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The Visual Culture of Niagara Falls: From Kitsch to Keepsake

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Art and Visual Culture

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Abstract

This dissertation uses the visual history of Niagara Falls to argue that iconic touristic landscapes promising Sublime moments can benefit from embracing their often-eclectic mixture of images, experiences, artefacts, and small-scaled private collectors and collections. This study takes up two distinct areas of Niagara's visual history; how the site is depicted and copied, and how the site is collected and memorialized. The natural site, charted through attractions, themed environments, souvenirs and amateur home collections, is an apparatus that generates everlasting spectacle. Niagara's current attractions connect the earliest physical encounters of the site with contemporary experiences along tourist corridors, bridging the void between eighteenth-century European landscape aesthetics and contemporary discourses of eco-criticism and sustainability. Wax museums draw on the desire to copy, commemorate, and recreate iconic places and settings, embracing the inherent spectacle of sites like Niagara Falls and redirecting it towards commercial and entrepreneurial gain. Souvenirs, mementoes, postcards, and other ephemera help memorialize visits to places like Niagara Falls, demonstrating that personalized experiences can occur at iconic tourist destinations. Amateur collectors, and their smaller-scaled private collections, illustrate that the eclectic visual histories of sites are preserved in the homes of its visitors, rather than larger-scaled accessioned collections of public institutions. This project concludes with an echo of the introduction, which attempts to establish an updated understanding of the Sublime that embraces eclectic and sometimes disparate visual examples.

Keywords

Niagara Falls, Sublime, Recreational Sublime, Spectacle, Souvenir, Tourism, House

Museums, Amateur Collections

Summary for Lay Audience

This dissertation explores the assortment of attractions, themed environments, images, souvenirs, house museums and amateur collections surrounding Niagara Falls to better understand why popular sites like Niagara Falls are continuously visited by tourists and locals. Niagara Falls is widely credited as an example of a Sublime landscape. The concept/notion of the Sublime is an aesthetic theory from eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophy that represents the grandeur, scale, and power of the natural environment. Sublime landscapes are also notable for their ability to inspire wide-ranging sensations of fear, exaltation, wonderment, and awe. Although Sublime sites can become popular places to visit, they run the risk of losing their ability to inspire personal and emotional responses through practices of mass-production and over-commercialization. This study argues that sites like Niagara Falls can still contribute to notions of the Sublime through the examination of current eclectic visual and experiential examples and drawing parallel examples from the past. This project proposes that the network of small-scale and private collections of images and artefacts that surround the Niagara region uphold and preserve the peculiar visual history of the site. Lastly, this project attempts to establish an updated understanding of the Sublime that actively embraces the diverse, yet sometimes disparate, visual examples of the natural environment.

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Introduction

Niagara Falls does not merely exist; literally or figuratively. The iconic site is actively carving a path through limestone and rock that started its journey over twelve thousand years ago, when torrents of ice water from melting glaciers plunged over an unstable rocky projection at the south shores of modern-day Lake Ontario. Even today, Niagara Falls continues its path south towards Lake Erie, albeit at a much tamer pace of approximately one to one-and-a-half metres per hundred years.¹ Niagara Falls is also cemented in the cultural landscape by capturing the imagination, and often the ire, of millions of visitors per year, while perennially landing on “Seven Wonders” lists.² Niagara Falls is a place of stories, of narratives, and memories, and definitely, a place of opinions. Many of those who visit Niagara Falls for the first time already have an idea of what they are going to experience, either through promotional imagery or accounts from others; there are preconceptions of how the site is going to look, feel, or sound. Niagara Falls has led to the creation of an extraordinary anthology of artwork and artifacts, spanning various mediums and techniques – from oral and written accounts, paintings, guidebooks, photography, postcards, posters, pamphlets, advertisements, film, television commercials, full-scale mock-ups, and themed environments.

1. K.G. Gilbert, *Rate of Recession* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), 22.

2. "Seven Wonders of Canada." CBC News, (2007), <http://www.cbc.ca/sevenwonders/results.html>.

This dissertation focuses on the visual culture of Niagara Falls, analyzing a mixture of “kitschy” artefacts, locations and more conventional visual and textual accounts such as etchings, carvings, sketches, paintings, guidebooks, maps, and journal entries. Through this, I attempt to better understand the site, focusing on concepts of the sublime, the beautiful and the vulgar. As Malcolm Andrews suggests, images of the landscape breed images of the landscape, allowing for “various typological genealogies” and “visual prejudices”³ to emerge through the visual conventions and techniques used to depict the physical world. These typological genealogies and visual prejudices not only pertain to the creation of images of the landscape, but also pertain to the manner that Western cultures experience and visually understand their physical surroundings. The way images are created and consumed, equally, shape the way the physical world is understood. As Andrews suggests, any conception of landscape in art history and visual studies must include genealogies and prejudices, which explain how a culture, privately and collectively, responds to its natural environment and to representations of their environments.

The cultural and social histories surrounding Niagara Falls can attest to the notion that every square inch of ground that has been walked or gazed upon contains a memory or story. Before reliance on visual representations and written accounts of what makes a place, or site, worthy of exploration, language and storytelling illuminated how individuals shared memories and stories. Niagara, like many regions within Canada,

3. Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1.

embodies this claim by deriving place names from Indigenous languages and cultures, then proceeding to build on and build over several millennia of cultures and narratives that existed prior to colonization. The practice of crafting a seamless history of occupation by colonial audiences and the development of nation states is not unique to Niagara, and the rich body of scholarship around this topic in the North and South American context has guided this research. For example, the delineation of geographic regions and representation of land on maps over the course of history contributes to our visual history.⁴ Landscapes serve as a collective unconscious, where buried memories and stories are waiting to be unearthed.

As a settler scholar who has lived and worked in the Niagara region, my focus falls on the way in which settler culture has been imposed on the lands, often through visual culture. Beginning in the seventeenth century, European missionaries, guided by Indigenous people, made their way into the region, and immediately translated the landscape into “visual prejudices” that coincided with aesthetic debates between empiricism and idealism that were popular in Europe at the time. The first Europeans to lay their eyes on Niagara Falls remains a contested point but there is a consensus that attributes Belgian missionary Father Louis Hennepin’s accounts from his 1678 expedition as the first widely distributed accounts of Niagara Falls.⁵ Hennepin wrote: “When one

4. Recent examples that address spatiality in settler-Indigenous interactions include articles like Cody Barteet’s 2013 *Contested Ideologies of Space in Hispanic American Cartographic Practices: From the Abstract to the Real in Spanish and Indigenous Maps of Yucatán* in RACAR and Erin Morton’s 2022 collection of essays and articles in *Unsettling Canadian Art History*.

5. Louis Hennepin, *A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America, Extending*

stands near the Falls and looks down into this most dreadful Gulph, one is seized with Horror, and the head turns round, so that one cannot look long or steadfastly upon it.”⁶ Niagara Falls was the ugliest thing that Hennepin had seen; cruel and disgusting, a waste of broken volume.⁷ Hennepin’s descriptions did much to exaggerate the verticality of the site, even though there was no measure to validate his claims, and a generation of European artists—who had never actually seen Niagara Falls—were commissioned to complete etchings and paintings based on his accounts. There was no debate that the Horseshoe Falls, in particular, was an example of a broad, open, and expansive cataract that did not exist in Europe, at least at the scale presented by Niagara. Hennepin’s descriptions and depictions infused the phenomenological traits of Niagara Falls with a sense of bewilderment, fear and repulsion, and set the stage for a half-century of expeditions, exclusively to Niagara, for the opportunity to set one’s eyes on this natural wonder.

By the early nineteenth century, the first commercialized tours and leisure routes through the American and Canadian Falls were established. Europeans and Americans plotted the land, and intervened with economic and cultural practices of commodification and leisure. Armed with guidebooks, maps, and checklists to experience the landscape,

Above Four Thousand Miles Between New France & New Mexico with a Description [sic] of the Great Lakes, Cataracts, Rivers, Plants, and Animals: Also, the Manners, Customs, and Languages of the Several (London: Printed by Henry Bonwicke, 1699)

6. Ginger Strand, *Inventing Niagara: Beauty, Power, and Lies* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 17.

7. *The Falls*, directed by Kevin McMahon (Toronto: The Ontario Film Development Corporation/Channel Four Films/Primitive Features, 1991), streaming video, <http://hotdocslibrary.ca/en/detail.cfm?filmId=12079>.

visitors sought to negotiate the unique sense of immensity and scale present at Niagara Falls without much fear for their safety. The solitude, the primeval setting, the densely forested backdrop, and the distance from civilization, as perceived by Europeans, amplified the glaring uniqueness of the seemingly unchartered frontier that was Canada, especially in contrast to the rise of dense urban centres throughout Europe of the early-to-mid nineteenth century. Jarrod Hore's 2022 *Visions of Nature: How Landscape Photography Shaped Settler Colonialism* explores the intersection of photography and colonialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His work is useful for me here because of the Eurocentric perception of Indigenous lands as somehow "empty," "untouched" and ripe for development. Hore explores how "settlers used a number of discursive and visual strategies to produce the empty spaces on colonial frontiers that they prized so highly."⁸ The myriad of pilgrimage routes that were carved through what is now Southern Ontario attests to the elevation of an "untouched" setting into a shrine or locus. The tourist routes and modes of transportation leading to the American and Canadian Falls, for example, set the framework for the development of consumerism and entrepreneurship in the area.

As collections of guidebooks were edited and re-edited, the emphasis and the focus seemed to shift from the natural features of the site towards the human-made infrastructure: the safe and convenient stairways, the fine bridges between the surrounding islands, and the convenient passages to the celebrated spot behind the

8. Jarrod Hore, *Visions of Nature: How Landscape Photography Shaped Settler Colonialism* (University of California Press: Oakland, 2022): 214.

Horseshoe Falls. The actual experience of the site became, as John William Orr articulates, in his 1842 *Pictorial Guide to the Falls of Niagara*:

...a judicious routine of observation, so that the stranger may be enabled, by its assistance alone, to find his way without loss of time or unnecessary toil, to every place which it is desirable to visit, and every point from which a good view may be obtained.⁹

Guidebooks like Orr's, of which there are numerous, contributed to the shifting context that Niagara Falls was "desirable" and the experience could be "obtained," eclipsing notions of fear, bewilderment or awe from previous accounts and depictions. The earliest architectural interventions at Niagara Falls emerged on the American side of the Niagara River, in the early nineteenth century. The bridge from Goat Island to Terrapin Point and Terrapin Tower, both depicted in various paintings and guidebook itineraries (see Figure 0.1 for geography of the American and Canadian Horseshoe Falls), highlighted and extended the memory of the experience at Niagara Falls by bringing visitors to the precarious outcroppings adjacent to the cataract.

Niagara was not the easiest place to visit during the expeditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but steady streams of sightseers portaging to the site from the north, and the development of stagecoach routes from the south, transformed the site into one of leisure; infrastructure, accommodation and attractions were in demand. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the reasons for visiting Niagara began to shift away

9. John William Orr, *Pictorial Guide to the Falls of Niagara* (Buffalo: Press of Salisbury and Clapp, 1842), iii.

from the actual traits of the site itself, and transitioned to the great architectural and man-made “feats” of the area. The experience begins to de-centre; the cataracts remained the prime attraction, but the vantage point of the brink was “framed” through the newly erected architectural structures and interventions, such as the Niagara Falls Museum (1827), Biddle Staircase at the Bridal Falls (1829), and Terrapin Tower (1833). Gideon Miner Davison’s *The Fashionable Tour; Or, A Trip to the Springs, Niagara, Quebeck, and Boston, In the Summer of 1821* represents one of many such documents that established checkpoints, thresholds and frames to ensure the visitor’s experience of Niagara did not disappoint. After crossing Goat Island Bridge or descending into the gorge via elaborate systems of stairs or climbing Terrapin Tower, one could “possess” the view and make it theirs. Possession is a key concept, as it takes on conceptual and literal meaning in the latter half of the nineteenth century, through the rise of consumer culture, photography and entrepreneurship. This not only marks the great shift in the experience one could expect at Niagara Falls but reveals how the site became an icon, specifically through its commercial, entrepreneurial and colonial representations. From the middle of the nineteenth century onward, Niagara Falls would predominantly be depicted, and understood, through attractions, advertising imagery, and other kitsch-culture memorabilia.

The study of souvenirs and the material culture of touristic and leisure practices are informed by recent contributors, like David Hume who focuses on how the souvenir is designed and consumed, and the role consumer expectation plays in the procurement of souvenir objects. He builds on Susan Stewart’s 1984 book *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, which established a spectrum of

souvenir object-types that hinged on the literal, and perceived, authenticity of artefacts obtained while travelling to foreign places. Stewart's work helps us understand and contextualize objects consumed on leisure trips that are crafted by local and Indigenous cultures but closer examination of her work reveals gaps within commercially produced objects consumed at highly commercialized tourist sites. Hume moves this further by proposing new readings of craft and means of production to include commercialized and mass-produced objects as artefacts worthy of study.

Niagara Falls can thus be approached from various perspectives—a geographic entity, a tourist object, a romantic honeymoon destination, an inexpensive weekend getaway—but the visual materials surrounding Niagara talk much about how the site is understood in varied historical contexts, from early nineteenth-century tourist environments to current commercial settings. And what Niagara's visual materials all have in common is that the place is always seen through something, it can never be experienced without predisposition. Kevin McMahon's 1991 documentary film *The Falls* sheds light on how visitors came to terms with their experiences at Niagara Falls, and the forces operating under the surface that frame those experiences. In the film, he notes:

Scientists came here in the early eighteenth century and they brought the new wisdom of the enlightenment. Where the explorers saw evil, they saw mathematics. They said, “don’t be afraid, very few observe nature with accuracy, and report the truth precisely...below its chaotic surface, nature follows very simple rules, its just mechanics under there.”¹⁰

McMahon’s quote breaks down the eighteenth-century Eurocentric desire to understand and make sense of nature, to tame it and affirm a form of dominance over it. The American and Canadian Falls are clear metaphors for power, energy, and the sublime, which can, at times, contrast the logistics of entrepreneurial endeavour and commercialization that surround around the site. Visitors are guaranteed a moment worth remembering, regardless of the weather conditions or waves of visitor volume on the day of their visit. As Davison and Orr articulate in their guidebooks, there is a struggle between the unpredictability of the place and the logistics of ensuring people hit the important vantages and checkpoints.

Visitors embarked upon Niagara Falls in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by foot, train, carriage, and steamship, with each form of transport influencing their impressions of the site. Guidebooks and other forms of paper-media convey how particular vantage points and viewpoints developed around Niagara, from leaflets, to postcards, ticket stubs, menus and railroad schedules. These forms of throw-away media may seem insignificant at first glance, but they outline the importance, and influence, that publicity, promotion, and tourist material have on the development of identifiable vistas

10. *The Falls*, directed by Kevin McMahon (Toronto: The Ontario Film Development Corporation/Channel Four Films/Primitive Features, 1991), streaming video, <http://hotdocslibrary.ca/en/detail.cfm?filmId=12079>.

around the site. The varied modes of transportation and tourist routes leading to Niagara in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were matched by the varied ways to “capture” the perfect view of the site itself, ranging from viewing platforms to observation towers and pagodas. For example, Charles Robinson’s plans and sketches of a pagoda-style observation tower from 1847 represent one of the oldest documented viewing platforms built at Niagara Falls, and one of only two such structures that he built on the Canadian side of the Niagara River. His towers provided multiple observation platforms to the visitor, situated at various heights, and offered unobstructed views of the Horseshoe Falls. Neither one of Robinson’s Canadian observation structures survived very long, lasting only fifteen and thirteen years, respectively, eventually being torn down for other developments. Pinhole cameras could even be found dotted along the Niagara River throughout the nineteenth century, where they served as their own type of attraction, pitting entrepreneurs against one another, jockeying for the ideal vantage point, each one seemingly perched closer to the edge of the gorge. In fact, adaptations of the camera obscura were evidenced in early photographs from the 1890s, and first described in *Steele’s Niagara Falls Guide Book* from the 1830s. Visitors willingly paid admission to lay their eyes on the site, through a tiny hole in the wall of a large, blackened, one-room building; mere metres from the cataracts. Three predominant locations were available to visitors; the first was located along the Canadian bank across from the American Falls, another was positioned to capture the famed Horseshoe Falls, and a third, located where modern-day Table Rock Visitor’s Center is situated.

It is estimated that more film was exposed at Niagara Falls in the mid-to-late twentieth century, per day, than at any other site in the world.¹¹ Although photo collectors and hobbyists have long prized historic pictures and cameras, as well as the glass plates and sheet films on which pictures were once made, it is only since the latter half of the twentieth century that the general public has found these items of interest, and worth collecting.¹² The photographic history of Niagara Falls is a testament to larger developments in photography, from daguerreotypes to ambrotypes, tintypes, stereoscopies, roll film and early paper prints. These collections of images depict individuals and groups set in front of many, now vanished, landmarks, bridges and structures. Every facet of Niagara Falls' cultural and geographical history seemed to have been recorded on them: bridges, stunters, railroads, ice jams, museums and *Maid of the Mist* boat tour. The earliest circle snapshots at Niagara Falls represent the inauguration of hand-held recordings, allowing for candid, in-the-moment images to be taken and shared. Such events as the ice damming at the base of the cataracts, a common occurrence in the latter portion of the nineteenth century, could be recorded relatively easily, especially when compared to other forms of photography and image-making conventions of the time, including albumen prints and tintypes. Beginning with the invention of the Kodak box camera in 1888, these early forms of hand-held photography, allowed for the most promising balance of personal and communal experiences at well-travelled destinations.

11. Virginia Vidler, *100 Years of Souvenirs* (Utica: North Country Books Inc. 1985): 115.

12. Ibid.

Visitors could capture their own piece of Niagara, as they saw it, which reinvigorated the uniqueness of the landscape, its scale, and ever-changing conditions and patterns.

Current readings of the sublime are similarly tasked with embracing technologies and leisure/touristic methodologies due to the (perceived) authority of humankind over nature.¹³ Visualization devices have continued to evolve. Instead of camera obscuras and stereo-cards we have recreational drones and satellite imaging capable of creating accurate three-dimensional mappings of the earth that can be “experienced” from living room couches. The possibilities of these new technologies do not erase the sublime from Eurocentric landscape theory, rather, they establish new social-cultural contexts to advance the definition of the sublime.

To this day, visitors are promised that a sublime experience awaits them at Niagara through marketing campaigns and posts on social media. Unfortunately, the opportunity for an unframed and unmediated experience is outside the control of those who brave the site. The myriad accounts that I have introduced above—Hennepin, Davison, Orr, and the anthology of paintings, engravings, sketches, photographs, and roll films—contribute to the established and wide-ranging collection of visual narratives that encircle Niagara Falls. The sheer volume of visual references support the rise of the

13. Contemporary writing on the sublime, as the concept pertains to landscape and environment, suggests that the concept is still prevalent today, as contributions to the discourse are carried by scholars like Elizabeth A. Brunner and Veronica R. Dawson, in their 2017 article “Marketing the Recreational Sublime: *Jumbo Wild* and The Rhetorics of Humans in Nature” in *Critical Studies in Media Communications* and Susanne Stacher’s 2020 chapter “Tourist Bubbles in the Alps: Sliding from the Sublime into Picturesque World” in *Tourism Fictions, Simulacra and Virtualitie*.

commercialized climate of the site and its popularity as a leisure destination which, conversely, makes intimate and individual experiences of the landscape difficult. Why then, do visitors choose to embark upon saturated, busy, and congested destinations, like Niagara Falls, to this day? Are tourists looking for a personal account or memory? Or, in turn, are they looking to validate the accounts set forth by others?

Zoe Leonard's 2008 art installation *You See I Am Here After All* exhibited at the Dia Beacon Art Gallery in Beacon, New York begins to answer some of these questions above, and uncovers broader implications of how cultures *see* iconic landscapes. Leonard displays thousands of original and copied postcards of the Horseshoe Falls that she personally scoured from countless garage sales and online auctions, some of which have been in circulation from as far back as the early twentieth century. Leonard's work asks how we describe popular destination without "giving it away" or, worse, eroding its unique character. Lastly, Leonard displays how postcards and their recontextualization complicate meaning-making through mass production. For example, the postcard serves a practical and personal function, however, what happens to the sentimentality of the artefact when its seriality is revealed through visual grouping and arraying on gallery walls.

Another goal of my dissertation is to explore the growing divide between recent critiques of Niagara Falls (the past two decades) and older forms of literature relating to the site's past (from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries), although the forms and types of cultural practices have largely remained the same since the first European expeditions to the site. It is my claim that current literature around Niagara Falls, and landscape theory in general, rely too heavily on the rhetoric of consumer and

commercial culture as uniquely contemporary phenomena, suggesting there has been some refined evolution towards the current relationship between culture and nature. It is my claim that consumer and commercial endeavours swirl (and always have swirled) around Niagara Falls because the unique site challenges humankind's power and fortitude; the awesome scale and power of the cataracts poses a challenge, or threat. Niagara is not the only place where this occurs, as other iconic sites of awesome power and scale present the same dichotomy: the Grand Canyon, vast Dams and Desert landscapes. The visual examples I explore, in combination with written, narrative, and recorded accounts, support the notion that the media and technique may evolve, but the sentiments remain the same.

The methodology for this dissertation employs visual and semiotic analysis tools in combination with broader speculations of how cultures represent and interact with their landscapes. As such, my methodology predominantly follows an iconographical and iconological arc, as introduced by Erwin Panofsky and later refined by W.J.T. Mitchell. I lean on secondary methodologies that seek out connections between the environment and literature; with literature being interpreted openly in written, verbal, visual and experiential forms. Mitchell's contributions to the field of visual studies include the development of the "pictorial" or "iconic turn," which frames the image as a form of knowledge and a form of communication. Mitchell shows that images can carry their own meaning and significance. Representations and descriptions of Niagara Falls evolved from purely empirical debates, rooted in religion, science, and cognitive analyses, to current understandings of the site, today, which introduce ethical, political, and commercial influences.

If one explores the written and visual histories of Niagara Falls, specifically, the site can clearly promise prospect of the sublime, as originally conceived by Edmund Burke (1757) and Immanuel Kant (1790) in their eighteenth-century philosophical texts.

Niagara invokes the Burkean sublime by displaying the great disparity between humans and their landscape, especially through the lens of vastness or infinitude. Niagara also invokes the Kantian sublime, which posits that *reason* allows humankind to maintain its position of superiority over nature. Traits of Burke's and Kant's sublime were captured by eighteenth and nineteenth-century painters and writers through the area, while a progressive shift occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries thanks in part to growing entrepreneurial development. The site shifted to spectacle. This evolution problematized the possibility of collective aesthetic understandings of Niagara Falls (see Dubinsky, 1999 and Lippard, 1999). The same visual and experiential factors that define the uniqueness of the place, and garner attention across cultural and societal boundaries, such as scale, power and the sublime, are equally responsible for notions of hyperbole and vulgarity. What causes these types of shifts throughout history, and what are some of the literary references that can help illuminate these transitions?

The first avenue to gather an understanding of site like Niagara Falls begins with a study of seventeenth and eighteenth-century European culture, when Niagara Falls was first viewed by missionaries, who documented and widely distributed visual recordings of their experiences. Canada was still a century away from gaining independence from Britain and the United States was emerging from the American Revolutionary War. The world of aesthetics was transitioning away from a reliance on phenomenal registries and physical confrontations with the surrounding world towards more conceptual

understandings of the physical world, which are framed through the constructive activities of the mind. It was not until eighteenth-century developments in aesthetics, judgment and taste that current understandings of powerful and imposing sites like Niagara began to take form. Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant's contributions to the writing on the sublime express the crucial interplay of Empiricism and Idealism; two methodologies that emerge in the analysis of documents and depictions of Niagara Falls, regardless of the era or period.

Burke and Kant's explorations serve as the first explicit interplay of the beautiful and the sublime, ultimately marking the beginnings of modern idealist thought. Operating between notions of wonder, terror, and awe found in corporeal experiences, Burke and Kant work through definitions of beauty and the sublime as part of a discernable history of a culture's taste and judgement. The sublime is what ruptures the continuity of taste and judgement, testing the limits of a culture's aesthetic sense and sensibility. Following Burke and Kant's contributions to aesthetics, nature was divided into what is physically in front of the viewer (the undeniable, empirical fact), and what is socially or culturally constructed (the imposition of idealist thought). The course of literature that followed these early epistemological endeavours opened discourses that viewed the landscape as a medium through which to explore a particular culture's social, cultural, and political limitations. The work of Leo Marx (1964), Neil Evernden (1992), and Jane Bennett (2010) each focus on the socio-cultural-political spectrum of art and the environment, specifically concentrating on how landscapes fit into—or extend—humankind's intellectual boundaries.

Marx's *Machine in the Garden* presents the dialectic of two worlds, the romantic and modern, that shapes the foundation of all social, cultural, and political appropriations of the landscape in North America. Referencing and engaging Henry David Thoreau (among a myriad of other American literary icons), Marx lays out the inherent tensions that uphold the nineteenth-century preservation of the North American pastoral ideal. Evernden's *The Social Creation of Nature* isolates the social implications and complications that humankind thrusts upon itself (at times unknowingly) when attempts are made to anthropomorphize nature. The value of Evernden's explorations and conclusions does not come without shortcomings, as his work operates as a counterbalance to Marx's dialectic of humankind (the machine) and nature (the garden) and the philosophies of Burke and Kant. By undermining (by design or not) the political undertones of a social construction of nature, Evernden does propose valuable lines of analyses and conclusions, such as "Nature justifies nothing, or anything." These types of claims by Evernden capture the Eurocentric desire to value nature as something to aspire to or something to transcend, which emerges in the visual histories of Niagara Falls through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Finally, Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* serves two distinct purposes for the aesthetics and cultural backdrop of this research; first, it fills in the political shortcomings set by Evernden's predominantly social exploration, and second, it reimagines the study of the nature-culture dialectic, originally set in motion by the debate between Empiricism and Idealism, as a coherent network without predisposition to either framework. Bennett proposes "vibrant networks" that, in effect, strive to make assemblages out of otherwise separated studies. Where Evernden and Marx argue for the separable matter of nature and

of human beings, Bennett argues for “a vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans to see how analyses of political events might change if we gave the force of things more due.”¹⁴ Bennett concludes that studies pertaining to nature and the landscape, especially in aesthetics since the early twentieth century, are biased to the objectives of modernity. The most tragic fallout from this reality is that societies are left with a systematic and lifeless conception of nature.

The foundational texts that inform this research project pertain to the culturally constructed landscape from a primarily European tradition, which is to say landscapes that are marked by, and bear the signs of, human intervention. Concepts of commercialization, notoriety, function, power, and leisure are a few of the concepts and terms that directly impact this research. *Landscape and Power*, edited by W.J.T. Mitchell marks a cornerstone in landscape theory, as he moves discussions of landscape and culture away from traditional questions that ask what landscapes *mean* and *represent*. Although the text is a composition of isolated essays composed by various authors focusing on various historical cases, Mitchell does much to frame the writings in his Introduction and “Imperial Landscape” chapters. Mitchell places the landscape under social, political and historical lenses by questioning what it is landscapes actually *do*, and how they *work* as “cultural practices.”¹⁵ As in most of his writing, Mitchell focuses on the products of our social and cultural creations. Within “Imperial Landscapes,” for

14. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), viii.

15. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1.

example, Mitchell utilizes concepts of colonization to contrast how cultures interact with their environments. In particular, Mitchell delves into the concept of the gaze of the halted European traveller and the gaze of native Maori of New Zealand. Mitchell does not stop at how culture merely *interacts* with its surroundings; he examines the cultural products and techniques employed to commemorate the landscape, and in doing so reveals that vastly differing cultural forms result in vastly different meanings and understandings of nature.

Eco-criticism and Indigenous studies not only allow for investigation of the primary sources in this research but they challenge and complicate the primarily Eurocentric characterization of what nature represents in cultural, social and political contexts.¹⁶ The writing of Greg Garrard touches on the conception of nature as “wilderness,” specifically in the case of landscapes like Niagara Falls, that fulfilled the notion that encounters in seventeenth and eighteenth-century North America provided

16. Recent cultural shifts are opening up what nature is and means to different people, including travel and nature experiences from the perspective of BIPOC, asylum-seeking families and LBGTQ2S+ people. These perspectives are not the central focus of my dissertation, however, recent occurrences, such as Christian Cooper’s March 2020 experience of having the police called on him while birdwatching in Central Park, shows that not everyone feels safe or able to enjoy popular sites that are designated as “nature.” Cooper’s May 26, 2023 Guest Essay “Three Years After a Fateful Day in Central Park, Birding Continues to Change My Life” reflects on the confrontation from his own perspective. These types of experiential disparities still exist, today. In Niagara Falls, for example, the definition of leisure and accommodation is being challenged due to the housing of asylum-seeking families in local hotels and motels, including the grumblings from the tourism industry, and locals, about how these spaces are being used. This is a real time example of how leisure landscapes are reserved for certain people, points of view, and experiences.

some “authentic existence”¹⁷ not possible in Europe. Furthermore, I employ the writing of Michelle Hamilton (*Collections and Objections: Aboriginal Material Culture in Southern Ontario, 1791-1914* from 2010) to explore the dynamics of exploration, local knowledge and site documentation between early European visitors and Indigenous culture, specifically the influence on Indigenous material culture. By introducing the eco-critical tropes of the “authentic experience” and “American identity,”¹⁸ around the treatment and documentation of sites like Niagara Falls, I uncover deeper understandings of how environment is placed in power hierarchies, and how intervention and representation are intimately linked to the establishment of cultural attitudes and hierarchies around nature and its inhabitants.

Joan Schwartz and James Ryan’s text *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* is structured as a three-part anthology, where photographs serve not only as visual images, but as historical and material objects. Various essays are organized into one of three volumes: “Picturing Place,” “Framing the Nation,” and “Colonial Encounters” with the concept of ‘geographical imagination’ lying below the surface. “Picturing Place” is of most interest to my research project, and in particular it is David E. Nye’s essay “Visualizing Eternity: Photographic Constructions of the Grand Canyon” that informs my work. They shed light on the visual history of the iconic site, and how the site only became iconic when it was understood as a singular, and entirely intelligible, feature. It was not until advances in photography and aviation intersected

17. Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2012), 71.

18. American identity includes the notion of the North American identity, as a predominantly rugged and rural existence, intimately tied to the land.

with each other, that the site could be described in a manner that was palatable to the general population. Nye uses the course of the Grand Canyon's visual history to inform broader developments of visual representation and image-making from the late nineteenth century onwards.

Recent developments in literature pertaining to Niagara Falls focus on notions of expectation and anticipation of the spectacle, rather than broader theoretical or aesthetic implications of landscapes or the environment. These works subscribe to Niagara Falls, and other infamous landscapes, as sources of cultural production; in other words, how can one labour over theoretical agendas when there is so much real-world material to sift through? What ensues is a rigorous analysis of the actual experiences and memories fashioned at Niagara, with careful attention on how the experience of the place is received by various stratospheres of culture. Authors like Karen Dubinsky, Patrick McGreevy, and Ginger Strand consider Niagara Falls as a network of natural wonder and human intervention, and after nearly three centuries of appropriation, the sampling they draw upon is vast and diverse. They explore the development of anticipation and gratification at Niagara Falls through analyses of attractions, marketing campaigns, advertisements, jingles, and commercials, as well as visitors' responses to these seemingly endless cultural interventions.

Dubinsky's book *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls* explores the interplay of visual attraction, figuratively and literally, present at Niagara and its impact on a small industrial region. Dubinsky immerses her work in the tourist landscape, and like McMahon's 1991 film *The Falls*,

there is a healthy inclusion of those attractions and stories that convey the glory of living around the world's most famous address:

A curious dichotomy of Niagara's tourist industry, which seems, he [Auld] says is as old as history...tawdry, slightly down at the heels image of the publicity stunt – over the falls in a barrel, sleazy honeymoon hotels, the bride's second biggest disappointment and the like.¹⁹

Dubinsky, McGreevy, and Strand allude to an integral aspect of locality that escapes many of those who explore the history of Niagara Falls under purely aesthetic “rigor” (see Elizabeth R. McKinsey's *Niagara Falls: Icon of the American Sublime*). These scholars present the notion that the site is always on display by drawing on ideas and histories of attraction, spectacle, and exploitation. Even visitors to the site are on display which inspires social, cultural, and political analysis.

I navigate the tensions that accompany experiences at Niagara Falls, which can best be understood as the struggle between the aura that draws visitors and the perils of over-commercialization. I choose to explore Niagara Falls because the further one examines its visual history, the closer they come to understanding *why* the site cannot escape its own fame. Niagara Falls does not exist without opinion, as enthusiasts battle with the “anxiety of consummation” (outlined by American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne on his own 1835 journey to Niagara Falls) or as skeptics know they will only be disappointed, like so many couples on their honeymoon getaways (in reference to

19. Karen Dubinsky, *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooners, Heterosexuality, and the Tourist Industry at Niagara Falls* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999): 222.

Dubinsky's own study of Niagara Falls). These interpretations are almost as old as the "discovery" of the site by seventeenth-century Europeans, or the first generations of mass tourism to follow. If the site can excite or disappoint its visitor, even when they have never been in the physical presence of it before, then Niagara's visitors must have a measure by which to compare the experience. What creates these units of measure? What creates these expectations?

Those who are politically and economically invested in the success of Niagara Falls have made great attempts to secure an image in the minds of potential visitors to the site. Expectation and recollection, therefore, are crucial avenues to explore in the visual and experiential history of Niagara Falls. In fact, the majority of those who experience the site come to Niagara with an image or description in mind. Do the visual and oral pluralities of experience at Niagara Falls, developed over the past three hundred years, erase the prospect of a unique, awe-inspiring, and sublime encounter today? Technology, economical development, and conservational strategies help establish Niagara Falls as an aesthetic icon by securing the image of the place clear in the minds of those who visit—or plan to visit—the site.

The final aspect of my research strives to go a layer deeper and explore *how* Niagara's visual history is collected. The final methodological approach to this dissertation, and the area that is missing from literature pertaining to Niagara's visual history, is the way the images and artefacts are preserved. Literature and scholarship are dedicated to the objects from Niagara's history, and the social-cultural impacts on the visiting population, though there is a void pertaining to the role local cultures take in preserving these histories and upholding the eclectic mix of artefacts and ephemera. *The*

Falls—an exhibition I was involved in curating and organizing in the fall of 2018 at a local Niagara Art Museum—uncovered a vast, yet largely unconnected and independent, network of images and artefacts diffused throughout the private homes, house museums and small-scale institutions in Niagara. Fiona Candlin’s work on micromuseums and other small-scale collections in her 2015 text *Micromuseology: An Analysis of Small Independent Museums* provides a framework to better contextualize the types of work uncovered in this research and the places the works are stored. An investigation of the visual depictions and interventions of Niagara Falls, so close to the iconic site, carries the potential to connect broader theories of landscapes and aesthetics with more a regional understanding of the site. In this regard, I hope to shed light on the voids between theory and practice that has developed throughout Niagara Falls’ visual history.

Chapter Outline

The organization of the material in this dissertation is grouped by chapter theme, while the sampling of images, artefacts and other visual examples draw from various time periods in Niagara’s history, intended to make connections across varying historical contexts. I include more recent and current attractions, artefacts, and souvenirs, intermittently, with the intent of strengthening my claim that the iconic site has not changed drastically over the last three hundred years, rather, the types and forms of material culture have. This dissertation is comprised of four chapters, where the first two chapters focus on the site itself and its attractions and spectacles, and the final two chapters shift to the collections of objects, memories, narratives, and souvenirs around the site.

The first two chapters explore how the proximity of two bodies—the source site and its representations—can influence each other, even when these two things appear disparate. For example, Niagara Falls presents two distinct sides, the natural and commercial through its physical features and surrounding haunted houses, wax museums, and spectacles. The opening chapters focus on memory-making and the spectacles surrounding iconic landscapes like Niagara Falls.

Chapter One, titled “Fun for the Whole Family: Seized Spectacle,” explores attractions and cultural events that draw on definitions and iterations of the sublime from a Eurocentric perspective. The first chapter also presents the varied iterations of the sublime used throughout the dissertation, including the foundational contributions from Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant regarding vast, open, and often frightening spaces in the physical world. Foundational iterations of the sublime help connect the experiences and accounts of earlier European missionaries to the current commercial context, which includes the haunted houses and scare museums that dot tourist corridors. Contemporary iterations of the sublime—referred to as the commercial or technological sublime—are influenced by eco-criticism and sustainability discourses. These additions to the study of the sublime help dissect nature tourism attractions developed around Niagara in recent years, including zipline routes and tree-top adventure courses. Finally, the history of daredevils and funambulists are explored in the context of the sublime, inspired in large part by the 2012 Nik Wallenda tightrope walk across Niagara Falls—a feat that had not been proposed for well over a century. The opening chapter illustrates how definitions of the sublime have evolved since the term’s inception in seventeenth and eighteenth-

century aesthetics, but also proposes that the sublime remains connected to the way cultures experience and describe their physical surroundings.

Chapter Two, titled “Fun for the Whole Family: Soaked in Simulacra,” investigates commercial or technological readings of the sublime by focusing on visual rhetoric that pervades commercial and promotional material from as far back as the early nineteenth century. Weaving between examples from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, I construct parallels between Niagara’s past and present, with the only distinction resting on models of representation and medium. I still explore attractions—wax museums and four-dimensional synthetic environments—but I begin to include other models, copies, and abstractions of the site—photography, daguerreotypes, stereo cards, guidebooks, tourist maps, elaborate movie sets and other architectural interventions. The chapter focuses on the desire to copy, commemorate, and recreate iconic places and settings. Material culture research into wax museums and wax figures offers a way in, through discussion of the original and its copy, highlighted by Rosie Marie San Juan’s writing on wax figures:

These are no longer two exterior surfaces that confront each other, rather they begin to resemble each other as they get closer together. And as they become conjoined, they reveal the sense of touch to be always doubled, always reciprocal, and even when they come apart, they leave a trace of one upon the other.²⁰

20. Rose Marie San Juan, “The Horror of Touch: Anna Morandis Wax Models of Hands,” *Oxford Art Journal* 34, no. 3 (2011): 441.

The final two chapters focus on collecting the memories, stories, narratives, and souvenirs from the natural and commercial landscapes discussed in the first half of this dissertation. Niagara Falls is a tourist city, a city of stories, a city of exaggerations and a city of hyperbole—which is reflected in its material culture, historically and currently.

Chapter Three, titled “Collecting Memories: Culturally Crafted and Constructed,” introduces the concept of possession in the tourist landscape, as the notion takes literal and figurative meaning in Niagara from the latter half of the nineteenth century until present day, fueled by the rise of leisure practices and travel routes. The dissertation shifts towards the material culture of Niagara Falls through the exploration of various souvenir and memento typologies. I address the souvenir shop as a landscape, where postcards, books, paper ephemera, domestic goods and tchotchkes are uncovered and explored for deeper cultural and historical meaning. Much research is dedicated to the notion of possessing experiences and moments in the physical world, inspired by the writing of James Ryan (*Photography and Exploration* from 2013) Michael Hitchcock and Ken Teague (*Souvenirs: The Material Culture of Tourism* from 2000 and 2019), Ruth Phillips’ *Trading Identities: The Souvenirs in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (1998), and Janice Anderson and Kristina Huneault (*Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1850-1970* from 2012). The second chapter also explores the role that craft and vernacular play in the manufacturing and consumption of the tourist objects and souvenirs. For example, beaded souvenir items made during the nineteenth century by Indigenous people, mainly women, explores how the creation and distribution of handmade objects can influence relationships between culture and landscape.

Chapter Four, titled “Collecting Memories: Three Typologies Inspired by *The Falls*,” explores the spaces and collections that hold the objects, mementoes and souvenirs analyzed in this dissertation. This chapter is dedicated to the institutions and individuals that attempt to put Niagara’s visual history into perspective. I discuss the importance of “local” collections and museums, with specific reference to RiverBrink Art Museum and other local Niagara museums, art galleries and private collections consulted in this research. I propose that three museum typologies exist in Niagara—Cluttered Collection, Vernacular Collection and Cabinet of Curiosity—which establish and preserve the eclectic mix of visual media and artefacts. The final chapter is informed by Fiona Candlin’s *Micromuseology* from 2015, which helped curate *The Falls* exhibition and, ultimately, flesh out the three collection typologies explored within the chapter. *The Falls* was designed to foster community-based collaboration and inspire connection and communication between local institutions. The most surprising outcome of the exhibition preparation was the interest garnered from private residents of the area, which not only enriched the exhibition but expands the role that memories and personal narratives hold in the visual analysis of objects.

The goals and aims of this research are to connect conceptual and philosophical writings and ideas of the sublime with the eclectic and quirky visual history of Niagara Falls. Sublime discourses, as preliminarily outlined above, are embedded in theoretical discourses which are often at odds with studies around sites like Niagara Falls. Commercialization and entrepreneurial forces, combined with myriad visual recreations of Niagara Falls in a wide range of media and over a broad course of time, have seemingly migrated discussions of the site away from aesthetics, art history and visual

culture. The negative outcome of this shift from an aesthetic understanding of Niagara Falls to a commercial one is that the site may no longer represent moments of wonderment and awe. Niagara Falls has long been associated with the Sublime, but these connections and correlations feel as though they are stuck in eighteenth century aesthetic discourses. In order to rekindle aesthetic and experiential readings of Niagara Falls, we need updated visual explorations of the site and its representations that exhibit its ability to incite feelings of the sublime moment. The goal for this dissertation and its contributions to visual studies emerges from a refreshed or updated understanding of the Sublime, as presented at sites like Niagara Falls, that embraces odd attractions, spectacles, elaborate enshrinements, smaller-scaled private collections, and amateur collectors of images and renditions of iconic sites.

Chapter 1

1 Fun for the Whole Family: Seized Spectacle

My heart is already pounding, my ears are ringing and my mind racing. There are far off noises I can't quite decipher, but it's noise, and it is everywhere. I'm hit with a wave of something sickeningly sweet and it is probably the cotton candy being spun beside us, on the sidewalk, or maybe the fresh waffle cones across the street.

I'm met with a sudden cackling, and other indistinguishable roaring and moaning in the background. A bolt of something electric illuminates my peripheral vision—
Frankenstein is around the corner!

My palms feel clammy and I'm starting to sense myself slowly filling with dread, but I continue along the path ahead of me. I begin to hang back a bit and sink into the protected space between my mother and my brother.

Soon enough, we're in. We pass some thickly painted blood-soaked cast-iron gates before the House of Frankenstein, haphazardly stuck into what looks like a faded fiberglass set and flashing neon signs that read: LIVE ACTORS. I can barely see my feet, and everything is loud; uncomfortably loud. I hear laughing and I feel shoulders and hands brushing past mine. We move through the darkness together and the random flashing lights distort my depth perception. Voices boom and grow.

We pass lab scenes, bubbling cauldrons, all soaked in a green neon light. Lights continue to flicker on and off. Webbed mesh hanging from above contributes to my

claustrophobia and it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between human or animatronic touch.

Finally, I hear it—“It’s alive! It’s alive! It’s alive!”

I can’t bear another second. A tingling chill rolls down my spine. I reach for the closest hand that isn’t a stranger’s. I look up to see my mother, half laughing as she leans down to whisper “we can leave.”

We turn down a dimly lit hallway, where the red glow of an exit sign barely illuminates the poorly painted and textured green walls. I inhale deeply to catch my breath, as we cross the threshold into drenching fluorescent light and muzak that fills the gift shop. Our feet land softly on the tired and worn Berber. We exchange glances and let out a laugh.

1.1 Introduction

What appears to be a conglomeration of gimmicky attempts to scare, jolt and frighten its visitors, Niagara’s adventure tourism, haunted attractions and daredevil feats inform the comprehensive visioning of how philosophies of the sublime and of landscape can convene in well-trodden tourist environments. Not only do these visual culture spectacles touch on a multitude of aesthetic and epistemological discourses that inform a relationship to the physical world, but they also present a relatively consistent and coherent picture of how humans (or at least humans trained in European strategies of viewership) have understood themselves in front of the vastness found in nature. This chapter focuses on the elaborate representations, recreations, and attractions that surround

natural wonders like Niagara Falls. Ranging from the ridiculous to the sublime, I explore how varied definitions of the sublime, the natural (and unnatural), the uncanny and the liminal can be applied to adventure tourism, haunted houses, and daredevil feats.

Niagara Falls is often described as “sublime.” Historically and currently, this term means different things. Interpretations of the sublime have undergone numerous usages and revisions in epistemological, aesthetic, art historical and visual culture texts. This chapter explores Immanuel Kant’s and Edmund Burke’s theorizations of the sublime as they pertain to the perceived challenge or test that landscapes can present to humans, especially notions of the sublime as a threat to well-being, or the sublime as fear-inducing. I investigate two revised notions of the sublime—the recreational sublime, and the sublime fiction—to better dissect the prominence and persistence of attractions around Niagara Falls that aim to incite fear and danger, albeit in exclusively benign ways.

Theorizations of the recreational sublime illustrate how commercialized landscapes like Niagara Falls “make safe” or “domesticate” the fear-inducing sublime, introducing a tension between “the recognition of nature as awe-inspiring and the desire to enter, scale, and surmount it.”²¹ Some of Niagara Falls’ most peculiar and campy attractions, like Clifton Hill’s *The House of Frankenstein* described in the introduction above, and the longstanding history of Niagara’s funambulist feats, from Charles Blondin to Nik Wallenda, put these tensions on full display. Blondin and Wallenda represent the

21. Elizabeth A. Brunner and Veronica R. Dawson, “Marketing the Recreational Sublime: *Jumbo Wild* and The Rhetorics of Humans in Nature,” *Critical Studies in Media Communications* 34, no. 4 (2017): 388.

oldest and most recent stunters to traverse the Niagara River by tightrope, respectively, with Blondin achieving the feat in 1859 and Wallenda following suit in 2012. These two feats, achieved over 150 years apart, exemplify how tourists and visitors willingly immerse themselves in the illusion of terror and danger that the natural wonder holds, while never actually placing themselves in harm's way. Furthermore, the obstacles presented to visitors and tourists are always surmountable; and when they appear too overwhelming, one can always escape through the emergency exit.

The recreational sublime has emerged in the world of environmental conservation studies in recent years, both as a model to better understand the prominence of the sublime in highly commercialized landscapes and to further define the “incompatibility of adventure travel and preservation”²² philosophies. Nathan Stormer further explores the conflicts between adventure travel and preservation.²³ If the sublime (landscape) signifies the immeasurable and unconquerable, how does the definition of the sublime change when humans continuously conquer or scale their surroundings?²⁴ How does the

22. Elizabeth A. Brunner and Veronica R. Dawson, “Marketing the Recreational Sublime: *Jumbo Wild* and The Rhetorics of Humans in Nature,” *Critical Studies in Media Communications* 34, no. 4 (2017): 388.

23. Nathan Stormer follows a predominantly humanist exploration of the sublime, which suggests that the sublime is a means to test the “limits of self” in his 2004 article “Addressing the Sublime: Space, Mass Representation, and the Unpresentable” from *Critical Studies in Media Communication*.

24. A recent area of study has emerged that resides at the intersection of social media influencer-culture and experiences in nature. Irma Arts, Anke Fischer, Domenic Duckett and Réne van der Wal’s *The Instagrammable Outdoors – Investigating the Sharing of Nature Experiences Through Visual Social Media* addresses the popularity of Instagram as a medium to portray experiences in nature. One of the strongest tensions in their research pertains to the authenticity of one’s experience in nature. The authors present the disparity between the personally-posted image of a popular site with the

definition of the sublime change when sites like Niagara Falls are converted from wilderness to commercialized space?

The breadth and prominence of recent adventure travel documentaries—Peter Mortimer and Nick Rosen’s 2014 *Valley Uprising*, Nick Waggoner’s 2015 *Jumbo Wild*, Jimmy Chin and Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi’s 2015 *Meru* and 2018 Academy Award-winning climbing documentary *Free Solo*—illustrate an acceptance that humans *can* still conquer nature. Topics include the counterculture lifestyle that emerged in the Yosemite Valley during the 1970s, the fight for the preservation of untouched mountain landscapes in British Columbia, the perils presented by Himalayan big wall climbing, and the unwavering portrait of a free soloist climber that conquers El Capitan in Yosemite National Park, respectively. Elizabeth Brunner and Veronica Dawson suggest that films like these present sublime landscapes through a “thick anthropomorphic lens,”²⁵ and in doing so, render the landscape impotent. The signs of domestication are worked into otherwise vast open and insurmountable landscapes through the depiction of leisure practices and “views for the taking.”²⁶

plethora of *many* other personally-posted images of the same popular site. Certain scenes are more ‘Instagrammable’ than others, which leads to a homogenous understanding of nature and broader visual understandings of the outdoors.

25. Elizabeth A. Brunner and Veronica R. Dawson, “Marketing the Recreational Sublime: *Jumbo Wild* and The Rhetorics of Humans in Nature,” *Critical Studies in Media Communications* 34, no. 4 (2017): 387.

26. Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo, “Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race: Carleton Watkins, John Muir, and the Construction of Wilderness” *Environmental History* 6, no. 4 (October, 2001): 549.

Visual depictions of landscape leisure and adventure tourism collectively push the limit of human-nature interactions towards a domesticated version of the sublime, which Brunner and Dawson describe as the practice of “humans confronting the sublime and then enervating its wildness and danger.”²⁷ The growth of image-capturing devices and outdoor gear make conquering sublime landscapes more achievable, and marketable. Extreme sports, like heli-skiing on remote mountainsides and ice-cave expeditions, introduce humans to yet-to-be explored remote landscapes, which in turn are co-opted for commercial gain. The recreational sublime, then, complicates the relationship between the seemingly opposing practices of consumption and preservation, as is the case in Niagara Falls with recent developments of tree-top experiences and zipline routings aimed at capturing the excitement of thrill-seekers and admirers of the environment.

Stormer and Brunner and Dawson’s approach to the sublime opens avenues to explore travel and landscape destination tourism across various settings. Susanne Stacher’s interpretation of the sublime, which is focused on the “desired dreamlike world”²⁸ of the Swiss Alps and its role in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Grand Tour, builds on the idea of the recreational sublime. Stacher doesn’t exclusively dwell on eighteenth and nineteenth-century rhetorical myths and fictions that the Alps represent,

27. Elizabeth A. Brunner and Veronica R. Dawson, “Marketing the Recreational Sublime: *Jumbo Wild* and The Rhetorics of Humans in Nature,” *Critical Studies in Media Communications* 34, no. 4 (2017): 388.

28. Susanne Stacher, “Tourist Bubbles in the Alps: Sliding from the Sublime into Picturesque Worlds,” in *Tourism Fictions, Simulacra and Virtualities*, eds. Maria Gravari-Barbas, Nelson H. H. Graburn and Jean-François Staszak (Routledge: New York, 2020): 81.

rather, she draws on contemporary examples of Alpine architecture to explore her iteration of the sublime. For Stacher, contemporary architectural interventions that dot the vast, open, and remote landscapes of Switzerland not only highlight the sublime experience awaiting visitors but create sublime moments in and of themselves. Stacher connects the two, architecture and the sublime, through the notion of “sublime fiction”:

Dealing with the history of the sublime and investigating the extent to which we can interpret its transfer onto Alpine architecture made me realize that architecture itself plays a part in generating the “sublime fiction”: by means of spatial devices that foster people’s capacity for a spiritual or physical liminal experience.²⁹

Stacher’s “sublime fiction” places value on architectural spaces, interventions and other built forms that hold in them the capacity to conjure feelings of the overwhelming power of nature. “Sublime fictions” mark the liminal thresholds between expectation and experiences in the physical world. Stacher labels these as fiction because these devices or human-made constructions are not the landscape or space in themselves but are copies of or homages to the *real* thing. The examples that Stacher uses in her analysis includes architectural interventions like Zaha Hadid’s ultra-modern Bergisel Ski Jump, Werner Tscholl’s landscape pavilion Fernrohr, and Ross Lovegrove’s off-grid hotel pod Alpine Capsule. Each piece of architecture undoubtedly pales in comparison to the incredible scale of the landscape it resides in but draws from the characteristics and types of experiences the landscape promises. Her work opens discussions around sensations of isolation, vertigo, intensity, and liminality.

29. Ibid., 82.

Niagara Falls' eclectic mix of attractions and experiences, geared at instilling sensations of danger, fear and exhilaration, embodies notions of the recreational sublime and "sublime fiction." Although Niagara Falls does not share many of the environmental and preservationist influences noted by Brunner and Dawson above, the focus on a humanist-inspired iteration of the sublime helps connect many of the otherwise unrelated tourist offerings around the site; both historically and currently. Niagara Falls has long provided attractions and experiences that bring visitors to the brink of the waterfall, into the bedrock walls that line the natural gorge, along the rocky shores of the rapids and perched within elaborate and precarious look-out towers and staircases; all of which allow patrons to challenge the omnipotence of the site and conquer it.

Take, for example, the recent creation of WildPlay's 2016 *MistRider Zipline to the Falls* which takes tourists on a "breathtaking ride into the gorge, towards the base of the Canadian Falls."³⁰ The 670 metre (2,200 foot) zipline launches from the observation platform centered in the Grand View Marketplace, descends southward alongside the gorge wall, above treetops, through the mists of Niagara Falls and culminates on a landing platform adjacent to the abandoned Ontario Power Company Hydroelectric Generating Station. Patrons gather their zipline gear and await shuttle vans that transport them up Niagara Parks Commission service roads back to the Grand View Marketplace. WildPlay advertises the attraction "for both the thrill seekers and the hesitant" while providing "a hands-free, worry-free, and fully-guided experience like no other in the

30. Niagara Parks, "Zipline to the Falls," (2022), <https://www.niagaraparks.com/visit/attractions/wildplay-zipline-falls/>

world.”³¹ Since the introduction of the attraction in 2016, the four parallel ziplines have propelled a steady stream of tourists towards the Canadian Horseshoe Falls from the early hours of the morning until dusk, seven days a week, well into the winter months. The experience is simultaneously serial and unique, which is a notion that emerges in many of the attractions surrounding Niagara Falls and other iconic tourist destinations. On one hand, the site offers unique, *once-in-a-lifetime*, experiences and views while on the other hand, the experiences and views must be consistent and immediately recognizable to establish brand recognition and inspire the broadest base of visitor possible.

Using the recreational sublime and fictional sublime as framing devices, this chapter draws out the parallels between Niagara’s built attractions and the actual physical site. I explore how Niagara’s adventure and haunted attractions provide examples of the domestication of the sublime and shows how the sublime is filtered through the tourist spectacle. The chapter not only underscores the immense technological and engineering feats that the site has undergone to create its current image, but aims to highlight how the constructed images, or narratives, permeate the surroundings and attractions.

Highlighting the parallels between natural and constructed landscapes supports the notion that architectural and infrastructural interventions already shape impressions of Niagara Falls, especially when the historical and cultural context that Niagara’s eclectic attractions emerged from—including *The House of Frankenstein*, *Castle Dracula*, *Nightmares Fear Factory* and *Haunted Asylum* – is considered. Thus, I complicate the

31. WildPlay, “Zipline Tours and Signature Ziplines,” (2022), <https://www.wildplay.com/ziplines>.

way in which many of the attractions are cast as deterrents to the natural beauty of the area, falling into the category of tourist traps that plague many popular vacation destinations.

Niagara's attractions serve as reflectors of the natural site; in some instances, the image is a near-perfect copy while in others, the result is a distorted rendition conjured by one of Clifton Hill's *Fun House* warped mirrors. In both instances, these types of attractions inform the role that the sublime plays in the aesthetic and experiential arc of the site while helping illuminate experiences and interpretations of Niagara Falls from the past. In this analysis, one might consider the attractions as reinforcers (or precursors) of the experiences one can expect to have in the presence of the actual wonder: or at the very least how the attraction references accounts, stories and experiences from previous visitors. Niagara's place in Euro-centric and North American visual culture crosses several forms of media, from engravings, guidebooks, paintings, photography, film, souvenirs, attractions and advertisements; establishing one of the longest and most diverse collection of narratives to excite and promote further exploration by tourists. The exploration of adventure and haunted attractions create some of the most convincing and exciting narratives that the site has to offer, as they pertain to the complicated nature of presenting and upholding the idea of the sublime in a heavily mediated environment.

The last aspect of the sublime I explore emerges from the history, and resurgence, of daredevils and stunt performers directly challenging the site. Niagara has attracted daredevils and stunt performers for centuries, and Wallenda's historic high-wire crossing demonstrated how the site can still host the spectacle, albeit having to traverse many obstacles presented by commercial, international, and supervisory constraints. Like the

ever-evolving accounts of Niagara Falls and tourist traps explored in this chapter, spectacles like Wallenda's walk contribute to a richer iteration of the recreational sublime, one that actively includes cultural fabrications and social "deterrents."³²

Niagara's visual history is vast and wide-ranging, and it coincides with the vast and wide-ranging uses of the sublime in landscape theory. I move through the changing definitions of the sublime, as they pertain to Niagara Falls' visual history, with focus on adventure tourism, haunted houses, and daredevil feats.

1.2 Seeing Double: Two Sublimes

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the idea of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime.³³

While it is the recreational and "sublime fiction" that inform much of the writing in this chapter, these two iterations owe much to one of the foundational versions of the sublime as outlined by Edmund Burke's quote, above, from *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Burke's text posits the relative

32. The countless online reviews of Niagara's Attractions on Trip Advisor, Yelp! and Google platforms, provide one of the sources of inspiration for the reconciliation of the natural site, its attractions and spectacles and the sublime. I will reference various online reviews throughout this dissertation in the hopes of illuminating the tensions surrounding the "natural" site and its mediations, such as a 2011 Trip Advisor review by "c21579" entitled "The World's Greatest Tourist Trap" which goes on to claim: "The attractions at Clifton Hill are pathetic. Run down, rusty, old, boring, short, expensive. The "gift shops" are a joke. Old, musty, run down, full of junk. The only place worth visiting is The Aviary and well yes, the falls are nice. But after being ripped off at every single place, its hard to enjoy anything about this tourist trap."

33. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. A. Phillips (Oxford: Simon & Brown, 2013): 36.

smallness and insignificance of humans compared to nature. Immanuel Kant builds on Burke's binary relationship between humans and nature in his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, which creates a second theorization of the sublime that further explores how the sublime invokes fear and a distorted sense of security.

Burke approached landscapes and other objects of greatness, vastness, and infinitude as totally foreign to humankind. The void created in humans by nature, he argued, is capable of invoking feelings of terror or fright. Burke's interpretation refers to landscapes like Niagara Falls—or the Swiss Alps or Grand Canyon—where such wonders are noted for their ability to suspend the senses and strike apprehension in those that choose, or dare, to scale their vastness. Niagara Falls embodies the unrelenting force of nature and the unfathomable concept of infinity, and according to Burke “infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime.”³⁴ The rhetorical differences between humans and their environments are at the core of Burke's writing as well as my research here. Humans differ from nature by nearly every metric (measures in time, scale, and fortitude), yet there are endless examples of humans attempting to bridge this perceived gap in the field of visual technologies or architecture. For example, Irish painter Robert Barker's invention of the panorama³⁵ emphasizes how cultural constructions can alter

34. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. A. Phillips (Oxford: Simon & Brown, 2013): 52.

35. Peter Otto, “Between the Virtual and the Actual: Robert Barker's Panorama of London and the Multiplication of the Real in Late Eighteenth-Century London,” *Romanticism on the Net* 46 (May 2007).

perceptual and spatial understandings of the physical world. Barker's eighteenth-century panoramas of Edinburgh embody Stracher's writing on "sublime fiction," expressly in the reimagined interrelatedness of its architecture and landscape features on one continuous ribbon of canvas. In the context of Niagara Falls' visual and spatial history, the architectural interventions, attractions, and recreations embody Stracher's "sublime fiction" on the basis that architecture can transgress the real (the physical world) and the imagined (the constructed world). New conceptions of spatiality emerge from crossing spiritual or liminal thresholds presented by the physical world.

The waters which fall from this horrible precipice do foam and boil after the most hideous manner imaginable, making an outrageous noise, more terrible than that of thunder.³⁶

Niagara's sights, sounds, power, and scale made an indelible mark on the accounts made by early European missionaries to the region. Reading Father Louis Hennepin's words, above, the hideous pit of foaming water, with its incredible scale, is waiting to swallow up anyone who dared make their way there. Hennepin is credited with being the first European to widely circulate images and descriptions of Niagara Falls to a European audience. His seventeenth and eighteenth-century accounts perpetuated religious ideals, specifically, the notion that the physical world was directly

36. Louis Hennepin, *A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America, Extending Above Four Thousand Miles Between New France & New Mexico with a Description [sic] of the Great Lakes, Cataracts, Rivers, Plants, and Animals: Also, the Manners, Customs, and Languages of the Several* (London: Printed by Henry Bonwicke, 1699): 48.

shaped by sin and wrongdoing.³⁷ Niagara Falls was the ugliest thing that Hennepin had seen³⁸ and his descriptions did much to exaggerate the verticality of the site. I conduct visual analysis of Hennepin's etchings and written accounts later in this dissertation but he is important to introduce here because he visualized Burke's earliest iteration of the sublime in its ability to invoke terror and repulsion. Hennepin would inspire a half-century of expeditions to Niagara, with the prospect of confronting a spiritual or physical threshold. Although Hennepin did not explicitly refer to the sublime, his writings described the threat posed by an incredible physical site. Many viewed his foreboding text as a challenge of humankind's limits against nature and, thus, represented challenges within aesthetic and intellectual communities of the eighteenth century.

Transitioning to Immanuel Kant's iteration of the sublime-in-nature and, specifically, the role fear and security play in the conceptualization of the sublime:

37. The most basic iterations of the Creation Story posit the utopia of the Garden of Eden somewhere within the *sinful* physical world. John Abbott dedicates an entire section of his 1875 text, *The Adventures of the Chevalier De La Salle*, to the expedition of Father Louis Hennepin through North America and Niagara. Hennepin's trek through Niagara framed the landscape as "a sin-blighted world, upon which had fallen the frown of its Maker."

38. *The Falls*, Directed by Kevin McMahon, (Toronto: The Ontario Film Development Corporation/Channel Four Films/Primitive Features, 1991), streaming video, <http://hotdocslibrary.ca/en/detail.cfm?filmId=12079>.

Sublimity, therefore, does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind...thus the broad ocean agitated by storms cannot be called sublime. Its aspect is horrible, and one must have stored one's mind in advance with a rich stock of ideas, if such an intuition is to raise it to the pitch of a feeling which is itself sublime—sublime because the mind has been incited to abandon sensibility.³⁹

Kant, like Burke, wrote of the sublime belonging to the world of ideas and culture—the mind—as opposed to unmediated nature. Kant's abandoned sensibility began to open up what Burke alluded to as a liminal threshold or experience. For Kant, the security afforded by residing in culture helped perceive experiences in the untamed wilderness as sublime, otherwise, the sublime would only conjure pure terror.⁴⁰ Superimposing this Kantian iteration of the sublime-in-landscape to our contemporary context, fear is not caused by a lack of physical security: at least in regard to nature tourism around Niagara Falls, with its manicured floral clocks and limestone parapet retaining walls dotting the Niagara River gorge.

Kant helped explain that the sublime was not about placing oneself in the face of danger without any escape—if this were the case, Niagara Falls would have long-exhausted its position as one of the most widely-visited tourist destinations. The Kantian sublime proposed that “as soon as architecture and infrastructure are installed in the

39. Immanuel Kant, “Critique of Aesthetic Judgement,” in *Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement, with Seven Introductory Essays, Notes, and Analytical Index*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911): 245–246.

40. Susanne Stacher, “Tourist Bubbles in the Alps: Sliding from the Sublime into Picturesque Worlds,” in *Tourism Fictions, Simulacra and Virtualities*, eds. Maria Gravari-Barbas, Nelson H. H. Graburn and Jean-François Staszak (Routledge: New York, 2020): 67.

wilderness, our fear diminishes or disappears completely, because we feel secure. Fear is then transformed into exciting curiosity, the maximal tension releases—and sublime ‘slides’ into the picturesque.”⁴¹ Kant’s “exciting curiosity” is engrained in the cultural practice of tourism by introducing as the picturesque is a mediator of the sublime. The replacement of fear with exciting curiosity allows for cultural intervention and narratives to produce moments of excitement and confrontation that can be challenged and overcome with ease.

Niagara’s precipice erodes annually, churning through ancient bedrock and sending an unfathomable volume of water over the precipice.⁴² The natural features surrounding the site do evolve, including the leading edge of the precipice, but the physical parameters of the site remain largely similar to those observed by Hennepin and other missionaries from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The iconic Canadian horseshoe-patterned falls erodes approximately one metre annually,⁴³ a number that has been greatly reduced over the past century with the establishment of water control dams, located upstream from the Canadian and American Falls, that divert water to power generation stations once night falls. The flow rate of the site is halved once the

41. Ibid., 67.

42. Courtesy of the “Niagara Falls Geology: Facts and Figures” provided by the Niagara Parks. Although Niagara Falls is not the tallest waterfall in the world (there are well over 500 other waterfall sites in the world that are taller than Niagara), what makes Niagara Falls so impressive is the amount of water flowing over the precipice at any one moment. The falls flows at approximately 100,000 cubic feet per second, which equates to over 2,800 tonnes of water.

43. Yuichi S. Hayakawa, “Factors Influencing the Recession Rate of Niagara Falls Since the 19th Century,” *Geomorphology* 110, no. 3 (September 2009).

nightly *Lights on the Falls* illumination display commences, cutting the flow rate down to 50,000 cubic feet per second.⁴⁴ These human interventions serve at least two purposes: to harness the inherent power of the site for the domestic comfort of nearly four million homes,⁴⁵ and to extend the well-secured image of the site for tourists and visitors. In either instance, this intervention on the site embodies the sublime becoming the picturesque through the direct reshaping of the site and its omnipotence towards the establishment of a predetermined desired aesthetic or visual quality.

Nelson Graburn, Maria Gravari-Barbas and Jean-François Staszak help connect concepts of mass tourism to the Kantian foundations outlined above. Kant wrote of the sublime's ability to "force the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace," "discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind" and "give us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature."⁴⁶ Kant demonstrates the sublime can only exist in an idealized world, shaped by imagination and ideas. Conversely, Graburn, Gravari-Barbas and Staszak claim that tourism's fictions, simulacra and virtualities are closely related to "tourist imaginaries which are the mental images

44. Niagara Parks, "Niagara Falls Geology: Facts and Figures," (2022), <https://www.niagaraparks.com/visit-niagara-parks/plan-your-visit/niagara-falls-geology-facts-figures/>.

45. NY Falls, "Power Generation," (2022), <https://nyfalls.com/niagara-falls/faq-4/>.

46. These three successive quotations are taken from Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, eds. Paul Guyer, trans. Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) §28, Nature as Might.

and stories that circulate about destinations.”⁴⁷ Graburn, Gravari-Barbas and Staszak go on to explain that these mental images and stories are embodied “individual and cultural fictions that relate to realities through memories, narratives and pictorial or virtual imagery.”⁴⁸ Kant’s iteration of the sublime dovetails with the study of architectural and infrastructural interventions that encircle sublime tourist landscapes, including the degree to which tourists engage with such interventions to challenge or test their limits.

House of Frankenstein, Castle Dracula, and Niagara’s other haunted attractions and scare mazes represent the large contingent of visual spectacles that entice tourists to “Come kill a little time”⁴⁹ while on their vacation to Niagara Falls. Just as the Burkean and Kantian iterations of the sublime dovetail into the eighteenth-century expeditions to Niagara Falls, I propose similar correlations between the recreational or fictional sublime and Niagara’s commercial attractions. First, on the role fear and terror play in the definition of the sublime: recent studies have focused on the notion of recreational fear⁵⁰ as leisure practices that can be classified as “engagement that ranges from mildly scary

47. Nelson Graburn, Maria Gravari-Barbas and Jean-François Staszak, *Tourism Fictions, Simulacra and Virtualities: Contemporary Geographies of Leisure Tourism and Mobility* (New York: Routledge, 2020): 1.

48. Nelson Graburn, Maria Gravari-Barbas and Jean-François Staszak, *Tourism Fictions, Simulacra and Virtualities: Contemporary Geographies of Leisure Tourism and Mobility* (New York: Routledge, 2020): 1.

49. Symetric Productions, “House of Frankenstein,” (2022), <https://www.houseoffrankenstein.ca>.

50. A 2020 field study and journal entry for *Psychological Science*, entitled “Playing With Fear: A Field Study in Recreational Horror,” explored how haunted attractions serve as illustrative examples of recreational fear, which alludes to people that voluntarily seek out frightening experiences in pursuit of enjoyment. Their findings shed light on how fear and enjoyment can coexist in recreational horror.

children’s activities, such as playfully being chased by a parent or caregiver, to full-blown horror media, such as horror films and haunted attractions, which remain prominent in popular culture.”⁵¹ Second, on the instance of security: Niagara’s haunted attractions and scare mazes—like many thrill-seeking and fate-tempting amusements—express no interest in placing their patrons in direct harm or danger. Countless disclaimers are dotted on promotional material, websites and even points of exit are relayed by staff members to parents, grandparents, and guardians. Niagara’s attractions are theatre for those willing to brave the crowds and price of admission.⁵² These scare attractions, steeped in the struggle between security and terror, are shown to echo the earliest definitions of the sublime while helping understand more contemporary reading and definition of the concept.

1.3 A More Sustainable Sublime

Another distinct iteration of the sublime that operates at Niagara emerges from the perspective that nature is the ultimate domestic product; a complete human construct.⁵³

51. Marc Malmdorf Andersen, Uffe Schjoedt, Henry Price, Fernando E. Rosas, Coltan Scrivner and Mathias Clasen, “Playing With Fear: A Field Study in Recreational Horror,” *Psychological Science*, 31, no. 12 (2020): 1497.

52. Continued exploration of pertaining to Clifton Hill attractions proves that when the haunted house and scare mazes tactics fall flat, they still inspire fear, with one particular 2018 internet review post by “Farley”: “To be perfectly honest the only thing scary about this place is the price.”

53. DeLuca and Demo’s research into Yosemite National Park, and the role of Carleton Watkin’s sublime photography, contribute to the founding of a wilderness vision that has shaped the contours and trajectory of environmental politics. Watkins’s images offered those who could not travel to El Capitan a glimpse of the land’s splendor without experiencing the fear or terror one would typically experience when standing at the base, or edge, of a natural wonder.

This version of the sublime embraces the notion that the human-nature binary can be flipped, which presupposes that humans possess the ability to scale or conquer nature. These connections predominantly emerge from environmentalist and conservationist circles, which are not at the core of my research framework but can nonetheless be used to rationalize the sometimes-peculiar interventions and treatments around tourist sites like Niagara Falls. The sublime landscape, as Burke first classified it, challenged the limits and wills of humans but the advancements in travel infrastructure, technology and the establishment of public safety standards have drastically altered what the sublime landscape can represent in a more contemporary context. This does not mean the sublime no longer exists, nor has the sublime been expunged from the site, rather, an up-to-date definition of the phenomenon is required.

Updated understandings of the sublime landscape, over the course of the nineteenth century inevitably led to domesticated understandings of nature and the sublime. Karl Marx argued in 1846 that nature is “a historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations.”⁵⁴ Marx infused nature into culture—in fact, he outright states nature *is* culture. This understanding of nature and of landscape has direct inroads to the sublime as it pertains to experiences in the physical world and has constructed what Brunner and Dawson term the recreational—or commercial—sublime. This version of the sublime proposes that humans hold the potential to conquer

54. Karl Marx, “The Illusion of the Epoch,” in *The German Ideology* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1988).

their fears and scale nature. Brunner and Dawson outline the influence that visual culture—in their case, environmental activist, and adventure travel film documentaries—has on constructing the idea that humans are a match for nature’s seeming omnipotence, going so far as to flip the dynamic to suggest that humans are stewards of its survival.

The root of Brunner and Dawson’s thesis rests on the effects of an over-simplified binary between humans and nature. When exploring the historical arc of corporate environmental advocacy groups operating under the guise of environmentalism, Brunner and Dawson propose that “our most revered nature photographers created a sublime that separated humans from nature” where “the two were conceived as incongruent and allowed for humans to settle in certain spaces with little regard to their impact because other spaces were being protected.”⁵⁵ Brunner and Dawson’s conclusions are reminiscent of William Cronon’s trouble with wilderness, which proposes that “wilderness is itself no small part of our culture’s problematic relationships with the non-human world.”⁵⁶ This human-culture binary is reinforced by the earliest definitions of the sublime and still permeates definitions of the sublime today, which hinge on hierarchical power dynamics. Sites like Niagara Falls undergo continued subjugation through visual culture via engravings, paintings, photographs, films, advertisements, and myriad other visual representations that tame the site to the point that the power hierarchy flips, threatening

55. Elizabeth A. Brunner and Veronica R. Dawson, “Marketing The Recreational Sublime: *Jumbo Wild* and The Rhetorics of Humans in Nature,” *Critical Studies in Media Communications* 34, no. 4 (2017): 390.

56. William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995): 69.

the disappearance of any notion of the sublime. The persistence of peculiar fear-inducing and adventure attractions represent a means to backfill the *perceived* loss of the sublime from the natural site.

Stacher's iteration of the sublime proposes an understanding of the sublime in a contemporary off-grid *adventure* tourism in the Swiss Alps, nevertheless, her work assists my research of Niagara. To Stacher, *adventure* is a highly coded term, for she notes that service centers and cellphones are never too far away in case "we need rescuing."⁵⁷ Remoteness and the escape from daily life is a cultural construct but it has effectively created an entire industry within contemporary destination tourism that tests "our 'power of resistance'...because we can measure ourselves not against the 'seeming omnipotence of nature' but against the omnipotence of a networked world, which we withdraw from for a while."⁵⁸ Stacher fully breaks the connection between the sublime and the rhetorical notion of an awesome physical world. Voyages to remote landscapes contrast daily urban life but the journey is, again, a cultural construct. The disparity between the two worlds is purely stored in the minds of those embarking on the journey.

Although Niagara's natural and leisure landscapes do not provide a space for the solitude, escapism or contemplation that Stacher explores in the Swiss Alps, its offering as a tourist destination is predicated on its ability to present moments that disrupt

57. Susanne Stacher, "Tourist Bubbles in the Alps: Sliding from the Sublime into Picturesque Worlds," in *Tourism Fictions, Simulacra and Virtualities*, eds. Maria Gravari-Barbas, Nelson H. H. Graburn and Jean-François Staszak (Routledge: New York, 2020): 82.

58. *Ibid.*, 83.

everyday experiences. *House of Frankenstein*, and other terror-themed attractions, rely on patrons to embrace the narratives that constitute the attraction. These narratives make obvious attempts to draw from the locale, such as *Castle Dracula*'s brooding wine cellar—an ode to the influx of estate wineries that have exponentially grown in nearby Niagara-on-the-Lake. A walk through the Clifton Hill tourist district is marked by the echoes of cackling creatures and mad scientists that hurl foreboding threats of the abomination and terror that loom behind the ticket gates. Interspersed between fun houses, scare mazes and family restaurants, these threats linger from sunrise to long after dark, 365 days a year. Like an unrelenting wave, there is no intermission; “Niagara Never Stops.”⁵⁹

1.4 *Spectacular* History

The *House of Frankenstein*, described in the opening anecdote of this chapter, not only contributes to the long history of attractions aimed at re-creating sensations of the sublime and bewilderment that Niagara Falls holds, but it opens the door to much of the natural and cultural history of the site. The attraction is perched at the top of Clifton Hill, a bustling tourist corridor that navigates a steep incline mere metres from the Niagara Parks Commission Parkway. *House of Frankenstein* has occupied the same location at the western-most point of Clifton Hill since its opening in late 1960s, when it was marketed as a wax museum. Promotional material dating as far back as the 1970s—

59. Niagara Parks, “Niagara Never Stops,” (2022), <https://www.niagaraparks.com/niagara-never-stops/>

cardstock brochures that double as cut-out masks for patrons (Figure 1.1)—connects to the Niagara Falls location.

Today, the *House of Frankenstein* marks the first of a half-dozen haunted houses and scare mazes, framed by a *Selfie Studio* to the west and *Burger King* to the east, that tourists must pass before capturing their first glimpse of the American and Canadian cataracts. Tourists embarking on Niagara Falls through the Clifton Hill tourist corridor are met with an eclectic mix of sights, however, the underlying themes of some of the attractions, including Frankenstein, reveal hyperbolic and clumsy allusions to science and technology. The green plaster and fibreglass façade of *House of Frankenstein* is fashioned in a manner that fits into James Whale’s “Hollywood Expressionist” Frankenstein Village and Watchtower film sets from the original 1930s films, which embraced embellished proportioning and other artistic licensure instead of rendering the setting as an homage to physical facts. Linda Bradley elaborates on this embellished “Hollywood Expressionist” aesthetic in her 2020 *South Atlantic Review* article:

The Frankenstein and the Universal horror films in general adapted chiaroscuro lighting, painted backgrounds, and “crazy” sets to intensify the spookiness, and Universal’s brand of “Hollywood Expressionism” essentially became the “horror picture.” Also pivotal to the genre and Universal’s success was the technological shift to “talking pictures.”...As products of this transition, Spadoni has pointed out, the earliest sound horror films initially struck audiences as eerie. Human figures on the screen were again rendered strange, out of kilter.⁶⁰

60. Linda Badley, “Hollywood Expressionism: James Whale's Frankenstein,” *South Atlantic Review* 85, no. 4 (Winter 2020): 18.

Frankenstein's screen adaptation in the early 1930s coincided with the transition to the sound era in film history. Synchronized sound, as it was originally referred to, did not come without technical difficulties. First, the correlation of the visual and audio did not align perfectly, presenting out-of-kilter figures that only contributed to the uncanny nature of the title character being alive, yet un-dead. Second, the laboratory—or watchtower—presented a stylized and melodramatic structure with exaggeratedly skewed walls and tilted shadows. Standing in front of the Clifton Hill *House of Frankenstein*, one might feel they are standing in front of a copy of a copy as the attraction refers to the original film set with its exaggerated proportions and forms, which appear more exaggerated against the adjacent contemporary buildings of stucco and brick. The tension extends to the façade of the attraction itself, where aluminum-and-glass storefront windows are crudely shaped into fibreglass-formed stone archways leading to a cavernous pit where the monster awaits (Figure 1.2). A crackling imitation Tesla coil looms over the void and every three minutes, the monster appears to the screams and shrills of the street-facing speakers.

Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein* is widely regarded as one of the “the first science-fiction novels, Gothic horror, tragic romance and parable all sewn into one towering body.”⁶¹ Her work still provides inroads and parallels to contemporary readership and culture, tackling such issues as artificial intelligence, scientific

61. Rebecca Laurence, “Why Frankenstein is the Story that Defines our Fears,” *BBC Culture*, (2018), <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180611-why-frankenstein-is-the-story-that-defined-our-fears>

advancement, familial abandonment, and broader societal rejection. *Frankenstein*—the film and Clifton Hill attraction—and Niagara Falls exemplify how narratives can conjure sensations of fear and “a sense of anxiety about what humans can do and particularly an anxiety about science and technology.”⁶² The anxiety that Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Niagara Falls share exploits the same human-nature binary I laid out earlier in this chapter. Both narratives experience what Brunner and Dawson classify as signs of domestication resulting from highly co-opted imagery utilized for commercial gain. Exploration of these similarities can help bring us closer to a more well-rounded definition of the recreational sublime or “sublime fiction.” Subsequently, a clearer understanding of attractions that surround Niagara, like *House of Frankenstein*, could further conceptualize definitions of the recreational sublime or “sublime fiction.”

Shelley’s *Frankenstein* was written over seventy years before Nikola Tesla and Industrialist George Westinghouse created the world’s first hydro-electric power plant at Niagara Falls in 1895. Tesla and Thomas Edison were engaged in a war of currents in the decades that preceded the 1895 contract, with each battling for their respective alternating and direct current electric power transmission technologies to be adopted throughout the rapidly developing North American urban landscape. This fascination with electricity-in-nature predates Tesla, Edison and even *Frankenstein*. Take, for example, Luigi Galvani’s eighteenth-century experiments aimed at utilizing electricity to reanimate dead frog

62. Ibid.

limbs,⁶³ operating under the theory that electric current courses through all human and animal life.

Galvani's work would eventually be cast aside, as it was found that the two differing metals used in his experiments were the cause for the electrical current—not the animal or human tissue. Despite the scientific and factual holes in the Galvani's experiments, the possibility of resurrecting life through electricity had already taken hold of Shelley, who translated the potential of resurrecting the non-living to the climactic moment of her novel:

It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet.⁶⁴

One of the critical differences between Shelley's iteration of *Frankenstein* and the fantastical tales that don the big screen—even the first adaptations by Whale and Universal Studios—is captured in Shelley's quote above. Shelley focuses on the prospect of science supplanting the natural, and on the trials of the “mad scientist,” while big-screen adaptations focus on the monster and on the spectacle. Anyone familiar with the big-screen adaption of *Frankenstein* is familiar with the iconic quote “It's Alive!”⁶⁵, although Shelley's original novel does not include such a proclamation—Shelley's

63. Marcello Pera, *The Ambiguous Frog: The Galvani-Volta Controversy on Animal Electricity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

64. Mary W. Shelley, *Frankenstein*, (Delaware: Prestwick House, 2005): 47.

65. *Frankenstein*, directed by James Whale (Universal Studios, 1931).

version does not even include Dr. Frankenstein's lab assistant Igor. The monstrous success of Whale's 1931 film, starring a young Boris Karloff as the creature, secured the story's longevity but obscured Shelley's version of it.⁶⁶ Christopher Frayling captures the pitfalls of a domesticated narrative below:

Frankenstein [the film] created the definitive movie image of the mad scientist, and in the process launched a thousand imitations...it fused a domesticated form of expressionism, overacting, an irreverent adaptation of an acknowledged classic, European actors and visualisers—and the American carnival tradition—to create an American genre. It began to look as though Hollywood had actually invented Frankenstein.⁶⁷

The inroads to Niagara Falls' visual history are unavoidable here, from the infusion of a domesticated form of expression resulting in a spectacle to the outcomes of co-opted visual imageries. *Frankenstein* and other Niagara Falls scare-attractions on Clifton Hill envisage narratives that allude to human-nature binaries, which stitches the writing of Burke, Kant, Brunner and Dawson, and Stacher together. Niagara's vast and appropriated visual history blurs the lines of distinction between fact and fiction, source and copy, and the sublime and recreational sublime.

The *House of Frankenstein* attraction, like the experience of Niagara Falls in a contemporary leisure travel context, encourages connections to the recreational sublime

66. Rebecca Laurence, "Why Frankenstein is the Story that Defines our Fears," *BBC Culture*, (2018), <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180611-why-frankenstein-is-the-story-that-defined-our-fears>.

67. Christopher Frayling, *Frankenstein: The First Two Hundred Years* (London: Reel Art Press, 2017).

in that the attraction, like the natural site, presents tensions around the staging of an awe-inspiring moment that also holds the opportunity to scale and surmount it. The attraction encourages visitors to conquer their fear or apprehension, albeit through elaborately staged and fictionalized animatronic creations set to decades-old audio recordings and imagery. The result is a cultural spectacle with inferences to source material—novel and film—so that the reactions and connections to the experience are infused with a mixture of nostalgia and terror. Furthermore, the attraction does not pose any danger to its visitors, aside from customary pop-up scare tactics and cackling sound recordings aimed to raise the soul’s fortitude⁶⁸ above its usual middle range before re-entering the Clifton Hill tourist district or Niagara Parks Commission corridor.

The next section explores other forms of Niagara’s sublime, rooted in human spectacles of daredevil feats and funambulism. This exploration uncovers at least two additional iterations of the sublime; the European and the American. Both iterations of the sublime not only show respective inroads to current treatment of the site, today, but they also close the perceived gap between how popular natural sites are documented and disseminated, irrespective of technological trappings or advancements over time.

1.5 A Daring Walk

It had been on the news for a little while and there was some excitement brewing. This had been an ongoing story, building up over the course of a few years, but it was finally

68. See Immanuel Kant’s writing in his *The Critique of Judgement*, where objects ‘raise the soul’s fortitude above its usual middle range and allow us to discover in ourselves an ability to resist which is of a quite different kind...’ (sect.28).

happening, and it was happening right at the brink. It was almost time, and we had turned the television on. Nobody was sure how long it would take, and everyone had been watching the weather—Nik Wallenda was about to embark on his high-wire walk across the American and Canadian Falls.

“What if it rains? What does it matter! He’ll get wet anyway!”

Wallenda was out on a high-wire, taugth over the Falls, connecting Niagara Falls, New York to Niagara Falls, Ontario. News stations were reporting, and the crowd was growing in size. Something like this really hasn’t taken place at the Falls in a long time — *legally*.⁶⁹

Suddenly, and without hesitation, it just made sense to be there. As if deep down we knew we’d end up going: “I’ll get the bikes.” We had to move fast because this thing was about to happen. We couldn’t ride hard enough. Our wheels couldn’t spin fast enough. This stretch of the parkway is usually the quieter side; but not tonight. I’ll never forget the locals, peddling toward the brink, with an electric excitement. You could begin to see the glow of the massive spotlights that had been set up to televise the event.

Did I really want to be here, to witness this? I couldn’t tell if I was nervous, anxious, scared, or excited. Would I cower as I did so many years ago at the *House of Frankenstein*?

69. Charlie Gillis 2011 *MacLean’s* article titled “Things You Can’t Do at Niagara Falls” outlines the many acts or “stunts” prohibited by the 126-year-old Niagara Parks Commission panel, which includes tightrope walkers, balloonists, river swimmers, kayakers and assorted thrill-seekers seeking a taste of notoriety.

We continued making our way into the crowd, deeper and deeper. I inched a little bit closer and there I was, standing right below the platform on the Canadian side of the misty chasm—the terminus of Wallenda’s eighteen-hundred-foot-walk from Goat Island in Niagara Falls, New York to the Table Rock House viewing concourse. The crowd was stirring, and the final uphill climb to the platform was underway.

We collectively held our breath; Niagara and the rest of the world watching. Moment by moment. Step by step. Ultimately, the crowd couldn’t be controlled, and a whirl of emotion was released as he set foot on Canadian soil—he made it across! Cheers, cries, and excitement filled the air.

1.6 Two More Sublimes—At Least

Niagara Falls has long attracted risk-takers and daredevils, extending the spectacle of the site from the powerful display of nature’s omnipotence and enveloping mists to feats of human strength and fortitude. Niagara’s thrill-seekers support Brunner and Dawson’s full definition of the recreational sublime which not only exposes “tensions between the recognition of nature as awe-inspiring and the desire to enter, scale and surmount it”⁷⁰ but proposes “humans as limitless” and “immune to fear.”⁷¹ Wallenda’s meticulously-planned high-wire walk across the mouth of the American and Canadian waterfalls opens two distinct areas of my research, both of which explore how representations and

70. Elizabeth A. Brunner and Veronica R. Dawson, “Marketing the Recreational Sublime: *Jumbo Wild* and The Rhetorics of Humans in Nature,” *Critical Studies in Media Communications* 34, no. 4 (2017): 388.

71. *Ibid.*, 388.

accounts of Niagara Falls struggle with conveying a sublime nature without diminishing it. First, Wallenda's walk draws on the idea that nature provides obstacles or barriers to overcome; reinforcing the human-nature dynamic outlined above. Second, commercialization and commodification of leisure landscapes like Niagara Falls create tensions between forces of preserving and commercializing a sublime narrative.

A 2011 *Maclean's* article suggested that the greatest obstacle that Wallenda faced on his 670-metre trek across the Niagara Gorge was not posed by the rocks, swirling winds or mists, but rather, by the "bureaucratic challenges"⁷² created by government bodies and commissions that mark both sides of the bi-national wonder. Niagara Parks Commission appointees, twelve of whom were responsible for the approval of Wallenda's proposal on the Canadian side of the Niagara River, noted that neither the famous Wallenda name nor the vision of the spectacle would sway their vote. Acting commission chair, Janice Thomson, was quoted as saying "it's sensationalism, and that's not what the falls is supposed to be about...it's supposed to be about the natural beauty of the river and recognizing the preservation of the environment that it's in."⁷³ Spectacles like Wallenda's walk complicate the self-imposed role of stewardship and preservation of landscape, which recall the tensions between preservation and consumption outlined by Brunner and Dawson's recreational sublime.

72. Charlie Gillis, "A Daredevil's Toughest Challenge: The Latest of the Flying Wallendas Wants to Walk a High Wire Over Niagara Falls. Authorities Are Balking, Though Not Out of Concern for his Safety," *Maclean's* 124, no. 31 (August 15, 2011): 19.

73. *Ibid.*, 19.

The establishment of the Niagara Parks Commission, and other agencies whose goals include the preservation of the history, landscape, and culture of the region, undoubtedly help establish and maintain the familiar and recognizable images of the site. The throngs of visitors and locals who embark upon the site are a testament to the visual and experiential understanding of it in tourism and leisure circles, however, the image of Niagara as a purely beautiful and pleasurable experience only tells a portion of the story. As Burke's sublime suggests, awesome and powerful landscapes produce conflicting sensations of pleasure and pain, and discourses around Niagara undoubtedly draw from both sensations. Adam Hallett explores the role that guidebook and travel writers held in not only navigating the conflicting notions of pleasure and pain, attraction and terror, and beauty and sublime but how these dialectics still pervade and inspire filmmakers, writers, artists and daredevils today.

Hallett presents two sublimes at Niagara, the European and the American, which are not intended to suggest opposing or contrasting iterations of the phenomena. In fact, his two sublimes complement each other to give a clearer picture of the conflicting sensations that landscapes present to visitors. Hallett explores Niagara Falls and the "problematic prospect of coming to terms with the site as a commercial and tourist destination,"⁷⁴ uncovering the struggle with promoting unique landscapes while preserving their originating character and image. Hallett draws upon written accounts

74. Adam Hallett, "Made of the Mist: Nineteenth-Century British and American Views of Niagara II," *Literature Compass* 11, no. 3 (2014): 173.

from European (Frances and Anthony Trollope) and American (Nathaniel Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller and Charles Dickens) writers to inform his iterations of the sublime.

The European sublime, first, is rooted in a search for “tranquility at Niagara and emphasized the need to be alone with one’s thoughts.”⁷⁵ This iteration of the sublime exists in myth and through the imagery and descriptions promised through literature. Placing the notion of the sublime on a focused site or locale, like Niagara Falls, elevates the place to that of a shrine or “holy site.”

The European sense of a holy site as being a man-made shrine is transplanted across the Atlantic to a natural location. This demonstrates something predating the European shrines as a rediscovery of something which has always belonged to Europeans by right, suggesting implicitly the themes of Manifest Destiny (with Americans destined, by grace of God, to spread across the continent) and America as a promised land (with the Europeans having finally found a new Eden in which to settle).⁷⁶

Hallett draws upon colonial studies in his distinction of the European sublime, above, by connecting the “tranquility” of sublime sites like Niagara Falls with the ideas of “shrines” and “discovery.” The initial images, accounts and experiences of Niagara Falls cannot be conducted without an understanding of the cultural and social factors involved in European colonization of the lands that would become North America. Frances and Anthony Trollope’s nineteenth-century accounts of Niagara Falls emerged long after

75. Adam Hallett, “Made of the Mist: Nineteenth-Century British and American Views of Niagara II,” *Literature Compass* 11, no. 3 (2014): 182.

76. *Ibid.*, 174.

Europeans first mapped Niagara Falls, although the complicated notion of the sublime landscape had already been ascribed to Niagara Falls by the time they embarked on their journey. Frances Trollope's 1830 journey to Niagara Falls was carried out through the newly established, and efficient, canal system connecting Lake Ontario to the Niagara Region. Trollope "imaged herself as a pilgrim completing an arduous journey,"⁷⁷ with her own account noting:

We felt every cup of coffee as a sin, so impatient were we, as we approached the end of our long pilgrimage, to reach the shrine...placed at such a distance from her worshippers on purpose to try the strength of their devotion.⁷⁸

Trollope speaks of Niagara with reverence, as if a visit to the site confirms some procession or pilgrimage to a sacred site. Hallett's European sublime relies on an advancement in aesthetics to transform Niagara from a site of terror to a pilgrim shrine.⁷⁹ The European sublime is rooted in a colonial understanding of the human-nature dialectic where cultural interventions and technological advancements are imaginatively

77. Adam Hallett, "Made of the Mist: Nineteenth-Century British and American Views of Niagara II," *Literature Compass* 11, no. 3 (2014): 173.

78. Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans: 1832* (Stroud: Nonsuch Publishing, 2006): 294.

79. Patrick McGreevy's 1994 text *Imagining Niagara: The Meaning and Making of Niagara Falls* alludes to the conferral of Niagara Falls as a "pilgrim shrine" by Pope Pius IX in 1861, an act which created a cultural and religious link between the Old World and Niagara. Such affirmations by the Catholic Church, in part, help understand how Niagara Falls evolved from a site of fear and repulsion to one of attraction and admiration from the seventeenth century to now.

stripped away⁸⁰ to present an iteration of the sublime that suggests humankind is the limitless entity, capable of scaling and harnessing what otherwise seems insurmountable.

Before Wallenda made his 2012 trek across the Niagara Gorge on a two-inch-wide wire, it had been well over a hundred years since any daredevil or stunter was permitted to carry out the act. Jean François Gravelet, better known as Charles Blondin, was the first to successfully achieve the feat in 1859. Blondin was billed as the “‘hero of Niagara’ in a geographical association elided with the perception of Niagara Falls as the eighth wonder of the world, to evoke a larger idea of an imaginary nature.”⁸¹ Blondin’s achievement symbolized a conquering or surmounting of nature that embodied nineteenth-century Euro-centric aesthetics and the sublime. Edward Ziter builds on Blondin’s walk across Niagara, proposing that conquering nature is rooted in cultural and historical studies that mark an evolving “spatial logic” that becomes “a principal space for the creation and dissemination of the modern geographic imagination...adopting an emerging conception of geography...at a time when new racial theories were coming to the fore.”⁸² The idea that Euro-centric culture is, somehow, responsible for nature’s preservation and the sole proprietor in enforcing lines of geography is crucial to developing an understanding of the sublime that works in both past and current Euro-centric contexts.

80. Adam Hallett, “Made of the Mist: Nineteenth-Century British and American Views of Niagara II,” *Literature Compass* 11, no. 3 (2014): 173.

81. Peta Tait, “Blondin Conquers Nature and Invents the Circus Celebrity,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 11, no. 3 (2013): 206.

82. Edward Ziter, *The Orient on the Victorian Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 18.

The inherent tension between the hierarchy of race in geographic imagination and the responsibility of preservation is a Euro-centric creation. The notion of preservation is further complicated by the idea that a culture could *conquer* nature, particularly in the historical context of Blondin's 1859 feat. A corollary can be uncovered, for example, in the extractive way that negotiations of treaties over how Indigenous lands were to be governed. Blondin and Wallenda's achievements extend beyond a singular figure crossing the daunting and cavernous void as they provide a concrete example that humankind—a Euro-centric iteration of humankind—is a match for nature's omnipotence. By means of reverse osmosis, the billowing mists transpose Blondin and Wallenda's triumphs to their captivated onlookers and spectators. Blondin and Wallenda represent the perceived dominance of culture over nature by showing that humans can conquer nature, while Niagara Falls sets the stage.

The concept of the American sublime at Niagara was, first, extensively studied by literary and history professor Elizabeth McKinsey, who established the foundations of a sublime that moved beyond European aesthetic and moral musings towards the recognition, and acceptance, of the site as a symbol of a growing technological and commercial enterprise. These conclusions were founded on a growing definition of the sublime that was far more democratic and inclusive compared to its previous iterations, which is confirmed by Donald Pease:

the dissemination of the sublime in America, its access to every American rather than merely an aristocratic elite as was the case in Europe, proclaimed the revolutionary democratic character of the sublime sensibility.⁸³

This understanding of the sublime reaches into history and connects the early cultural productions and accounts of Niagara Falls from the nineteenth century to the treatment and consumption of the site today. Halett proposes that the earliest descriptions and images of Niagara were problematic because there was no precedent of a waterfall within Europe to compare scale-wise, leaving opportunity for hyperbole and outright exaggeration. There are, of course, other great waterfall sites across the world that provide larger uninterrupted plunges, greater flow rates and longer crest expanses, however, none of these sites carry the same notion of “discovery” in the settler colonialist context of North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The use of language and descriptors, albeit colourful and imaginative, did not evolve or change during the earliest distribution of written and visual accounts of the site, posing “the problem of language which confronts the author at Niagara: specifically, the lack of a new vocabulary for the landscape.”⁸⁴

The American sublime does not rely on language or visual conventions that revolve around the singular figure embarking or stumbling upon the vastness and greatness of an abundant force. Rather, this new iteration of the sublime “relies on other

83. Donald Pease, “Sublime Politics,” in *American Sublime*, ed. Mary Arsenberg. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986): 47.

84. Adam Hallett, “Made of the Mist: Nineteenth-Century British and American Views of Niagara II,” 173.

voices to construct it collectively.”⁸⁵ This iteration of the sublime is experienced collectively, by means of mass-produced or mass-distributed imagery. Accounts of Niagara that emerge from guidebooks, travel diaries, satirical commentary and social media platforms help form an iteration of the site—and the sublime. We find connections to Stacher’s “sublime fiction,” again, through the spatiality that is opened between the natural site and the recreations or interventions at the site. Stacher refers to architecture that extends or highlights the scale or expanse of the central sublime object—the Alps. In the case of Niagara, there is the central sublime object—the Falls—and a groundswell of social, cultural, and economic practices that echo the site’s sublime characteristics. Tall tales and hyperboles are not the only conventions that encircle Niagara. Cultural rites of passage like birth, death and, for some, marriage and the honeymoon⁸⁶ help present a version of the sublime that undoubtedly attracts and draws in a wider spectrum of visitors. The American sublime, in many ways, proves to be a precursor to the

85. Ibid., 173.

86. Writers like Karen Dubinsky (*The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls*, 1999), Patrick McGreevy (*Imagining Niagara: The Meaning and Making of Niagara Falls*, 1994) and Ginger Strand (*Inventing Niagara*, 2008) consider Niagara Falls as a network of natural wonder and human intervention, and after nearly three centuries of appropriation, the sampling that they draw upon is vast and diverse. They explore the development of anticipation and gratification at Niagara Falls through analyses of attractions, marketing campaigns, advertisements, jingle and/or commercials, as well as visitors’ responses to these seemingly endless cultural appropriations. Dubinsky’s work, in particular, explores the interplay of visual attraction, figuratively and literally, present at Niagara and its impact on a small industrial region. Dubinsky dives into the “the front line” (her own words) of Niagara, which is marked by a healthy inclusion of attractions and stories that convey what living around the world’s most famous address entails. She also gives priority to the role that locality and regionality plays in Niagara’s visual history, which escapes many of those who explore the site’s history under purely aesthetic means.

recreational sublime in its focus on experiences that veil and domesticate the physical dangers that plagued previous generations of visitors. The creation of captivating visuals, accounts and interventions by its visitors are perpetuated, ultimately seeking to validate one's attendance at the wonder.

Perhaps the earliest allusion to this practice was established by Mark Twain in his early 1870s visit to Niagara, where he sardonically wrote about visitors who posed in front of the site for a portrait: "there is no actual harm in making Niagara a background whereon to display one's marvelous insignificance in a good strong light, but it requires a sort of super-human self-complacency to enable one to do it."⁸⁷ Twain's satirical writing was not limited to tourists posing: he went on to equate the site to a Garden of Eden that fell from grace upon naming the site Niagara and littering the surroundings with "execrable names and offensive signs...NIAGARA FALLS PARK, THIS WAY TO THE WHIRLPOOL, CAVE OF THE WINDS THIS WAY."⁸⁸ Twain outlines the beginnings of the cultural practice of (reducing) Niagara Falls to a singular picture or image that, although making for a tidy memento for the tourist, becomes easily adaptable to the stories and narratives of its collector.

Niagara Falls was the subject of some of the earliest forms of photography during the nineteenth century. Tourists and visitors long explored and recorded the site through its seemingly endless views, where taking one's picture in front the great gulf, as a

87. Mark Twain, *The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain* (Garden City: Hanover House, 1957): 18.

88. *Ibid.*, 273-274.

memento or souvenir of the site, established a cultural rite of passage that still exists today. *Two Unidentified Men at Niagara Falls* (Figure 1.3), a tintype uncovered from a local Niagara historical archive, and *Horseshoe Falls, Niagara, from the Canadian Side* (Figure 1.4), an oil on canvas work by an unknown nineteenth-century artist, represent the cultural practice of setting up for a picture in front of the cataracts. The oil on canvas work *Horseshoe Falls, Niagara, from the Canadian Side* presents two non-descript human figures rendered into the dark foreground, which sharply contrasts with the torrents of vivid aqua-marine waters crashing over the precipice. Three chairs perched at the edge of the great gorge stand out in the foreground, awaiting tourists to pause along their trek, allowing visitors to appreciate the natural phenomenon that is presented before them; and even have their picture taken. The scene is one that describes how images of Niagara are made and how this image-making reduces the physical perils that plagued previous generations of visitors and replaces them with a domesticated way of seeing and relating to the landscape.

Two Unidentified Men at Niagara Falls (Figure 1.3) is an early photographic example that visualizes Twain's satirical accounts and marks the turn of experiences at Niagara Falls that provide all visitors the opportunity to take their own version of Niagara home. Twain's observations, rooted in actual cultural practices, reinforces the prospect of the sublime discourse by placing humans as superior to nature, suggesting that leisure practices are super-human traits capable of flattening obstacles presented by nature. Viewing Niagara Falls as a flattened object only compresses its vastness—literally and figuratively, in terms of the wide-ranging visual examples and media—into a fragmented version where its creator is free to impart their own meaning or program. The means of

the American sublime, s introduced by McKinsey above, differs from the European sublime by replacing philosophical and aesthetic musings with domesticity and democracy. The images and mementos that surround Niagara Falls are mass-produced and mass-distributed. The result is a definition of the sublime that gives way to the commodification of nature; and in the case of Niagara Falls, a canvas for creators of attractions and spectacles to display our peculiar relationship with nature. The following chapter builds on the commodification of nature through the exploration of elaborate and clunky reconstructions of nature that attempt to draw upon the sublime aspects of the site that I have explored within this chapter.

Chapter 2

2 Fun for the Whole Family: Soaked in Simulacra

Grey overcast skies, scarcely dotted with white clouds, mark a mundane late morning in February. I am making my way to the brink. I use my Niagara Parks Commission parking pass to find the closest parking spot available to Table Rock House, the architectural beacon situated at the foot of the Falls, mere feet from the endless rushing and gushing of water over the Horseshoe Falls. As a local, but even if as a tourist, this proves to be a difficult task as you near the Falls themselves. I'm not particularly happy about having to brave the unforgiving and blasting cold winter winds to reach my destination, but there is no other way to reach the Falls.

You park, you pay, and then you walk.

Moments after my arrival, I carefully find my footing. It's *wet*.

The big blue transparent poncho isn't helping my mobility, as it tangles and finds its way awkwardly under my winter jacket sleeves and hood. It's a bit dark but I can catch a glimpse of what I've come to see. A small crowd of people huddle together, and another group passes by, but I manage to find a small pocket of space, that prized view, the place you need to be to really take it all in.

I reach out and grab the rail. Secured. *Here I am, right at the front!*

I begin to feel vibrations beneath my feet, which prompts me to hang on a little bit tighter. Immediately, I realize my view is obstructed by mist, and my poncho begins to

tack itself to my face. I feel the hair on my forehead, now slick, beginning to drip with water. My eyes blink through this sudden torrent of atmosphere. I can hear a voice exclaim: *What can I say about Niagara Falls? It has already been written about so much, that there is nothing new to say about it.* The stories around Niagara never seem to escape themselves; recounted in every tourist pamphlet and historical guidebook.

I stand there and wonder. This all feels *so* familiar.

Large thundering roars continue to fill the space, while those around me laugh, gasp, and share exclamations of wonder and awe. It begins to snow. Large, sudsy snowflakes catch a bit of cool wind, creating a misty slurry of fog and makes it rather difficult to see anything.

All I'm left with is noise.

A few moments pass, and the strange combination of snow and mist begins to subside. The light seems to shift rather suddenly, and I can see again. A series of eight automatic doors open and the 360-degree and four-dimensional cinema reveals itself. The complicated network of lighting, fog machines, plumbing lines and ventilation ducts loom overhead as the mists subside. A ten-foot-high perimeter screen that encircles the metal grate platform is separated from the perimeter walls by a large moat. A loud voice booms over the intercom directing participants to watch their step, as the ground is wet and covered in foam. A spectacle of smoke and mirrors. My eyes catch the recognizable red glowing haze of the exit sign and I head out of the attraction. I'm greeted with my second view of the main gift shop, where thirty minutes earlier I bought my tickets for *Niagara's Fury*, a unique year-round four-dimensional attraction, located just feet from

the great cataract itself. Walls of souvenirs are made to be the first order of business, upon exiting the attraction, but afterward, if you're willing, just steps beyond a silencing expansive, double-paned atrium window, an enormous, thundering, and misty waterfall awaits your arrival- and if you're lucky, you might even catch a rainbow.

2.1 Introduction

There are several ways to analyze the sophisticated visual culture spectacles that encircle Niagara Falls, all set in close proximity to the actual Canadian Horseshoe Falls, nestled into the Table Rock Welcome Centre or along the Niagara Parks Commission Corridor. First, one might consider the authenticity of the actual corporeal experience one can have in four-dimensional arenas, like *Niagara's Fury*. In an aspirational manner, the elaborate human-made reconstruction is an ode to nature's power. In this analysis, the vastly differing scales and forces between humanity and nature quickly reveal *Niagara's Fury* as a meagre copy of the original, an unapologetic copy, that nevertheless embodies an entirely lucrative tourist industry predicated on the creation of attractions that, convincingly or not, aim to recreate experiences found in nature.

Second, one can take an entirely different approach by exploring Niagara Falls' attractions in light of multi-billion-dollar enterprises like Disney and Universal Studios, where amusement park rides and attractions benefit from a pre-determined knowledge of the themes and motifs at play. Here, the importance of the "Opening Scene" and "World-Building" come into focus, as they both shape and frame the narratives surrounding *Niagara's Fury*. Third, one can examine moments where prevailing narratives and cultural intervention perfectly align with the natural site, resulting in a "Convincing

Fake” that creates an indelible mark on the landscape. Fourth, although attractions and recreations may clearly fall short of creating a convincing copy of the original, simulated-environment tourist attractions remain popular and continue to generate revenue. The emergence of attractions that attempt to recreate the real, from four-dimensional experiences and wax attractions, waiver between the convincing and the ridiculous. To illustrate this, one of Niagara’s long-standing tourist attraction typologies, the wax museum, presents examples of varying accuracy and likeness to their sources of inspiration, often gaining prominence for their kitsch or camp value; supporting the idea that everybody likes a “Good Fake.”

What appears to be a quiet off-season visit to a tourist trap, like *Niagara’s Fury*, is in fact a comprehensive visioning of a visual culture spectacle. Multiple interconnected stories are presented as visitors work their way to the coveted Niagara Table Rock outcropping to gaze upon the raging waters with their own eyes. This chapter focuses on the elaborate representations, recreations, and attractions that surround natural wonders like Niagara Falls. Ranging from convincing to unapologetically fake, I explore examples of simulated-environments, stage sets and wax museums through the lenses of authenticity, aura, likeness, uncanny, presence and absence. Questions that drive this area of my research include: what are the implications of interaction with natural surroundings and natural wonders when clumsy, even campy, human-made environments surround them? How do elaborate fabrications and copies of nature’s effects secure a new relationship with the surrounding physical world? And finally, what are the implications when culture’s impressions of nature are buffered by media, technology, and modern modes of travel?

2.2 The Unapologetic Fake

Niagara Falls has long been associated with, and surrounded by, attractions that seek to highlight or extend the notable experiences promised by the landscape itself. This is best reflected in the attraction *Niagara's Fury*, a four-dimensional film presentation of the Horseshoe Falls, set near the actual cataract, nestled into the Table Rock Welcome Centre since the summer of 2008. *Niagara's Fury* contributes to the popularization of the site today as a tourist destination, where daily commercial operations intersect with natural spectacle, natural phenomena, technology, and advertising. *Niagara's Fury* weaves the traditional tourist information film, found at many iconic natural sites, with immersive and multi-sensory recreations of Niagara Falls and the surrounding Niagara River. The proximity of the four-dimensional, multi-sensory recreation of Niagara Falls, so close to the natural site, presents tensions regarding experience, reality and authenticity with the immediate and most obvious tension being that four-dimensional (4D) attractions and experiences seek to make convincing replications of the real world. The fourth dimension, as reflected in *Niagara's Fury*, alludes to the added plane of sensorial and phenomenal effects that immerse the viewer *in* an experience. The second inherent tension pertains to the relatively close physical proximity of *Niagara's Fury* to the natural site and the great distance felt, sensorially, when patrons enter the elaborate four-dimensional theatre versus their actual physical encounter with the famous cataract.

Niagara's Fury, and other 4D attractions, exemplify a growing trend of tourist attractions that attempt to extend beyond mere visual experiences. Attractions are

undergoing a “performance turn”⁸⁹ which marks the larger development in tourism that seeks “new metaphors based on being, doing, touching and seeing rather than just ‘seeing.’”⁹⁰ Tourism, as a merely visual or spectator exercise, has resulted in growing boredom and general disinterest in a contemporary digital culture where images and pictures are consumed routinely. Gazing upon a natural wonder is not enough. Tourist activities have evolved since Urry’s first exploration of the purely visual exploration of tourist culture in 1990, which he addresses in his latest iteration of his iconic text *Tourist Gaze*. Urry describes the growing trend of new attractions and simulations that explicitly seek to provide “active, multi-sensuous bodily sensations, affect and actions”⁹¹ that challenge and excite all of the senses. Urry’s arguments are supported by tourist destinations like Niagara Falls, where visitors navigate a terrain of attractions, advertisements, simulacra and simulations before laying their eyes upon the iconic cataracts.

The growing trend of attractions at Niagara Falls that aim to immerse visitors in elaborate simulations and obstacle courses have grown over the past decade with *Niagara’s Fury*, *Ripley’s Selfie Studio*, *4D Moving Theatre*, and *WildPlay Niagara Falls Whirlpool Adventure Course*, a 2019 addition to the many Niagara Parks Commission

89. John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc., 2011): 189.

90. Harvey C. Perkins and David C. Thorns, “Gazing or Performing?: Reflections on Urry’s *Tourist Gaze* in the Context of Contemporary Experience in the Antipodes,” *International Sociology* 16, no. 2 (June 2001): 189.

91. John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc., 2011): 190.

attractions that promises “a fun and thrilling experience of suspended obstacles and ziplines next to the world-famous Niagara Whirlpool and Niagara Gorge.”⁹² *WildPlay Niagara Falls Whirlpool Adventure Course* promises a multi-sensory and performative experience adjacent to one of Niagara’s natural wonders:

A fun and thrilling experience of suspended obstacles and ziplines next to the world-famous Niagara Whirlpool and Niagara Gorge. Three self-paced courses include dozens of climbing, ziplining, jumping, and swinging aerial games. Our cliff-side Courses are a totally new and unique way to have a Niagara River adventure and discover the lost art of monkeying-around! CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE!⁹³

Like *Niagara’s Fury*, *WildPlay Niagara Falls Whirlpool Adventure Course* draws inspiration from the churning waters of the Niagara River Gorge, however, the disparity between creations of nature and humankind are quickly made evident. The written advertisement for *WildPlay Niagara* combined with photography that greatly foreshortens the proximity of the attraction to the surrounding gorge, promises a deeply immersive experience in nature. The near-ninety degree turn of the Niagara River produces some of the most aggressive, and powerful, rapids in the entire world⁹⁴ with no shortage of nature trail routes to descend upon the raging waters; access can be achieved via Niagara Parks Commission’s *Upper Whirlpool Trails*, *Whirlpool Beach* and *Niagara Glen Nature Centre* or *Whirlpool State Park* on the American side of the Niagara River.

92. WildPlay Niagara Falls, “Whirlpool Adventure Course,” (April 13, 2020), <http://niagarafalls.wildplay.com/whirlpool-adventure-course/>.

93. Ibid.

94. Niagara Parks, “White Water Walk,” (April 12, 2020), <https://www.niagaraparks.com/visit/attractions/white-water-walk/>.

WildPlay is precariously placed between overflow parking lots for the nature trail routes, ticket booths, the Niagara Parks Commission Golf Course and the Whirlpool Aero Car lookout platform, all of which are selectively omitted from promotional material and photography (Figures 2.1 to 2.4).

Urry, in the *Tourist Gaze 3.0*, explores the problematizing aspects of the use of ‘art’ in advertisement of popular culture media and products (from free downloadable music to reality television whose sheer existence hinges on viewer-engagement) within a ‘commercial culture’ that rests on a problematized distinction between ‘representations’ and ‘reality.’⁹⁵ The manner in which a commercial culture establishes meaning and connotation is becoming increasingly visual and referential to objects, or images of objects, that are not the actual source of desire or interest. In the case of Niagara Falls, specifically, the establishment of a broad cultural understanding of the site is steeped in the myriad attractions, casinos, museums, theme parks—even the fifty-kilometre long Niagara Parks Commission corridor—rather than the experience that the actual cataract promises to its visitors. Although seemingly counter-productive to the exploration of humankind’s relationship to the physical world, what results is a deeper and richer understanding of the relationship between ‘representations’ of iconic sites and the ‘reality’ of standing in the presence of those iconic sites. A question undoubtedly emerges: what do poor representations and recreations of iconic sites contribute, if anything at all, to understandings of iconic sites? Niagara Falls provides an array of

95. John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc., 2011): 99.

peculiar and campy attractions, yet it remains one of the most well-travelled sites in the world.

A visit to Niagara Falls, today, does not include the physical constraints and demands that plagued early explorers, thus removing many of the factors that inherently contributed to tourism as ‘active, multi-sensuous bodily sensations, affect and actions.’ This reality only suppresses the sensorial aspects of travel and replaces them with visual and rhetorical impressions of place; when the physical is suppressed, the visual backfills. Upon the establishment of leisure tourism, the sightseer appreciates the world through visually dominant media and methods, which include the train-car window, postcards sent to close friends, paintings hung on a gallery wall, hand-coloured aquatints from travel periodicals, family photo albums, Technicolour films and four-dimensional theatre attractions; all of which place value on the multi-sensorial experience and supersede physical engagement with the site. Representing nature confronts nature, which echoes Guy Debord, and his canonical text *The Society of the Spectacle*; “...all that was once lived has moved into representation.”⁹⁶ Jean Baudrillard’s 1983 text *Simulations* and short essay “The Ecstasy of Communication” from 1985 elaborate on the relationship between ‘representations’ and ‘reality.’ Baudrillard famously argued that we increasingly consume signs and representations which directly inform social order and identity through the exchange of sign-values.⁹⁷ What ensues is a world of sign and spectacle that

96. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994): 12.

97. John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc., 2011): 99.

functions without any sense of original or virgin material, instead operating as a ‘travel in hyper-reality.’⁹⁸ Umberto Eco proposes that everything in the hyper-real is a copy, or a text upon a text, which applies to sites like Niagara Falls: a landscape caught in its multiple histories even as new attractions are added.

Many of Niagara’s attractions that derive from or accentuate the nature’s power or beauty—*White Water Walk*, *Hornblower Niagara Cruises* (formerly *Maid of the Mist*) and *Whirlpool Aero Car*—have limited seasons due to the inconvenience of weather, temperature, and public safety. Simulated environment and four-dimensional attractions, like *Niagara’s Fury*, escape these logistical restraints, bring Eco’s ‘hyper-reality’ into practice through the presentation of an environment of effects. The attraction brings, or at least *attempts* to bring, every seasonal effect and weather pattern that happens at Niagara into a single twenty-two-minute experience that can be had year-round, by anyone willing to pay the price of admission. Separating itself even further from other attractions surrounding Niagara Falls, *Niagara’s Fury* does not depend on seasonal conditions in order to accommodate tourist surges. The attraction, in effect, proves the “flimsiness of reality”⁹⁹ by creating a depthless world immune from the forces of nature. Experiencing the attraction in the grips of February winter does not differ from a humid August afternoon. In addition to being open year-round, the twenty-two-minute film and four-dimensional experience runs at the top and bottom of the hour, from sunrise to sunset; an unrelenting force that challenges the great waterfall.

98. Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper-Reality* (London: Picador, 1986).

99. Scott Lash, *Sociology of Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1990): 15.

Table Rock House is the architectural beacon that marks the top of the Canadian cataract, serving as the gate between visitors and the natural phenomenon. The Table Rock House Gift Shop is the first experience that greets the majority of tourists to the iconic site, whether they embark upon the site via public transit or enjoy the comfort of their own vehicle. After crossing the pedestrian Bridge of Flowers or the 2020-renovated visitor's concourse, visitors are greeted by plush stuffed animals (Figure 2.5) that will ultimately guide them through the dazzling history of Niagara Falls in *Niagara's Fury*.

Once tickets are purchased, the wait can be anywhere from mere minutes to almost half of an hour—just enough time to venture down a ramp, past *Elements* restaurant and *Pop and Lolly's Candy Shop*, to the main visitor atrium where the awesome waterfall is framed through massive picture windows (Figures 2.6 to 2.7). From this vantage point, the entirety of the cataract is in front of the viewer, but the experience is soundless, and the frightening rumble reduced to a subtle vibration.¹⁰⁰ Before too many pictures can be taken from the atrium, *Niagara's Fury* awaits.

100. Soundscape Ecology is a recent development of ecological research that calls for the study of natural sounds in an ever-evolving landscape influenced by humans. Bryan C. Pijanowski's 2011 *Bioscience* article "Soundscape Ecology: The Science of Sound in the Landscape" posits that sounds are a perpetual and dynamic property of all landscapes and a natural resource with its own influence on sense of place, recreational, therapeutic, educational, research, artistic, and aesthetic value. Travel websites and online hotel reservation services today are filled with inquiries regarding the proximity of accommodations to Niagara's cataracts and the prospect of hearing the roar from their room connecting the long history that sound has played in humankind's understanding of Niagara Falls. The sounds around Niagara range from the desirable to the disruptive, nevertheless, they contribute to the full sensorial experience of the place.

After the admission tickets are scanned, ponchos are handed out to each guest with the disclaimer “you will get wet,” parents and guardians are advised to remove children from the theatre if the effects are too terrifying and all the patrons are herded into a large room where a massive, imperious, screen greets them. The mysteriousness of what is about to unfold builds, heightening expectations and anticipation. The animated picture is based around Chip the Beaver’s detention session, where he is tasked with writing a synopsis on the history of Niagara Falls. The most telling excerpt from this light, eight-minute film is during the first scenes when Chip exclaims, “But what can I say about Niagara Falls? It has already been written about so much, there is nothing new to say about it!” Chip’s declaration, albeit grossly oversimplified, speaks to the over-extraction of iconic landscapes through relentless exploration, documentation, and dissemination through varied media.

The remainder of the film collapses the last 10,000 years into distinct moments from history, introducing at each stage the characters that greeted visitors at the Table Rock Gift Shop. At this precise moment within the attraction, the distinct pedestrian pathway that leads patrons through the Table Rock Gift Shop reveals one of its purposes; to increase the likelihood of sales of the various stuffed animals, ceramic figures, keychains and t-shirts in the gift shop. Chip’s history of Niagara Falls simultaneously provides the condensed, Euro-centric, story of Niagara and enlivens the gift shop souvenirs with a narrative and backstory.

Upon completion of the twenty-two-minute film, a series of eight massive automatic doors pivot open, revealing the epicenter of the Table Rock House, the four-dimensional cinema. Cautionary instructions echo through the theatre: “Please find a

handrail to hold on to as the platform will rumble, and you will get wet.” To quote the Niagara Parks Commission tourism website directly, *Niagara’s Fury* promises:

The temperature will drop. Water will bubble and spray while snow falls all around. The moving platform beneath your feet will help you understand the power of Nature, while you are surrounded by stunning visuals along the mighty Niagara River.¹⁰¹

The “four-dimensional” experience interlaces visual aerial footage of the Horseshoe’s crest, as well as expansive pans of the upper and lower Niagara River, Gorge, and Whirlpool Rapids. An elaborate network of lighting, fog machines, plumbing lines and ventilation ducts looms overhead with a 360-degree perimeter ribbon screen encircling the metal grate platforms (Figures 2.8 and 2.9).

There is nothing natural about *Niagara Fury’s* landscape. The phases of the four-dimensional experience are loosely divided into historical and seasonal changes, from a blast of “snow”—a foam creation—to repeated surges of rain and fog from the massive structure overhead, to thunderous rumbles and lightning flashes. *Niagara’s Fury* presents two distinct offerings worth exploring, both of which illuminate broader cultural understandings of nature and landscape: the visual montage of aerial footage and flyovers, and the immersive and sensorially invasive effects created by the fabricated

101. Niagara Parks, “Niagara’s Fury,” (April 18, 2020), <https://www.niagaraparks.com/visit/attractions/niagaras-fury/>.

environment.¹⁰² *Niagara's Fury* displays how humans are limited in their capacity to mimic nature, resolved to make feeble copies of its effects rather than its structure.

Although the effects and environmental conditions created in attractions like *Niagara's Fury* fall short, compared to their corresponding natural wonder, the popularity of such attractions and interventions persist.

2.3 The Opening Scene

The montage of sweeping flyovers and drone footage of Niagara's precipice and raging rapids that accompany *Niagara's Fury* presents the environment in a manner that is impossible to experience by any vantage point or lookout surrounding the site, and in doing so, undoubtedly conjures unique images and perceptions of the site. The visual montage also extends the long visual history of competing unique and dazzling views of the site. In this regard, *Niagara's Fury* contributes to the "absolute cinema experience"¹⁰³ that pervades Niagara, in the sense that cinema experiments with perceptual interfaces and methods that seek to engage the audience in a more bodily invasive way.¹⁰⁴ Angela

102. Massimo Negrotti's text *The Reality of the Artificial: Nature, Technology and Naturoids (Studies in Applied Philosophy, Epistemology and Rational Ethics)* from 2012 is a vital tool in contextualizing simulated environments like *Niagara's Fury*. Negrotti outlines the disparities between humankind's tools and nature's processes, as outlined in two chapters entitled "Artificial Environments and Landscapes" and "Duplicating Reality." The critique put forth by Negrotti articulates that the fabrication of artificial weather effects, rain, snow and fog is "an undertaking which focuses on process over structure."

103. Angela Ndalians and Jessica Balanzategui, "'Being *Inside* the Movie': 1990s Theme Park Ride Films and Immersive Film Experiences," *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 84 (Fall 2019): 18.

104. *Ibid.*, 21.

Ndalianis and Jessica Balanzategui explore the continued persistence of theatrical-based exhibitions in the experience-based leisure economy that, even to this date, increasingly privileges a diverse range of immersive cinematic experiences. Everything from IMAX, to 3D and 4D experiences claim to offer the opportunity to be part of or “feel” the film¹⁰⁵, which distinguishes the media from other, competing, forms of digitization and expanded capabilities of home entertainment technologies that threaten the “death” of cinema.¹⁰⁶ Niagara Falls, as a tourist destination—more specifically, a natural wonder tourist destination—faces the same challenge to present new and unique ways to experience the iconic site.

Scott C. Richmond helps illuminate the correlation of developments in cinematic experiences and Niagara Falls by exploring the growing trend of twenty-first-century screen representations, digital and photochemical, that function as perceptual interfaces that attempt to convince us of the illusion of their constructed realities.¹⁰⁷ What Richmond concludes is that the use of flyover sequences extend beyond the simple creation of immersive effects of the moving image, rather, these types of sequences display how “...the impression of a world unfolding before us arises from the cinema’s perceptual modulation of its viewers.”¹⁰⁸ Richmond explains the impact of perceptual

105. Ibid., 18.

106. Haley Trowbridge, “Contemporary Film Distribution and Exhibition: A Review of Recent Studies,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 11, no. 2 (2013): 224.

107. Scott C. Richmond, “On Learning to Fly at the Movies: *Avatar* and *How to Train Your Dragon*,” *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 254.

108. Ibid., 254.

modulation through his own exploration of iconic and visually stimulating cinematic achievements such as *Avatar* (2009) and *How to Train your Dragon* (2010), whose immersive opening scenes greatly assist in setting the stage for a unique world. *Niagara's Fury* can be viewed as an “opening scene” to the experience of the *real* site; most first-time visitors to Niagara Falls are sure to pass through this attraction and base their initial understanding of the site on the views and vantages points established in the attraction.

The relationship between Niagara's attractions and the natural wonder itself also parallels the precepts of cinema's influence on broader perceptions and experiences of space. Visual representations of Niagara Falls—print media, advertisements, commercials and photographs—only tell a portion of the story, while the attractions and surrounding touristic experiences enliven the otherwise two-dimensional idea of the place. Kevin Ferguson argues that cinema has long been obsessed with, and challenged, notions of volume, due in large part to the inherent tensions and limitations of the media being bound to a flat, two-dimensional plane. These type of claims, Ferguson admits, are largely founded in the gross exaggerations of how the new “magical art” of the nineteenth century spellbound its audiences to the point that they found themselves “fleeing at the sight of an approaching train in one of the first motion pictures, *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de la Ciotat* (Auguste and Louis Lumière, 1896).”¹⁰⁹ Some of the earliest European accounts of Niagara Falls, like the Lumière brothers' films, challenged broader

109. Kevin L. Ferguson, “Volumetric Cinema,” in *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2019*, eds. Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003): 335-349.

understandings of volume and space, while also inciting similar sensations of recoil and fear. Father Louis Hennepin's written and visual accounts of Niagara Falls, for example, confronted the awesome and cavernous site with religious ideals that assumed the world was directly shaped by the sins and wrongdoings of its inhabitants. Hennepin went so far as to proclaim Niagara's cataracts and raging rapids as the ugliest thing that he had ever seen; cruel and disgusting, "a waste of broken volume."¹¹⁰ Hennepin would claim the site would cause visitors to literally recoil in its presence. The reactions to the Lumière brothers' film *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de la Ciotat* and Hennepin's documentation of the awesome wonder reveal how disruptions in the visual plane can disturb conventional understandings of space and the surrounding world. Hennepin's descriptions clearly exaggerated the scale and danger surrounding the site and spurred on numerous written and visual accounts of the expedition that were widely translated and distributed throughout Europe.

Hennepin's efforts culminated with a 1698 series of paintings and engravings that interpreted the awesome power and scale of the place as, undeniably, demonic in nature (Figure 2.10). Reading through Hennepin's accounts, Niagara Falls was a disturbing site to behold: "When one stands near the Falls and looks down into this most dreadful Gulph, one is seized with Horror, and the head turns round, so that one cannot look long or steadfastly upon it."¹¹¹ Both written and visual accounts incite fear, as reflected in the

110. *The Falls*. Directed by Kevin McMahon, (Toronto: The Ontario Film Development Corporation/Channel Four Films/Primitive Features, 1991), streaming video, <http://hotdocslibrary.ca/en/detail.cfm?filmId=12079>.

111. Louis Hennepin, *A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America, Extending*

male figure cowering in the bottom left corner of the work (Figure 2.11), with his hands to his head, contorted to fit into the strong black-and-white depiction of the Great Gulph. The composition is one that emerges in countless historical renderings of the site, with Hennepin's version marking one of the earliest such depictions of a visitor in an emotionally distraught state. The distribution of Hennepin's foreboding tales of his expedition through Niagara did not result in widespread trepidation or evasion of the place, rather, his accounts served as the "opening scene" for a century of expedition and travel, exclusively to Niagara, for the rare opportunity to set one's sights on the cataract and experience the physical challenges presented by an unfamiliar world.

2.4 World-Building

we must appreciate the cinema as itself a perceptual interface, a technology that manipulates its viewers.¹¹²

Scott C. Richmond

Richmond's quote, above, refers to early filmmakers who experimented with various cinematic methods that could engage audiences in more bodily invasive ways. The techniques surrounding Niagara Falls and its attractions are no different. Niagara Falls challenges perceptual and spatial boundaries, historically and currently, through the development of leisure practices that fixate on the visual and experiential characteristics

Above Four Thousand Miles Between New France & New Mexico with a Description [sic] of the Great Lakes, Cataracts, Rivers, Plants, and Animals: Also, the Manners, Customs, and Languages of the Several (London: Printed by Henry Bonwicke, 1699).

112. Scott C. Richmond, "On Learning to Fly at the Movies: *Avatar* and *How to Train Your Dragon*," *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 254-255.

of the site. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century planning and construction of architectural interventions along both sides of the Niagara River, for example, provide the starting point of a long history of the entrepreneurial competition to provide Niagara's visitors the perfect view of the natural wonder. The erection of camera obscuras, viewing platforms, observation towers and pagodas pitted developers and business owners against one another in a race for tourists' eyes, and wallets. With each architectural intervention pushing closer and closer to the edge of the gorge, tourists were guaranteed a new and exciting vantage point to consume the landscape, to counter the sublime and to expand the practice of colonialism.

Twenty-first century leisure and touristic experiences have evolved from the visual to the spatial and "four-dimensional," aiming to engage the viewer not only through sense of sight but through sound, smell, touch, proprioception, equilibrioception and thermoception.¹¹³ There are at least two avenues to analyze the effects of the four-dimensional and multi-sensory experiences surrounding Niagara, represented by attractions like *Niagara's Fury* and *Ripley's 4D Moving Theatre* (Figure 2.12); the first is how these types of experiences reinforce, or disrupt, the experience of the *real* site and second, how these types of experiences influence broader visual and spatial perceptions of nature, landscape and the physical world.

113. Angela Ndalianis and Jessica Balanzategui, "Being *Inside* the Movie': 1990s Theme Park Ride Films and Immersive Film Experiences," *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 84 (Fall 2019): 18.

Niagara’s multi-sensory tourist attractions and experiences differ slightly from the broader category of theme park-type rides, which can be attributed to the fact that Niagara’s attractions are situated right beside the natural site. This proximity creates an unavoidable dialogue between the source and its copies. Iconic theme-park rides that populate places like Disney’s Hollywood Studios and Universal Studios—see the incredible successes of *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids: Movie Set Adventure* (1990-2016), *Back to the Future: The Ride* (1991-2007) and *Terminator 2 3D: Battle Across Time* (1996-2017)—are copies of a different type of source material: blockbuster films. The respective box office success of each ride’s film franchise helps support the general awareness of the elements comprising the attraction. These attractions also benefit from a greater “narrative economy”¹¹⁴ and “world-building,”¹¹⁵ where:

the audience arrives at the attraction with the background story well in hand so that everything is instantly recognizable and easy to follow. With experience and background knowledge of all the characters, the audience recognizes the narratives instantly—even if it’s loosely delineated in the experience.¹¹⁶

Iconic natural sites, like Niagara Falls, are flooded with audiences that hold the “background story well in hand,” however, Niagara’s story is not as legible once the tourist embarks upon the site. Proximities between the elements surrounding Niagara Falls—Clifton Hill, Niagara Parks Commission Parkway, Table Rock House, Fallsview

114. Ibid., 24.

115. Ibid., 24.

116. Allen Yamashita, “Theatres of Illusion: The Continuing Evolution of Entertainment Simulation,” *Computer Graphics* 28, no. 2 (May 1994): 142-144.

Casino Resort—are not preloaded in patrons nor are the plethora of attractions that pop-up along pedestrian routes into and around the site. Although Niagara Falls benefits from a strong visual history, it does not possess an equally robust “narrative economy” rooted in the actual experience of the site. The widely circulated and immediately recognizable images of the place—conveyed through commercials, paintings, postcards, selfies, t-shirts and other memorabilia—only reinforce predetermined readings of Niagara’s story, while the eclectic mix of attractions and experiences do little to shake the entrepreneurial and commercial pitfalls of tourist traps. Theme-park rides and their corresponding blockbuster films are brought into comparison with Niagara Falls, here, because there are inroads to the visual and spatial understanding of originals and their copies; especially in the context of immediately recognizable international brands, including Ripley’s and Madame Tussauds.

The Ripley’s franchise, in particular, has maintained a strong presence within Niagara Falls and its Clifton Hill tourist corridor with various attraction and museums, including *Ripley’s 4D Moving Theatre*, *Ripley’s Believe it or Not! Museum* and *Louis Tussaud’s Waxworks*. *Ripley’s 4D Moving Theatre* alerts visitors to “Hang on tight!” as their “...state-of-the-art-theater will leave you hanging at the edge of your set! Let your senses run wild as you experience every bump, drop and turn.”¹¹⁷ These types of phrases are undeniably tied to the surrounding area and draw on the powerful cataracts and raging

117. Ripley Entertainment Inc., “Ripley’s Niagara Falls: Ripley’s 4D Moving Theater,” (April 22, 2020), <https://www.ripleys.com/niagarafalls/attractions/moving-theater/>.

rapids at the bottom of Clifton Hill, although *Ripley's* may have over-extended its promise. The theatre is comprised of moving bucket seats, 70mm wide high-resolution film, air vents to mimic blustering winds and 3D glasses. The attraction provides visitors two short films entitled *Rats Race* and *Winter Wipe Out*, which bear no resemblance or connection to the natural wonder—and render some lukewarm *Yelp* and *Trip Advisor* online reviews. The relatively unenthusiastic response to *Ripley's 4D Moving Theater* has less to do with the material execution of the attraction and more to do with the gross over-exaggerations and hyperbole of what tourists can expect. The use of strong language describing that a physically jarring encounter is about to unfold, paired with public safety warning trailers, sets up an experience that will undoubtedly fall short.

Earlier in this chapter, I proposed that attractions like *Niagara's Fury* can serve as the “opening scene” to the *real* site, which is to say that the attraction is successful in setting the stage for experiences that the natural wonder can provide. The infrastructure required to recreate nature's effects may be clumsy, borderline awkward, and the fabricated environment undoubtedly pales in comparison to the weather patterns, but tourists and sightseers are less prone to leave negative reviews as the experience bears *some* resemblance to what awaits them outdoors. This claim can be further extended to the plethora of attractions and rides that surround the cataract, as all of Niagara's attractions, for better or worse, contribute to the otherwise two-dimensional understanding of the environment perpetuated by images, renderings, and photographs. If nothing else, the terminology and experiential references conjured by Niagara's attractions are remarkably consistent and suggestive of a physically jarring and stimulating encounter.

The recreated effects of nature—snow, fog, mist, lightning, earthquake—only reinforce the desire for encounters that are truly indicative of the site, and to compress all the possible experiences one could have at Niagara Falls, simultaneously. Leisure-seeking tourists and sightseers, generally, never think about their own travel practices under a critical lens, as they are content to tour in an aura of mindless enthusiasm or delusion, praising and discovering those beaten tracks that rarely “exercise our brains.”¹¹⁸ Urry builds on art critic and curator Lucy Lippard, here, by arguing “how cultural forms are consumed...in a deeply distracted or preoccupied manner as opposed to a deeper, more reflective fashion.”¹¹⁹ Keeping in mind that the tourist’s first predominant experience of the Horseshoe Falls is perceived from routes that directly pass down Clifton Hill, through the Table Rock House or along the Niagara Parks Commission corridor, it is easy to lose site of the actual cataracts.

This is where *Niagara’s Fury* far exceeds *Ripley’s 4D Moving Theater*—and other attractions like *WildPlay Niagara Falls Whirlpool Adventure Course*—as the attraction reconstitutes a direct engagement with the power and scale of the natural site, albeit within modified perceptual boundaries. The (re)establishment of narratives and “world-building,” then, are left to all the unique and seemingly peculiar experiences that surround the site and grab the attention of the tourist. The handing out of the iconic Niagara Parks Commission blue poncho (Figures 2.13 to 2.14) and the public advisory

118. Lucy Lippard, *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place* (New York: The New Press, 1999): 4.

119. John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc., 2011): 98.

disclaimers that precede attractions like *Niagara's Fury*, for example, draw on narratives that directly pertain to experiencing the natural wonder, which pulls the tourist closer to experiences that resemble the *real*. Regardless of the variations in weather patterns or seasonal changes, or the nuisance of large crowds that can spoil one's visit to a well-trodden site, tourists partake in the tradition of putting on the iconic blue poncho and getting sprayed with foam and mist.

2.5 The Convincing Fake

The *Rainbow Cabins – Film “Niagara”* landmark (Figures 2.15 to 2.16) that currently dots the edge of the Niagara River, perched between *Hornblower Niagara Cruises* and Queen Victoria Park Restaurant, demonstrates the influence that a strong “narrative economy” holds in defining tourist and leisure spaces. The 1953 full-feature film entitled *Niagara* undoubtedly secured both Marilyn Monroe and Niagara Falls in the lexicon of twentieth century popular culture. As promotional print media, mostly billboards and film posters (Figure 2.17), proclaimed, both natural wonders represented a “raging torrent of emotion that even nature can't control!”¹²⁰ The film follows the story of Rose Loomis (Marilyn Monroe) and her plot to murder her weary suffering husband George (Joseph Cotton), a war veteran. In short, the manipulative Rose endeavors to use her young lover, Patrick (Richard Allan) to carry out her dirty work, but the plan to kill George completely backfires. George is no fool, but as a troubled man, he is completely enraged by her plot

120. Twentieth Century Fox, *Niagara*, (1953), promotional print poster, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0046126/mediaviewer/rm2754872320>.

and act of adultery, which he always suspected, and counters with a plan of his own. Caught in the middle of it all are newlyweds, Polly (Jean Peters) and Ray Cutler (Casey Adams), who serve as a point of contrast to Rose and George's relationship but more importantly, to anchor the story in its twists and turns. In the final scenes of the film, George, wrought with guilt after strangling Rose to death, captures the Cutler's fishing boat and presses towards the brink of Niagara Falls, not knowing that young Polly is still on board.¹²¹

Unlike Monroe's typical sweetly innocent roles, in this film she takes on the dark and tempting characteristics of Niagara when she portrays Rose Loomis as a seductive, calculating, and unsympathetic, ultimately drawing upon the archetypal femme fatale motif. Monroe's physical attributes are still highlighted within the film, but are activated within the sultry, and unhappily married, Rose, who becomes entangled in the lives of the young Ray and Polly Cutler (who are also vacationing to Niagara Falls). Ray and Polly are enjoying a long-overdue honeymoon and their youthful exuberance is contrasted with the tired marriage of Rose and George (Cotton). Rose is not only engaged in an extra-marital affair with Patrick (Allen) but she and her lover are plotting to murder George at Niagara Falls. Monroe's character is simultaneously central figure and backdrop—not

121. The *Niagara* film plot is drawn from various sources, including Carl Rollyson, *Marilyn Monroe: A Life of the Actress* (University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, 2014) and Robert Horvat, "Niagara (1953): Revisiting the Film Noir Classic Starring Marilyn Monroe," *Rearview Mirror*, (June 6, 2019), <https://rear-view-mirror.com/2019/06/06/niagara-1953-revisiting-the-film-noir-classic-starring-marilyn-monroe/>.

unlike Niagara Falls—in that she invokes the underlying tension throughout the film and serves as a contrast to the newlyweds, Ray and Polly.

Karen Dubinsky's analysis of Niagara Falls in mid-twentieth-century media—films such as *Niagara* (1953) and *To Catch a Thief* (1955)—not only connects the natural site to the honeymoon but delves deeper to connect the rite of passage to its heteronormative foundations. In doing so, she reinforces the notion that landscapes, and the promotion of them, are tailored to particular social, cultural, and political groups:

Mass travel meant mass honeymoons, and after the war the honeymoon became, like the automobile or television set, a standard, affordable consumer good. But what was being purchased had changed considerably. Public discussions of the honeymoon had expanded enormously after the war, as did the promotion and advertising efforts of the tourist industry at Niagara Falls... When a sophisticated Cary Grant declared to a young and petulant Grace Kelly in the 1955 film *To Catch a Thief*, "What you need is ten minutes with a good man at Niagara Falls," everyone knew he was not referring to sightseeing or nature appreciation. In the history of heterosexuality, the 1950s hold a special place. In that era, the dominant culture demonized the pathological homosexual; a sexual cold war helped to reinforce gender and sex-role conformity. But the emergence of the happy heterosexual also forms a key part of this story, and nowhere was this more evident than at Niagara Falls. In the reinvented Niagara Falls honeymoon of the post-World War II era we can see how changes in leisure time, family life, and consumption resulted in an altered experience of heterosexual companionship.¹²²

122. Karen Dubinsky, "'The Pleasure is Exquisite but Violent': The Imaginary Geography of Niagara Falls in the Nineteenth Century" *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 9.

One of Dubinsky's central pairings throughout *The Second Greatest Disappointment* hinges on the establishment of a primarily heterosexual experience at Niagara Falls and the longstanding undercurrent of disappointment in the actual physical site. Humor and quick wit, such as Grant's advice to Kelly above, and the commodification of the entirety of the natural site to that of an "automobile or television set" veils the far more covert goal of establishing conformity and predictability when visiting Niagara. My research within this section, and the remainder of the chapter, builds on Dubinsky's notion of the veil as a device to cover or obscure the natural landscape; another way of looking at the concept of the "fake" at Niagara. I approach the veil, or fake, in a more literal sense, by first examining the architectural and spatial modifications to the Niagara Parks corridor that simultaneously mislead visitors to the site yet inspire their interest. This idea extends further into the chapter when the visitors still willingly flock to the site when presented with obvious fakes or copies.

Like the successes of Disney Hollywood Studios and Universal Studios attractions outlined in the previous section, the atmosphere and fantasy portrayed by iconic films and film franchises help establish the "narrative economy" and "world-building" that guide visual and spatial experiences. *Niagara*, a film-noir, was filmed in Technicolor, which is a contradiction of terms¹²³ not only in the literal sense of a "dark" film presented in colour, but that most early film-noir (pre-1950s) were low budget projects and were rarely recorded with new technologies. Film-noir emerged in the

123. Carl Rollyson, *Marilyn Monroe: A Life of the Actress* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2014): 63.

1940s, as a presentation of America's underbelly, where decent core values and justice were threatened. *Niagara* was different, as it was a big-budget film, with a larger-than-life central character and one of the most recognizable backdrops in the Western world. Furthermore, *Niagara* also drew on one of the most prevalent motifs of post-war America:

...the American male's concern about his own masculinity and his worry that he was not up to the job of subduing the postwar woman, who emerged from the war confident of her own abilities but also disenchanted with her prospects. Fritz Lang had explored this theme in *Clash by Night*, but not with the kind of brio and flamboyance that Hathaway brought to the screen by making Monroe the screen siren par excellence.¹²⁴

The returning war veteran, embodied by George, finds it difficult to adjust to new civilian life back on home soil, as the landscape has shifted in his absence. The change, or shift, is largely represented by the postwar woman, embodied by Rose, as an empowered member of society, "confident of her own abilities."¹²⁵ The social and cultural outcomes from this changing landscape are overtly reflected in various publications on the women's liberation movement (such as Lang's *Clash by Night*), however, *Niagara's* setting amplifies the effects of being in a place where one can let their hair down and have fun. Both Monroe (Rose) and Niagara Falls challenge the masculinity—or fortitude—of those brave enough to stand in the presence of a natural wonder and refuse to be subdued by their counterparts. Monroe's character clearly

124. Ibid., 63.

125. Ibid., 63.

struggles with feelings of (sexual) empowerment and disenchantment (caused by her marital woes), made even more evident from the historical metaphors and motifs established by the backdrop.

The “Rainbow Cabins” serve as the backdrop for the contrasting couples’ stories and provided such memorable and convincing views (Figure 2.18) in the film that countless requests were made by prospective tourists to secure a booking at the lodging where the film’s characters stayed. Little did tourists know that the “Rainbow Cabins” were, in fact, fakes.

The accommodations were fabricated stage sets, erected for the purpose of the film and promptly disassembled and removed upon completion of production.¹²⁶ The Niagara Parks Commission corridor is a strictly regulated and governed parkway system, where any intervention that potentially obstructs or alters the view of the river, gorge or waterfall must be reviewed by the Commission and fulfill many provisions and permits. The demand created by the elaborate lodging accommodations, although subtly placed in the backdrop of a motion picture film, comments on the filtered understanding of iconic and well-travelled landscapes. After the film was released, persistent requests for lodging at the “Rainbow Cabins” grew so much that the set was partially re-constructed and now serves as the *Rainbow Cabins – Film “Niagara”* landmark with corresponding

126. The Niagara Parks Commission commemorates “The Rainbow Cabins” site with a bronze plaque, which resides at the present-day Hornblower Niagara Cruise attraction concourse.

bronze plaque—the folly has even inspired further architectural interventions that house seasonal craft and trade markets.

Niagara concludes with Rose Loomis falling victim to her own elaborate plans to run away with her lover, Patrick, as she is strangled to death at the hands of her own husband, George, in the closing scene. In this moment of Rose’s death, framed entirely in silence, the film shifts to suggest that humans can control nature—*human* nature in the case of Rose’s torrid love affair. Wrought with guilt and the overwhelming realization of his actions, George steals a small boat along the lower Niagara River to escape his inevitable arrest. Upon realization that young Polly is on board the thieved boat, George sets her on the banks of the Niagara River before plunging to his death as the result of an elaborate police chase. Philippa Snow’s 2018 *Artforum* film analysis of Hathaway’s *Niagara* touches on the inherent tensions that Rose’s sexual liberation plays through the entire film, from her relationship with her husband to the contrasting young couple of Ray and Polly bunking in the adjacent honeymoon “Rainbow Cabins.” Snow claims that Rose’ story proves that “the shock of the sexually exotic or the unfamiliar is a paradox, predictable and cyclical. It lives, dies, and regenerates elsewhere.”¹²⁷ This concept is manifest at every corner of the film, from every tense exchange between George and Rose, to the sickly-sweet relationship of Ray and Polly; it all feels sadomasochistic.¹²⁸ The same traits that attracted Rose to George ultimately threatened their relationship and

127. Philippa Snow, “It Felt Like a Kiss,” *Artforum*, (March 29, 2018), <https://www.artforum.com/film/philippa-snow-on-henry-hathaway-s-niagara-1953-74924>.

128. *Ibid.*

ended their lives. Niagara Falls serves as the perfect backdrop for such a story, where the raw torrents of emotion and the endless, cyclical forces of nature simultaneously attract and consume.

2.6 The Good Fake

There's nothing quite like staring Willie Nelson down, eye to eye, (Figure 2.19) or waiting for Leonardo DiCaprio to exhale, on your wedding anniversary, on Clifton Hill, while your husband patiently waits for you on a bench, sitting next to a cheerful Tom Hanks. If there could be anything *weirder*, it might be the fact that thousands of people are compelled to visit and spend time with a good fake. Every year, millions of visitors flock to Niagara Falls to challenge the thunderous roars of the brink, to meander back and forth along the Niagara Parkway, to watch water crash over rock, to peek into the "Rainbow Cabins," to play arcade games and buy knock-off sunglasses along Clifton Hill and Victoria Avenue, to meditate in the billowing mists, and to spend an afternoon bouncing from attraction to attraction.

All of that noise.

The volume and variety of wax museums that dot tourist corridors along both sides of the Canadian and American Niagara River – *Louis Tussaud's Waxworks*, *Movieland Wax Museum*, *Boris Karloff Wax Museum*, *Biblical Wax Museum*, *Sports Wax Museum*, *Tower of London Wax Museum*, *Criminals Hall of Fame Wax Museum*, *Rock Legends Wax Museum*, *Castle Dracula Wax Museum*, *Niagara Wax Museum of History* and *Haunted House of Wax* – continue the long-standing history of attractions designed to capture and extend the awesome experience at Niagara Falls. Seemingly unrelated at

first glance, I propose that the continued presence of wax museums and the astounding natural waterfall site share more commonalities than disparities, which only further secures reasoning for the popularity and continued presence of this attraction-type in Niagara. Visitors come to Niagara for the spectacle. One of the most intriguing arguments for the connection between wax museums and Niagara Falls, and the ones that help illustrate the forthcoming analyses, is the theory of simulacra. Both the wax museum and natural site borrow concepts of the simulacra to question the role that culture—tourist culture—holds in delineating the boundaries and limitations of their experience.

Critics sometimes use the term simulacrum negatively to describe a culture that, like a reflection in a mirror, has lost its moorings in reality. But the term might also take on a more positive sense, as the mirror metaphor might suggest, because the simulacra can also allow us a new perspective through which to see ourselves.¹²⁹

The attractions and experiences that surround Niagara Falls, for better or worse, are reflections of the natural site, which undeniably helps enliven the attraction and the cataract; mirroring one another. Jim Watkins' quote, above, continues to describe the simulacra as “presences or appearances that have lost their ground in reality.”¹³⁰

Returning to the leisure practices around sites like Niagara Falls, perceptions of reality are under constant redefinition due to the implications of sightseeing, where tourists act

129. Jim Watkins, “Love and Death of the Simulacra,” *Transpositions: Theology, Imagination and the Arts*, (2011), <http://www.transpositions.co.uk/the-love-and-death-of-the-simulacra/>.

130. *Ibid.*

as pure explorers of desire and satisfaction and feel privileged to believe they can peer into everything. The plethora of attractions that surround Niagara Falls—human-made creations—are less indicative of the actual physical site and its traits, and more a reflection of how the site is socially and aesthetically understood by its surrounding cultures. I propose that the continued presence and evolution of peculiar attractions around Niagara Falls have less to do with commercial endeavour and success—of course these attractions would cease to exist if paying tourists were not flowing through the ticket gates—and more to do with the fact that such attractions succinctly draw upon the social and aesthetic characteristics of the site. As unsettling and abnormal as Niagara’s attractions may appear, they are rooted in the place. The persistence and variety range of wax attractions at Niagara Falls present avenues to better understand the relationship between art and spectacle.

To this point, I have explored attractions that either recreate the awesome power of the site or have drawn experiences and traits of the site that subliminally, yet sometimes clumsily, present it to the tourist—*Ripley’s 4D Moving Theater* or *WildPlay Niagara Falls Whirlpool Adventure Course*. This section will explore Niagara’s attractions that unapologetically highlight and reinforce the notion that its visitors are in the presence of a spectacle and icon, “...the likes of which you can capture a selfie with.”¹³¹

131. Ripley Entertainment Inc., “Ripley’s Niagara Falls: Louis Tussaud’s Waxworks,” (April 22, 2020), <https://www.ripleys.com/niagarafalls/attractions/wax/>.

Christine Looser and Thalia Wheatley suggest that “Given the choice, it is generally wiser to pay closer attention to a bear than to a rock. Indeed, psychological science has shown that biological stimuli, such as faces, capture attention faster than inanimate objects...”¹³² This quote works in a multitude of ways for Niagara Falls, as it establishes a scientific-based hypothesis for the onslaught of visual representations and attractions that reinforce steady flows of human beings around the site and that the crowding and density of people around the site and its attractions are vital to the perceived stimuli of the experience. Niagara Falls is an icon, and it seems only fitting that the site finds itself surrounded with other recognizable cultural icons—even if these cultural icons are hollow mannequins and wax figures. This is where the wax museum and Niagara Falls share their strongest connection, especially in the realm of their placement in art and art history; wax sculptures will generally not inhabit the same museum space as their bronze or marble counterparts and have historically been relegated to the realms of religion, science, and spectacle, rather than art.¹³³

Returning to Tussaud’s continued presence along Niagara Falls tourist avenues, it was Madame (Marie) Tussaud’s nineteenth century wax museums that helped shape the commercialized potential of the medium and practice. Although the commercial wax empire is not the first instance that the material was sensationalized—Florentina churches

132. Christine E. Looser and Thalia Wheatley, “The Tipping Point of Animacy: How, When, and Where We Perceive Life in a Face,” *Psychological Science* 21, no. 12 (December 2010): 1854.

133. Vito Adriaensens, “Anatomy of An Ovidian Cinema: Mysteries of the Wax Museum,” in *Screening Statues*, eds. Vito Adriaensens, Lisa Colpaert, Susan Felleman and Steven Jacobs (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017): 85.

of the Renaissance will be explored later in this chapter—Tussaud undeniably exploited the “undesirably rigid divide between art and science”¹³⁴ by introducing entertainment and fascination to the museum setting. The main difference between the historical museum and the wax museum lay mostly in the dramatic presentation and the link to history or actuality, rather than constituting a difference between “art” and “science.”¹³⁵ The evolution of Niagara Falls’ natural and tourist corridors have undergone the same battles while vying for visitors’ attention, with the creation of public conservation parklands and parks commissions—on the American and Canadian sides of the Niagara River, respectively—directly adjacent to highly commercialized carnival-like trappings: one part nature shrine, one part circus.¹³⁶ John Sears makes the claim of a schizophrenic Niagara by arguing that the creation of conservation parks established “two versions of the Falls settled down side by side to vie for the attention of visitors.”¹³⁷

Hanneke Grootenboer compiles various short essays that theorize the material and “art history’s remarkable silence on the topic,”¹³⁸ claiming the history of wax sculpture

134. Michelle E. Bloom, *Waxworks: A Cultural Obsession* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003): xviii.

135. Vito Adriaensens, “Anatomy of An Ovidian Cinema: Mysteries of the Wax Museum,” in *Screening Statues*, eds. Vito Adriaensens, Lisa Colpaert, Susan Felleman and Steven Jacobs (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017): 86.

136. Karen Dubinsky, “‘The Pleasure is Exquisite but Violent’: The Imaginary Geography of Niagara Falls in the Nineteenth Century” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 79.

137. John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the 19th Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998): 188.

138. Hanneke Grootenboer, “Introduction: On the Substance of Wax,” *Oxford Art Journal* 36, no.1 (2013): 6.

can best be understood as a “history of disappearance.”¹³⁹ Disappearance defines the realm of wax sculpture for practical and metaphorical reasons. Practically, wax objects and creations survive against all odds, as the properties of the medium—at least in its organic form—are sensitive to atmospheric conditions, where changes in temperature and humidity threaten to accelerate the deterioration of a work. Metaphorically, wax creations that aim to recreate human or living form begin to complicate and question cultural notions of perfection and universality, which inevitably draw upon notions of fragility and mortality. As Walter Benjamin wrote in *The Arcades Project*; “The figure of wax is properly the setting wherein the appearance of humanity outdoes itself.”¹⁴⁰ The development of tools and techniques to construct the perfect image inevitably creates tensions between creator and subject, which for both wax museums and the iconic site of Niagara Falls, results in superficial, skin-deep notions of perfection and desire.

Movieland: Wax Museum of the Stars, like its competitors along Clifton Hill and Victoria Avenue tourist corridors, promises a walking tour through entertainment history, permitting up-close and personal encounters and selfies with many of the iconic film and music stars from past to present. One of the features that separates *Movieland: Wax Museum of the Stars* from its competitors is the exclusive *Wax Hand Emporium* located in the Fun Factory Gift Shop which provides tourists with the opportunity “...to use

139. Ibid., 12.

140. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999): 409.

colorful wax to make replicas of your own hand – a terrific one-of-a-kind souvenir!”¹⁴¹
(Figures 2.20 to 2.21).

A brief exploration of the history of wax works reveals the creation of ex-votos in Florentine churches during the Renaissance, where hands, legs, arms and heads were commissioned by wealthy worshippers as offerings to various saints and deities, in search of relief from illness or as offerings of gratitude. These wax creations, originally placed at the base of shrines, became so widely commissioned that the combination of a lack of space and increasing demand forced the ex-votos to be suspended from roof structures above, which attracted increasing numbers of visitors and tourists.¹⁴² The growing demand and popularity of wax limbs and wax figures transformed objects of worship into objects of spectacle.

When a hand moves, there is always something of the stranger in it. Perhaps it is because the hand rarely seems to be in sync with the rest of the body, frequently betraying the face or undermining the voice, and always casting doubt on the unifying power of consciousness. The hand has a tendency to stray, one moment disregarding the resolve of the body to which it is connected, the next directing it as if it knows better.¹⁴³

141. Hoco Entertainment, Inc., “Wax Hands, Clifton Hill Niagara, (April 12, 2020),” <https://www.cliftonhill.com/shopping/wax-hands>.

142. Hanneke Grootenboer, “Introduction: On the Substance of Wax,” *Oxford Art Journal* 36, no.1 (2013): 6-7.

143. Rose Marie San Juan, “The Horror of Touch: Anna Morandis Wax Models of Hands,” *Oxford Art Journal* 34, no. 3 (2011): 433.

Art Historian Rose Marie San Juan argues that anatomical prints and wax models operate at the intersection of the human body and representation. Depicting or modelling an aspect of the human body is not quite as simple as making a good copy, as San Juan's introduction on the work of eighteenth-century anatomist and anatomist wax modeler Anna Morandi Manzolini outlines above. San Juan posits that depicting human hands and limbs, for example, draws upon concepts of corporeality and connections to the physical world, of competing modes of verbal and non-verbal communication, and tensions between the part and the whole.¹⁴⁴ The history of Niagara Falls' visual reproductions and interventions operate in the same manner, where depictions of the natural site undeniably conjure a dialogue between original and copy. While the replica may be convincing in its form or presentation, it pales in comparison to the original. The replicas fall short in conjuring the experiences provided by the real site, supporting what Patrick McGreevy argues as "the metaphor of death...in the landscape that humans have created around the waterfall."¹⁴⁵

Melissa Bailar delves into the interface between the corporeal and the constructed while exploring nineteenth-century French narratives that portray the relationship between anatomical discovery, medical clinicism and the plastic arts in narratives about love, adventure and anatomical models. Bailar focuses on three texts, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *The Future Eve* (1886), Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus: A Materialist Novel* (1884),

144. Ibid., 433.

145. Patrick McGreevy, "Reading the Texts of Niagara Falls: The Metaphor of Death," in *Writing Worlds : Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, eds. Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan (London: Routledge, 2011): 50.

and Champfleury's "The Man of Wax Figures" (1852), which emphasize "wax's cultural capacity to form figures that occupy a liminal position between human (with their bits of bodies, lifelike qualities, and sexual invitations) and inhuman (with their construction based on an assemblage of organic and inorganic matter)."¹⁴⁶

Bailar draws specifically on the wax model's uncanny fleshly imitations and necrophilic appeal, highlighted by late eighteenth-century medical training practices that substituted "anatomical Venuses"¹⁴⁷ for cadavers. Such histories, according to Bailar, draw parallels between wax figures and female agency because they enact the impossibility of reducing women to knowable medicalized objects.¹⁴⁸ Just as the wax figures in Bailar's cases emphasize the submissive malleability of the substitute humans they feature—the female form—all notions of submission are erased once the wax figures exceed their capacity as inert material objects.¹⁴⁹

To borrow Bailar's conclusions for Niagara Falls, the cultural and infrastructural treatment around the iconic site—from engravings to paintings to photographs to mass-hydro-electrical stations and leisure tourism—suggest how appropriating nature instills a perception of "submissive malleability" in our landscapes. Moreover, elaborate attractions, clumsy reconstructions and wax museums provide the opportunity for visitors

146. Melissa Bailar, "Uncanny Anatomies/Figures of Wax," *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 49, no. 2 (2016): 45.

147. *Ibid.*, 29.

148. *Ibid.*, 30.

149. *Ibid.*, 30.

to challenge their limits with nature; by tempting fate in the presence of the world's most powerful waterfall and dangerous criminals or travelling through time to rub elbows with the rich and famous. The long-standing history and presence of peculiar attractions and wax museums along the Niagara Parks Commission Corridor and tourist avenues, such as Clifton Hill's scare-themed attractions and *Niagara's Fury*, express a certain anxiety on how to represent the power and fame of the iconic site. The persistence of unstable formal structures, represented by the narratives encircling Niagara Falls, demonstrate how attractions and their many iterations influence the cultural and visual reading of the site, and iconic landscapes in general.

Chapter 3

3 Collecting Memories: Culturally Crafted and Constructed

When I was around five years old, my dad was riding his bike one morning and as he passed a Canada Post mailbox, he noticed that it was open, and that there was a bag falling out onto the grass. He stopped to look and as he picked up the bag, he noticed it was addressed to the Niagara Falls Museum. He turned around to come back home and called the museum to let them know what he had found. They asked him if he wouldn't mind just dropping it off and since he was initially headed out for a bike ride, he happily agreed. My dad loved cycling and was planning a ride down to the Falls. He took the scenic route along the Parkway. Once he arrived, the individual in the gift shop made a phone call and someone quickly appeared from the back room, behind souvenir stands and museum display *stuff*. They thanked my dad several times and revealed to him that the bag contained a few hundred dollars. They gifted my dad a lifetime membership as a thank-you, which inspired weekly trips to the museum and countless visits to look at all the *stuff*. My brother and I loved every minute of it and each time we visited, we seemed to find something new. I had my favourite displays and vitrines, but the gift shop always held a special place in my heart.

The museum was often quiet on Sunday afternoons which was special because it felt like we were the only ones there. We'd begun to get to know the place inside and out, and if the right person was working, it meant extra paper and crayons to etch fossils at the archaeology display. We would spend hours walking through the space, passing by geode

displays, and whale skeletons only to circle back and gaze upon taxidermized oddities and pharaohs: Skipper the Dog,¹⁵⁰ the three-eyed pig, the two-headed calf, and Ramses I mummified human remains.¹⁵¹

The visit wasn't complete without time spent in the gift shop. It would be here that my fascination with all things Niagara Falls began and my insatiable desire to scour souvenir shops for the right find. I learned here what it meant to look for and choose a souvenir. Every few weeks there would be new stock, requiring you to carry out further digging expeditions. Only a keen observer would uncover new rulers, glitter-filled pens, heart-shaped keychains, and pencils with unique font styles; all branded with "NIAGARA FALLS."

The polished gemstones clicked and clacked together as you scooped your hand through the bottomless sale bins, the keychain racks rattled, and the magnet board

150. In January of 2015, the Niagara Falls History Museum acquired the infamous two-legged taxidermy dog Skipper, the beloved pet and companion of entrepreneur Thomas Barnett. Barnett established numerous nineteenth-century cabinet of curiosities and natural history museums throughout Niagara, one of which was located along River Road and remained in operation until 1999. Upon closing of the museum doors, the collection—including Skipper—was sold at auction and thought to be lost forever.

151. From "Rameses I Mummy Return to Cairo," *Current World Archaeology*, no. 4 (March 6, 2004): <https://www.world-archaeology.com/world/africa/egypt/rameses-i-mummy-returned-to-cairo/>. In 1871, Rameses I was looted from Luxor's Valley of the Kings and sold to a Canadian antiquities dealer. Many suspect that it was taken from tomb DB320 in Deir el-Bahari, where a cache of other royal mummified human remains was later discovered. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Ramses I turned up in Canada's Niagara Falls Museum and was later identified as a royal mummified human remains through a series of X-rays, CAT Scans, radiocarbon dating and computer imaging.

thudded and echoed as you lifted each one off to get a closer look. The postcards sat on a shelf adjacent to the giftshop window bearing the reflection of the waterfall and gorge.

As explored in earlier chapters, visitors are promised that a sublime experience awaits them at Niagara Falls, however, the opportunity for an unframed and unmediated experience is outside the control of those who brave the site; a notion that extends to the earliest streams of leisure visitors from the nineteenth century. The myriad attractions and themed environments outlined to this point help construct narratives that only challenge the possibility of an intimate experience with the landscape, due in part to the sheer volume of visual references that exist and in part to the commercialized climate of the surroundings. Why then, do visitors choose to visit saturated, busy, and congested destinations like Niagara Falls? And why do they insist on collecting souvenirs of this experience? The souvenir gift shop is a compelling object of study as it simultaneously acts as a tourist space and a curated or collected space. The gift shop is where the experiences and memories unique to tourist destinations are made visual and concrete. Objects are inspired by the site and tailored to support unique narratives and traits of the area, ultimately inspiring visitors to purchase the memento. This chapter is structured around the souvenir gift shop experience and the object-types one can expect to encounter in contemporary and historical contexts.

3.1 Introduction

Souvenir hunting began as early as 1836 in Niagara Falls, when a small hammer was placed at the base of the gorge on the American side of the Niagara River.¹⁵² Visitors were encouraged to break off portions of rock to take home as a memento for themselves, literally embodying the notion that a piece of the American and Canadian Falls could be taken home. This practice dovetails with the earliest European expedition cultures that ventured to sites like Niagara Falls, viewing their *discovery* as scientifically important and worthy of adding to collections of “Naturalia.”¹⁵³ As the first half of this dissertation outlines, the expedition and exploratory culture to Niagara Falls shifted along the undercurrents of broader commercial and leisure practices. The types and modes of collecting mementos, souvenirs and artefacts similarly evolved over this time. Another key concept regarding souvenir collecting is the idea of possession, which evolves in the material culture of iconic tourist sites from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. I reference how the evolution of souvenirs and craft can break previously established binaries. David Hume’s 2014 *Tourism Art and Souvenirs: The Material Culture of Tourism* explores what he calls the “Language of Souvenirs” by questioning the long-standing binary division of souvenirs as either ‘Sampled’ or ‘Representative,’ as originally proposed by Susan Stewart. Hume introduces a third category of souvenirs—

152. Virginia Vidler outlines a detailed chronology of Niagara’s tourist and souvenir history, touching on major cornerstones, in her book *100 Years of Souvenirs*, Utica: North Country Books Inc., 1985.

153. Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting the European Tradition*, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1999, 32.

‘Crafted’—which acts a hybrid between the ‘Sampled’ souvenir (an object or artefact of the actual site) or ‘Representative’ souvenir (a general consumer good not particularly tied to the actual site). Niagara Falls’ tourist artefacts and tourist memorabilia, combined with the plethora of narratives and accounts that visitors take home with them, supports this nuanced approach to the material culture of tourism.

The first area to explore in the collection of ephemerae (kitsch-culture memorabilia) is the concept of possession of the tourist landscape, as the notion takes literal and figurative meaning from the latter half of the nineteenth century until present day, fueled by the rise of consumer culture and entrepreneurship. From the early-nineteenth century, Niagara Falls was predominantly depicted, and understood, through consumption practices, which included attractions, spectacles, and kitsch-culture memorabilia. After exploring attractions and spectacles in the first half of this dissertation, I am shifting to the third consumption practice, kitsch-culture memorabilia, in this chapter, which opens my research to theories of material culture and possession. Much research is dedicated to the notion of *possessing* experiences and moments in the landscape, including James Ryan’s *Photography and Exploration* (2013), Tim Bonyhady’s *The Colonial Earth* (2000), Michael Hitchcock and Ken Teague’s *Souvenirs: The Material Culture of Tourism* (2000 and 2019), Ruth Phillips’ *Trading Identities: The Souvenirs in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (1998), and John Urry’s *Consuming Places* (1995) and *The Tourist Gaze* (1990, 2002, 2011). Peter Osborne’s study in *Travelling Light: Photography, Travel and Visual Culture* from 2000, specifically, serves as a model for my exploration, as he establishes a connection between travel and the objects we accumulate along our journeys. Phillips illuminates the

underlying gendering of souvenir craft objects and settler-Indigenous readings of domestic goods and housewares. Hitchcock and Teague's collections of essays illuminate the uniformity of travel and acquisition of objects from the perspective of the Western tourist, which posits travel as a device to break the bounds of daily existence and ascertain meaning through the collection of objects and materials from novel places.

The second major concept to explore is the role that craft and vernacular play in the manufacturing and consumption of the tourist objects and souvenirs we collect. Both the type and style of objects that tourists collect at Niagara Falls have evolved since the first tourist routes were established in the nineteenth century but I propose that the assortment of objects today is more connected to Niagara's visual history than one may initially consider. For example, how do objects like beaded souvenir items made during the nineteenth century by Indigenous people, mainly women, sold at places like Niagara Falls—and neighbouring New York State Parks like Saratoga Springs—fit into this framework? I introduce Phillips' 1998 *Trading Identities* to the dissertation, which explores how the creation and distribution of tourist material culture objects—crafted and commercial—directly influence the relationship between the tourist and the landscape.

I also introduce David Hume's questioning of long-standing, and long-accepted binaries in souvenir and craft cultures. By introducing craft to the consideration of souvenir-making and consumption, Hume begins to problematize the broad assumptions about how and what tourists purchase while on their leisure trips, which brings few forms of analysis to tourism's material culture. I propose there are further gaps in the research around the material culture of souvenirs, and that the study of Niagara Falls' objects can help enlighten this area of research. I focus on the space between Hume's 'Crafted'

souvenirs and Stewart's 'Representative' objects, as these references help formulate a connection between a source site like Niagara Falls and its assorted objects, which I propose have deeper implications than commercial and entrepreneurial stimulus.

Furthermore, I am proposing that the exploration of the souvenir giftshop as a curated or collected space reinforces my claim that the sampling and purchase of commercialized and serialized souvenir objects serve more than economic stimulus, as the objects mulled over and purchased are elevated to mementos and markers of personal experience.

3.2 Souvenir as Memento

Travelling to Niagara Falls is a rite of passage for leisure tourists looking to check off a visit to one of the world's wonders. As such, those who embark on the trip to Southern Ontario or Western New York travel along well-beaten paths and routes marked by millions before them.¹⁵⁴ The sheer volume of visitors spilling through the area over the past two hundred years is immeasurable while their moment at the precipice is as transitory and short-lived as the waters cresting the rock outcropping. Visiting Niagara has predominantly become a visual exercise, and a distanced one at that, where visitors can gaze upon the incredible site from their car window as they wind along the Niagara River Parkway.

154. A 2017 Niagara Region Government-issued Tourism Profile—the first of its kind in Ontario—explored jobs, businesses, visitors and expenditures surrounding the Niagara tourism industry. Findings reinforced many long-standing stereotypes pertaining to the volume of visitors and their time spent in Niagara. Over 12.9 million visitors are projected to visit the region annually, with nearly two-thirds of these visitors constituting day trips only, supporting the notion that the majority of those who visit Niagara Falls spend merely half a day in the region before returning home or continuing their trip through southern Ontario or Western New York.

As noted in the introduction of this chapter, Osborne’s study of tourism and its material culture concentrates on the role that the photographic image plays in travel and the social identity of leisure travel. His conclusions are transferrable here. First, his version of travel as “an activity requiring no deep knowledge of the object that stimulated it”¹⁵⁵ aligns with Niagara Falls’ attractions and spectacles—which the first half of this dissertation is dedicated to—but is even more useful in the exploration of Niagara Falls’ visitors’ social patterns. Osborne’s claim that leisure travel requires no “deep knowledge” of the source site does not allude to the foreignness of the source site, rather, it suggests the contrary, which posits that the travel to certain source sites can become so deeply engrained in broader cultural and societal circles that the desire to visit them becomes habitual or second nature. These desires are primarily constructed through visual means, and across various media, so long as they conjure what Osborne claims as the “reverie” or “attraction” within the bourgeois traveller or would-be traveller. Osborne helps explain how leisure travel is democratic and inclusive—anyone could have a reverie.¹⁵⁶ I propose that the democratic nature of leisure travel, combined with the accumulation of material objects, mementos and trinkets help shape the uncritical and consumption-oriented environment that surround tourist destinations. To quote Dean MacCannell, such environments “enable us to possess something which possesses us and, perhaps, to

155. Peter Osborne, *Travelling Light: Photography, Travel and Visual Culture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, 26.

156. *Ibid.*, 26.

engage in the uncritical pleasure of venerating rather than challenging what exists.”¹⁵⁷

Tourists rely on souvenirs to enhance and compliment the tales of their travels; the word souvenir, in its Latin origin, means “to come to mind.” This helps explain how the material objects, mementos and trinkets acquired during our vacation spur on stories and accounts of the places we visit.

Niagara Falls, for example, began as a source of expedition and exploration of the sublime landscape but soon transitioned to a spectacle of another kind; human-made interventions and recreations. Some experiences at Niagara can still be classified as purely sublime while others are almost purely commercial. The first half of this dissertation introduced the seventeenth and eighteenth-century explorations and documentations of the natural site throughout Europe that promised an unmediated encounter with nature. The first half of this dissertation also introduced the inspiration that the sublime experience holds in the creation of spectacles and simulacra; haunted houses, wax museums and mediated environments are a few of the examples that simultaneously venerate and domesticate nature. These highly marketable, and commercial enterprises pop up around unique landscapes and become almost as recognizable as the iconic site itself. Ripley’s, Niagara Parks Commission and Louis Tussauds are a few of the examples that I introduced earlier in the dissertation to express the dialogue between the natural and the commercial in tourist landscapes. The experiences found along the Niagara River parkway, the wax museums and haunted

157. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of Leisure Class*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013, 3.

houses on Clifton Hill appear opposite to each other but they equally permeate the lexicon of Niagara, which encourages its visitors to consider how they look at their surroundings and exercise their tools of observation. Collecting from iconic places like Niagara Falls materializes narratives that I introduced in the first half of this dissertation, where attractions provided opportunity for tourists and visitors to challenge and scale the otherwise unchallengeable and unscalable. In the context of this chapter, the souvenir giftshop and collection of personal mementos provide another means and scale for visitors to connect to iconic places like Niagara Falls. Object-types explored herein include postcards, booklets, domestic goods and hand-made novelties.

3.3 Postcards: You See, I am Here After All

In the gift shop, the most prominent display case is often reserved for postcards, those extremely popular souvenirs. Picture postcards create repeatable, consistent, and recognizable themes and views of landscapes, which directly equate to the rise in popularity and profitability of leisure business products. Picture postcards differ from other types of crafted souvenirs in this chapter, as they represent a medium that can be shaped and modified by the tourist. Postcards are created and mass-produced by large print houses, which not only encourage personalization but become deeply personal when shared with family and friends. The emergence and widespread popularity of the medium helps shape how places like Niagara Falls are collected and consumed. Photographer I.C. Adams linked the repetition and popularity of the picture postcard in his 1913 *Camera Craft* article pertaining to the *camera craze* in the Napa Valley area: “I sincerely believe that the more a certain beauty spot is photographed and the greater the number of photographs that are distributed, the larger will be the sale of easily available, good view

cards showing the same scene.”¹⁵⁸ Adams’ sentiment aligns with the growing trend of presenting easily accessible ways of visually exploring places like Niagara Falls, which are inherently vast landscapes capable of providing an infinite amount of vantage points to enjoy. Tensions emerge between showing the vastness and infinitude of the landscape in a manner that provides “good views” that are immediately recognizable and marketable to a growing leisure class during the early twentieth century.

Zoe Leonard (1961—) is an American contemporary artist who questions and observes trends in daily life and image-making, with a focus on the social and political undertones of her observations. Leonard weaves photography, sculpture and installation techniques into her practice, and her 2008 work titled *You See I Am Here After All* (Figure 3.1) brings together the importance of validating tourist images and pre-determinations of iconic sites like Niagara Falls. Leonard activates postcard imagery to convey her ideas about our relationship to the environment and iconic places. It is easy to pair sites like Niagara Falls with notions of advertising, branding, promotional imagery, and consumption practices in contemporary (post-industrial) readings of Niagara Falls today, but Leonard shows just how long-standing and entrenched these readings are. Leonard adds texture to the image and history of Niagara Falls by showing decades-worth of personal accounts and stories scrawled across the backs of postcards. The cultural practice of purchasing the object for the purpose of sharing a personal experience of a tourist destination has evolved due to newer modes of communication, social media

158. I.C. Adams, “Good Post Cards Still Profitable,” *Camera Craft* 10, no. 11 (1913): 502.

posting and travel blogs but the practice of seeking out personal experiences and sharing with others remains constant. Many who visit iconic sites like Niagara Falls are faced with the dilemma of treading the beaten path while still carving out their own experience.

Niagara Falls has been captured by amateur and professional photographers alike, from the mass-produced Kodak Brownie box cameras used by young families throughout the early 1900s to commercial wedding photographers that are required to follow the *Niagara Parks Act*¹⁵⁹ today. Images of Niagara Falls donned some of the earliest picture postcards of early-to-mid twentieth century and provided visitors the opportunity to impart their personal accounts, stories and observations of immensely popular places.

Leonard's work arrays thousands of original and copied postcards of the American and Canadian Falls that she personally scoured from garage sales and online auctions, some of which have been in circulation from as far back as the late nineteenth century. The work has been exhibited in various gallery spaces, with its installation at the Dia: Beacon (Figure 3.2) providing the strongest compositional and contextual prospect. First, the Dia: Beacon gallery space provides the compositional opportunity to display the sheer volume of postcards amassed—nearly four thousand in total—on the gallery walls and tables. Visitors cannot help but feel the overwhelming nature of the work, like Niagara Falls itself, from the seemingly endless grid of images along the gallery walls

159. The *Niagara Parks Act* was established in 1990 (Ontario Regulation 829 and *Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act* Section 38) to issue and oversee land use along the parkway system, which is regulated to the same level as a controlled-access highway.

and stacks of images scattered on display tables. Second, Leonard's work resonates contextually in Beacon, an otherwise quiet industrial town nestled along the Hudson River in New York State that, like Niagara, owes its connectedness to the broader world to its waterways. Like the Niagara River and its canals, the Hudson River serves both industry and leisure thanks in large part to the development of nineteenth-century canals—Oswego and Erie—which connect New York City and the Eastern Seaboard to interior lands.

Leonard arranges her postcards on the gallery walls so that similar images and vantage points are grouped to reflect the vantage point depicted on the front of the postcard. In doing so, Leonard provides an abstracted composition of the winding Niagara River and horseshoe-patterned cataract. From a distance, the images are nearly indistinguishable from the ones adjacent to them (Figure 3.3), as many of the groupings of images reference the same vantage point with the variations emerging from the subtle difference in weathering, dis-colouration or printing techniques. The resulting effect creates modulations of saturation, hue, and colour temperature, similarly reflecting the variation in colour and opacity across the waters that flow along the Niagara River and over the precipice of the American and Canadian Falls. Lastly, the postcards are arranged in an evenly spaced and gridded fashion, with each image aligning orthogonally to the one adjacent to it. The work is rigid in its structure but free in its degree of personalization (each postcard is a personal memento from a visitor) which introduces the complicated way that visiting and local cultures understand iconic sites like Niagara Falls. The work simultaneously alludes to the natural features of the site and the myriad narratives and personal accounts that complement the place by literally constructing the

work out of souvenirs and mementos of the past. By contrast, the order of the work is highly rigid as the postcards are gridded and ordered. Leonard's work suggests how the site is simultaneously natural *and* influenced by human intervention.

The waters spilling over Niagara's precipice are controlled for a multitude of reasons, from the necessity of directing waters for the purpose of power generation to the maintenance of a tourist iconic image. The lower Niagara River water is diverted to the Sir Adam Beck Hydroelectric Generating Stations and Robert Moses Niagara Power Plant for purposes of powering nearly four million homes¹⁶⁰ but this is only permitted once the sun sets, and the evening light displays are turned off. During the day, the waters are permitted to flow with greater fortitude albeit under control of the lower Niagara River International Control Dam, so as not to erode the crest of the precipice at a rate that would dramatically alter the current shape and image of Niagara Falls. Note the rate of erosion marked in Figure 3.4, which indicates the leading edge of the crest over the past few centuries. The horseshoe pattern of the Canadian Falls emerged near four hundred years ago and has shifted rapidly—by geological standards—since the seventeenth century, however, the rate has been halted since the establishment of the local power generating stations and control dams in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The current and familiar Horseshoe-patterned waterfall maintains its position as a direct result of human intervention; Niagara Parks Commission records indicate that if the Niagara River south of the cataracts was permitted to flow unimpeded, the waters would

160. NYFalls, "Power Generation/Electricity," (2021), <https://nyfalls.com/niagara-falls/faq-4/#diverted>.

rise nearly five metres from its current level,¹⁶¹ swallowing the current concourse of the Canadian Table Rock Centre and observation platforms along both sides of the precipice.

You See I Am Here After All simultaneously comments on the complexity behind the constructed image of an iconic landscape like Niagara Falls, and how these constructed images are shared. Leonard's postcards are arranged based on the vantage point taken around the iconic site to suggest an accurate, albeit abstract, re-imagining of the site's myriad accounts and visits. She reinforces the sheer scale and breadth of Niagara's images by exhibiting more postcards in copious stacks and displays throughout the gallery space—perhaps recreating the countless yard and estate sales that formed her collection. Notably, only the fronts of the postcards are on display, effectively suppressing any personalized messages and notes to loved ones that occupy the backs of the souvenir shop purchases. We are only left with the images. Leonard's work reveals the inherent conflicts and tensions when consuming tourist places. Personalized messages and anecdotes would only complicate the images on the front of the cards. In keeping with Osborne's version of travel culture, which values stimulation over "deeper knowledge," it is fair to imagine that the nearly four-thousand written accounts on the back of the postcards would only complicate the clearer—visual—understanding of the site. Niagara Falls' visitors come to an understanding of the landscape through second-

161. Niagara Parks, "Niagara Falls Geology: Facts and Figures," (2022), <https://www.niagaraparks.com/visit-niagara-parks/plan-your-visit/niagara-falls-geology-facts-figures/>.

hand accounts and shared visual experiences—as opposed to first-hand accounts—which suggest the importance that images hold in shaping first impressions of a site.

3.4 The Bookshelf: All Over the World

The giftshop bookshelf, often set at key points in the floor plan—flanking the major pedestrian entrance points or adjacent to the cash register—are designed to catch the eye of those waiting in line to make their planned purchase of other souvenirs or tchotchkes. One of the ultimate impulse buys, the souvenir or giftshop book, is often priced competitively enough to simply “tag-on” to what you are already planning to spend.

Osborne’s contributions to the material culture of tourism align with earlier suppositions in this dissertation of what a technological, or democratic, sublime means in terms of our relationship with landscapes. The intersection of technology and democracy, in the context of leisure travel, rests on the idea that anyone is capable of embarking upon nature and “conquering” its awesome power. A technological, or democratic sublime, first emerged at Niagara Falls through the emergence of convenient travel routes, guidebooks, travel diaries and other forms of paper media in the nineteenth century. These forms of media and technology were easy to consume and were thoroughly diffused through the mists of the great cataracts. This was on full display during the 1901 Buffalo Pan-American Exposition, which took place a mere fifty kilometres from Niagara Falls. Having outbid Niagara Falls as the host city of the six-month-long showcase, tourist routes were nevertheless established between Buffalo and the iconic cataracts. A visit to the peninsula would not be complete without a stop at one of the world’s wonders. *Singer: The Universal Sewing Machine* capitalized on the proximity of the

iconic site by publishing an advertising souvenir booklet titled “All Over the World” (Figure 3.5) which attempts to thread together the emergent global sewing brand with the already well-established global brand of Niagara Falls. The modest four-and-a-half-inch diameter souvenir serves as a model of similarly small-scaled and throw-away-type objects that help reinforce sites like Niagara Falls in the minds of leisure tourists and broader society.

The booklet seams together marketing vocabulary and imagery with the spaces and landscapes surrounding the Buffalo World’s Fair. The round-shaped booklet, when opened, presents opposing images and text of domestic scenes and natural landscapes; the distinctly mirrored form of two adjacent circles only reinforces the desire to compare and contrast the imagery. One of the booklet spreads (Figure 3.6) displays a mother and child with a Singer Cabinet Table and the phrase “Mother’s Helper” adjacent to images of a formal water court from the Pan-American Exposition and a foreshortened view of the American and Canadian Falls taken from the American side of the Niagara River. The booklet continues with various contrasts of domesticity on the left and images of the natural site and human-made constructions on the right (Figure 3.7). Singer claims their products are the “Acme of Perfection of FAMILY SEWING” against images of the Canadian Horseshoe Falls from the Niagara River Parkway and the Liberal Arts Building constructed for the Exposition. What these images convey is the interconnectedness of family, space, and the familiar practices of daily life with the immediately recognizable landscape of Niagara Falls, both of which strongly suggest the “taming” of nature.

The last *Singer: The Universal Sewing Machine* booklet foldout breaks the structure of the previous pages and presents a full depiction of the American and

Canadian Falls, notable architectural features, and a numbered legend to help point out important landmarks (Figure 3.8). The circular composition of the booklet makes a strong connection to a glimpse through a coin-operated tower viewer or stereoscope, both of which are synonymous with the material and visual history of Niagara Falls. The development of image-making and image-capturing technology over the course of the nineteenth century resulted in the popularization of the stereoscope, which mounted two identical images—stereographs—slightly offset from the other to produce a three-dimensional rendition of the scene.

At a time when there was no television or documentary film series, stereoscope viewers brought landscapes and nature to life. Stereo-cards were mass produced and sold in souvenir shops; geared towards the growing leisure and middle class. Every facet of Niagara Falls history seems to have been recorded in this format; bridges, stunters, railroads, ice jams and *Maid of the Mist* boats. The emergence of iconic views and perspectives hardly grew organically, with many captivating stereo-card views emerging from longstanding and long-established vantage points. Underwood and Underwood's 1900 (reissued in 1902 and 1905) *Niagara Through the Stereoscope* represents one of many tourist visual guidebooks that literally maps out key views and vantage points (Figure 3.9) across the site. Underwood and Underwood describe how the new medium reshapes the way tourists move around iconic places, setting aside a section in their visual guidebooks on "how to travel with the stereoscope."¹⁶² The stereo viewer was not only a

162. Underwood and Underwood, *Niagara Through the Stereoscope* (Underwood and Underwood: New York, 1900): 6.

device for viewing landscapes but something that influenced how tourists travelled and embarked upon the site. Prospective visitors to Niagara could garner a better visual and spatial appreciation for the space they were to encounter and those visitors who chose to travel with the stereoscope could validate the technology in their hand by comparing the stereo-card views against the views at the actual site.

By 1901, the views around the *Cave of the Winds* (Figure 3.10) had already long been established as an “old Niagara guide”¹⁶³ thanks in large part to generations of European and American painters and engravers. The two figures and rickety wooden stair structure emerge from the billowing mists and rocky outcroppings of the base of the American Cataracts. Underwood and Underwood’s stereo-card views, like the *Cave of the Winds*, reintroduced these old vantage points to the masses. Paintings and engravings abstract and romanticize the experiences around Niagara while stereo-cards bring the same scene to life. The scene is not rendered in fashionable garb from the mid-nineteenth century “Grand Tours,” rather, the figures and structure appear clumsy and out of place in the rugged landscape; this is a scene that tourists could expect on their visit. The material and visual culture aspect of the stereoscope exemplify the accessibility and legibility of tourist media as the form does not demand rigorous aesthetic or visual analyses; the three-dimensional effect of the image directly draws the viewer in. Furthermore, the images allow for a leisurely and domesticated way of viewing nature while conveying the

163. Ibid., 41.

myriad stories that encircle the site. The combination of imposed narratives and influx of visual technologies help contribute to the rise of Niagara Falls as a spectacle.

The story of Bossy Sims represents one such spectacle that has become concrete in Niagara's visual and material culture. Bossy was the prized cow of George W. Sims, a local superintendent for the Prospect Point incline railway that took visitors to the base of the American Falls. Bossy would often graze above the American falls, wading out into the waters on occasion. Her daring feat is immortalized in an 1870 stereo-card (Figure 3.11) that depicts one of her trek's mere feet from edge of the American Falls; a common sight for locals but undoubtedly a novelty for visitors.¹⁶⁴ Bossy's indifference to her surroundings is a symbol for the domestication of the untamed landscape. Virginia DeJohn Anderson's 2002 (reissued in 2006) *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* and, more recently, Andrew A. Robichaud's 2019 *Animal City: The Domestication of America* represent the growing study of how the establishment of domestication—of both land and animals—serves as a symbol for conquering nature.

DeJohn Anderson investigates the parallels between the establishment of healthy livestock with “successful” colonization. For DeJohn Anderson, domestic animals,

164. Bossy's peculiar practice still inspires a century and a half later, as Andrew Porteus' limerick titled “Bossy Simms” won second prize in the 2009 *So You Think You Can Rhyme* limerick contest:

A cow named Bossy took her drink
Daily, by the Falls at the brink
She never went over
She must have et clover
Of the four-leaved kind, or she'd sink!

specifically cattle and livestock, improved otherwise untenable land, which provided the means to justify conquest. Dr. Matthew Ward's summary of DeJohn Anderson's work proposes that:

English settlers had imagined that they would replicate patterns of agriculture from home, however, the high cost and chronic shortage of manual labour meant that colonists were forced to allow their animals to roam free in the woods, rather than penning them into enclosed fields.¹⁶⁵

The introduction of European livestock to colonized lands was an attempt to replicate agrarian techniques from home but when these familiar practices became untenable livestock was left to "roam free" forging a new symbol of domestication. Not only do the structures and architectural interventions that dot the landscape bear the mark of colonization and domestication, but so too do the animals that meander through the fields and forests.

Bossy the Cow is one such example of what happens when livestock is left to "roam free." Bossy reportedly wandered all the way to Goat Island on one of her journeys,¹⁶⁶ as evidenced by her 1870 stereo-view card. Examining the image suggests she travelled a distance of nearly 1,000 feet along the edge of the American Falls, towards Terrapin Tower. Upon her return, she found herself an unexpected attraction to

165. Matthew Ward, Review of *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* by Virginia DeJohn Anderson, 2005, no. 471, <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/471>

166. Goat Island, located between the American and Canadian Falls, constitutes a portion of the Niagara Falls State Park and at the time of Bossy's trek, could only be reached by a network of pedestrian footbridges.

tourists, immortalized in newspaper articles from both sides of the American-Canadian border and making appearances in guidebooks, like Peter A. Porter's 1901 *Guide: Niagara Falls River - Frontier, Scenic, Botanic, Electric, Historic, Geologic, Hydraulic*. Her story would eventually inspire a 2006 children's book by writer and illustrator Suzy Becker, titled *Manny's Cows: The Niagara Falls Tale* (Figure 3.12). The sustained circulation of children's books utilized for education purposes or bedtime stories that fill souvenir shop shelves on both sides of the Niagara River has not waned in the past decade.

A visit to the Table Rock Welcome Centre along the Niagara Falls Parkway or the Prospect Point Gift Shop in the Niagara Falls State Park reveals countless published works, including Adam Gamble and Mark Jasper's 2018 *Good Night Niagara Falls*, Megan Stine and Tim Foley's 2015 *Where is Niagara Falls?*, Jennifer Maruno's 2020 *Until Niagara Falls*, Matt Tavares' 2016 *Crossing Niagara: The Death-Defying Tightrope Adventures of the Great Blondin* and Conor MacNeill's 2017 *Benny the Whale Goes to Niagara Falls*. Each of these books, brilliantly illustrated and rendered, not only continue the long history of written accounts and tales inspired by the site but help share the stories of cultural histories and spectacles surrounding the place.

Paul A. Roncken and Ian Convery draw concepts of landscape, nature and the contemporary sublime from examples of children's literature in *Interpreting Nature and Landscapes* (2017). Roncken and Convery propose the idea that "illustrated children's literature has an important role in facilitating childhood interactions with the natural world, often helping to develop emotions and experiences that may resonate deep into

adulthood.”¹⁶⁷ Roncken and Convery lay out the active definition of one’s “sense of self” and “sense of place” through illustrated, and visual, readings of landscapes. With the assistance of Dutch landscape illustrations, Roncken and Convery outline four key landscape ‘types’—*Legible*, *Neglected*, *Portal* and *Horrific*—which are simultaneously inspired by sublime ideologies and able to demonstrate that ‘nature’ is unavoidably shaped by narrative.¹⁶⁸ They begin with the sublime, in its earliest eighteenth-century iteration, as a means of experiential learning rooted in the idea that nature must be survived or combatted.¹⁶⁹ Their work moves past the antiquated notion that nature is waiting for discovery in the ‘wilderness’ and replaces it with an iteration of nature, and the sublime, in more mundane places and ephemeral moments.¹⁷⁰ The contemporary sublime cannot rest on the unscalable and untamable notions of the past, as continually evolving technological advancements and self-imposed stewardship of the environment has erased this possibility. The sublime is only able to survive through perceptive shifts, both real and embellished, that actively draw upon narratives and accounts that question one’s “sense of self” and “sense of place.”

167. Paul A. Roncken and Ian Convery, “Landscape, Nature and the Contemporary Sublime in Illustrated Children’s Literature” in *Changing Perceptions of Nature*, eds. Ian Convery and Peter Davis (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016): 171.

168. *Ibid.*, 179.

169. *Ibid.*, 173.

170. Robert Macfarlane’s 2007 book, *The Wild Places*, reads like a modern travelogue or guidebook through the United Kingdom. Macfarlane explores unequivocally sublime and dangerous places in his text, while also traversing common and everyday places such as empty industrial complexes in the search for wildlife and re-emergences of nature. His use of descriptive language and conveyance of wonderment is most noteworthy, as he reveals no distinction or change in tone between the ‘wild places’ found in nature and human-made landscapes.

Returning to Niagara Falls, the propensity of the site to serve as the backdrop for seemingly ridiculous and strange happenings—such as the absurdity of a prized Holstein wading the waters mere feet from the precipice—actively contributes to the collision of ideas and definitions of “nature” today. The intersection of a domesticated animal in a landscape that is equally “tamed” and domesticated is rich ground for detailed exploration of narratives and tall tales that utilize the iconic site as backdrop. In reference to Ward’s synopsis of DeJohn Anderson’s *Creatures of Empire*, these types of narratives explore the outcomes of allowing animals to “roam free in the woods.”¹⁷¹

MacNeill’s 2017 *Benny the Whale Goes to Niagara Falls* demonstrates the importance that local stories and myths play in establishing—and sometimes reinvigorating—broader understandings of places and landscapes. MacNeill, a Niagara-born animator and illustrator, has produced work in the film and advertising world for nearly two decades, working with clients like Disney, PBS Kids, General Mills Food Company and Fisher Price.¹⁷² He frames his print works and series as “Sketches and Things: An Inquiry into the Digital Arts, Storytelling, and Canadian Myths and Legends.” In this example, the title character, Benny the Whale, draws inspiration from

171. Matthew Ward, Review of *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* by Virginia DeJohn Anderson, 2005, no. 471, <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/471>.

172. Conor MacNeill, “Sketches and Things...An Inquiry into the Digital Arts, Storytelling, and Canadian Myths and Legends,” <https://conorpmacneill.com/about/>.

the 2018 story of a beluga whale sighted in the temperate Atlantic waters of the Thames Estuary in the United Kingdom—a visit that lasted upwards of three months.¹⁷³

Benny’s venture into the River Thames is one that echoes Bossy’s wading into the waters above the American Falls, as the event gained notoriety in various creative, commercial and ecological circles, from the widespread production and consumption of plush stuffed animals to recreations of the event by local artists, photographers and hand-craft artisans. Benny’s venture even made landfall in the Twitter universe, with the #keepbennysafe¹⁷⁴ tag emerging in local port towns along his journey, in one instance causing a Gravesham Borough Council fireworks show to be rescheduled. The arbitrariness of the beluga’s journey through heavily mediated waterways, and subsequent excitement at local and international levels, reinforces the notion that the sublime emerges in moments that challenge perceptual understandings of one’s sense of self or sense of place. Gravesham Borough Council, for example, would undoubtedly heed the advice of considering environmental noise pollution in their 2018 Christmas greeting to their followers, which read: “Thinking of setting off some #fireworks this holiday? Keep in mind they also disturb some people and animals including our lovely whale”¹⁷⁵ (Figure 3.13).

173. “Benny the Beluga: Whale Still Thriving in River Thames,” *BBC News*, (November 19, 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-kent-46255755>.

174. Eights, Twitter Post, (November 3, 2018, 8:46 AM), https://twitter.com/eightclubs_/status/1058701983383740417.

175. Gravesham Council, Twitter Post, (December 25, 2018, 10:01 AM), <https://twitter.com/graveshambc/status/1077580202316910592>.

In *Benny the Whale Goes to Niagara Falls*, MacNeill transfers Benny, a now-iconic international figure, across the Atlantic Ocean to share the narratives and myths inspired by the waterways that stretch throughout the Canadian landscape. Niagara's popularity is undeniable, both environmentally and culturally, through the range of tales and stories that encircle the place; even the proposition of a domesticated creature treading the iconic waters is not an original notion (see Bossy above). MacNeill's story conveys how nature and culture intersect at the Niagara River through the retelling of three distinct stories from the region's history: the Cave of the Evil Spirit,¹⁷⁶ the 1919 Prohibition¹⁷⁷ routes across the Niagara River and the Maid of the Mist (Lelawala) Haudenosaunee myth. Although this chapter shifts from the bookshelf to an exploration of domestic goods and housewares, many of the same underlying themes emerge in the artefacts and objects, including environmental stewardship, settler-indigenous relationships, and gender roles.

176. From the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, "The Cave of the Evil Spirit," coined by early Seneca People, is located along the American shoreline of the Niagara River Gorge just north of the Niagara Glen. It occupies a location that was historically an important portage used by Indigenous people to transport canoes around Niagara Falls and rapids on the Niagara River. It was so named because subsequent disaster would come to anyone who enter the cave. Indigenous people attributed the misfortunes of Robert de la Salle after his visit to the cave 1679 despite clear warnings to steer clear of the area. de la Salle would eventually be murdered by members of his own expedition party, years later, as they travelled across North America. The gorge cave was also the site of a bloody massacre on September 14, 1763, titled "Battle of the Devil's Hole."

177. From the *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, 78, no. 1, 2011. It was the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919 that banned the manufacture, sale and distribution of alcohol in the United States for over a decade. Niagara was in an advantageous position during Prohibition because the manufacture, sale and distribution of alcohol remained legal in Canada, so trade routes were established along the Niagara River from Buffalo to Youngstown.

3.5 Domestic Goods: Crafting Long-Standing Narratives

The story of Lelawala, widely adopted and marketed as the story of the “Maid of the Mist” for a colonial setting, is so greatly diffused and appropriated that its origins and embellishments are indistinguishable. Robinder Kaur Sehdev’s 2008 dissertation “Unsettling the Settler at Niagara Falls: Reading Colonial Culture Through the Maid of the Mist” focuses on the varied and complicated iterations of the myth, all of which are told from settler perspectives. The most common story follows the stereotypical, and unfounded notion of a sacrificial offering to the gods:

Lelawala, the daughter of a powerful chief of an ancient...tribe, lived on the shores of the Niagara River. She was granted the highest honor that a woman in her community could possibly be afforded: decked with fragrant flowers in the finest white doe skins, she rode a white birch bark canoe over the brink of the Niagara's colossal waterfalls.¹⁷⁸

Renditions of this sacrificial trope supports such alternating ideas that Lelawala’s plunge over the cataract was punishment for spurning the love of a “malicious medicine man”¹⁷⁹ or that she was offered by her culture to combat the *evil* forces in nature (a return to the Eurocentric treatment of sublime landscapes introduced in earlier chapters). Some

178. Robinder Kaur Sehdev uncovers at least three coinciding iterations of Lelawala’s tale over the past century and a half, including Andrew Burke’s 1851 self-published “Visitor's Companion to Niagara Falls: Its Strange And Wonderful Localities,” Willard Parker’s 1922 “Niagara's Rainbow: The Legend of the White Canoe,” and Lini Grol’s 1971 children’s book “Lelawala: A Legend of the Maid of the Mist, The Heroine from the Niagara Peninsula.”

179. William Trumbull, “The Legend of the White Canoe” (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons: 1894).

iterations even suggest that her plunge over the precipice was caused by her saddened state at the news of her husband's death; which culminated in her rescue by Hinu, the river god who lived behind the waterfall.¹⁸⁰ In every settler iteration of Lelawala's story, the musings of nature, science and the sublime become gendered. The female, or *maiden*, carries meaning in colonial culture and society, where the "maid" fulfills both the desires and expectations of the colonizing culture; a role fulfilled both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. Furthermore, Lelawala's myth is re-framed as a lesson in morality,¹⁸¹ nobility, domesticity, love and the power of companionship. This grossly over-simplified myth carries colonizing undertones, which allows for her image to fit seamlessly, and conveniently, into the countless narratives and conceptions of Niagara.

The Maid of the Mist sightseeing boat tour company is one such recognizable example, where the moniker has emerged as an internationally recognized brand¹⁸² that is synonymous with the area. Now a literal vessel for the tourist experience in Niagara Falls, New York, the Maid of the Mist ferry brings visitors to the base of the powerful cataracts and continues the unique practice of simultaneously presenting nature's omnipotence from a safe distance.

180. Lini Grol, "Lelawala: A Legend of the Maid of the Mist, The Heroine from the Niagara Peninsula" (Fonthill: Trillium Books, 1971).

181. Robinder Kaur Sedhev, "Unsettling the Settler at Niagara Falls: Reading Colonial Culture Through the Maid of the Mist" (PhD diss., York University, 2008): 11.

182. The Maid of the Mist ferry boat was a bi-nationally-named attraction that operated from the 1970s until 2013, when the Canadian government renewed the contract and subsequently renamed the attraction Hornblower Niagara Cruises. Since 2014, the attraction operates three seasons of the year on both sides of the international border, however, only the American government has maintained the Maid of the Mist moniker.

A more subtle example of Lelawala's myth, and broader settler retelling of the site's history, emerged in the Fall of 2021 with the illumination advertisement collaboration between The Niagara Parks Commission, Tiffany & Co., Beyoncé (Knowles) and Jay-Z (Shawn Carter). Tiffany & Co.'s "About Love" advertisement campaign fuses art (from the estate of Jean Michel Basquiat), music, film and history to capture "the beauty of love through time and all its dimensions, forging a new vision of love today."¹⁸³ The campaign brings together the architecture of the power generating stations that are situated above the cataracts and the craft of various musicians, artists, filmmakers and jewelers to produce a two-minute short film directed by Jay-Z and Beyoncé. The short film advertisement is recorded on a Super 8 camera and includes an iconic 1877 128.54-carat stone diamond necklace, 1961 *Breakfast at Tiffany's* "Moon River" audio samplings and Basquiat's 1982 *Equals Pi* painting. The work was then scaled up to a thirty-foot projection that played on loop across the exterior façade of the Toronto Power Generating Station (Figure 3.14).

The projection overlays the stonework of the long-abandoned power generating station façades above the Canadian Horseshoe Falls that flank the fast-moving lower Niagara River. The structures are adorned with many elaborate carvings and details, the most notable of which depict Indigenous figures, in canoes, navigating the powerful Niagara River water above the precipice (Figure 3.15). Acting as symbols of conquest

183. "About Love," Tiffany & Co., https://www.tiffany.com/stories/guide/beyonce-and-jay-z-about-love/?omcid=sm-us_twitter-owned_about+love&utm_medium=social_media-us&utm_source=twitter-owned&utm_campaign=about+love&sf156363243=1

and superiority over the landscape, these settler-metaphors appropriate Indigenous imagery and folklore for American and early Canadian hydroelectric conquest. The stories and depictions of Indigenous culture are literally cemented into the place through the architecture and crafted details. A ten-minute car ride North, along the Niagara Parkway and across the Queenston-Lewiston bridge, reveals the same motif on the Sir Adam Beck entrance keystone medallion (Figure 3.16) in Niagara Falls, New York. These symbols not only reveal the problematic history of depicting Indigenous people in European and settler art¹⁸⁴ but also materialize the complicated interaction between settler and Indigenous cultures. The successful re-routing of waterways and establishment of hydroelectric plants on both sides of the national border not only exemplify domestication of the landscape, but the inclusion of generic images of noble and proud Indigenous figures—from the settler perspective—in the architecture piece together a tidy narrative of progress and linear history. This would not be the first example of the trope of the “noble savage” utilized in settler-created imagery, as Gail Guthrie Valaskakis writes about this concept in various historical iconographies. She explores the dominant representation of the “Portrait of Pocahontas” or “Indian princess” in advertising imagery between 1915 and 1940s. “The ‘lady in red,’ a maiden draped in a red tunic, wearing the requisite headband and feather, and posed with picturesque mountains, pristine forests,

184. Sedhev dissects the Adams Power Station keystone medallion in great detail, most notably pointing out the features and clothing of the male figure do not align with actual Indigenous people of the Niagara area or region. For example, the figure depicted in the canoe is wearing the iconic and clichéd headdress, which is characteristic of people from the Great Plains.

waterfalls, and moonlit lakes”¹⁸⁵ emerged in mass-produced advertising campaigns, including “corn, peas, apples, Mazola oil, Land o’ Lakes butter, Kraft foods, beer, and beverages.”¹⁸⁶ Valaskakis noted the lack of correlation between the rendered Indigenous women and the advertised product, representing, in her analysis, the first “North American ‘pin-up girl.’”¹⁸⁷

The Tiffany & Co. illumination project with the Niagara Parks Commission also consisted of washing of the American and Canadian Falls in “Tiffany Blue”—the practice of washing the iconic waters in curated colours has emerged in recent years as a means to convey solidarity, advertisement, protest or mourning since the 2016 bi-national Niagara Falls Illumination Board lighting replacement project.¹⁸⁸ The nightly light display has operated for the wonderment of visitors and locals for decades, however, in recent years the practice of illuminating the American and Canadian Falls has garnered deeper social, political and commercial potential. Tiffany & Co.’s narrative “About Love” claims to reimagine love across time and dimension through the collaboration of varied artists—past and present—and media—music, film, art and craft. Niagara Falls is the backdrop to the interrelatedness of love, beauty and domesticity while simultaneously conveying

185. Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, *Indian Country: Essays on Contemporary Native Culture* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005): 136.

186. *Ibid.*, 136.

187. *Ibid.*, 136.

188. In 2016, the Niagara Parks Commission and bi-national Niagara Falls Illumination Board (NFIB) completed the replacement of twenty-year-old lighting technology with newer, energy-efficient, LED modules, which gave the NFIB a much broader colour spectrum to operate with and greater customization possibilities for its scheduled illumination displays and internationally recognized signature dates.

ideas of the sublime and powerful. The tension between these oppositional readings is heightened by the layering of light on the waterfall and the layering of the illuminated notions of love and beauty over the architecture. Niagara serves as a backdrop for the narrative of others. In the case of the Niagara Parks Commission and Tiffany & Co. collaboration, the wash of light and illumination not only alludes to settler-Indigenous relationships but broader societal conceptions of love, femininity, and domesticity. The re-appropriation of Indigenous stories and the complicated history of representing Indigenous people in Western art and culture extends to the earliest moments that the natural site was described and marketed for consumption by the touring masses. Art, souvenirs and handmade goods that bear Niagara's likeness suggest an authentic connection to the place and, in turn, are linked to the participation of Indigenous people in souvenir and trade markets.

3.6 Beaded Novelties and Other Ephemera: Gender and Domesticity

The long history of handmade crafts and novelties by Indigenous people around sites like Niagara Falls and Saratoga Springs, first established in the mid-nineteenth century Victorian wave of tourism to the area, sets the beginnings of the material domestication of the sublime at iconic landscapes like Niagara Falls. The influences of domesticity have less to do with the monetization or competing entrepreneurship, which will be explored in later chapters, but more to do with the aestheticization and sentimentality of the objects and sellers of objects. Phillips presents scenes from photographic albums and stereoscopic views of tourist resorts in Niagara, but it is her collection of written accounts about Indigenous trade markets that reveal the shifting experience of the sublime:

Written accounts are consistent in constructing souvenir sellers as picturesque figures. These texts articulate unambiguously the way in which buyers transferred sentimental, archaizing significations from the figure of the maker-seller to the objects themselves.¹⁸⁹

Niagara Falls, and other notable tourist stops along the railway and waterway routes that ran from the Northeastern United States into Canada, were evolving into bustling markets where seekers of genuine domestic handcrafted goods could take their piece of the site home. The depiction of objects and their makers in picturesque scenes further complicates the history of leisure tourism, in a colonial context, by presenting ideas of novelty, otherness, and domesticity. The perceived authenticity of these types of tourist objects and souvenirs does not rest solely on the qualities of the object but the methods of distribution and sale in these trade markets. I reintroduce the concept of the cult of domesticity, a concept introduced earlier in this chapter around Singer's *The Universal Sewing Machine* booklet, and how it further highlights (female) gendering and domestication of the site.

One of the popular objects for sale at Niagara, and Saratoga Springs, during the nineteenth century was the beaded moccasin, in particular, the hand-made infant moccasin made by Indigenous women for sale at tourist markets. Indigenous-made tourist artefacts like children's footwear represents a broader scope of souvenir typology, which includes hatpin pincushions, hanging wall pockets for men's watches, doilies, box purses, and picture frames. The Niagara Falls History Museum and Niagara Falls

189. Ruth B. Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenirs in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1998): 32.

Exchange – Cultural Hub and Market hold vast collections of these artefacts. The beaded infant moccasin (Figure 3.17) represents resistance to cultural appropriation and a model for reimagined authenticity. Phillips presents a unique perspective to analyze Indigenous, hand-made, objects within a colonial context. Rather than view the creation and distribution of mementos to European and American suitors as an oppressive practice or representation of a false primitivism, Phillips inverts this stereotype and focuses on the ingenuity and adaptability of Indigenous women expressed through appropriation of European culture. Phillips refers to an excerpt from an 1859 edition of *The Ladies' Handbook of Fancy and Ornamental Work* to convey this cultural response:

...this infant's shoe is, in point of fact, a small Indian moccasin, imitated from one of those ingenious fabrics, which are so often brought under the notice of the ladies who visit Saratoga Springs and the Falls of Niagara. The imitation might be very advantageously extended to other articles of Indian manufacture, particularly watch cases, card boxes, several kinds of mats & Ornamentation with beads, in the Indian style, could also be applied to many other articles unknown to the aboriginal artists.¹⁹⁰

Hartley represents a nineteenth-century Victorian reaction to the craft and souvenir markets of Niagara Falls and Saratoga, displaying a reverence for the craft of Indigenous women, alluding to their beadwork *craft* as a form of *art*, literally referring to the Onkwehonwe and Haudenosaunee women of the area as *artists*. Returning to the infant moccasin noted above, the memento typology shows how Indigenous women “imitated” their own cultural objects while adapting them with fabrics and materials that

190. Florence Hartley, *The Ladies' Handbook of Fancy and Ornamental Work*, (Philadelphia: G.G. Evans, 1859): 25.

were more familiar to their Eurocentric suitors.¹⁹¹ The modest booties reflected in Figure 3.18 are a hybrid of cultures and craft; the suede fabric is the lone material reference to Onkwehonwe culture, as the red cloth and coloured beads are Victorian products.¹⁹² The moccasins of trade markets encircling the Canadian and American cataracts progressively shifted from “authentic” materials and patterns towards those that would sell to Eurocentric tourists. Neither of these new materials were familiar to Indigenous people until interactions with European settlers began in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Onkwehonwe, in particular, had been enthusiastically trading for cloth, beads, and other trade goods since first contact with Europeans over four hundred years earlier.¹⁹³ The Indigenous women *artists* displayed an innovativeness and agency over their craft to produce items that followed traditional notions of texture, order, precision, beauty and pattern. Footwear was not the only domestic object that would catch the eye of European visitors to Niagara, for newlyweds would require other wares to fill their homes.

191. Rick Hill—Scholar-Artist, Director and Curator for various institutions in southern Ontario and New York State—has presented various lectures and talks pertaining to First Nations aesthetics within colonial history, such as his lecture at University of Western Ontario on September 21, 2022, titled “How the Foundations of Haudenosaunee Aesthetics Survived Colonization.” Hill also contributes to the historical research at Niagara Falls History Museum, specifically noting how Haudenosaunee beading artists replaced their leather works with vibrantly coloured velvets and other fabrics. Furthermore, their ornamentation evolved to include coloured glass beads, which replaced beads made of more traditional materials, such as bone, shell, and stone.

192. Janice Anderson and Kristina Huneault, *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1850-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012): 337.

193. *Ibid.*, 336.

The opening sentence of the Canadian wares show at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition¹⁹⁴ indicated “there is nothing that attracts customers so much at bazaars as novelty.”¹⁹⁵ Phillips proposes that the “quest for novelty expresses the essential restlessness of consumer culture”¹⁹⁶ as embodied by the endless reinvention of household ornaments documented in the needlework columns of women’s magazines. The theme of domesticity was first introduced in this chapter through Singer’s *The Universal Sewing Machine* booklet and extends to the distribution and consumption of Niagara’s early domestic artefacts, largely crafted by Indigenous women in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. This early cult of domesticity coincided with the development of one of the most well-known honeymoon sites in the world; which remains one of the most well-known honeymoon destinations today.¹⁹⁷ The earliest examples include table

194. The use of the term “Indian” in this context references the original naming of the 1886 International Exhibition held in South Kensington, London. The use of the term is representative of the vast body of colonial representations of Indigenous people and purchase of artefacts as the oversimplified search for “authentic” or “genuine” civilization.

195. “Trifles at the Colonial Exhibition Suitable for Bazaars,” *The Queen, The Lady’s Newspaper*, August 14, 1886, 181.

196. Ruth B. Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenirs in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1998): 212.

197. Karen Dubinsky utilizes the trope of Niagara Falls as the “honeymoon capital of the world” as a central theme of her 1999 book *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooners, Heterosexuality, and the Tourist Industry at Niagara Falls*. Drawing on the European tradition of the grand wedding tour, she brings ranging ideas of sexuality and culturally-expected practices or rites of passage to the site of Niagara Falls. Even Nathaniel Hawthorne, in his 1835 written accounts of Niagara Falls, draws out the impending “anxiety of consummation” that hangs over those that visit the natural site.

housewares, such as underliners, vanity trays (Figure 3.19), salt dips, nappies, compotes, cream pitchers (Figure 3.20), bone dishes, coasters, meat platters and custard dishes.

The vanity trays and cream pitcher noted represent the plethora of china that was available for purchase at Niagara in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This category can be vague in terms of its materiality, as china refers to a broad spectrum of materials. I will be focusing on ornate porcelain items that highlight highly stylized images of Niagara Falls across milky-white and soft-blue back drops. Virginia Vidler's 1985 *100 Years of Souvenirs* book which, in part, marks the centennial anniversary of the establishment of the Niagara Parks Commission, is a valuable resource in appreciating the range and styles of souvenirs across Niagara's visual history. The vanity tray and cream pitcher are quintessential china works, displaying iconic vantage points, perspectives, or photographs of the site, with embellishments, like the vanity tray from 1925, marked with pink roses anchoring the corners and layered gold tracery. These two works represent the process of "transfer printing" which takes an engraving on a copper plate with transfer ink and sheets of thin but durable paper to pick up the original image. While still wet, the paper is pressed on the china piece, transferring the image to the object. The finishing phase includes colouring, painting, firing and glazing. This process was first developed in the middle of the eighteenth century, primarily as a means to provide beautifully decorated objects to people of average means.¹⁹⁸

198. Virginia Vidler, *100 Years of Souvenirs* (Utica: North Country Books Inc. 1985): 28.

Vidler outlines how Canadians and Colonial Americans who emigrated from England, for example, were naturally partial to tableware imported from their own country. As a result, the china-producing districts of England, known as The Potteries (Staffordshire, Liverpool, Burslem, Bristol, Leeds and Sunderland), did a flourishing business creating export china that they knew would be popular in Niagara Falls.¹⁹⁹ The peculiarity of this cultural practice suggests that visitors who travel across the world to explore a unique and powerful landscape, prefer familiar objects, housewares, and other domestic articles in souvenir shops and trade markets. Commonplace household items were popular with honeymooners visiting Niagara, as the growing markets for Indigenous-made art commodities and other housewares entered hotel lobbies and hotel porticos, oftentimes greeting guests right from the railcar window.²⁰⁰ These types of objects and consumptive practices not only influence how a culture understands its relationship with its landscapes but how conceptions of these landscapes can shape broader cultural and social hierarchies.

The novelty of the Niagara Falls tourist landscape, based largely upon the promise of the unique sublime experience, first emerged in nineteenth-century Victorian grand tours through Niagara Falls. The reduction of the site to picturesque recreations

199. Ibid., 28.

200. Harvey Green's 1983 *The Light of the Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America* states that in the 1870s honeymooning couples could expect lavish greeting from the various hotels that lined the rail lines, with some businesses greeting newlyweds with bursts of band music. Gift shops and bazaars filled hotel lobbies, catering to the visitors' desire for souvenirs, including feathered fans, miniature bark canoes, jewelry, vases carved from local rocks and beadwork. Green claims the souvenir became part of the American domestic landscape.

and banal everyday objects provides a strong contrast to the sublime history of the site as documented in written and oral accounts but creates equally lasting implications on how humans define nature. The sublime experience in nature, until the rise of leisure tourism, almost exclusively rested on the idea that nature needed to be dominated or conquered. The religious undertones of early European visitors to the region emerged in the engravings and written accounts by missionaries and clergymen, such as Father Louis Hennepin, as explored in the first chapter of this dissertation. The establishment of leisure routes and souvenir hunting across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries lead to richer understandings of how broader cross sections of society interact with and represent their landscapes, especially iconic places. The earliest crafted novelties that were produced and sold at Niagara, for example, give clearer insight into the growing domestication of the sublime and Eurocentric definitions of women's roles in society—including Indigenous women.

Returning to Vidler's anthology of objects and mementos of Niagara, she also explores the long history of Niagara's silver souvenir spoons and novelties. Silver spoons are the ultimate banal everyday object, along with napkin rings, paperweights, and finger rings, yet the context of the production and distribution of such goods propelled these everyday objects into the homes and collections of visitors to Niagara. Oneida and International Silver companies both established production facilities on the Canadian side of the Niagara River at the turn of the twentieth century, which coincided with the 1901 Buffalo Pan-American Exposition. The new hydro-electric generators were on full display to the visitors, connecting the technological advancements of the day to the

newly found conveniences of the home—Singer’s *The Universal Sewing Machine* pamphlet is a testament to the possibility of connecting product to consumer.

Niagara’s spoons were popular souvenirs at the Buffalo Pan-American Exposition due, in part, to the fact that “spoon collecting was a national fad at the time”²⁰¹ and that spoons were ideal impulse purchases due to their relatively low price and elaborate designs that caught the eyes of visitors. The rise of industrial mining, dewatering and drilling techniques made silver plentiful and cheap, forcing companies like Oneida and International Silver to compete for the popular market. Fabrication of housewares of the time fused hand-craftsmanship with newly-patented machined equipment and processes, such as the “two part die casting machines that simultaneously pressed both sides (of the spoon) with an engraved or embossed appearing design.”²⁰² What emerged were elaborate spoon and cutlery design sets, such as the *Pan American Spoon with the Goddess of Light Tower and Falls with Horseshoe in the Bowl*, *W.H. Glenny Sons & Co. Niagara Spoons* and *All-American Fork* (Figure 3.21, from Left to Right). The vertical motif of the cataracts fold into the handle (or neck) of the utensils while the swirling rapids or horseshoe-patterned whirlpool fits seamlessly into the bowl of the spoon. The exploration of common-place souvenirs, from the perspective of craft, distribution and sale, is largely unheeded due to the perceived mass-produced and commercialized nature of their fabrication. Although Vidler explores many of Niagara’s eclectic and ephemeral

201. Virginia Vidler, *100 Years of Souvenirs* (Utica: North Country Books Inc. 1985): 52.

202. *Ibid.*, 53.

objects in great detail, it was not until the last ten to fifteen years that contemporary souvenir typologies have garnered wide-spread research.

Until David Hume's 2014 *Tourism Art and Souvenirs: The Material Culture of Tourism*, the study of artefacts and souvenirs was subject to the binary classification established by Susan Stewart. Until 2014, souvenirs were classified into two categories, "Sampled" or "Representative," where the former alludes to objects collected from individual experience and not available as general consumer goods²⁰³ while the latter encapsulates objects of "exterior sights" which are most often representations and purchasable.²⁰⁴ The long-established classification of souvenir material culture operated for nearly thirty years without notable revision, creating gaps in the types of souvenirs circulated at popular tourist destinations and the modes of manufacturing and distribution.

Sampled objects are, in Stewart's terms, the most "'impoverished and partial' findings; in their purest form, literally samples of the environment" which "take the shape of seashells or pebbles, wild flowers dried and pressed, or animal remains."²⁰⁵ Representative objects exemplify "all other souvenirs; objects that may properly be called artefacts, in that they are produced from human mediation and interpretation" which

203. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of The Miniature, The Gigantic, The Souvenir, The Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1984): 138.

204. *Ibid.*, 138.

205. David Hume, *Tourism Art and Souvenirs: The Material Culture of Tourism* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2014): 122.

include “postcards, wilderness posters, calendars and other representations of the site.”²⁰⁶ Hume expands upon Stewart’s binary through a deeper exploration of the space between Sampled and Representative objects, which emerges from a refined definition of “Craft.” Stewart had already included craft in her categorization of souvenirs, however, the ethnographic readings and study of cultural values were greatly restricted by her binary classification.

Hume’s exploration of “Crafted” objects opens the “Representative” category—the mass production of souvenirs, made from non-native or generic media—to give space for the exploration of objects and souvenirs created with local materials and local craft traditions, which frequently retain some utilitarian reference.²⁰⁷ Crafted objects favour the article’s operation as a domestic item but does not bind it to the level of an ethnographical artefact or artwork. I propose that Hume’s three-tiered approach to souvenirs (Sampled, Representative and Crafted) inspires further revision to actively consider the evolution and circulation of souvenir types that pervade North American and European giftshops.²⁰⁸

206. Ibid., 122.

207. Ibid., 122.

208. One of the most promising outcomes of David Hume’s expanded typology is that it permits the analysis of Western and non-Western artefacts within the same framework. Susan Stewart’s typology, as originally proposed, only alluded to non-Western artefacts and sites that excluded North American and European objects. Previous explorations that did include Western artefacts only alluded to folk art typologies (see Nick Graburn’s 1976 *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*) which largely ignored souvenirs and kitsch items. Hume’s work brings a refreshed perspective on the objects that don souvenir shop shelves but does concede that his proposed typology will inevitably uncover souvenir types that are difficult to place within the three main categories.

What is interesting about much of the previous work on souvenirs is that while there has been work on authenticity in terms of production, product, experience and consumption patterns of tourists, there has not been any extensive work found to date that examines the concepts of geographical scale associated with souvenir authenticity.²⁰⁹

Atsuko Hashimoto and David J. Telfer's quote, above, examines Niagara Falls' souvenirs under the lens of a "geographically displaced authenticity," which presents a new perspective that extends the study of souvenirs acquired on leisure trips beyond the mere classification of objects as genuinely crafted or sourced. Through readings of Stewart and Hume, we understand that any object that falls outside of the classification of *genuine* or *hand-made* is cast as mass-produced and loses any reference to authenticity. I propose that the classification of souvenirs based on the authenticity of their manufacture only captures part of the cultural and social value of the object.

Souvenirs are equally important based on their distribution and sale²¹⁰ and the manner that the objects are received in the homes of those that acquire them. Souvenirs serve as presents to relatives, decoration for home, shared with friends or worn as proof that a place was visited.²¹¹ Hashimoto and Telfer's 'geographical scale' alludes to the

209. Atsuko Hashimoto and David J. Telfer, "Geographical Representations Embedded within Souvenirs in Niagara: The Case of Geographically Displaced Authenticity," *An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place and Environment* 9, no. 2 (2007): 197.

210. Veronika Dumbrovská and Dana Fialová, "The City of One Hundred Souvenir Shops: Authenticity of Souvenirs in Prague," *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 18, no. 2 (May 2019): 187.

211. Kimberley Anne Peters, "Negotiating the 'Place' and 'Placement' of Banal Tourist Souvenirs in the Home," *Tourism Geographies* 13, no. 2 (May 2011).

various ways that souvenirs connect with their collectors, from references to national identities or icons to regional or site-specific attractions. Their work helps explain how objects that have no conceivable association with their source site, such as a pair of sunglasses or a shot glass picked up in a Hoover Dam giftshop, hold geographical importance due to the fact they were purchased away from the home and hold in them the memories of the particular place.²¹² The exploration of souvenir shop purchases and tchotchkes, explored in this chapter, represent the importance of overlooked objects—overlooked in regards to their aesthetic or cultural value—as these impulse buys are universal across leisure visitors. The objects have no particular functional connection to the site, other than the fact that the objects are presented with regularity in its retail spaces.

It is important to not only appreciate and analyze objects within the giftshop, but the giftshop itself as a collection or curated space. To reintroduce examples from this chapter and the accompanied visual analyses, we see how commercial objects can hold cultural and symbolic value. The objects explored here border on kitsch, while their method of production, distribution and presentation connect the objects to other social, cultural and, even, gender theories. For example, we can understand how handcrafted housewares and beadwork in Niagara's nineteenth-century markets contribute to broader cultural and social practices of domestication and settler-indigenous relationships.

212. Atsuko Hashimoto and David J. Telfer, "Geographical Representations Embedded within Souvenirs in Niagara: The Case of Geographically Displaced Authenticity," *An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place and Environment* 9, no. 2 (2007): 197.

Through such analysis, we come to understand that souvenirs are not simply made, marketed, and purchased; nor are they haphazardly arranged in retail shops. The following chapter shifts focus to the *collection*—both as a practice and as a compendium—of eclectic objects of art and kitsch inspired by Niagara Falls. Furthermore, I will explore collections ranging from public-funded art institutions to private homes of local tourism-sector workers and Niagara-historical enthusiasts.

Chapter 4

4 Collecting Memories: Three Typologies Inspired by *The Falls*

During certain visits to the Niagara Falls Museum in tourism's off-season, the only sound you would hear is your own hollow footsteps beneath you, tracing across the hardwood floors, disrupting the silence and stillness of this curious space.

After entering through the gift shop, visitors are faced with navigating narrow and poorly lit hallways featuring a variety of daredevil displays, accompanied by tinny and staticky recordings and narratives of Niagara's bravest, including a barrel to stand behind, in front a faded and scaled down fibreglass replica of the Horseshoe Falls. The thin, worn carpeting maps the path to the first stairwell.

As you cross the threshold of those first doors, your eyes need a moment to adapt to the darkness of the space, contrasting the overhead fluorescent lighting you left behind. Each step highlighted by the sound of the floor settling beneath it; soft creaking, soft echoing, reminding you of your own presence.

As you continue inward, the soft glow of the large glass vitrines begin to illuminate the space. Peach and coral-coloured partitions structure the interiors of large vitrines. One of the large vitrines displays a peculiar collection of taxidermy mounts; a two-headed calf, alongside a three-eyed pig, not far from a small white dog, with a wheel apparatus affixed to its hind legs. The mounts are organized in a frontal fashion to communicate with viewers directly, and head-on. They stand on top of dulled green artificial turf.

If you slowly walk around the vitrine, but maintain your gaze on the animals, there is a sliver of vision that affords a glimpse of stitchwork, and the seams along the side bodies, hocks, and tails of these objects on display. There is an exchange between your eyes and the glass-eye substitutes donning the taxidermy creatures.²¹³ The figures are simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar; an unaccustomed gaze that is both present and absent, penetrating and dislocating, reflective and refractive, perhaps located somewhere in between the panes of glass that stand between viewer and display.

4.1 Introduction

Each chapter of this dissertation has explored depictions, re-creations, and mementos of Niagara Falls to gain a deeper and more nuanced visual understanding of the natural site, especially when it might feel difficult to immediately draw parallels between the site and its myriad representations. This final chapter shifts to consider the importance of *where* Niagara's visual history is preserved and presented, with an emphasis on the role that regionality and locality play in its preservation and presentation. In this chapter, I propose that the spaces that preserve Niagara's visual history reside not only in its local museums and art galleries but across the region's private collections. I expand what defines a museum or collection by exploring the concept of the micromuseum using the region's

213. Donna Haraway writes of the visual exchange with a particular gorilla group diorama in her 1984 *Social Text* article, titled "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936." The scene she analyzes depicts a group of taxidermy silverback gorillas in a painted Rwandan landscape scene, with one of the silverbacks rising above the others in a confrontational chest-beating gesture. Haraway notes the unforgettable gaze of the creature, in spite of the fact the eyes were prosthetic and the scene was a frozen snapshot of time.

giftshops, souvenir shops, house-museums, hobbyist collections, and cabinets of curiosities as examples of curated spaces.

One of the strongest inspirations for this dissertation emerged from my development of *The Falls*, a 2017 exhibition at RiverBrink Art Museum. The exhibition shaped my appreciation of the volume and variety of source material that is preserved in the living rooms and basements of local residents. *The Falls* exhibition focused on Niagara Falls as a popular tourist destination, beginning almost two centuries ago. In many of the works in the exhibition, the awe and terror inspired by the iconic site is tempered by familiarity. Artists have responded to the challenge of capturing such a recognizable landscape in unique ways since the middle of the nineteenth century. The exhibition registers the encroachment of development and expanding infrastructure of tourism at the Falls, even as artists recorded the spectacular effects of water, mist, light, and air.

It is no accident that art works and artefacts depicting Niagara Falls are an important part of the collection of locals, both institutionally and privately. RiverBrink Art Museum, for example, was the summer country home of Samuel E. Weir, a lawyer who purchased the plot of land in Queenston, Niagara-on-the-Lake in the 1940s, where the museum sits today. Weir began to build on the site in the 1950s and, upon its completion, he stored many of his acquired paintings, sculptures, and rare books there. Between the 1960s and his death in 1981, his collection began to shift to include more works of Canadiana and images of the local area: Queenston and Niagara Falls. While initially considered part of the décor at his summer home, his works grew to include

numerous etchings, engravings, and other types of prints. Upon Weir's death, he left his Queenston estate and collection of nearly 1,400 works of Canadiana to the foundation, in his name, which allowed for the creation of RiverBrink Art Museum. The majority of Weir's collected works are housed in his basement vault while his former private living quarters serve as gallery spaces. *The Falls* aimed to draw upon the dozens of works depicting Niagara Falls from Weir's private collection that rarely get displayed.

The Falls was designed to foster community-based collaboration and inspire connection and communication between RiverBrink Art Museum and other local institutions, including the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum, Niagara Falls History Museum and The Niagara Falls Art Gallery William Kurelek Art Collection. The interest from the general public and local museum mailing lists was immediately evident after the first round of annual exhibition brochure prints and programming emails were circulated. Local residents responded with interest, indicating they had *stuff* that might be considered for the exhibition. From this moment on, collaboration with local institutions was expanded to include the collections and curios nestled in the homes of residents who were willing to share. These unplanned partnerships provided materials and narratives that not only enriched the exhibition but expanded my perspective on the role that memories and personal narratives play in the visual analysis of objects.

Each of the object-types described in this chapter exemplify David Hume's idea of the crafted article, as introduced in the previous chapter. Hume shows how crafted articles, such as domestic objects, can be examined outside of the ethnographic discourses. The objects within this chapter are neither sampled—a genuine artefact

from a culture—nor representative—a generic mass-produced copy, to borrow Susan Stewart’s terminology. Furthermore, most of the objects to be explored are a mixture of hand-made and mass-produced items, ranging from priceless to inexpensive. One of the subtexts of this chapter pertains to the possibility that highly commercialized museum gift shops or souvenir shops can serve as a type of curated space. This idea builds on the foundation set by previous chapters, which together propose that Niagara’s cultural and historical significance is rooted in the development of technologies that make traversing and consuming landscapes easier. More specifically, the technological developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the Niagara Region, Eastern Canada and United States popularized the leisure consumption of sublime landscapes. Visual representations of the site multiplied, from guidebooks to photographs to postcards to housewares to reprints of iconic paintings. These artefacts now reside in local museums, galleries, and of key importance to this chapter, in private collections.

The objects illustrated in this chapter are often cast as hollow representative copies but should we not consider if these are unfair classifications when the memento denotes personal or cultural value? *The Falls* exhibition, and the engagement with local resources that allowed for the exhibition to come together, attempts to address these questions while bringing to light three distinct models of collecting iconic places like Niagara Falls: the cluttered collection, the vernacular or basement collection, and the cabinet of curiosity.

The first model of collecting that I explore in this chapter is defined as the cluttered collection, a particular kind of curatorial arrangement identified by Fiona

Candlin in her work on micromuseums. Candlin highlights a shift away from the model set by larger public sector institutions that are equipped “to deliver a coherent story that is easily communicated and assimilated.”²¹⁴ Smaller art and historical institutions, especially those run by amateur or hobbyist collectors, are valued for the way they reflect their community. Furthermore, the subjects, or subject matter of cluttered collections are commonly framed around one aesthetic concept or theme, where the presentation of the object(s) stands out to viewers. The correlation of cluttered collection micromuseums, their subject matter, and their community is described by Candlin:

the way micromuseums are shaped by and shape their location varies according to the subject of the museum and their settings, but whatever the precise delineation of that geography, the single subject character of micromuseums can convey the impression that they provide the story of the area when in fact other narratives or exhibitions are equally possible.²¹⁵

The subject character of micromuseums, and cluttered collections in particular, rely on conveying a clear concept through the presentation of similarly themed objects devoid of elaborate narratives or curatorial backdrops. The themes and motifs are not deeply embedded in the objects. While researching works for *The Falls* exhibition, I found that the types of presentations of media broadened as I moved from the accessioned collections of permanent institutions and museums to the loaned works offered by personal and amateur collectors. The presentation of the objects in personal

214. Fiona Candlin, *Micromuseology: An Analysis of Small Independent Museums* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015): 139.

215. *Ibid.*, 148.

and amateur house collections echoes the cluttered collection defined by Candlin, which suggests that the personal back-story or anecdote that accompanies each object can carry as much significance as the visual quality or monetary value of the object.

The second model of collecting that emerged from *The Falls*, the vernacular, or basement collection, builds on the broadening range of media noted above. This type of collecting presents objects as they are, which is to say the collection is not curated, accessioned or catalogued with an overarching theme other than the personal account or narrative surrounding the objects being shared. These objects are often serialized or distinct copies of an original work, yet, their value is intrinsically personal to their owner(s). Through the exhibition planning process, I uncovered a network of local general-interest collectors and retired employees across the Niagara Region tourist sector—from bus tour and winery guides to museum and gift shop workers—who were more than eager to open their homes and not only share their collectibles, but the stories associated with them. I draw upon exploration of memory and remembering in museum spaces to contextualize *The Falls* Exhibition, as presented to the public, and the exchange between curator and collector in the selection of objects for display.

The final model of collection and presentation that I explore in this chapter is the cabinet of curiosity, which holds a specific place in Niagara Falls' visual history while also serving as an intersection for many of the concepts raised in the second part of this dissertation: memory, possession, and consumption. The commercial practice of capturing visitors' attention was established in the nineteenth century through attractions and spectacles, while cabinets of curiosities, oddity museums and natural history

museums provided a different type of experience. The presentation of noteworthy specimens and artefacts, including two-headed calves, ancient mummies and taxidermized domestic pets illustrate many longstanding themes swirling around Niagara, from nostalgia to longing to remembrance. Another approach to this form of collecting at Niagara draws on humankind's desire to scale or diminish the omnipotence of the surrounding world by telling nature's story in its own words.

4.2 *The Falls* as Cluttered Collection

...it is worth briefly returning to histories that propose that museums have moved from displaying more to less objects from the collections. Just as curators in mainstream museums select objects and arrange them so as to form a representative and comprehensible exhibition narrative.... By focusing on public sector institutions rather than micromuseums or small county museums, they have been able to deliver a coherent story that is easily communicated and assimilated.²¹⁶

Candlin's quote, above, presents the notion that large museums with vast collections are migrating away from displaying objects and artefacts; rather, opting for interactive multimedia displays²¹⁷ that present a coherent story that is easily communicated and assimilated. The negative outcome of these interactive multimedia displays and coherent narratives is that the genuine objects are not afforded the opportunity to stand on their own and garner visitor response. Steven Conn responds to what he perceives as the

216. Fiona Candlin, *Micromuseology: An Analysis of Small Independent Museums* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015) 139.

217. Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010): 22-26.

displacement of objects and reduction of the “central position”²¹⁸ of them, effectively reducing the importance of artefacts to that of explanatory texts, photographs, documentary footage, and presentations. Conn and Candlin, from differing contexts, argue for objects to stand on their own rather than succumb to over-contextualization and convenient narratives imposed by larger institutions.

The foundational step in collecting works was to dive into the private collection in the RiverBrink Art Museum’s vault and draw upon works that had rarely, if ever, been displayed. Even if the works were paintings or etchings, as opposed to souvenir-type objects, the process of researching and uncovering largely forgotten works from the collection breathes life into the museum and, in turn, the curation of the exhibition and its themes. The criteria for the consideration of work was simple; the image or object must reflect Niagara Falls. Returning to Conn’s theorization of the central position that objects can hold in a museum, I wanted to ensure that the narratives and themes would emerge from the objects themselves, rather than an easily communicated and assimilated idea superimposed on them.

218. Hilde S. Hein, *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000): 3.

Candlin alludes to the pleasures of exploration that micromuseums can hold. Her analysis of the Bakelite Museum²¹⁹—formerly in Williton, Somerset, England—begins with the concession that it “does not present a comprehensible history of plastic, much less a contemporary multimedia experience.”²²⁰ Illustrating the concept of the cluttered collection, the Bakelite Museum exhibits objects of a similar or singular nature without an overarching narrative; the resin objects are presented in and of themselves. The Bakelite Museum achieves its popularity through the disjunction of the collection and its location by encouraging exploration and discovery of an otherwise common country home through the display of vibrant objects arrayed throughout the entire living space. There is a relation between the space and the location. Similarly, RiverBrink Art Museum, nestled in Queenston, Niagara-on-the-Lake, provides the ideal location for *The Falls* exhibition because it embodies the traits of a house museum, converted from a country home after the death of its owner, Samuel E. Weir. The seasonal home was originally completed in 1970 and upon Weir’s death in 1981, a foundation was created to preserve and present his collection of art works, ultimately granting his wishes for the

219. Lee Hibbert provides a concise review in 2017 in *Professional Engineering* of the eccentric museum “shrine” to what was the world’s first entirely synthetic material, developed by chemist Leo Baekeland in 1907. Peter Cook established a private collection of Bakelite products in Somerset, England that began in the 1970s and evolved into a sizeable collection which was eventually housed in a mill from the 1980s until the late 2010s.

220. Fiona Candlin, *Micromuseology: An Analysis of Small Independent Museums* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015) 123.

structure: “I have built a foolish house on the Niagara River with the idea of leaving it for a museum, art gallery, library, etc., mainly Canadiana.”²²¹

Most works drawn from the Samuel E. Weir Collection for *The Falls* were painted works from the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, such as Frederic Marlett Bell-Smith’s *Niagara Falls in Winter* (Figure 4.1). It should be emphasized that Weir’s Collection by no means represents a comprehensible history of any particular art movement, style or theme, rather, it represents a grouping—a notably extensive grouping—of pleasing images and sculptures acquired by an affluent hobbyist collector.

Bell-Smith’s *Niagara Falls in Winter* reflects the artist’s fascination with photography and propensity for leisure scenes, both of which are indicative of works from the early part of his career. The vantage point, taken from below the American Falls, is not particularly unique in that it uses one of the many recognizable perspectives of the well-trodden site. The most noteworthy aspect of this work is the depiction of the ice bridging that occurs at the base of the American Falls, spreading across to the Canadian side of the Niagara River. Throughout the winter months, the water that travels over the Canadian Horseshoe and American Falls can move slowly enough to freeze below the persistent westerly mists, forming natural ice bridge structures strong enough to bear the weight of crowds and vehicles. This practice has long been banned with the establishment of controlled access points for pedestrians wishing to access the Niagara

221. RiverBrink Art Museum, “Our History,” (2022), <https://www.riverbrink.org/history.html>.

Gorge floor—at least in the areas directly surrounding the cataracts and the bustling tourist district. Bell-Smith renders his figures prominently in the foreground of his work, strolling and skating across the frozen river, suggesting that Niagara Falls isn't a site to be feared or taken too seriously, even in the dead of winter. Bell-Smith's work sits well in the context of Weir's collection, which does not take itself too seriously—a sentiment the owner conceded himself.

Visitors to the Niagara Region often overlook RiverBrink Art Museum, as the property is nestled amongst various Niagara Parkway estate homes. But those who chance a visit share similar accounts on review websites like [tripadvisor.com](https://www.tripadvisor.com), such as [ralpht1030](#) from 2018: “We happened upon this little GEM on accident... You get art and history when you stop in. The house itself is a piece of art as an added bonus,”²²² and [dianathecookie](#) from 2014: “This was an unplanned stop for me during my bike ride from Niagara Falls to Niagara on the Lake. The lovely building and grounds caught my eye... The variety of the collections was interesting and easily appreciated even though I'm not very educated when it comes to art.”²²³ There are numerous indicators for the museum, from permanent signage mounted on the site's entrance gates to its inclusion in art and culture pamphlets of the region, although it is not well known when compared to other attractions and institutions from the area.

222. Tripadvisor, “RiverBrink Art Museum: An Unexpected Gem,” (2018), https://www.tripadvisor.ca/ShowUserReviews-g155009-d2335229-r609033752-RiverBrink_Art_Museum-Queenston_Niagara_on_the_Lake_Ontario.html.

223. Ibid.

The second attribution of RiverBrink's popularity emerges from the discrepancy between the structure and its function. Weir's country home maintained every bit the feeling of a residence well into its years as a not-for-profit organization and even until recently with the incorporation of RiverBrink Art Museum in 2015. The museum is comprised of modestly sized display spaces, aptly called the Dining Room Gallery, Living Room Gallery, and accompaniment of bedrooms on the upper floor that serve as display galleries or staff offices. Visitors are free to meander through the house-museum spaces, and with the small staff stationed at the giftshop and throughout the private bedroom-offices, the experience is largely self-guided, blurring the boundary between public and private space. The gallery flows through the entire basement, ground, and second floor, with functioning bathrooms and closet spaces intertwined. The central space of the gallery comprises a functioning kitchen with many original millwork features and appliances selected from mid-century houseware catalogues.

Gallery spaces comprise wood paneling, trim work, parquet flooring, grand fireplaces and built-in wood corner cupboards. The basement is home to an extensive library containing books of law, residential architecture ranging from Arts and Crafts to Victorian Style, art history and general history, all open to the public without need for staff accompaniment, unless visitors should want to explore the rare books collection, locked and reserved for special research appointments. The principal, yet hidden, feature of the house museum is a concrete-walled vault situated below the nearly eight-hundred square foot rear porch that houses the 1,400 works of art and curio amassed by Samuel E. Weir during his lifetime. The Cold-War-inspired shelter is sealed with a metal-lined bank

vault-style door and hidden behind elaborate wood wall paneling at the bottom of the main public access stair.

RiverBrink Art Museum, for reasons outlined above, can serve as a model of the micromuseum in that it is private and “independent and small”²²⁴ with staffing under ten paid members.²²⁵ Furthermore, *The Falls* exhibition emphasizes this *independence* and *smallness* by presenting a single-subject theme in a homestyle setting. The museum spaces attract and encourage exploration and discovery while presenting the inherent tension between the function of a museological institution within the confines of a modest country home. RiverBrink Art Museum is part of large and long-standing community of galleries and museums in the Niagara Region—the Museums of Niagara Association (MONA)—however, RiverBrink stands out as it is one of the few privately-run institutions. The access to a network of institutions and surprising number of enthusiastic private collectors—including volunteers and board members from across the Niagara Region who opened their collections and homes—has been an invaluable source of support for both the exhibition and this dissertation.

224. Kenneth Hudson, “The Museum Refuses to Stand Still,” *Museum International* (January 2018): 45.

225. From *Micromuseology*, Candlin concedes there is no consensus on what counts as a small museum, or for that matter, a ‘medium’ or ‘large’ institution. She refers to Hudson’s defined ‘small’ as having less than ten paid members of staff, whereas the Museums Association UK equates small with fifteen or fewer employees and ‘very small’ with one or two workers.

4.3 *The Falls* as Vernacular—Basement—Collection

When reaching out to the local art and museum community about the musings of an exhibition dedicated exclusively to Niagara Falls, which included reaching out to members of the Museums of Niagara Association, board members of institutions in Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake, and resident museumgoers and history enthusiasts, I received many calls and emails from locals who wanted to invite me into their homes, inquiring about the possibility of including their objects in an exhibition dedicated to Niagara Falls' visual culture. These vernacular collections exist outside traditional institutional boundaries and, in many ways, were assets to the exhibition. The vernacular—or basement—collection, in the context of this research, is attributed to the types of collections that emerge in the homes of local Niagara residents whose appreciation for art and visual culture may not necessarily emerge from art historical backgrounds. As such, the objects that I uncovered were not catalogued or accessioned artefacts. In fact many of the objects were purchased from local gift shops or souvenir stands.

The inspiration for this concept of collecting, within the context of Niagara Falls' visual history, emerged in large part from Liz Rex and Christine Woywood's 2015 *Art Education* article "Envisioning Home, Self, and Community through Vernacular Art Environments." Rex and Woywood focus on eccentric homes that fit the definition of a "Vernacular Art Environment," which is defined as a space created by an artist—trained or amateur—that "transforms a specific place by creating art that dramatically alters the

way that place is experienced by an individual or community.”²²⁶ The types of spaces Rex and Woywood analyze include outdoor sculpture parks with life-size three dimensional storybook²²⁷ garden sculptures paying tribute to local area immigrants in Hollandale, Wisconsin and shimmering foil, rhinestone and glitter interiors in McComb, Mississippi inspired by Glen Campbell’s 1975 “Rhinestone Cowboy.” According to Rex and Woywood, intimate spaces like the home can be sites for meaningful everyday interactions and spaces to envision and construct notions of self and community. The examples of Vernacular Art Environments almost exclusively reflected traits or histories of their surrounding areas, serving as a mirror to their community or environment. Returning to the sourcing of works and artefacts for *The Falls*, the homes and basements of many local residents served as similarly curated spaces or collections that reflected the surroundings.

An unforeseen aspect that emerged from exploring local vernacular or basement collections, beyond the sheer number of images and artefacts of Niagara that are housed in the region, were the stories and anecdotes that accompanied them. Gaynor Kavanagh’s *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum* helps contextualize the experience and exchanges I uncovered while exploring the collections of local hobbyists and residents with a general interest in the topic. Kavanagh’s writing inspired me to view the private

226. Liz Rex and Christine Woywood, “Envisioning Home, Self, and Community through Vernacular Art Environments,” *Art Education* 67, no. 6 (2014): 42.

227. Leslie Umberger, *Sublime Spaces & Visionary Worlds: Built Environments of Vernacular Artists* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007).

amateur collections as curated museum spaces, especially in the context of her quote below:

In dream space, many things might tumble through our minds: bits of songs, half-written shopping lists, things left unsaid. The shape or shadow of something, its texture or colour, the operation of space and people moving through it can be triggers to an endless range of personal associations... We have to accept more fully the imagination, emotions, senses and memories as vital components of the experience of museums.²²⁸

The objects I found myself in front of, including shot glasses, snow globes, sheet music, poetry, railway car menus, stereo-view cards and die-cut scraps, relied on being open to an endless range of “personal associations” as noted by Kavanagh. The objects possessed unique and noteworthy visual qualities, colouring, texture and composition, yet the most valuable trait they held was their ability to inspire personal stories and accounts of the area. How else could these ephemera simultaneously conjure feelings or memories of the vast and powerful site? Kavanagh draws upon similar arguments to Conn from earlier in this chapter, who suggests the idea that objects can hold a central position or aura.

Jillian Rickly-Boyd connects Benjamin’s developments around authenticity and aura to the materiality of tourism, claiming that “in landscapes of tourism experience the souvenir is found at the material-symbolic center, it inherits a certain sacredness as an

228. Gaynor Kavanagh, *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 2000): 3.

intermediate form.”²²⁹ The intermediacy of the souvenir form is owed to its simultaneous existence as a mundane commercial object and a deeply personal symbol of a new and valued experience. The souvenir capitalizes one’s memory and serves as a “schema of the commodity’s transformation into an object for the collector.”²³⁰ The connective thread through Benjamin’s writing on tourism and the aura of the souvenir rests on this *collector* and their practices of acquisition and preservation.

Earlier in Chapter Three’s Introduction, I noted the development of souvenir hunting at the base of the gorge, where visitors could take their own piece of Niagara home. The aura that the physical bedrock fragments of Niagara Falls holds is undeniable, however, Benjamin helps us understand how mass-produced souvenirs and collectibles can similarly evolve into symbolic forms of transcendence and invoke the same feeling of authenticity. The evolution of an object to symbolic form occurs when the souvenir reaches home, finds its spot on a display shelf, and the collector begins to share the memories and anecdotes that the object represents. Rickly-Boyd argues that, in “Benjaminian” terms, the tourist experience “becomes a register for the participation in a tradition (however mediated), its rituals (however secularized), and an experience of aura which is a result of this participation”²³¹ The aura of the object, regardless of its materiality and worth, rests on its ability to invoke participation and interactivity.

229. Jillian M. Rickly-Boyd, “Authenticity & Aura: A Benjaminian Approach to Tourism” in *Annals of Tourism Research* 39, no. 1 (2012): 281.

230. Walter Benjamin, “Central Park,” in H. Eiland & M. W. Jennings (Eds.), *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938–1940* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003): 190.

231. Jillian M. Rickly-Boyd, “Authenticity & Aura: A Benjaminian Approach to Tourism” in *Annals of Tourism Research* 39, no. 1 (2012): 284.

When reflecting on the private collections, the first element to study is the collector, or curator, responsible for acquiring the objects within their anthology. The act of collecting objects is inherently personal, imaginative and emotional. People collect for different reasons: some may simply enjoy the site and all that it has to offer in its ephemera, some have worked in the tourist industry and perhaps have purchased objects against best efforts to resist the gift shop, and some may simply have been gifted items by family members and friends. Regardless of the means of acquisition, reasons for collecting can be personal and sentimental. Within this space, I took advantage of the opportunity to satisfy my own curiosity by accepting as many invitations from Niagara's general-interest collectors as I could. Many of those I visited included a large contingent of retired employees from across the numerous local tourist and seasonal work sectors—tour guides, giftshop workers and volunteers at local museums and art galleries.

The second factor to explore are the objects that elicited a strong personal response and sparked conversation between museum goers and museum staff. These were the objects that reduced the vast site to something miniature that could be held in one's hand; snow globes, paperweights and shot glasses. The previous chapters touched on the role domesticity plays in the aesthetic and spatial experiences around Niagara Falls, inspiring the investigation of functional household objects sold at the site. The objects explored in this section do not hold the same utilitarian purpose as serving platters or creamers, as these miniature recreations and copies show how cultural and aesthetic implications of the site are constantly conditioned by its visitors.

The imagery depicted in snow globes and on shot glasses convey what was popular or fashionable during the time of their manufacturing as they tie into what

visitors might have seen on their trip. The show globe or paperweight, in particular, presents captivating three-dimensional vignettes of natural history, landscapes or architecturally significant structures or features while the shot glass, in its contemporary iteration, provides serialized and illustrative renditions of natural history, landscapes or architecturally significant structures designed to catch the eye. Although the popularity, and necessity, for paperweights has waned greatly over the past few decades, the snow globe has maintained its popularity due to its continued presence in gift shops and souvenir shops. Shot glasses have forever maintained popularity in tourist shops and private collections due to their affordability, eclectic designs, and capacity to hold memories. The snow globe and shot glass reflect the long history tied to leisure practices and how we understand and experience space.

Orvar Löfgren, Swedish cultural researcher of consumerism and tourism, illustrates how souvenirs are intrinsic to the way we talk about travel. He describes how these commercial objects amassed during holidays and vacations seem to inherently encourage the sharing of stories and memories through the objects' "readiness to carry the mind in all directions":

Souvenirs may look trivial but the kinds of narratives and memories they trigger off are astounding...To me the most striking characteristic of a souvenir is its openness, its readiness to carry the mind in all directions...no two of them carry the same meanings.²³²

232. Orvar Löfgren, "Souvenirs," in *Tourists and Tourism*, ed. Sharon Bohn Gmelch (Longrove: Waveland Press, 2009): 101.

This helps explain why mass-produced objects still carry multiple and nuanced meanings. A substantial takeaway from the touring of private home and basement collections was the idea that no two souvenirs or reprints of the site carried the same meanings, from person to person.

I maintain that a well-rounded visual and material understanding of Niagara Falls resides in its commercial corridors and its attractions, whether one considers this in a contemporary or historical context. The various giftshops and souvenir stands that dot the edges of the Clifton Hill and Victoria Avenue tourist corridors, today, present many souvenir typologies bearing Niagara Falls' namesake or resemblance, reducing the site to a hand-held object. One of the outcomes of this miniaturization, as Susan Stewart proposes, is a "reduction in a physical dimension corresponding to an increase in significance, and as an interiorization of an exterior."²³³ According to Stewart, souvenir miniatures contribute to both the production and consumption of commodities. First, the production of miniatures calls upon attention to detail, precision in the re-creation and, oftentimes, the exaggeration of certain traits in the design of the object. Second, the consumption of miniatures offers "transcendence"²³⁴ to the tourist, where the mass-produced experience or vacation spot becomes personalized through a memento.

The work of cultural researchers like Löfgren illuminate Stewart's concept of the consumption of the souvenir miniature and more specifically what she refers to as a

233. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993): 144.

234. *Ibid.*, 144.

moment of transcendence for the viewer. Löfgren studies modest and seemingly trivial objects, which coincides with some of the most compelling objects uncovered in my research and planning of *The Falls*: snow globes and shot glasses. Löfgren on souvenirs:

...snow globes, and souvenirs in general, are punctuation marks: ellipses, question marks, exclamation marks, even interrobangs. They elicit pause, beg questions, shout memories, and draw a combination of emotions. Souvenirs are part of how we talk about travel; they encourage stories and memories.²³⁵

This *Canadian Horseshoe Falls Scene* (Figure 4.2) snow globe does not hold any vintage quality given that it is a molded plastic product bearing a manufacturer's stamp from halfway across the globe. The importance of the snow globe, and gift shop souvenirs in general, is how they complement how we talk about travel. Lindsay A. Freeman classifies these object-types as conversation starters, and when placed on our desks or shelves, they elicit pause and beg questions. The snow globe was popularized at the 1889 Paris Exposition²³⁶ with numerous depictions of the Eiffel Tower rendered in the glass orb. Walter Benjamin even made direct reference to them in 1926 when writing to a friend about his purchase of souvenir orbs.²³⁷ Lindsey A. Freeman proposes that the souvenir gained popularity due to its relationship to newly constructed spaces of steel and glass, specifically noting the process of entering the Gallery of Machines during the 1889

235. Lindsey A. Freeman, "Catastrophic Snow Globes as Oneiric and Mnemonic Gadgets," *Space and Culture* 19, no. 2 (2016): 118.

236. Ibid.

237. Walter Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin 1910-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 297.

Exposition Universelle in Paris. The snow globe contributed to new understandings of space, scale, and the influence that the *gaze* can have on perceiving the world around us. According to Freeman, the snow globe “troubles the phenomenological experience of space on two distinct levels...by alternately gigantizing and shrinking those who encounter it through the looking glass.”²³⁸

A pop-up culinary attraction emerged adjacent to the brink of the Canadian Horseshoe Falls in January and February of 2020 titled *Domed Dining Village and Snow Globe Soiree* (Figure 4.3). The Niagara Parks²³⁹ teamed up with Niagara Wine Festival to showcase local wines and a multi-coursed meal curated by local chefs, as part of the annual Niagara Icewine Festival, which promised “a clear view of the glowing falls...equipped with twinkling lights, fur blankets, and a snow globe concierge.”²⁴⁰ The architectural follies created unique experiences and perspectives around the well-trodden site, as the clustered and illuminated domes produced a striking play of light for those who dined within them and a lantern-effect for passers-by. The translucent life-sized snow globes glowed and flickered as the frost and snow melted, altering perception and depth of space. The globes also challenged notions of scale, as they appeared to be

238. Lindsey A. Freeman, “Catastrophic Snow Globes as Oneiric and Mnemonic Gadgets,” *Space and Culture* 19, no. 2 (2016): 119.

239. The Niagara Parks Commission released of a 10-year strategic plan in 2018 which began removing the term “Commission” from all branding and promotional imagery although the formal title of the government remains “Niagara Parks Commission.”

240. Narcity, “You Can Dine In A Magical Snow Globe Overlooking Niagara Falls This Winter,” (2019), <https://www.narcity.com/niagara-falls-snow-globe-dining-event-lets-you-feast-on-top-of-the-falls-this-winter>.

twinkling Niagara Parks Winter Festival of Lights decorations from a distance but upon closer examination, they proved to be large enough to house groupings of four to six people. These intimate and insulative capsules stand in sharp contrast to one of the busiest and most public sites in the world by challenging ideas of scale and personal interaction.

Another souvenir typology that emerges in Niagara's visual history is the shot glass. Similar to the snow globe, it is an object that can be held in the hand and inspires personal interaction. Outside of painted plates and paper ephemerae, the souvenir type that stood out the most in peoples' basement or vernacular collections were shot glasses. Maggie L. Popkin explains how the existence of souvenirs, in general, have the power to manipulate and shape the narratives they elicit, as beholders construct memories based less and less on actual experience and more on the souvenir itself.²⁴¹ The shot glass is the quintessential souvenir, as they are relatively inexpensive, pack well in luggage, are durable and often decorated with amusing and conversation-worthy imagery.²⁴² Not only a recent phenomenon, Popkin's research examines etched glassworks from the Late Roman Empire with specific focus on the souvenir flasks of Puteoli and Baiae.

241. Maggie L. Popkin, "Urban Images in Glass from the Late Roman Empire: The Souvenir Flasks of Puteoli and Baiae," *American Journal of Archaeology* 122, no. 3 (July 2018): 397.

242. The souvenir shot glass serves as a sign that someone visited a place—or received it as a gift from family or friends that visited a place. The object might commemorate a vacation week at an all-inclusive resort in the Caribbean or signify an impulse purchase at an airport giftshop for someone back home. The function of the object also varies, with many never finding a practical use, sitting on a shelf in a kitchen cabinet for decades.

The term “souvenir” captures an essential aspect of these flasks—namely, that they were commercial objects intended to remind people of Puteoli and Baiae, whether the viewer had visited the sites himself or herself or had not seen the cities in person but was envisioning them from the engraved images alone.²⁴³

The ancient flasks of Puteoli—present-day Metropolitan Naples—are third or fourth century glassworks engraved with scenes and landscapes local to the Regions of Puteoli and Baiae. Popkin explains how the engraved image relays experiences of landscapes, not only for those who visited the site but, equally, for those who were never there. This theme emerges throughout souvenir research, regardless of typology or tourist destination, which posits that the memory or narrative of an experience is extended by the accumulation and preservation of objects.

Niagara Falls, Canada with Many Sites on Green (Figure 4.4) and *Niagara Parks Floral Clock* (Figure 4.5) are two shot glasses mass produced and distributed through international supply chains. Nonetheless, they are still able to invoke detailed memories and histories of the Niagara Parkway.²⁴⁴ Renderings of popular Niagara sites on housewares and glassware are often indicative of the timeframe of their production; the earliest scenes printed on shot glasses draw inspiration from artists’ paintings, photographs, postcards and photograph illustrations. In this respect, shot glasses and

243. Maggie L. Popkin, “Urban Images in Glass from the Late Roman Empire: The Souvenir Flasks of Puteoli and Baiae,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 122, no. 3 (July 2018): 397.

244. The naming of these two shot glasses are not “official” titles of the artefacts, as neither one of the purchases—online sale and garage sale—came with original packaging or manufacturer documentation.

other glassware can be seen as a medium to add another layer to the evolving visual timeline of Niagara Falls and its surrounding architectural features and structures. The depictions on glassware evolved from recreations of artists' paintings to the manufactured graphic composition and photograph illustrations popular in present-day souvenir shops.

Shifting to the visual analysis of the shot glasses, the souvenirs situate themselves in history as *Niagara Falls, Canada with Many Sites on Green*,²⁴⁵ in particular, depicts four iconic attractions or features, all of which are in operation today; Horseshoe Falls and Plaza, Prospect Point, Rainbow Bridge and Spanish Aero Car at Whirlpool. The last attraction helps date the piece, as the *Spanish Aero Car at Whirlpool* attraction officially changed its name in 2004 to the *Whirlpool Aero Car* after nearly one hundred years of operation.²⁴⁶ The attraction began its operation in 1916, with many ownership changes until it was purchased in 1968 by the Niagara Parks Commission. After renovations to the launching point and terminus to accommodate a visitor center and retail shop, the attraction kept its original name until 2004. The iconic red and yellow carriage that carries passengers across the Whirlpool Rapids is rendered on the shot glass. Although

245. Figure 4.6 depicts the salt and pepper shaker set that compliments the *Niagara Falls, Canada With Many Sites on Green* shot glass, rendering the same four attractions as the shot glass on a sage green background.

246. Niagara Parks promotional material claims the attraction officially opened in 1916 and travels between two points on the Canadian shore at a major bend along the Niagara River and the level six rapids. The antique cable car takes its patrons across the international border between Canada and the United States of America a total of four times due to the way the river elbows: "No passport required!" The attraction was officially called The Spanish Aero Car from its inception in 1916 until 2004, as a reference to its design and fabrication in Bilbao.

the shot glass reflects the renovated iteration of the carriage, many of the components are original to the 1916 design.

The *Niagara Parks Floral Clock* depicts a popular yet less-promoted attraction along the Niagara Parkway. The *Floral Clock* is an annually curated and twice-planted garden display that flanks the Sir Adam Beck Power Station and Centennial Lilac Gardens. The landscape feature provides a reprieve from many of the highly commercialized tourist corridors—Clifton Hill and Victoria Avenue—and attractions along the parkway. The Niagara Parks horticulture staff plants and maintains the feature while the mechanism that drives the fully operational hour, second and minute hands are kept in working order by the Ontario Power Generation, whose Sir Adam Beck Power Station is within a few hundred feet. Although the shot glass renders the always colourful and vibrant clock (Figure 4.7) in a black and white palette, the attention to detail of the block-image style is noteworthy with the accurate depiction of the tiered fieldstone wall and moat.

The shot glass and snow globe, as souvenir media, are representative of a larger contingent of miniatures that I uncovered in the private hobbyist collections in Niagara, including miniature top hats, compact guidebooks, and saucers. The shot glass and snow globe, in particular, gigantize and shrink the site and its attractions, simultaneously challenging the omnipotence of the site and reimagining our relationship to it. Regarding shot glasses, reducing the site to a one-by-one-inch rendition that requires a magnifying glass to appreciate the detail, complicates the way we correlate with the otherwise vast and insurmountable site. Returning to Stewart, the act of shrinking Niagara Falls through

its miniature souvenirs can be viewed as a strategy to uncover the vast and insurmountable aspects of nature and reduce the site to measures and scales that can be held in one's hand; inverting the sublime dialectic constructed between humankind and the natural world.

Sourcing materials for *The Falls* from the private collections and homes throughout Niagara helped illuminate the vernacular, or basement, collection as a space where the stories, anecdotes and memories behind collected objects are as vital as the physical traits, and objects themselves. In the context of Niagara's visual history, images and objects do not exist without stories, even if the stories are gross over-exaggerations or hyperbolic in nature. The hobbyist and private local collections managed by residents can serve as micromuseums of Niagara's visual history. The embodied tension within these private collections is that they will never be experienced by the public en masse, rather, their exposure is limited to visits from family and friends.

The final collection-type that inspired *The Falls* exhibition is rooted in a very different form of public exposure than the vernacular, or basement, museum. The cabinet of curiosity collection model engages the public domain and embraces spectacle, which reflects the highly commercialized and entrepreneurial characteristics of Niagara Falls. The undercurrent of attraction and embellishment draws upon the gaze and other "occasions of wonder"²⁴⁷ in the cabinet of curiosity.

247. Sarah Berry, "Marianne Moore's Cabinets of Curiosity," *Journal of Modern Literature* 41, no. 3 (Spring 2018): 22.

4.4 *The Falls* as Cabinet of Curiosity

The final museum typology I explore here pertains to the cabinet of curiosity and the public versus private dynamic inherent in cultural institutions. Conventional museums—ones that fit the Museums Association definition as outlined in Candlin’s *Micromuseology* below—are dedicated to the public and all museum contents are held “in trust”²⁴⁸ for broader society. Private institutions or collectors, by contrast, are not required to carry out the fiduciary roles expected of their public or not-for-profit counterparts. It should be noted that the private collections discussed in this dissertation cannot technically be classified as *museums* based on the widely accepted definitions noted above. I argue, though, that the study of these collections is critically important in conveying that private spaces nestled off the beaten track contribute to “a history that is worth preserving.”²⁴⁹

A successful aspect of *The Falls* exhibition, in terms of visitor engagement and dialogue, pertained to the Dining Room Gallery glass-cabinet display cases, which drew

248. Fiona Candlin’s openly confesses that the micromuseum, in its privatized iteration, cannot technically reshape the world of museum studies or museology because they are not *museums*. She introduces the pivotal moment in 1998 when the definition of *independence* was retooled by the Museums Association. Before 1998, museums were defined as institutions that ‘collect, document, preserve, exhibit and interpret material evidence and associated information for the public benefit. Since 1998, the definition shifted to read that museums are ‘institutions that collect, safeguard, and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold *in trust* for society.’ This subtle change removes the museum’s ownership of its artefacts and with it, its independence. Any museum that is privately owned or owned outright by families no longer count as a museum.

249. Fiona Candlin, *Micromuseology: An Analysis of Small Independent Museums* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015) 11.

upon the history of cabinet of curiosities in the region. One of the most well-known and long-standing cabinets of curiosity, or natural history museum enterprises in Niagara was developed by entrepreneur Thomas Barnett during the nineteenth century. Barnett focused his businesses on the lands flanking the Canadian side of the Niagara River and gorge, stretching from the current Table Rock House at the brink of the Canadian Falls to the international Rainbow Bridge connecting Niagara Falls, Canada and Niagara Falls, New York. Cabinets of curiosities like Barnett's were an integral part of Niagara Falls' history of museums and entrepreneurship as they comprised the earliest museums and collections of human history and artefacts in the Niagara Region. The model of cabinet of curiosity I explore in the context of Niagara's visual history, and exemplified in Barnett's own collections, is borrowed from the "Wunderkammern" model²⁵⁰ that sought to juxtapose unlikely things, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where collectors sought to make sense of the chaotic changes of the present "strange times."²⁵¹

According to Libby Robin, cabinets "stack and array, they align and contrast. Each object is a counterpoint to other objects, in conversation and contradistinction. Objects in museums have always carried stories across generations and places, drawing out memories of other times."²⁵² The origins of the cabinet of curiosity date even further

250. Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

251. Libby Robin, "Anthropocene Cabinets of Curiosity," in *Future Remains: A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene*, ed. Greg Mitman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018): 205.

252. *Ibid.*, 205.

back, to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with Ole Worm's 1655 *Museum Wormianum* serving as one of the most well-documented inventories of natural history. Ole Peter Grell tracks Worm's travel across Europe—Italy, Netherlands, Germany and Denmark—in the development of his own collection and eventual housing in Copenhagen.

Reference and correspondence with Francesco Calzolari's collection first established in 1584, Ulisse Aldrovandi's botanical garden and museum established in 1568 and Bernhard Paludanus's collection dating as far back as 1584, suggests Worm's cabinet of curiosity was not the first of its kind, though it was one of the first vast collections of "peculiar natural objects"²⁵³ and those "rarer objects from the animal and mineral kingdoms."²⁵⁴ Worm's assemblage represented a collection of other collections, often acquiring objects from others throughout Europe that focused on aspects of geology or the animal kingdom or botany, but rarely were these wide-ranging objects and findings in one space. The outcome of this curiosity collecting puts the onus on the collector to correlate and connect the pieces to each other, allowing for narrative to emerge.

Brent Nelson touches on the manner that early sixteenth and seventeenth-century cabinets of curiosities presented nature and history in his 2019 article. Nelson notes how

253. Ole Peter Grell, *The World of Worm: Physician, Professor, Antiquarian, and Collector, 1588-1654* (London: Routledge, 2022): 201.

254. *Ibid.*, 200.

collectors like Worm presented “a further step in the translation of the natural world”²⁵⁵ which inspired further evolution of the typology in English collectors such as plant anatomist and physiologist Nehemiah Grew, who stated that “the first step in this sort of translation...is the imposition of some sort of order. The collections themselves, though at least partially scientific in their use and motivation, were not entirely scientific in their arranging of objects on display.”²⁵⁶ This lack of scientific arrangement emerges from an inherently anthropocentric approach. Principles, classifications, and categories of nature’s objects are based on their perceived hierarchies and similarities, and ultimately, their relationship back to humans. The earliest cabinet of curiosity models, therefore, hinge less on empirical rigor and more on the comparisons between humans and nature, with humans firmly set in the upper hierarchical position. This approach coincides with the earliest eighteenth- and nineteenth-century visual histories of Niagara Falls, where Eurocentric aesthetic and landscape theories underwent great change to rationalize sublime moments and experiences in nature.

Returning to RiverBrink Art Museum’s Dining Room glass cabinets in *The Falls* exhibition, the displays did not present items from nature or oddities of the animal kingdom. Rather, the cases arrayed souvenirs, paper-media, and eclectic ephemera, alluding to the various material objects one might expect to find when travelling to Niagara Falls in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Dining Room

255. Brent Nelson, “Translating the Cabinet of Curiosities in Early Modern England,” *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 46, no. 2 (June 2019): 340.

256. *Ibid.*, 340.

Gallery is the smallest display space in RiverBrink Art Museum by floor area and usable wall space, allowing two or three works to be exhibited at once. The multi-use space is divided by circulation routes and marked with three entry points and a fold-out bird's-eye maple dining table in the middle of the room, which is used as a breakout discussion space for coffee and snacks after film nights or afternoon lectures. The space is flanked with two built-in glass-faced corner wall cabinets, which provided the opportunity to engage conversation and dialogue with those who visit the gallery. These cabinets housed thirteen works—or curios—of varying media, sourced entirely from collections outside of the Samuel E. Weir Collection. A few of the objects displayed in these cabinets have been examined within this dissertation, including *All Over the World: Singer, the Universal Sewing Machine* promotional booklet and *Bossy Sims at the Edge of Niagara Falls* stereo view card, which were both loaned from local private collectors. The remainder of the works were sourced from other private collectors, the Niagara Historical Society and Museum in Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Niagara Falls Art Gallery & Children's Museum.

One of the oldest objects loaned from local collectors for the Dining Room Gallery cabinets included an 1867 dining car menu from the *Great Western and Michigan Central Railway* (Figure 4.8). The Great Western and Michigan Railway was one of the first companies to establish railway crossings that spanned the Niagara Gorge, and by the mid-1850s and well into the early twentieth century, generations of prosperous and extravagant sightseers were escorted to the iconic site. Locomotives, dubbed “iron

horses”²⁵⁷ pulled into train stations on both sides of the Niagara River, unloading tourists who were met by porters, horse and buggy coachmen, and vendors who waited at these stations to drum up business.²⁵⁸ Local trolley companies, like the Niagara Belt Line Streetcar established secondary routes along the base of the Niagara River Gorge with local crossings at the Honeymoon Bridge and the Queenston-Lewiston Bridge. A 1905 cardboard print of the *Niagara Belt Line Streetcar* (Figure 4.9) from a private collector shows one of the early electric streetcars that navigated the spaces between the major locomotive stations and the Falls. These lines made frequent local stops in Queenston and Lewiston and a hike to the bottom of the Niagara Gorge today will reveal fragments of the long-abandoned Great Gorge Route, as seen in promotional imagery (Figure 4.10) capturing a scene along the bottom of the Niagara River.

The modes of transportation and heightened sense of leisure and luxury afforded to travellers perpetuated the competitive aspect of capturing visitors’ and locals’ attention and wonder. Until the establishment of the Niagara Parks Commission in 1885, designed in part to “ensure the immediate Falls area remained clear of low-grade tourist traps,”²⁵⁹ the prized mile-long stretch of land connecting what is now Oakes Garden Theatre and

257. Robert Druce, “‘The Iron Horses of Steam’: Dickens, Thoreau, Zola, and the Steam Locomotive,” *DQR Studies in Literature* 27 (2011): 707-727, 916.

258. Virginia Vidler, *100 Years of Souvenirs* (Utica: North Country Books Inc., 1985).

259. Ian Ellingham and Helen Mulligan, “Designed for Touring: Niagara Falls, Canada,” *disP -The Planning Review* 51, no. 3 (2015): 9.

Table Rock House was referred to as “The Front.”²⁶⁰ This landscape was dotted with hotels and museums, with each development edging closer and closer to the Niagara River, including look-out structures and staircases down to the gorge. The steady flow of tourists, supplied by the newly established railways and streetcar infrastructure, were channeled through “sleazy” curiosity shops²⁶¹ and oddity museums, with artefacts, both genuine and fake, often obtained through questionable means.²⁶²

The archives of the City of Niagara Falls Museum and Niagara Falls Exchange (NFX) Cultural Hub and Market contain an abundance of accessioned artefacts and ledgers that document the highly commercialized setting around Niagara Falls and the promotional language developed over the course of the nineteenth century. Per City of Niagara Falls Museum Curator Suzanne Moase:

260. Duncan Mcleod, “Niagara Falls Was A Hell Raising Town,” *MacLeans Magazine* November 26 1955.

261. Karen Dubinsky, *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooners, Heterosexuality, and the Tourist Industry at Niagara Falls* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

262. Barnett’s prized Egyptian mummified human remains were displayed in the Niagara Falls Museum Collection (Niagara River Parkway location) from the nineteenth century until the museum closed its doors in the late 1990s. The mummified human remains would eventually be identified as Pharaoh Ramses I, whose tomb was raided in early 1800s and found its way into one of Barnett’s Museum collections in 1860. On display for nearly 140 years, Ramses was positively identified and returned to Egypt through a 1999 lot-sale of the Niagara Falls Museum Collection (formerly Barnett Museum Collection) and returned to Egypt.

Thomas Barnett opened his museum of curiosities and natural history to the viewing public in Niagara Falls in 1831. The Niagara Falls Museum, considered to be Canada's oldest museum, was one of the first substantial buildings along "The Front" (the road that ran alongside the brink of the Horseshoe Falls). A guidebook printed in 1835 declared that the museum rooms were "...calculated to delight the eye, improve the understanding and mend the heart." By the end of that decade Barnett had moved to his second location, also along The Front, where his attractions included a zoological annex and a winding stairway that descended to the floor of the gorge near the base of the Horseshoe Falls.²⁶³

Barnett would establish and operate three museums throughout the Niagara region, displaying wonders and curios from local and distant sources. From this quote, we begin to see the interrelatedness and parallels between language used to describe the attractions, accommodations, and the qualities of the natural site. Barnett was a self-taught collector and his museums centered around samplings from natural history: "lined up shells, dried herbs, pinned insects and mounted animals...birds and owls about to lift themselves into flight, the alligator ready to clamp down on your leg...realistic dioramalike displays with elaborate backdrops."²⁶⁴ I will explore three of his most prized items; his beloved pet Skipper, his two-headed calf and three-eyed pig through concepts of longing as these provide clear inroads to understanding Niagara Falls and its museums, souvenirs, amateur collections and cabinet of curiosities.

263. Suzanne Moase, "A Bit of Barnett's Comes to the Niagara Falls History Museum," *The Barnett Collection*, <https://nfexchange.ca/museum/discover-our-history/history-notes/the-barnett-collection>.

264. Ginger Strand, *Inventing Niagara: Beauty, Power and Lies* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008): 85.

Recent research on taxidermy—from eighteenth and nineteenth-century museums, collections and touring displays—captures the interrelatedness of spectacle, commercialism, commemoration and remembrance, bringing together ideas surrounding nostalgia, commodity fetishism, and souvenirs. The concept of effigy or copy also emerges here, which draws connections to earlier chapters of this dissertation centered on the analysis of themed attractions and environments—see wax museums and 4D theatres. This aesthetic and experiential foundation was laid in the nineteenth century and still permeates the visual experience of Niagara Falls today, which modulates between ideas of a “transcendental or elusive inherent aura”²⁶⁵ and the “human preoccupation with dominance and control...when we gaze upon the frozen animal form.”²⁶⁶ The tension between humankind and the natural world draws directly upon ideas of the technological and recreational sublime, as introduced in the opening of this dissertation, as a struggle between dominance, preservation, and awe.

J. Lynne Teather outlines the nineteenth-century museological landscape in southern Ontario, beginning with Barnett’s Niagara Falls Museum:

265. Giovanni Aloï, *Speculative Taxidermy: Natural History, Animal Surfaces, and Art in the Anthropocene* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018): 56.

266. Racheal Harris, *Skin, Meaning, and Symbolism in Pet Memorials: Tattoos, Taxidermy, and Trinkets* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019): 88.

the distinction between proprietary “commercial” museums and proper “official” museums had emerged and the Niagara Falls Museum identified as an entertainment museum. In part the museum operated as a front for the lucrative work of the tourist shop attached. The collections ceased to grow, fossilized in time as a nineteenth century cultural locator, without the hand of professional museum people to conserve the specimens and objects, or to create new displays.²⁶⁷

Barnett owned and operated the Niagara Falls Museum from 1827 until 1877, until he was forced to sell the collection and property at auction,²⁶⁸ although the collection existed for a hundred years after Barnett was forced to sell. The collection existed in various iterations, ownership groups, and locations, until it was officially dissolved in 1999. Barnett’s enterprise embodies various collection typologies, including models of the natural history museum and the cabinet of curiosity, but the focus of his museum as an “entertainment museum” illustrates how he valued profitability over preservation. As Teather notes, above, Barnett did not evolve his collection, nor did he equip himself with conservation professionals. The goal of the museum was to inspire admissions and economic growth, and most importantly, drive visitors through the giftshop. When museum displays, dioramas or panoramas were decided upon, they rarely evolved and quickly became “fossilized in time.”

Skipper (Figure 4.11) was Barnett’s beloved Terrier-breed dog that was openly exhibited and marketed under the “Freaks of Nature” (Figure 4.12) display at the Niagara

267. J. Lynne Teather, “The Niagara Falls Museum and the Exhibitionary Complex of Early Canada,” *Museum History Journal* 1 No. 2 (2008): 261.

268. *Ibid.*, 277.

Falls Museum. Barnett's pet companion was born without front legs; however, he fashioned a harness with wheels that allowed Skipper to accompany him for walks throughout Niagara and live an otherwise ordinary life. Both the taxidermized Terrier and his skeleton were displayed beside each other creating a split register where two aspects of the same form stand in opposition. The definition of taxidermy in the museological and archaeological context presents "an interface between the natural world and the institutional bodies that seek to organize it."²⁶⁹ Barnett's taxidermized companion represents the 'transcendental or elusive aura' outlined by Giovanni Aloï, while also supporting Benjamin's presentation of 'aura' as an experience or engagement between an owner (collector) and their objects (souvenirs). Both Aloï and Benjamin's use of the term 'aura' rely on the collector to infuse meaning into the object, even in the face of commercialization and commodification practices.

Barnett's *Skipper* is currently housed in the Niagara Falls Museum collection after a brief period of separation between 1999 and 2013, when the Terrier was held in a private collection.²⁷⁰ The Niagara Falls Museum purchased Skipper's taxidermized and skeleton forms—among other artefacts, including museum ledgers and Victorian insect art—from a private estate in 2014. The return of Skipper to Niagara reflects the insatiable demands of nostalgia, not unlike the souvenirs and collectibles accumulated in the private homes throughout the region. Rachel Poliquin argues:

269. Giovanni Aloï, *Speculative Taxidermy: Natural History, Animal Surfaces, and Art in the Anthropocene* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018): 48.

270. The eXchange: Niagara Falls, "The Barnett Collection," (2022), <https://nfexchange.ca/museum/discover-our-history/history-notes/the-barnett-collection>.

All souvenirs arise from the insatiable demands of nostalgia: the longing to look back and inward into our past, to recount the same stories again and again, to speak wistfully. But nostalgia cannot exist without loss, and souvenirs are always only fragments of increasingly distant lives and experiences.²⁷¹

The souvenir or memento undoubtedly calls upon memories and recollections of the past, while these material manifestations of memories and recollections can be equally viewed as commemorations of a past. The dissolution of Barnett's Niagara Falls Museum at the turn of the twentieth century symbolizes, in part, a loss of history caused by the physical loss of the objects. The stories remained but the objects, or ruins, vanished.

The objects, souvenirs and mementos acquired from the places we visit serve as fragments or ruins of personal experiences. Within the context of architectural preservation, ruins signify the viewer's imagination and "the fragments activate myriad connections between what is and what was."²⁷² David Lowenthal affirms that ruins evoke the unstoppable passage of time through their partiality and incompleteness, never fully recouping but always evoking the past, encouraging nostalgic dreams of significance.²⁷³ Skipper's return to Niagara Falls reconnects the souvenir to its collection, in both taxidermized and skeleton form, raising questions about what the object can evoke now that it has returned. Stewart contextualizes the possible outcomes, in her proposition that

271. Rachel Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2013): 204.

272. David Lowenthal, "Material Preservation and Its Alternative," *Perspecta* 25 (1989): 72.

273. *Ibid.*, 71.

the souvenir is a potent fragment that erases the distinction between what actually was and what we dream or desire it to have been.²⁷⁴ Niagara's visual history resides in its objects, copies and souvenirs, which serve as symbols of the experiences within the natural landscape. Karen Dubinsky expands on this relationship between object and experience when she frames the tourist gaze as "created by symbols and signs, and thus one's journey consists of collecting—visually, through souvenirs or photographs—the appropriate symbols."²⁷⁵

Barnett's other taxidermized offerings, which have been lost over time, contained wonders and anomalies of the natural world, including his *Three-Eyed Pig*, *Two-Headed Calf* (Figure 4.13) and lambs with contorted faces, one of which Ginger Strand noted to have its head mounted upside down when compiling her research for her 2009 book *Inventing Niagara: Beauty, Power, and Lies*. The polycephalic calf was comprised of two bodies, eight legs and staged in a manner that greatly exaggerated the condition of the creature, with each set of legs presented in a contorted manner. Barnett's displays of unique animal forms and dioramic scenes parallel the aesthetic treatment or response to Niagara Falls over the course of its visual history.

The fascination with uncovering and mediating unique findings in the natural world parallels what Racheal Harris calls the practice of seeking to "mediate the lives of

274. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

275. Karen Dubinsky, *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooners, Heterosexuality, and the Tourist Industry at Niagara Falls* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999): 61.

animals, wild and domestic” which encapsulates “the human preoccupation with dominance and control.”²⁷⁶ Barnett even produced and marketed entire forest scenes with live animals and reptiles next to vitrines of taxidermy. These instances of mediation and dominance between the natural and artifice are never more evident than “when we gaze upon the frozen animal form”²⁷⁷ for leisure purposes. Recreating nature, as outlined in the opening chapters of this dissertation and highlighted in the cabinet of curiosity motif, materializes the submissive malleability of our landscapes, which has implications in the production and consumption of the myriad souvenirs, mementos and keepsakes of Niagara Falls. Rachel Poliquin poses questions about memory in relation to the frozen animal form, which can easily be transposed to the touristic and leisurely experiences of Niagara Falls: is it possible to remember someone who is still fully physically present, albeit rather stiffly? It is one of those arcane philosophical questions, at once profound and profoundly trite, but it is a question worth keeping in mind.²⁷⁸

The Falls exhibition not only showcased the rich collection of works depicting Niagara Falls in the Samuel E. Weir Collection, held in a summer country home along the Niagara River, but works held in local collections, both public and private. The exhibition provided the rare opportunity to view a range of historical art works, artefacts and promotional materials focused exclusively on the subject. Although images of the

276. Racheal Harris, *Skin, Meaning, and Symbolism in Pet Memorials: Tattoos, Taxidermy, and Trinkets* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019): 88.

277. *Ibid.*, 88.

278. Rachel Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*. (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2013): 204.

iconic site are found in abundance in the area, this exhibition brought together works across an extensive timeline—over a century-and-a-half—to convey many core cultural understandings of the landscape are analogous to the area, regardless of time period. Many works from the exhibition present the tension between the site’s ability to incite feelings of awe and terror while also tempering such feelings with familiarity and leisure; conveying how the site and its visitors have long grappled with preservation and consumption practices. The exhibition was made possible by generous loans from local institutions— the Niagara Historical Society and Museum in Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Niagara Falls Art Gallery & Children’s Museum—and numerous private collections, which directly shaped the exhibition’s themes and readings.

The process of gathering works for the exhibition helped formulate, or at least reference, museological typologies that pertain to collections of popular sites with myriad visual media to sort through. The first museological typology to draw from *The Falls* pertains to the cluttered collection, which is reflected by smaller institutions presenting works or themes of a narrower subject matter and devoid of overarching or broad narratives. The objects are able to stand for themselves, without elaborate backstories or predetermined knowledge. Selecting RiverBrink Art Museum, a house museum dedicated largely to works of Canadiana, as the venue for *The Falls* proved to be the correct choice. The presentation of similarly-themed objects in a house setting encouraged exploration and discovery of an otherwise common country home through the display of compelling images and objects arrayed throughout the living spaces.

The second museological typology inspiring *The Falls* relates to the vernacular, or basement collection, which proposes that appreciation for art and visual culture may not necessarily emerge from art historical backgrounds. The objects and artefacts—shot glasses, snow globes, sheet music, poetry, railway car menus, stereo-view cards—were items purchased from local gift shops or souvenir stands and displayed in the living rooms and basements of residents, adjacent to other personal family memorabilia. The items were accompanied by personal anecdotes or memories connected to the site or its surrounding features and architecture.

The last museological typology that can be drawn from *The Falls* harkens to the cabinet of curiosity museums that existed along the Niagara River corridor and adjacent to the Canadian Horseshoe Falls throughout the nineteenth century and lasted up until the turn of the twentieth century in natural history museums. Inspired by competitive commercial enterprise, Niagara's cabinets of curiosities and natural history museums presented the oddities and wonders of nature as a means to capture the attention of nineteenth-century visitors. The myriad eclectic objects, and collections of oddities and peculiarities, speak to how cultures surrounding iconic sites like Niagara Falls cannot escape the notoriety of the place they reside and work. This final typology proves how, over the course of the last two centuries, the sheer scale and boundlessness of the site inspires collections of objects that simultaneously attempt to rival and compliment it.

Conclusion

The primary goal of this research was to bridge gaps between predominantly theoretical underpinnings of the sublime landscape, in written form, and the depictions, imageries, representations and cultural responses of the sublime landscape, as reflected in the visual history and culture of Niagara Falls. The examples that describe physical encounters with Niagara Falls are manifest through the rich history of oral and written accounts, paintings, guidebooks, photography, postcards, posters, pamphlets, souvenirs, mementoes, film, television commercials, full-scale mock-ups, and themed environments. From the outset of this dissertation, I hoped to find correlations between these two worlds—theory and practice—through the exploration of cultural byproducts and practices responding to nature and the landscape, especially landscapes that hold the ability to occupy and suspend the senses. I also hoped to produce, and accurately depict, a practical understanding of how representations of Niagara Falls from the past and present contribute not only to the world of art history and visual studies, but cultural studies, geography, and landscape theory.

Niagara Falls, as a subject of art history and visual studies, undeniably contributes to notions of the sublime and beautiful, dating back to seventeenth and eighteenth-century European aesthetics, at a time when humankind was exploring new ways to describe and represent their physical surroundings. Alternatively, Niagara Falls as a subject of cultural studies, geography, and landscape theory, can lead one to believe that Niagara Falls offers more than a serial experience that borders on the visually saturated or vulgar. Current literature and documentation surrounding the history of Niagara Falls

conveys the idea that notions of bewilderment and awe have progressively been extracted from the site, as the multitude of images, photographs, advertisements, attractions, and tchotchkes have made the site all-too familiar. How can this site offer anything new?

The study of visual and cultural histories surrounding Niagara Falls, presented in this dissertation, reveals that the site has always grappled with notions of the sublime and the vulgar, even in its first widely distributed representations commissioned by seventeenth-century missionaries. These conflicting thoughts about Niagara Falls are not unique to our current historical context. The visual and cultural histories surrounding Niagara Falls created an incredibly diverse sample of documents, galleries, and museums, all of which contribute to the individual and collective experiences one might expect to have at the iconic site. Regardless of the time period, aesthetic or medium that is selected, the rich visual history of Niagara Falls reveals how sublime landscapes stimulate wide-ranging reactions, and at times, the outcomes border on the bizarre, quirky and peculiar.

One of the unexpected outcomes of this dissertation surfaced during the organization and reception of *The Falls* exhibition and how it shaped the direction of my research. The range of media and collections—from cultural institutions and private residences—that existed within the Niagara Region was diverse and unexpected, seemingly elevating the project to a community collaboration. This feeling was reinforced at the opening and accompanying public talk, where visitors and attendees were eager to share their own stories, experiences, and memories of Niagara. Although not the intent, the engagement with public and private collections and the media they preserved for decades, encompassed many of the themes I had established in the

framework of this dissertation, and have pointed to future directions for my own personal research. One of the most impactful outcomes emerges from the realization that definitions and contributions to the sublime discourse—especially in landscape and environment studies—has more to do with the cultural and social setting than the landscape itself. The progression of chapters of this dissertation is a testament to this realization and sets a path for future work.

The opening chapters of this dissertation were founded in the theory and history of the sublime landscape, with contemporary readings of the term aimed at suiting leisure and tourist practices. Focusing on scare attractions, haunted houses, elaborate reconstructions, and spectacles from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, I hoped to draw conclusions between some of the earliest Eurocentric encounters with Niagara and our current context. Experiences at Niagara Falls seem to conjure overreactions and hyperbolic descriptions or accounts, which embody humankind's difficulty in grasping something grander or more omnipotent than itself. I tried to exhibit this claim through the introductory pages of the first two chapters, which began with a personal account or story from campy, even tacky, attractions. Playing with notions of replication and authenticity, the first two chapters were aimed at conveying how the sublime evolved from its original definitions, however, I came closer to a comprehensive understanding of the term that spanned medium and history. Sites like Niagara Falls, with their grandeur and austerity, can only be eroded or chipped away with human intervention and "preservation." This does not result in the removal of the sublime, nor does it suggest the sublime definition has changed, rather, it shows the act of human intervention and preservation is embedded in any definition of the sublime. The sublime does not exist by itself.

The second half of the dissertation embraced the idea that sites like Niagara Falls exist for consumption and abstraction. Not only did I continue with introductory narratives to frame each chapter, but the narratives shifted to objects and *things*. Each of the artefacts, mementos, and ephemerae that were analyzed contributed to a broader concept of the natural site and broader understandings of the social and cultural context that the object was produced and consumed in. Readings of Niagara Falls, and other iconic landscapes, can benefit from a regional or local perspective. These analyses dovetailed with notions of the micromuseum, as defined by Fiona Candlin, which greatly influenced how I contextualized the objects and artefacts uncovered in Niagara's local small-scale and private collections. The fourth chapter uncovered a connective thread throughout the dissertation by proposing how Niagara's visual history is collected and preserved in the living rooms, basements, and commercially skewed museums. Niagara's visual history does not hang on a gallery or museum wall.

The significance of this dissertation lies in the analysis of the various forms of cultural production around Niagara Falls, from different histories and contexts, to uncover common sensibilities and understandings of the site. I actively sought to break down, rather than uphold, the conflicting streams of literature that either investigate Niagara's cultural products and artefacts in a vacuum or, by contrast, uphold the rhetoric of the site as type of sacred place that only diminishes as culture intervenes. Just as Niagara Falls is an active system in geological spheres, it is also an active system in social, cultural, and political worlds. If one considers the extent of mediation that Niagara Falls currently endures daily—controlling of the mist, the redirection of the river for purposes of energy consumption, upkeep of the iconic horseshoe pattern—then any visual

or experiential conclusions about Niagara Falls must include cultural interventions. I hoped to produce, and accurately depict, a practical understanding of how representations of Niagara Falls throughout the past and present contribute not only to the world of art history and visual studies, but how these representations exemplify the broader social and cultural practices of tourism and leisure.

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Curriculum Vitae

A. Formal Education

2017 – Present	Western University	PhD in Art and Visual Culture
2011 – 2013	University at Buffalo SUNY	M.A., Art History
2004 – 2009	Brock University	B.A., Visual Arts and Italian

B. Academic Distinctions and Awards

2014 – 2015	Ontario Graduate Scholarship Award
2009	Ontario Textbook and Technology Grant
2007 – 2009	Brock University Dean's Honours List
2004 – 2009	The Branscombe Family Scholarship
2004	Canadian Italian Business and Professional Association Award
2004	Dr. Angelo Albanese Scholarship

C. Work Experience

1. Non-academic positions:

2021 – Present	Gallery Coordinator, Visual Arts - Faculty of Humanities, Brock University
2015 – 2021	Programming and Curatorial Assistant, RiverBrink Art Museum

2. Non-academic part-time and contract appointments:

2015 (4 months)	Museum Administration and Special Events Assistant, RiverBrink Art Museum Young Canada Works in Heritage Organizations Program, Department of Canadian Heritage
2013 (4 months)	Curatorial Assistant, RiverBrink Art Museum Young Canada Works in Heritage Organizations Program, Department of Canadian Heritage

3. Academic part-time and contract appointments:

2023 (4 months)	Instructor, Visual Arts, Brock University VISA 1Q98: Introduction to Visual Culture
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2022 (4 months)	Instructor, Visual Arts, Brock University VISA 1Q99: Contemporary Issues in the History of Western Art
2022 (4 months)	Instructor, Studies in Arts and Culture, Brock University STAC 3P42: Methods and Principles of Curating
2022 (3 months)	Graduate Student Assistant, Western University Artist Material Fund Project (Artlab Western)
2021 – Present	Instructor, Department of Theatre and Fine Arts, Niagara University AHM/FAA 206A & LAS 201A: Latin American Art of the Twentieth Century
2020-2021 (8 months)	Teaching Assistant, Faculty of Humanities, Brock University (Online Course), HUMA 1P50: The Master Student
2019 – Present	Instructor, Department of Theatre and Fine Arts, Niagara University AHM 201/FAA 201: Nineteenth-Century Art
2018 (4 months)	Research Assistant, Western University, John Hatch Various tasks/projects, including: <i>Research project on Kazuo Nakamura</i> <i>Research project on Greg Curnoe and the Digital Catalogue Raisonne</i> <i>Course development for the upcoming academic year</i>
2017 (4 months)	Teaching Assistant, Department of Visual Arts, Western University VAH 2291F/VAS 2294A - Introduction to Design
2012	Research Assistant, Brock University <i>Be Kind to Animals: A History of Humane Education</i> , Online Exhibition for the National Museum of Animals and Society curated by Dr. Keri Cronin
2009 – Present	Teaching Assistant, Visual Arts, Brock University VISA 1Q98: Introduction to Visual Culture
2009 – Present	Teaching Assistant, Visual Arts, Brock University VISA 1Q99: Contemporary Issues in the History of Western Art (formerly Introduction to the History of Western Art)

D. Scholarly Activity

1. Conference Presentations:

a) Papers Presented at Conferences and Learned Societies

1. “Niagara and the Sublime: From Folklore to Film”, Annual Lecture Series, RiverBrink Art Museum, Queenston (Ontario), October 26, 2014.

2. “Niagara's Sublime: Introducing Locality to the Aesthetic History of the Niagara Horseshoe Falls”, Biennial Conference, Middle Atlantic and New England Council for Canadian Studies, Niagara Falls (Ontario), September 25-27, 2014.
3. “Niagara: A Case Study for the Rise of the Sublime in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Thought”, Annual Conference, Beauty: Exploring Critical Issues, Mansfield College, Oxford (United Kingdom), September 20-22, 2014.
4. “Niagara’s Sublime: Exploring the Aesthetics of the Bi-national Niagara Region”, Annual Conference, Crossing Borders 2014: A Multi-Disciplinary Student Conference on the United States, Canada, and Border Issues, Buffalo (New York), March 14, 2014.

b) Posters Presented at Conferences and Learned Societies

1. “Niagara’s Sublime: From Folklore to Film”, Annual Student Research Conference, Mapping the New Knowledges, Brock University, St. Catharines (Ontario), April 9, 2015.
2. “Niagara’s Sublime: Archiving and Tracing the Visual and Oral Depictions of the Niagara Horseshoe Falls”, Annual Conference, International Journal of Arts and Sciences, Toronto (Ontario), May 19-22, 2014.
3. “Niagara: Exploring our Sublime Landscape”, Annual Student Research Conference, Mapping the New Knowledges, Brock University, St. Catharines (Ontario), April 7, 2014.

E. Teaching Activity

1. Teaching Apprenticeship:

2016 (4 months) VISA 2P50, Canadian Identities: From Nouvelle France to the Mid-20th Century, Brock University, St. Catharines (Ontario).

2. Guest Lecturer:

VISA 2P50, “Fine Art, Commercial Art and Graphic Art of the 40s and Beyond”, Brock University, St. Catharines (Ontario), March 16, 2016.

VISA 2P50, “Emily Carr and the Group of Seven”, Brock University, St. Catharines (Ontario), March 03, 2016.

VISA 2P50, “Landscape, Nature and the Art of Building a Nation”, Brock University, St. Catharines (Ontario), February 25, 2016.

VISA 1Q98, “Advertising, Consumer Cultures, and Desire: Fashion”, Brock University, St. Catharines (Ontario), November 3, 2014.

VISA 1Q98, “Advertising, Consumer Cultures, and Desire: Niagara Falls Case Study”, Brock University, St. Catharines (Ontario), November 5, 2014.

F. Curatorial Projects

- 2023 Visual Art Gallery and Student Exhibition Space, Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts, St. Catharines (Ontario):
- Lindsay-Ann Chilcott, *Cyborg Series*
Elise Popa, *From Sound to Sight*
Andy Patton and Janice Gurney, *Other Minds: The World in Translation*
Brock University Students, ‘23 *Juried Show*
VISA 3F91 Advanced Art Practices, *We Are Here*
VISA 4F06 Honours, *Feeding the Bite*
Willow Arts Community (Members), *Visible: An Exploration of Intersecting Identities*
VISA 2F05 Introduction to Sculpture, *SPARCS*
- 2022 Visual Art Gallery and Student Exhibition Space, Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts, St. Catharines (Ontario):
- Marcel Grimard, *Mercury is Also a Metal*
Richard Dean Irvine, *Impact*
Brock University Visual Arts Students, ‘22 *Juried Show*
VISA 3F91 Advanced Art Practices, *Table for Eleven*
VISA 4F06 Honours, *Resurfacing*
VISA 3V91 Revealing the Anatomical Body, *Inside Out*
VISA 2F05 Introduction to Sculpture, *Undefined*
Amy Friend, Donna Szoke, *Small Movements*
Julie Luth, Charelle St-Aubin, Emily MacDonald, Laurie Morrison, *Give Us a Moment*
Brock University Students and Community, *Juried Postcard Exhibition*
- 2021 Visual Art Gallery and Student Exhibition Space, Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts, St. Catharines (Ontario):
- Sarah Formosa, *Intricate Connections*
Rabia Choudhary, *Unruly Growth*
Angelina Turner and Rea Kelly, *Beneath the Skin*
- 2020 *Botanicals*, RiverBrink Art Museum, Queenston (Ontario)
- 2018 *The Falls*, RiverBrink Art Museum, Queenston (Ontario)

G. Texts

2018 “The Falls”, Exhibition Catalog, RiverBrink Art Museum, Queenston (Ontario)

H. Other Scholarly or Professional Activity

1. Service as an Assessor/Referee

(Assessor) Teaching Assistant Awards 2016, Centre for Pedagogical Innovation, Brock University, St. Catharines (Ontario).

2. Memberships in Scholarly or Professional Societies:

2015 – Present Ontario Museum Association

2015 – Present Canadian Museums Association

2015 – Present Ontario Association of Art Galleries

2013 – 2017 Graduate Student Associate, HRI (Member Humanities Research Institute) Brock University

3. Presentations, Lectures & Workshops:

(Lecturer) “Influential Canadian Artists and Works: Past and Contemporary” Parkway Artists’ Guild, Online, January 23, 2022.

(Lecturer) “Bring Me Back a T-shirt: The History of the T-Shirt and its Role in Fashioning the Tourist Landscape” Art and Fashion Lecture Series, Niagara Historical Society and Museum, Niagara-on-the-Lake (Ontario), September 19, 2019.

(Lecturer) “The Symbolist Landscape: America” Annual LearnMore Lecture Series, RiverBrink Art Museum, Queenston (Ontario), November 23, 2016.

(Lecturer) “The Symbolist Landscape: Scandinavia and Northern Europe” Annual LearnMore Lecture Series, RiverBrink Art Museum, Queenston (Ontario), November 2, 2016.

(Attendee) “More Feet on the Ground: Training on how to Recognize, Respond and Refer Students Experiencing Mental Health Issues on Campus” Brock University, St. Catharines (Ontario), October 11, 2016.

(Lecturer) “Cezanne’s Landscapes: The Natural and The Artistic” Annual LearnMore Lecture Series, RiverBrink Art Museum, Queenston (Ontario), April 6, 2016.

(Lecturer) “Dissecting the Subject in Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*” Annual LearnMore Lecture Series, RiverBrink Art Museum, Queenston (Ontario), March 23, 2016.

(Lecturer) “Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, Perception of the Sublime” Annual LearnMore Lecture Series, RiverBrink Art Museum, Queenston (Ontario), March 9, 2016.

(Attendee) “Transportation of Cultural Property & Artwork Inside & Outside of Canada” Ontario Association of Art Galleries, University of Toronto Art Centre, Toronto (Ontario), February 8, 2016.

(Co-Facilitator with Terry McKenzie-Trzecak) “What is beauty and does it matter?” Public Conversation Series, Community Learning through Brock University, St. Catharines (Ontario), March 25, 2014.

4. Posters, Pamphlets and Program Design:

Exhibition image and graphics, Designed in collaboration with artist Elizabeth Chitty, “Power”, Video and Audio Installation by Elizabeth Chitty, Queenston (Ontario), July 2021.

“SCHOLAR-ACTIVISM: A One-Day Graduate Student Workshop”, Brock University Social Justice Research Institute, Brock University, St. Catharines (Ontario), October 13, 2016.

“Global Movement Assemblages: Linking protests across time and space” and “Continuities, Differences and Connectivities: A Symposium”, Brock University Social Justice Research Institute, St. Catharines (Ontario), October 13-15, 2016.

“Thinking Through Deleuze: Nomadic Subjects, Global Citizenship and Posthumanism”, Transdisciplinary Conference, St. Catharines (Ontario), February 6-8, 2015.

5. Professional Development:

“Exhibition Installation and Design in the Age of Experiences”, Galleries Ontario/Ontario Galleries, Online/virtual, October 7, 2021.

“Exhibition Lighting”, Canadian Conservation Institute, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton (Ontario), February 6-7, 2019.

“Cataloguing and Records Management in the Digital Age”, The Ontario Association of Art Galleries, Toronto (Ontario), March 19, 2018.

“Indigenous Canada”, University of Alberta (MOOC platform), 2017

“Art Handling for Storage and Exhibition Installation: Examining Real Life Situations”, The Ontario Association of Art Galleries, Toronto (Ontario) March 15, 2017.

“Collections through the Prism of Diversity Series: Engaging Audiences: New and Existing”, The Ontario Association of Art Galleries, Mississauga (Ontario), December 2, 2016.

“Transportation of Cultural Property and Artwork, Inside and Outside of Canada” The Ontario Association of Art Galleries, Toronto (Ontario), February 8, 2016.

6. Teaching Grants:

2022 “Exploring Experiences: Conversations Around Curating and Creative Curatorial Project”, Centre for Pedagogical Innovation, Brock University, St Catharines (Ontario)