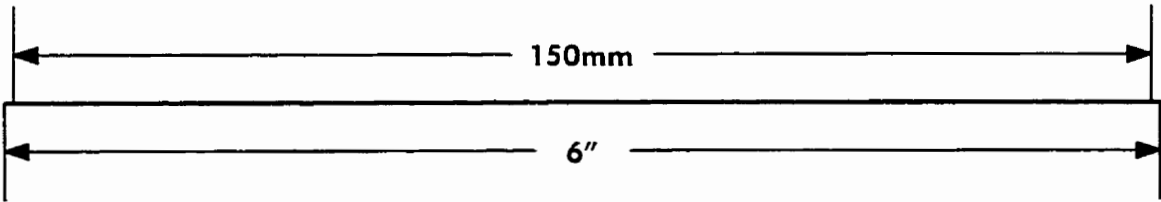
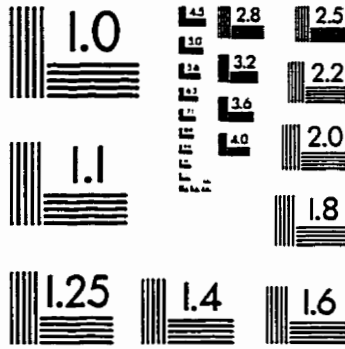
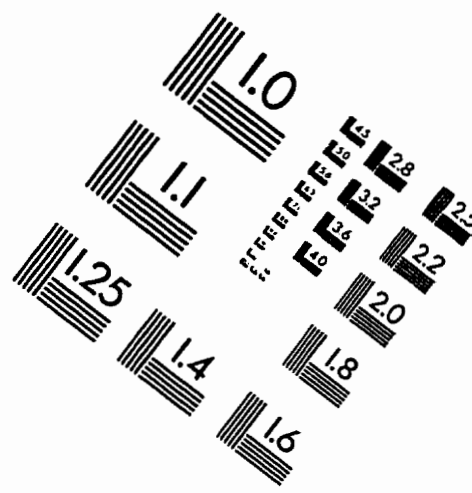
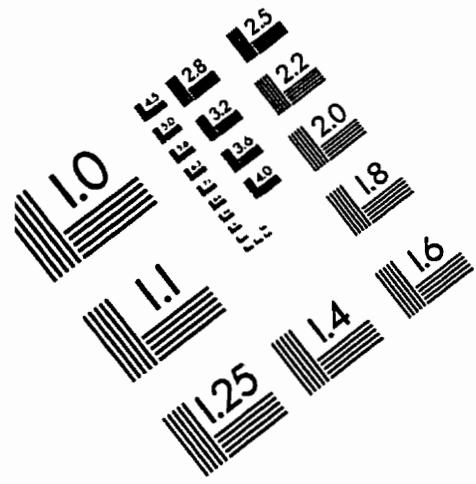
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