

Authenticities: A Semiotic Exploration

Janina Fenigsen and James Wilce

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Article abstract

Charles Taylor has called ours an “Age of Authenticity”, and authenticity is a popular object of scholarly examination, not least in anthropology. A considerable number of scholars have even proposed models for multiple “authenticities”. None, however, has brought a modified Peircean theoretical tool-kit together with ethnographic evidence that “the natives know” that there are many authenticities. This article seeks to fill that gap. Working with Peirce’s model of the sign and with postmodern theories of originals and replicas, we draw on Wilce’s Finnish fieldwork to analyze what we consider clear evidence of four authenticities arising in recent debates surrounding traditional Karelian lament and particularly highly organized attempts in Finland to “revive” the practice. We call performances arising out of the revival “neolaments”. We treat authenticities as strictly relational, metasemiotic, and ideological phenomena. Authenticities that appear salient to actors on the revivalist scene may involve the following relationships : that between any neolament performance and any particular Karelian lament performances, with the question being whether the former is adequately “traditional” (*i.e.* relationship between replica and original); between a particular lament performance and the generic essence of that which makes lament a lament (*i.e.* token and type); between a lament performance and emotion – a relationship ideologically construed as “expressive” (*i.e.* sign and object); and finally, a relationship between some sort of dynamic interpretant of particular old Karelian laments (lament₁) and new dynamic interpretants generated in and through new lament performances (lament₂ or habitual participation in such performance) that in some way replicates the old dynamical interpretant (interpretant₁ and interpretant₂).

Authenticities : A Semiotic Exploration¹

Janina Fenigsen and James Wilce
Northern Arizona University



Figure 1 : Martta Kuikka in Traditional Karelian Lament Posture

In 1971, Finnish folklorist Anneli Asplund was ready to record Martta Kuikka, a famed lamenter from Finnish Karelia (see Figure 2). Asplund asked Kuikka to record something she had learned traditionally. Kuikka said that what she was about to perform were actually two of her own laments, which had been performed recently at a very large meeting of people who had fled parts of Karelia before it had been ceded to the Soviet Union around 1939. Thousands of these refugees, along with their children and other Finns, continue to emotionally identify with the putative heartland of “Finnish” culture (Anttonen 2005 : 138-139).

In 2005, thanks to Senni Timonen of the Finnish Literature Society, Jim Wilce listened to the recording, housed in the Society's archives. Kuikka's lament compared her fellow refugees to birds. Although the lament's setting was non-traditional, Timonen pronounced it a real lament, traditional in its melody and use of metaphor, alliteration, and diminutives. For Asplund, on the other hand, Kuikka's recorded lament was *omatekoinen* 'self-made', *epäaito* 'inauthentic,' according to her 1971 recording notes. Asplund's comments eventually got back to Kuikka, resulting in profound hurt.



Figure 2 : Many Karelias (Wikimedia Commons)

Until roughly 1900, it was common for women to perform a lament (Finnish *itkuvirsi*, Karelian *itkuvirzi*) at funerals and weddings – tuneful weeping with words – throughout the transnational region of Karelia (Figure 2). Although it had become much rarer, some so-called tradition-bearers like Martta Kuikka in Finnish Karelia (North and South Karelia in Figure 1) were offering their services and teaching the lament revivalists on whom this paper focuses until their passing a few years ago. Finnish and Russian folklorists have studied Karelian lamenters for almost 170 years, and at least one Russian-Karelian folklorist is still interviewing the remaining handful of aged rural women in White [Viena] Karelia and its neighboring regions who now and then lament by the body of the deceased (E. Stepanova 2009). Since the late 1990s, however, a “revival” of Karelian lament has started, focusing on weekend lament courses that have now reached over 1,000 people – almost all of whom are middle-class Finnish women. Though these classes have almost all included some Karelian ancestry, the mini-movement is a Finnish phenomenon with no counterpart in Russian Karelia.

The still palpable old lament tradition, in confluence and juxtaposition with the “revival”, has brought questions of authenticity to the fore. As the conflict between the understandings of the lamenter and

the folklorist has painfully illustrated, different understandings of authenticity are not merely academic issues.²

We are going to examine these different authenticities, and suggest a semiotic perspective to capture their nature. In particular, we would like to suggest that these multiple authenticities invite us (if not compel us) to keep rethinking authenticity, particularly as emergent from the situated semiotic events themselves, such as revivalist lament sessions.

If authenticity is predicated on uncertainty and doubt, as Trilling (1972, as cited in Bruner 1994 : 403) suggests, the emergence of authenticity as a central and multifaceted concern of the modern and late modern age should come as no surprise. As the claims of and quest for authenticity pervade multiple domains of life, there exist a plethora of authenticities and experiences and practices across and within each of them, rather than a unified and transparent notion of authenticity. Even in relation to a single narrowly circumscribed cultural practice, such as the revivalistic performances of *itkuvirsi* 'laments' in Finland, several "authenticities" are in competition. The multiplicity of authenticities makes authenticity claims and assessments vulnerable to contestation. It also invites our scrutiny. What diverse conceptualizations of authenticity jockey for position, both within and outside of academia? Is there a way to triangulate this range of meanings, understandings, and interpretations? What makes a neolament performance an authentic one? Is it a perception of its faithfulness to a source-performer? Of its faithfulness as replica of an earlier lament, or all earlier laments (as genre)³ and their traditional form (as register)? Of its truth *vis-à-vis* the lamenter's inner state, her feelings? Of its dynamic function in the social world, seen and unseen, here and beyond? If so, how can we tell, and who is to say?

In our search for ways of deconstructing monolithic concepts of authenticity and theorizing plural forms thereof, we take as our starting point the heterogeneity of "authenticities" in the discourse of "neolamenters" or lament "revivalists" in contemporary Finland (Wilce 2011). In neolament, authenticity refers to "being true to self" (Taylor, 2007; Trilling 1972), but other externally anchored, objectivized, and multiple authenticities intersect in the *itkuvirsi*, making this revivalist practice a particularly promising site for examining authenticities.

Authenticities : A Semiotic Approach

Our approach is informed by Peircean semiotic, which in its dynamic notions of semiosis (sign-vehicles generate interpretants, each of which is a new sign that likewise generates interpretants, etc...) lays to rest any essentializations of authenticity (*e.g.*, Baudrillard 1983; Boorstin 1967), accommodates various modes of authentication, and allows us to account for the plurality of authenticities from a conceptually unified perspective.⁴ We suggest that multiple authenticities emerge at semiotic crossroads where ideologies of relationships between *itkuvirsi* and the

semiotic objects that anchor lament's authenticity meet distinctions between performance and performativity. In various ways, social actors draw on and combine these rich semiotic resources either to stake their claims to authenticity or to challenge those made by others.

We start by suggesting the inherently relational nature of authenticity such that to consider something as authentic involves framing it as related in a particular way (a semiotic ground) to something else, be it an objectifiable entity (an object or practice) external to that something (an authentic example of *x*, or even an authentic replica of *x*, as in Bruner 1994), a quality of either the experience of that something (Wang 1999), or the context of its emergence (Bruner 1994). Authenticity comments on such relationships.

Authentic With Regard to What? Authenticity and Its Externalities

In its earliest recorded uses in English – as with its forerunners in French, Latin, and Greek – calling something “authentic” (*authentik*, etc.) presupposed, but also performatively created, links between features of a particular text and conventionally agreed upon features of an Ur-text. To call something authentic was thus to guarantee its authority *vis-à-vis* externalities.⁵ Therefore, the authentic bore a certain relationship to something, and granting something authenticity involved an external process of legitimation. In that vein, exemplified by Asplund's rejection of Martta Kuikka's lament, the authenticity of neolament performance may be made to depend on its replication of a particular traditional lament by a “master”.⁶

Yet, in our post- or late modern age such an objectivizing use is neither the only nor the central use. In many influential explorations, the personal, subjective authenticity has become so salient that it appears to be the only form worth contemplating. For example, in dubbing ours the “Age of Authenticity”, Taylor (2007) – like Trilling before him (1972) – betrays no interest in authenticities other than one definable as “being true to self for self's sake”. Does this mean, however, that such forms of authenticity do not rely on externalities? While the “authentic self” of subjective authenticity could be argued to have escaped the external anchoring for its validation – after all, it is you and I who know whether this is our true selves shining through – the escape may be somewhat spurious. While the authenticity of the self may seem to be unmoored from an external object as a measure of its verisimilitude, it still answers to external criteria. In fact, it provides its own metasemiotic tools through which a listener (*e.g.*, a psychotherapist) can discern the “real” from the “unreal” experience of the authentic (Smith, in press). When authenticity is not anchored in a tangible, external object it is still assessed against a conceptual externality on which the Peircean interpretant can seize to pronounce *x* (in)authentic in relation to *y* at any level of semiosis. Thus, even though Wang (1999) in his discussion of existential authenticity

identifies it as an activity-related, non-objectified state of Being, such authenticity – while it may not rely on the authenticity of tangible objects – still hinges on an externality of sorts. It relies on understandings of what makes the experience authentic, and how can we make such determinations. If, as Deleuze notes, a Platonic “well-founded” copy (authentic in Bruner’s sense of verisimilitude) “proceeds less from one thing to another than from a thing to an Idea” (1983 : 48), its authenticity still depends on an externality of essence or form. The authenticity of a neolament performance evaluated through its concordance with the old genre (as a faithful token of a type), rather than by its repetition or replication of a particular old lament (relating as copy-to-original), exemplifies such an anchorage in a multiplex object that may not be a tangible one but certainly is an object in the semiotic sense.

Authenticity, Emotion, Lament

At the beginning of this paper we recounted the conflict between Asplund, a folklorist, and Martta Kuikka, a renowned lamenter, and the hurt it caused Martta. The emotional loading of concerns with authenticity is limited neither to controversies over authenticity nor to social actors involved in such controversies; it characterizes its theorizing as well. Although the worry about that which may be lost in replication dates back at least to Plato, in post-modern reflection authenticity has become a trope for engaging with the directionality of history, serving either to question (Baudrillard 1983) or to uphold the notion of progress (Bruner 1994). Without entering directly into the claims and controversies over the authenticity of lament, this emotionally charged theorizing merits some attention as a backdrop against which the authenticity of lament plays out.

At least three emotionally charged perspectives (none directly related to the four kinds of authenticity we discuss below) characterize social-theoretical reflections on the relationship and distinction between reproductions and originals. The first one, dystopic, dates back to Plato and emphasizes the distinction between original and reproduction; the dystopic perspective privileges the original and worries both about the verisimilitude of the reproduction and, according to Deleuze, the possibility of that distinction’s disappearance (1983 : 47). If reflexivity has become the hallmark of modernity and post-modernity, enabling the questioning of entities with regard to their sources and the interrogation of their authenticity, the reflection upon the perceived innocence lost between the cracks that separate the simulacrum from its source of origin has filled these cracks with nostalgia (see also MacCannell and Flower MacCannell 1993 : 134).

The second perspective, which is celebratory, emphasizes the distinction, too, while privileging the reproduction over the original of which it is considered to be constitutive (Bruner 1994; MacCannell 1976 :

148).⁷ Finally, while the distinction presumably disappears in the third emotion-laden perspective, where reproduction is the (only) original; however, the emotivity of this third perspective is ambivalent. Baudrillard's (1983) world of hyperreality is clearly dystopic. Deleuze (1983), in contrast, does not seem to worry about the reign of simulacra.⁸ Putting aside, for now, the question of whether the death of the original may have been exaggerated (Wilce 2009a), we simply note the emotive saturation of the theorizing of authenticity as illustrative of the stakes involved, for Plato, for Baudrillard, for the neolamenters, and – most likely – for ourselves as well.

The Problematics of Traditionality, Performance, and Emotion for Social Actors and Scholars

Emotion is at the very core of lament as its semiotic object, medium, and outcome; yet the relationship between emotion and performance has been insufficiently theorized. The study of affectivity in cultural performances such as laments has tended toward one or more of the following unfortunate directions, in our opinion. The most common is the apparently innocent notion that lamentation amounts to an “expression” or “performance of emotion”. This expressivism has been criticized by Volosinov (1973 : 85) and Feld and Fox (1994), but the underlying idea that emotion has its own existence prior to and separate from the semiotic forms in which it is expressed – recently critiqued by Ochs (2012) – is still too common in the literature on lament (*e.g.*, Gamliel 2006). For some, the notion of performativity, rather than centering on creation or agency (often on magico-religious or ritual agency), is often swallowed by notions of performance and the assumption that performed emotions have their real existence inside us, before and apart from expression. “Performativity” comes to mean “performance-related” (again, see Gamliel 2006). Ochs (2012) and Wilce (2009b) invert the received wisdom about language and feeling, noting that uses of language are as likely to stir, or be the object of, emotion as they are to “express” it.

A second unfortunate tendency is the functionalist interpretation of lament. Lament either purges individuals of painful emotion, acting just as Aristotle envisioned “poetry” to act (*i.e.*, as cathartic), or serves to unify communities for which death somehow threatens dissolution (*e.g.*, de Martino 2000 [1975]). We see a third problem in invocations of “ritual weeping,” namely : Although we now recognize that sincerity is quite a foreign notion in vast regions of the world (*e.g.*, Rosaldo 1982), little progress has been made in ethnographically exploring sincerity or authenticity in terms of metasemiotic norms. Anthropologists in general have not adequately faced the semiotically reflexive nature of all human communication (an inevitability, given the nature of Peirce's notion of the sign's interpretant). The cultural processes that define modes and outcomes of reflection are inadequately explored, which is one explanation for a tendency to refer to authenticity in the singular,

to see it as unified.

The metasemiotic nature of human communicative activities such as lament (in which tears are rarely unaccompanied by discourse about tears) certainly does not require a “symbolist” interpretation, as Desjarlais (1992), for example, indicated. Language can be “about” tears (sadness), but the opposite is also true. Tears might be no more authentic than language, but this insight rests on recognizing that language is not only a set of symbols or a tool for reference-and-predication, but instead is richly and multifariously indexical. Ochs (2012) points out that speech as an embodied expressive activity is itself experienced – *i.e.*, it is the object and not only a symbolic vehicle of experience and (Wilce 2009b) emotion.

Thus, lament may be “about” emotion, but there is inadequate attention to *what the emotion is about*. The emotionality of traditional Karelian laments as performative acts embedded in larger ritual contexts was “about” the spiritual power wielded (for good) by lamenters as, in some sense, female shamans (Tolbert 1990). This recognition opens the door for our analysis of lament-relevant authenticities.

Authentic How? Relationships (and Their Directionality)

Key to our argument is the assertion of the relational nature of authenticity. As a phenomenon that is always an intervention in the dynamics of semiosis, authenticity is best seen as a metasemiotic frame while various modes of authentication are seen as multiple framings (compare Turino 1999). As our analysis of neolament will show, through metasemiotic imaginings that crystallize processes of social legitimation by means of several semiotically distinct mechanisms, these framings frequently authenticate plural and at times conflicting authenticities.

Addressing the at-least-fourfold plurality of authenticities related to neolament, as we do below, involves asking questions about socio-semiotic ideologies of relationships between a given neolament performance and any particular Karelian lament performances construed as adequately traditional (replica and original); between lament performance and the generic essence of that which makes lament a lament (token and type); and between lament performance and emotion (sign and object), commonly assumed to be an expressive relation (a questionable assumption, as indicated previously). It also calls for attention to a distinction between performance and performativity, to the directionality of the relationship between the semiotic event of lament and its semiotic object, or to the relationship between some sort of dynamic interpretant of particular old laments (or laments generically) and new dynamic interpretants generated in and through new lament performances (or habitual participation in such performance) that in some way replicates the old dynamical interpretant.

Our agenda is to explore these four authenticities as matters of pressing importance and themes of frequent discourse in Finland and its so-called “lament revival” as the fieldsite that we describe here. Indeed, one cannot do fieldwork with Finnish neolamenters or folklorists who study Balto-Finnic lament traditions without eventually hearing discussion pertaining to the extreme importance of authenticity, or else – and this is an area of significant diversity and conflict – to just what constitutes an authentic lament performance.

Given this approach, it should be clear that we are neither “giving up on” authenticity (a prospect that worried Coupland, 2003 and, in a different way, Baudrillard 1983), nor making our own judgments as to what is or is not authentic. Our semiotically-grounded exploration of four different sorts of authenticity aims instead to extrapolate from contemporary Finnish and historical Karelian metasemiotic discourse to formulate a typology that we hope might be of use *vis-à-vis* practices and ideologies of authenticity in other ethnographic settings and thus to demonstrate the relevance and utility of semiotic approaches to issues of concern to contemporary anthropology.

- First – Replica-and-Original. Asplund’s. Stresses traditional transmission and traditional settings at the expense of improvisation;
- Second – Token-and-Type. Timonen’s and Matveinen’s. Emphasizes iconicity of sign-vehicles to sign-vehicles. Neolament performances must demonstrate their featural qualifications as types of traditional genre (token);
- Third – Sign-Vehicle-and-Determining-Object. Fihlman’s. Entails iconicity between outward signs and inner experience as semiotic object;
- Fourth – Interpretant-to-Interpretant Iconicity. Matveinen and Fihlman. Relationship between dynamic interpretants of contemporary vs. traditional laments – one of magical efficacy (performativity).

Figure 3 : Four Kinds of Authenticity

Since perhaps 1971 when Asplund recorded Kuikka’s lament, instances of discourse on “Karelian” lament have been sites of contestation. Four visions of authenticity have competed in the discourse of old Karelian lamenters, Finnish folklorists, and Finnish revivalists, all of which involve a strong identification with Karelia or sometimes Karelian ancestry. With varying degrees of frequency, all four visions have entailed explicit invocations of the Finnish term *aitous* (‘authenticity’) though we have not made such explicit reference a prerequisite in selecting the transcribed examples presented below.

First Kind : Replica of an Original (Which in Balto-Finnic Lament May Not Exist)⁹

To return to the controversy that opened this paper, Asplund's "authenticity" – denied by her to Kuikka – is the authenticity of Plato and Baudrillard, who both mourned its loss to the corruptions of indefinite reproduction, which renders authenticity inauthentic.¹⁰ Its only approximation could have been delivered to Asplund by Kuikka had she decided to perform by quoting an "original", "traditional" lament, lament-as-an-object. Ironically, however, as Asplund might well have known, neither in Karelia nor in many of the areas in which a vibrant lament tradition has been ethnographically documented are laments "pre-composed" or "fixed" (Feld and Fox 1994), for *laments are typically improvised* (Honko 1974 : 10; E. Stepanova 2011; Porter 2001; Holst-Warhaft 1992 : 7). The kind of authenticity Asplund was looking for – faithfulness perhaps to one's mother or grandmother and to a particular lament she performed on one or more occasions – would probably never have appeared.

If the first kind is but one academic's ideal-type, discourse about authenticities 2-4 is commonly heard among neolamenters.

Second Kind : Authenticity Requiring Neolament as Token of a Type

Authentic neolaments must "sound like [real, traditional] laments", says pioneering lament revivalist Liisa Matveinen.



Figure 4 : Liisa Matveinen, Pioneer of the "Lament Revival" Since the 1980s

For Matveinen, "sounding like lament" means the obligatory use of the 1400 old canonical *kiertoilmaisut* ("circumlocutions", E. Stepanova 2009)¹¹ – albeit translated from Karelian into Finnish – that (along

with alliteration, free metre, etc.) defined Karelian lament as a genre. Transcript 1 shows the kind of model lament, collected by folklorists, in relation to which the authenticity of Liisa's students is judged.

- 1.1 Valkualkua vualimaiseni — Whiten my little cherished one [daughter]
- 1.2 valtajouččenuisien valkevaisikse — to the whiteness of white little swans
- 1.3 valkeih šyntysih, — for the departure to the white little ancestors,
- 1.4 jotta valkeih luatusih valkeih — so that in [their] white little ways, to
šyntysih the white little ancestors [otherworld],
- 1.5 vaštualtais valkiet omakuntaset. — white little own-communities
[relatives] will come to meet [her].

Transcript 1 : Lament From White [Viena] Karelia, 1967 (A. Stepanova and Koski 1976 : 86, as cited by E. Stepanova 2009 : 19)

The generic features of rampant alliteration and diminutivization, free metre, circumlocutions (*e.g.*, *vualimai-seni*, 2.1,¹² whose root points indirectly to a daughter or child, and whose suffix is diminutive), etc., function here as an instance of Baudrillard's codes that generate (potentially) indefinite reproductions of "reality", corrupting the lament's authenticity while (we suggest) at the same time generating authenticities of a new kind. Contra Baudrillard, a situated lament performance – informed by the generic standards that have been determined by the semiotic object of such lament-as-sign (that object being the texts collectively representing the Karelian lament genre) – not only participates in the *ad infinitum* replication of that object but also establishes two novel authentic objects – itself and the traditional lament, now re-defined in the terms of the semiotics of the genre.

If the lament excerpted in Transcript 1 represents the semiotic object, an exemplar of the traditional genre, what defines lament courses is not just the lament performance at course's end, but also their metasemiotic discourse about lamenting "then" and "now". Liisa Matveinen's courses emphasize the very features shown above – features that make a neolament "sound like a lament", *i.e.*, like an exemplar of the genre, a token of the type. In one course, Liisa quizzed her students, asking them, "What are the stylistic methods of laments?" With apparent pleasure, she affirmed the features they listed, one by one – alliteration, "metaphors" (circumlocutions), and free metre.¹³ Such lists need not be complete, and indeed this one was not; it touched, however, on the features Liisa treats as paramount. It has, that is, the "enoughness" (Blommaert and Varis in press) needed to make any given neolament authentic. A depar-

ture from Asplund's "authenticity" (in the Platonic and Baudrillardian sense, seemingly privileging "historicity" and "systemic coherence" – two of the five qualities of authenticity identified by Coupland 2003) – is seen in Liisa Matveinen's focus on the genre-centered authenticity of lament-as-sign. Its shape is determined, in a truly Peircean fashion, by its object, "traditional lament", experientially and temporally removed by the recursive semiosis of/in time. If the generically compliant new performance counts as authentic, as Matveinen asserts, this new type of the semiosis of authenticity not only creates a Baudrillardian hyper-reality of inauthentic authenticities,¹⁴ but is also performative of authenticity of a new kind, one that answers to questions of the portable generic canon, but not of historicity or systemic coherence.

Wrapping Up the Second Kind

Note that it was formal features of the lament-as-sign (*i.e.*, Peircean sign-vehicle) that clinched the deal for the person who gave Wilce access to the recording and the recording notes : Senni Timonen. She sided with Martta rather than with Asplund on the issue of Martta's lament's authenticity. Pioneering lament revivalist Liisa Matveinen is similarly convinced that the semiotic features that constituted traditional laments *per se* are the criteria that determine the authenticity of contemporary laments as tokens replicas of the generic type – metrically free and full of alliteration, diminutives, and word-substitutions or phrasal circumlocutions.



Figure 5 : Pirkko Fihlman at Her Dining Room Table in a "Lamenting Pose" for a Journalist, February 2009

Third Kind : Authenticity of/as Self-Expression

Yet another kind of authenticity has emerged from the work of the largest and only formally organized wing of the Finnish lament revival,

Äänellä itkijät, ry (best rendered as “Those Who Cry With Words, registered organization” – or *ÄI-Lamenters* for short). In the late 1990s Pirkko Fihlman asked Matveinen, Kuikka, and academic experts to teach her and others to create their own laments. In 2001 Pirkko, with her husband Ensio Fihlman, founded *ÄI-Lamenters*. From the start, Pirkko carried out her own vision of authenticity, departing from both folklorists and Matveinen. Her students would compose laments whose semiotic features would be “Karelian” not in letter but in spirit, not focusing on canonical features of the old genre, but using a version of the genre to authentically perform their own feelings. This third authenticity de-prioritizes faithfulness of form across time – as an icon-of-genuineness between sign forms loosely inspired by Karelian *itkuvirsi* – in favour of the faithful expression of feelings “deep inside”. This is the authenticity of modernity according to Trilling (1972) and Taylor (2007).

Pirkko and other leaders of *ÄI-Lamenters* consider catharsis one of the chief functions of old Karelian lament, which reflects their understanding of the lament subgenre known as *tilapäätkut* “occasional laments”, as described in the literature on Balto-Finnic lament: “Women versed in the art of lament have themselves composed laments on various themes outside the context of communal rituals and have mourned their own and others’ fates by means of these laments (occasional laments)...” (Nenola-Kallio 1982 : 74; compare E. Stepanova 2011).¹⁵

Transcript 2 is an excerpt from a discussion of the third kind of authenticity that occurred at the very end of a lament course led by Pirkko Fihlman, who is the speaker throughout.

- | | | | |
|-----|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| 2.1 | P: tää itku ei saa vaan olla | — | P: This lament should not be just |
| 2.2 | sellast pinnallista vaan se nimenomaan | — | on the surface, but absolutely |
| 2.3 | et se kohtaa aidosti | — | it will authentically face |
| 2.4 | ihmisen tunteet | — | the person’s feelings. |
| 2.5 | ja se hoitaa sillon lähimmäistä | — | And then it heals loved ones, |
| 2.6 | se hoitaa itseä | — | and it heals oneself. |

Transcript 2 : Pirkko Fihlman, February 2009

Based on this and many other invocations of authenticity by Pirkko Fihlman, we can confidently concur that while, for Liisa Matveinen, “sounding like a lament” is primarily a matter of textual poetics, for Pirkko it is one of sobs, moving words, and other audible signs of “real

feelings". Such performances are not only replicas-to-a-degree of a model lament or performances of pre-existing feeling; they are also performative in either establishing an emergent authentic event/standard of authenticity or, potentially, even undermining the notion of authenticity as event-external.

Given that this third authenticity is the most widely described, and has been made into a key sign of modernity, it is worth reviewing before moving on. Those taught by Pirkko Fihlman, while very aware of regional lament traditions, do not seek authentication in alignment of the semiotic features of their performances with the features of traditional ones, even if they may draw on some traditional resources. Instead, they situate authenticity in the cathartic effects of each performance. In that sense, each neolament event can be self-sufficient with regard to establishing its authenticity. Furthermore, if one cathartically successful neolament may stand in an object position to another future lament-as-sign, it also establishes through its success a metasemiotic type – the type here being that of “authentic”, “cathartic” lament, its nature and achievement as performatively entailing other specific laments-as-objects to come. Does this form of cultural production result, as Baudrillard feared, in a world of lost referents (1983)? We claim, rather, that these flexible, robust, ever-emergent “replicas” of traditional lament are the new authentic laments.

Fourth Kind : Authenticity as Iconicity Between Dynamic Interpretants

Tired old interpretations of lament being about emotional expression or repairing communities facing the crisis posed by a death (DeMartino 2000[1975]) do not fit traditional Karelian laments, be they funerary or “occasional”. Their laments instead constituted magical interventions in the Other World,¹⁶ led by a particularly skilled “cry-woman”. Indeed the emotion these women displayed during hours-long laments were culturally understood to reflect and constitute their trance-like state, essential for communication with *Tuonela*, the world of the dead.

Such a performative-magico-religious function appears, at least on first glance, to be totally missing from revivalist lamenting. If it is indeed missing, how can lamenters (or we, for that matter) assert that a contemporary lament that claims affiliation with the old tradition is “authentic”? How can “the authentic” ignore the contexts and goals of traditional laments? The multiple answers we receive open up the diverse authenticities circulating even in just one cultural domain.

Our first answer is that function is NOT ignored in the revival. As a purist *vis-à-vis* the traditional genre, Liisa Matveinen epitomizes the second form of authenticity. Pirkko Fihlman represents the third. Yet, despite long years of debate, the two activists share an orientation to a final kind of authenticity. This fourth kind involves claims authenticated through a relationship between lament performance and its effect – what

Peirce would have called the “dynamic interpretant” of any given lament. In lines 2.5 and 2.6 above, Pirkko refers to the power of lament to heal others and the lamenter herself. Indeed she often tells of the mending of relationships that can come about once one laments, particularly from the emotional perspective of one from whom one is alienated. These claims clearly reflect a performative understanding of authentic lament.

But this fourth authenticity goes beyond that. As important as the “healing power of lament” is to Pirkko and others, lament has another more important and less obvious effect. We emphasize the following contemporary testimonies because they bear such a strong similarity to testimonies concerning expert cry-women in Karelia (Konkka 1985 : 107). We are referring specifically to claims of authenticity both women have made in relation to their lament practice based on the communicative channel it has opened between themselves and the dead. Matveinen and Fihlman both began to receive dream-visitations from their departed loved ones after they began lamenting, though Matveinen argues that such supernatural visits can only happen if the lament is in the old register since spirits can only “answer” messages in that register. Thus, in this fourth version of authenticity, laments are authenticated based on their effects and thus only in retrospect.¹⁷

In a 2009 lament course in which Wilce participated, Pirkko Fihlman mentioned the death of her brother, who had been living in Canada. Pirkko arrived there from Finland in time to be with him just before he passed away a few days later. During that time she performed at least one public “funerary” lament. In the lament course, a few minutes after Pirkko had mentioned her brother, her husband Ensio Fihlman returned to the story to add a supernatural dimension to which he was privy. Hours after the lament in Canada, which was in the middle of the night in Finland, Pirkko’s brother appeared to Ensio in a dream. Before Transcript 3 begins, Ensio has described his brother-in-law appearing to him in a dream, mentioning how good it was during the heat of cremation to have cushions under his legs. Cushions? Eventually Pirkko told Ensio she had sent them to him in his new world.

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------------------|---|
| 3.1 | Pirkko itki hänelle — | Pirkko lamented those |
| 3.2 | ne niin pehmeät pielukset — | soft cushions for him |
| 3.3 | ja seuraavana aamuna — | ... And the next morning [on the phone] |
| 3.4 | mä kerroin Pirkolle että — | I told this [about cushions] to Pirkko |
| 3.5 | sitte sit vasta sä kerroit sen — | and then she told this |
| 3.6 | pehmoset pielukset siinä — | soft cushions thing to me [that she had “lamented soft cushions to her brother] |

3.7 että et se oli aika jännää tämmönen — That was quite exciting.

Transcript 3 : The Story of a Lament's Dynamical Interpretant

Elsewhere in the recordings of that lament course, Pirkko mentioned that lamenters often said comforting things to the dead – *e.g.*, that they would go to their place with soft cushions. Ensio had not known this, and claims to have first received an inkling of it in his dream-visitation. His phrase, “lamenting soft cushions for your brother”, is quite remarkable in that the Finnish verb *itkeä* ‘to cry, lament’ is no more a transitive verb in Finnish than it is in English. Making it transitive in this case makes it performative.

Liisa Matveinen began receiving visitations from long-gone relatives as soon as she began to lament – she would say, lament *properly*. Her friend and mentor, the same Martta Kuikka introduced earlier in this paper, told her not to be afraid, as Liisa had indeed been, since these dream visitations were part of the traditional experience of the Karelian lamenter. The dreams exemplify the sort of positive connection with the Other World that Karelian lamenting traditionally brought about. Liisa came to see that “they are *answering* me in my dreams”. Much as conversation analysts argue that second pair-parts in adjacency pairs help constitute the meaning of a first pair-part, the dream-answers of the dead retroactively confirm the authenticity of laments (Sidnell 2010).

Conclusion

Several points emerge from our argument. First, we hope to have demonstrated the usefulness of a modified Peircean semiotic approach to our main body of data – the revival of Karelian lament in Finland. Our analysis is grounded in that body of data, and particularly in the fact that *aitous* ‘authenticity’ is a salient theme among Finnish lament revivalists (in pedagogical discourse and interviews) and to those who question their practice.

Second, we have shown that the world of revivalist lament in Finland is populated by a multitude of authenticities. These plural authenticities differ in their semiotic referents (authenticity with regard to what?), as well as in the kinds of semiosis involved in their creation and authentication (“expression”, “performance”, and “performativity” being quite different forms of semiosis indeed). While for some, a neolament’s authenticity is ultimately anchored in the traditional genre, for others the proof is in the pudding – that is, in the efficacy of the lament performance, whether conceptualized in terms of catharsis, healing, or being connected to the Other World.

Finally, to the extent that we may have been successful in suggesting

shifts in the very semiosis of authenticity (*i.e.*, the grounding of authenticity in the event itself, and a two-way “determinacy” between object and sign-vehicle), such that while the (loose) replicas of the traditional may mutually entail and authorize each other, this is no Baudrillardian dystopic hyperreality we have been unfolding here. Instead, we suggest, even if authenticity may have become a moveable feast, the new authentic is as real as the old one. All that has changed, to paraphrase Michael Warner *et al.*, are its very conditions (2010 : 9).

Notes

1. The representation of the Finnish lament revival in this article is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 0822512. Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.
2. In 2003, two years before Wilce heard Kuikka’s lament and read Asplund’s recording notes, the founders of the Finnish lament revivalist organization – Pirkko and Ensio Fihlman – had told him about conflict between Finnish folklorists and neolamenters over authenticities.
3. It would be more accurate to speak of Karelian laments as a handful of subgenres – funeral, wedding, “occasional”, and “recruit” laments (*hautajais-*, *hää-*, *tilapä-*, and *rekryytti-*), the latter saying goodbye to departing soldiers (E. Stepanova 2009).
4. Our use of Peircean semiotics for the analysis of authenticity has been foreshadowed by MacCannell’s (1976 : 110) insight, inspired by Peirce, into what MacCannell considered in his analysis of the tourist attraction an interchangeability of signifier and signified. “MacCannell notes that analysis of the touristic attraction demonstrates the interchangeability of signifier and signified : the Statue of Liberty, originally a marker – a sign welcoming travelers to New York – has become a sight; but then as a celebrated tourist attraction it has become at another level a marker, used on posters and travel displays as a marker for the United States as a country for tourism. The Eiffel Tower, a major touristic signified, represented by a variety of different signifiers, is itself a signifier that signifies ‘Paris’. The Empire State Building is a sight that serves as a marker for the sightseer’s Manhattan” (Culler 1990 : 15). More precisely, the process to which MacCannell refers is that involving the orders of indexicality (Silverstein 2003).
5. Authenticity’s etymological tendency toward an external orientation is indicated in the phrase “of established credit” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition 3a.
6. For the use of “master” (Karelian *moast’eri*) in metasemiotic commentary about the very best lamenters, perhaps seen as a model or teacher, see Konkka (1985 : 107).
7. Thus, rather than being tacky copies of the tourist attractions they depict, tourist trinkets become roadmaps in the treasure-hunt for authenticity, diagrammatic icons that mark particular qualities as the shibboleths of the authentic.
8. For Deleuze, “the simulacrum is not degraded copy, rather it contains a positive power which negates both original and copy, both model and reproduction” (1983 : 53).
9. “Perhaps no lament has ever been performed twice in exactly the same words” (Honko 1974 : 10).

10. We must for the moment leave the need to address the relationship between a replica and a family-resemblance-based spin-off unmet.
11. Note the new Finnish dictionary of the “Karelian lament language” and its “hidden [taboo-avoidant] names” or circumlocutions (A. Stepanova 2012).
12. For a thorough [Finnish] discussion of *vualimaiseni* as one example of the 1400 canonical circumlocutions in Karelian lament (see A. Stepanova 2012 : 210).
13. For an exploration of ascribing such formal features to a lament register (which is honorific), see Wilce in submission.
14. For Baudrillard, chains of simulations that self-refer to each other create a closed semiotic system without a stable referent. That represents Baudrillard’s version of Plato for whom “the simulacrum is a copy of a copy. Violating an ethics of imitation, its untruth is defined by its distance from the original and by its exposure of the city scandal that an imitation can in its turn function as a reality to be copied (and so on endlessly)” (Frow 1991 : 126). But Peirce allows us to view this as semiosis, not as a problem. So our approach to hyperreality is closer to Deleuze than to Baudrillard – a theme to be explored outside the limits of this paper.
15. One problem : if the chief function of these “occasional laments” was truly personal catharsis, why were they performed in the same *itkukieli* ‘lament language’ used in “ritual laments” and intended for spirits who understood only *itkukieli*?
16. Compare funerary laments in ancient Egypt (Wickett 1993; Wilce 2009a).
17. Our choice to compare traditional Karelian lamenting and healing in shamanic trance reflects decades of scholarship concluding that Karelian lamenters acted in some sense as female shamans (see, e.g., Tolbert 1990).

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Abstract

Charles Taylor has called ours an "Age of Authenticity", and authenticity is a popular object of scholarly examination, not least in anthropology. A consider-

able number of scholars have even proposed models for multiple “authenticities”. None, however, has brought a modified Peircean theoretical tool-kit together with ethnographic evidence that “the natives know” that there are many authenticities. This article seeks to fill that gap. Working with Peirce’s model of the sign and with postmodern theories of originals and replicas, we draw on Wilce’s Finnish fieldwork to analyze what we consider clear evidence of four authenticities arising in recent debates surrounding traditional Karelian lament and particularly highly organized attempts in Finland to “revive” the practice. We call performances arising out of the revival “neolaments”. We treat authenticities as strictly relational, metasemiotic, and ideological phenomena. Authenticities that appear salient to actors on the revivalist scene may involve the following relationships : that between any neolament performance and any particular Karelian lament performances, with the question being whether the former is adequately “traditional” (*i.e.* relationship between replica and original); between a particular lament performance and the generic essence of that which makes lament a lament (*i.e.* token and type); between a lament performance and emotion – a relationship ideologically construed as “expressive” (*i.e.* sign and object); and finally, a relationship between some sort of dynamic interpretant of particular old Karelian laments (lament₁) and new dynamic interpretants generated in and through new lament performances (lament₂ or habitual participation in such performance) that in some way replicates the old dynamical interpretant (interpretant₁ and interpretant₂).

Résumé

Charles Taylor a baptisé notre époque “l’Âge de l’Authenticité”. Certes, l’authenticité est un sujet populaire dans la recherche académique, surtout en anthropologie. Un nombre important de chercheurs sont allés jusqu’à proposer des modèles “d’authenticités multiples”. Aucun, cependant, n’a offert jusqu’à présent une “boîte à outils théorique peircéenne modifiée” qui mettrait en évidence le fait que les “autochtones savent” qu’il existe de nombreuses authenticités. Le présent article vise à combler cette lacune.

En combinant le modèle sémiotique de Peirce avec les théories postmodernes sur les originaux et les copies, nous nous sommes appuyés sur le travail mené sur le terrain en Finlande par Wilce pour analyser ce qui nous semble être une évidence, à savoir que quatre formes d’authenticités sont présentes dans les récents débats sur la lamentation carélienne et, en particulier, dans les tentatives entreprises en Finlande pour “faire revivre” cette pratique. Nous appelons “néolamentations” les expressions issues de ce renouveau et traitons les questions d’authenticité qu’elles suscitent comme des phénomènes strictement relationnels, metasémiotiques et idéologiques. Les authenticités qui paraissent saillantes aux acteurs de la scène *revivaliste* font émerger les rapports suivants : 1) le rapport entre l’usage de la néolamentation et celui de toute autre forme de lamentation carélienne, dans le but de déterminer si la première est adéquatement “traditionnelle” (soit : la relation entre la copie et l’original); 2) le rapport entre la performance d’une lamentation et l’essence même qui lui octroie son identité de lamentation (soit : la relation du token et du type); 3) le rapport entre performance et émotion – une relation idéologiquement interprétée comme ‘expressive’ (soit : la relation du signe à son objet); 4) enfin, le rapport entre une sorte d’interprétant dynamique d’anciennes lamentations caréliennes (lamentation₁) et des interprétants dynamiques nouveaux produits par des performances nouvelles de la lamentation (lamentation₂ ou participation habituelle dans pareilles performances) et qui, d’une certaine manière, visent la reproduction de l’interprétant dynamique ancien (soit : la relation entre un interprétant₁ et interprétant₂).

JANINA FENIGSEN (Ph.D., Brandeis) is a Lecturer in Anthropology at Northern Arizona University. Her interests include semiotic and political-economic approaches to language, creolization and superdiversity, writing, linguistic heritage, health promotion, selfhood, and post-secular spiritual discursivities. She has done research in Europe, in the Caribbean, in the South Eastern US; and in Arizona. Fenigsen published articles including, “Flying at Half-Mast’ : Voices, Genres, and Orthographies in Barbadian Creole” (2011); “From Apartheid to Incorporation : The Emergence and Transformations of Modern Language Community in Barbados, West Indies” (2007); Guest-edited *Pragmatics* 13(4). Special Issue, “Misrecognition, Linguistic Awareness, and Linguistic Ideologies : Ethnographies and Approaches”; and co-edited “Ethnographic Explorations of the Borderlands : Between and Among Authenticities”, Special Section for an upcoming issue of *Semiotica* (August 2014).

JAMES WILCE (Ph.D., UCLA), is Professor of Anthropology at Northern Arizona University, Editor of the book series *Blackwell Studies in Discourse and Culture*. He has previously been Visiting Researcher at Helsinki University’s Department of Folkloristics, and Invited Scholar at L’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris. His interests include semiotics, linguistic anthropology, medical anthropology, ethnopoetics, performance, emotion, religion and “emotion pedagogies” (particularly in Finland and the US Southwest). Wilce’s publications include *Language and Emotion* (2009); *Crying Shame* (2009); “Scientizing Bangladeshi Psychiatry : Parallelism, Enregisterment, and the Cure for a Magic Complex” (2008); “Magical Laments and Anthropological Reflections : The Production and Circulation of Anthropological Text as Ritual Activity” (2006); and co-edited “Ethnographic Explorations of the Borderlands : Between and Among Authenticities”, Special Section for an upcoming issue of *Semiotica* (August 2014).