Ethnologies

ethnologies

This I Know to be True
Ethnology, Divination and the Processes of Authenticity

Kari Sawden

Volume 40, Number 2, 2018

Devenirs de l'ethnologie
Whither Ethnology?

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1056385ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1056385ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)
1708-0401 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Sawden, K. (2018). This I Know to be True: Ethnology, Divination and the Processes of Authenticity. *Ethnologies*, *40*(2), 93–110. https://doi.org/10.7202/1056385ar

Article abstract

Working within alternative belief communities, I frequently encounter a tension between what is felt to be authentic and the facts provided by external sources. Even a cursory glance at the news headlines and social media postings that saturate daily life with terms such as "fake news" and "alternative facts" reveals that this is not an isolated struggle. Focusing on the ways in which contemporary Canadian divination practitioners establish their own truth, this paper examines how these processes reflect and support folklore's engagement with and ongoing relationship to the emergence of multiple authenticities defined by the experiential.

This I Know to be True

Ethnology, Divination and the Processes of Authenticity

Kari Sawden
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Introduction[1]

The news headlines and social media postings that punctuate the lives of many Canadians are filled with terms such as "fake news" and "alternative facts," revealing an ongoing uncertainty about what is real, what is fake and how authenticity is established. These tensions are familiar to ethnologists,[2] whose work has long struggled with questions of how and by whom such concepts are wielded. While context and performance, among other notable theories, have moved us away from the binaries encapsulated by Richard Dorson's fakelore, the communities within which we reside are finding themselves treading these familiar paths as they contend with how "fake" and "real" are impacting their lived experiences. Weaving in amongst these debates is the more basic human need to be heard. Concerns over voicelessness and speaking one's truth have been reborn anew and, with them, the need to reflect upon our discipline once again as we meet these issues in the field.

Entering into research with divination[3] practitioners in central

1. This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through a doctoral fellowship. My deepest thanks to everyone who shared their stories with me and to all those who provided me with feedback on this paper

2. The relationship between the terms "folklorist" and "ethnographer" is complex and part of a larger debate about disciplinary language; however, throughout this paper, I will be using these terms interchangeably.

3. As explained in my article on divination and charming for *Incantatio: An International Journal on Charms, Charmers and Charming*: "My definition of divination is that it is the conscious utilisation of a variety of tools to uncover information deemed by the participant(s) to be otherwise unknowable. This information can be about, but is not limited to, the future and is often about

Alberta, I found myself quickly immersed in a familiar discourse about what constitutes true information and its relationship to externally determined facts. The individuals whom I interviewed are acutely aware of how their work is frequently regarded as a deception or fraud, and how they are seen to be participating in a de-rationalization that has allowed for the proliferation of various manifestations of the fake. Consequently, throughout our conversations, they explained the systems of verification they have established in order to ensure that what they provide is accurate within the context of the reading (the ritual act of engaging with and interpreting their chosen tools such as tarot cards, astrology, palmistry and spirit communication). These processes, however, are not simply a reaction to social criticism but are an integral part of the divinatory act itself. The methods they use frequently depend on extra-sensory input that is interpreted intuitively as they respond to questions deeply rooted in the experiences of people who are, more often than not, strangers. Therefore, it is important for the diviner to establish their own checks and balances to ensure that they are translating their tools accurately within the context of a specific reading, a process that often requires input from the querent (the person seeking the reading). In considering these sites of knowledge exchange and the intersecting space of the divinatory and the ethnographic that I occupied during this research, I have found opportunities for contemplating how my participants' approaches to truth are applicable to broader conversations about authenticity as framed by the vernacular.

This paper reflects on the parallels between ethnographic and divinatory approaches to the fake and considers what we, as academics, can learn from these personally constructed systems of validation. In particular, I examine how the growth of experiential authenticity is shifting this discourse as institutional authority is being called into question and definitional rights are being reclaimed by the individuals and communities within which we situate our research. This vernacular engagement with meaning opens up new avenues to understand, among other things, its relationship to personal identity and how people find the language for self-recognition. Exploring this phenomenon, I address the increasing influence of more intimate forms of authenticity that are felt, contextual and co-creative. Finally, in considering how folklorists deal with the personalization of these issues, I address a defining question for our discipline: what does it mean, in the twenty-first century, to be an authentic ethnographer?

present or past situations (including past lives). While divination can be a spiritual act, there is no religious requirement since the source(s) of this knowledge range from external deities to one's own subconscious" (2017: 133n1).

Authenticity Anew

The authenticity of the diviner can often be found within the story they construct with their querent, existing only in the context of the reading and, consequently, requiring re-substantiation for each person. While no two practitioners are the same, there are similarities amongst many, including a pattern of narrative verification that emerged during several of my interviews. Donna summarizes them under the label of "validating points." As a medium (one who communicates with spirits) and a tarot card reader, she finds that these deeply personal and detailed messages given in the reading are essential for ensuring that the information provided is accurate:

> But you'll feel people [spirits] around them [the querent], but if you can't give them a validating point about who this person is, they're just going to pooh-pooh it. So it's really important that you give a strong validating point. For instance, I did a reading the other day for this woman and her name was Chantel. And then her grandfather was there, and he was chatting and then, all of a sudden, I heard the name Matilda, and I said, "who's Matilda?" She goes, "well, my Grandpa calls me Matilda." So her name's Chantel, but he calls her Matilda, like, where would you get that? That was a very strong connecting point for her because it's not something that I would have guessed; it's not something I would just know ahead of time, couldn't have looked it up on the internet. It's all these things that the people who come to you, they need those validating points to give you some authenticity.

These points are rooted in the mundane and are often known only to the querent; hence, their power to confirm the narrative is established within the reading. In another interview, Shannon told me of one of her first experiences conducting mediumship:

> It's interesting what they'll [spirits] convey to me, and I'll have no idea. […] One of the coolest ones [readings] that I did, one of my very first ones, is when this lady came to me. And so we were connecting with her grandmother and, from the beginning, right up until just before it was over, she kept showing me spaghetti and meatballs. I was like, okay, this isn't important; it's spaghetti and meatballs. I'm not going to say anything yet. So I was relaying all these other messages and then there it was again, spaghetti and meatballs, and…then finally, I'm like, "okay, she keeps showing me spaghetti and meatballs, and she's really happy. Did she really like spaghetti and meatballs?" And the girl goes, "oh my god," she said, "weird." This was like a week before Halloween, and she had a seven-month-old baby. The day before they had gone out and bought a costume for the baby, and he was dressed as spaghetti and meatballs.

> And she sent me a picture when she got home, and she said, "this is his costume." And I'm like, that's validation that she [the spirit] was there.

As evidenced above, the reader may not be aware of the importance of this information and will require querent input to determine its truth. Frequently these points are complicated because they exist beyond the reading; the meaning of a message may only become clear after it has concluded and the one seeking the information has returned to their normal life. These circumstances challenge the authority of the diviner.

The decoupling of true information from an established authority has resulted in these validation points becoming essential to the practitioner. Since readings are rooted in the personal, they cannot be certain of its veracity or meaning without the querent's insight. Consequently, for many diviners I interviewed, authenticity is established through collaborative engagement. As Lesley, an astrologer, put it, "the reading's not about you, it's about them". It is a co-created event between the reader and the querent and reflects how diviners have not fought against but embraced the restructuring of power dynamics that is not limited to this culturally alternative space alone. The authentic is being fractured so that it is not wholly defined by the external but is, instead, recognized as existing in multiple forms. Its placement within the personal, wherein figures of authority, such as diviners, may have input but not final say, is heightened by new technologies that open up alternate channels of knowledge creation and dispersal. Heather, in reflecting on the intersections between the internet and divination in her own practice, considers both as essential vehicles for people to begin to connect and transform themselves apart from institutional authority. The blending of online spaces into the vernacular means that within a person's life they have new venues wherein to challenge old structures of knowing and construct their own understanding of the authentic with the support of a variety of voices they deem valid.

In her article "Envisioning Folklore Activism," Deborah Kodish explores the cooperative potential of ethnographic work, particularly its possible role in social justice movements. Authenticity, she writes, has been "a discredited notion in the field of folklore for some time now" (2011: 34), and whatever its current manifestations, it is no longer emergent from a top-down institutional authority (2011: 40). These were, after all, systems that engaged in "vernacular management," as Diane Goldstein terms it, participating in the rewriting of the vernacular for their own goals (2015: 138). Folklorists, however, cannot fully discard the authentic since it has proven to be an important part of many of the groups and practices we

study. Indeed, the processes undertaken within this discipline to move away from a top-down authority dictating what is true folklore, often rooted in a historic quest for origins, provide insight into the same processes occurring within the field.

The disassociation of divination from a popular construct of Canada as a modern, scientific country within which it does not belong,[4] suggests that it is completely decoupled from any recognized systems of proof. Yet, rather than an extreme and reactionary response – again, divinatory practices are not premeditated based upon social expectations but emerge from contextual needs – it provides a model of restructuring power that incorporates different systems of authenticity. As a result, readings are a site of redistributed authority between those involved[5] wherein the diviner holds certain forms of control through their ability to access desirable knowledge. Their position is not absolute, however, since it is dependent on verification from the querent. Hence, the authentic is positioned as an emic act that exists within a cooperative space, a concept not unfamiliar nor undesirable to the folklorist. Our dedication to those who have been frequently overlooked provides us a foundation upon which to not take up the mantle of expert but to act as a guide through familiar but changing lands. Ideally, this collaborative approach, as it is with divination, will nudge us all towards a contributive model wherein hierarchies of knowledge are not the assumed norm but are replaced by processes of engagement that reveal an, not the, authentic.

The uncertainties emerging from new deconstructions of meaning result in opportunities to reframe past assurances, such as the division between fakelore and folklore that Dorson proposed many years ago. Now, Regina Bendix's assertion that "[t]he notion of authenticity implies the existence

4. See, for example, the 2017 speech Governor General Julie Payette gave at the Canadian Science Policy Convention wherein she said: "Can you believe that still today in learned society, in houses of government, unfortunately, we're still debating and still questioning whether humans have a role in the Earth warming up or whether even the Earth is warming up, period […] And we are still debating and still questioning whether life was a divine intervention or whether it was coming out of a natural process let alone, oh my goodness, a random process […] and that your future and every single one of the people here's personalities can be determined by looking at planets coming in front of invented constellations." (Rabson 2017)
5. A typical divinatory reading, according to my participants, consists of two people: the reader and the querent. While they may read more than one person at a time, or they may read for themselves, thereby serving as both reader and querent, these are less common than one-on-one.

of its opposite, the fake" (1997: 9) is a more complex issue. As the fake changes, it shifts what becomes the authentic and, at times, seems to suggest that neither fully exists. Their meaning is best known from context. Michael Dylan Foster, in his introductory chapter to *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World*, observes how folklorists are no longer focused on origins and authenticity but on the perception and interpretations of these concepts (2016: 12). It is a conversation that is gaining greater importance within broader political and social discourse as issues of fake news and alternative facts are being pulled between claims of personal authenticity and assumptions of ignorance or outright dismissal of the factual. Its current expansion feels even more urgent and consequential because, while it has always existed, new technologies that facilitate its incorporation into everyday lived experiences have destabilized the traditional means by which the authentic is established.

Within divination, the past is not a historic precedent used to authenticate the present reading but another piece of the puzzle that creates meaning and validates the current experience. This disassociation of the historic from the authentic was a significant development in the discipline of folklore, and the decoupling of the old and the true has, not surprisingly, also had ramifications for broader cultural expectations. It has created a novel form of authenticity found in the heightened present. Within the divinatory space, past experiences (including past lives) and potential (changeable) futures are brought together,[6] framed by the querent's current questions and needs and interpreted through the lens of the present. In doing so, the authentic is resituated; it is not linear but experiential, with emic validating points emerging in the moment of contemplation.

This experiential authentic rooted in the heightened present draws not on historical frameworks but often turns to narrative ones to define the truth, which operate under different rules. A fictional story can be emotionally true, and a personal narrative does not always align with external facts. This debate "about the authenticity of narrated memories," Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps recognize, "reverberates through the halls of governments, clinicians' offices, and media venues – profoundly affecting and sometimes dividing members of society in the process" (2011: 288). Within divination, where the memories may be of past lives, from spirits, or of things not yet having come to pass, it is further complicated. But boundaries have always been porous. Sarah Gretter, Aman Yadow and

6. While fortune-telling is part of divination, among my participants it is not favoured and, even when the information is about the future, it is not regarded as fated.

Benjamin Gleason, in their article "Walking the Line between Reality and Fiction in Online Spaces," explain that "[b]oth factual and fictional information share similar goals: communicating knowledge, connecting people, making people laugh, or even antagonizing others" (2017: 5). A richer understanding of the individual and their perception of truth emerges when these binaries are dissolved into a narrative that is constructed for a particular need and interpreted as thus. Julie, a numerologist and astrologer, explains her process of letting go of external expectations as embracing the "truth for the day." It is the truth that the person is able to tell in the moment. Instead of being focused on fixed facts, she works with the narrative of the present. It is in this space that the authentic person is found, and it is where they have the opportunity to define themselves.

Cassandra Speaks

When writing "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Practice," Simon Bronner was drawn to the figure of Pheme from Greek mythology, "who personified renown and was characterized by the spreading of rumors […] Pheme does not fabricate knowledge; her skill was in framing material in such a way that it would be passed around in ways that drew attention to itself or formed localized versions" (2016: 16). In considering the current discussions of authenticity and the ethnographer in relationship to my research, it is of little surprise that I found myself turning to another mythological figure: Cassandra. She was cursed by the god Apollo with a gift of prophecy that would never be believed. She became voiceless, even when she spoke, a pattern that is being contested within and outside of divination today.

The authentic voice is more likely to be heard and believed; therefore, when one lays claim to the personal authentic, it is part of a counteraction against silencing. In *The Road to Delphi: The Life and Afterlife of Oracles*, Michael Wood explores the phenomenon of silence through many incarnations of Cassandra, including the one found within Christa Wolf's novella bearing this character's name. He writes of it that "the future this Cassandra sees is not a privileged apparition. It is the future anyone could see if they could bear to look. She is the figure who reveals everyone else's denial of the truth, and the god's gift to her is a merciless clear-sightedness in a world in love with a blurred vision" (2003: 111-112).

Working within places of power redistribution, several of those with whom I spoke emphasized the ability of all to access this information.

When, for example, I asked Dona, who has been reading palms and teaching palmistry for decades, if the ability was only available to a select few, she answered with a simple "no." Instead, its position of exclusion has occurred through an external silencing that denigrates divination – and, consequently, its information – as fake and has resulted in individuals denying their own intuitive capacity. However, for those who find themselves in this divinatory space, it is one where the voices of practitioners, querents and even deities and spirits are verified. For folklorists, who have themselves long struggled with the silencing power of academia (see, for example, Behar and Gordon 1995; Enguix 2014; Lawless 1992; Narayan with Devi Sood 1997; and Ritchie 2002), the field provides equal opportunities to offset the voicelessness of "the folk." This is achieved not by silencing the ethnologist (an impossibility given our responsibility for collecting, transcribing and interpreting the narratives of our participants) but by engaging in discourse wherein the participant is recognized as authentic based on their own points of validation that may or may not conform to academic expectations.

This personally authentic voice begins in context. For the ethnologist, it is rooted in the field and is later shaped through academic research and the personal contemplations of the interviewer and interviewee alike. For the diviner, it emerges within the reading, shaped and redefined by the querent as they go about their life and consider what was said. It is, therefore, in a constant state of transformation that can be challenging to articulate. In my time in these spaces, I witnessed how the authentication of the moment was hindered by the limitations of language to reflect the experiential, within which validating points were frequently situated. Julie, describing her own struggle for self-definition as a child, explained how she understood things "from a knowing point of view…but I didn't know the wording." The felt needs to be part of the language of the authentic because it is part of the vernacular within which resides the fake and the true. And, for many people, it is found in alternative modes of communication.

The diversity of readers and divinatory tools attests to the need for adaptive forms of expression. Lesley, for example, explained that after working with various methods, she concluded "that my language is astrology." Therefore, to dismiss divination as false is to dismantle the language being used to articulate people's experiences and conclude that they are inauthentic when it is the imposed, external language that is actually inadequate. Folklorists, who have contended with this in relation to the ways in which individuals have been dismissed because of their different

communicative forms, especially in comparison to elite or higher classes, must recognize this as a critical part of the validation process. Dominant voices and external language cannot be the sole arbiters of truth. It is critical that ethnologists continue to support alternative communicative forms, such as divination, that express the experiential.

Felt authenticity, whether articulable or not, has become more recognized by those engaging in belief studies. It is frequently situated within official religious systems. John J. Sosik et al., for example, explain it as "the extent to which [religious] leaders feel a role is an authentic expression of the self" (2011: 180). They go on to link it to the act of consistency that is another central component to authenticity, a uniformity "between one's self-concept and behavior" (2011: 182). More broadly, Kennon M. Sheldon et al. explain it as an "internal consistency" (1997: 1384) that Whitney L. Heppner et al. describe as "the operation of one's 'true self'" (2008: 1140). This approach reflects its incorporation into the vernacular. It is a process situated in the emic and one that works as an integrative force to direct an individual along their spiritual path. For Elizabeth J., who utilizes multiple divinatory methods in her own practices of self-development, the experiential is the means by which we make sense of things. To understand a person's world, one needs to understand the emotions that ground it. To be authentic is to connect to the felt, however fleeting and intangible it may seem to be to those on the outside.

The frustrations of academics and non-academics alike over the destabilization of the true and real is understandable. There are legitimate concerns about individuals who become entrenched in their partisanship and choose to remain ignorant. However, caution is needed when labelling others as naïve, foolish or uninformed as it is frequently based on external standards that may or may not be personally relevant. The diviner and the ethnologist alike are able to address these issues in two significant ways: first, by bridging the gap. The practitioners I work with do so by demonstrating that it is inadvisable to dismiss those who embrace what is frequently assumed to be fake as unreflective. Instead, there is a synthesis between the felt and the practical. In doing so, they reflect Bendix's claim that while "[t]he search for authenticity is fundamentally an emotional and moral quest," these components alone "[do] not provide lasting satisfaction, and authenticity needs to be augmented with pragmatic and evaluative dimensions" (1997: 7). In the divinatory space, the emotional quest contains internally pragmatic and evaluative dimensions that only become apparent in context. As evidenced through validating points, practitioners

have developed systems of proof, while encouraging their querents to do the same, that reveal complex and personal reasons for what frequently appears irrational to others. In much the same way, ethnologists do not dictate knowledge or facts to our participants but instead look beyond reductive terms to the living human beneath. In doing so, we are able to understand the experiences that bring people to claim their own definitions of truth and contest the ways they have been defined by others.

Second, both diviners and ethnographers recognize the contextual nature of truth and, by extension, facts. After all, truth is, as Michel Foucault succinctly observes, "a thing of this world" (1980: 131). Lynn has encountered this in her own personal work using tools including astrology. Catching herself in moments of frustration over people's dismissals of her experiences and what she feels as true, she explains that she "needs to get over my own righteousness about it" and provide people with space to develop their own authenticities and not demand conformity to hers. The complexity of personal authenticity is that it resides in individuals, appearing as true to one person and a lie to the next. In discussing these differences in her own life, Lynn related how her boyfriend approached the issue: "I know you're not lying because I've never heard you lie…but I can't believe." Recognizing the subjective nature of truth and lies within the felt authentic allows for such paradoxes to exist.

Cassandra, like many mythological figures, is frequently reduced to one narrative or feature – an act I am guilty of when turning to her as a muse for this research. Yet she is more than just the voice of thwarted prophecy, just as every individual is more than just a naïve or engaged consumer of the authentic and fake. Folklorists, who continue to counter reductive interpretations of our participants and even our own discipline, know this well. The ongoing transformation of authenticity reflects this recognition as it is reclaimed from external institutions in order to support the internal processes of identity formation. In doing so, truth is detached from what Douglas Ezzy terms its Enlightenment legacy that "assumes that only the Western scientific method can understand the truth" (2008: 318). Instead of a "fixed and imposed" legitimacy that is "an objectifying caricature that denies agency, historical complexities and the fluid nature of self-making," it is frequently being recast as a progressive act whereby people engage in processes of self-definition that are deeply contextual (Kodish 2011: 34). It is the co-creative experience of an ethnographic interview and of a divinatory reading.

Becoming Authentic

Constructing the authentic as a fixed point provides roots but is ultimately restrictive. As already established, divination, as practised by my participants, is dependent upon mutability as the validating points shift from reading to reading. In her article "Authenticity: who needs it?," Sherry Johnson reflects on this fluidity in her experiences teaching world music. She explains that as long as she subscribed to the authentic as original and belonging to past traditions, she was "effectively paralyzed" in her classroom (2000: 279). Decoupling it from its origins through an association with the felt reveals a more complex portrait of those who experience it in the present moment. The true or fake become so not because of external dictates but through the individually defined.

Ethnographic work that engages in the processes of the authentic deepens conversations about the real and the fake that are frequently reduced to decontextualized tweets and Facebook posts. Whitney Phillips, when addressing the relationships between fake news and folklore, argues that the former "tends to direct focus to the veracity of the text itself, not on the social processes that facilitate its spread, or how particular stories align with the interests and biases of those sharing it. It is geared toward surface phenomena, in other words, not to underlying currents" (2017). A focus on the text of divination frequently elicits similar results. It is why Anne explains her process of tarot card reading as being situated not as that which comes from drawing on knowledge from the external and initial creators (the artists and authors of the deck) but from one's personal interpretation of it or "your reaction to it." Consequently, the deconstruction of binaries such as origins equalling authentic, value increasing with age, or true being equivalent to good provides a necessary freedom for personal and academic development.

Within divination, the flexibility of process is essential. It is literally embodied in the act of palmistry wherein, Dona explained to me, what the person feels becomes manifest on the hands. However, she emphasized, these lines and other markings change as the individual does. This is important because a driving motivation for my participants is to encourage the growth and development of their querents. Therefore, the authentic palm is not static but transformative, not losing its truth by changing but reflecting the fluid nature of the experiential. Each person accumulates authenticities as they transition from one moment to the next. In acknowledging this complexity, however, practitioners and ethnologists

alike must recognize that the authentic cannot be associated solely with "good", "nice" or "harmless."

Pauline Greenhill's ethnography of niceness is a key concept to integrate into the folkloric engagement with the formation of an authentic identity. It is the "benign interpretation of all cultural manifestations – that has characterized too much public sector and academic folklore work particularly in North America" (2002: 227). When they do so, she contends, "many folklorists may choose to downplay 'negative' material in a paternalistic effort to 'protect' those with whom they have worked" (2002: 239). The connection between personal identity and authenticity has the capacity to create an equivalency between what is authentic and what is right or to justify the imposition of the personal truth of one upon another. Folklorists must challenge this association and not fall into the trap of connecting morality with authenticity.

Lesley emphasized that in her work as an astrologer: "I am non-judgemental…This is not my personal opinion." However, she is not going to leave the querent unchallenged and, consequently, abandon her own responsibilities in the co-creative process. Her key role is to "help you understand what it is you're dealing with" without allowing you to slip into blaming others and abdicating personal responsibility. Elizabeth J. likens the shirking of self-reflection to being on autopilot: "you can't make the best choices for yourself because you're not driving." Her role is to help individuals become more conscious of the journey and discern what makes them authentic. In doing so, the shift is away from binaries of good and evil and the essentializing of all who would reside in such systems. Instead, it demands that its position within the emic be understood as just that: personal. It cannot and should not be imposed upon others who have different lived experiences nor be confused for etic authenticity. Instead, it needs to be situated as an essential part of a larger conversation.

It is important to recognize "how, where, why, and when people construct (multiple) authenticities" (Kodish 2011: 35). Ethnographers are able to explore the complex diversities of motivation and action in order to help us and our participants, as well as those outside of these groups, understand how and why the fake, the authentic, and the alternative are utilized to bolster contentious ideas. Yet, folklorists need not situate themselves in a position of judgement, taking on the mantel of external arbiter of appropriate truth. While no scholar should have to silence themselves when it comes to addressing issues of moral complexity or stand by and permit harm to be done to others (lest we succumb to the ethnography

of niceness), the question of "why" that drives our research allows us to understand these motivations. It provides us with opportunities to engage with our participants in new ways and to emphasize that authenticity is fluid. People are not static, neither are the truths that formulate their identities nor the disciplines that study them.

Who do we want to be?

Folklorists have and continue to engage with the definitions of our discipline and the question of what is authentic ethnography. Bronner summarizes some of this struggle when noting that we have moved away from the challenge of eking out an identity situated between anthropology and literature as we did in the 1960s. However, he notes that "scholars with folkloristic identities now seek their place among a myriad of integrative studies such as cultural studies, women's studies, ethnic studies, and performance studies, all of which claim their own disciplinary locations" (2016: 10). The processes of identity creation that individuals are contending with on a daily basis, and that frequently bring them to the diviner's doorstep, are ones shared by folklorists and open up new opportunities for the breakdown of boundaries between the researcher and participant. If academics are able to continue expanding our work beyond journals and conferences and find ways to relate our experiences to the communities within which we work and reside, as well as those "myriad of integrative studies," we can create new sites of exchange.

One of the strengths of folklore is the growth of reflexive and reciprocal ethnographic practices that allow for us to engage in dialogue with our participants. It encourages conversations with others concerning how we perceive their authentic experiences, as well as our own personal and disciplinary goals. As with the divinatory reading, it becomes a site for the co-creative. When we allow our participants to guide us through their processes, it benefits all those involved. In their article "Racism and Denial of Racism: Dealing with the Academy and the Field," Pauline Greenhill and Alison Marshall write of their rejection of "presumptions that scholarly and popular audiences are necessarily distinct, and that materials accessible to non-academics – or even to those in other disciplines – lack academic value" (2016: 215). The deconstruction of the boundaries between the academic and the field encourages a more expansive discourse on the processes by which we construct identities. Doing so not only provides us with insights into our communities, but also helps us grapple with who we want to be and the directions and obligations that accompany our work.

When Dorson brought forward the concept of fakelore in "Folklore and Fake Lore," he bemoaned folklore's failure to fulfill its promise. Instead of greatness, he argued, the discipline had "been falsified, abused and exploited, and the public deluded with Paul Bunyan nonsense and claptrap collections" (1950: 335). He established validation points for folklore that were situated in the authority of the academic and could not see the individual experiential truth of our participants as a possible alternative. Yet, while we have moved past these specific elements of verification, the question remains: are we fulfilling our potential? Ethnologists are left to grapple with our authentic identity both in relation to other scholars in our field, as well as those who are our potential collaborators within other academic units. Beyond questions of what it means to accurately or authentically record and report what we uncover in the field, Kodish now considers what our responsibilities are to the interpretation of materials. "Imagine," she writes, "what the field might look like if we framed our work in terms of struggles that matter in which living people (and future generations) have a stake, if we linked variously placed efforts" (2011: 52). The experiential authentic is becoming one of these sites wherein academics and the broader community have a stake as it challenges authority, definitional meaning, and personal identity. With this recognition, we come to understand that we will accomplish more when we link our knowledge.

Heppner et al., open their article by asking: "What influences the way that people feel about themselves from day to day?" (2008: 1140). Every discipline has its own ways of approaching this topic and, all too frequently, the answers remain enclosed within that subject alone. When considering these boundaries, it is easy to associate the authenticity of a discipline with the solidity of these divisions. However, the acknowledgement of the processes that surround the concepts of true and fake demand that we let go of a fixed identity. Instead, when tackling complex people, it is to our disadvantage to tie ourselves to any predetermined restrictions. In her 2015 Presidential Address to the American Folklore Society, Michael Ann Williams outlines that her intent is to reclaim folklife "not to promote the term or any specific approach of its practitioners." Rather, she continues, it is her desire to "see our collective discipline as holistic," capable of incorporating the many dimensions of culture (2017: 136). Instead of worrying that our discipline will stray into the inauthentic should we let go of set definitions, let us explore what it would mean to do so. Let us embrace the possibilities that come with a fluid authenticity and the potential of any resulting interdisciplinary discourse.

When tackling the multifaceted and potentially harmful topics that frequently accompany conversations about the authentic, it is hubris to try and do it alone. We need different disciplinary voices, and they ours, if we are going to meaningfully engage with the lives of others. We need co-creative spaces. Furthermore, academics are not the only ones tackling this challenging topic, and it behooves us to bring our participants' voices into the conversation, not just as subjects of study but contributors to our own development. In doing so, ethnographers have the opportunity to further enrich our engagement with the field, our discipline and academics of all subjects while creating (and challenging) our own validating points.

Conclusion

Debates about the authentic and the fake, their definitions, and who does and should wield power over such concepts exist in diverse facets of our communities within and outside of academia. As the authentic becomes further rooted in the personal, felt and present, divination practitioners and other individuals who exist on the boundaries of social propriety offer important insight into how to approach these complex topics. The co-creative spaces that are of immense importance to many of my participants and their querents, and the languages formulated within, provide equally valid insights into ethnographic struggles with our own powers and responsibilities while conducting fieldwork. Furthermore, it opens up our dialogue to more fully recognize the multitude of authenticities that continue to grow, understanding that the rules of the etic are not the same for the emic and are not shared by all.

The common conception of the authentic as an object or final state is reductive. It demands conformity to a fixed point, an origin narrative that discounts the dynamic elements of culture. Authenticity, in all its forms, is a stubborn idea that will not soon dissipate from academic or vernacular discourse, nor should it so long as there is something to be gained from it. Johnson, while recognizing the value of letting go of the concept altogether, reflects that, "as a more practical strategy, I argue for a broader, more flexible, and symbolic role for authenticity" (2000: 284). Its permanence does not necessitate it remain static. In this, ethnographers are well positioned to engage in debates about the authentic, and its accompanying themes of the fake and alternative and draw attention not only to the processes but the potential of this discourse. Johnson's practical strategy is not a detrimental compromise but an act that complicates our understanding of how worldviews are constructed, maintained and transformed.

The morality that is often bound to the authentic, in addition to the appeal of origins and authority, is not inherent in its identity. Given the heightened political discourse whereby concepts of "real", "fake" and "alternative facts" are weapons used to further or discredit multiple competing perspectives, it is also becoming a significant part of identity construction. It is, therefore, incumbent upon folklorists to create spaces for conversations about the authentic that are not simplified or hindered by superficial associations of the true with the good or the original with the real. The felt authentic requires that truth be approached as an emic construct, as well as etic, and neither dismissed nor accepted unquestioningly. Ethnographers are able to bring our history of fakelore, of text and context, and of the vernacular into the field to facilitate this discourse.

"The idea of authenticity," Kodish argues, "can lead us to more just places" (2011: 39). It does not have to be a cage that confines identity any more than it is a final judgement that condemns or permits an action or belief. It creates opportunities to reflect on who we want to be as folklorists. To engage with the topic in the field, we must grapple with reflections of our own concepts of authenticity and acknowledge that none of us have a definite answer. In this, we join with diviners to help those with whom we work and, through them, bring ourselves into the realm of the co-creative. We must recognize that if we claim the title of Cassandra and feel voiceless ourselves we still have power and, if we are willing to carry this discomfort with us into the field and find our struggles reflected in our participants, the boundaries between us and the other will dissipate. In its place will be a space that is, at times, challenging because there is no pre-determined authority figure to dictate truth. However, in its stead is a collaborative dialogue about the multitude of authenticities we all create, share and experience on a daily basis.

References

Behar, Ruth and Deborah A. Gordon (eds.). 1995. *Women Writing Culture*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

Bendix, Regina. 1997. *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*. London and Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Bronner, Simon J. 2016. "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Practice." *Cultural Analysis* 15(1): 6-27.

Dorson, Richard M. 1950. "Folklore and Fake Lore." *The American Mercury* 30: 335-342.

Enguix, Begonya. 2014. "Negotiating the field: rethinking ethnographic authority, experience and the frontiers of research." *Qualitative Research* 14: 79-94.

Ezzy, Douglas. 2008. "Faith and Social Science: Contrasting Victor and Edith Turner's Analyses of Spiritual Realities." In Graham St John (ed.), *Victor Turner and Contemporary Cultural Performance*: 309-323. New York and Oxford: Berghahn.

Foster, Michael Dylan. 2016. "Introduction: The Challenge of the Folkloresque." In Michael Dylan Foster and Jeffrey A. Tolbert (eds.), *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World*: 3-33. Logan: Utah State University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Power/Knowledge*. Brighton: Harvester.

Goldstein, Diane. 2015. "Vernacular Turns: Narrative, Local Knowledge, and the Changed Context of Folklore (American Folklore Society Address, October 2013)." *Journal of American Folklore* 128(508): 125-145.

Greenhill, Pauline. 2002. "Folk and Academic Racism: Concepts from Morris and Folklore." *Journal of American Folklore* 115(456): 226-246.

Greenhill, Pauline and Alison Marshall. 2016. "Racism and Denial of Racism: Dealing with the Academy and the Field." *Journal of American Folklore* 129(512): 203-224.

Gretter, Sarah, Aman Yadav, and Benjamin Gleason. 2017. "Walking the Line between Reality and Fiction in Online Spaces: Understanding the Effects of Narrative Transportation." *Journal of Media Literacy Education* 9(1): 1-21.

Heppner, Whitney L., Michael H. Kernis, John B. Nezlek, Joshua Foster, Chad E. Lakey, and Brian M. Goldman. 2008. "Within-Person Relationships Among Daily Self-Esteem, Need Satisfaction, and Authenticity." *Psychological Science* 19(11): 1140-1145.

Johnson, Sherry. 2000. "Authenticity: who needs it?" *British Journal of Music Education* 17(3): 277-286.

Kodish, Deborah. 2011. "Envisioning Folklore Activism." *Journal of American Folklore* 124(491): 31-60.

Lawless, Elaine J. 1992. "'I Was Afraid Someone like You…an Outsider… Would Misunderstand': Negotiating Interpretive Differences between Ethnographers and Subjects." *The Journal of American Folklore* 105(417): 302-314.

Narayan, Kirin in collaboration with Urmila Devi Sood. 1997. *Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon: Himalayan Foothill Folktales*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ochs, Elinor and Lisa Capps. 2001. *Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

Phillips, Whitney. 2017. "Putting the Folklore in Fake News." *Culture Digitally*. January 24: http://culturedigitally.org/2017/01/putting-the-folklore-in-fake-news/

Rabson, Mia. 2017. "Payette takes on climate change deniers and horoscopes at science conference." *CBC News*. November 2: http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/gg-payette-climate-change-1.4383562

Ritchie, Susan J. 2002. "Contesting Secularism: Reflexive Methodology, Belief Studies, and Disciplined Knowledge." *Journal of American Folklore* 115(457/458): 443-456.

Sawden, Kari. 2017. "A Shared Inheritance: The Interrelationship Between Divination and Charming in 21st Century Canada." *Incantatio: An International Journal on Charms, Charmers and Charming* 6: 117-136.

Sheldon, Kennon M., Richard M. Ryan, Laird J. Rawsthorne, and Barbara Ilardi. 1997. "Trait Self and True Self: Cross-Role Variation in the Big-Five Personality Traits and Its Relations with Psychological Authenticity and Subjective Well-Being." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73(6): 1380-1393.

Sosik, John J., Weichun Zhu, and Anthony L. Blair. 2011. "Felt Authenticity and Demonstrating Transformational Leadership in Faith Communities." *Journal of Behavioral and Applied Management* 12(3): 179-199.

Williams, Michael Ann. 2017. "After the Revolution: Folklore, History, and the Future of Our Discipline (American Folklore Society Presidential Address, October 2015)." *Journal of American Folklore* 130(516): 129-141.

Wood, Michael. 2003. *The Road to Delphi: The Life and Afterlife of Oracles*. New York: Picador.