

## Wilderness State of Mind: Expanding Authenticity

### **Abstract**

This paper challenges the overuse of existential authenticity as a categorical umbrella encapsulating touristic experience and contributes new insights to the way postmodern authenticity is defined in tourism research. To date, studies associated with postmodern authenticity have focused on the *inauthentic* and *themed*, with scholars contending that it speaks more to the *consumptive*, the *superficial*, and the *trivial* than to the *substantive* and *meaningful*. By working through a case study focused on nature tourists in pursuit of authentic wilderness experiences, this paper illustrates the ways postmodern authenticity encompasses much more than cynical authenticity, for while the American wilderness may be a *hyperreal*, and even *hypernatural*, *simulacrum*, nature tourists nevertheless report deep, meaningful, and “authentic” engagements with wilderness.

Keywords: Authenticity, postmodernism, wilderness, Adirondack, hyperreality, simulacrum

### **Introduction**

*“To me, I think wilderness is in large part a state of mind...you can find wilderness in surprising places”*(Jeremy, 27 year-old nature tourist)

The concept of existential authenticity has gained considerable ground within tourism studies to the point that over a decade ago Steiner and Reisinger (2006a) proclaimed that all other forms of authenticity should be discarded in favor of existential authenticity. In the intervening decade, existential authenticity has been widely accepted within tourism studies and an increasing number of facets of touristic experience have been encompassed under this concept. Of late, however, tourism scholars have begun to question existentialism as a basis for conceptualizing authenticity within tourism and to challenge its overuse as a categorical umbrella employed to encapsulate all aspects of touristic experience (see Shepherd, 2015; Knudsen, Rickly, & Vidon, 2016; Vidon & Rickly, 2018). In this paper we argue that the introduction of psychoanalytical authenticity, or authenticity as a *fantasy* (Knudsen, et al., 2016), must also be brought to bear on tourism research in two ways. First, it leads to a reconsideration of Wang’s (1999) four categories of authenticity (*objective*, *constructive*, *postmodern*, and *existential*). Second, psychoanalytical authenticity also attends to the shortcomings of the current theorization of postmodern authenticity in tourism research. To date, studies associated with postmodern authenticity have employed a cynical tone by focusing on the conspicuously *inauthentic* and the *themed*, with scholars contending that it speaks more to the *consumptive*, the *superficial*, and the *trivial* than to the *substantive* and *meaningful*. Studies tend to present theme parks, virtual and augmented realities, and shopping malls as exemplars, with tourists motivated by consumption, frivolity, and image (see Fjellamn, 1992; Bruner, 1994; Pretes, 1995; Brown, 1996; Hollinshead, 1998; Wang, 1999; Mintz, 2004, Buchmann, Moore, & Fisher, 2010; Guttentag, 2010). Arguably, this trajectory

might have much to do with Wang's (1999) sizing up of postmodern authenticity as a perspective that "buries" and "abandons" the meaning-making and experiential qualities of authenticity. In response, we seek to investigate, through extending postmodern authenticity to include psychoanalytical authenticity, an experiential phenomenon of tourism: on tour one gets the feeling of authenticity despite an absence of its absolute existence. Importantly, psychoanalytical authenticity facilitates a more nuanced and more precise attention to authenticity that allows for its conscious and its unconscious elements, the expressible and the inexpressible (Vidon, 2017). We use the term "psychoanalytical authenticity" in this paper to denote the split nature of authenticity – that is to say its conscious and unconscious aspects and the ways of those both can and cannot be experienced, embodied, and expressed.

By working through a case study focused on nature tourists in pursuit of authentic wilderness experiences, this paper draws out new insights on postmodern authenticity. We suggest that there is a more visceral driver of postmodern authenticity in tourism, the *seductive* power of the fantastical, which takes place well beyond hyperreality and simulacra. Indeed, the fantasy of authenticity is seductive in even the most "pristine" environments, with wilderness being exemplary. Further, while Wang (1999) suggests postmodern authenticity in tourism studies paved the way for a conceptualization of existential authenticity in the field, it is important to recognize the way the development of these philosophical perspectives actually evolved in the reverse order. Existentialism *preceded* postmodernism. This historical lineage has important implications for the application of these perspectives to authenticity research in tourism studies. Namely, it supports arguments that existential authenticity has been over-extended as a conceptual framework for understanding touristic experience, and in doing so, revives the often overlooked postmodern perspective of authenticity as accounting for much more than the continuation of the *inauthentic* but also reveals the power of fantasy as seductive for the psychological incongruences of experiencing authenticity.

### **In Defense of Postmodern Authenticity**

By articulating the object-oriented nature of objective, constructive, and postmodern authenticities, Wang (1999) does not acknowledge the psychological implications of postmodern authenticity that come with the acceptance of the inauthentic (false, fake, replica, etc.) and the active pursuit of the hyperreal, fantastical, and virtual despite tourists' knowing its *inauthenticity*. Rather, postmodern authenticity has become a catchall category for the undiscerning ways in which the inauthentic persists in tourism, and is typified by what we have come to term "cynical authenticity". However, we argue that this postmodern authenticity involves a type of "enlightened false consciousness" (Sloterdijk, 1988), typified in Žižek's words (1989, p. 23) as "we know what we do, but we do it all the same." That is to say, tourists may well be aware of the inauthenticity of a site or attraction, but they participate as if it were authentic or holds the potential for their own authenticity. When we consider the psychological incongruences of postmodern authenticity we are able to more directly attend to its motivational dimensions. This attention to motivation allows us to move this conceptual framework forward in tourism research to account for more than cynical interpretations. In fact, it allows us to delve

deeper into both the conscious and the unconscious, that is, into the psychoanalytical realm to discover what drives us toward the *inauthentic*.

Further, while Wang (1999, p. 358) states, “a postmodernist deconstruction of the authenticity of the original implicitly paves the way to define existential authenticity as an alternative experience in tourism”, he is underestimating a more powerful underlying relationship of existentialism predating postmodernism. In particular, existentialism’s questioning of the nature of experience and the self was crucial to further critiquing the overarching narratives of modernity. It inspired a revival in psychological inquiry and questioning of reality. From this, postmodernity has come to be recognized as a theoretical shift toward the acknowledgement of multiple truths and multiple identities, as well as towards attention to hyperreality and simulacra. The postmodern era may have sped the deconstruction of the idea of the original, but the inspiration for such a shift has come from seeds sown much earlier in existentialism itself. As such, the burgeoning interest in existential authenticity as a means to encapsulate any investigation of touristic experience has over-reached its ability to adequately elucidate the dynamics of touristic motivation and experience. Of course, there remains utility in using existential authenticity to conceptualize touristic Being based on self-making, embodiment, and social relations, but it cannot fully account for the phenomenon of tourists’ describing the feeling of authenticity while also recognizing an absence of its absolute existence. Rather, this potential rests within postmodern authenticity that incorporates not only cynical interpretations but also psychoanalytical.

A psychoanalytical approach facilitates an understanding of why claims of authenticity “beckon” us – the lack created by and inherent in our subjectivity creates a desire to be made whole. And while the object of that desire is desire itself (Lacan, 1959), authenticity serves a critical role as the mechanism through which it is expressed and experienced in material form (Kingsbury, 2010; Knudsen, et al., 2016; Vidon, 2017; Vidon & Rickly, 2018). The ways in which our subjectivity is “split” in late capitalism has been theorized since the time of Marx (1995), who first identified modernity (and postmodernity) as alienating us from what we produce, from fellow humans, from Nature and, ultimately from ourselves. Further, objective, constructed, existential and postmodern authenticity name the ways in which we attempt to consciously overcome the foundational renting of ourselves as subjects. In fact, it has been suggested that these categories are interrelated in most touristic experiences (Rickly-Boyd, 2012).

Lacan ([1966] 2006) contended that rather than a consequence of capitalism or modernity, alienation *constitutes* the subject, resulting in split subjectivity. The process however, leaves us with feelings of “lack”, feelings that we need to be made whole again, as we are split, separated from the purely biological part of ourselves during the all-important process of alienation (Lacan, [1966] 2006, [1986] 1992). While Lacan ([1966] 2006) maintained that we can never be made whole, that our alienated condition is not meant to be nor can it be resolved, we nevertheless continue to seek things we believe will fill this “lack” and make us feel whole (Kingsbury, 2010; Knudsen, et al., 2016; Vidon, 2017; Vidon & Rickly, 2018). Authenticity is an important target for the split subject seeking to assuage feelings of lack.

Psychoanalytical authenticity attends to both the unconscious and the conscious (Lacan, [1964] 1995), thus acknowledging authenticity's existence in both realms. While something may be consciously authentic to us (i.e., we experience it as such and thus may express it as such in language), it cannot, by definition, be unconsciously experienced as authentic to us (making it resistant to linguistic expression) (Lacan, [1964] 1995; Proudfoot, 2010; Vidon, 2017). Proudfoot (2010: 510) calls these elements that resist expression "extradiscursive", explaining that they exist outside Lacan's symbolic order – they reside in the unconscious and while they exist, they cannot be experienced or expressed in the same way as those elements of the conscious can. This attention to both the conscious and the unconscious allows for a nuanced attention to the draw of authenticity, allowing for a better understanding of why we continue to seek it even though some contend it is an abyss (Oakes, 2006) or a fantasy (Knudsen, et al., 2016; Vidon, 2017; Vidon & Rickly, 2018).

Importantly, several researchers have returned to the concept of postmodern authenticity in recent years, illustrating the ways hyperreality and simulacra are in fact more seductive than deceptive (Bolz, 1998). For example, Buchmann et al. (2010) find that it is the hyperreality of *Lord of the Rings* tours in New Zealand that invites tourists to engage in fantastical and imaginative experiences that also result in further reifying friendship bonds and a sense of adventure. Similarly, Szmigin et al. (2017) examine the socio-spatial dynamics of outdoor music festivals uncovering the co-creation of aura and authenticity in tourists' experiences. Further, Lovell (2018, forthcoming) elaborates on the seductive and mesmerizing nature of son et lumière shows that use lighting equipment to illuminate and transform buildings and urban spaces. Despite the viewers' knowledge of the artificial facades being created before their very eyes, the hyperreality of the atmosphere alongside other viewers' willingness to play with the fantastical imagery cultivates an aura that inspires reports of authentic experiences. This, thus, brings us back full circle to the power of MacCannell's (1976; 1999) writing on the staging of authenticity. The power of staging is less the result of the easily fooled touristic masses, as was once argued, and more the result of the sophisticated design industry that stages the interfaces of tourism encounters of which we all dream (Rickly & McCabe, 2017). Spaces deemed "nature" and "wilderness", however, are not immune to this postmodern phenomenon and may very well be among the most en vogue, popular stages upon which this phenomenon unfolds, as it extends well beyond bounded physical spaces of staging to the very core of society. Thus in this paper, we aim to remark on an experiential phenomenon of tourism: the feeling of authenticity despite an absence of its absolute existence. To do so, we explore the case of nature tourists in the Adirondack Park in Upstate New York who report authentic experiences in its wilderness while also describing the lack of wilderness' existence.

### **Wilderness as a state of mind**

To demonstrate the influence of Existentialists on Lacan, as well as the potential his theories have for tourism studies, specifically postmodern interpretations of the seductive power of the fantasy of authenticity, we present a case of wilderness tourism. While most

discussions of postmodern authenticity focus on highly constructive and controlled environments that offer surreal, hyperreal, and/or fantastical settings, such as theme parks, virtual and augmented realities, film tourism, and festivals, we wish to push beyond these more obvious correlations of (in)authenticity and simulacra to consider the role of fantasy, desire, and alienation in the quieter, less crowded, and more introverting spaces of nature-based tourism. In focusing on such a setting, we argue that notions of self, being, and experiential qualities so prominent in interpretations of existential authenticity of tourism, as well as the desire for and seductive power of authentic places that continually inspire touristic pursuits, can be explained through Lacan's theories. In doing so, we speak to a shortcoming Wang (1999: 358) identified amongst postmodernists, that there is the possibility for alternative experiences of, and indeed deeper inspirations for, authenticity than a focus on originality alone can offer.

*Background: The Adirondack Park*

Representing one-fifth of New York's land area (see figure 1), the Adirondack Park is a nearly six million-acre piece of land and is today the largest publicly protected area in the contiguous United States (APA, 2017). The Park is unique in its composition in the United States, however, as it is comprised of roughly equal parts public and private land. While this mixed-use composition may be common in other countries, most parkland today in the US consists of exclusively public land (Porter, et al., 2009). The Adirondack Park finds its progenitor in the 1885 establishment of New York's Forest Preserve lands, 2.6 million acres of state land constitutionally protected by the "forever wild" clause of Article XIV of the New York State constitution as lands that "shall be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be leased, sold, or exchanged, or be taken by any corporation, public or private" (NY Const. art. XIV, §1). This proclamation paved the way for the Adirondack Park's establishment a mere seven years later, spurred by concerns for the region's timber and water resources (APA, 2017). In 1892, New York State drew what is colloquially referred to as the "Blue Line" on the map of New York state, delineating the Park's boundaries, which encapsulated established communities and undeveloped lands within them (Porter, et al., 2009).

Over the past 125 years, the Adirondack Park has become a hot spot for tourism, today boasting an average of ten million visitors annually (Janeway, 2013). While the Park draws many tourists to its larger and more developed communities, notably Lake Placid, Saranac Lake, and Old Forge, a great many seek the Park's wild areas for recreation, including hiking, canoeing, backpacking, rock climbing, and others. Indeed, a study by Vidon (2016) found that for most visitors, the Park's primary identity is one of wilderness, rather than as a place to visit communities for shopping or dining. Of these recreationalists, many flock to officially classified wilderness areas of the Park, wherein they enjoy the quiet and solitude that results from strict regulations prohibiting motorized vehicles, bicycles, and man-made structures on these lands. In the Adirondack Park, the Forest Preserve is comprised of lands variously classified by the New York DEC, the most restrictive classification being wilderness (APA, 2016, 22).

**[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]**

The data that follow were collected among tourists in the Adirondack Park in 2014. Specifically, this work focused on “nature tourists”, defined as visitors to the Park whose stated primary motivation for visiting the area was engagement with the Park’s wilderness spaces, as the tourists themselves defined them. This work took place between May and October of 2014, and resulted in the collection of 43 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with nature tourists, primarily in officially designated wilderness areas of the Park. All interview subjects participated voluntarily, all were 18 years of age or older, and all remain anonymous, referred to in this paper by pseudonym. The interviews were all transcribed and thematically coded using NVivo software. The codes were not predetermined but were developed inductively. In addition, themes were analyzed using “constant comparisons” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), a process involving three stages of coding in discourse analysis which allows for a thorough representation of the data organized around a central idea (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

### *Wilderness as a simulacrum*

According to the DEC and the APA, wilderness (as a subcategory of the Forest Preserve) is defined as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man – where man himself is a visitor who does not remain [...] an area of state land or water having a *primeval* character, without significant improvement or protected and managed so as to preserve, enhance and restore, where necessary, its natural conditions” (APA, 2016, 22, emphasis added). This official definition of wilderness is important for our purposes, as we argue that wilderness itself is a third order simulacrum, lacking a complement or original in the *real* world (Baudrillard, 1988). While styled, staged, and sold as the quintessential “real thing” (see Eco, 1977), pristine, sacred wilderness so embraced by many a contemporary American nature tourist has no antecedent, no original from which it has emerged. For Baudrillard (1988), this constitutes a third order simulacrum, the hyperreal par excellence. He contends,

Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal [...]. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself (p. 166-167).

This wilderness, constructed through social and cultural mechanisms and dispersed through various discursive media is one of untouched, pristine land, land that simply does not exist in any “true” or “real” way as an on-the-ground referent (see Baudrillard, 1988). To be sure, it is a simulacrum, but its unique ability to stimulate our desires and dreams for Wild Nature in ways that “real” nature cannot do renders it a *hypernatural* place as well (see Eco, 1986). It is only the hypernatural that has the privilege of being devoid of humans or any evidence of them; hypernatural wilderness promises all that is pristine and perfect – Thomas Cole’s Schroon Mountain and Ansel Adams’ iconic Tetons and Snake River immediately come to mind at its utterance. This hypernatural wilderness of the American psyche is what powers so many RVs, populates racks of postcards, and fills Instagram posts. Most of all it is the hypernatural that keeps us coming back again and again, thinking that maybe next time we’ll actually find and experience it, for it and the fantasy of authenticity are inextricably linked (Knudsen, et al., 2016). However, the

hypernatural wilderness is more than just elusive; it exists only as an object of our desire (Lacan, 1959) in the American psyche, living not through material place but rather maintained through discursive mechanisms and cultural imperatives (see also Cosgrove, 1984; Albanese 1991; Cronon, 1995; Nash, 2001; Lewis, 2007; Weatherby & Vidon, 2018; Vidon, 2016, 2018 forthcoming). Wilderness as simulacrum, as place devoid of human habitation or evidence of management is part of the fantasy that authenticity resides here. This wilderness, held up in postmodern American culture as a virtual panacea for social ills, a place of solitude, wholeness, and serenity, is one that seduces the nature tourist with its siren song of authenticity (Vidon, 2017). This relationship with wilderness is not a postmodern phenomenon, but dates to the founding principles of the American identity via the writings of Thoreau, Emerson, Muir, Fenimore Cooper, the Hudson River School, and many more. The authentic wilderness is that magical land devoid of any evidence of human presence or impact, one with the *primeval* character defined by the DEC and reported in APA documents, the simulacrum that promises self-actualization, self-realization (see Wang, 1999), and re-creation of self (Vidon, 2017).

Thus, contrary to Wang's (1999: 358) assertion that postmodernists "abandon the concept of authenticity altogether" and "justify the inauthenticity of the tourist space", in the case of the wilderness simulacrum, authenticity is not so much abandoned as it is unveiled for what it is: a fantasy (see Knudsen et al., 2016; Vidon, 2017). Here, the hyperreality of place is not what nature tourists are seeking in pursuit of "genuine fakes" (Wang, 1999:357); they are instead seeking engagement with the fantasy of authenticity in a hyperreal space in the way that Baudrillard describes hyperreality as a proxy for reality. Thus, that the place is hyperreal, a simulacrum, matters less to the nature tourist seeking her authentic self than the experience of engaging with the fantasy that it is an authentic wilderness through which she may meet her authentic self. For example, the following quotes demonstrate the malleability of the physical character of "wilderness". Rather than a distinct, material setting or a predetermined image, wilderness functions more as a state of mind.

"There's a me part of it [wilderness]...it recharges me emotionally. It's the bonding with myself, those moments I have when I'm, I'm in place. It doesn't have to be on top of a mountain, it might be at the bottom of a waterfall or a cliff or you know, just wilderness". (Trudy, age 28)

"I feel like I'm truly in wilderness right now. People think that wilderness doesn't exist, but this is it. I think it's more of a feeling that you can get in certain places than an actual, physical thing. [...] It involves not being sure that there's [sic] people there. It's like, you know there might be people off the trail ten feet away having a snack and you don't know they're there – it's the *illusion* that you might be alone". (Dagny, age 26)

The illusion of solitude of which Dagny speaks is a crucial one, for it enables her to interact with the fantasy of the authentic wilderness while at the same time recognizing on some level that what she is enjoying is not "real" solitude in a "real" wilderness. Instead, it is a simulacrum, a hypernatural landscape carefully designed to provide her

just such an illusion. As MacCannell (1976) maintained, staging is a powerful mechanism through which tourists are drawn to sites in anticipation of authentic experiences. In Dagny's case, the appearance or illusion is enough to provide her an experience and an enjoyment of authenticity, even while she intellectually understands that there may be snacking hikers mere feet away.

22 year-old Amy shared her own thoughts on the wilderness experience, revealing palpable tensions between the affective and the intellectual in her considerations of wilderness. She remembers,

I look at the Adirondacks and I'm like, this is the play place of the rich in New York and that's why it's protected...in the 70s, white middle class people realized that this tiny part of NY state was being destroyed and they were like, 'but we think it's beautiful' and if that had been poor black people it wouldn't have been protected. It would have been destroyed. For economic gain. It would have been a different thing. Honestly, I've been feeling that seeking wilderness is almost a logical fallacy. I mean, the minute you walk into the wilderness it's got a person in it. [...] Well yeah, these are the things I've been thinking about, but it's also my own hypocrisy and my own distinction because I do come here and I do feel different when I'm out there. I do! Yeah, so even with all my academic thinking about it, I still experience something here, I still want to be here, I still feel different here. And this is why I want to seek wilderness outside of the wilderness, to seek those moments of clarity and purity and beauty and solitude and smallness, I think. I have to search for those things everywhere, everywhere, everywhere that I go...My new goal is to take wilderness with me.

Thus, even those tourists who conceptually recognize the hyperreality of the wilderness simulacrum submit to its siren song, finding within it a salve that soothes frayed nerves, alleviates discomforts, assuages fears, and empowers through a perspective unlike any other. The state of mind, the wilderness within, is what many tourists seek in landscapes that have been carefully constructed to answer those desires. It is the pursuit of this wilderness state of mind that transcends the simulacra and hyperreality so often decried in cynical postmodern authenticity as a tool for hoodwinking the gullible tourist. Here, the wilderness simulacrum provides a powerful, visceral driver in postmodern authenticity, offering an opportunity for deeper, more meaningful engagement with authenticity heretofore overlooked in the tourism literature. While inauthentically wild and hypernatural, the wilderness simulacrum nevertheless may well be interpreted and experienced in a way that provides the tourist an experience worth pursuing again and again, an experience that challenges Wang's (1999) assessment of postmodern authenticity as something that "buries" and "abandons" the meaning-making and experiential qualities of authenticity. That Trudy, Dagny, and Amy all experience authenticity despite its absence pushes the boundaries of postmodern authenticity to include the experiential and the psychoanalytical, illustrating the depth of meaning-making, self-making, and re-creation in even hyperreal, fantastical settings.

#### *Nature tourists and the fantasy of wilderness*

For 26 year-old Kris, being in the wilderness is central to his feelings of well-being, his



very sense of self and health, and as such, he laments the fact that more people do not take advantage of all that wilderness has to offer.

And everything around's just so quiet, calm. It's amazing because when you do it, you feel it, that letting go, that fulfillment, like you're exactly what you should be and where you should be. It's sad but so many people that haven't had that experience to know that they can do that, or they weren't raised with it so when they do go out there, there's a fear of it.

He continues, noting that he finds something "real" in the wilderness that does not exist the same way in our increasingly "artificial" society.

[W]e have come so far away from nature...we're, especially Americans, we're pumping chemicals into our body that should never be made, let alone consumed, and we're, everything is so artificial that you have to be reminded of what's real. That's why I come here. This [wilderness] is real.

Thus, even though this wilderness is not the untouched, pristine wilderness constructed through cultural and social mechanisms and displayed in photographs and prose, Kris's feelings about it illustrate his engagement with the fantasy of wilderness. That for him, its "realness" comes from existing in stark contrast to what he deems as the "artificial" of everything and everywhere else echoes the assertion by Eco (1977:7) that "The 'completely real' becomes identified with the 'completely fake'. Absolute unreality is offered as a real presence". This "real" place, for Kris, in fact functions as a proxy of reality. That he finds his daily life alienating, it is thus not surprising that wilderness would be described as the opposite to this. That it is a simulacrum, an idea, and a fantasy is of no consequence for his experiences with it.

Similarly, the following tourist described the juxtaposition of wilderness to his everyday environs. William, a 50 year-old nature tourist who himself acknowledged that, "wilderness is a human construction", nevertheless found something powerful in his relationship with it, despite his academic thinking on the issue. Further, in contrast to the mundaneness of everyday life, wilderness possesses the potential for "magic".

There is something out there [in the wilderness] that I don't get elsewhere...it's almost a religious experience...So, anyway, yeah...I just...walking in the woods, it's magic! There's something magic there. I'm always working, always trying to put my finger on it. It's joyous but it's...I'm always trying to figure out what I mean by that, by spiritual. But that's what it does for me that nowhere else does.

William's experiences in the wilderness simulacrum, rather than signaling an end to authenticity or an inability of this hypernatural landscape to allow for anything more than a superficial interaction, speaks instead to a deep and abiding relationship with this place and the experiences he has therein. And while he may think academically of the wilderness in some ways, the emotional connection he has with it signals something enduring and genuine rather than fleeting and shallow. For William, this is not about a "playful search for enjoyment", nor is it about an "aesthetic enjoyment of surfaces", as Cohen (1995) contended. Rather, it is about something more profound and much less superficial. The experience he has – religious, spiritual, no matter that he continues to

wrestle with an accurate descriptor – is seductive in calling him back again and again. Thus, it is an engagement with the fantasy of authenticity as manifest in the wilderness simulacrum. As a result, we can see that here in the wilderness simulacrum, in this hyperreal, hypernatural landscape, we encounter postmodern authenticity as we seldom do, not as cynical, superficial, or hedonistic, but rather as substantive and deeply meaningful.

*Wilderness and the fantasy of authenticity*

Unlike theme parks or festivals, the wilderness simulacrum offers tourists an opportunity to connect with the fantasy of authenticity that provides them the feelings of wholeness and authenticity of self they so desire, which speaks directly to Lacan's "lack". Through an engagement with what they may call an authentic wilderness, nature tourists experience moments they deem satisfactory in fulfilling their desires for connection with their authentic selves. Indeed, for the following tourists, wilderness offers not an epiphany of "self", but rather a space for perspective and reflection. While examining these quotes from the lens of existential authenticity might focus on this touristic moment as the potential catalyst for a moment of Being and an authentic self (c.f. Brown, 2013), if we dig deeper, take a psychoanalytic perspective, and consider what is missing from these moments, we can better understand the psychological work of the fantasy of authenticity.

being able to go and see something that's not touched or stained, just leaves you with a really nice feeling that you're out of the rat race. You're out of the daily commute, you're out of the neighborhood kids, breaking them apart, you're out of all that and you're, you have a lot of alone time but it's really just being able to reflect on it all, to be able to say this is really nice, really quiet, and the solitude a lot of the time to think before you go back to that other life. You have a different sense of who you are with that time, like this is a different part of you, or a different you that you forget about in your other life. Sounds weird when I say it, but... (Stan, age 48)

Many interview subjects highlighted the isolating character of wilderness. It is a space absent of other people and distractions, leaving nothing but their "own thoughts" and moments of "mindfulness". So while an existentially authentic moment in wilderness might yield an experience that is without precedence and expose the authentic self, these subjects know the experience they are seeking in wilderness. It is a familiar one that lacks the stresses of everyday life. Wilderness is constructed as "empty" such that one may find moments of peace. However, once in this space one's mind is not always quiet, but instead often turns to "big decisions", nagging thoughts, and unresolved personal issues.

I think when you're out in the wilderness you're finally left alone with your own thoughts... get to know yourself a little bit better, and make decisions based on what you really think is right compared to other people. I think a lot of times in my life I've made big decisions either out in the Adirondacks or out somewhere I consider more wilderness just because it's a good time to kind of self reflect. (George, age 19)

The wilderness simulacrum often fosters a heightened state of attentiveness and engagement with both the here and the hereafter. This heightened spatial and temporal awareness and attentiveness lends itself to expectations and experiences of authentic life moments that transcend the temporal and spatial boundaries in which they occur. In addition to reflection and attention to “big decisions”, hyperreal, hypernatural wilderness yields, in the nature tourist open to it, opportunities for “real”, “authentic” life moments to happen, and presents a stage upon which transformative experiences are encouraged.

Doug (age 20) reflected on just such a moment he experienced during the summer following his graduation from high school. At the end of a summer working in the Adirondack Park, his father came to pick him up. He recalls,

So after that really life-changing summer, my dad came to pick me up and we ended up hiking...that was really amazing, really cool, just to...I don't know. I think it was the first time having my parents look at me as an adult as opposed to being a kid in high school, you know what I mean? That was like the first time my dad and I split a beer, which was cool, you know? That was a big, big part of my life, and yeah, sharing that with my dad in the wilderness was really cool. It was nice that that sort of coming of age happened there – I think the Adirondacks played a big part in that transition [growing up].

Chelsea (27) experienced a profoundly life changing event while in the wilderness. While this would have been life changing in any environment, the wilderness landscape perceived as authentically wild made it all the more profound for her. While working as a Summit Steward on Algonquin Mountain, a hiker on the mountain suffered a heart attack and passed away. Chelsea was the first person on the scene, and though she tried to revive him, he was already gone. While this would be traumatic in any landscape, the scale of the wilderness and the feelings of remoteness and solitude it engendered made the experience all the more significant.

And so I think since that experience [the man passing away] this [wilderness] is much more about feeling small. To me, that experience was extremely humbling. It was like, when we took off in the helicopter and I looked down and it was this beautiful, beautiful view. And I was looking at the spot where I knew everything had happened. And it just kept dwindling and dwindling and became smaller and smaller until it was just Algonquin, a rock pile, a giant, you know, unthinking uncaring pile of rocks. And that was when I was like, wait a second. So now, when I hike up to the top of the mountain I like to look out and realize how small I am. And I think I'm naturally kind of prideful person, and a little humility goes a long way for me so I seek it out, and the wilderness is a really wonderful place for that [...]

Wilderness, for Chelsea and for Doug, provides a space for something authentic in life, regardless of whether or not the landscape itself is itself an authentic “pristine wilderness”. Even as a simulacrum, as a hyperreal space, wilderness nevertheless offers a space for profound, meaningful experiences, quite unlike the theme parks and fantastic attractions so often associated with cynical interpretations of the postmodern in

authenticity. While constructed, staged, marketed, and managed, wilderness nevertheless answers the call for authenticity so often heard in tourism, providing a range of experiences that cannot be explained by existential authenticity alone.

### **Conclusion**

Consideration of psychoanalytical authenticity provides insight into the category of postmodern authenticity, which has yet to receive serious theoretical attention in tourism research. More specifically, extending postmodern authenticity to include the psychological explains an experiential paradox of tourism: on tour one gets the feeling of authenticity despite an absence of its absolute existence. In so doing, it makes postmodern authenticity conceptually available to attend to the ways existential authenticity has been over-extended in the field with attempts to use the concept for all manner of touristic experience, including those for which it may not be the most appropriate.

The choice to use American wilderness to illustrate the ways postmodern authenticity accommodates psychoanalytical authenticity has been a deliberate one. What Cronon (1995:80) called “the ultimate landscape of authenticity”, wilderness is often held up as the authentic landscape par excellence. It is, however, hypernatural, a simulacrum, and thus provides the perfect opportunity to explore postmodern and psychoanalytical authenticities working together. With a combination of fantasy and seduction, hyperreality and meaning making, postmodern authenticity is manifest in the American wilderness of the Adirondack Park. Nature tourists, while intellectually understanding and recognizing that the wilderness they are visiting is *not* the pristine, authentic wilderness constructed and held up in poetry, painting, and prose, nevertheless experience it in meaningful and abiding ways. For the interviewees in this study, experiences of this hypernatural simulacrum, rather than being synonymous with the superficiality and frivolity often decried in cynical postmodern authenticity, have instead been characterized by depth and sincerity. Thus, postmodern authenticity, extended to include psychoanalytical authenticity, facilitates greater depth and breadth of explanation in the realm of the seductive and taking into account authenticity as fantasy (Knudsen, et al., 2016; Vidon, 2017).

To be sure, we are not suggesting that existential authenticity should be discarded in favor of a postmodern authenticity coupled with the psychoanalytical. It remains an important tool for conceptualizing touristic experiences involving Being, embodiment, self-making, and social relations. However, we do contend that existential authenticity cannot account for the entire range of experiences that come under the banner of “authenticity”. As such, postmodern authenticity allows us to account for the psychoanalytical, and in so doing, we are better able to attend to what drives the search for the authentic in place and experience and the fantasy through which authenticity operates.

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