

MAPS OF OUR OWN MAKING: PRACTICING DIVINATION IN 21ST CENTURY
CANADA

by

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Abstract

Divination in 21st century Canada is rooted in paradox. Frequently the site of challenge, reductionism, and dismissal, it continues to thrive in individual lives and defy cultural expectations. Through an ethnographic study of over thirty divination practitioners (those who use tools such as tarot cards or astrology charts to uncover information deemed otherwise unknowable), primarily located in central Alberta, I explore the ongoing functions of this practice within individual lives and the larger communities they serve. In doing so, this thesis counters claims of divination's erroneous, at best, and harmful, at worst, presence within this modern, rational country.

Built on the personal narratives of my participants and the research of scholars from multiple disciplines on divination and folk belief, I explore what the term divination means within both academic frameworks and lived experiences. Once terminology is established, I examine how it fits within the worldviews constructed by those who undertake divination and the ways they reconceptualise ideas of proof and truth. Recognising that a key role of the diviner within their community is that of storyteller, this thesis goes on to explore the literary strategies they utilise and the means by which their rituals, and the tools used within, form alternative languages through which identity is constructed and communicated.

Divination as a site of power contestation is an essential part of this thesis, and I focus particularly on the ways diviners confront the larger social narratives that cast them into the role of charlatan by reframing the relationship between the monetary and the spiritual. Furthermore, the role of gender, significant due to the large number of women

who participate in this act, and divination's role in claiming personal power, in general, are also addressed. Finally, the relationship between divination and that of good and evil is explored, revealing how the concept of darkness is transformed through these practices to support a deeper process of individual development.

It is impossible to understand divination and its ongoing presence within Canada without listening to the voices of those who choose to practice it. By engaging with them and bringing their stories into academic spaces, I challenge the stereotypes of divination that emerge from popular culture and the ivory tower. This thesis provides a new framework for divinatory discourse beyond that of the pre-established vocabularies and theories of other disciplines and cultures. In doing so, I explore the paradox of divination in Canada and how this practice is proving to be a growing alternative resource for knowledge, healing, and hope.

Acknowledgements

I sit in front of a blank page and am struck by the inadequacy of language. Twenty-six letters, in any combination, are not enough to articulate the support of all of those who have been with me during this journey. But ever undaunted by a challenge, as is befitting a PhD candidate, I shall try while begging the forgiveness of all those who will remain nameless here, but never forgotten.

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Before Memorial, there was the Department of Folklore at University College Cork that welcomed a former English major into the discipline of folklore. It was here, spending afternoons looking through the National Archives of Ireland, that I first came upon the vernacular methods of divination that would form the basis of my master's work and the foundation for this thesis. In particular, my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Cliona O'Carroll, for all her support.

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It has been my greatest fortune to have grown up with a family who encouraged intellectual pursuits and whose only reaction to my announcement to undertake a PhD in Folklore was to wonder what took me so long to begin. How blessed I am. I've spent countless hours in deep (and sometimes not-so-deep) conversations with my beloved sister, exploring many of the topics that are discussed within these pages. With her purple pompoms waving, she is a source of endless strength. Alan (and co.), who may not have quite known what you were getting into when you met my mother, thank you for welcoming me into your family. Jerrot, my much older brother, thank you for always having a welcome refuge ready when I am in your neck of the woods. Finally, Mumsie,

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In undertaking this research, the topic of spirits was an ever-present topic, and so I conclude with my own. My grandmother, who passed on her deep love of learning to me, lived long enough to see me begin the program but not finish it. I think she was more excited by my acceptance than I was, if such a thing is possible. And my dad. It was not long enough, but what our lives together lacked in length they made up for in depth. No child could ask for more love than you gave to me. Words fail.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Figures	ix
Introduction.....	1
What I Have Done	8
Those Who Have Come Before	19
Where I Am.....	30
Where We Are Going	38
Making our Maps	41
Chapter 1	44
What Do We Mean? Defining Divination and the Tools of the Trade	44
In Other Words	48
What Could It Mean?	57
The Tools of the Trade.....	64
Belonging.....	82
My Definition.....	88
Chapter 2	99
Dwelling Places: Practitioner Worldviews and Their Place in 21 st Century Canada	99
Many Layers	100
We Are Not Alone!?!	108
Moving Through Time.....	111
Our Life-Worlds.....	124
What Was and What Could Be	138
Where Does It Fit?	150
Chapter 3	155
Proof, Truth, and Knowing: The Roles of Facts, Evidence, and Skepticism in Divination	155
How We Got Here	155
Truth for the Day	161

What Do You Know?.....	167
Prove Me Wrong.....	175
Time and Time Again	191
Chapter 4.....	198
Tell Me A Story: The Use of Language, Narrative, and Performance in Divination	198
Dialects of Meaning.....	199
As Simple as ABC?	204
Finding the Story.....	209
Making Sense of it All	235
Sharing the Story.....	247
Chapter 5	256
Who Controls Your Fate? Divination's Relationship to Systems and Structures of Power	256
The Almighty Dollar.....	256
More Than One Narrative	279
Making It Personal	287
Chapter 6	300
Here There Be Dragons: Addressing the Dark Elements of Life Through Divination....	300
By Any Other Name	300
Be Well	307
Good and Evil Are Inadequate.....	318
Endarkenment	329
Conclusion	345
Bibliography	359
Appendix A: Interviews.....	390
Appendix B: Conducting a Reading	400
Appendix C: K.T.'s Layers of the Universe	408
Appendix D: Michelle's Affirmations of Tarot	412
Appendix E: Drawing Exercise.....	415

List of Figures

Figure 1: Muscle Testing	73
Figure 2: Pendulum	74
Figure 3: Cards from the Mythic Tarot deck	79
Figure 4: Holy Family, photo by Miriam.....	92
Figure 5: Drawing by K.T. of Multi-Layered Reality	102
Figure 6: Drawing by Jason of Multi-Layered Reality	104
Figure 7: Life path drawing by Richard.....	112
Figure 8: The Lover's, Mythic Tarot.....	123
Figure 9: The Wheel of Fortune, Mythic Tarot	123
Figure 10: 2009 Pew Research Poll on Supernatural Experiences	146
Figure 11: The Star, Mythic Tarot	221
Figure 12: The Star, Radiant Rider-Waite Tarot.....	221
Figure 13: The Star, Voyager Tarot.....	221
Figure 14: The Star and The Sun, Mythic Tarot.....	222
Figure 15: Celtic Cross Tarot Spread.....	223
Figure 16: The Hanged Man, Thoth Deck	225
Figure 17: The Hanged Man, Mythic Tarot.....	225
Figure 18: The Tower, Radiant Rider-Waite Tarot.....	230
Figure 19: Drawing Exercise	238
Figure 20: Death Card, Mythic Tarot.....	317
Figure 21: Death Card, Thoth Tarot.....	317
Figure 22: The High Priestess, Mythic Tarot.....	331
Figure 23: The Fool, Radiant Rider-Waite Tarot.....	334

Introduction

If I tell you that I practice divination, what do you know about me? More importantly, what do you think you know? How have you come to this understanding? Do scenes from movies and television shows leap into your mind, filled with the dramatics of the Death and the Devil tarot cards and smoky crystal balls that slowly clear to reveal a tragic fate? Or perhaps you have had your own experiences that you graft onto this label and, therefore, onto me. But do you know what tools I am using or why? Do you know where I think the messages come from or what information I am seeking; if I can interpret them myself or need someone else to read for me? Do you know whether it is a private or professional act? Do you know my religious affiliations? Do I regard it as a game, a serious undertaking, both? What do you know about me? What can any of us know when all we have is a single word? This thesis, built around this one word, is about all the things that we do not, cannot, know until we look beyond the label; it is about the complex and beautiful meanings that are all too often overlooked when one accepts that an unexamined word can adequately describe worlds.

My opening question is not hyperbole. Divination is a practice that I have integrated into my own life, and this project is one that is deeply rooted in self-interest and curiosity. When I use this label, I am left to wonder what it means to call myself a diviner. This study is an attempt to understand why I, along with countless others who live in a modern, western nation, turn to tools that are typically viewed as belonging to another time or place, but not here, not now. This project is an exploration into what it

means to be a diviner in 21st century Canada, what these methods mean to us, and why they have survived. And they are thriving.

The first chapter explores more thoroughly what is encapsulated by the term divination, but a tentative step in this direction needs to be taken at this early stage. In Erika Swyler's novel *The Book of Speculation*, the central character, Simon, goes to a carnival where his sister, Enola, is reading tarot cards. The scene is set thusly:

[Her tent is] purple velour and duvetyn, spangled with gold moons and stars, hand painted. A sandwich sign leans against the tent corner, a picture of a hand floating over a crystal ball with the name *Madame Esmerelda* written in Gothic style [...] The interior is lit by a lamp covered in a red silk shawl. At a card table draped with paisley cloth, Enola is a child's idea of a fortune-teller – head wrapped in a purple scarf, gigantic gold hoops in her ears. (2015, 211)

Her presence is enhanced by the thick and entirely fake accent she uses when giving her pronouncements. This scene is familiar to anyone who has encountered pop culture depictions of divination that frequently extend far the limits of a child's imagination. The reality, however, is that what you encounter is dependent on a myriad of factors as diverse as those who seek out and utilise divination. Sometimes expected cues are absent, as the writer Jaclyn Einis notes in her opening sentences for her article about Janet Horton, an American tarot card reader: "There is no wall of beads. No headscarf. And absolutely no crystal ball. Just a set of stairs inside a boho-chic bistro spiraling up to a tiny alcove near the bathroom. Tucked in the corner is a woman, sitting, hands folded on a floral tablecloth, cards stacked and ready" (2012).

Among those I worked with for this project, the reading (the process of interpreting the divinatory tool for a specific person or question) is more likely to occur in a coffee shop or the reader's home than a carnival. There may be incense or candles, but

there are no false accents or elaborate costumes and when communing with spirits, the lights do not flicker and the table does not shake. At its simplest, the act of divination involves using tools to uncover information otherwise unattainable, often involving two people: the one conducting the reading and the one seeking the information. But all the components that go into this process are brought together in endless combinations that are contextually dependent. For example, Shannon, a practitioner who frequently integrates card readings into her mediumship, prepares for her sessions thusly¹:

I'll have a white candle lit because they're [the spirits] attracted to light. I'll have different crystals around depending on what crystals I intuitively picked beforehand because I'll invite them, and I'll ask them, "okay, I know your loved one's coming here today. What do you think we should be dealing with? Should we be dealing with love? Should we be dealing with this or that?" You know, then I'll pick crystals. I also have card decks that I'll bring out because sometimes I'll do a card reading after to kind of give them extra comfort or messages through the cards as well because sometimes the spirits like to do that. I have, and I make sure that I sage everything to protect, and I call on Archangel Michael to come and protect us because we don't want any – you know, we just want to be focusing on the good, and we don't want any waywards coming on their coattails, and then we have another issue to deal with. So yes, so then I light and do all that and then have the music playing in the background and they come in. (I.49)²

Jason, a tarot card reader, will select or create a specific layout for the cards contingent on the question being asked:

Sometimes the question is really unique; I may just start writing down some of the things that they – so for instance. Creating a spread. So, sometimes the question is very unique, so you might want to make a list of things that could answer into that question and then spread out the cards in some sort of way that would make it pleasing to you. So that's one method; there's a general spread that I use for general readings, a lot of people come to tarot with no idea what they want to know.

¹ For Shannon's full description of conducting a reading, as well as other examples, see Appendix B.

² All interviews are referenced by Interview (henceforth "I") and a number. The full list of interviews and corresponding numbers are in Appendix A.

Depending on the person, they may do the shuffling and cutting of the deck of cards, or he may do so, spreading them out for the individual to select the ones they feel drawn to before beginning to read them (I.22).

When examining the spread of tarot cards that she is to read, Anne works with the individual to explore the narrative of the layout:

And typically what I do is I'll determine the spread, and we'll go through it, and a lot of tarot readers will just sort of give them a general synopsis. I go through each card with them so that they can see where I'm getting the information from: this is the signifier, this represents this, and this card means this in this position, and then when we look at your past or whatever. So then I go through the whole thing. After having done each of the individual cards, then I will look at how many swords they had; I'll take a look at the suits that were prominent, what numbers were prominent, how many major arcana cards, what that means, explain that to them. And they're certainly welcome to take notes or record it. Lots of people like to check back, some things don't make sense until months later sometimes, so they're welcome to do that. And then, if they have any questions, I invite them to ask. If, after the first reading, they still had some questions or if they want clarification we can do another spread. And when they feel satisfied that their question has more or less been addressed, sometimes with resounding results, then we can, I'll just keep reading until our time is finished. And then, I just thank them for coming and they pay me and they go away [laughs]. Until next time. (I.1)

Each reader creates their own rituals, processes, and meanings. They emerge from the contexts through which divination has entered into and taken hold of their lives, the exploration of which lies at the heart of my work. But still, the child's idea does have its place; through it many people, myself included, have found themselves beckoned towards tarot decks and starry nights with the promise that there is something more out there, even if it is not what is expected.

I have always been interested in divination. Its aesthetics reached out to me from the pages of books I read as a child and the television and movies I watched. *Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?* However, growing up in and around the

community of Camrose, Alberta, a rural, traditionally Christian city, it was not so much that such things were condemned outside of, and sometimes within, literature, but that they simply did not exist as a reality. Fiction was the only way in which I was able to engage with them. It was not until I moved to Edmonton to pursue a Master's degree in English Literature at the University of Alberta that I first had a tangible encounter with the tools of divination. In a used bookstore my curiosity was renewed when I found a tarot set published by, appropriately enough, Reader's Digest – many households in Canada have some sort of connection with this publication. I have fond memories of my grandparent's basement bookshelves filled with their volumes of abridged novels and poking through the magazine when it arrived, marking my own maturity by the transition from the short, humorous inserts that captivated me as a child to the articles that began to hold much more import as a teenager confronting a new world. So that is how I ended up with a tarot deck in my early twenties and have collected many more since, including *The Mythic Tarot* which is the one I work with most. But it was in Ireland, when pursuing my Master's in Folklore, that I brought together my academic and personal interests. I explored a particularly resilient and clever form of what I term vernacular divination: tossing an apple peel over one's shoulder and interpreting the result as the initial of one's future spouse, and in this act found a synthesis of divination as personal passion and academic potential.

When I continued my journey into folklore at Memorial University I knew that I wanted to further explore this topic but decided to shift my attention away from any specific tool and instead focus on the individuals employing them. As mentioned before, this project is a highly personal – perhaps even selfish – one in many ways but, beyond

that, it is one which recognises that how divination is often positioned within academic discourse, as well as within larger communities, is insufficient for a contemporary Canadian context. Taking a cue from the folklorist Jody Shapiro Davie's observation that within her own discipline there has been a tradition of scholars shying away from examining the "contemporary, mainstream, middle-class religious communities – the very communities from which most academics spring" (1995, 7), I turned my attention back to those that formed me, religious and non. Having lived in Edmonton for several years, I knew there was a strong community of divination practitioners, professional and private alike. The city is home to a variety of shops that serve alternative spiritual needs and dozens of readers who advertise online and within various papers and magazines. It made sense to me to return to this place to do my fieldwork. It gave me focus in a project that had the potential to spiral quickly out of control. By turning my attention to Edmonton and area, including my hometown of Camrose, I sought to establish some geographical constraints.

Situating my research in Canada does not mean this is a comprehensive study of Canadian divination; such a thing is not possible. Even narrowing it to Alberta or Edmonton still demands that I must work with some generalisations. Canada is immense and constantly growing and changing, filled with people who are equally complex, and if I may borrow from Walt Whitman, contain multitudes³ who are constantly growing and changing. But some roots are necessary; for my purposes, these are found in the lived

³ From Whitman's "Song of Myself":
Do I contradict myself?
Very well then...I contradict myself;
I am large...I contain multitudes. (1314-1316)

experiences of individuals residing in central Alberta. So I ask that we remain focused on these individuals, able to see larger patterns but remembering that personal knowledge is the only way we maintain a foundation and move forward.

In 1963, the anthropologist George K. Park published his article “Divination and Its Social Context” wherein he noted that “[d]ivination is typical of the folk, and not of the contemporary, urban, form of the social life; its distribution is also uneven within the folk world” (205). There still remains an association of divination with rural areas of the country, and while academic understandings of “the folk” have been expanded beyond these isolated communities, many of the practices associated with folk belief still bear connotations of being othered from the urban world. I chose to situate my work within Alberta’s capital city in part because I am interested in what happens to divination within an urban context, how it is presented and received. It also further challenges the stereotypes of what divination is and its place within various communities. Urban centres are often seen as having let go of superstitions; this idea is combatted by simply showing that many of the things associated with “backwardness” have taken firm hold within cities and, in doing so, refute such shallow assumptions. In this way, there is a movement away from trying to place everything on an evolutionary scale and instead examine individual experiences, recognising that all gatherings of people, regardless of size or location, are complex and diverse.

Alberta itself is home to just such stereotypes. Linked to oil and agriculture, I have heard it referred to as the “Texas of the North” on more than one occasion. And there is some truth to its reputation. The 2015 provincial election was the first time in my life that the Progressive Conservative party did not win, and shock made up a great deal of the

small talk during my interviews. It is not where one expects to find a thriving divination community, especially when compared to its western neighbour, British Columbia. Yet Alberta holds its own claim, as we shall see. Rooting this study within this province, within Canada, and within the 21st century offers new opportunities to explore an act that has not disappeared but is thriving and growing and challenging what we think we know about the labels we use and the communities that we call home.

What I Have Done

This thesis does not document how divination is used, although this information was often gathered as part of the interview. Nor does it research the origins or history of any of the methods discussed. I am in agreement with the religious studies scholar Graham Harvey that “[w]hile origins are interesting, they are rarely the most significant aspect of a religion’s formation, identity or character. The fruits of a tradition are found not in its roots but at the end of its many branches and present manifestations” (1997, 178). This project is structured around these branches, a collection of the personal narratives of practitioners through in-person interviews and participant observation, leaping from branch to branch as they converge and diverge. In 1977, Sandra Stahl, the literary folklorist, proposed the definition of personal experience narrative as: “a prose narrative relating a personal experience; it is usually told in first person and its content is non-traditional” (20). It is a solid place to begin, as is the definition of personal narratives by Donald Braid, a graduate of the Folklore Institute of Indiana University, as those that “are coherent, followable accounts of perceived past experience” (1996, 6). I must expand

upon the latter, however, to note that the boundaries between past and present, or even future, experiences are not easily discerned within a topic such as divination. Therefore, I regard personal narratives to be about individual perceived experiences, regardless of their temporal dimension.

There is a desire to find a code that can be cracked, something that unlocks meaning for everything and for everyone, an eagerness to find the configurations that connect us all and reveal the bigger picture. All through these conversations what I have discovered is that if there is a code it is unique to each person and it is adaptive. We interact with a world that moves with us and in spite of us. We change our minds, have new experiences, make mistakes, and witness miracles that all weave together, defying a single answer. By consciously seeking out narratives I began to capture a glimpse of these vast worlds of variation and meaning but am forced also to recognise that there is not enough time to grasp them fully; there is not enough space. There never will be.

I had taken a course through the University of Alberta from the Rev. Dr. Bruce Miller several years ago on the esoteric and occult, and it was the memory of learning about tarot in his class that led me to reach out to him as a possible participant. To my great delight, he agreed to once again take on the role of teacher that has defined his life as both a university instructor and United Church minister. During this lesson, couched in terms of an interview, he provided insight into not only divination but the academic process of the PhD:

I think one of the challenges for you is the narrowing because you can't, in order to finish it, it has to be narrow and focused and your thesis statement upfront has to always be in your mind of what you're trying to accomplish, otherwise it's unending. And you have to always remember, as this advice was given to me, that your PhD thesis is the last exercise you do before you graduate. It's not your

magnum opus. If you think it's your magnum opus, you'll work on it ten years and you won't finish. That's happened to lots of people. (I.4)

He gave me permission to cut what needs to be cut and to release all that I cannot possibly hope to hold. It is in this act of letting go that I am best able to serve my chosen topic and all who participate within it, myself included.

The thesis is a balancing act of fulfilling multiple sets of requirements. Primarily, it is a necessity for a degree and must conform to the demands of the university and the department. Yet, there is also a responsibility to the participants of the project and my personal desires, and these are not always in alignment. In constructing my research, I returned again and again to William A. Wilson's article "Folklore, a Mirror for What? Reflections of a Mormon Folklorist". His struggle with his insider status both as an academic folklorist and a member of the Mormon community served as a mirror for my own methodological concerns and overarching goals. He highlights the ways in which the expectations of students and teachers within his discipline shaped what he sought from his own Mormon community even though they do not equate to "what a lifetime as a Mormon tells me to be true" (1995, 18). The problem, he notes, is not that folklorists "hold less than accurate notions about what constitutes Mormon folklore; the problem is that I, and others like me, who know what Mormons really do talk about, have played too willingly to the expectations of outsiders and have thus reinforced their misconceptions" (ibid., 19). The idea is not a foreign one to fieldworkers; we are all too aware that our participants often try to give us the information they think we want. His reassessment of this paradigm, observing how academics are prone to this same act in our own work, giving to the academy what we think they want to hear, was revelatory for me. It

remained with me as I set about the practicalities of undertaking my own fieldwork and returned again when I sat down to transform my data into the structure of a thesis.

This question of what is true can easily come to haunt research about divination. These connections will be addressed in the chapters that follow; however, it is necessary to take a moment to reflect on the expectations of truth that accompany the researcher. During the summer of 2015, when I was conducting the majority of my fieldwork, I became aware of the controversy surrounding the sociologist Alice Goffman's book *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*, her multi-year ethnographic study of a black neighbourhood in Philadelphia.⁴ In my own fieldnotes I sought to work out my perspective:

I'm currently reading about Alice Goffman's new book about, well, newish book, and the controversy around ethnographic accuracy. The fact that she didn't keep her notes and the concern over did she commit a crime and admit to it in the book or participate in a potential crime. There are issues of race, of course, as a white woman going in to study a black community. And I find it interesting because every once in a while this idea comes back that she wasn't objective, and how do you fact check? And it's frustrating to see how the concepts, methodological concepts, of one discipline are seen to be universal and the best and to see people who don't understand ethnographic processes. I mean, I have my own curiosities; I haven't read the book. But it certainly brings up interesting issues, of course, that I'm thinking about now: how I approach people that I'm doing interviews with.

⁴ While receiving critiques before the publication of the review by the law professor Steven Lubet, it was his "Ethics on the Run" that set off vast, interdisciplinary online conversations about the book and the methodologies that she employed (see Neyfakh 2015, Camps 2015, Lewis-Kraus 2016, Singal 2016). While issues about race and class were expressed – this is, after all, a white, privileged woman doing research in a black, impoverished community – the conversations that seemed to capture the greatest attention, including my own, were around the processes by which scholars engage in ethnographic research. Lubet wrote that he was left "with vexing questions about the author's accuracy and reliability", going on to later comment that "[o]ne of the previously unremarked upon problems is Goffman's credulity toward her sources, which leads her to repeat dubious stories as though they are unquestionably true" (2015). In particular, I found it fascinating to read the responses and expectations of those both outside of disciplines that conduct fieldwork, as well as those between different ethnographic disciplines that is best summed up by Leon Neyfakh in his article for *Slate* when he asks: "So what are the rules of ethnography, and who enforces them?" (2015).

And I don't think my approach is quite the same. And folklore is obviously different. [...] What are our obligations to the readers? What are our obligations to the academic world? To the people that we work with? What happens when we expect people's lives and narratives and experiences to be within the confines of something that is fact-checkable? And how do facts really integrate into our lives? (June 15, 2015)

These questions are not mine alone, and I am, thankfully, not alone in confronting how external calls for the truth must be situated within and not overwhelm the larger conversations taking place.

When introducing her book *Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment through Narrative*, Elaine J. Lawless, a scholar whose work spans the disciplines of gender, folklore, and religion, immediately challenges any concerns about truth or accuracy in relation to the historical or factual. Instead, she is “actually contesting the notion that ‘truth’ exists or that one account might be more ‘truthful’ [...] ‘Truth’ is relative, although I am cognizant of the dangers of saying that so bluntly. I accept the truth of the telling” (2001, 6). It is this truth of the telling that drives my interest. The truth of the narratives that were told to me, as well as the truth of the telling that each practitioner embarks on when they conduct a reading form the core of this work. It is what Stahl terms the intimacy of the personal narrative (1989, xx) that I find so compelling, much more so than matching up stories with external facts.

My interest is not in establishing an objective, academic baseline to which all divinatory practices are to be married. Instead, I am compelled by a love of stories. It is one of the key influences that brought me into the world of divination, for what is it but another way to tell life stories. “Narrative,” writes the folklorist Bente Gullveig Alver, “provides an important source of information about people's interpretation of reality”

(1995, 23). These interpretations are necessary to any understanding of divination, a deeply personal act that involves layers of truths and realities. Ultimately, whatever truth emerges from this work rests with the participants and the stories they tell.

The Participants

My focus is on practitioners and not their clients (or querents, as those seeking a reading are often called) for a few reasons. First, it is easier to make contact with professional readers; they advertise. Second, it gave me further focus for a project that cannot encompass everything. An anthropologist who has written extensively about divination, David Zeitlyn, rightly observes that “[i]n examining the process of divination, we must consider the multivalent and hence multivocal relationship between divination technique and diviner *as well as* between diviner and client” (2001, 237). It is a perspective echoed by Barbara Tedlock. Her experiences as a cultural anthropologist, shamanic healer, and diviner lend additional weight to her assertion that “[i]t is only by engaging with diviners and observing their acts of divination, in the spirit of the principle of no privilege, that we can study divination as we would any other meaningful social or cultural phenomena” (2006, 72). However, there is much to be learned from the narratives of practitioners and the stories they have to tell outside of the performance itself, and their voices provide an alternative to the socially constructed stereotypes that academics and the public alike often rely upon when considering this topic. In particular, I found myself intrigued by the space that many individuals occupy as both diviner and querent, either doing readings for themselves or going to others within their network. It is this multivalent relationship that will emerge within this thesis.

My decision to emphasise the personal narratives and experiences of those who practice divination emerges from a recognition of the delicate position of divinatory readings in many people's lives. While I had the privilege of having several participants conduct readings, or partial readings, for me in order to assist me in understanding how they approach their materials and better reveal its roles in their lives, I do not feel it was possible to observe other readings. Divination, as practiced by those I interviewed, is frequently an intimate experience that brings up deeply personal issues. Recognising this reality, many of the practitioners I worked with do not permit anyone else to observe a reading. Folklorists understand that their presence changes the event and that there are times when it is not possible to bear witness without altering the meanings and influencing the event too much. This situation is one of those times. It is further complicated because practitioners may also interact with the spirits who they understand accompany each of us; these beings provide information and guide readings, meaning that my own energies or spirits would be present in the room, shifting and possibly confusing the messages that were meant to come through for the querent.

The presence of spirits complicates matters in another way. As we came to the end of our two-hour conversation about mediumship, tarot readings, spirits, and the difference between her home country of Australia and her time in Canada, Leah commented that "I'm obviously getting told [by spirits] to say all of this stuff too" (I.34). It adds a level of intricacy to consider there are certain elements at play which I cannot fully acknowledge. Instead, I am left to bring together this story the best I can, keeping in mind we are complicated beings leading complicated lives that I cannot even begin to fully represent.

The Interviews

Divination tastes of jasmine tea. It is tinged with the smell of freshly-brewed coffee and humming with the background murmur of voices, countless lives intertwined together as we share space, momentarily united as strangers. Sitting together in various coffee shops in Alberta around uneven tables that barely contained our drinks and my small recorder – a conscious choice not to draw attention to us – participants and I worked through what divination means. In doing so, these places are now part of its definition. In these sites of mundane life arose the liminal wherein our conversations reshaped my research over and over again and took what I thought I knew and expanded it into new dimensions.

Interviews are a process of continual adaptation, and I kept mine as flexible as possible. They ranged in length from twenty minutes to well over two hours, averaging an hour and twenty minutes and were intentionally non-directional. While I did have themes I identified over years of research and experience that I knew I wanted to discuss (struggles charging money, source(s) of information, changing social perspectives), I did not go into any interview with a list of questions. I began by asking the participant to tell me a bit about themselves and how they got into divination and allowed the conversation to be shaped as much as possible by the practitioner. Some were content to talk with little to no input from me, others preferred a question and answer format, so I adapted to whatever was preferable to each person within the context of the interview.

The decision to structure my interviews this way required that I consider the role of quantitative data in relationship to my overall research goals:

I've been thinking about intersectionality and quantitative research. I don't feel comfortable asking people about their sexuality, gender orientation, etc. If it is important and they feel comfortable sharing, then it will come out. But I also think that we need to be careful about assuming how it influences people or that it does at all. My asexuality doesn't shape a lot of my divination – the biggest thing is I'm not interested in romantic relationships (which has more to do with being aromantic). I'm also not sure I want to discuss it in this project – I can't see how it fits. Gender – yes, there are some important implications that have come up in interviews. A tricky topic that I am going to need to think about and address carefully. (Fieldnotes [FN] July 8, 2015)

I am not disputing the value of this type of information; however, I am contesting the idea that this is the data that should frame the rest of the interview. I cannot presume to know what experiences are formative in someone's journey as a divination practitioner; therefore, I choose to leave the dialogue open for them to reveal what they will and to respect what they choose to keep to themselves.

The structure of the interviews and guiding impetus for the entire project – why do people still practice divination in Canada? – comes up against Pauline Greenhill's ethnography of niceness. It is “the benign interpretation of all cultural manifestations” that she connects to much work in public and academic folklore (2002, 227) that frequently emerges when academics “downplay ‘negative’ material in a paternalistic effort to ‘protect’ those with whom they have worked” (ibid., 239). This research, in many ways, is nice. It is rooted in a positive approach to the practice, which is not to suggest that there are no tensions amongst practitioners of different faiths, political inclinations, or other influencers of identity. Within my interviews, however, these critiques were largely absent for a few reasons: my relative status as a stranger and outsider, past negative experiences with journalists or skeptics, and, as will be discussed later in the thesis, an underlying individualism that frames the western cultural

development of divination. By and large, my participants are not interested in converting anyone to a single approach.

I interviewed 34 individuals specifically about divination and have included five other individuals who participated in another project on sacred play. I found the majority of my participants through online searches for divination practitioners in Edmonton and area and contacted said individuals. As time progressed I was able to make further connections and gain referrals from initial participants and my own network of family and friends. Unless otherwise requested, I use the first name of the participant only. For two I use their initials: K.T. and C.F. For Elizabeth J. the initial is added to differentiate her from the other Elizabeth, and the name Peter is a pseudonym used at his request.

Appendix A is a listing of interviews, the primary divinatory methods of each individual, and whether they read professionally.

These recorded interviews make up the majority of the primary materials of this thesis. In addition I attended a weekend retreat of the Edmonton Astrological Society as a participant observer and an Evening with Spirit, a monthly mediumship demonstration at the St. Brigid's Spiritualist Church of Edmonton. These events provided me with new connections and revealed different contexts which I recorded in my fieldnotes. These notes are used throughout the thesis (indicated by FN and the date), as well as selections from my own divination journal (indicated by J and the date). I recorded the majority of my fieldnotes orally as I travelled to and from interviews, transcribing them later; therefore, they reflect the oral nature of my speaking.

Transcription

Translation is a cultural mediator (Roth 1998, 245) that proves to be anything but objective. Questions of what to record and how to convey it have grown as different scholars have tried new methods of transcribing meaning such as representing intonations on the written page (see Braid 1996, Ochs and Capps 2001). The folklorists Lee Haring (2007) and Gerald Thomas (1993) use a variety of methods to record their narratives, recognising the need to adapt to every situation in order to convey truth (Haring 2007, xii). Observing how they attempt to do so reveals information about how they perceive their work and their participants. In the same way that “[q]uite often the belief is the creation of the collector” (Honko 1964, 9), the transcription is a clue into the fieldworker’s understanding of their subject matter and what defines the truth of the performance. The objective observer is giving way to the creative ethnographer who struggles to mitigate the power of their position, recognising that the value of these narratives does not come from a static nature that can be articulated on paper but from their ability to respond to the needs of the audience.

I fully transcribed and edited all interviews, which provided me the opportunity to consider how best to represent the words and experiences of those with whom I spoke. False starts, pause and filler words, and stutters have been edited out. Minor interruptions, such as affirmations (mm hm), have been removed if they do not influence the meaning; [...] is used to indicate that words have been taken out while “–” indicates that there is an interruption in speech. In addition, recognising that a transcript is an act of translating meaning from one form to another, minor grammatical changes that do not influence the narrative have been made in order to facilitate ease of reading. Punctuation is used to

clarify the text and indicate pauses and stops. There has been no attempt to represent accents.

My intent is to capture the meanings of the words and not create a literal replica of what was spoken. In order to do so, certain oral tendencies must be smoothed out. This approach opened up a freedom in the interview for some of the participants who felt self-conscious about the stutters and grammatical errors that slip by unnoticed by the ears but are jarring to the eyes, especially when placed in relation to scholarly text. It allowed them focus on the content of speech and not its formulation. To ensure understanding, contextual information is provided as needed, when responding directly to a question, statement, or comment from me, it has been included; however, this is often not the circumstance, in which case only the participant's words are given.

Those Who Have Come Before

When it comes to studying divination in Canada, the academic foundations are fragmentary, at best, and in folklore, nonexistent. It is a significant oversight to which this work is a response. In his review of *Divination: Perspectives for a New Millennium*, the local historian and folklorist based in England, Bob Trubshaw, notes, “considerable academic literature exists about divination in cultures separated in time or space from the modern West” (2012, 217) but little is focused on this country. The often disconnected study of divination in academia has frequently focused on practitioners and practices of ancient societies (Halliday 1913, Davies 1969, Cryer 1994, Koch 1995, Field 2008, Johnston 2008) or cultures outside of North America (Bascom 1980, Aphek and Tobin

1990, Peek 1991, Loewe 1994). At times, these actions are integrated into the study of varied beliefs, especially Pagan or New Age (Feher 1992, Hanegraaff 1998, Blain 2005, Pike 2004, Eller 1995) or broken down into specific methods from the more expected such as astrology and tarot (Bauer and Durant 1997, Beck 2007, Farley 2009) to the more foreign, at least in Canada, like reading entrails (Collins 2008). Nevertheless, divination exists outside these boundaries as comfortably as within them and the interdisciplinary nature of folklore is well-situated to bring together these disparate approaches, finding unity in the lived experiences of those who undertake these practices.

On a broader level, significant works of divination have been completed within Folklore Studies, most notably William Bascom's work on Ifa and Yoruba Divination ([1969] 1991 and 1980), and from within other disciplines. Patrick Curry, a scholar with a focus on cosmology, has brought forward the importance of divination in modern North America, most notably in his edited volume *Divination: Perspectives for a New Millennium* (2010) which creates an interdisciplinary space for this dialogue. The work of Tedlock is of particular standing, not only because of her studies of divination (see 1987, 2001, 2006, 2010), but also due to her willingness to explore narrative ethnography (1991) and the challenges and rewards of belonging to those whom you study (2005). In 2001 she called out current divinatory research:

To this day, the state of our knowledge of the ethnography of divination is far worse than the conditions that led Dell Hymes nearly forty years ago to call for an ethnography of speaking (Hymes 1962). Unfortunately, the lack of such ethnography has not stopped scholars from attempting to explain away divination by placing it within evolutionist, diffusionist, ecological, or functionalist theories. All of these approaches rationalise divination after the fact, totally removing it from the realm of intentionally effective action. (194-195)

While my study comes over a decade later, I still see this need, and it is one of the gaps that this thesis addresses.

Any understanding of divination must consider multiple other disciplines and approaches because divination scholarship does not exist in isolation. It is, for instance, a performative act that benefits from the significant contribution of folklorist and anthropologist Richard Bauman (1972, 1977, [1986] 1992, 1992, 2011) and Bauman's work with the anthropologist Charles L. Briggs, "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life" (1990). It is necessary to consider the importance of performative knowledge (Bell 2006) and the challenges and risks that emerge from any such act (Yankah 1985). It must also be recognised that the performances have changed over time, as evidenced in the literary scholar Michael Wood's *The Road to Delphi: The Life and Afterlife of Oracles*.

The study of religion itself shapes this discourse. From Mircea Eliade's extensive work on the history of religion, most notably *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, we gain a sense of how religion fits within life but are also forced, now, to question the divisions that are often academically created between what is sacred and what is profane. *The Golden Bough* by the social anthropologist James George Frazer is still influential in its divisions between magic, superstition, and religion. His work is also significant because he relied heavily upon stories and language as a way of communicating connection and meaning. In his work is found the "tension between creative innovation and historical accuracy" (Wood 1998, 15) that remains a dialogue in folklore today.

The forefront of this research is now on vernacular, or lived, religion which breaks down these divisions. The sociologist Meredith B. McGuire has been particularly influential on my thinking. Her book *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (2008) calls for scholars to delve deep into the ways in which belief is lived out in the everyday. In doing so she has also focused on the body and the tangible (1990, 2003), which becomes particularly significant when looking at the tools of divination that include the body itself. Of course, the work of folklorist and religious studies scholar Leonard Primiano cannot be underestimated in importance in establishing vernacular religious practices (1995, 2009). The entire special edition of *Western Folklore* on “Reflexivity and the Study of Belief”, to which he contributed, is a significant discussion on the reflexivity in folklore scholarship which acknowledges the influences of the vernacular in both academic lives as well as those we study.

It is important to recognise that while divination cannot be regarded solely as belonging to paranormal studies or alternative spirituality, there is overlap, and it is necessary to incorporate related research, especially that which seeks ways of understanding the roles and importance of these acts in everyday life. Works like *Paranormal America: Ghost Encounters, UFO Sightings, Bigfoot Hunts, and Other Curiosities in Religion and Culture* by the sociologists Christopher D. Bader, F. Carson Mencken, and Joseph D. Baker; Jeremy Northcote’s *The Paranormal and the Politics of Truth: A Sociological Account*; and the philosopher Stephen T. Asma’s *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of our Worst Fears* explore the meanings of the otherworldly to modern North Americans. The writings of religious studies scholar Jeffrey Kripal hold particular resonance (2010, 2011; Streiber and Kripal 2016), especially his perspective on

the concept of proof and evidence within a paranormal context that will be explored more fully in chapter three.

From folklore comes Gillian Bennett's "*Alas, Poor Ghost!*" *Traditions of Belief in Story and Discourse* that brings together personal experience narratives and the supernatural among elderly women in England, seeking to understand the ongoing presence of supernatural beliefs. In her study, her objective is not to prove or refute these beliefs but to explore the competing cultures found in contemporary western society: "rationalist 'traditions of disbelief'; and the supernaturalist culture, the 'traditions of belief'" (1999, 31). Through the examination of several case studies that are then placed in the broader context of informal culture, Bennett demonstrates that they continue to thrive and articulate lived experiences that cannot be relegated to the margins of culture. Bill Ellis' work on the occult in North America (2000, 2003, 2004) explores the ways in which individually and culturally people remain influenced by the supernatural, even in our so-called modern world. Diane Goldstein has contributed significantly to the discussion of belief and disbelief within scholarship (1989, 1995). Of note is *Haunting Experiences: Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore*, written with Sylvia Ann Grider and Jeannie Banks Thomas, wherein they draw attention to the trivialisation factor that they argue "has undermined the number of folklorists willing to work on supernatural belief and thereby created an unusual gap in contemporary folkloristic treatment of supernatural topics" (2007a, 8). Barbara Walker's *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural* joins this conversation by presenting numerous key voices in folklore as they undertake explorations into what the supernatural means. Yet within many of these works, the voices of those who professionally practice this work, not just who experience it

throughout their lives, is frequently overlooked. These are perspectives that will add greater depth to this rich subject.

Healing, especially studies that draw into question dominant biomedical approaches and what it means to be healed, are influential in my work. Alver's "The Bearing of Folk Belief on Cure and Healing" (1995) and "The Growing Evidence for 'Demonic Possession': What Should Psychiatry's Response Be?" (2005) by religious studies scholar Stafford Betty challenge how we go about approaching illness and what we as a society owe to the beliefs of those who are being treated. These experiences become particularly complex when exploring the ways in which alternative practices are integrated into scientific methods, refuting clear divisions between these types of healing.

When it comes to exploring gendered experiences, the spiritualist movement has proved a significant topic for academic study due to the fact that women found within this religion a position of authority. See, for example, the work of anthropologist Erika Bourguignon (2004) and the various historical perspectives of Ann Braude (1993), Alex Owen (1989), and Molly McGarry (2008). Stan McMullin's *Anatomy of a Séance: A History of Spirit Communication in Central Canada* is one of the few studies that situated this movement in Canada. Cynthia Eller's extensive work in religious studies, particularly on feminist spirituality movements within America, explores not only the power gained through these groups (1993, 1995) but also some of the issues of appropriation and objectification that are occurring within these practices (2000). Within Paganism, Sabina Magliocco's work as a folklorist and anthropologist is of great import in part because she addresses issues of insider-outsider within academia. The religious studies scholar Sarah M. Pike's *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America* also looks at alternative spiritual

practices in North America. More broadly, the essays in *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture* are important, chiefly Susan S. Lanser's "Burning Dinners: Feminist Subversions of Domesticity". Lanser uses her literary expertise to draw forth the ways in which our actions have layered meanings, systems of coding that find their way into spiritual and divinatory practices. Lawless' writings, not only her contemplations on working as an ethnographer engaging with religious practices (1992), but also on the importance of narrative, especially for women, and the ways by which narratives are power that lie beyond simple binaries of truth and lies (2001), have also remained with me throughout my research.

The ongoing conversation concerning the rhetoric of truth that emerged in the twentieth century has been influential in the study of ritual and belief. This drive toward "factuality" and "objectivity" (Oring 1996, 329) aspires to the ahistorical and universal (Ochs and Capps 2001, 157). It frames the expectations of the methodologies but also the results of a thesis such as this one. It assumes that inner and external logic are the same (Rosenberg 1973, 17), that objectivity "is the sole property of the outsider" (Tedlock 1991, 71), and that folk experience and narrative can be ordered, classified, and explained without emotional response (Bendix 1997, 97), including the creation of functions (see Propp 1958, Olrik [1921] 1992) through which narratives could be deconstructed.

The objective is now, rightly, under attack. Those who have called it into question are critical to my own work. Linda Dégh, the notable folklorist, writes that this idea of the objective is paradoxically subjective, and she wonders "[w]hose subjective opinion determines an objective truth?" (2001, 50). David Hufford, whose work blends his training in medicine and folklore, asserts that "[a]ll knowing is subjective, and the

‘objective world’ is what knowers claim to know about. Reflexivity in knowledge-making involves bringing the subject, the ‘doer’ of the knowledge-making activity, back into the account of knowledge” (1995b, 58). It is a “false objectivity” (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 68) that hides much and reveals little because the truth shifts for each person and reading, as every individual receives a different message (Dolby-Stahl 1985, 58; Ellis 2003, 218; Holbek 1987, 409). The legend teller tells the truth (Dégh 1995, 81), but it may not be the same one that is heard. The personal narrative may no longer maintain the illusion that there is nothing between the reader and the text (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 130), but it does not remove power, it simply redefines it. The movement away from objectivity is a displacement of an elite power structure imposed upon narrative events and a recognition that power, and the truth that creates and sustains it, is a process of exchange and transformation.

I join a growing tradition of scholars who see the truth not as an external imposition tied to scientific proof but as a shifting entity that may never even enter into the conversation. In his classic book *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, the anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard wrote that, like us, the Azande “use rational means for controlling the conditions that produce misfortune, but we conceive of these conditions differently from them” ([1937] 1976, 65). Rooted in the reality of experience outside of an external verifying force, Kay Turner and Suzanne Seriff, both folklorists, instruct their readers to pay attention to how participants create and interact with their St. Joseph altars (1993, 92-3). In his chapter “Anthropologists Encounter the Occult” in *Behind the Crystal Ball: Magic, Science, and the Occult from Antiquity Through the New Age*, the anthropologist and astronomer Anthony Aveni writes: “We focus too much on

proving or disproving the power of magic and not enough on what it means to those who practice it” (2002, 294).

Goldstein challenges folklorists, as well as other scholars who look at contemporary belief, who approach the topic from the singular perspective of trying to figure out how false beliefs are held to be true (2007a, 67). She is just one of the more recent scholars who argue that our approach needs to recognise that within the worlds where magic (or divination) are practiced, they do work (Lindquist 2006, 4) and must be treated as such. In doing so it becomes essential to explore the emotional component of human experience, within which this proof of efficacy often resides, if we are to ever understand what drives those who undertake practices that are situated outside of the mainstream. I agree with the scientific anthropologist James Lett that interpretive and scientific anthropology must be complementary as each “has something to say to the other” (1991, 325) and expand upon this idea to recognise that all disciplines need to work more closely together. Yet, when he writes that he is “convinced that it is much more important to explain human affairs than to evoke human experience” (ibid., 324), I am left to wonder how the two are separate and what is lost when we assume that explanations can be bereft of emotion.

Countering binaries of scientific vs. emotion is the folklorist Patricia E. Sawin’s assertion that there is a “need to incorporate emotion into our thinking” (2002, 41). Research is, as the anthropologist Begonya Enguix writes, “infinitely layered and complex. Its borders are easily put into question as shifting and ambiguous identities challenge assumptions of oppositional subjectivities rooted in Western, binary thinking” (2014, 88). She goes on to recognise how both reason *and* emotion “construct our idea of

‘otherness’” (ibid., 91). This idea is picked up by Samuel Wagar, a Wiccan priest and participant in my research, in his book *The Uses of Ecstasy: Ritual and Practical Mysticism in Wicca*. He calls out the false distinction that has been culturally ingrained to separate “the unconscious creative and the logical and rational” (2012, 5). Reflecting these discussions, the role of folklore is not that of a lie detector meant to measure an objective truth understood only through the application of stress and decontextualized questions upon the performer and their story.

These debates often come down to semantics. Throughout this thesis I will return again and again to the power that words and definitions hold. At the core of this argument, for the purposes of my research, is the question of the role of scepticism and rationalism when engaging with someone’s story. Scepticism, Hufford notes “may mean either suspension of judgement or a generally pessimistic view of the possibility of genuine knowledge” (1990, 21), while rational “means, simply, characterised by or capable of exercising the faculty of reason, and the process of reasoning refers to the drawing of conclusions from evidence, inference. *Rational* implies that this is to be done in a ‘normal manner’, which further implies that there are abnormal (disordered) forms of reasoning” (ibid., 22). Goldstein brings in the term neutrality, arguing “belief can be logical and well-reasoned despite the truth of its claim and a recognition that our disbelief may be open to logical flaws. We need not be neutral about agents but we must be neutral about processes if we are to understand why people believe what they believe” (1989, 66).

What do we mean by these words that we use? These discussions have and continue to play out in folklore such as in a multi-article conversation about this topic in

Talking Folklore (see Hufford 1987 and 1990, Bennett 1987, Simpson 1988, and Goldstein 1989), as well as in Susan J. Ritchie's "Contesting Secularism: Reflexive Methodology, Belief Studies, and Disciplined Knowledge" critiquing Hufford's approach to reflexive models. Situated as both a parish minister and historian of the Unitary Universalist Church, Ritchie argues that this methodology "stifle[s] personal expressions of faith" because the scholar speaks as and for the participant and thereby takes their power (2002, 452). It is a worthwhile consideration, but the reality is not so simple. The strategies I use, including non-directive interviews and the opportunity for reviews and comments by participants, emerge after wading through these discussions and concluding that there is no easy answer. Ritchie's perspective challenged me to clearly recognise that this project is mine. To claim it as such, upfront, is not a power play but a reflection of the reality of completing a doctoral thesis. In the end, I do not seek to speak for others but to bring together voices, and this project is not, I hope, an act of taking power but being gifted with new perspectives to consider and share.

One of the key concerns that Ritchie has with Hufford's approach is the individualized nature of his perspective on reflexivity (ibid., 452). She argues that this personalised and individualised reflexivity is where this methodology has failed (ibid., 445). Instead, she wishes to see us be "reflexive not about personal selves but about the situated and interested character of our knowledge production" (ibid., 44). The anthropologist and folklorist Kirin Narayan highlights a similar perspective when she writes that there are "personal experiences that don't really add insight to what is being described, and we may end up hogging attention to ourselves rather than sending it out to understand the people and issues about which we are trying to write" (with Devi Sood

1997, xii). Of course, reflexivity can be both triumphal and defeatist (Hufford 1995b, 59). Indeed, it is a reflection of Goldstein's assertion that "[n]o matter how strongly a folklorist argues against what we might feel to be false or even dangerous belief, we stand as one opinion in many. It is by knowing about the construction, world-view, and maintenance of belief that we can truly do some good [...] We cannot solve conflict by setting ourselves up as authorities on objective reality" (1989, 65-66). It is as complex, and imperfect, as is any methodology, but it has a necessary place within this thesis, particularly as I work to situate myself within my research.

Where I Am

The problem of bias is one that has plagued folklore from its inception. For those who work within the field of ritual and belief it has been a particular challenge. It has also, however, resulted in important dialogue and advancement, especially when grappling with the position of the folklorist as insider or outsider (see Lawless 1992, Wilson 1995, Hufford 1995b, Mullen 2000). It is not a foreign topic to the individuals that I interviewed:

JASON: But I definitely do not go for this [tarot] for answers on my own, I get other people to read me, just because then I get to look away, I get to have the tarot experience that I've been talking about, and I can't be biased, because you can still be biased because everybody's experience is in some way biased. And what I mean by that is, you know, you're listening to me talk and you're going to process it the way that you understand reality, understand the world, and so your experience of what I'm saying might be different, completely different from what I'm saying. That sounded profound. [laughs] (I.22)

So where am I, an academic and practitioner, in this work?

The boundaries between the etic and emic spaces have been increasingly dissolved in scholarly discourse. The days of fieldworkers going out into “exotic” spaces to study “the other” have given way to complicated understandings and questionings of what these spaces mean and how they are constructed. However, with this new exploration of boundaries comes a renegotiation of how academics situate themselves within them. Tedlock notes that this division lies at the heart of the idea of “going native”, that “a subject’s way of knowing is incompatible with the scientist’s way of knowing and that the domain of objectivity is the sole property of the outsider”. Yet “[i]n phenomenological terminology, this communicative interaction, or ‘we-talk’ belongs neither to the realm of objectivity nor to that of subjectivity, but rather to ‘human intersubjectivity’” (1991, 71). My research embraces this realm of intersubjectivity and the processes that bring us into these liminal spaces.

In discussing her own position of participation and engagement within the Pagan community, Magliocco writes: “The trouble with categories such as ‘emic’ and ‘etic’, ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ is that they presume identity to be fixed and essential, rather than the shifting, negotiated, contextual construction that we know it to be. My answer to readers who want to know whether I am ‘really’ an insider or an outsider to the Pagan community is that I am neither and both” (2004, 15). She expands this further in an interview conducted about her writing and experiences:

The key to doing anthropology or folklore research effectively lies in successfully negotiating between the cultures you are studying and the culture of the academy. It is a form of “walking between the worlds,” as Pagans like to say, only in this case, I’m not talking about the spirit world, but about cultures that belong very much to the material world. You must learn to move between them with grace and reflection. You go deep, participate, get close to people, feel what it’s like to be

one of them – then pull away and reflect on what just happened, using analysis and theoretical language to frame your thoughts. (White 2014)

I model my own response upon hers. I am both an insider – I use divinatory methods and have for many years – however, I am also an outsider because I am an academic and, more importantly, because the individuals who use these methods are not a monolithic entity. This reality was never so clear as the weekend I spent at the Edmonton Astrological Society's retreat. Astrology is not my language, as was made evident as I listened to people use these different words to reconnect with others they have come to know over the years through this annual getaway. I was an academic engaged in an act of participant observation. I was an outsider. Yet, although astrology is not my language, I was not a skeptic. I have had my charts read, and I utilise various “alternative” methods of knowing. I was never, and have never been, fully on the outside or the inside but, along with every other person, wander the spaces in between.

When I speak with people who use the tools that I am familiar with, like tarot, it does not necessarily mean that I use them in the same way as others, but we have the same foundations to move forward. At its basic level, while I may not use the same methods, I understand their importance and recognise that they are useful. Furthermore, the situating of my academic persona must also be recognised; what it is and what others expect it to be. Even after recognising this complex position, there is a temptation to situate myself within a nice, tidy label. Bringing together their disparate perspectives from both within and outside of academia, Anthony Thorley, Chantal Allison, Petra Stapp, and John Wadsworth, for example, provide three basic categories into which I could sort myself:

It seems to us that contemporary academic presentations of divinatory practice tend to fall into three broad categories or basic positions. These are (1) academics who are not practitioners of divination; (2) academics who are practitioners but who present their material as if genuinely separate and detached from their practice; and (3) academics who are practitioners and who acknowledge a more personal divinatory involvement in the material they present. (2010, 251)

While the third category is accurate, very little is gained from settling into it. Each person is so much more.

In the interview quoted from earlier, Magliocco discussed the issues that emerged around her work with Paganism, noting that:

The first error – assuming that my beliefs changed as a result of initiation and participation – is understandable, because coming from a Christocentric perspective, as most Westerners unconsciously do, belief is seen as the central feature of religion. But like the majority of world religions, modern Paganisms are not primarily religions of belief; they are religions of practice and experience. My beliefs have not fundamentally changed as a result of the experiences I had during my Pagan fieldwork. Instead, I have a deepened, enriched understanding of a religious culture and its performative art forms that helped me portray it in a more holistic way. In fact, had I not had the experiences, the picture I would have been able to paint would have been incomplete. No one would bat an eye if a folklorist studying a potter apprenticed herself to that craft in order to better understand how pots are produced, or if an ethnomusicologist studying Irish folk music learned to play the fiddle or (gods help us) the *bódhra*n. But because we're dealing here with *religions*, a co-religionist is assumed to try to convert others rather than to give an unbiased account. Once again, this misconception is based on an evangelical model of religion that does not apply to any of the modern Paganisms. (White 2014)

This model does not work with divination either, whether it is situated within many spiritual systems or not. In the anthropologist Tanya M. Luhrmann's work on modern witchcraft in England, she writes that "it is hubris – and bad ethnography – to assume that people act first and foremost because they are motivated by belief" (1989, 310). My participants are not interested in conversions; they are too busy managing and engaging in

their own complex lives to worry over whether or not a stranger believes in their worldview.

There is no such thing as a complete picture of divination, but the one that I seek to provide is enriched by my perspectives. Any approach has limitations as well as strengths. When I was conducting fieldwork for my Master's in Folklore I interviewed a group of Pagans, and during the conversation there was a notable shift in the interview after I was asked about the tarot deck I used. Others were familiar with it, and once it was confirmed that I was, at least in this way, one of them, a new, relaxed conversation replaced the more formal interview that preceded it. What is lost when I reject objectivity is made up for by the insights and conversations that emerge from an ability to cross over, even briefly, into the esoteric space. After all, the folklorist Bruce Jackson reminds his readers:

Folklore fieldwork is personal work. It isn't neutral and it isn't objective. It's too much subject to such factors as the unique chemistry between people at a specific moment in time, by the presence or absence of indigestion that day, by a slight memory of someone who had exactly that color eyes, by the response to the fabric and hue of the shirt one of you happens to be wearing to a faint odor there below the edge of consciousness. And those are the simple factors influencing what goes on. The ideas about the material and the world are far more deeply hidden, far more pervasive in their influence. (1987, 57-8)

I do not deny that my work is personal, and I am not seeking any sort of detached or objective status. It simply does not work that way. Instead, I make myself at home in the hyphen space.

An author of both fiction and non-fiction, Marc E. Fitch argues that it is not possible to not be changed by those things we study in depth (2013, 46); therefore, we must become aware of and comfortable with the hyphen space or the hybrid status. This

concept was introduced by social psychologist Michelle Fine in “Working the Hyphens: Reinventing Self and Other in Qualitative Research”. Her article is focused on dismantling the static boundaries of self-other and the power structures that establish and distribute these labels for the purpose of domination. Yet to discuss the self and the other is to recognise its inherent connection with insider-outsider constructs which are found in the microcosm of these meetings. Here is a place where no one is ever permanently situated on one side of the hyphen or the other but where each person is constantly moving in the space in between, grasping hold of threads from both sides, weaving together whatever is true or useful in that moment. As scholars of organisational studies, Ann L. Cunliffe and Geetha Karunanayake offer their own perspective, explaining that these spaces are not about the boundaries but are instead those of possibility between the researchers and the respondents (2013, 365). No one remains constant. To “trespass across the frontiers between different groups” (Enguix 2014, 91) demands a great deal of self-reflection and dialogue with everyone involved. In these circumstances the hyphen is not a space where the insider and outsider overlap or are challenged, but where those who need to be heard and those who seek to listen are able to connect.

The insider-outsider spaces require a process of reflexivity. At its most basic level it asks that scholars look at their own positions within the academic process. Lawless’ approach works well as a starting point. Reflexivity is “about acknowledging who we are as we do ethnography, and where we are as we write up these ethnographies and as we offer our interpretations of the materials we study” that “should illuminate the biases and preconceptions that inform our interpretations (where we *are*) and move us forward” ultimately resulting in a “multivocal kind of ethnography” that does not privilege one

interpretation over another (1992, 302). Is it possible? Perhaps not, but her reminder that academic interpretations are not the “last word”, the best or most correct (ibid., 310) remained ever present as I wrote this thesis.

For all its flaws, I cannot do anything but build my project on the foundation of reflexivity. The anthropologists George E. Marcus and Dick Cushman, over thirty years ago, reflected that “[w]hether ethnographies can, as a matter of convention, balance both *reflection on* understanding and *an* understanding itself in a single text is still largely unresolved by these experiments” (1982, 26). I argue that the two are necessary for a successful ethnography, and I cannot do anything but situate myself deeply within this topic and recognise that I am part of the process of constructing knowledge, not discovering it. Rosemary Roberts, a student of anthropology and midwifery, reflects on Magliocco’s assertion in her introduction to *Ethnologies*’ special issue on Wicca, that reflexivity in ethnographic practices of belief is both possible and highly effective, noting the ways in which it is true in her own work:

I have found this to be true in my own research, as my intimate understanding of the beliefs and practices in question has encouraged informants to share details that they may not have otherwise disclosed. Furthermore, I bring an insider perspective and personal experiences into my fieldwork, which compliment traditional anthropological methods and deepen data analysis. (2011, 242).

There is no single best way to gain information, only different methodologies that add layers to the depth of exploration.

My own work is focused on not only my reflections but also an entire interviewing process intended to grant each participant a period of reflexivity, to contemplate what has brought them to where they are. I recognise that the search for meaning leads to everyone’s front doors as Ritchie put it (2002, 453), including mine and

theirs. And that each house, if I may extend this metaphor more fully, is of value, and changes the neighbourhood, mine included. And yes, as Ritchie observes in reflecting on Lawless' advocacy of methodologies to even out the power differential between participant and ethnographer, "[w]hile the women may interpret the text given to them in their own fashion, the significant power here – of transubstantiating lives to text – remains with Lawless" (ibid., 447). Undeniably, the power remains with me, but it is a power that many of my participants recognise as they too seek ways to interpret, to transubstantiate the lives of their querents into words during a reading. This is something I explore more fully in chapter five. There is no perfect thesis, but I hope that it is enough that I seek, with open eyes, to find balances, to negotiate, and to recognise that there are compromises to be made. And to stand assured that, in the end, they are worth it.

Isabelle Stengers, a philosopher of science, asks the question: "Do we impose comparison or are we authorized to compare by the subjects we address?" (2011, 48) What does it mean to study something that I do? To look within? In this case it needs to be recognised that this is both an external and internal process referring not only to my own interior consciousness and sub-consciousness, but also looking inside the etic world wherein I reside. Again, the boundaries continually shift, and what was internal becomes manifested in the tangible world around me. Where, exactly, is the boundary between me and the external world? It is not enough to stand firm as an academic; I cannot shed this identity. Instead, I stand, I wobble, I stagger, and I dance through identities and moments. I am constantly shifting, based on moments, on moods, on thoughts and ideas that emerge from me as often as from those with whom I have come into contact. And so I reflect:

My ethnography is not objective. My folklore is messy. I am not silent with it, and I am always present. Never doubt that I am present, never question that my voice is here, calling forth others, demanding space, shaping and molding what you encounter, blending with the voices of others [...] I am your guide, your eyes, your map. But I am also only a beginning, a foundation. My work is intertwined with poetry and fiction, wandering the boundaries of true and false. My folklore is a constant act of creation, of writing and rewriting. Everything shifts. What else can we expect, desire, from that which attempts to provide a glimpse of humanity? (FN June 22, 2015)

In the end I can only work to solve the problem identified by the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern: “how to create an awareness of different social worlds when all at one’s disposal is terms which belong to one’s own” (1987, 256). The process of productive exchange that occurs within fieldwork allows for the breaking down of boundaries between groups, demanding the collaboration and negotiation of meanings (Enguix 2014, 91). This collaboration and negotiation is one that I feel is important. In keeping with the method of reciprocal ethnography, participants had the opportunity to receive a copy of the recording, as well as to read over this thesis and make comments on thesis drafts as a way to ensure their ideas and words were reflective of their own experiences and perspectives. While I must acknowledge that I am the author behind this document, I am also in collaboration with the words of many others and feel this work will only be successful if I ensure they are comfortable with how they are being represented. Ultimately, this is the paradox that I am confronted with: this is my story to tell, but it does not belong to me alone.

Where We Are Going

This thesis is built around six chapters that look at the shifting and interconnected components of divination in the lives of those who participated in my fieldwork. In the first chapter I explore the definition of divination, as well as the challenges of creating this classification. Specifically, I examine how academics and participants have engaged with this terminology and the debates to be had about whether or not certain practices, particularly astrology, fall under this umbrella. I then introduce and explain my own definition of divination and provide a brief exploration of the primary methods used by my participants.

The second chapter situates the now-defined concept of divination within a broader context that lends to it new layers of meaning. In it I introduce and explore the identities and worldviews of the participants and how their experiences incorporate divination while also shaping their approaches to it. To do this, I address the multiple perspectives they hold which demand we step outside the idea of a single, shared, linear reality in order to engage more fully with them and their worlds. This topic includes exploring ideas of past lives and their influence upon divination, fate and soul contracts, and the ways in which Canada is changing that continue to encourage and support divination.

Chapter three expands on these worldviews by exploring the questions of proof, truth, and knowing. The practitioners I worked with are acutely aware of the accusations of fraud that follow their profession. Instead of ignoring these attacks, they frequently challenge external assumptions and demonstrate their own complex systems of proof. These structures dispute etic impositions of what constitutes evidence of efficacy within a divinatory ritual and how these practices, while not conforming to these expectations,

create their own systems of knowing that reflect their lived realities and the needs of those who seek them out.

It is necessary to reframe concepts of proof and truth in order to engage with divination as story, the topic of chapter four. I explore the ways in which divination serves as a storytelling device and how narratives are constructed and negotiated. I look at how different tools serve as languages or dialects, complex communication systems that are deeply personal and often cannot be easily shared. The act of interpretation is, therefore, intricate and facilitated through the utilisation of narrative frameworks. I investigate the challenges of communicating or translating these different linguistic systems to clients and negotiating the accompanying biases. Finally, the act of performance, intertwined with that of storytelling, is addressed.

Power dynamics factor into how divination is defined, situated with the world, and communicated to others. The ways by which divination creates, negotiates, contends, and dispels power make up the fifth chapter. Focusing on the intersecting issues of money, commercialisation, and appropriation, I analyse how practitioners reconcile these issues with their own work, especially those who are professionals. Expanding beyond this topic I look at the question of gender because the majority of querents and practitioners remain women. Finally, I examine the ways in which personal power is formed and enhanced through acts of divination.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I accompany my participants into the shadows. Divination is often cast as part of a larger discourse on good and evil, while the realities of those I interviewed are much more complex and profound. Its role in healing and understanding death are critical but challenging topics. They are essential to

comprehending its longevity in Canada, particularly in how these practices reframe victimhood, bringing personal power and agency to those who feel helpless, and ask participants to let go of binaries of good and bad, power and victimhood, and to step into the hardship of their lives while embracing the fear of walking down new paths.

Making our Maps

“We come in with many maps” Julie explained to me during one of our interviews. The image of a map is one that she returned to several times throughout our conversations. A retired nurse, numerologist, and dabbler in astrology and tarot, she shares with many of the other participants the perception of divination as a series of maps that people create to guide them through their lives. “The thing about maps,” she said, “is when you tune in to them, then you can see the possibilities there are for yourself and you can also see where to put your energy” (I.26). Fitting into a larger worldview that integrates ideas of agency and fate, this imagery represents not only an understanding of what divination has to offer but how it defies fatalistic pronouncements. Jean, a mostly-retired tarot teacher and reader who has had great influence among several others I spoke with in Edmonton, explained it to me in similar terms. Her tarot readings are “a good map for people to find their way because that’s what it is. It doesn’t tell you what’s going on, it shows you where you’re at in terms of what the dynamics and forces are that are in play in your life right now. So it’s a map. I see it as mapping” (I.23).

I have always been fascinated by maps, particularly by those old ones that hold so much unknown within and beyond their borders, showing mysterious worlds yet to be

discovered. *Here there be dragons*. In them are not just what is there but the potential of where one can go. A map does not represent all that is but some of what could be. It is an evocative image that continues to be brought up by practitioners and writers alike. Sam, in his book, and Marcus Katz, a tarot writer and instructor, both reference Alfred Korzybski's famous phrase "the map is not the territory" to expand upon their own work (Wagar 2012, 95; Katz 2011, 19). Katz explains that:

It is taken to indicate that what we perceive is not the full story, or a description is not the object, your view of a person is not that person, and so forth [...] In tarot we can plainly see that the map is not the territory; the pictures on the cardboard are not the life or situation they are describing [...] However, there are some further, lesser known extensions of that statement which are of relevance to our tarot reading. These are *the map is never complete* and *you can make a map of a map*. (ibid., 19)

Maps cannot be confused with the things they represent, but they can help us recognise and seek out that which is otherwise overlooked.

Sean Kane, a scholar of cultural studies, also contemplates the map imagery in his book *Wisdom of the Myhtellers*. "If there were maps of the invisible realm of powers that are greater than human, what would those maps look like?" he asks before going on to answer his own question. "There wouldn't be a unified map, of course, because there is no singleminded order to myhttime. Instead, there would be places of local meaning where mystery is felt" (1994, 61). Throughout my interviews it has been affirmed that there is no single map; each person has access to and creates many of them throughout their lives using whichever methods will best facilitate their journey into the places of emotion and mystery that divination is so adept at guiding people to and through.

Maps make tangible the vast complexities of life. Divination is about finding paths through these intricacies, allowing individuals to explore different ways of

navigating the world. When they have guidance it is much easier to gather the courage to try out a new direction. “While I acknowledge that we are all predisposed to a particular path,” writes the tarot practitioner Benebell Wen in *Holistic Tarot: An Integrative Approach to Using Tarot for Personal Growth*, “no one, no destiny, no pattern of constellations can make us walk any one path” (2015, 4). Each route is different and none are static. For Richard, the minister of Edmonton’s St. Brigid’s Spiritualist Church, his journey to becoming a medium and working with the spiritualist religion did not begin until his 40’s because until then he was too busy with his family and career. So he holds that “we’re all on our path, our life path” (I.47), but it is ours alone. Not everyone is at the same place in this journey.

[Buddha] says it’s like, my teachings are like a raft. So you get in the raft and you get to the other side of the river. So when you get to the other side of the river, what do you do? You don’t take the raft, put it on your back, and carry it around with you. You leave it behind. That’s what he thought about his own teaching. (I.4)

Bruce told me this story, one of his favourites, during our interview. It stayed with me. While I am not quite so arrogant as to equate myself with Buddha, this thesis, and the topic of divination, is like this trip on the raft. We are on a map-making journey into different lands where we encounter people who are both familiar and yet strikingly different. From them we will learn, and after the journey comes to an end, we will let go of what does not move us forward and use what does to help us find our way. No map shows the entire world. No divination reading defines an entire life. No thesis reveals all meaning.

Chapter 1

What Do We Mean? Defining Divination and the Tools of the Trade

Is it possible to understand the meaning of a word like divination? What definition can adequately express its histories and meanings, embrace its textures, the scents and sights which it embodies, and the heights of human grace and the depths of our shadows that it reveals? Where are the boundaries between a definition and its lived experiences? When introducing terms to my students, I echo the assertion of Peter Kingsley, whose studies span the topics of western spirituality, culture, and philosophy, that “[t]o understand something, you always have to have somewhere to start” (1999, 205). I typically explain it as such: these labels are an excellent place to commence a conversation and a terrible place to finish it. And so this chapter is about beginning a dialogue that will create the foundation necessary for anyone seeking to come to an understanding of what divination means and what it represents in people’s lives.

Definitions provide what the religious studies scholar S. Brent Plate describes in his book *A History of Religion in 5 1/2 Objects: Bringing the Spiritual to its Senses* as shorthand accounts. “*Religion*, like *bread*, is a useful term;” he writes, “just as *art*, *literature*, *history*, and *culture* are useful terms. We use these terms as concepts and conventions, even if what they point to is an invention. They help us live and offer us abbreviations for our experiences. Yet we must remain aware of the limits of our comparisons” (2014, 213). In this chapter I explore terms, not just of the broader concept of divination, but also some of the myriad of tools it encompasses. Through them the lived practices of divination are made accessible. But it cannot be emphasised enough: no

single, static definition is sufficient. Instead, wherever we begin from, we must be willing to let go of to move forward.

Since beginning my research into divination in 2008, I have worked to develop my own definition of divination that will be discussed further on in this chapter. When I conceived of this thesis I thought that it would be enough to provide my description in the introduction and move on. As the project expanded, however, and I engaged in conversations with individuals about the word divination and we worked out together how they did or did not fit within my definition, it became clear that terminology requires a separate section all its own. In his studies and writings about religion, Christopher I. Lehrich encountered this same situation. In *The Occult Mind: Magic in Theory and Practice* he writes that when it comes to defining magic: “The proliferation of definitions of magic, positive as well as negative, among scholars as well as those whom they study, certainly attests to the confusion or diffusion of the term, but it also indicates in magic an unusual power to manifest distinction and division” (2007, 159). Divination exhibits this same unusual power in the many different meanings that emerge and diverge from the contexts in which it is enacted and by whom it is used.

“Ordinary is entirely dependent on who you are with” (FN June 12, 2015). A definition, while helping individuals situate themselves in a discussion also serve as a mirror, reflecting back one’s own assumptions. It is a valuable tool, but one that is frequently used to sum up the people upon whom it is imposed instead of offering new insights. Terms, such as superstition, frequently emerge around the act of divination that are used to establish the boundaries between what is “normal”, i.e. the academic’s (and

assumed reader's) worldview, and what is "abnormal", or those engaged in practices situated outside of the socially endorsed.

A scholar of Irish studies, Angela Bourke confronts this insider/outsider positioning in *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*. Researching and writing this work required her to look closely at the use of terms and their accompanying baggage. She specifically examines how they and the ideas they encompass are manipulated and used to justify or explain tragic events that led up to the torture and killing of the titular character. More than a justification for cruelty, however, the concepts associated with this event such as superstition provide critical contextualisation to events. Bourke is left to call out labels like superstition as problematic because "beliefs and practices can appear bizarrely irrational when the system of which they were once part has begun to disintegrate" ([1999] 2006, 134), or, I contend, when these systems are shifted outside of "normal" or acceptable social discourse.

Solomon Nigosian, a religious studies scholar, offers a similar caution when he discusses divination and magic within the Old Testament: "strange as it may appear to us, there is not the least doubt that the Israelite people firmly believed that certain expert functionaries had the power to evoke and communicate with the dead" (2008, 89). It is easy to assume that such ideas are in the past; Kingsley, for example, writes that "[t]he idea of people receiving laws through dreams or other states of awareness, of being given them in another world: this is as remote as possible from what we nowadays consider reality. In fact it's so remote that we can hardly believe such an idea could ever have been more than just that – an idea. And yet it was (1999, 220). And yet, it is. It is important that these scholars demand the reader acknowledge these systems were as important and

real to those who held them as any practices we maintain today. What is striking about academic works such as these is that they work from the assumption that such beliefs are now incomprehensible to the modern reader. However, for many with whom I worked, there is no doubt that the evocation of and communication with the dead and the messages that come from dreams are not only possible but part of their ordinary.

Divination practitioners understand that their normal is not one that is widely shared in Canada, and many are comfortable with their location on the edges. Open to a myriad of possible ways to integrate the sacred and the self, Mélanie blends together her membership in the United Church of Canada with alternative healing practices and dream interpretations. She claims all of these experiences and does not hesitate to call them weird:

MÉLANIE: I think I've listed all my weirdness for today. You should call that the weirdness book. The study of weirdness.

KARI: But I think part of it is it's not as weird –

MÉLANIE: No.

KARI: Because a lot of people are doing it. It's just –

MÉLANIE: Yeah.

KARI: It's just not talked about as much so it seems –

MÉLANIE: That's right, it's not talked about, so it's kind of nice to just discover things. Like I say, I've never accosted anybody and said, "oh, you must be into weirdness," you know. But I recognise people that are in tune, or like, they're listening to the other voice, you know. I don't know, it's just something you can kind of recognise in other people, and then you can see people that really are just pretty much in the here and now. (I.40)

Reflecting on this conversation, I am struck by my own need to save my participants from the weird, but a very specific type defined by skeptics like Michael Shermer, who holds a

PhD in the history of science and is the founding publisher of *Skeptic* magazine. He classifies weird in these ways: “(1) a claim unacceptable by most people in that particular field of study, (2) a claim that is either logically impossible or highly unlikely, and/or (3) a claim for which the evidence is largely anecdotal and uncorroborated” (2002, 282). What Mélanie does in the eyes of Shermer is weird, and she is comfortable with such a label. What became obvious to me at that moment is that I do not see it as weird, or that this term is inadequate. But these diviners do not need my protection from these terms. They follow what Bader, Macken, and Baker observe in those involved in such activities: “The willingness to be unconventional is a key distinction that separates people who are involved in the paranormal” (2010, 128). Given the many ways in which we all feel weird at times, embracing such terms do not have to make us feel apart but serve as a site of unity in which the marginal spaces are welcoming and familiar.

In Other Words

Before delving into the complexities of what is meant by divination, it is important to have a baseline for other words that are of importance to any dialogue about this topic. The concept of the supernatural and those words that often intertwine with it – alternative, religion, belief, and occult – provide insight into how divination has been and is to be approached. Most definitions of the supernatural begin with the oppositional construct of what it is not: it is that which exists outside of the natural or normal (Harvey 1997, 213; Stark 2001, 108). It may be regarded as part of the sacred, which Eliade

defines as “a reality of a wholly different order from ‘natural’ realities” ([1957] 1987, 10), but it does not have to be. Davie uses the term broadly:

to refer to any being or experience that exists outside the normal human world of the five senses, regardless of whether that being or experience belongs to the religious realm or the secular paranormal. The supernatural, therefore, includes angels as well as extrasensory perception, conversion experiences as well as visions, and God as well as ghosts. (1995, 12)

Lett echoes this idea when explaining the paranormal as “generally understood to refer to phenomena that are beyond the normal range of human experience and perception” (1991, 305). While there is a recognition that the supernatural is not necessarily tied directly to religious experience, the idea that it is outside of the senses is not, as we shall see, accurate and has led to the reworking of the concept in books like *The Super Natural: A New Vision of the Unexplained* written by Kripal and Whitley Strieber, a writer famous for his memoir of his own alien-abductions. By separating the term into two words, they ask readers to consider that if someone has a sensory experience directly tied to the human or natural world of the senses, can it not simply represent a different part of nature instead of something completely removed?

In much the same way, that which is alternative is defined by its positioning against socially accepted norms. As the supernatural is situated outside of the natural, the alternative is located outside of the community. From an exoteric perspective, it is often regarded as being in direct opposition to normative methods. Yet, amongst those I have worked with, the alternative nature of divination is part of a larger system that includes culturally accepted methods such as medical services. These systems are not intended to overtake the institutions of a society but are there to provide support to it while challenging citizens not to limit the forms available to them. Thus, it reflects the same

desire for a more holistic vision of the world that emerges with the shift from the supernatural to the super natural.

The supernatural is often tied closely to or interchanged with ideas of the occult which focuses on “hidden or concealed forces in nature or the cosmos that cannot be measured or recognised by the instruments of modern science” (Tiryakian 1972, 498) and the paranormal. The development of this latter category is newer; Kripal places it in the early twentieth century when it began to be used as “a way of referring to physical or quasi-physical events, often of an outrageous or impossible nature...that were believed to be controlled by as yet unknown physical, that is, natural laws” (2010, 8). In this concept is a larger struggle with a term that places experience outside of nature and the attempts to better articulate the vast and complex meanings of these ideas.

Folklorist Timothy C. Lloyd proposes that “we reconceive the supernatural as the realm of the fundamental patterns and rhythms – of time, space, growth, and decline, for example – which, connecting, give purpose and governance to life” (1995, 60), seeking to bypass set meanings and build definitions from larger, mutable patterns. Davie also shifts her focus toward experience when she sets out what the supernatural means in her work with Presbyterian women: “senses, coincidences, and dramatic events” (1995, 108). Perhaps the supernatural is one of those things that we know only when we see, or encounter, it.

Folklorists who work with belief have and continue to confront the challenges of using the term supernatural. Barbara Rieti, in her work on Newfoundland fairies, employs it with reluctance. She notes the implicit judgements it brings and the external demands it places upon individuals to situate their understandings outside of the norm, when, for

them, they are often “an empirically verifiable fact” (1991, 12). Hufford chooses to use the term “spiritual belief” because of how the supernatural has been misused by scholars in the past (1995c, 15). This decision echoes Don Yoder’s who, when looking at the concept of superstition (often closely tied to the supernatural if not used interchangeably), uses the term “folk belief” instead (1974, 13). Bonnie Blaire O’Connor draws attention to the pejorative use of the term supernatural in her book *Healing Traditions: Alternative Medicine and the Health Professions* (1995, 2), a concern that extends beyond the study of folklore. Her assertion is reflected in the anecdote that opens Matthew Weeks, Kelly P. Weeks, and Mary R. Daniel’s article on the relationship between the paranormal and the religious. Scholars of psychology, business, and interactive telecommunications, respectively, they tell of a colleague in the study of religious psychology who, upon observing an exhibit “Religions of the World”, relegates both the religious and the nonreligious supernatural to that which “involve[s] believing in something that’s not real” (2008, 599). Every use of the term, or conscious substitution, reflects the expectations of the one who wields it as much as those they study.

The discussions over the concept of folk religion in relation to official religion (see Yoder 1974, Danielson 1986, Primiano 1995) reflect the limitations of definitions because the lives to which they apply are messy. Oppositional definitions, supernatural being that which is not natural, call into question what is natural and who makes the decision. Evans-Pritchard observed during his work among the Azande that what appears to us (the western audience) as abnormal or extraordinary is ordinary to them ([1937] 1976, 30). This same idea was presented by Frederic Myers, a founder of the Society for Psychical Research, in his definition of the supernormal – “Of a faculty or phenomenon

which goes beyond the level of ordinary experience, in the direction of evolution, or as pertaining to a transcendental world” – which he uses instead of supernatural because the latter is problematic in its implication that there is something “outside nature” (1903, xxii). Of course, the supernormal has the same potential issues, and it seems there has never been a definition that can be used without disclaimers. For the purposes of this thesis, the terms “supernatural”, “supernormal”, and “paranormal” are used to draw attention to the experiences of my participants that fall outside of the larger cultural – but not personal – norms.

In her introduction to *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, Walker puts it best when she writes that:

Referring to something as “supernatural” is not to call it unreal or untrue – on the contrary. The existence of the term itself is a linguistic and cultural acknowledgement that inexplicable things happen which we identify as being somehow beyond the natural or the ordinary, and that many of us hold beliefs which connect us to spheres that exist beyond what we might typically see, hear, taste, touch, or smell.

For some the supernatural is a natural part of life, and supernatural experiences not only are considered “normal” but, in some instances, are expected to occur, with personal attitudes and behaviors shaped and acted out on the basis of those expectations. (1995, 2)

The term “supernatural” persists, in part, because of its multitudinous nature and its ability to transform as needed. In a single word it conveys something wholly mundane and wholly other and provides the space wherein to explore this paradox.

In 1956, when the anthropologist Åke Hultkrantz discussed the challenges of definitions with regard to folklore and religion, he wrote that it was the lack of definitions that made it more difficult to find “a natural dividing line between folklore and comparative religion” (14). The expectation for inherent boundaries has long since passed

as the recognition of social influences has increasingly become part of academic discourse. These constructs of meaning are further complicated by the recognition that within religion there is fluidity and syncretism which blends beliefs together, changing traditions (McGuire 2008, 188) and creating new ones (Lesiv 2013, 126). What is natural or supernatural is not a shared universal but formed by the individual or community (Walker 1995, 4). They are perspectives through which to construct and view the world (Geertz [1973] 1993, 110) and serve as a starting point for explaining what individuals and their communities understand the supernatural to be.

The renowned anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner explore the different usages of religion noting that they are commonly regarded as social, which connect humans to deities and each other or as public practices and beliefs. Furthermore, they can be systematic, “representing an ensemble of beliefs, sentiments, and practices which have for their object invisible and intangible beings or powers which a human group recognizes as superior, on which it depends, and with which it can enter or has entered into relation, either by interior worship (prayer, meditation) or by exterior, ‘liturgical’ acts” (1982, 201). Belief itself is defined by Davie as “that which one holds to be true, and which is often accepted on the basis of trust or as part of a larger framework of understanding, rather than on the basis of concrete, tangible proof” (1995, 12). Hufford looks at it as:

the certainty that something is true. (This is belief in the cognitive sense; *belief* also has an emotional meaning that associates it with such terms as faith...) *Knowledge* is a particular kind of belief, that is, belief that has met customary criteria of justification; this is the basis for the strong distinction between the two terms – that knowledge is justified true belief. (1995c, 19)

This concept fits well into McGuire's concept of religion as she applies it in a broader sociological context as consisting of "how people make sense of their world – the stories out of which they live" (2003, 1). It conflicts somewhat with what Jon Butler terms as "a reasonably traditional understanding of religion," that which "resort[s] to superhuman powers, sometimes beings, to determine the course of human events" (1979, 319) by moving its meaning outside of specific duties to broader worldviews.

Spiritualism, often seen as an alternative to religion, is discussed by the sociologist Giuseppe Giordan as "a modality of referring to the sacred that is legitimized no longer by obedience to the external authority of a religious institution, but rather by the subject himself/herself, by the free expression of his/her creativity" (2009, 231). He goes on to explain the difference between religion and spirituality as the former being "founded on objective truths, on codified rites, on the moral norms to which we must subject ourselves; spirituality starts from one's own experience, one's own feelings, one's personal wellbeing and from the realization of one's own self" (ibid., 233). This term is broader than that of the Spiritualist religion, which is formed around mediumship. It is important to recognise that the claim of being spiritual does not mean that one is a Spiritualist.

The occult and its cousin, esotericism, are rooted in the idea of secret knowledge. However, as the anthropologist Galina Lindquist points out, when relocated into urban centers, it often becomes a public phenomenon that is created, supported, and integrated into the media and the market (2006, 23). Edward A. Tiryakian, a sociologist, understands the occult to mean:

intentional practices, techniques, or procedures which *(a)* draw upon hidden or concealed forces in nature or the cosmos that cannot be measured or recognized by the instruments of modern science, and *(b)* which have as their desired or intended consequences empirical results, such as either obtaining knowledge of the empirical course of events or altering them from what they would have been without this intervention. (1972, 498)

These practices, he acknowledges, have included divination. At the core of this quest for knowledge, he observes, is that it is the hidden truths of how things really are (ibid., 449-500).

Paganism and the New Age movement (not to be confused as being identical) are often associated with divination practices. Pike notes that one of the most important distinctions between the two is that “New Agers tend to look toward the future when a new age of expanded consciousness will dawn, while Neopagans look to the past for inspiration in order to revive old religions and improve life in the present” (2004, 34). This is supported by the folklorist Mariya Lesiv’s observation that “Pagans are enchanted with the distant past” (2013, 14).

Wicca, which is often used interchangeably with Paganism but is, again, not the same thing,⁵ was described to me by Debra, a Wiccan herself, as “a spirituality; it’s actually a recognised religion in Canada. We honour the Goddess and the God, we believe in the dual, duality, and it’s an earth-based spirituality, so we – our festivals are all based on the seasons, but it’s not just the growing season, we also recognise the

⁵ In his chapter “Modern Perspectives in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives” Michael F. Strmiska, a scholar of world history and comparative religions, notes that within North America and Europe, modern Paganism can be understood as “religious movements dedicated to reviving the polytheistic, nature-worshipping Pagan religions of pre-Christian Europe and adapting them for the use of people in modern societies” (2005, 1). Wicca is one of the religions that falls under this broad category.

internal work and the internal journey, also goes in similar cycles” (I.8). Sam, a Wiccan priest, provides a further explanation:

Wicca is a new religious movement founded in about 1940, give or take a few years, by a group of occultists in the United Kingdom centered around a fellow called Gerald Gardner. Gardner,⁶ who drew from a variety of influences and, interestingly enough, and very valuably disavowed his role as the founder of Wicca. He always said, “oh I was initiated into a coven that existed since ancient times”, which is very interesting because founders of new religions don’t tend to disavow what they’ve done, but there’s not much doubt that he was the founder of it all. Anyhow, Gerald Gardner thought that Britain needed to revive its ancient religious and spiritual traditions, and he went looking for them and didn’t find them. He got involved in folklore groups, the Folklore Society. He also got involved in various esoteric communities including Rosicrucian and Thelamian, he became an acquaintance with Aleister Crowley, who was at that point, an elderly man in ill health and decided, well, if it’s going to be done, I’m going to have to do it. So he drew together a variety of factors. Let’s see. The book *Triumph of the Moon* by Ronald Hutton is an excellent history of the various factors that he brought that came together into the Wiccan synthesis. With very minor historical quibbles, I think that’s basically, that’s the way it was. (I.48).

Wicca and Paganism often find themselves located within the vicinity of shamanism which Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, an anthropologist, explains as “the capacity evinced by some individuals to cross ontological boundaries deliberately and adopt the perspective of nonhuman subjectivities in order to administer the relations between humans and nonhumans” (2004, 468). Tedlock defines it as “the oldest spiritual healing tradition still in general use today” which uses not only herbs and plants for healing but combines them with “the power of a patient’s faith in the healer and the healing process. Like all healers, shamans employ hope, suggestion, expectation, and rituals that elicit a powerful placebo effect” (2006, 14, 15).

⁶ Gardner claims that he was initiated into a surviving coven in 1939 (Clifton 2006, 7), but it was not until the 1950s, especially with the publication of *Witchcraft Today* in 1954, that the term “Wica” was introduced (it became “Wicca” in the 1960s) (Hutton 1999, 24).

All of these words intersect with divination. Furthermore, they reveal that beneath the surface of any label is a vast network of terms and definitions in an ongoing debate about meaning and value. These are not static entities but projections of personal and cultural expectations. It is a paradox identified by Dégh that is concerned with the ambiguities of the subject matter with which academics work: the appeal of definitions is increased while their explicitness is weakened (2001, 29). Instead of looking at these terms as diminished, however, it is necessary to transform academic expectations of what a definition is and how to use it. The absolute must be relinquished if meaning is to be grasped.

What Could It Mean?

It is now necessary to delve deep into the word that forms this thesis: divination. In particular, the definitions of practitioners and scholars must be brought together in order to reveal patterns useful for laying the groundwork of potential meaning. In 1947 John H. Manas' book *Divination: Ancient and Modern* was published by the Pythagorean Society, wherein he wrote that "[m]ost of our misunderstandings today, regarding the subject of our present discussion, are due to the use by the public of the wrong word, or to the use of the word with the wrong meaning" (7). He looks to the Latin origins of the word: "'Divinatio' and 'Divino,' to prophecy, to divine the future, means the foretelling of future events; that art of dealing with things and with knowledge pertaining to divinity. Thus, the great question and challenge comes. Is the foretelling of the future possible?" (ibid.). This decades-old approach brings up some important points, particularly that of

the history of divination and academic approaches to it, but it is not sufficient for a contemporary situation and, in fact, has never been a universal construct. Sarah Iles Johnston, who studies ancient religions, highlights this in *Ancient Greek Divination*: “Ancient divination, moreover, adapted itself to different cultures and different technologies just as readily as contemporary divination has” (2008, 3). Tedlock argues the same approach, that all peoples throughout history have turned to divination, not only to look to the future, but also to solve problems, for healing purposes, to uncover “things unknown”, to determine appropriate times for religious practices and, generally, to make choices (2006, 64-5). Divination has never been just about the future, in part because the future cannot be easily separated from the past or present and, in part because it encompasses much more.

Categories are an easy way to approach any definition. This tendency is common with divination partly because it is rooted in methods. Jessica, a tarot reader originally from Calgary, Alberta, who is currently living in Newfoundland, explains that the art of divination, as she terms it, is “any tool that you use to do a reading” (I.24). Tools, which are addressed later in the chapter, form different approaches and systems. There are binary and non-binary practices; the former provides yes/no responses. Methods are as simple as flipping a coin to as complex as decoding the stars. Tedlock creates four categories of divination: omen, pattern, symbol, and trance. She explains them thusly:

Omen divination refers to reading natural signs such as the flight of birds or the road crossing of animals. Pattern divination, such as rod or pendulum dowsing, refers to making a shape or design and then interpreting it by fixed guidelines. Symbol divination includes the Tarot, the Chinese I Ching, and the Toruba Ifa readings, together with palmistry and geomancy [...] Trance divination involves contacting spirits to answer questions. (2006, 65)

In reviewing the works of divination scholars, including G. K. Park and Michael Jackson, Samuel J. Preus comes up with seven universal features of this practice: 1) it usually deals with specific problems; 2) non-authorship: the diviner is a mediator but not the author of the messages; 3) the system depends on structures and rules that prevent manipulation; 4) it functions both as a one-on-one transaction and a social ritual; 5) being wrong does not undermine the entire system but reflects a failing with the specific diviner, querent, or supernatural being; 6) it is a paradoxical system that is associated with external powers but enables the querent to take responsibility for personal action; and 7) it works “in that it is psychologically and socially efficacious” (1991, 444). Within these features lie much room for variation and adaptation. Instead of focusing on what the content or results are, these approaches keep the meaning much more malleable.

Part of this flexibility emerges from viewing the components of divination on a spectrum. Thorley et al. make this distinction when they separate divination into the categories of essential divination, that which everyone has access to through a symbolic attitude, and practitioner divination that is intentionally undertaken (2010, 261).

Tedlock’s categories of mediumistic (nonrational) and inductive (rational) divination (2010, 13) reflect a similar approach. When discussing these divisions, Thorley et al. clarify that they are “aware that the distinction we are making between essential and practitioner divination is a matter of degree, perhaps even a spectrum of potential complexity, and that carries all the conceptual and technical problems of artificial separation” (2010, 261). This artifice serves the function of clarity but not absolute truth.

Divination is often situated on a spectrum with religious and supernatural experiences, in particular magic (Fortes 1966, 413) because both tools, according to the

Biblical scholar Ann Jeffers, “help the individual or the nation to realign themselves into the created order of the world” (2007, 640). Sam has his students learn a method of divination because it unlocks their intuitive abilities (I.48). When I asked Bruce about his definition of divination, interested in his perspective both as someone who has used it and someone who has taught it within university religion courses, he told me:

it’s difficult because what we’re talking about, there’s so many different varieties [...] And it overlaps with magic and with shamanism and alchemy and all kinds of things. It’s very hard to define. I think the emphasis on method and technique is important. I think that has to be part of the definition. So it’s using a particular technique to explore the inner meanings of the cosmos, the inner meanings of ourselves in relationship to the whole cosmos. So it’s similar to esotericism, I think esoteric in the same way; it’s a revealing, an exposing of the inner secrets of the cosmos. But then there are different kinds of divination. (I.4)

Nigosian situates his research in ancient Near Eastern religions, arguing that within them “a strict distinction between magic and divination is difficult to conceive. Both are concerned with the supernatural, deal with nonhuman forces, and refer to a realm beyond the tangible, the measurable, or the ‘logics-experimental’” (2008, 17). Within Canada, Rieti makes a similar claim that in Newfoundland “it was a small step from fortunetelling to witching” (2008, 12). Of course, it exists within and beyond these confines, as we shall see, but divination’s ability to blend within other systems has only strengthened its presence.

Helen Creighton contemplates how divination has been an integral part of Canadian life from the earliest stages. In the introduction to her section on divination in *Bluenose Magic: Popular Beliefs and Superstitions in Nova Scotia* she writes:

“Speculation is something we begin in earliest childhood as we pluck the petals of a daisy to find out if the loved one loves us. Most of the items here have to do with love and

marriage, although there are others like the finding of a lost child and the use of a divining rod in deciding where to dig a well” (2004, 180). Norma E. Cantú, Pauline Greenhill, and Rachelle H. Saltzman note that “Creighton herself was a believer in predestination; for example, she believed that being born with a caul made her lucky” (2008, lxii). Predestination is not an inherent part of divination, but her approach exemplifies how the idea of divination – seeking to uncover information – is an integral part of many elements of folklore from which this research, among others, is built.

Jessica, as mentioned above, uses the term the art of divination because it allows her to not “pigeon hole anybody into any one thing” (I.24). Definitions from academics that focus on the idea of its exploration of the unknown “to elicit answers (that is, oracles) to questions beyond the range of ordinary human understanding” (Tedlock 2001, 189; see also Karcher 1998, 215) are manifested in this same approach. Bruce identifies many of the types of divination that populate the western contemporary world as wisdom-oriented types of divination instead of guru-focused, meaning that instead of receiving the knowledge from a figure of authority, one goes on a personal journey of discovery (I.4).

Elizabeth J., who works with multiple methods of personal development, explains that:

So when you talk about the divination of the 21st century, I think of that as to include all of that stuff. It’s not – some people think of it as just the woo-woo stuff or it’s just the psychic readings stuff or, you know, it’s just this or just that. No, I think it’s everything from, like I said, personal development to any type of healing modality that is out there, of which, really, personal development is one. Because it provides healing in a venue outside of the traditional, ordinary venues of psychologists or counsellors, or et cetera, et cetera. So I think it all falls inside of that. In some way. (I.16)

When she is guiding her querents through processes of personal growth, Marlene draws on numerous ritualistic systems including tarot, describing them as “an opportunity to

open up the book of you and to see where things are and where they're progressing, but at the end of the day, they walk out with something that they know that they have to work on within themselves". It is not about an absolute answer but about engaging with a process. In her own life she has noticed an expansion of what her role encompasses: "It started out to be fortune-telling. I didn't like the responsibility of that to some degree. And then it evolves, I guess, as you evolve. It becomes something more or different, right, and I think I'm really lucky" (I.39). In the same way, scholarly approaches are expanding what divination is from that of predictive to a much more complex and integrative system of knowing.

This inclusion of but not limitation to fortune-telling is echoed in Michelle's definition. She is a practicing Catholic and an artist who designed a tarot deck and who reads the cards as well as engages in crystal healing. As such she exemplifies the multi-dimensional potential of divination:

My definition of divination... that's kind of a Wikipedia sounding - the art of foretelling the future, as you know, by means of whatever the modality is – for some practitioners, predictions casting stones, interpreting the future through the placement of cards within spreads. What I like to do is to interpret the present situation for someone, to meditate, see the signs and images that come up, with my card spreads and crystals that suggest a path, give a message to guide you forward. Do you see the difference? So, I'm not able to sit and say oh, this is what's going to happen. What I like better is sitting with someone, sensing their energy, pulling it into me, and with my deck and crystals feeling what I'm seeing. Then I'm able to turn that around and verbally interpret it in such a way that the person is going to walk away feeling positive, able to recognize more options for their present situation. It defines something to them in their lives, and it defines something in me because we've allowed a communicative connection to form between us (I.41; clarifications provided by email on May 18, 2017)

Her definition shows the difference between a prescribed meaning and lived experiences; the information querents seek when they reach out to practitioners cannot be situated neatly onto a linear scale. To make this connection with the unknown demands an expansive approach. “[O]racular discourse is not confined to ‘fortune telling’ in the narrow sense”, writes anthropologist Paul Gillen, “it appears in all commentaries on situations of uncertainty” (1989, 407). Even when looking at the future alone, Rachel Pollack, a renowned practitioner of and writer about tarot, observes in *Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom: A Book of Tarot*: “The practice stems from the simple desire to know, in advance, what is going to happen, and more subtly, from the inner conviction that everything is connected, everything has meaning and that nothing occurs at random” ([1980] 1997, 9). She goes on to associate this idea of randomness as being very modern, replacing the idea of correspondences: “The pattern of the zodiac corresponds to the pattern of a person’s life. The pattern of tea leaves in the bottom of a cup corresponds to the outcomes of a battle. Everything is interconnected (ibid., 10).

Eller, in her work with feminist spiritual movements, notes how divination lies at the intersections between these belief systems and New Age movements as a way not to find out about the future, but to connect with internal, higher knowledge (1995, 111-112). In many ways, this is what the future is about: a deeply personal experience of growth. It is an act that is, Preus notes, “rule-governed” (1991, 441) and associated with ritual (Fortes 1966, 409). In contemporary Western practices that reflect larger cultural norms, it has shifted from a community focus to an individual focus (Zeitlyn 2001, 228) as Canadian societies have similarly changed.

An academic whose own work draws upon topics of performance, religions, and cultural history, Evan Heimlich sums up much of the scholarship around these definitions and the challenges encountered by those who endeavour to create them:

Divination is tricky to define today except in terms of what has supposedly replaced it, because supersessionism works so powerfully in Western scholarship. That is, while monotheists can define divination as a practice used only by unenlightened pagans, similarly scientists can define divination as a superstition (an unscientific, irrational practice) that the dawn of reason made obsolete, worthless or worse [...] Fortunately, approaches that deploy methodological relativism have enabled a few researchers to show how *divination works as an inquiry of the unknown, a tactic for making time cohere, a grammar for turning uncertainty into certainty and a communal procedure for procuring a warrant for a choice*. It tends to require procedural exposure to a ritually pure degree of chance. Divination moreover functions as a kind of *idiom for reading to one's people, aloud*. (2010, 144, 145)

Divination moves, shifts, and transforms along with those who use it. It reflects different individual and cultural expectations and needs. Looking at it through these lenses often leads to a necessary blurring of meaning, further complicated by the tools used.

The Tools of the Trade

One way to approach divination, according to Bruce, is to see it as technique oriented:

You're using, it's a method. It's even in the realm of the technological. It's using, it's tactile, it's something that, so that's part of its appeal for people in our society is that instead of being just told something by preachers and so on, here is something that you can explore on your own, and it has a connectedness. It's a technique, well, all techniques have possibility of being helpful, in the interests of our freedom, or causing us to be harmful. Whether we're talking about nuclear weapons or we're talking about tarot cards, it's the same thing. I mean, the technique itself, technology, the cards they use, the deck of cards they use is not in itself good or bad, right, it's how it's used. So it's all within the realm of the relationship between the reader and the client and where that goes. It can go badly or it can be really quite wonderful. (I.4)

An understanding of divination comes in part from the tools that are used, in three ways. First, because anything, *anything*, can be a tool. Within western contemporary practices methods like tarot, astrology, palmistry, numerology, and dreams dominate, but they are not the only ones. Food, the weather, nature, your own body, all of these and so much more are carriers of this potential. You are only restricted by your imagination.

Divination has incredible flexibility in what it can be and how it is implemented. Second, the tools do not exist in isolation from each other but are often layered in concert to provide more depth of interpretation during a reading. Katz writes that “Tarot is not a solitary system: it likes to make friends! It has been variously connected with kabbalah, magick, Gnosticism, psychology, and astrology” (2011, 6), to name a few. Finally, for many practitioners, the tool itself is not necessary, or not always needed, but is instead used for purposes other than direct interpretation.

As mentioned before, this thesis is not an exploration into how to conduct divinatory readings or a history of any particular method or practice; however, it is important to understand a little bit about some of the key tools that are used within divination. The following is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of all methods but an introduction of those which are favoured amongst my participants.

Astrology

When I asked Chris McRae, one of the foremost astrologers in Canada, what astrology is, she replied that:

People have been trying to give a definition of that, probably for eons. Probably since the beginning. But to me it's just the way our life is entwined with the cosmos. As above, so below. We are all part of a larger environment [...] You

know, everything has a season, doesn't it? And everything has a timing, and that timing is governed by the whole solar system. You wouldn't plant a carrot in this part of the country in the wintertime, would you? No. Seasonally it's not a time of growth. But we know that because winter comes in. What causes winter to come in? It's because we are part of the universe. And the rotation of everything within that framework. So in our life, too, it's the same thing. There are times that we can grow our carrot; there are times that we can take advantage of certain types of growth, and at other times, perhaps, we need to pause and cultivate or pause and collect our resources, or maybe pause and get educated. Or maybe this is the time to start raising my family. I would start raising my family at a certain age, not when I'm 65, you know. So, yes we're all part of the cosmic energy, or, as I say, we can reduce cosmic to universal. We're all part of a system. What happens on planet earth is so much involved with that system, so why not us? (I.6)

There is no single form of astrology. Different charts are created or interpreted for various life situations and even, in the case of evolutionary astrology, past lives. The astrologer Montgomery Taylor notes that astrology, "the study of the influence of heavenly bodies on human affairs", has enjoyed a resurgence as "a tool for psychological insight and for the forecasting of events and conditions" (2008, 93). It assumes, writes Bader, Mencken, and Baker, "that the position of stars and planets at the point of one's birth will have effects throughout life", and they continue by identifying that a "reader provides insight into one's personality and information on how the current position of stars and planets will impact the near future" (2010, 30). This explanation is stereotypical, and somewhat reductive, given that astrology reveals itself to be very complex. It is not always focused on the future and is more than just looking at the birth chart.

Astrology, like all divination methods, is deeply contextual, even when it comes down to whether or not it falls under this larger umbrella of divination which will be discussed later in this chapter. For example, Chris explained to me the concept of

humanistic astrology, a newer approach that seeks to take astrology outside of the predictive model:

KARI: So what is humanistic astrology?

CHRIS: That is one of the phrases that takes it out of the older, predictive type of astrology that was practiced in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries.

KARI: Okay.

CHRIS: More predictive, fatalistic type of astrology. So bringing it more into self-awareness type of implications in that we do have choices. You know, I think many of us would prefer not to think that we were puppets on the, dancing on the string of some magical entity of some type or unknown entity. I mean, what is the point? What is the point of getting up in the morning if what we're going to do is governed by somebody else?

KARI: Right.

CHRIS: You know, some string somebody is – we're puppets, you know. So taking it out of that realm of fortune telling; that's another good term that I think humanistic astrology takes us out of that concept as well. (I.6)

Elizabeth J. is more drawn to evolutionary or constellation astrology. This approach uses the natal chart but interprets in relation to the evolution of one's soul in this lifetime and how it relates to past lives (I.16). Harvey notes how Paganism has utilised astrology, recognising that it “can be seen as highlighting the interconnectedness of all things and be used in meditation on situations as well as in finding propitious occasions” (1997, 14). This capacity for adaptation is not unique to astrology alone and continues to emphasise the limitations of a single definition.

Dreams

Dreams have long been recognised as holding potential meanings or containing important messages, and interpreting the images within a dream is, consequently, part of divination. Pearl has spent decades helping people uncover this source of insight. She

explains the importance of dreams in her doctoral thesis, “The Apple and the Talking Snake: Feminist Dream Readings and the Subjunctive Curriculum”:

I believe that dream reading has deep potential for investigating the continuous creation of self-identity. Dreams bypass the ego and its protective gates as well as the superego of the colonizing patriarchal consciousness, thus opening deep and wide spaces for investigation in, with and through our learning to live. There is no endpoint in dream interpretation. Each encounter with the dream contributes a perspective and contributes to the shape of the dream possibility. Every interpretation contributes to changing the dreamer and the dream in an ever-evolving spiral of change leading to transformation. Within this research are issues of gender identifications and subjectivities that derive from the patriarchal positions embedded and often unconscious within a culture. (2008, 14)

When Tedlock uses the word dreaming, she clarifies that “I mean the entire process of inducing a dream state by undertaking dream incubation or a vision quest, the dream itself, and sharing the dream” (2005, 104). Elizabeth comes from a family who values dreams. A medium who employs numerous divination methods for her querents, she takes note of what she dreams while recognising that not every one is a premonition or infused with meaning (I.14). This topic came up at the Evening with Spirit event I attended in June 2015.⁷ This event involves Richard and another medium doing platform mediumship, i.e. getting messages from spirit for those in attendance. It was explained here that the dreams you remember are the ones that you were meant to, and if you forget the dream you do not need to worry because it was not meant for you to know (FN June 27, 2015). Richard regards them as a journey where we return to our home in the spirit

⁷ The Evening with Spirit is held monthly by the St. Brigid’s Spiritualist Church in Edmonton and serves as a main source of income for the church, charging \$30 per person to cover the costs of their rent (I.46).

world; the ones that you remember are the ones where you have been interacting with loved ones in this world, your true home (I.47).

Interpreting dreams is often as deeply contextual and personal as any other act. For Irene, also decades into her divinatory journey, the largest object in the dream is you. When she is working with her querents she asks them to explore questions like “How are you feeling? What’s the next thing? What’s the emotion? Are you frightened? Do you feel giddy? Are you anxious about something?” because “everything gives you a clue to what it is. It’s like solving a mystery, right” (I.22). Mélanie explains that after waking, if she remembers the dream:

I write it out, look for where the most energy is. Because usually [there are] three stages to a dream. So there’s a lot to deal with. Like, you know, if I were to say to you, “I had this crazy dream last night,” you know, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, but if I write it out it’s probably four times as long as what I put into verbal words, so there are a lot of images there. And so I guess I kind of look to see if there’s anything literal about it, but I usually just dismiss that if there is, I just take that, that that’s somehow – because I have this sense that there’s really no separation, so if there’s something going on in my life and that leads to a dream, it would be hard for me to argue, which came first, the dream or the life, you know, because they’re all so connected. So I make those connections. Look for something that I keep coming back to, and I keep looking at again and I go with that. And I do a little, I guess you’d say, brainstorming around connections, so, like, if you had a chair, you’d just think about chair and everything that you’d think about, you know, start writing that down. (I.40)

Eller identifies dreams as a component of modern women’s spiritual movements, noting they are used for personal growth that invites women to “direct their dreams in such a way that they are able to confront problems or antagonistic persons in their sleep and emerge victorious, giving them the confidence to do the same in waking life” (1995, 108).

Numerology

Numerology is the association of meaning with numbers. “Similar to astrology, numerology readers assume that the date of one’s birth impacts personality and future. Rather than focusing on the alignment of stars, numerologists focus upon the numbers in one’s birth date” (Bader, Mencken, Baker 2010, 30). It is not just limited to the date of one’s birth. A person’s name can be converted into numbers and its significance explored through how the numbers are combined and the meanings associated with them.

For Peter, who works primarily with tarot, numerology is the energy of the person:

I dabbled into it just to, like there’s Dan Millman, he is an author. It’s how I get your numbers, and I usually use your birthday and your month, your day, and your year, and I just add them all up and it comes out to be a number. Every number has a meaning to it and it sort of has a meaning of your, sort of expectations that you can be. It’s not about you being exactly that [...] Numerology is energy as well, and this is what I believe in. Different numbers, we’re good with different numbers. So for instance, if I’m a number, I feel there’s master numbers, there’s 11s, 22s, 33s, 44s; I feel those numbers are very connected with the universe in a sense of knowing things very intuitively; could be readers. Different numbers are intuitives. I’m not saying – any number could be an intuitive. There isn’t one number. Everyone can be whatever they choose to be but sometimes we get into patterns in our numbers, in who we are. I don’t know if that makes sense, but that’s something that I feel.

As well as numerology, sometimes numbers clash. So you, just to, for an example, you may go to a party or a gathering and all of a sudden you see all these new people that you don’t know and you run to a group and you say, how are you doing and this is what I do, and so on and all of a sudden you know, you feel so comfortable that, you know, you feel like you’ve known this person for years, and you’ve just met them. And you feel, you know, let’s get together. You feel that we can be friends. On the other hand, on the other side of the table there’s, say two people are just standing there and you are going to go do the same thing to them and all of a sudden you stopped. You say, “you know what, I just don’t feel comfortable going and talking to them.” That’s their numbers, that’s their energy, that’s something that’s sort of stopping you from connecting with them. It’s not saying that they’re bad, it’s just saying, you know what, it’s not time for me to connect with them, they may be going through a hard time right now, you know, and I better just say hi if anything, or I’ll just pass them by.

So numerology is a tool; it's a tool to help people know themselves. You can do the numerology yourself, and there's books that you can read, and you can have a good grip on yourself, and you can have a good grip on others as well. So just a little added information about, say, your partner or friendship or information about yourself, as well. So I really feel it's a good tool for anybody to get into it. (I.45)

In a life devoted to healing both as a nurse and energy healer, Julie works primarily with numerology and introduced me to Faith Javane and Dusty Bunker's book *Numerology and the Divine Triangle* that has heavily influenced her approach. In her readings she uses the individual's name (nicknames are of particular significance and the maiden name is always used) and birthdate to determine a variety of different numbers including the soul number, outer personality, destiny, life lesson, and power numbers. It is a complex process that looks at birth numbers and separates out vowels and consonants. Reflecting the integrative practices in Javane and Bunker's book, each number is also associated with a tarot card that adds further depth of meaning of each (I.26).

Palmistry

Palmistry involves the reading of the physical aspects of the hand including the shape of the hand, palm, fingers, and fingernails; the lines on the palm; the joints; and the mounds on the palms. Colours and textures of skin are also a part of it. Readings can reveal future directions, health issues, and harmful patterns. Ellen describes her process as follows:

When I start a reading, I start with the back of the hands. The process begins with the client gently shaking the hands and then placing them on the table with the palms down. This allows me to see the spacing of the fingers and the thumbs. Spacing is indicative of extroversion/introversion; daring/caution; responsibility or lack thereof depending on which fingers are involved. Length of fingers is another detail that I pay attention to as is the shape, colour, and length of the fingernails. Are there any hangnails and are the knuckles smooth or pronounced? As I turn the hands over I note their feel and determine if the skin ridges are fine or coarse. Then the lines, I start with the life line, then the head line, followed by

the heart line. If present the fate/destiny line and any other markings that are present. Then the mounts – Venus, Neptune, Pluto, Luna, the Plain of Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Apollo and Mercury. Then the back of the fingers and their segments. (I.17)

It is important to note that the lines change, which means that nothing is fixed. Wendy, a palm reader based in Calgary, explained that it is “a terrific tool for insight into our personalities. I often say we cannot see our own aura⁸ in a mirror, and we cannot see our potentials without good tools. Palmistry is one of those tools. Palmistry changes fast if you are growing and evolving quickly, in a couple months we can see a new future unfolding” (I.51).

Palmistry fits into an idea that McGuire has been working with for several years, that the body is part of spiritual experience. We live in our bodies; they are, therefore “our vehicle for perceiving and interpreting our world” (1990, 284) and a part of the divinatory experience. “Where is memory located?” she goes on to ask. “In Western ways of thinking, we tend to identify the memory as an operation solely of the brain. But biological evidence suggests that memory resides in the whole body, such as in nerve connections and in the cells of the immune system” (2003, 2). In the same way that Chris identified the “as above, so below” relationship in astrology, this idea carries on throughout many different divinatory and spiritual practices. Robert A. Johnson, a Jungian analyst, summarises it in his book *Inner Work: Using Dreams and Active Imagination for Personal Growth*: “Each of us is a microcosm in which the universal process actualizes itself. Therefore we are all caught up in the movements of the contents

⁸ The aura is an energy field that surrounds a person that many practitioners read. Richard explains that: “Anything that’s ever happened to you in your life from the time you were born to now is in your aura; all that information is in your aura” (I.46).

of the unconscious toward the level of the conscious mind. Each of us is involved in the countermovement of the ego-mind back toward the unconscious, reconnecting with its root in the parent matrix that gave its birth” (1989, 7).

The body contains immense potential for being participatory in the divinatory act. At times, like any tool, it has been misused, as physical attributes often are. Craniology, the reading of the shape of the skulls, is one of the more notorious examples in that it was used to promote racist and classist ideologies. But it does not have to be this way. Every person carries a powerful tool of divination within themselves, and, like most systems, it can be as simple or as complex as they need it to be.

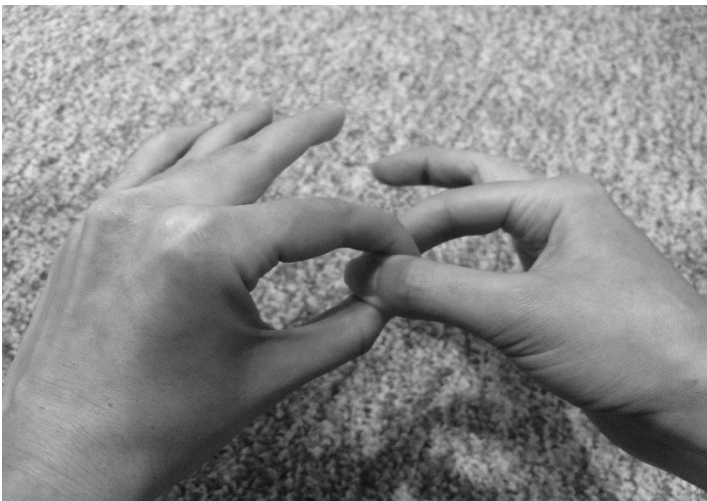


Figure 1: Muscle Testing

During our interview, Patrice brought up a method involving muscle testing that her husband uses. Interlocking the thumb and first fingers of each hand together, he asks a yes/no question and pulls his hands apart. If the answer is yes, then the fingers will remain

connected; if the answer is no, then the chain is broken (I.43). In a follow-up email to me on May 9, 2017, she reflected that: “There’s an art to becoming comfortable and confident with this. I suspect we need to believe in the innate wisdom of the body – doubts in the effectiveness of the tool will interfere with the process.” Such methods provide opportunities for practitioners to develop this trust and deepen their connections to their own bodies.

Pendulums

A pendulum is simply an object that is attached to a string or chain. It is now easy to find ones that have particular stones or crystals that have their own associations, but they are not a requirement. Pendulums are often used to resolve binary questions (yes/no); however, as Katrina explained:



Figure 2: Pendulum

Once you know how the pendulum works, you can also put your hand down and use each finger as an answer, but you have to have one that's saying, like, free, not known, not decided, not my business. So you put the pendulum at the top of your hand, and not the palm side because your energy from your minor chakra from your palm is going to affect it, so you put your hand down, and you have an intention of what they all are, or you can draw a picture of the outline of your hand and then put an intention on every finger. Put the pendulum in the middle, take a breath, and ask your question, and it will swing in one of those directions. It's very cool.

You can also, a friend of mine bought a house that way. She took a map, because she wanted to move, she took a map and it's kind of like dowsing...And she used the pendulum, and she bought a house in British Columbia and then she got that it was supposed to be in BC, she went to BC, and it took her to the city where she lives, and then she got an area of the city, and she broke it down, broke it down, broke it down to a small area, a small community, and they went on a trip and the very first house they saw, poof. It's very cool.

So you can use it for anything. It's just a matter of being a third channel and getting out of your head for what you want it to say. And, yeah, there's, you can do it for the months of the year. You can have a circle and it's broken down into the 12 months, when should you, blah, blah, blah. Then it will tell you in March. You can do it – it's very cool. The only thing that limits the pendulum is yourself, and you have to ask a question that's not, you have to ask a specific question. (I.31)

Unlike other methods, the pendulum is often not part of the professional reading because it is simple to use and interpret the answer. But that is not to suggest it is a lesser tool. Its complexity comes from the myriad of ways it is used that extend beyond divination.

Treva carries hers as both a talisman and a method of obtaining quick answers (I.50), showing that the same tool can serve multiple functions. Heather explains why she still favours this method, even when she does not require it:

The thing like, the pendulum, no I don't need it, but I do like it. And with friends...I think everybody worries now, but especially female friends that have a tendency toward worry, you know. Over time I've taught them all how to use a pendulum because I've told them, anyone can do it. And I don't think that anyone should ever wonder or be in doubt as to what, which way to go. A lot of people have difficulty making a decision or knowing what is the best choice for them, so I've taught many of my friends how to use the pendulum, and whenever I'm speaking with them and they start that doubt and worry starts to creep in, I say, "okay, use your pendulum." (I.20)

Pendulums are also used to cleanse spaces and tools of negative or leftover energy. Leah, who was introduced to it by her friend with whom she now works, uses the pendulum as part of clearing the energy from past readings and to help her focus on tuning in for her mediumship (I.34).

Psychics and Mediumship

The terms psychic and medium are generally regarded as separate but interconnected. Leah, who works primarily as a medium, provides an explanation that sums up the perspective of the majority of those I interviewed:

[A medium is] someone who can connect with spirits who have passed over, so as opposed to a psychic. Now, every medium is psychic but not every psychic is a medium. So if, say if you're doing a psychic reading, you're readings someone's, I guess, what's around them, around their energy field and what's happened to them and things that are coming up for them whereas a mediumship reading is where it's actually connecting to someone who's passed over. So, and generally

that involves, you'll have some validation points, so they'll describe specific things, and you'll know who it is like whoever you're reading for. And that's always things they're already aware of, and then the message will come through and quite often it's in a certain tone that the person goes, "oh I know, that's definitely my father," or whoever. So it's quite interesting how they validate themselves, and all of us see them differently too, so some people physically see someone standing there. I see everything in my third eye, but then sometimes I see things as well, so it really depends on what, how that person wants to come through and how I'm connecting with them as well. (I.34)

Donna describes a psychic reading as reading a person's aura, while mediumship involves crossing over into a different realm, passing over the veil into the other world where we go when we die and connecting with the spirits there (I.13). For Richard, psychics read the aura of a person while "in mediumship we get our information, we connect with someone in the spirit world and they tell us" (I.46). Frequently the ideas of intuition and psychic are regarded as the same with the former being more commonly used because it has less stigma. Elizabeth, however, does see a distinction between intuition and psychic ability. Someone who is reading tarot cards may be using their intuition but not connecting psychically which, for her, involves receiving visions (I.14). The general agreement among those I interviewed was that everyone has an intuitive ability to some extent, although whether everyone could be a medium was a little more open to question.

Tied into mediumship is the idea of channelling. It frequently involves the act of opening yourself up to have a spirit control what you are writing or speaking. Shannon explains it as the channeller being "the middle person" through whom a spirit speaks (I.49) which is different from a medium relaying messages being communicated to (not through) them. Pearl expands its meaning; for her it is "opening up to hear your own

inner wisdom”, and it has had a profound impact on her life. She describes her own experience channelling:

But I do know that...the most deepest spiritual experience I had, ever, or a close second, was during a channelling session where I – you could look, you could see through my body. I was a light being, and my energy – I don’t know if you’ve ever experienced just an energy that goes through you and lifts through your entire vibratory system. And, how do I explain it? It’s like the experience of, it’s an angelic experience. For me it was an angelic experience. It was like talking to angels or talking as though Christ is walking beside you, but they’re in energetic form, and you can’t touch them. But, for me, in Catholicism there’s Pentecost, and Christ appeared through the room. Like he came through the wall, and they were all astonished, and he appeared sitting on the stone at the tomb and they were all astonished. Well, that’s where you lift your energy to such a high vibration that you’re invisible, and you are uncovering more of who you really are. (I.44)

Richard, in explaining some of the development of mediumship within the Spiritualist movement, separated it into two key types: 1) physical, involving physical manifestations such as a hand, or a flower, or a whole body appearing as proof which was more dominant at the start of this movement; and 2) mental, wherein messages are communicated inside the head of the medium (I.46). There is also trans-mediumship which he describes as going into a state of semi-consciousness wherein the individual has allowed the spirit to come in, not to take over the body – he regards this as a damaging lie that keeps people afraid of connecting to spirit – but to take over your aura and use your voice box and speak through the person (I.47). However, there are different approaches to mediumship, something Sam noted when talking about his own experiences as a Wiccan:

SAM: Their [Spiritualist] understanding is completely different from mine. I mean, I see myself as doing possession trance, so it’s a different thing than their messages from the beyond.

KARI: So for your possession trance your deity’s coming into you?

SAM: A deity comes in and takes over my body, usually for a very short period of time, a matter of a few minutes to half an hour or so. It’s an important part of

British traditional Wicca. It's one of the things we share in common with voodoo, which is one of the reasons why I'm interested in voodoo because there they have group possession trance. They will have a number of people who will be dancing and drumming and all the rest of it, and will be possessed by different goddesses and gods during the course of the ritual. And I'm very interested in how they manage that because we generally don't. In coven, generally, the priestess and priest will be possessed, if we're lucky we'll get possession. It generally doesn't go as deep as that. But, anyways. So it's a different approach. That's one of the things that distinguishes, by the way, Wicca or witchcraft from the neo-pagan milieu in which we are indebted is that very, very few people outside of the coven structure do possession trance. It just takes talent, application, and a very high level of trust in order to get there. [...] I'm not sure what the mixture of things is, but I do know that you cannot do it in a public circle. It's difficult to do it with a large number of people present. I've seen it done in fairly large groups, but rarely. It's really fun. [both laugh] It is, it's really fun. (I.48)

Tarot and Other Cards

In an interview she gave to a local magazine *Word of Heart: Searching Together for Ways to Nurture, Empower, and Enlighten Ourselves*, Jean explains tarot:

A Tarot deck is 78 cards with pictures on them, divided into the major and minor teachings, or major and minor arcana. "Arcana" at its root means secret, but these teachings aren't secret anymore.

The major teachings are 22 cards that portray the development of an individual to her fullness. They fall in a progression, numbered zero through 21. We see them in a circle. You don't just experience those parts of life once – you go around and around the circle. Sometimes you're here, sometimes there, and sometimes you're in several places at once.

The minor arcana of 56 cards is divided into four suits: disks, wands, cups and swords. Earth, fire, water, air. These four basic elements are the building blocks of



Figure 3: Cards from the Mythic Tarot deck

the cosmology or the understanding of the universe in medieval times [...] Each of the four suits is associated with an aspect of our experience. Disks are associated with our physical experience: our health, physical world, lifestyle, relationships, work, finances. Wands with our fire within, our own light, our spirituality. These cards show us our growth, our authenticity. Cups: our emotions, our feelings. Swords: our thinking, our attitudes. [...] Each of these four divisions has 14 cards, numbered one through 10 and four royalty cards: The Prince, Princess, Queen and Knight. (1998, 6)

The cards are then laid out in a pattern, each position holding a particular meaning, and are interpreted based on the question asked. Another common practice is selecting a single card on a daily basis and interpreting it within this personal and individual context.

There is an incredible amount of diversity and creativity demonstrated within these cards and their use. Wen explains it thusly: “Talk to ten practitioners of tarot and you will get ten different answers about what tarot is, how it works, and even what the cards mean” (2015, 5). This tendency is not a weakness but a strength. Bruce reflected upon its “tremendous breadth of freedom in interpretation. And that is where the ingenuity of the reader comes in” (I.4). There are card decks for any interest and layouts for any question. If there is a gap, one can create their own layout, mix up decks and adapt to individual needs.

The topic of tarot is subject to many stories regarding its origins, or what Katz terms as “tarot sillies”:

1. The tarot did **not** originate *ex nihilo* from Egypt, the gypsies or a secret order;
2. You do **not** need to be gifted your tarot – you can buy a deck for yourself;

3. You do **not** have to keep your tarot in a silk bag of any particular colour;
 4. You **can** let other people touch your cards if you choose;
 5. There are **no** real 'rules' in tarot, but some generally agreed good ideas;
 6. The keywords for cards are somehow **set in stone**...then why do books disagree?
 7. The cards are **evil**...well, if print and cardboard are evil, avoid libraries;
 8. You have a **single** birth card or yearly card – that seems somewhat limiting;
 9. You have to be intuitive or gifted in some **special** way – you don't, you can learn;
 10. The 'ancient Celtic Cross' spread has been used for **centuries** – it hasn't!
- (2011, 5)

These narratives of “alternative”, if you will, tarot beliefs extend well beyond its origins. I am not interested in disputing or confirming these beyond saying that most of the people I spoke with identified at least some of these as untrue. Anne has no patience for the mystical history the cards have acquired (I.1), and Jason dismisses the idea of having to be gifted a deck (I.23). However, it should be noted that if someone finds value in some of these ideas, it is their right as well. For instance, Gus feels that a lot of ancient knowledge is transferred into tarot (I.19) even if the cards or specific decks themselves are not as old, and I, myself, pay attention to both my birth and yearly cards.

Tarot are not the only cards that exist. There are countless types that draw upon any interest a person has, the most common being angel or oracle cards. Debra explains the difference:

Tarot has four suits; they have the major arcana, so there's 78 cards, and then the four suits they have from Ace or 1 all the way up to King. And there's a lot of similarities even between the different decks, so they'll usually have the same major arcana cards. There's some decks that have slight differences. The symbology is fairly similar and the same with the meanings of the cards.

Oracle cards could have as many or as few as what the artist designed and usually an oracle card will have a word or will have a saying on the card for that particular meaning. There's no suits; there's no major arcana. And the topics that the oracle cards are on is, well, it's vast. I mean, tarot cards are vast but oracle cards are

larger because it could be on gems, it could be on angels, it could be on fairies, it could be on just about whatever. So those, and they're read differently.

So, you know and sometimes I'll use oracle cards on my Facebook page and will do, it's an interactive exercise that I'll do with my followers. And it's sort of like, pick a card, and I'll take a picture of the back of the cards and then, then they'll pick a card and then I'll tell them what the meaning is. And sometimes I'll use it in the store where people can pick a card just for the day. They don't get to keep it but, so that's the differences between an oracle deck and a tarot deck. (I.8)

Many, including Irene, use a plain deck of playing cards. All of these decks, and others, are used to engage in readings and offer participants the answers they seek and reflect the needs of all involved.

Tea Leaf Reading

At its most basic, tea leaf reading is interpreting the patterns of leaves left in a cup and/or saucer. Like all the other methods, there is no single way to conduct these readings. The cup may be divided into sections representing time periods, for example the top is the furthest away from the present time. The handle may also be an anchor point; in one class I took, it represented the person, so leaves closer to the handle represented events and issues that are more directly connected to the querent (J, October 31, 2010).

Katrina's work is rooted in reading and teaching multiple methods, and she gives the following explanation of her process of teaching others to read tea leaves:

KARI: Well, maybe you can take me through a little bit more in depth the pendulum and the tea leaves and the tarot.

KATRINA: Okay. Okay, so the tea leaf. You learn, whoever signs up, comes, it's – all my workshops are roughly three hours with a break in the middle. With the tea leaf it's a little different because they learn the history of the tea leaf; they learn the dos and the don'ts. Never, ever cut a tea bag open and use the tea leaves from a bag. It's very disrespectful. It has to be loose tea leaves. And it doesn't matter if they're mint or if they're Earl Gray. It doesn't matter, some are big, some are small; it's whatever you're comfortable with. And I have ones, loose ones that are big and small, and they get to practice to see what represents, what works for

them, and then they learn how to brew a cup of tea. A lot of people think that you have to have it really, really, really, really, really hot. But when you have it really hot, a rapid boil, then you sort of damage the tea leaves and you scorch them, you burn them, so before it comes to a rapid boil is when you're supposed to make a cup of tea. You're supposed to let it sit for five minutes.

So when they're picking their tea leaves, what I incorporate it in, is that when they have it on their saucer, they can make a design in it. They can put an intention or question in there, their energy in the tea leaves. And then they have the tea, the cup, and then when they're stirring it, they put the intention of what they want from the reading. Not, it can be a specific question or it does not have to be a specific question, it's just bringing their energy in. And then they drink the tea, we have a little tea party with shortbread and sometimes cucumber sandwiches and it's really fun.

And then they learn what to do with the tea cup and turning it and then how to read it. It's fun. And then they read for other people because when I have a group, like we used to – now I start that we take one tea cup and you look at it and if you look at it and you get a message, you share it with that person. If you don't, you pass the cup around and it goes around, so everybody gets a quick glance and you go, "oh yeah, I see where so and so said that." And it's kind of cool, and it breaks the ice. And then you also get to work in pairs. So you get different opportunities to get more in depth or quick answer a question. So it depends what the group is. I sort of follow the energy of the group. And then they get some tea leaves to take home with them and yeah, they learn how to pick the tea cup and the saucer, because they're different. It's just fun. Any questions on that?

KARI: So they read the leaves in the cup, not on the saucer?

KATRINA: Both.

KARI: Both. Okay.

KATRINA: Yeah. Because wherever they land, that's where they're supposed to be. Sometimes they fall out and sometimes they don't, so it's cool. (I.31)

Belonging

With all of the tools and approaches that emerge under the umbrella of divination, the question bears asking: what does not belong? The label of divination is one that

concerns Chris immensely because of the harm she has seen it cause the field of astrology, and she does not agree with my classification of astrology as a contemporary divinatory act. “We struggle,” she told me during our interview. “Some of us, we do struggle hard to help it be elevated, to be accepted, to become something that people are not going to hide the fact that they have an astrologer” (I.6). In her response to my initial email requesting an interview she wrote that:

I do not think of astrology, as it is practiced globally today, as a divination form. It was a much simpler task in the 15th, 16th, even 17th century to make predictions because choices were so limited. Today our array of choices are so much more varied and complex that making predictions is considered foolhardy. Astrology has become much more of a personal growth and self-awareness tool than a predictive tool. We attain insight into the various astrological influences that are part of our individual as well as societal impulses.

The ancient form of astrology still practiced today in India is called Vedic Astrology. It is still much more predictive than Western Astrology and based upon a little different zodiac. However, their degree of accuracy in making such predictions is questionable. I have quite a few clients from India who much prefer the Western approach than Vedic which is what they used before they immigrated to Canada. (June 9, 2015)

It was a conversation we came back to when we met at the astrology retreat, and I owe a great debt to her for challenging my own definitional blindness. While I recognise that divination has often been regarded in a negative way, my work is focused on reclaiming the word and, in doing so, the practice. Yet, particularly as an academic, I run the same risk of imposing my external ideas, particularly because I am not an astrologer, upon others.

Geoffrey Cornelius, an astrologer himself, wrote an article, “Is Astrology Divination and Does it Matter?”, grappling with this question. For him it becomes a question of subjectivity versus objectivity:

Is astrology a divination practice (like Tarot cards or tea leaves), and, therefore, dependent on an act of imaginative creation rather than objective facts that are established in nature (tables and chairs, atoms and molecules)? If so, should it be considered *subjective*? In other words, are the understandings I got through astrology actually my own subjective creations? (1998, 5)

He notes that many of the calls to situate astrology outside of divination are because inclusion undermines the objectivity of this practice, but for him astrology is not objective. Instead, “the inference drawn from symbols is a type of subjective, creative process of the astrologer, and is not dependent on a physical process in the natural world” (ibid., 5), finally concluding that “[w]e assign significance, not the stars” (ibid., 6). Chris, however, disputes the role of intuition:

If you want an intuitive interpretation go to a medium or a psychic. In astrology, astrology is a body of knowledge to be applied as a body of knowledge, not integrated in other processes. So I take a little exception to that too, you know. I certainly don’t mind somebody calling themselves a spiritual astrologer, but astrology is not a spiritual body of knowledge in that way. In my opinion. (I.6)

What becomes apparent when exploring this debate is that there are multiple definitions of astrology and divination. Lynn, who I also met at the retreat, reflected on these different attitudes during our interview noting that “there’s value in legitimising the process, for sure, but you can’t say that’s the only process because it’s not, and it’s not ever going to be, and it’s not the most valid process or the least valid” (I.38). Lesley, a former journalist who is now a professional astrologer, classifies astrology as “a tool of divination” because her definition of divination is:

an opportunity to provide awareness, right. Yes, there’s an element of prediction to it [...] so for me divination isn’t about giving *all* the answers because, I mean, you know, this is my personal opinion. If you do this kind of work and believe that you can give someone all the answers to their lives, I think you’re sadly mistaken. And I often say to people, and I hope you will use this in your thesis, that psychics are not unlike quarterbacks, they don’t complete all their passes. (I.35)

When considering the relationship between astrology and concepts of legitimacy, she notes that:

But now things have shifted and changed and you know, on the one side there are the astrologers who really want to prove to science that we're legitimate, and I really don't care because I don't think astrology is a science, I don't. I'm not saying it doesn't involve mathematics and those sorts of things, but ultimately – and I applaud the people who are doing research projects. I mean, I really hope that – it would be nice to lend some viability to what we do [...] There is some of it that smacks of powerful insecurity. And there are some of them that, so you definitely don't want to be talking about intuition around them. Oh no, that's going to put astrology over if people think you're psychic too. Fuck! Like seriously? You know, you've made science into a god. Why – the purpose of science is, was only to describe things we don't understand. So apparently we decided we don't want religion anymore, so let's elect science instead. Well, why can't you just be on a journey of discovery and be open to what information, however it chooses to come to you? (I.35)

Ellen, a palm reader based in Ontario, sees reflections of this perspective in her own work, writing to me that for her “astrology is a science. That's why for me it requires so much study” (I.17). The astrologer Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum highlights the difference between astrology and other forms of divination in that with the former, “its medium is the planets and stars in the sky, whose movements can be measured and consistently predicted (unlike, for instance, the casting of lots, which change each time they are thrown). Also, once a chart is written down, it becomes a stable and enduring record of a fleeting moment, whereas once the flock of birds has passed, or the liver cools, the divination ends” (2010, 182). Yet, are science and divination really so far removed?

In their review article “A History of the Autopsy”, the medical doctors Lester S. King and Marjorie C. Meehan explore the relationship between ancient divination and science, particularly the examination of animal entrails. While the purpose of the act was

different from the scientific one, they observe that “the information gradually accumulated [during divinatory readings] and eventually did become relevant to autopsy performance” (1973, 516) “What is meteorology,” asks Manas, “other than scientific divination as far as the weather is concerned?” (1947, 10). Aveni makes a similar parallel: ‘Then there’s the ‘God bless you’ gesture after a sneeze. It can be traced back to ancient Greece when sneezing was believed to expel ghosts, demons, or fairies from one’s body. But blasting out these unwanted tenants at high velocity endangered those around the sneezer – one generation’s evil spirits are another’s germs” (2002, 3). The issues of predestination that genetic testing are raising have been grappled with by querents and readers alike long before DNA was a concept, particularly by individuals looking back at their family history to understand current health issues.

Divination, ultimately, is a fluid entity. It cannot be removed from its context. When Treva mentioned that she carries a pendulum with her as a talisman and a divinatory tool, she led us into a conversation about the mutability of these tools:

TREVA: I have a healing Buddha on my altar upstairs, and I have...blue jay and eagle feathers and an athame and a cape...the Wiccans use an athame for cutting open directions and what not. So I don’t know if those would be talismans or divinations. I think these would be more divination.

KARI: I think a lot of times it’s how you use it.

TREVA: Yeah.

KARI: They’re all just tools.

TREVA: They’re all tools, exactly. That’s right. And this [the person] is the greatest tool, this is where the wisdom lies. This just helps to open up, to get through all of the critical levels, thinking levels to get down into the source, it seems to me. Yeah. (I.50)

In the same way that tarot cards were and can still be used as a game, any tool is rooted in the context of its use. So, what we are left with is the recognition, as I noted in my fieldnotes, that diviners, astrologers are not a homogenous group (June 13, 2015). This diversity became clear at the retreat, a weekend of learning about and sharing information on astrology. It was a space wherein I found the influences of tarot and numerology discussed, and where it was not out of the ordinary to see a healing session going on in the living room between talks. In these spaces I found myself grateful for the work of folklore that reminds us to begin our own investigations with the individual, with the singular performance, and build out from that context, whether it is concerning a definition or a reading, which is what must happen here. A stone is not a tool of divination until it is, until a rune is carved into it, or it is picked out of a bag. Our experience shapes our words and our worlds. For Chris, astrology is not divination, for others it is, and no one is wrong.

Moving forward I am forced to recognise the power of definitions and continue to contemplate who has the right to wield them. After meeting with Chris at the retreat I spent much time thinking and writing about our conversations and about how to negotiate my own perspectives and research goals with those of others. These internal conversations carried on throughout this entire project and even now because I do not have a set answer. On July 13, 2015 I wrote a list of solutions to this issue:

- we need to talk and to listen
- we need to treat people's professions with respect
- labels are a place to start – shed when no longer needed. Not an astrologer, so I leave those within to decide their own paths.
- whatever term you choose – respect those who claim it or fall under it [or reject it]

In the end, all that I can do is try and offer a space where this conversation happens, recognising that for this thesis my focus is on the ways in which astrology does fall within a divinatory label; not because I am adamant that it is always so, but because I recognise that for some it does, and those moments are what this project is rooted in. I can only focus on “[t]he right to speak, be heard, and disagree. The right to continue the conversation and to have the conversation in the first place” (FN July 13, 2015). In discussing my own definition, that I will get to soon enough, Pearl commented that “I’ve spend my life in divination” (I.44). Some have, some have not. What I ask is that we recognise that this conversation is going on and it is a dialogue worth having.

My Definition

Finally, my definition of divination must be addressed because it is the foundation of my thesis. Bringing together participant and academic voices with my own experiences, the rest of this chapter is focused on exploring what I mean by divination. My working definition is as follows: *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; it is often about present or past situations (including past lives) and is not fixed or fated. 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.* It is my attempt to put into words a complex and deeply lived experience, acknowledging that “[s]ometimes it is easier to recognize a phenomenon than it is to define it” (Bader, Mencken, Baker 2010, 20). This definition is rooted in context, not in tools or history. It shifts if the practice is situated

within a spiritual or secular context, depending on what methods are used, what questions are asked, and all the other nuances of ritual.

A conscious act

Divination is rooted in the intentional act of seeking out information. There is a distinction to make between omens and divination, and that has to do with the conscious act. Gillen defines the former as “anything (object or event) which is taken to be a signifier of an unknown and not otherwise knowable signified” (1989, 408). The difference between these two acts of seeking out the unknowable is that divination is intentional while omens are not; they are signs that are interpreted but are not a response to a specific question. Often times they overlap, using the same tools, even the same interpretational frameworks, but they are separated by intent. For example, a dream can be an unbidden omen offering information about what is happening or about to happen. Or you can also ask for a dream to answer a question, at which point it becomes a divinatory act. These boundaries are, of course, fluid but rooted in the power of the querent to seek out knowledge.

The Utilisation of Tools

The conscious act of divination is centred around the tools used and reveals a complex and layered process of positioning and integration. Practitioners may blend together different methods during a reading or they may specialise in only one system. The tangibility, or lack thereof, of methods emerged when I approached mediums, and we were left to wonder about their inclusion within this category. While their method lacks tangibility they do fit within Tedlock’s category of trance divination. Furthermore, even when a material object is utilised, the spirit component is frequently also present.

Kelliena, a professional reader in Nova Scotia who employs a variety of different tools, explains the connection:

KELLIENA: And I've, like no two readings are the same. Like I've had readings before where the guardians⁹ only wanted to use tarot or the guardians just wanted to use palm, like they're always different, it's never the same energy.

KARI: Okay, so when a seeker [querent] comes, they usually choose the tool?

KELLIENA: No, the guardians, I'll go with the energy and what the guardians say.

KARI: Okay.

KELLIENA: And then I just follow them. (I.32)

There is a desire for a tangible representation of the divinatory experience. In fact, for some practitioners, this need is the reason for the tools:

JESSICA: I could do it [the reading] without divination tools, it's just that people don't necessarily like it when you do it because they just think it's made up, whereas with divination tools, there's something there for them to be able to hold on to concretely. (I.24)

LYNN: if I do it through astrology or psychometry¹⁰ or reading your palm or seeing a ghost or mediumship, I don't care. To me it's all the same. Like somebody said, would you do numerology too? Well, I could, but why would I? I would come up with the same answer. (I.38)

ELIZABETH: the information is going to come through the same [...] what I see for somebody is going to come through whether I use something or whether I don't. (I.15)

Elizabeth also has a practical reason for bringing in tarot cards; she keeps her querents busy shuffling them while she is channeling information. The tools become a point of

⁹ Kelliena explains that guardians are "your [spiritual] guides. The ones helping us in our lives; they're putting energy there to help us make positive change" (I.32).

¹⁰ Psychometry involves gaining information about someone by holding an object of theirs, usually something that has personal meaning, such as a wedding ring.

intersection, part of the liminal space that reader and seeker can inhabit together, and its purpose is not to give information but to help the querent engage with it.

This tangible connection was noted by the former editors of *Gnosis: A Journal of the Western Inner Traditions*, Richard Smoley and Jay Kinney, in their examination of the process of extraction healing in the Philippines:

They use some combination of genuine paranormal power and sleight-of-hand to perform ‘bloody extractions,’ whereby they magically seem to reach into a patient’s body with their fingers, without surgery or implements, and extract harmful objects ranging from worms to safety pins. Though these healers have been shown to use some measure of trickery, many patients go away from the procedure much improved or even completely healed. If this is a matter of healing by suggestion, it seems to work often enough. Far more than Western doctors, shamans regard the mental and emotional condition of the patient as paramount in the healing process. ([1999] 2006, 165)

The object is not unnecessary, even if it is not being used in the way anticipated, because it is about the context of the tool. “It is not the object,” the folklorist Regina Bendix asserts, “but the desire, the process of searching itself, that yields existential meaning” (1997, 17). Or, as Elizabeth J. puts it: “How do I get myself enlightened? How do I get myself empowered? What are the tools that I need to get there?” (I.16). These items, then, are a hook to help get the person to a place where they can “understand who they are and accept it” (Marlene I.39). Jean explains it as a link: “these cards are pieces of paper with pictures on them. I see it as a circuit, a linkage from you through the cards to the source of information – your high self, the angels, life, whatever. The cards are the link, in tangible space and time, that we can put on the table and have some visual, possibly visceral, association with” (1998, 6). They serve as “storage units” for ritual data, as Victor Turner terms it (1968, 1). The needs of the querent must be a factor and tools help them engage with a process that can often appear utterly intangible.

In 2014 I undertook a project on sacred play which brought me into contact with Miriam, a United Church minister in Newfoundland, who uses a method of Godly Play¹¹ with her congregation.



Figure 4: Holy Family, photo by Miriam

KARI: How do you think engaging with something tactile or playing with the water, how does that impact someone's relationships to the story that they're engaging with?

MIRIAM: Because they can feel – if you can take the pieces and you can touch them, I mean, you can experience them in a different way. I think that it makes them more memorable. Acting out anything, like, I just think you remember it differently because you can see it and interact with it in a different way. So like these stories, like I'm not a memory person, but I can remember these stories because I've got the pieces that help me move along, and I think the kids do too. (I.40)

Objects not only help people access this information but also to engage with it, to remember it, and to integrate it into their own lives. Wendy, a palm reader, makes this observation about the tactile experience of the palm reading: “Just touching someone makes it personal and they give up boundaries when they allow this, we are so seldom touched, we are so seldom the centre of attention and I think there is some comfort and familiarity that happens” (I.51). Therefore, it is not surprising that the tools of divination remain central to the practice, even when they do not offer up new information to the reader.

¹¹ Godly Play is a kit used for Biblical storytelling that includes objects related to specific stories that are either two or three-dimensional figures and environments that participants can interact with while listening to the narrative, and questions for them to consider after hearing it.

Recognising that the tools utilised serve various functions does not result in a hierarchy of value. The person who reads the symbols on a tarot card is not inferior or superior to those who receive messages from spirits and use tarot more abstractly to connect with the querent. There are many maps, many ways of reading them, and while they are not always needed by the guide, one cannot underestimate the power of the seen and touched.

Accessing unknowable information

All of these tools, whether a material object, an intangible dream, or the body itself, come together in that they reveal information that has been determined by the querent as unknowable or unknown to them. What falls into the category of hidden knowledge, however, is not fixed. It is influenced by cultural and personal systems of knowing and one's access to and relationship with different institutions such as political or medical. It is often regarded as part of a larger process of understanding that brings together different elements of socially affirmed and alternative systems of uncovering information.

Elizabeth J. explained to me that constellation healing is one such way in which people seek out unknowable information through alternative means. This practice involves tracing an illness or issue back through the generations of a family to find the original source. It is something she has participated in, facilitated by Lynn, whom she has worked with closely:

It's kind of like a who-done-it. So let's say you want to have a better relationship with your mom; there were some issues around with you and your mom. So what they do is that we work inside what is called a knowing field, so it's very energetic, it's very spiritual, and it's your energetic bodies that get represented. And an energetic body refers to what's more real, what's on the inside. What's

really happening on the inside because what we portray on the outside is usually a cover-up to whatever is going on underneath, what we're feeling with, what we know, or what we're hiding, or what we're dealing with, or all of that, right.

So what, in essence, this does is energetically she would put someone into what we would say – she would pick someone to represent you and that person would stand, and we have the circle, so they stand in the circle, and all she does is ask them how they're feeling. And they could be feeling anything: hot, cold, sad, mad, crying, elated, they could be dizzy, they could be falling down, they could be writhing on the floor, they could be so tired they're falling asleep. Any emotion, thought, activity, that you could think of, the person could experience. And everything means something different. So depending on what it means it gives clues as to, okay, where she needs to go to get to the source.

And then what she does with the other people that were there, she asks them if they want to step in and be a rep. So they say yes, so they just step into the circle. And they have no idea who or what they are. The first person does because they know that they're representing the client, and then the rest of us step in. We don't know who or what we are, and all we have to tell her is how we're feeling or what's going on with us. And from that, based on how – because I could step in, and I could be your great grandmother, and I could step in behind you, and I could have a really adverse reaction to you. So that would tell Lynn something. So what she's looking for, whatever that trouble is, she wants to know where it started so she'll either go down the family line and usually go down female to female, down the mom's line or down the dad's line until you find it. And then you energetically bring in that person.

So you'll have someone in the circle representing that person, so it's almost like you're working on them in the here and now, and they're like a real person, but they're not because they could be dead because it could be ten generations back, but you can still heal it with them because energy knows no time and space. Energy is time inside spaces, and so then when you get it healed there you bring the energy forward and anything could show up. Anything you could think of and then some would show up. And I've never not seen Lynn be able to do, to get them to a place of healing because, you know, there's going to be some resistance and blah, blah, blah, but she's always able to get through, get them there, and do the healing. Like, it's absolutely an amazing process. (I.16).

It is not uncommon to connect healing to past lives and to try to understand what has been brought forward. In this case, healing cannot happen within a western or biomedical system alone, so a form of divination needs to be brought in to go back in time and find

out what has happened that will facilitate a person's current life and help them bring together all these medical options for their own wellbeing.

Not necessarily about the future

In the first episode of the television show *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), one of the main characters, Vanessa Ives (Eva Green), responds to the statement: "You're a fortune-teller" with the comment: "That term is inadequate" (Showtime, May 11, 2014). Jason notes that many people now do not like to be called fortune-tellers, although he does not have a problem with it because "sometimes people want fortune-telling" (I.23). Jessica, on the other hand, hates the word. "I'm not telling your fortune. What I'm doing is, it's like life coaching. So the modern day life coach is using techniques and tools that aren't really all that different from what a reader does, they just use it in a different way" (I.24).

Lesley echoes this sentiment:

My intent is to support you, to offer you options, to use my considerable ability to open those doors for you, not, a) to tell you what to do, which is why I hate the word fortune-telling. And for me, in terms of the development of human consciousness, we are well past, at least in this part of the world, we're past that point of view where, you know, the circumstances of your birth dictate the entire circumstances of your life. We don't live in that kind of society in this part of the world. (I.35)

The general consensus within 21st century Canada is that the term 'fortune-telling' is no longer adequate to encompass what happens in a reading. As easy as it might be to assume that this is a recent and particularly western shift, this is not the case. Zeitlyn calls attention to how Ndembu divination sought to uncover "the hidden cause of an earlier misfortune" (2001, 229), while Johnston, in exploring ancient Greek practices, focuses attention on the tendency "to think of divination as being particularly focused on the second of these, the future, but one of the most important jobs of the *mantis* [diviner], as

well as of the institutional oracles...was to examine the past in order to understand its relationship to the present; by doing so, the *manteis* could then help to ensure that the future would be better” (2008, 118). Divination offers information about all aspects of life and all times that the life has occupied.

The concept of time, especially the future, is not a simple matter of linear progression. When someone speaks of the future, what do they mean? Is it fixed? Is this an entity that can exist outside of the present? For many, as will be addressed in the next chapter, it is a complex process. As Wen argues:

If I ask you, “What will happen when I put my hand into the fire?” and you answer, “You will burn yourself,” are you predicting the future? In one sense, yes, you are. What you’re doing is tapping into your conscious knowledge to access information that will provide you with insight into the most probable outcome of my contemplated action. Tarot operates the same way, albeit for more complex human inquiries. (2015, 2)

Patrice expresses this same idea, clarifying that while some people may be able to see the future, she has never gone there “because I think information coming in about the future just plants ideas in our minds which limit our ability to be really open to opportunities that happen in each moment” (I.43). For her, this approach allows her to exist in the now: “I am convinced it is possible and freeing to live fully in presence, unconcerned with ideas of past and future, allowing divine intelligence to express as it will” (May 9, 2017 email). For my participants the future is shaped by the present, by an awareness of it, but the present cannot be divorced from ideas of what could come. If so, people would not be compelled to seek to be healed, to understand the patterns of their lives, which are forward-focused endeavours. Much of what they do is focused on finding a balance between the various periods of time which are constantly in play in their lives.

Not necessarily from spirit

There is no requirement that information gained from divination be from an external deity. Religion is not inherent to the identity of divination. There is no single religious tradition that provides the answer; those I interviewed identified with Spiritualism, Wicca/Paganism, various Christian denominations, or with none at all. As the classicist G. S. Kirk notes, “not everything that is supernatural is sacred” (1984, 57), and not everything divinatory is supernatural or sacred. Tied into this understanding is the importance of contextualisation because, personally for example, one time I can use tarot and feel that the spread is divinely inspired (and how do I define the divine – I am still working on that) and the next time recognise that it is a subconscious message from me to me.

Mélanie approaches the tarot as a psychological tool: “I was the one that shuffled the cards...So you are putting, you’re putting your cards in your own order. So it’s all coming from you. And dreams, they’re coming, it’s coming from you. It’s not some other being is sending a dream into your head, you know. So I like that. So it’s really all about self-understanding and hearing yourself” (I.40). For Sam, it is part of magic. “There is no reason,” he told me:

there is no rational material reason why the tarot cards should do anything except be purely random. I was, when I was first given my first deck of tarot cards, I was a Marxist atheist. And it convinced me that there was something going on that was not rational and not material. It’s definitely a magical tool. At least that’s how I approach it. It’s an intuitive too; it’s a psychological tool; it’s like a Rorschach. But it’s a magical tool. (I.48)

A husband and wife team who have set up a business in Edmonton to provide a variety of spiritual services to the Edmonton community, Ashterah and Fraezor draw

attention to the ways in which our higher selves or subconscious are not always divorced from the spiritual:

KARI: Where do the messages come from?

ASHTERAH: For the most part, I believe that they come from our higher self. We have our everyday consciousness, but I think we have a consciousness that is connected to, I'm going to use a few different words here and you can pick the one that works for you. It comes from the all that is, it comes from the universal life force, it comes from the great creator.

FRAEZOR: The superconscious.

ASHTERAH: Whatever term you're comfortable with. We're not churchy people, so [laughs]. But there is an all-encompassing intelligence out there. (I.3)

Divination is involved in helping some connect to God, to their families, and to themselves. It also opens up new ways for people to not only access different elements of the world that surrounds them but is frequently not accessible through other means, but also becomes a tool by which practitioners and querents alike construct worldviews within which they find deeper meaning.

Chapter 2

Dwelling Places: Practitioner Worldviews and Their Place in 21st Century Canada

To walk between worlds is an evocative idea. It conjures images of entering into mysterious realms, engaging with unseen forces, and coming to know that which lies just beyond one's grasp. It is, in reality, much more mundane, refusing to be limited to a chosen few. We all weave between worlds on a daily basis. Every time we encounter a perspective that brings us out of our own or we engage with someone else and listen to their lived experiences, in these moments we enter into a shared space between lived realities. For none of us fully shares the same world, but we frequently settle in the places where they overlap. It is in these spaces that this chapter resides, focusing on those created by divination and how they converge with and diverge from each other. To understand why divination continues to survive is only possible when one comprehends where it fits within the realities of those who use it.

There is a temptation, Smoley and Kinney write, to look at different belief systems and try to conclude that "they're really all saying the same thing. Although there are strong similarities among traditions, it's dangerous to try to reduce them all to a lowest common denominator. At the very least one may end up obscuring differences; at worst, one may even demonize another vision of the world" ([1999] 2006, 162). As emphasised in the quest for definitions, there is no single construct of the world that can be equally applied to practitioners. However, it is necessary to begin to identify commonalities: that reality is multi-layered; the relationship between humans and other beings dwelling within these realms; and the role of time, particularly nostalgia, change,

fate, and soul contracts. When these worldviews are laid out it becomes possible to begin to recognise where divination fits. But first, a word of familiar caution.

Throughout my interviews there was a common refrain when the discussion turned to how participants understand the structures of the universe and beyond. Donna was quick to advise anyone looking to her as an absolute authority: “There’s no way for us to prove this. It’s just a theory; these are just theories. That’s all we can say is, like, you get the vibe or spirits told you. Well, you’ve got priests that say God spoke to them too, so, I mean, these are theories, right. So to me, this is how it feels” (I.12). Elizabeth J. finds herself at a similar point, reflecting: “In all honesty, do we know for sure? Don’t have a frickin’ clue. Everything that I could tell you could be so far off, but everything that I’ve been telling you could be right on. We don’t know, and I don’t think we’re supposed to know or be in a position to know” (I.16). Or, as Lynn succinctly put it: “[I’m] pretty sure we don’t know anything.” (I.38).

Many Layers

“My life has not followed the hero’s story,” writes Pearl. “Instead, my story weaves.” (2008, 21). The world within which divination and diviners reside is multi-layered, which accommodates multiple forms of being and constructs of time. It is a space where tangible and intangible forces constantly interplay and where neat divisions ultimately collapse in upon themselves. There is also a distinct lack of demarcation. While some point to a specific moment which shifted their perception of the world, for many more it is a gradual process or a way of being that they have always known. When

approaching this topic it is, therefore, beneficial to consider interpretational drift or “the slow shift in someone’s manner of interpreting events, making sense of experiences, and responding to the world” (Luhmann 1989, 12). In his book *The Paranormal and the Politics of Truth* Northcote observes how this theory is played out among those he has studied: “So gradual has this shift been for many of the people in my own study, in fact, that very often they have been unable to pinpoint the precise moment or pivotal event that led to their interest in the paranormal” (2007, 105). While there are moments of profound revelation that mark some lives, a growing awareness that emerges from lived experiences is far more prevalent.

When beginning to explore the foundations of these worldviews, it is essential to take into consideration the general consensus among many of my participants that living humans reside on one level of a multi-layered reality. K.T. drew the following diagram to illustrate her perspective, explaining as she drew the different levels how they relate to each other and to us (see Appendix C for her full description):

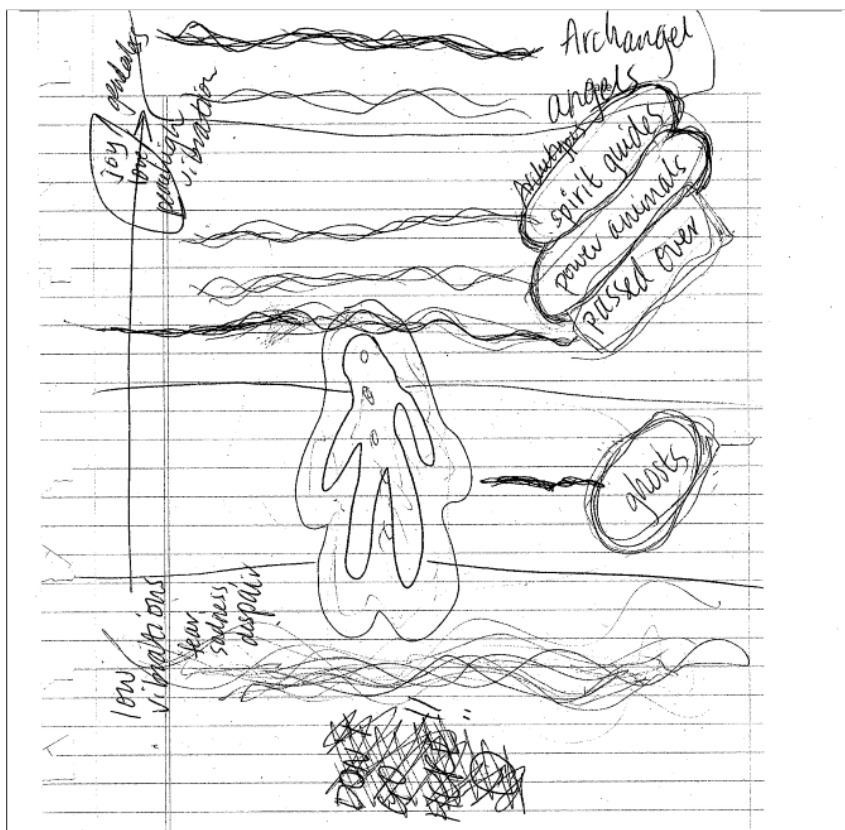


Figure 5: Drawing by K.T. of Multi-Layered Reality

So, here's us on this plane, on our 3D world, let's put it like this [drawing the figure in the centre of the page]. So this is where we exist, and we have to vibrate on this dimension where we exist, and you know from physics that everything is vibration, right, we know that already. So we exist in this world and our bodies are here. And just around us, as you probably know, we have our energy field, our personal energy field, and that's where, that includes our different chakras, right, in our bodies which are related to different emotions and things we do. So we have that, and so we exist and go about our daily lives, our emotions and things are kind of in here and, like I said, if we're angry or if we injure ourselves we get energy stuck in different places in our body, too, so we can see that.

Now, if I turn on my little spider senses and I'm looking at you, I will start seeing things that include – now your passed-over folks are on one of the lower vibrations, and I think that's because they used to be people, right, and those aren't scary as soon as you realise that you talk to people every day, and they're just people that used to be people, right, so people are people. [...] So, folks who have passed are kind of here... So let's say their vibration's there, so they're slightly higher so, because they're transitioned, right; they don't have a body so,

and anything that brings you into the corporal, the body, is going to be lower, right, because it has to exist here on this vibration. But as soon as you don't have a body, you go up a little higher. So those folk are right there, let's say. And I would also say your power animals¹² are kind of about here because animals have a – I don't want to say they have a slightly lower vibration, but they're a little more connected with us in the corporeal somehow. Then, so we'll just say power animals down here. [...] So your spirit guides, who some people think were people who used to live on the earth but transitioned and took on this role, they're a little higher, they're up here. And for me sometimes I think they were, but sometimes I don't think they were – so I'll call these your spirit guides. But they are your main folks, these are with you all the time. Their job is to tell you what you're doing here, to point out things if you can quiet your mind down enough to perceive that, and I think that's where most of the divination comes from, right. My perspective, they're the ones who are having cards show up a certain way, right, because they're pointing in different directions, they want to show you the way. (I.28)

As an instructor of tarot and yoga, as well as a card reader, Jason is used to explaining his perception of reality and, like K.T., was quick to put pen to paper to

¹² K.T. explains power animals:

you're born with your main power animal, and that power animal stays with you for your whole life. He's kind of like a – he or she is kind of like a representation of you and you are of him or her. And so you'll have characteristics of that power animal, and if you utilise those, and even if you study the real animal, that's what I find fascinating too, because animals are archetypes like humans [...]

So if you have a power animal that's jaguar, it's not that jaguar in the zoo, whatever its name is, Sparky, it is all jaguars and the things that all jaguars do, right? They all have certain characteristics; they've evolved in a certain way. So that's what power animals are; they're the energy of this specific animal, and you will get – and I'm kind of condensing a million things into, you know, this short amount of time we have. So, they will have, like, what's one I know better than the others? Well no, let's say one of jaguar's would be like stealth, right, and probably blending in, camouflage. You might have an instance in your life going on right now, like I had one where we were selling this business; we were very powerless in this situation. It was terrible; we were just trying to get out. So something like the jaguar could come in and you'd be like, oh, I'm seeing jaguars everywhere, that's weird. They're showing themselves to me. But if you started studying jaguar you'd see, like, okay, of value to me right now would be being stealthy and camouflaging myself so I can make the best of the situation.

So, you'll have a main one that's with you always that's kind of, like I said, embodies your personality, but then you'll have other ones that come and go as you may need them for help. And the same with spirit guides. They are archetypes. (I.28)

illustrate it. He, too, situates humans as part of a much more complex and multi-level system:

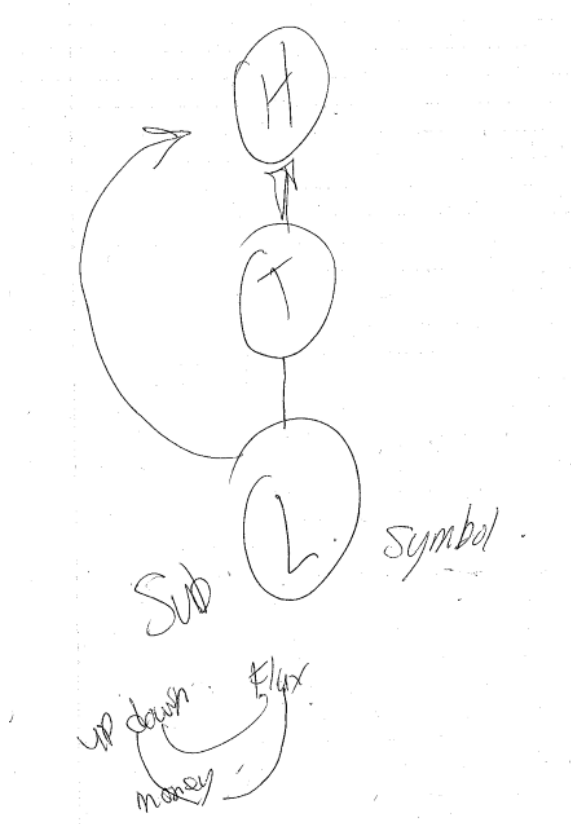


Figure 6: Drawing by Jason of Multi-Layered Reality

JASON: So I think there's a three-tiered system that brings us information, so I do believe it's coming from our soul, our higher self, if you want to say that. Guardian angel. There's different ideas of what it is; I choose to think it's like our higher self, and so we have what we call the lower self, or the subconscious, and then sort of our talking self. So our talking self cannot talk directly to our higher self because our higher self speaks through symbols. So in order to do that, those symbols have to go through the subconscious, so it kind of makes like – is it okay if I draw something?

KARI: Oh, absolutely!

JASON: Yeah. Okay. So, lower self, I'm not an artist by the way, just throwing it out there. Talking self and higher self. So talking self and then lower self or subconscious, okay. So, like I was saying, these two people, or these two circles cannot talk to each other, alright. And so you have to use the subconscious, where

all the symbols that we use are created, created that language in order to talk to the higher self.

KARI: So the subconscious is your lower self –

JASON: Yep.

KARI: Using the symbols to access –

JASON: Right.

KARI: Right. (I.22)

In her research, Lynn has come across and adopted the idea of twelve different levels or dimensions she believes everyone can develop the ability to move through. Many reside in the third which is the physical, concrete, “traditional” view of reality. The fourth dimension is where one begins to move beyond these limiting situations. Lynn has experienced nine or ten different levels that have motivated her to rethink her entire worldview and have taken her beyond the boundaries of the easily explainable and the limitations of language. In struggling to articulate what she has experienced, she finally concluded: “I am” (I.38).

Elizabeth’s experiences as a practitioner cannot be divorced from her spiritual identity, particularly her Catholic upbringing. For her it is not the layers that are essential, but a sense of unity that emerges from the recognition that the divine or god is everything. “It’s that kind of energy field where everything’s connected, where everyone’s connected; we’re all connected” (I.14). She later expands on this idea explaining that “everyone connects; everyone tunes in whether you want to or not. It’s like being in the ocean and not believing in the ocean. You’re in the ocean; you’re part of the ocean” (I.14). This approach reflects Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s idea of “Participation” which the philosopher and

ecologist David Abram draws upon in his own articulation of the complexities of the world. He explains that:

to characterize the animistic logic of indigenous, oral peoples – for whom ostensibly “inanimate” objects like stones or mountains are often thought to be alive, for whom certain names, spoken aloud, may be felt to influence at a distance the things or beings that they name, for whom particular plants, particular animals, particular places and persons and powers may all be felt to *participate* in one another’s existence, influencing each other and being influenced in turn. (1997, 57)

The layers that many see making up the world do not disconnect them from different realities but encourage participants to engage with them. Divination is one such tool that allows for practitioners to transcend one level or to engage with and recognise the unity of the world that surrounds them.

Eva Castellazzo, a participant in Gabrielle Ricciardi’s ethnographic study into Pagan altars, highlights this sense of unity: “Everything is an altar, your life is an altar.” (2006, 548). As often repeated throughout my research as well, the boundaries created are not as absolute as one might think or hope. “All things are full of gods,” writes Wood in his study of oracles in literature and history, “even if they are often figurative, and those gods talk all the time” (2003, 15).

When Patrice and I met, this soft-spoken but passionate woman brought with her a page outlining Jeddah Mali’s Model of Existence, the teachings that are transforming her own understanding of herself and the world. This approach is summarised in seven points:

1. The fabric of existence is energy.
2. The present moment is truly the only time we have.
3. The format of existence is beingness.
4. We experience being with consciousness (which is different from thinking).
5. The nature of existence is expansive, light-filled, and harmonious.

6. Thought is an opportunity to be in harmony with our nature.
7. Sensation is a feedback mechanism. (I.43; clarifications provided in May 9, 2017 email)

Energy is at the core of her worldview, and the speed of its vibrations construct different levels of reality. Reflecting back on this model of existence, Patrice explains matter appears solid because it vibrates at slower frequencies. “Beyond our physical energy bodies, we humans also experience emotional, mental, heart and purely spiritual bodies; each with a faster vibration than the previous (I.43; May 9, 2017 email). It is the capacity for connection amongst and within these vibrational spaces that makes way for divination which is able to easily situate itself inside a worldview where boundaries, whether between realms or times, are not absolute but always in a process of deconstruction and transformation.

While only a couple of my participants are part of the Spiritualist religion, their constructs of time and overall understanding of life and death share many commonalities with practitioners outside of this belief system. In *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America*, McGarry explains that “[w]hereas linear, secular history demands the transcendence of the past, Spiritualist practice collapsed time and refused to accept the past as over [...] Spiritualism called into question the very categories of the material and immaterial, knowledge and belief, the living and the dead” (2008, 6, 8). By not accepting time as progressive, the future and past are no longer set apart but are, instead, accessible, if one only knows how. Consequently, a significant part of my participants’ work is to raise awareness that there is more than one way to understand the world. No one has to live in one realm, in one time, only.

We Are Not Alone!?

There is no inherent spiritual component for the practice of divination, but it is often present as part of larger religious practices and also through the involvement of various spiritual entities. C.F. provides a succinct definition of spirits as “conscious life that’s not physically manifested” (I.5), and within this construct are multiple different types worth paying attention to, in particular guides, guardians, ghosts, and angels. These are entities that may participate within the divinatory process in various ways.

Spirit guides are those who are directly involved in people’s lives, guiding them through day-to-day events or a specific crisis.

ERIN: Our guides are here to guide us throughout life. So we’re all born with one main guide, and he or she will stay with us throughout our entire life. And they do just that, they guide us, they help us out. When we’re feeling really down, they’ll be there to kind of, you know, pick us back up again. So we’ve got one main guide that sticks with us from the time we come in to the time we leave. And then we have a bunch of little guides who come in as we need them. So, a joy guide might come in when you’re really depressed, when you’re going through some stuff and you just need some happiness in your life. Your joy guide will come in and they’ll just make your emotions feel a bit lighter. A teacher guide will come in if there’s a certain task that you’re meant to learn at that time, things like that. And so, I work with my guides a lot through meditation, I communicate with them through prayer, stuff like that. And they just really, they help me out by helping me with my messages, giving me my messages. And also just keeping me on guard, okay. Like, if I meet an individual, their energy’s a little off my guides will stop and be like, okay, you don’t need to go near that person. They’re going to affect, you know, the way you feel. (I.18)

Not surprising, given that Donna and Erin work together and Donna is Erin’s mother-in-law, their perspective on spirit guides are similar. In particular, they emphasised that we all have guides; it is up to us to choose to listen to them or not (Donna I.12). Erin explained this concept further by noting that while we all have them, they are not all the

same. Leah also agrees that spirit guides are beings who are with us from birth to death, as well as others who guide and support us in specific tasks we are undertaking. “So,” she told me, “you’ll have a guide that’s going to help you write this paper” (I.34), which is an odd thing to think about as I sit here writing, resisting the urge to look over my shoulder. Who is there?

K.T. drew attention to the ways in which each person experiences spirits in different ways:

It’s like knowing that a radio station is 103.9 or whatever, right. That’s all that that is. The name really doesn’t matter. Because I’ve had readings from different psychics myself who identify my guides. Some see them as humans, some can see them as animals, whatever. But I can tell from the things they tell me about the personality aspects that they ascribe to them, or whatever, that it’s the same, same thing, just in their flavour. (I.28)

Names do not adequately express what is experienced with these beings. Kelliena, for example, uses the term guardians for the spirit guides that she works with. They are with us all from birth and they help us “remember who we are and our connection to spirit”, and they can include angels (I.32), but angels are also situated in their own category. They are, Erin explained, distinguished from other spirits in that angels have never been human while spirits were, at one point. Angels are “pure energy...they’ve never had a life here. So it’s harder for them to relate to all our wacky human emotions” (I.18). Although both can serve as guides or guardians, the information they provide and the contexts from which this knowledge emerges are not always the same. For Irene, recognising these different spirits is important because she has found that over the years the messages from angels are not as accurate and, therefore, she does not look to them in the same way she does when communications from other spirits (I.21). Elizabeth J. turns to angels,

particularly archangels, because they serve as a bridge between the vibrations of god that are at a much higher level than humans (I.16).

Moving into the lower vibrations brings individuals into contact with ghosts and other entities that lie at the forefront of cultural stereotypes and expectations. While they may not be regarded as negative or evil, they are generally understood as less helpful and to be avoided unless one is properly prepared. Shannon explains that they are wayward beings:

So people who were into addictions, you know, negative things, bad things. You know, what we consider bad things like murderers, things like that. Then there are usually negative entities that are attached to them as well, right, which is why a lot of times you can see it in, you know, you can see by looking in peoples' eyes or you can feel it in, you know, in who they are when they are involved in things that aren't positive, right. (I.49)

She, like others in this field of work including Leah, Ashterah, and Fraezor, undertakes cleansings of houses and spaces; consequently, she has broader experiences with these entities than others who do not spend time working with or considering them.

Beyond the broad category of ghosts is that of poltergeists; Shannon identifies them as mischievous but relatively harmless, while demonic or vengeful spirits are the ones who can cause harm by becoming attached to people, buildings, or land (I.49). K.T. regards them as beings that are “essentially trapped because most of them are afraid of judgement on the other side. So it's almost like they're trapped. See, [pointing to the diagram she's drawn] because we keep going up the evolutionary scale, right, in terms of vibrations, so it's like they get stuck here” (I.28). One of the other reasons they become imprisoned, Shannon clarified, is that sudden deaths cause confusion and they are unable to make the transition. However, most of the beings that she and others work with are not

these entities. While spirits have passed on and are communicating from another plane, ghosts have never gone through the initial transition and have remained here after their death; therefore, they do not have access to the same information as those who have passed on. Being in this state, K.T. explains, becomes a living hell where they have cut themselves off from love, from universal, unconditional love (I.28).

Moving Through Time

The linear progression of life to death is repeatedly challenged by the worldviews of many of those who participate in divinatory practices. Past lives or concepts of reincarnation were a common topic in our conversations. The cyclical element to our existence, particularly that which is articulated through the understanding of living more than one life and connecting to the idea that we pass on information to ourselves from past lives, is one that brings some people into divination sessions. In my fieldnotes, after a few of these interviews, I was left to ponder: “Divination becomes a way of communicating with our past selves? Messages we give to ourselves? [...] Do we decide these messages beforehand?” (June 16, 2015). Fate becomes intertwined within this idea but is not a simple concept of a set future.

The most common explanation of this process is articulated through the idea of a soul contract. Elizabeth J. discussed with me the worldview she has been constructing during her time working with Lynn:

We also believe in the theory of past lives; this is not our only time here. So if something happened in a past life, and it wasn’t resolved before you died, you carry it with you in your soul to the next life to be resolved. That is partly the evolution of your soul; it’s what’s meant to happen; it’s what’s supposed to

happen; it's not a fluke or nothing. So, for example...I have a girl, a friend that I know, and her and I have a really interesting relationship. We piss each other off more than not, and annoy each other and frustrate each other, and we don't even know we're doing it. But yet, at the same time, we're actually supporting each other and seeing some things in ourselves. So it's really interesting.

Well, there's this thing called the soul contract, a sacred soul contract...So this whole business, this whole theory around the fact that we have what we call soul families or soul groups and when we come down to do a lifetime, we make what we call sacred contracts with other people that they're going to help us and we're going to help them. So when we come down we have specific things that we come down to work on, so specific things that we want to work through on a soul level to move us forward. So that could be forgiveness, that could be anger, that could be pain, that could be abuse, could be any things, any human nature things that go along with that. So then in order to help us get through that, we make these soul contracts, sacred soul contracts. [...] for example here, you and I are sitting here talking. Well, who's to know you or I didn't make a sacred soul contract before we came down, saying when you got to this point in your studies and you needed information then I would come along to help, to support you in your piece, and hey, I get to talk and share; that always helps me. And then that helps the bigger consciousness, the overall consciousness as a whole in that perspective because the work that you're doing in not really exposing, but bringing to light, or getting a different viewpoint or information out there so people are more willing to investigate and look at some of these things, is huge. (I.16)

Richard provided a similar explanation, noting that our spirit guides are aware of the soul contract because this knowledge allows them to better guide us and to prepare us for future experiences:



Figure 7: Life path drawing by Richard

So we're going down – our path is supposed to be like this [the top, straight line] – our guide will get us back on, even if they have to make us go like that to get back on, right. And we'll go through a whole bunch of stuff, and we'll say, why the hell did that happen? You went off your path. But they will put you on it and try and keep you. They won't make you

because you'll change your mind. So let's say, you were coming, this is divorce, and then you decide, you don't really like this and you start going away from it,

but they'll say, well, for your own good you should, because you want to do it, otherwise you're going to come back the next time and do this. So your guide does that for you. They won't make you, and they'll never do it for you; they'll guide you, try and say, "stay on track, Kari." Right. Because you'll accomplish what you came to do. So we have all these things that we came to accomplish. And they're usually all the hard things in our life. And you'll wonder at the time, why did this happen to me? I've done it. I've said, god, I'm a good person, why did this happen? But it has nothing to do with that, and people you hear blaming god, why did you take my child, whatever? You also put that in. Everything that happens in your life. So a child dies young. It's the most devastating thing to a woman or parent I believe. So there's lessons going on all along here. The lady, the mom, wants to experience this for the compassion and everything else. The baby also agreed to take part in this and come here for three years, experience it, right. We'll all get back together on the other side. (I.47)

The soul contract is not, however, just about the tragedies of our life. Rather, it is full of the mundane and the profound, and the moments where they converge. Katrina related one memorable yet simple moment in her own life:

So I was out in British Columbia a couple of years ago, in White Rock. And I went to this little place – I love ice cream, I love ice cream. And I went to this little place, and it had 50s music playing, and he looked like he was dressed from the 50s, and it was white and the hat and the jacket, and he was very, very happy. And they made the ice cream there, and I had birthday cake ice cream for the first time in my life. And I went outside, and I had a lick of it, and I looked up and I said, "this is on my list. Thank you." It was a moment of pure joy. And we make a list of what we want to experience. So I could tell you the colour of the sprinkles, the ice cream cone was made there fresh. It was a waffle cone, hand made; it was incredible. And the sprinkles were orange and yellow and blue and red, ah, and it was so creamy, it was unlike any – I've never had ice cream like that. The sun was shining, the birds were flying, it was incredible. It was a piece of heaven. (I.30)

Recognising that they have accomplished a pre-ordained goal, that they have successfully found the path on their own map does not signify they have given up free will nor that their lives are set in stone. It rather indicates that their experiences and their connections with the world are complex and that part of their journey is coming to terms with why each person is here and where they are going.

The purpose of life, of reincarnation, is often associated with learning, which allows for the growth and betterment of the individual and, ideally, the world itself. Richard expands upon this idea, recognising that when one breaks down the barriers between different realms and life and death, it results in the flow of knowledge moving beyond this lived reality. Individuals bring their experiences back to share with the spirit world:

where we came from; that's our true home. We will go back there and be in our spirit [...] When we live in the spirit world, we've all had many lives because you want to have many experiences, so you can't have them all in one life, and so there is a belief we have [...] We decide we want to come back to earth; we say, "okay, you know, I'm going back this time, and I want to learn this." (I.45)

Patrice terms it as "the personalised energy [soul] choosing situations for itself so that it can grow and evolve" (I.43; clarification provided in May 9, 2017 email). This decision precipitates the creation of a soul contract, a life plan for what one desires to learn and who will help them along the way. Ashterah explained to me: "We've been together in numerous lifetimes, he [Fraezor] and I. And I think that's true for most people, that they're partners or different family combinations, you know. He's probably been my mother in previous lifetimes, or whatnot" (I.3). In this worldview, no one is alone, and everyone is always learning.

In astrology, Chris has found the opportunity to engage with these larger questions about life and purpose:

And, of course, along with it, certain points of philosophy start to develop because you wonder why do some people have such, let's call it, fortunate experiences in life and others are born with bodies that are hard to live in. Why do some people live to be 75 and a little girl of five years of age loses her life in a traffic accident? Where's the justice? So, when you study something like this about life itself you begin to...question reasons, purposes, why, what is it all about? Do we just get up in the morning, have our breakfast, go off to work, go home, have dinner, relax for

a few moments, and do whatever people do in the evening, go to bed and do it all over again? Is that what it's all about? Maybe to some people that's enough. But when you undertake a study as deep and profound as this, you have to ask questions, and those ideas are not satisfactory, that it's just a repetitive day after day after day after day; the same old, same old, same old. Surely we can evolve. Surely we can be more tomorrow than we are today. How do we do that? How do we do that? I don't know; I just think that this is a profound body of knowledge that gives us many of the answers to an enormous number of questions that otherwise might be more difficult to answer. (I.6)

Divination and the worldviews that accommodate it ask people to consider their lives. If one is to engage with questions of their future and their past or pasts, one is required to think more broadly about the purpose of this journey and the experiences they have within it.

The purpose of the soul contract is not so clearly defined and is open to debate and disagreement among practitioners. Donna reflected on this point of contention:

I'll hear people say in my trade, the common refrain is, well, you pick the time to come, and you pick the time you're leaving, and you chose. And I don't personally feel we chose, I feel like we were assigned, if anything. We were assigned. I feel like, well, you mucked up the last life so much, you've got to redo that one. Here you're going to go over here this time. You know, you were an abuser, now let's see you be a victim. That makes more sense to me. Or when somebody says you're where you need to be. You know, the right time kind of thing. Yeah, tell that to a kid in a Mumbai garbage dump they're where they need to be, you know. That doesn't make sense to me. What that does serve, perhaps, they're there to help me to have gratitude for what I have. Perhaps they're there to serve as an example to what poverty looks like. Or, you know, there could be other reasons which make more sense to me. Like, if you're going to go with reasons and cause and effect and things like that. Those kind of things, like saying, "I chose to be here." I don't know, I can't see that. I was assigned here. That I can see. I had a reason to be here. Somebody kind of had – maybe I even had an input in it. You know. Maybe wherever we go after we die, perhaps our energies get together and decide, ah, I'm going to come back.

Reincarnation is quite believed a lot, and I have always felt that myself. Always have felt, I believe in reincarnation. I used to say to my mom, it kind of freaked her out. I said, "I've always had thought. I've always been." And she looked at me, and she said, "what?" I said, "no, I've always been." I used to have dreams of lives before. So I feel I've lived a long, long time. And I'm not afraid of dying or

anything like that, or after death. Because I know, I do believe that the energy continues, I'm just not sure in what form. That's the thing. And I mean. None of us knows until we die. I mean, I could be dying going, oh well, son of a bitch, I should have been a Jew. You know. There it is, right now, the answers are all there right there in front of me. Because I don't think you know until you die, right? Which is kind of like not getting to find out the story until you shut the book. It's kind of strange. Why can't I see the ending before I shut the book, you know? [laughs] [...]

Where people say, "you're here to learn a lesson," my argument is why? Why do we have to learn lessons? We're in spirit form, what the hell do we need lessons for? If we're already in love and light, why do we have to? You know, is it just because we're bored? Do we have to come back down for their amusement? Let's mix it up; let's have a game show and we can all watch it? You know, hey, you can be this character, you be that character, you be that character. And we'll sit up there and eat popcorn and watch the show all play out. I don't know. Some of these questions, they're the bigger questions for me. And I make myself nuts if I start thinking about them. (I.12)

Lesley also discussed how she has found that her perspective diverges from those she commonly encounters in her field: "We're not here to learn anything; we're here to experience what we already know to be true." She does not think that the soul requires evolution:

I think it's the human that requires evolution. I think it's rather amusing that we think that being human is somehow going to evolve the soul. Maybe it's a two-way street, I don't know, but that would be the other reason why I didn't completely sign on to evolutionary astrology. I didn't necessarily, that didn't resonate for me. I know there's a process of evolution going on and, you know, maybe we don't need to quantify what it is. (I.35)

This lesson is one that many people encounter within divinatory fields: sometimes they are not meant to understand everything. Part of seeking out knowledge is recognising that there may be limitations, at least within this lifetime.

Are these limitations understood as fate or fated? Is this life fixed? Does an adherence to soul contracts strip away agency during this immediate lifetime? While hidden knowledge is often mistakenly regarded as being fixed, particularly in guru-

centred systems, this approach does a great disservice to the individuals who seek it out. In 1981, Cary J. Nederman, a political science scholar, and James Wray Goulding, a sociologist, argued that fate was of central importance to astrology because it told the consumers to accept things as they are because it is one's destiny. However, without the inclusion of the voices of practitioners or querents they are, in my opinion, unsuccessful in their attempts to unravel the complex relationship between astrology and fate. Their position as outsiders leaves them with no solution to what they see as a blatantly self-contradictory message in astrology: "A person is the victim of fateful chance at the same time as he is responsible for the difficulties in his environment" (327). The ethnographic methodology upon which this thesis is built, one which de-homogenises divinatory groups and gives space for individual, insider understandings, allows for a more complicated approach that acknowledges that not everyone adheres to the idea of fateful chance or of being a victim of it (to be addressed more fully in chapter six). Furthermore, being responsible for the challenges that one faces does not mean one must passively accept them. Soul contracts are maps; those who recognise them are under no obligation to follow them. Astrology gives them information, but they are under no guarantee nor threat that it is fixed.

Contemporary practitioners are, in Bruce's opinion, leaving the gurus behind and embracing their own wisdom-based approach (I.4). Susan M. Drury, whose studies of plant lore encompasses the practices of English love divination, points out that:

It does seem to me that these divinations were not merely practised on the chance that a lover would suddenly appear from somewhere. Communities were small and closely knit, and both sexes would know of the times when these divinations were practiced. It seems feasible to suggest, therefore, that the outcome could be

influenced by one partner or the other, perhaps in order that a relationship only acknowledged between the couple could now be revealed to the community at large through the medium of the ‘supernatural’ event. The couple could now claim that fate or chance had brought them together. (1986, 213)

There is much validity in her argument, particularly in acknowledging how the concept of fate can be utilised and manipulated by conscious choice to allow for a desired outcome.

These individuals are not victims of fate, like Nederman and Goulding argue, but are instead agents of it, harnessing its power and undermining its external authority.

Keeping with the topic of astrology and fate, which often come up together and is one of the reasons why Chris is concerned about continuing to associate divination with this particular method, it is worth looking at the concept of humanistic astrology that Chris first brought to my attention in our interview. Cornelius defines it as an attempt to “disengage the classical model from fatalism by saying that the birth chart shows *potential*, rather than actuality” (1998, 8). This intentional shift reframes fate not as a set entity but a participatory process.

When I asked Donna whether the information she receives about the future is set, she did not think so. Perhaps, she mused, some things are, but most can be shifted and anything that she receives as a message is intended to serve as a warning. Whether it is a gut feeling or a tarot spread, much of it is about knowledge to be used for personal empowerment. “Otherwise,” she concluded, “I don’t think we’re probably given the information” (I.13). What would be the point of receiving information that binds you? Elizabeth also discussed the concept of fixed and mutable futures and how they intertwine:

Okay, for example. So we all have a life purpose, we all have a path, right? The fine-tuned details, I think, are interchangeable, and you can make changes, but the

ultimate plan, the ultimate, like where you're headed, I don't believe you do make changes to. So for example, somebody is naturally gifted as a musician. That's just their natural talent, that's their real connection, it just comes to them with ease; it's kind of their purpose. They can make choices about what school they're going to go to for music, they can make the choice of what kind of music they're going to use, they can make choices, but naturally that's just part of their path. And if somebody's purpose is, for example, to not even stay here in Alberta and I see them somewhere else, the relationship is holding them here, for example, I see them meant to be somewhere else...it's kind of hard to explain. Some people are good alone; some people aren't going to be, they're going to have loved ones around them. Not everyone's meant to have somebody with them at their side the whole time. So people are very much the opposite; they're always meant to be with somebody. Who that person is can be interchangeable, they're just meant to be loved in this life...

KARI: So the idea being that there are certain paths that we're on and some of your work is then to help people get on the right path and stay on it.

ELIZABETH: I don't feel I have any role in anyone's path.

KARI: Okay.

ELIZABETH: I strongly believe in the path of least resistance. So I believe when people are hitting roadblock after roadblock, and I'm not talking about little challenges because there is no self growth without challenges, right, but if you're hitting dead ends, dead ends in any aspect of your life, whether it's relationships, whether it's work, if you're constantly hitting your head against the wall, that to me speaks very loud and clear, that's the universe saying no, no, you'd better get going this way. Like, you're kind of, you're going the wrong way; this isn't the right place for you. [...] I think we're all guided; when people connect with me I believe like we're connecting for a number of reasons; I don't feel I have any major role in anyone's life like in meeting them. There might be that connection there but I certainly don't see myself as part of that. I kind of think that people are on their journey, people are on their path and day to day, everybody, we encounter different people; sometimes encounters are more meaningful than others but, ultimately, you're moving, we're all moving, we're all headed on our own little journeys. I don't think anyone really has that power to make changes in other people's lives, I don't think that at all, in any way, like in any kind of field. I think messages that come through me to people, those are messages that people are seeing in other aspects of their lives, they're just not tuning in. They might hear it when I tell them, they might not. I just might be one of the other, it might just be the other sign they choose to ignore, but ultimately I think that you only can ignore the signs for so long. [...] For example, if a job isn't right for you, if a relationship isn't right for you, a friendship isn't right for you, I think, I think we

get signs and they get louder and louder and more and more clear, right, so I see myself more as just another sign. (I.14)

Knowing the right path, identifying an individual's place and journey on their personal map, makes life easier because it allows them to know the direction that is best for their own development. Elizabeth terms it, "the path of least resistance" in which "everything is kind of destined for us and things have a natural time" (I.14), but there is no obligation to follow it.

Elizabeth J. situates this idea in her own life with the approach that things come to her when she is ready. When she reflects back on her life she can see how each event has its place and has moved her forward. "So, would I have been willing to do the workshop had I not had the year and a half counselling before? Probably not" (I.16). There is a practicality to the understanding of fate and future. Marlene commented that it "is how God works, isn't it? No invisible hand comes out of the sky handing, you know, here's the number you need to call, right. It's always going to be another person, so if we just take care of our own business and be happy, it's amazing how life changes" (I.39). Fate does not limit options or dictate actions but offers new opportunities.

In letting go of the fixed, whether it belongs to the past or the present, those I interviewed have found they are able to be open to the patterns of the universe and the moments of chance that bring them together with each other and with the other entities and realms that coexist around them. Stephen Karcher, a writer and lecturer on divination, summarises how these interpretations have come to hold different meanings in his article "Divination, Synchronicity, and Fate":

We think of chance as "meaningless co-incidence" or "random activity."
Traditional cultures saw it as the work of the gods and spirits. Jung saw it as the

engine of what he calls *synchronicity* or acausal connection¹³, a form of experience in which time and space are relative [...] As synchronicity, chance opens a space in the imagination, a symbolic field where time and space are fluid and anything goes. What happens there puts you in touch with the Other. (1998, 221)

It also puts you in touch with yourself. The concept of synchronicity, chance, or coincidence lies at the heart of much of the work conducted by diviners and defines the world. In our first interview, Richard emphasised that there are no coincidences (I.46). Michelle told me about one of her more recent experiences that brings up the ways in which synchronicity plays out in life:

Funny, just before you contacted me for an interview, our family SUV, which I drive, was broken into. I had left my crystals in the vehicle overnight, because it was evening, I had worked all day, and was just too tired to carry them along with my groceries into the house. During the night, thieves broke in to my vehicle; they stole all my crystals, my [tarot] deck, which was one of the first my publisher had sent to me. They stole my crystal charms, that I had created and designed for clients. Because I had a lot of semi-precious crystals, and beads, I was very organised, they were all in trays ... to use for meditation and energy work. Basically, the product [the querent] gets when they leave me, after a session. [...] All gone.

What the thieves didn't do, which I thought was interesting, was to take my crystal books for healing and meditation - they left them on my front seat. And listen to this, I would usually set up a table to display my crystal charms, which I covered with a show skirt (it was a nice gold colour with black piping) meant to look antique for my display. They had folded the skirt neatly, and left it sitting in my vehicle. And I can't think what else they did – oh wait, I'm also an artist. They stole all my paintbrushes. Because I paint using pans (that's how I learned to paint with watercolour) [...] They took all my brushes, but left all the paints. My paints were more expensive than my brushes, but I guess because they looked messy, the thieves probably thought they were junk. That's how I knew they weren't artists.

I was so angry, and I thought, arrgh! Not like I would ever curse anyone (I don't believe in that) I was just so upset at that point it was like...I felt like a piece had just been taken from me; it was the weirdest feeling. I have a small replica statue

¹³ For an overview of Jung's complex and expansive writings about synchronicity, see Roderick Main's introduction to *Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal*.

from Medjugorje in Croatia of the Virgin Mary, given to me from my mother in law, which sits on one of my window ledges, in my house, with a few special stones around her [...] I found myself standing there, in front of her, sort of meditating and saying a little prayer, thinking Jesus, why did this happen to me? And just like it – something came to me. I could see the image of someone talking, laughing, acting up and doing whatever. I felt a man's energy. And then I saw a child, a young boy probably eight or nine, and he didn't seem to be in good health. I thought of all my stones, that their energy which I intended to help people heal were with them, so they'll help. This feeling replaced my loss. I thought, it's fine, it all makes sense now. (I.41; clarifications provided by email on May 18, 2017)

In this circumstance, through prayer and meditation and the accompanying vision, she came to understand the meaning behind events that seem meaningless. Divination offers a similar solution, providing answers and helping practitioners and querents determine the unseen convergences in their lives and the reasons for actions that extend beyond their own lives and connect them to others.

Synchronicity encompasses an individual's connections with others. When I asked Donna if there were patterns in the questions querents wanted addressed in a reading, she responded that:

It's funny that you ask about patterns because it seems like I get crops of people that come in with similar concerns for a period of time, and then the concern will change for the next group, and the next group. So it's kind of funny because I'll get a run of – I do mediumship so I get a lot of people come that have lost somebody. And for, I might get three or four clients in a row that have all lost a mother. And it kind of plays with you a little bit because you're going, really, a mother, again? I have another mother? All right. So, you know, it will be one after another. And then you'll get a run where it might be, it's all grandfathers, or it's grandmothers. It's kind of strange that that seems to be how that happens for me. (I.13)

Leah has found that the issues people come to her about, "it's often themes of what's going on in my life at the time" (I.35). It is not just moments within their life stories that

bring them to where they are now, it also brings them together with others when they are ready. Katrina's philosophy in her work is that "the people that come to me, if the pieces fall into place, they're supposed to be [seeing her]" (I.31).

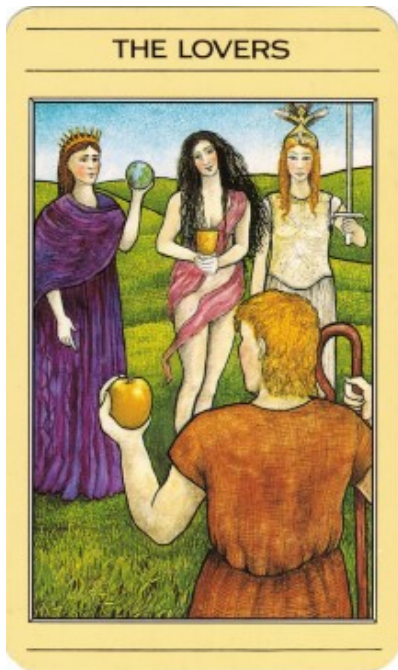


Figure 8: *The Lover's, Mythic Tarot*

It was not until writing this thesis that I, in going back through my own tarot journal, remembered examples of these connections in my own life and the ways they play out in subtle and not-so-subtle manners. I frequently pick a tarot card every morning and reflect upon and write about it in the evening. I was amused to discover that on the day when I learned of a dear friend's engagement I had selected The Lover's card – even with

no understanding of tarot the connection would likely be obvious.

"[I]nteresting," I wrote at the end of that day, "how that works

out" (J March 30, 2008). Other times, it is more subtle. Halloween 2012, a period

frequently linked with times of transition as one year ends and another one begins, was a point when I had begun to seriously work on my application for the PhD program at

Memorial University. On that day I drew the Wheel of Fortune. Even a cursory glance at it conveys the sense of change that accompanies it. At the time cycles, endings and

beginnings, were playing out in my mind, and I wrote, in part: "Cycles are important, but so is the knowledge that sometimes they can be stopped or changed." Reading back over



Figure 9: *The Wheel of Fortune, Mythic Tarot*

the entry I am reminded of the fear of leaving a stable job and salary and breaking the comforting routine of daily work to try something new. I remember what it is like to consciously spin the wheel and take one's chances.

Past lives, soul contracts, and fate are not dominant parts of broader Canadian social discourse yet, upon closer examination, they are not as foreign to these larger worldviews as might be expected. It is frequently a matter of context. Erin explained why understanding past lives can help with present concerns: "If you have a fear of swimming, and you don't know why; you can't explain it in this life, well, perhaps you died drowning in a previous life" (I.18). How far removed is this idea from that of suggesting our phobias are part of a survival instinct, a past evolutionary advantage? The sources established for interpretation have changed, but the desire to uncover the unknown in a quest for answers remains the same.

Our Life-Worlds

The complexity of life-worlds is two-fold: they are formed from experience and they result in lived experiences that are frequently different. There is, Sam writes, "no pure experience, but always an experience which is being reflected upon as it occurs in an intertextual dance with not just other experiences but also other descriptions of them, no pure individual subject but always a social creature, and no experience free of power, resistance, creation and so on" (2012, 63). Whatever they are, life-worlds shape each person's understanding of themselves and their environments.

When exploring the concept of believing, which is intricately intertwined with that of lived experience, Marilyn Motz, a scholar of American culture, writes that we must focus on belief as practice and not as a singular entity: “using the form of a verb rather than a noun – is a crucial distinction” (1998, 349). “An individual participant,” she goes on to note, “may experience a transformation in the nature of his or her belief, for example from symbolic to literal, without any alteration in the expressive form” (ibid., 350). With the growth of contextualism comes a shedding of the essentialist claim to experience as real or natural (Shuman [2005] 2010, 10), and a new type of authenticity is established. It is one that is rooted in the daily life and the felt realities of those who engage with these worlds.

Folklorist Tom Mould observes that many personal narratives in the Mormon tradition “do not claim fact, faith, or fiction, as narrators negotiate reality and wrestle with belief for themselves” (2011, 5). Divination, as we shall see later, is rooted in the concept of self-narration and the power of this act to create and recreate identity. With this recognition of personal experience the expectation of external reality as the core for defining meaning is undermined. Instead, what is of interest is what the folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett terms the “cohort awareness”, the space where the individual life and the historical moment converge in narrative form (1989, 125). The goal of divination, and of even articulating these worldviews, is not to present answers but to explore the possibilities and processes by which people make meaning.

For Michelle, personal experience is integrated into the creation of her own tarot deck where family members and friends were used for certain figures in the cards. It was inspired by her own love of stained glass and “the idea of it being fragmented and the

centre point being the strongest as far as the light and energy”, the images of which came to her in dreams. “I would go to sleep, literally, and I would see a hand, and it would come in from the side. And I would say, what am I supposed to do? Ace of cups? And it would go [mimics drawing] and then I’d see it in my head and I’d go, yep, okay. It was like, copy this” (I.41). The creativity in divination emerges out of experiences of divination. The experience of dreams is not only divinatory in meaning but in giving the ability to create new meanings and tools which form deeply complex maps of self-knowledge that, at times, diverge from the socially constructed notions of reality and truth.

Differences are to be expected; therefore, context becomes increasingly important.

Ashterah and Fraezor understand channelling as an essential element and connected to fate:

KARI: And is that [higher self, superconscious] part of what you channel when you’re channelling, or is that a different entity?

FRAEZOR: The answer to your question is yes and no.

ASHTERAH: Yeah, it depends.

KARI: Okay. It’s contextual.

FRAEZOR: Well, it depends on the questions being asked, right. If it’s a question that you’re asking for you, and I’m going to channel the answer to it, I’m going to tap into the energy that is your entity and give you an answer from your superconscious. If it’s something that’s not personally relevant, it comes from a different entity, from a different source. If you work on the basis that a time is something we’ve invented, so in the realm of the superconscious, for lack of a better term, there’s no such thing as time...in this timeline this is what’s going on, but from a superconscious point of view I can see what’s going to happen; you might want to make a different choice. And a lot of what we do is about having people be aware that there are different choices as opposed to, I’m following this line, following this line, following this line. You might want to consider this, or this could happen if, or other things. So a definite: here’s what I’m seeing and

that's all it is, no, that's not the kind of control that we present to people. We present possibilities. Here's what I'm seeing, this path is going to take you here; however, there are other options you might want to consider. If you consider those options it's going to change the path that you take. Your choice. But if you're not aware of them, you can't make that choice. So a lot of what we do is make people aware that there are different choices to work with. And sometimes that comes through as a channel, sometimes it comes through as a card spread. And she'll put out a card spread for somebody, and I'll look at it and get a totally different interpretation, but it's still relevant to the original question. So we're tapping into the same kinds of energy but not necessarily at the same time, pardon the expression of time. (I.3)

Pearl tells two stories, one of a dream experience she had and one of her husband's, that demonstrate how integrated divination and its messages are in personal experience. It is easy, when looking from the outside, to associate divination with the grand moments of life and mysterious experiences or with the opposite: frivolous entertainment. An understanding of what divination means, however, cannot be removed from the experiences of those who use it in the most ordinary of circumstances. Pearl relates:

That same summer we were very – we were having a hell of a time getting the hay off because it rained and rained and rained. So we postponed and postponed and postponed. So I started asking when I was going to sleep to be told when it would be safe to cut. One morning before I woke up, or when I woke – I don't know because these things are very strange – I was told there will be ten days of dry weather. So I wrote it down in my book, because if you don't you will discount these things later. And I told Bill, I said "you can cut the hay, there'll be ten days of dry weather." He says, "you're sure?" I said, "that's what I was told." So he cut the hay, takes it down; the eleventh day it rained. So, you know, yeah. I'm a believer [laughs]. I mean, Bill was a great – that's why I said the man deserves medals because he went – I don't know if he believed or not, he never actually talked about that. He was just supportive of whatever I was doing, and if he had a dream, and he did.

One afternoon he woke up; he came rushing out of the bedroom out to the garden where I was. He was just shaking like a leaf; there was sweat coming off his brow; he's [gasping] "I had this dream!" I thought, holy hell. "What was it?" "I was up

on a stool, my dad was there and we were trying to kill a pterodactyl.” I said, “well, did you get him?” He said, “well, my dad was yelling you’ve got to get him, you’ve got to get him!” Well, I’m starting to think, what’s a pterodactyl? He and his dad were not close. In fact, they had had major differences, and they were not estranged but they just weren’t close. His dad died when he was 25. I never met his father. And so I said, well maybe, what’s a pterodactyl? Well, it’s a dinosaur. I said, “well, so what’s a dinosaur?” “Well, it’s ancient. It’s just ancient.” “Well maybe this is just ancient shit and you need to get rid of it.” You know like, but if you just look at the dream like a literal thing, it’s meaningless. You have to uncover, like, the word weird or whatever. You have to dig deep to find what is the unknown. So dreams are, in fact, I never thought of, if that’s your definition of divination, I’m good with that. I can use that in my advertising. [laughs] (I.44)

The first story is an example of the conscious utilisation of dreams as an act of divination because Pearl asks for a dream and receives an answer. The information is proven or made real through the weather, i.e. through her experience of the world. In the second example it becomes clear how interpretational meaning is deeply invested in personal experience and history. A dinosaur can represent many things, and even if it is agreed upon that it represents the ancient (as with most methods, it is often discouraged to go to any set answer for what a dream means), that is meaningless until it is applied to a particular situation. The specific messages emerge from bringing together the world of the dream and the world of the individual.

Throughout Pearl’s life she has come to recognise that it is not advisable to seek to share the same experiences other people. She began by telling me the story of one such moment in time that belongs to her alone, even as she tries to reduce it into words so that I can at least understand her a little better:

It’s like walking in on a Saturday morning. Everything, it’s all snow. Walking from the house up to check the cattle. And I walk into this space of 100% silence, and I have no idea how long I stood there, and all of this information just flooded

in, all I'm seeing is blue. I'm surrounded, and I'm translucent blue. What is that? I have no idea. I just know it works. Now, I can't call upon it instantly. I have to be in the right space somehow. I don't know how to explain it, but it's fascinating. It scares the bejeezus out of you from time to time, [laughs] but whatever.

She goes on to speak about how she, herself, has been unaware of these moments in the lives of those who come to her for workshops:

I have had people come at the end of a workshop and say, "you know, the most amazing things of what happened," and I'm completely unaware. Just was doing what I was doing. They've had these experiences, which is quite wonderful, I think. And I think we would interfere with their experiences were we aware of what was happening. So I think their process – I have a rule: don't touch anybody, don't talk to anybody if they go into a deep space. Or if they're crying – you know how women are, "oh, what's wrong?" Don't do that. Let them work with their own unknown. (I.44)

Individuals are limited if they must always share the same experiences with others. They are restricted if they must always follow someone else's map.

What becomes apparent when one begins looking at these narratives is that there is no single, shared world; there is no reality that everyone inhabits together, just many, many points of intersection. There are times when divination allows individuals to connect with others at these junctures, and other times when it gives them the space to wander off on their own, creating new paths visible to themselves alone. The classicist E. R. Dodds, in *The Greeks and the Irrational*, writes: "Man shares with few others of the higher mammals the curious privilege of citizenship in two worlds" (1966, 102). He was writing in reference to the worlds of the waking and the dreaming. What divination reveals is a belief that there are not just two worlds but many that are shifting, changing, and being born and dying. All overlap and diverge from each other and those that hold them to be true. These are, as the scholar of social work Caroline Humphrey terms them, "life-worlds" (2007, 13).

We find ourselves in a space of bricolage, or as Bruce terms it, the cafeteria approach to spiritual traditions, picking and choosing what we need instead of cleaving to “the master narratives”. “We’ve lost the overarching stories that give, gave people meaning”; he goes on to explain:

The most important story that people are paying attention to now is the story of the evolution of the cosmos. Science provides this alternative story. So what we’re left with now, in the 21st century, are fragments. So if this is what it’s all about, us being good quilters [laughs], we have to take fragments from here, there, and we have to melt them together, quilt them together into a path of spirituality that means the most for us. (I.4)

In attempting to articulate these ideas, several different terms have been proposed and adapted. Building on Benedict Anderson’s work, the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai proposes the concept of the imagined world or “multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe”. He goes on to note that many people in the current global world live within these imagined worlds. They are not just communities “and thus are able to contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surround them” (1996, 33). He also proposes the term *ethnoscape*, by which he means “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree” (ibid.). *As above, so below*. As global, so local. The macro and microcosms reflect each other. The moving parts of the individual are extended to the communities, nations, and realms that they occupy.

Annette Hill, a media and communications scholar, notes that there are times when “the paranormal becomes associated with solipsism, a form of scepticism that denies the possibility of any knowledge other than personal experience” (2011, 114). Yet it is much more complex than a binary of either everything is personal or nothing is. Primiano observes how “Folklore, in general, must enlarge its focus to emphasize the individual as creator and possessor of a single folkloric world view, who constantly interprets and negotiates his or her own beliefs” (1995, 48). Personal experience shapes reality and demands a recognition that individual norms are not shared by everyone.¹⁴ Within divination it is of particular importance because it is personal experience that allows people to interpret and receive meaning.

Divination has the capacity to adapt to lived experiences. It survives, in part, because it shifts with people, continually being reincorporated into new realities as they change. Ellen wrote to me that she is drawn to palmistry because it “floats my boat”. She went on to contemplate this personal connection: “It’s hard to say why one modality appeals more than another. I imagine that the individuality of it is one of the major

¹⁴ The capacity for us to encounter the same text or situation and come away with different interpretations is one that is apparent to anyone who looks at used or library books that have notes scribbled within its pages. As I was reading through *When Prophecy Fails* by the social psychologists Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, I became increasingly taken up by the notes that I found in the margins. As a habitual margin scribbler myself, I am always interested in what other people have to write and what their thoughts are when they are reading the same passage as me. I am quite often struck by how differently two people can approach an idea, and what key points of information they are looking for that are irrelevant to me, or vice versa. In this case, there was the stark contrast of two very different worldviews. On page 33 is written: “Although it was her most impressive experience with psychic phenomena, the message from her father was by no means the first contact Mrs. Keech had had with the occult, either as an interested student or as a participant” (1956). Not only had the previous reader underlined part of this passage, they also starred it and wrote a rather succinct note: “A nut!” Further comments followed Mrs. Keech throughout the pages. “Oh Christ!” appeared on page 34 while “Ha Ha!” appeared on the next. A diagnosis of “multiple personalities” (37) concluded this arc of assessment. Here I have, laid out in text before me, an interplay of ideas and interpretations of experience that all come to coexist in a single text.

reasons” (I.17). Peter, while recognising that astrology, numerology, and tarot go together, defines tarot as his love; it is what he focuses on (I.45). Even within a single method there are variations, however, as discussed earlier in the subfields of astrology. Within tarot there are numerous different decks that appeal to all types of practitioners and clients:

SAM: Each of the decks has its own personality [...] the Rider-Waite deck because of the group that it came from The Order of the Golden Dawn, and the late Victorian biases of its designer has a strong bias toward polarity, female and male polarity. Gender essentialism, I guess you might call it these days, but also towards balance. Everything has to come back to a balance, and most of the time that’s useful in readings, but sometimes a person is trying to move towards something really strongly. They want to be unbalanced. They want to be exploring something in some depth with some passion, and this deck is not that useful for that kind of a reading. [...] And again, it has a bias.

This deck [Thoth tarot], because of Crowley’s own predilections, is not at all interested in balance. It’s interested in passionate excess. When you read this deck, you have to throw yourself wholly into it, say, “okay, I’m just going to go with it.” Just go as far, as fast, as hard as I need to to get where I’m going to go, and to hell with what gets in the way. It’s sort of like the Chariot card except an entire deck of the Chariot card. Again, sometimes it’s really a great deck because it helps people to break through their sense of limitation around whatever the question is. I mean, if you think that you’re living in the eight of wands or something, living in this constrained, constricted kind of life all the time, reading something, reading with this deck will say “no; in fact, you can burn down that stockade around you, you can burst through it and it opens up the options to you in a different way.” So it’s useful for that kind of a read. I read with it occasionally. I’m a big fan of Uncle Al as a magician but this deck, sometimes it’s just a little too intense; it doesn’t suit a lot of questions or questioners. (I.48)

ANNE: That’s another thing about the magic of tarot. There are thousands and thousands and thousands of decks out there. I mean, there’s Hello Kitty decks; there’s a deck devoted to beer if you really need to identify with beer that strongly. Today I was using a Steampunk deck, which is Barbara Moore’s Steampunk deck, is amazing! But, it doesn’t matter. Like I say, Hello Kitty, the Gay Tarot, whatever. And whatever you want to see in it, you can – like, whatever images appeal to you, you can find them in some deck, somewhere [...] but Hello Kitty, that’s so, that’s such a narrow piece of culture. And so, to me, it just sort blocks off a – but if Hello Kitty makes someone very happy, that’s very nice. (I.1)

At times these differences are a source of frustration, such as in the case of Hello Kitty tarot decks that seem to undermine the seriousness of the work that Anne does in a world that already overlooks it. But, as she recognises, if it is what makes them happy, if it is how they can connect to spirits or themselves, then it is fulfilling its purpose.

These tools and methods serve as constant reminders that practitioners are not one and the same. Dona Piercy, a Christian, recounted with much laughter the time she accidentally started working out of a Pagan store. She left because “they have a whole different system than I believe” (I.11). Donna finds Erin, her daughter-in-law, is “much more...esoteric than I am [...] She talks to her guides and connects with them all the time, and she meditates for hours and stuff and, where I don’t” (I.12). There is no one way to do this work. Instead, part of the journey is figuring out the map that works best for the specific person.

The Catholic faith is significant for both Michelle, of Irish descent, and Elizabeth, who is influenced by her Chilean mother’s approach to the faith. The term Catholic, like all labels, is again limiting and inadequate to describe these two different women. For Elizabeth, divination and Catholicism have never been in opposition:

KARI: Well, one of the things I thought was interesting is you talked about you were raised Catholic, but also that your gifts are in your family and you were never made to feel bad about them or ashamed of them or a need to hide them, and I thought that was interesting because a lot of times we think that those two things would not go together. That if you were Catholic, you wouldn’t be encouraged to pursue mediumship or spiritual practices.

ELIZABETH: So, in terms of being Catholic. My mom comes from the south of Chili, as I had mentioned. So in other countries in the world...a connection to spirit and a connection to...angels and things like that are very much connected with religion. [...] Like I know other countries, here, you know, you go to church – and I’m not saying that’s what they do in church or anything like that, but my mom was raised religious but that was part of her upbringing as well. So it didn’t

have any impact on my abilities. So it's not like – I don't know. And it was, like my involvement growing up, we had to go to church every Sunday; my mom took us to church, but I was never very much into the religion. I liked the tradition and just spending time with my mom, and then after church we'd go for, like, pie or to the movies or something...So it wasn't an issue for me [both laugh]. (I.15)

Michelle found herself struggling with her use of the tarot, especially earlier on in her life. It was two personal experiences that helped her integrate it with more ease. First was encouragement that she received from other Catholic women to regard her ability to read tarot as a gift from God. The second emerged from a deal she made with God for Him to save her nephew; he was born after Michelle's sister was in a collision with a drunk driver and was struggling to survive (for the full explanation of both situations, see Appendix D). Belonging to the same faith does not make people identical; practicing divination does not make all diviners monolithic; using the same tools does not render similar meanings.

One unusually warm Saturday evening in June, I found myself in the blissfully air-conditioned Edmonton Spiritualist Church, seated in one of the back rows on a chair set up for the monthly Evening with Spirit Event that Richard had invited me to attend after our first interview. The room was full but not packed, and I was one of the few, if only, people there by myself. Most were in pairs. This event was one of mediumship, and over the next couple of hours I watched Richard and another medium deliver messages to people in the audience. In reflecting on the experience with him during our next interview, I brought up my thoughts about watching the two of them work:

KARI: I did find it really interesting to watch the two of you work because it was so strikingly different –

RICHARD: Yes!

KARI: between your methods, and I think again you have that stereotype of what you see on TV as that's the way mediums work, and you don't realise the nuances.

RICHARD: Yeah. Totally right. And if you think about it this way, let's just say both you and I were mechanics. Would we do everything exactly the same? You might have a better way of putting on something than I do, and you found it out and it works for you that way, but it doesn't work for me. And it's the same with anything. And remember, this is very important, everybody, we all have our own spirit guide. Now if we were, we've often joked with this, we tell the audience, if I said to you, Kari, I want to borrow your spirit guide and I'll give you mine, it wouldn't work because they're used to working with us and they work with our energy and everything, so the way their spirit guide was able to work [...] Spirit makes us the medium they want us to be, not what we want to be. And that's another mistake that people make on earth. They go, okay, I want to do this and I want to do that. It never works because you have this idea but spirit says, okay, we have this medium here. We want them to be able to do this, and we want them to be this type of medium; it's fascinating, and you do. And that's why we're all a little different.

And also, it's always changing. Now, when I started this stuff I used to get names like that, like crazy names like Walden. Not like John, Walden would be right. And I had a nickname for somebody one time, it was a weird, like Cookie. I used to get these, but now that's changed with me, and they keep testing me to make me better. So I don't get names now. [...] But that's them working with us because they want us to become better all the time, and then you become well-rounded. So in the long run...they'll have taught us how to do mediumship many ways, with names, without names, with this, with that, whatever. And still get the right message, and that's the important thing. And then you become well rounded, right. [...] You know, so it's developed all the time, and progresses. (I.47)

Validity of experience does not emerge from an experience of sameness but from the recognition of divergence, which is crucial when considering how proof is situated within divination, a subject discussed in the next chapter. There is power in recognising our differences:

LYNN: I think I just use astrology as a way to explain the weirdness, you know, and then people resonate because, I mean, one of the common things that happens is they just cry at the end. And they're like, "you mean I'm not crazy, and this is who I am?" And then I show them other people's charts, and they don't, none of the charts look the same, nobody's unless you're a twin. So it's like, why would that person, with that picture try to be like that one? Like, how ridiculous. Like,

we're not supposed to be like each other or we'd already be that way. So, and that way I get a lot of, I think it validates who they are, and so I just use that as a way to open doors for them to be who they are and go where they want to go and then be it. (I.38)

MARLENE: Life should be a big experience, I guess, provided that we're learning, right. But everybody's different. And that's, again, what's so awesome is you get to see so many different people, and we're all, like, pushed by different values. And the crazy thing is that some of those values aren't even ours. Like some of those values don't make sense to us but we accept it because our church said it or our parents said it or this is the way that it's done or, you know, so again, it's that self-awareness. Oh, I guess my value is this. Like I always had a big value of working hard, right, but I also had big triggers, right, about working hard. Again, if I wasn't so messed up I'm sure that I wouldn't have bothered to really try to understand how to fix this. I can't feel like this anymore, you know. But it really helped. (I.39)

The fear of not being normal is often coupled with the fear of judgement. Lesley spoke of how concerned some people are that they are going to be condemned by her (I.35). What she and others told me again and again is that this process is not one of judging but confronting and challenging. It fits within Jean's explanation of the systematic positive:

Systematic positive means that through the entire deck the message or the interpretation of every card can have something positive to say to us. Even if it's a challenge card – what we might call a negative card – or even if it may seem scary, like the Death card, for example. There's a way we can see any card as being for our good, in a way that supports ourselves, that doesn't scare us. (1998, 6)

Or the historical presentism that Pearl brought up during our interview:

You cannot judge 1945 by 2015. It's not fair [...] Jung was criticised pretty strongly for being anti-feminist or anti-woman, and he was in his early writings. But that was in the '40s and '50s, like give the guy a little credit for being a bit of a screw-up. Other people took his work and developed it further. It doesn't mean you throw the whole baby out. (I.44)

A recognition that each person's life is different demands that one life cannot judge another. Everyone is flawed in their own ways; if they were not they would not need divination and diviners to provide guidance and insight. As Richard discovered through his changing mediumship styles, he is always a work in progress. Lynn brought this up as well, catching herself in a moment of frustration asking: "How could you not see that?" referring to the spiritual dimensions in life. But, she told me, she had to learn to get over her own righteousness. "It's like, oh, okay, well wait a minute Lynn, there was a point you didn't see [anything] either, what are you going on about?" (I.38). They situate their work not as demand for conformity, as a power that forces change upon people, nor as a judge or jury; instead, they are there to be present and to provide the information they can in a way that will be heard.

Yet, they still find community. In my own fieldnotes after attending the astrology retreat, I wrote about the conversation Julie and I had driving back into Edmonton. "Julie and I chatted about the various members. [She] wanted to emphasise the community that has formed. Members/participants come from Calgary, St. Albert, etc. Conscious effort to make and keep the connections. Everyone brings something different to the group" (June 14, 2015). It is a mistake to think that communities are homogenous entities, that they subsist on agreement and conformity alone. Within divination they find a place to test and be tested. These spaces give them permission to contradict and to know that, even if they are different, they are not without belonging.

This diversity allows for divination to continue to flourish as well because it ensures that there is a match between querent and practitioner. One of the aspects of her practice that Anne has wrestled with is interacting with some of the less "grounded"

individuals, as she puts it. Just before our second interview, she decided not to do some teaching for a particular shop because she struggles with the outlook of many of those who show up for these workshops. However, she continues to teach with the Edmonton Public School's Metro Continuing Education program because of the students who are drawn to this site of learning:

What I find with predominately women who take the course through Metro is that they're there because they're intrigued, they're there because they're curious, they're there because they want to learn, but most of them are pretty centered, pretty grounded. I hate the word normal, but they're pretty normal. I mean, you get the occasional one who is a little bit off in left field, but as a rule they're pretty adult. (I.2)

Letting go of the stereotypes of who a diviner is requires the recognition that there is no singular label. Some approaches will match, some will conflict. Sometimes it can make for a solitary experience, as is the case for Lesley who has found her approach very different from other people's processes (I.36). The strangeness that isolated practitioners from the larger community does not always guarantee them inclusion into alternative groups.

What Was and What Could Be

Divination is not static because people are not static. The lines on the palm do not remain the same, and new cards will emerge in the next tarot reading. The cultures within which people dwell are equally mutable, and Canada is not immune. The experiences practitioners bring with them into these environments, however, shape their attitudes towards the places they work. For some, Canada, Alberta in particular, has proven to be a welcoming space. Richard describes the process of moving from Ireland to Canada

several decades ago: “It was like when I came to Canada it was freedom here. I didn’t have to worry about what I know, and then I started hearing spirit speak to me”. It was here that he had the space to begin to reconnect with his spiritual side and, eventually, become involved in the Spiritualist Church. Others whom he has spoken to have also reflected on the freedom found in Alberta. It is, among many, regarded to be a “very, very spiritual place. And it’s growing” (I.46). Having moved from Saskatchewan, Shannon finds Edmonton to be “absolutely amazing”. While she still returns to her home province on a monthly basis to see her querents there, she regards it as “kind of stuck” and a much harder “nut to crack” (I.49).

Shannon was not the only one to observe differences between the provinces. Coming from PEI, Elizabeth J. finds this small island province to be more conservative (I.16), a sentiment Jessica shares when reflecting upon her experiences living in Newfoundland. Yet, Anne was advised that Charlottetown, PEI, had many opportunities for tarot reading, especially during the tourist season (I.1). This divergence is not surprising considering that tourists and locals have often been at odds. The association of British Columbia with liberal and hippy cultures carries on into divinatory communities, and Anne and several others identified BC as being more open and welcoming to those involved in alternative practices.

Participants have not always had positive experiences, and larger cultural systems have and continue to fail to support divination. Chris, who has been involved in astrology since the 1960s, has taken her knowledge of this practice to many different countries. Reflecting on her time in China, she told me that “I am enormously impressed with the astrologers there in that there is this body of very, very young astrologers. They’re like

sponges”. In England she found that they are “much more advanced, much more accepting, and there are more highly academically achieved astrologers”. It is the lack of good schools that she identifies as detrimental to the North American system and causes her concerns over the quality of astrologers available to its citizens (I.6).

Ashterah and Fraezor, who lived in Saskatchewan and BC before settling in Alberta, find this final province to be challenging in many ways. “I’m not sure how that’s changed in the last ten months because we’ve had quite a downturn in the economy, a lot of layoffs and whatnot,” Ashterah told me, “but when we first started doing this, and it was a huge eye opener for me, [...] this: ‘read my cards’ with the crossed arms and the negative body language, it was just, wow, I never expected to find that.” Fraezor jumped in to add that:

In my own practice I’ve come across similar things. It’s like, I don’t feel well, fix me. And the stuff that I do is related to traditional Chinese medicine; it’s not a, this hurts here, now it doesn’t hurt. It’s a process. And most people that I’ve come in contact with don’t realise that it’s a process. I don’t have a magic elixir; I don’t have a magic bullet. It’s going to take time for your body to heal.

Ashterah spoke of the frustration of knowing that there is more they could do to open people up if they were interested and willing, but the desire for money and excess that has dominated Alberta, due to its oil, closes people off to what the world has to offer. (I.3)

Elizabeth finds Edmonton to be more industrial than other places in Canada, particularly BC and parts of the United States. For her, however, a strong family makes all the difference. Both her mother and sister are mediums and because of this “I never really cared what people think, you know. You can’t, not everyone is going to like you all the time and not everybody’s going to believe in you” (I.14).

In an email Wendy wrote to me that “I have to say I am pleased with your topic and your intention. In so many interviews I have done there have been judgements around being female, Goddess anything or most things psychic or alternative. It is refreshing to have something positive about the old beliefs and the ancient ways” (Feb. 7, 2014).

Linda, a participant in my project on spiritual play, shared her experiences of coming back to Canada after spending time living and working in Lesotho, a small nation surrounded by South Africa. It mirrored many of the inadequacies, past and present, that practitioners have identified in (parts of) Canada. She notes that, while in Lesotho “there’s a thin line between material being and spiritual being”, in North America “we totally ignore our inner being and our inner capacity and those powerful energies and abilities we have within us as human beings that are manifestations of the life force”

(I.27). Julie encountered this division in her own work:

when I was working in the hospital in a unit with doctors who were certifying people because of their mental illness, wondering if I wasn’t getting to be certifiable by what I was doing [energy healing], if you understand my meaning. I mean, I knew all I needed to know, and I knew right from wrong, but there was no way these people I worked with every day would look at what I was doing in any way other than, oh my god, I can’t believe you’re silly. And part of me thought, I don’t want to lose my license, my nursing license. (I.25)

Heather also discussed this lack:

You know, in many ways you can look around Canadian society and, or even worldwide, and I see a real hunger for spirituality and a real hunger for true human connection. And meaningful relationships with family, friends, children, spouses. And, you know, you could look around and see all the materialism, but really one-on-one with people, that doesn’t, that’s not – rarely is that what people are all about. I think a lot of people are, especially now, you know, in the last ten years, I think people are very scared, very worried, very [sighs] very lonely, very depressed, very unfulfilled. People want to be understood. (I.20)

Navigating multiple layers of reality within a potentially hostile environment often leads to conversations about what is authentic and who gets to decide. Authenticity and its twin, nostalgia, are no strangers to the folklorist. Romantic inclinations toward the rural folk of the past who lived pure lives of storytelling and handcrafts is appealing, even for many modern scholars. It also appears in many spiritual movements and is applicable to divinatory practices where one may seek to uncover their own lineage or connecting with past ways of doing things, as evidenced in Wendy's email above. Many vernacular methods of divination such as tea leaf reading or water dowsing also play into this model of being more in touch with nature. This idea becomes complicated when, as Bendix writes, the concept of the authentic requires the opposite, the fake (1997, 9). At one time these boundaries may have had a stronger illusion of simplicity, but it is now clear that the concept of fakelore and the quest for the real through the authentic, as posited by folklorist Richard Dorson's in his 1950 article "Folklore and Fake Lore", have never held validity, at least not in the way it was previously conceived.

Nostalgia, as defined by the historian David Waldron, "refers to the past as idealized and imagined through a combination of memory, metaphor, symbolism and desire" (2005, 38), while Roger Abrahams, a folklorist, deems it to be a "bourgeois disease" (2003, 203). Globalisation, in particular, has brought about a nostalgia for the past, both through the sense of a growing loss of control and loss of the local, as well as through what is seen as the opportunity to potentially purchase the past or the authentic. The disjuncture spoken of by Appadurai (1990) results in fractures within which there is a longing for the stability of a definable identity. This sense of loss has led to various actions including travel focused on capturing an authentic experience or connecting with

one's ancestry (see Bendix 1989, Wang 1999, Yeoman, Brass, and McMahon-Beattie 2007) or the adaption of practices that build this connection. The worldview of many of my participants, however, is not nostalgic or romanticised even though there is a longing for the world that they left behind and will return to: the spirit world and the wholeness that comes with it.

Folklorist Ray Cashman's work in Northern Irish communities has brought him to the conclusion that "not all nostalgias are the same" (2006, 140). It is, in fact, a "practice" and not "a given content" (ibid., 153). It is easy to look at nostalgia as a trap that causes one to idealise the past and neglect the present and future. However, throughout his article "Critical Nostalgia and Material Culture in Northern Ireland," Cashman demonstrates how it can motivate individuals to work for a better tomorrow, to identify the good of the past (while often also acknowledging the bad), and to use that as a model for what to strive for in the future. Recognising that something of value has been lost does not mean that one neglects the present or future entirely. This approach is paralleled in many divinatory acts that focus on bringing together the past, present, and future in the moment of the reading. Patterns from the past (including past lives) are identified as harmful or helpful and their potential to be reshaped into the future is explored. Instead of demanding querents be imprisoned in a nostalgic dream of what has never been, it is a force driving them toward what could be.

Often, when talking about the growth of divinatory movements and many of the interrelated spiritualist or alternative practices, the concept of re-enchantment is brought up. Curry cautions the reader to recognise what this term is and is not: "Re-enchantment is not about re-introducing a former condition where it no longer exists; rather it must be

a matter of recognizing, articulating and encouraging Enchantment – or more exactly, the conditions for Enchantment that exist now” (1999, 407). Instead of relying upon concepts of nostalgia that seek to return to an absolute past, divination opens up opportunities to bring forward appealing aspects and transform them within a contemporary context. Divination allows for people to come up with a new sense of enchantment that fits within their contemporary world.

The rootlessness that is often associated with globalisation (Appadurai 1996, 29) is counteracted by divination. Jeffers posits that “magic and divination are tools that help the individual or the nation to realign themselves into the created order of the world” (2007, 640). It becomes part of what Bendix calls an emotional and moral quest (1997, 7), and in this search for the experience, new layers of meaning are opened up. Science is often found in these spaces. Many practitioners are waiting for it to support these positions, to get the language out there that everyone can use in order to discuss these experiences. C.F. thinks that “science, particularly in the field of quantum physics, has discovered a lot of things in, you know, the past ten or twenty years that synchronise almost perfectly with a lot of spiritual teachings” (I.5). K.T. brought up this same idea: “I’m sure that science will catch up and prove this at some point” (I.28). Reflecting on the past does not isolate anyone from modernity; it moves its participants outside of the presumed authentic and into the realm of experience. In being able to identify what is of importance and worth cultivating for the future and what can be discarded, it is possible to participate in changing communities, not into what they used to be, but into what they need to be in the future.

A balance is important, however, and there are calls for science not to be used as the definer of divination. Gus reflected:

I think it gets twisted in with science. Like I feel like mathematics and scientific principles say it's 78 cards [in the Tarot deck] and the cards come up by chance, we don't have control over what cards are coming because of chance, the same way the lottery is, kind of. But yet, certain cards constantly come up and you have different relationships with these things. (I.19)

Change, for Jason, is not just a growing awareness but a shifting approach. Tarot, he notes, is now being addressed more frequently, not as a fortune-telling device, but as a tool of spiritual development. Echoing Bruce's identification of wisdom-centered approaches, Jason notes that tarot is now "kind of unlocking for everyone" (I.22). For some this means moving away from institutional systems, particularly religious; for others, it means supporting these institutions as they change. Mélanie, a member of the United Church of Canada, notes that it is becoming more open, and she is actively engaged in supporting it in her own way (I.40).

At this juncture, it is of value to bring in the limited statistical information available on this subject. While there are constraints upon this data, most critically its lack of context, it does provide a snapshot of larger cultural trends. Those about divination, especially in Canada, are sparse; however, polls conducted by the Pew Research Centre and Gallup provide a summary for American alternative practices that contain useful information. Of note is the following chart from a 2009 Pew Research Center report:

Supernatural Experiences			
<i>% felt you were in touch with someone who has already died</i>			
	Jun 1990	Sep 1996	Aug 2009
Yes	17	18	29
No	82	81	69
Don't know	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>
	100	100	100
<i>% seen or been in the presence of a ghost</i>			
Yes	9	9	18
No	90	90	80
Don't know	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>
	100	100	100
<i>% consulted a fortuneteller or psychic</i>			
Yes	14	17	15
No	85	83	85
Don't know	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100	100
Sep. 1996 and June 1990 surveys conducted by Gallup.			
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.			
Q292a-c.			

Figure 10: 2009 Pew Research Poll on Supernatural Experiences

Comparatively, a Canadian Ipsos Reid poll conducted in 2006 found that 47% of respondents believe in ghosts and 20% have been in the presence of a one. In David W. Moore's report on the 2005 Gallup poll, he cites that 25% of respondents believe in astrology (2005), a number repeated in the 2009 Pew Research poll.

In conjunction with concerns over decontextualised information is the framing of questions used within statistics that shapes answers and reveals biases. For example, the wording of the one regarding astrology in the Pew and Gallup polls: the latter asks simply if the respondent "believes in" astrology, as if the charts, or the stars themselves, may or may not exist. The former poll expands upon the concept, clarifying that the question is a belief "that the position of stars/planets can affect people's lives." This was implied in the Gallup poll, but not directly articulated, leaving the participant to create their own

definition of this practice and disregard or remain ignorant of the difference between divination's existence and its utility. However, for all their faults – the most egregious being a denied opportunity to find out *why* – these polls do confirm a core theme of this thesis: in North America, divination is not disappearing.

Jessica recognises that approaches to divination are changing and observes that this does not mean tradition is being lost but enhanced (I.24). Jean told me: “It’s been years, years since I had a person who wanted to know whether they should have their surgery or if the guy they met in the bar last night is the one, you know” (I.23). Kelliena notes that in the sixteen years she has been doing this, it has shifted from being entertainment that was not taken seriously to becoming more closely associated with questions of one’s spiritual path or one’s own psychic or spiritual abilities (I.32).

Bringing astrology back into the realm of equal knowledge is something that is important to Chris.

CHRIS: [At times] I questioned why would anybody with a reasonable intelligence want to spend a lifetime trying to elevate a subject that was so criticised and unpopular at the time, in public opinion. Why would anybody want to do that when there are so many other things to put an active, intelligent mind into use? So at times I did question what I was doing. But then, I don’t anymore because I believe, I see a change happening. I see a big shift. You’re from Edmonton right, originally?

KARI: Just outside of Edmonton.

CHRIS: Yeah, so this kind of phrase that I’m going to use now will probably make sense to you. I saw a very powerful and important need to bring it out of the 97th Street¹⁵ gypsy fortune-telling position where people could see it not as a fortune telling or, I’m going to use the word divination art, but as something that can be useful to give one insight into a deeper understanding of who you are, where you came from, how you can evolve your whole life purpose or process into something more meaningful. (I.6)

¹⁵ 97th Street is a major road in north Edmonton where one might go to find walk-in fortune-tellers.

While divination is not a rejection of nostalgia, it is also part of a changing nation that is opening up to these “old” ideas made new again. This topic emerged throughout my interviews:

DONNA: we’re letting some of those really rigid, traditional ideas slip away so that we can at least think about some of these other ideas out there. (I.13)

CHRIS: I had, in the early days, I had schoolteachers, I had nurses, I had other people in a various assortment of other jobs, but they were always inquisitive and enquiring types of people. Today I have so many more professional people that come to see me. I have many doctors that consult me regularly. Not because I’m telling them their fortune, but because I’m giving them insight into some of their dilemmas and situations. (I.6)

HEATHER: Now you can walk into any bookstore and find whole sections. There was nothing thirty years ago. You could barely find a deck of cards (I.20)

ERIN: I feel like it’s talked about more from when I was a child. I feel like no one talked about it back then. I feel like now it’s addressed a little bit more. I feel like people are kind of looking into, like, the whole New Age thing, the whole listening thing. For example, Reiki. I’m a Reiki practitioner as well, which we could talk about that too, but that is becoming more and more popular. Different hospitals, they talk about it a lot on TV now. So I think it’s being talked about in, you know, making people aware of it, that kind of helps with the stigma. I don’t know if it’s, I don’t believe it’s fully accepted yet, or even any more accepted, but I think people are more aware of it, okay. And people maybe, yeah, they’re just more aware, and I think by being aware it helps. (I.18)

Pearl cautions, however, about her own biased position. “Whether it’s getting worse or better,” she answered in response to my question on this topic, “I’d like to think there’s more of it, but that’s – I see more of it because of the circles I travel in, I think” (I.44).

As above, so below. Many of these changes are reflected in larger shifts going on in the world. Elizabeth J. explained to me that “[t]here are theories out there that the earth is changing its vibration”, going on to reflect Lynn’s categorisation of different levels of reality by noting that there are “several levels of vibration”. We are currently in the third

level, shifting toward the fourth, “a much more spiritual frequency” (I.16). While it can be an uncomfortable and difficult process to make this change, for her it is an exciting time to be alive and working in the field of personal development. Heather also highlighted this vibrational change:

I think the entire planet, I think everybody’s undergoing a change right now. I think we’re all going through a vibrational change. We’re all having a vibrational download, if you will, or upgrade. A download or an upgrade. Yeah, so I find that very interesting in talking to people about it and what their experiences are with that. And, you know, many people are currently living a tower card experience. They don’t know why. But there may be one event, they lost their job or they’re divorced. But often there’s lots of bread crumbs on that trail. But so many people, and I don’t know about your generation, but so many people of my generation and age, people’s lives, everyone is, so many people are living this experience like a volcano. All of this stuff is coming up. And they may not have experienced an external life event but everybody’s psyches are being turned up at this time.

For her it is not one single event that signals this shift, but it is an ongoing process, and she does feel optimistic about the outcome (I.20) even if this process of transformation is a difficult one. Jessica, too, talked about a “shift in the world consciousness” which she is seeing manifest in larger urban centres where there is more acceptance of these different experiences (I.24). Yet it would go against the underlying thesis of this chapter to assume that everyone has the same outlook.

When I asked Irene if she thinks attitudes are shifting, she responded that she is surprised that it has not changed more:

It has changed. Definitely more people are going for it, but they’re going for it in the wrong way. People are doing it for amusement. It’s not amusement. Like people think it’s funny when I read a card or something; it’s not funny to me. I’m playing with your life. I don’t touch the cards, you touch them, not me. I will not touch them. And you’re pulling these cards, and I am interpreting your message by me reading you a story of something, right. And they just think it’s a joke and then something happens. And it’s not funny, not to me. It’s serious business. (I.21)

She has noticed that things like tarot are no longer secret, which is a positive development, but she is also worried about the increase in cruelty she has seen growing around her. In speaking with her I feel the weight of her over 70 years on this planet, the exhaustion of the emotional burdens of those she sees around her and those that are brought to her door when she does a reading. Pearl's perspective is not as negative – there have been encouraging changes – but she still recognises that there is a tendency for mockery. “I think in [the] last 25 years, definitely it has changed. Not in mainstream because they make fun of things. When they can't deal with it, they make fun of it. When it's too true, they laugh at it, very dismissive” (I.44). Change does not always mean progress, and progress is not always linear. Instead, as always, everyone remains in a messy state of different experiences converging and diverging as they struggle to find and define their place in the world.

Where Does It Fit?

Divination continues to be used because it is a practical tool; it is useful. As Jean said to me: “If it isn't usable, if it isn't practical, why are we doing it?” (I.23). While there is much to be critiqued in the historian Keith Thomas' foundational work *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, he captures something important when discussing astrology:

To understand fully why it was that the public did not tire sooner of the astrologers and their pronouncements, it must be remembered that many of their rulings were not predictions at all. A large part of the astrological practitioner's business consisted in giving advice and in helping men to resolve personal problems and to make their own decisions. This was not an activity which was easy to discredit. ([1971] 1991, 401)

The ability to give advice and help people resolve personal problems makes it of value in any time or place. Divination, as has already been discussed, is not only about the large moments of life. It is also about the mundane and everyday, even though it is easily overlooked. In Jonathan Evans' article "Semiotics and Traditional Lore: The Medieval Dragon Tradition", this scholar of medieval languages and literatures argues that what we as academics may be interested in is not necessarily shared by the audience. "Often," he writes, "it is the most mundane or trivial features – ones most likely to go unnoticed in analysis that looks for creative innovation – that provide the best clues to the meaning of a text" (1985, 89, 90). That which is overlooked is often of great power.

Divination is situated at an intersection between the mundane details of everyday life and the broader cosmic patternings of the universe within which practitioners and querents find themselves operating. For Julie it is important to not be too mired in the day-to-day questions and lose sight of the bigger picture. A favourite divinatory question of hers is: "What is it that I need to know?" (I.27) as a way to keep her paradoxically rooted in the larger cosmos. Treva also adopts this approach. When she uses her runes she has a general question she likes to ask: "What is it that I need to know for my life as it is right now?" (I.50). The mundanity that appears within divination, and its balance with the larger universe, is deeply appealing.

After the Evening with Spirit, I reflected on how the messages that were given

Are very rooted in the ordinary [...] But yeah, a lot of it is just very practical, very ordinary, very human. Which I think is lovely, and it does feel very much like folklore [...] Because the idea is, these aren't, you know, there's no lightning bolts coming down from heaven. It's just people talking and sharing stories and finding connection and communicating and trying to help each other and trying to make sense of things. (FN, June 27, 2015)

I brought up this point during my second interview with Richard when he asked about my impressions of the event:

KARI: But yeah, I really had no idea, and I was struck with how – and I don't mean this in a derogatory way –

RICHARD: No.

KARI: but by how mundane, like how the messages that came across were, you know, it's a grandmother lecturing her grandson about getting the proper footwear.

RICHARD: Yeah, yeah.

KARI: Like these normal –

RICHARD: They're normal.

KARI: concerns that are yet so important and profound for the individual.

RICHARD: They are for the individual, you see. (I.47)

Sometimes bigger issues are brought up; sometimes a spirit just wants to remind a loved one to drink more water (Shannon I.49). When I was interviewing Treva, at one point a picture of her son got knocked over and she mentioned that often, if she is worried by a sign, she uses her pendulum to ask if he is okay (I.50). A small but meaningful act of reassurance.

Divination shapes the lives of those who come into contact with it, practitioner and querent alike.

JEAN: It's been a good thing for me. Really a good thing for me. Other people trust to allow me to come in so close to their lives; it's an extremely intimate experience to be present to another person when you're saying things like, you know you've got a real mess here, and this needs to be cleaned up and this is how you might do it. To say such a thing, to have the presumption to say such a thing to a person, you know. My overarching perspective is kindness, personally, and also that every card, even the challenges, you can have something positive to say about all of that, and I do. So, like it's a deeply nourishing experience for me that

people would continue to come to the cards. And, and that I have the opportunity to talk about something that I feel so deeply connected to. It moves me. It feeds me, and I think, what a great placement, you know? (I.23)

These practitioners are people who are coming into contact with individuals at points of crisis, at times of confusion, or who are seeking enjoyment, although this latter motivation is not as common amongst those with whom I worked. Divination exists as a form of entertainment in many people's lives, but among those I interviewed this is a far lesser part of the experience. While the fun and the serious are not diametrically opposed, practitioners situate respect at the center of what they do, even if they cannot control how the querent approaches the reading. For Anne there is a fine line between divination as entertainment and it becoming something frivolous. She will sometimes do comedy fortune-telling for friends, dressing up in characters like the Queen, but she will not use her tarot deck for those readings. Instead, she brings a plain deck of cards in order to ensure that the tarot is not associated with this specific performance that her friends are seeking (I.2).

For Gus, his tarot is much more than a pastime, although he admits he is still "processing...what it means inside my life". He feels that it is a process of uncovering or unlocking information that he already had deep within himself. He has three different Tarot decks that he works with, including a travelling one and a large deck with vibrant colours that he only brings out for readings he "really gives a shit about." When talking about his travel deck, he explained that

I carry this almost everywhere with me. I can't imagine, if I'm on a bus and I die, I want to be, have this on my person. If I crash in an airplane, this will be on my person. It's become something really important to me. If I had to like get, this would be my version of swearing on a Bible. Not a Bible, would be swearing on a

Thoth tarot deck, so that's more meaningful to me than anything else in my life.
(I.19)

In this statement is a stark reminder to academics and skeptics alike that whatever their opinions, this practice is not something to be dismissed lightly. When anyone speaks of where divination fits within people's lives, there must be the acknowledgement that it can be situated at the periphery or at the core. In order to understand its position, there needs to be a willingness to recognise that divination is not something belonging to the past and it is not something that should be open to easy disregard or derision. It is, for some, the object that will accompany them into death and, for others, the object that allows them to traverse beyond death altogether.

Chapter 3

Proof, Truth, and Knowing: The Roles of Facts, Evidence, and Skepticism in Divination

Maps are appealing in their tangibility. As landscapes transform, unpredictable as ever, and journeys into self-knowledge heighten the desire for the concrete, these guides give a sense of control. In this thesis, definitions keep shifting and personal experiences undermine any sense of unity thereby leading us to explore where potential stability might be found. Within Canada, western rationalism offers a response: proof. Scientifically testable and repeatable, it presents itself as the compass that will direct the journey and keep everyone on the right path.

The relationship between divination and proof or truth appears, upon first glance, to be oppositional. Yet to regard them as such is to do a disservice to my participants who regularly explore their own meanings. Over the course of my fieldwork I was shown the ways that skepticism is part of divination. Practitioners revealed how they challenge dominant definitions of proof and truth, particularly through different systems of knowing that offer up alternatives. In doing so they do not dismiss dominant social structures of knowledge rooted in science but propose that there is more than one approach. There are always multiple routes.

How We Got Here

Every few years, especially around Halloween, news stories come out detailing how many people in North America or Western Europe believe in a variety of elements of the supernatural concluding, often with surprise, that these numbers are not decreasing.

Many journalists find themselves asking “why some of us can’t shake off old superstitions and folk-lore” (Robson 2014) and turning to psychologists and external skeptics to provide conclusive answers. Why, though, is there the expectation that these things are to be shaken off, that they are antiquated, and expressions of belief in them are surprising? What drives the decisions about who is sought out as an expert? What answers will provide satisfaction? In trying to understand these preconceptions it is essential to look at the historical development of scholarship and culture concerning the supernatural. One must understand how knowledge has been constructed; the expectations placed upon scholars; and how science has impacted approaches to experience and shaped concepts of logic, the rational, and the real.

The historian Mary Poovey opens her book, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Science of Wealth and Society*, by asking:

What are facts? Are they incontrovertible data that simply demonstrate what is true? Or are they bits of evidence marshalled to persuade others of the theory one sets out with? Do facts somehow exist in the world like pebbles, waiting to be picked up? Or are they manufactured and thus informed by all the social and personal factors that go into every act of human creation? Are facts beyond interpretation? Or are they the very stuff of interpretation, its symptomatic incarnation instead of the place where it begins? (1998, 1)

It is common to associate facts with an objective truth set out by science. Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt, whose scholarship focuses on the history of anthropology and folklore, writes that “in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth, science became equated with fact, with pure knowledge. If it was scientific, it was true” (1988, 3). Within this discourse it is not surprising to find that, as the religious studies scholar Richard Kieckhefer contends, the rationality of magic (and, we can insert, divination) is a “classic problem” of the disciplines of anthropology and history (1994, 813). Even the

connection of these two ideas – the rational and the magical – seem so oddly juxtaposed to many modern scholars and citizens alike.

The expected disappearance of the supernatural resides within the emergence of social evolutionary theories that regarded human development as existing within a linear-progressive model that moved from superstition to science. According to Goldstein this “conventional academic point of view that supernatural beliefs are survivals from a naive past and must decline as scientific thought ascends is itself quite old, steeped in the rationalist perspective of David Hume and other eighteenth-century philosophers who attributed religion to primitive thinking processes” (2007a, 60). One of the most famous examples is Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* and his articulation of a division of superstition, magic, and religion. People, their beliefs, and cultures are positioned in these stages through which all peoples must pass to reach the civilising influence of science. Instead of showing reality, however, Luhrmann writes that these systems are, ultimately, a means through which society seeks to control reality (1985, 162). Power was obtained over the “other” by reducing their methods of managing the world to nothing but pseudo-science, illusions of the real thing. This continued pattern of separating magic and religion that was first undertaken, Hutton argues, by Pagans but later continued in the Judaeo-Christian tradition (2000, 106) has undeniably left its mark on western civilisation. It greatly influenced the separation between the material world (nature) and the spiritual world (McGuire 2003, 1). It set out what the rational person, i.e. the more evolved, was to believe. By excluding the acceptance of the supernatural from the pantheon of acceptable human behaviour, it left these skeptics to puzzle at not only at the irrationality of other beliefs, but also at their tenacity (Gillies [1937] 1976, xxi).

The emergence of modern western science and its equation with what is rational and true was and continues to be regarded as the final, triumphant conqueror of the supernatural. It situates all encounters in nature and utterly disenchant, to use Max Weber's term, that space (O'Connor 1995, 15; White 2012, 6). For some scholars the battle continues, but for others this victory has already occurred. The sociologist Robert Blauner, in his 1966 article "Death and Social Structure," founds his work on the preordained conclusion that ghosts are relatively absent because of scientific developments and the changing social structures around death (382). The very title of Thomas' *Religion and the Decline of Magic* sets forth his hypothesis clearly. Within its pages he makes the argument that the natural and social sciences "helped men to understand their environment" which is inseparable from the capacity to control it ([1971] 1991, 785). Less absolute, but still limiting, is Victor Turner's declaration that "[r]eligion no longer pervades all social domains; it is limited to its own domain" (1985, 86).

When knowledge increasingly came from the natural and social sciences it was made quantifiable and, most importantly, offered answers that could be universally applied. Through technology and professionalisation, it also became increasingly situated outside of the grasp of the ordinary person, creating a hierarchy in which lived experiences and folk practices and beliefs were granted a lower status (O'Connor 1995, 8, 39). It created a divide between spiritual belief and scientific knowledge. This became the basis for the secularisation thesis – or myth, as Roland Robertson, a sociologist, terms it (2007, 9) – that guided the development of the social sciences (Hufford 1995c, 16-17). Furthermore, it introduced the idea of objectivity removed from the context within which the object resides and the traditions which form it and are used for its interpretation in

favour of objective knowledge (Motz 1998, 343) as the only or most valuable type worth pursuing.

This reinterpreting of knowledge led scholars to seek, as Frazer terms it, “the solution of the problem” ([1994] 2009, 21) of why individuals and communities undertook the magical and religious acts they did. The supernatural became a problem that science could solve, resulting in the conclusion that people still believed in the supernatural because they did not know any better due to a lack of knowledge (see Evans-Pritchard [1937] 1976, 201-4) or a lack of interest in the right knowledge (i.e. that from western academia) (Malinowski [1948] 1954, 35). The idea that there must be a shared answer that is universally applicable to all people is a reflection of the centralising of knowledge under the European educational model. Furthermore, while it excluded many from its labels, it also denied scholars many avenues of insight through the “assumption that educated members cannot really participate in the beliefs and life of a religious group” (Hufford 1995a, 9). This perspective became a foundation for the perceived decline in the belief in the supernatural because once academics found the solution to the “problem” of belief, there was no reason for its continued existence.

The ideal form of knowledge was regarded as that which reflects a rational (or materialistic) worldview, and there was no space for the otherworldly in this perspective that was, and is, deeply rooted in ideas of the natural. However, as recent scholarship has indicated, knowledge is a construct and not a product of a natural evolutionary process (Santana and Erickson 2008, 162). The rational, according to Dégh, is not inherent but is a democratic concept that depends on the consensus of the majority (2001, 7) and is a European idea that has regarded secularisation as linear and deterministic (Makrides

2007, 565). Bennett notes that rationalists have their own folklore, and that rationalism and supernaturalism are both cultural options, neither of which is better or more superstitious than the other (1999, 36, 112). Journalist Steve Volk, in his book *Fringe-ology: How I Tried to Explain Away the Unexplainable – And Couldn't*, draws attention to the phrase “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence” that he links back to the skeptic Marcello Truzzi and, more recently, to the popularising influence of Carl Sagan. “Regardless,” he writes, “the slogan is merely a pithy, modernized exaggeration of what the humanist philosopher David Hume declared roughly 250 years earlier about miracles. Hume famously argued that before we believe in a miracle there should be so much evidence it occurred we’d be more foolish *not* to believe in it” (2011, 63). And yet, more fundamentally, the issue comes down to not only who gets to decide what constitutes evidence, but what is extraordinary and who gets to define it as such. As Rieti discusses in *Making Witches: Newfoundland Traditions of Spells and Counterspells*, “[n]arrative and experiences, not theology, supply the best evidence for most people” (2008, 71). This is something that became clear in the previous chapter, whether or not it withstands scientific rigour.

Collecting folk beliefs in the form of texts or written documents that are created by and often reflective of the beliefs of the collector (Honko 1964, 9) has only recently begun to lose its dominant status. The inscribed has long been accorded a higher level of credibility within academia, placing it on the same evolutionary framework wherein the oral is of the past, and the written a symbol of modernity and advancement. Yet much of the knowledge of the supernatural is intangible. It is told verbally; it exists outside the realm of the collector’s own world and defies linguistic constructs by often relying upon

communicative forms not socially or scholastically recognised. The body and its perception, observes Plate in his study of religious objects, communicates in its own verbal way that is often neglected in the contemporary details of rational thought and knowledge (2014, 9). Ignoring them narrows the scope of what is considered knowledge, ensuring that alternative narratives are either excluded entirely or, at the very least, deemed inferior.

It is easy to fall into the trap of abridging the past with superficial labels that help individuals and societies sort human behaviour and control the complex through simplification. The push for scientific rationalism that is traced back to the eighteenth century was much more complex than we often recognise, as were those involved. Many academics did not immediately abandon all “superstitions” and become modern skeptics (Bennett 1999, 146; Poole 2011, 20). They grappled with the social expectations and constructs of their times and with their own experiences and beliefs that we will never be able to fully know. While it must be argued that there is a lack of evidence to support the application of evolutionary ideas to societies and cultures, and there is no proof that the peak of civilisation is found in rationalism and materialism (Bennett 1999, 9), it is still inadvisable to ignore any perspective. For even as social development continues to be regarded as more complex and fragmented than any single theory can contain, the evolutionary ideal has the capacity to influence current discourse, especially when scientists and folklorists meet in the realm of the divined.

Truth for the Day

“Truth,” the preeminent philosopher Michel Foucault reminds us, “is a thing of this world” (1980, 131) and things of the world are rarely simple. Truth is often rooted in concepts of tradition – the right way is the way that it has always been. However, tradition is not static but innovative (Bauman [1986] 1992, 78); it keeps up with the times (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1974, 238). It is a process of negotiating accepted reality and determining who deserves the power to test, let alone define, what falls under this label. The trustworthiness of the narrator and their script, the diviner and their tools, changes between peoples and contexts. It is not, as the folklorist Lutz Röhrich argues, that audiences will tolerate no variation ([1979] 1991, 145), but that different traditions place greater or lesser value on content or performance.

The engagement with concepts of truth and fiction are something that Julie encounters when doing a reading, but it is a process she learned while she was working with sex offenders. She spoke to me about the need to remain rooted in the truth of the moment:

JULIE: You can tell me your story today and next week I find out you have another victim I didn’t know about, and they [her co-workers] say, “see, I told you he was a liar”. And I’m saying, “he’s not a liar, he’s telling you more of the truth today.” Telling you more of the truth because now he can, he’s got more trust in you, and he’s got more trust in himself. And six months from now he might have another one, and we have to work with that as we go [...]

People lie all the time. I have this fellow, I did his chart for him...he was born in Edmonton, and he was talking about this and that, so about six months later I heard him say to a friend, “yeah I was born in Minnesota.” What? Oh, I didn’t say anything. So a little after that he came to me and he said, “so did you do that thing you do every year for your birthday?” I said, “sure.” He said, “good.” And I said, “so where would you be born today?” He had no clue, you know?

KARI: Yeah.

JULIE: And he said, “I was born in Edmonton.” Okay, I’ll put Edmonton down. I didn’t say, “oh you silly liar, I heard you say blah, blah, blah,” you know. Truth for the day. (I.27)

Additionally, as Wood argues: “the language of truth is strange in this connection” because “[p]rophecies are neither true nor false at the time of their utterances. They are awaiting confirmation; they are checks that still have to clear” (2003, 36-7). Then, of course, the truth of a prediction, if one is made, becomes open to never existing at all, never being realised as soon as the querent knows that they have the choice to walk away from that future altogether.

Lett, when referencing Shirley MacLaine, discounts the argument that “her perception of reality is ‘true’ because it enables her to cope with life”. He argues that this position is:

not only intellectually indefensible, it is also morally offensive. By that logic, any and all racist, sexist, or ethnocentric propositions are “true” because some fool or knave somewhere is using them “to make sense of an unstable world”. To deny the independence of truth is to deny the possibility of either knowledge or morality. To abandon the premise that scientific knowledge *is* possible is not only to embrace the absurd; it is also to court disaster. (1991, 32)

Such arguments are reductive and essentialising, demanding that there is no difference between one “false” idea and another and seeking to scrap individual context for an “objective” form of knowledge. Yet, can objectivity be attained by humans who are biased, i.e. all of us? Finally, and most critically for the study of folklore, comes the inability to separate different types of truth and knowing. In folklore I was taught, and continue to teach my students, that when you interview someone they cannot tell their story incorrectly; they are not wrong. It does not mean you have to agree with them but that you are willing to enter their world and listen to their knowledge. Here is the fallacy

that many have bought into: that truth is objectively out there. Such statements ignore that it must be internalised in order to have meaning. Can truth exist outside of self? Certainly not all truths, only some. And who gets to decide, in a hierarchy of truth, the positions?

One of the recurring themes regarding truth is that of the child and the idea that there is a way of knowing that children have that is lost when they get older and parents and society at large start reinterpreting what their children see and experience. Julie, however, notes that because of the disengagement of her parents she never had anyone who told her that her interpretation of the world was not, in fact, true. This neglect, for that is what her childhood held, provided her with a great freedom to never lose that part of herself.

Fitch highlights this same focus on childhood, writing that:

The paranormal allows us to relive childhood wonder, to exist in a world that is outside the mechanics of the accepted physical universe, to operate in a world of symbols. Because symbolism is the first form of knowledge that we learn as infants and children, it can often feel as if it is an innate sense of truth – something basic and deeper than the learned reality in which we function today. So we feel drawn to it, not completely willing to believe the world that has been placed before us by society, science, and education. There is a deep, inner feeling that there is a different truth out there, one that functions largely in a world of magic and symbolism, one that thrives in the mysterious and unknown. (2013, 45)

Bruce M. Hood, a cognitive psychologist, draws attention to Vyse's assertion that what we acquire about the supernatural is cultural and learned (2009, 3). Several participants complicated this theory, associating what they know about the supernatural to be instinctual while reflecting on how their childhood experiences of the supernatural were, as they grew up, overwhelmed by a system of disbelief that was cultural and learned.

The concept of linear progress, whether of cultural development or that of child to adult, has other impacts on how truth is perceived, particularly within the process of

narrative of which divination partakes. Although the “narrative is motivated by the drive for coherence” (Roof 1993, 299), “coherence is not,” Braid emphasises, “an objective quality that is inherent in the events of the world” (1996, 12). Yet many institutions are geared toward this idea. Think, for example, of the legal system – a structure rooted in maintaining tradition – and concepts of truth and power; this expectation of a coherent narrative is often imposed upon a victim’s testimony (see Taslitz 1999, Lawless 2001, Burns 2004, Duncanson and Henderson 2014). This desire for a linear order not only denies individuals the opportunity to struggle to follow and interpret their story (Braid 1996, 6), thereby transforming it and themselves, but it also refuses the narrator the same right of engagement, interpretation, and comprehension.

The tension between binaries of true and false became a clear point of debate for folklorists in the middle of the twentieth century when questions of authenticity emerged. Dorson’s fakelore drew attention to an etic divide between what could and could not be considered true or, as 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). Any time that we as academics set up a binary is a time to be concerned. As the anthropologist Otávio Velho writes, “it seems that the either/or logic of academic rhetoric tends to lead to these dualisms, which may permit endless polemics, but it does not do justice to historical events” (2009, 32). However, Bendix observes, the shift toward expressive culture began to unravel the concept of fakelore (1997, 156) and call into question the authority and claims to objectivity of those who employ labels and their related dichotomies.

Martin Holbraad, a social anthropologist, took on the task of creating a concept of truth from a divinatory perspective in “Ontography and Alterity: Defining Anthropological Truth”:

Hence, with reference to the ethnography of Ifá, I formulate a concept of divinatory truth that avoids the epistemological assumption that truth must be a property of representations that make claims about the world. Rather, I argue, diviners’ claims to pronounce truth turn on an essentially ontological operation. The role of the truths that diviners pronounce is not to make a claim about the world but rather to change it – to interfere, in other words, in its ontological constitution. (2009, 82)

Zeitlyn carries on this idea by arguing that there is a need to shift away from “an obsession with truth or correctness...and return to a more appropriate set of concerns of social anthropology: what is required for the clients to find the divinatory process valid or satisfactory (in the sense of how their concerns are satisfied). As an aspiration, we could imagine an account of divination in which the words ‘truth’ and ‘true’ never occur” (2012, 537). While I do not necessarily agree with this aspiration, it is an important point. I caution that instead of getting rid of the concept of truth altogether, the focus needs to be on challenging what is meant by this term, taking control of the word away from a single construct and, instead, recognising that true and truth are ideas that are subjective, constructed, and reveal a great deal of meaning when explored from the inside out. Victor Turner writes of Ndembu divination that it contained “[m]odes of divination...regarded as instruments which both detect lies and discover truth, although, since they are operated by fallible men, their verdicts are not always accepted without question” (1968, 27). While this may hold true for certain methods, times, and geographies, it is apparent that within the Canadian context of this research divination is not used nor intended to discover larger truths and lies but is meant to help people discover their own truths and

confront their own lies. These issues are played out, not in finding facts, but in finding the self.

What Do You Know?

The truth is tricky; it does not tend to stay still long enough to be captured and conveyed. The folklorist Georgina Boyes, in observing the tension between the cultural suppression of perceived truths and the subcultural knowledge of reality, observes that: “*The truth is a shifting concept, dependent on viewpoint and accidental presence at a place in time; a truth exists wherever it is perceived*” (1996, 50-1). It becomes rooted in the idea of the anecdote, of the personal experience. The truth that I know is not absolute. It is not even “the” truth. But it is what I know. Many of the people I interviewed discussed the fact that there are things they just know, that they have always known. It is part of the intuitive process. Erin explained to me, with regard to her psychic side, “I’ve just always known things. It’s just a knowing; it’s a second nature, you just know. I can’t explain it. I just know” (I.18). In my own fieldnotes I found myself confronted with the question: “How do we ‘prove’ knowing?” (June 12, 2015). Peter, for example, returned throughout our conversation to how the knowledge he receives during a reading is rooted in the feeling that he gets (I.45). Northcote, in discussing the political nature of the paranormal, observes that “it challenges the boundaries between ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ knowledge that lie at the heart of our ‘modern’ society” (2007, 10). Divination plays this same role, questioning hierarchies of knowledge and demanding it incorporate, not deny, felt experience.

Through her work with Jeddah, Patrice has come to recognise that experience and knowing are deeply intertwined. The guided meditations that Jeddah teaches allow for her to connect with and explore her inner nature, a process that is rooted in the experiential (I.43). Knowing something mentally, she clarifies, is not the same as experiencing it. “With embodied knowledge,” she wrote to me, “we rest in complete certainty that we are energetic beings capable of altering our experience through conscious intent” (email, May 9, 2017). Knowing cannot be divorced from personal experience which is something Richard finds appealing about Spiritualism. It makes no absolutist claim: “If you say to me, ‘I think that’s a load of garbage’, I’d say, ‘fine’. You have to find your own truth; you have to find what resonates with you” (I.46). Truth and knowing, therefore, are not easily separated.

Mirroring the importance Peter places on feeling, Patrice relates it to the idea of detecting truth through an awareness of contraction or expansion (I.43). In reflecting on this point in a later email, she clarified the distinction:

If we feel expansive, we are aligned with the Source of all being, with Truth. If we feel contracted, we are resisting the life force and operating from some sense of illusion. The resistance arises from conscious or subconscious beliefs that are not aligned with the reality of how life works. So it comes down to a really simple strategy for navigating through life and our experiences: Do I feel expansive or contracted? And if I feel contracted, I can acknowledge what’s happening without resisting it, and then choose to focus on anything that feels better. (email, May 9, 2017)

Part of knowing comes from the idea that thoughts create the realities within which people reside. Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, a sociologist, explains that “[i]deas live beyond their times and have a way of reaching beyond the interests of their formation. Contrary to Marx, and critics of ideology more generally, ideas reach beyond the context of their

creation, and even the specification of the context is not at all certain” (2005, 285). These ideas also have the power to grow, change, and survive, becoming meaningful to new people and adapting to new contexts. Truth changes.

This desire for “methodological atheism” or an objectivity that is removed from emotion (Ezzy 2008, 309) has extended to theory itself being perceived as ideal (masculine) detachment (Lutz 1995). This impartiality is a concept that key figures such as Claude Lévi-Strauss saw as the ambition of anthropology (2013, 22). Edith and Victor Turner reflected upon this expectation and its limitations as they sought out ways to discuss religious experience within their disciplinary framework. Looking to Edith Turner’s work, especially in *Experiencing Ritual: A New Interpretation of African Healing* where she discusses her own experiences with these rituals, it is apparent how important feeling is to her work. She challenges the positioning of the researcher and the concept of objectivity by writing about her own subjective involvement and pushing for experience to be taken seriously (Dubisch 2008, 334).

The importance of acknowledging emotion and experience are vital in folkloristic and divinatory undertakings. As Catherine Bell, a religious studies scholar, observes about the entire performative approach to religious actions, it does not offer definitive interpretations but instead is “better at conveying the multiple ways in which such activities are meant and experienced, as well as how such multiplicity is integral to the efficacy of ritual performances” (1998, 318). Furthermore, the role of emotion must also be recognised in relation to the positioning of the researcher. Even if one does not see within divination the truths that others do, one can understand the driving forces of fear, grief, hope, and the desire for information that bring individuals to a diviner’s door.

Truth becomes rooted in the idea of the anecdote, of the personal experience. Folklorist Barre Toelken, in “The Moccasin Telegraph and Other Improbabilities: A Personal Essay”, seeks to redefine the structures that are often assumed to make up a truthful experience. “Rather than privileging any kind of sequential logic, the anecdote uses what I would call ‘cluster logic,’ in which all things that are seen to be functionally related are recognized for their reflexivity and intertextuality – regardless of the sequence of particular” (1995, 54). He goes on to say that “I believe that the kind of cluster logic discussed here, which assumes that relationships are more important than sequence and lineal causation, represents the thought process out of which the moccasin telegraph and other similar ways of knowing may grow” (ibid., 55). I suspect many of my participants would recognise this concept of cluster logic. Decades before Toelken, another folklorist, Lauri Honko, was wrestling with similar ideas, writing that a “person’s storehouse of memories can accumulate supernatural experiences, the meaning of which becomes evident only after weeks or even months. In this way omen-memorates are formed: an unexplainable event experienced earlier is later interpreted retrospectively, for example, in connection with a fire as an omen of catastrophe” (1964, 17). In conversations with diviners, this phenomenon is quite common. There is, it is safe to propose, a divination-memorate that overlaps with the idea of cluster logic where meaning is created, not out of the sequential ordering of events, but out of the meanings that emerge from them coming together as a whole. This approach fits within Braid’s observation that “[f]ollowing a narrative is not a linear progress. Narratives are not structured like arguments where a sequence of statements logically leads to a clearly visible conclusion” (1996, 8). Many personal stories do not progress along a tidy path, and concepts of truth and facts become

much more complicated by the simple recognition that they cannot always be established and that they are not always static. Instead of progressing forward they cluster, they move together and apart shaping each other and being reformed by experience.

As has become an almost expected pattern in this journey, the map turns into a palimpsest. When Anne teaches her students she experiences the multi-layered nature of knowledge that many of us do when we are teaching:

The vast majority are not there to teach me what they know, they're there to receive knowledge. And as the class is set up we end up learning from each other. And I, they're always saying, "shit that totally blows me out of the water." Like really! Really! "Where did you hear that because that's fascinating!" That's just one more layer, you know. So I'm also open to learning from my students. (I.2)

A driving force of divination is the desire to know more, shared by the participant and querent alike. Elizabeth J. told me:

It's all about information, information and awareness. And I think more than anything, that's what people are looking for. They want information. They want to know, like when you start to, we use the term wakening, awake [...] So if people start to wake up, then it's like, okay, now what? I need information, I need to know, I need tools, I need this, I need that, I need to figure it out, I need help, I need support. And that's when all of it comes into play, and we can really have a huge, huge, vast pool of knowledge and tools and places and people that we can access to get what we need to figure out whatever it is that we need to figure out or heal or let go of. (I.16)

It is dangerous to think, however, that waking up demands that one let go of the dream – a nonlinear, symbolic space. Instead, when individuals wake up it is in a space through the dream, through the divination, which is a journey that demands they carry new experiences with them.

To know is a powerful thing. To know is to be able to take action, to see more clearly, to face one's own ignorance and to recognise that there are ways of becoming, of transforming the self. It is something that Wendy finds very compelling about palmistry:

“I believe that really ‘knowing’ you are a spiritual being having a human experience and that all of it is part of a plan you desired for yourself is incredibly profound” (I.51). For Chris, the gift of her work is in the sharing of knowledge:

I have found it an enormous privilege to sit here with a client and work with a client according to the prescription of their life that I see on a piece of paper and have us work together to understand how to live life more fully or more progressively or more in an evolutionary process. Look at the vast opportunity of learning I’ve had in talking to all these people. I can only live one life, and I can only learn from my own mistakes, but when I sit here and work with a client, look at how many lives I get a chance to look at or to work with, and the enormous amount of knowledge and understanding I’ve been able to gain from that. So that takes me to the next phase of my career, which is lecturing and writing and passing on some of those things that I have learned. The other part of my career is to help astrology evolve to a powerful discipline of knowledge by itself, not bulked in with any other body of knowledge or form. (I.6)

Gus talked about Aleister Crowley, the infamous occultist who, with Lady Frieda Harris, created the Thoth tarot deck. He reflects that one of the reasons why Crowley is regarded as such a controversial figure is that “he kind of let people see what was behind the curtain in a sense, and I think that’s one of the parts that I really like about reading his writing and reading people who write about his writing” (I.19). Gus has come to see and trust knowledge that is passed down intergenerationally, but he also recognises there are many things that:

we just absolutely flat out don’t know. And that’s part of, maybe, why this does excite me as well is because the knowledge just seems like it’s so ancient, it’s been around for so long. And, yeah, it’s very, I find that really – I don’t know. Inspiring’s not the right word, I find that really rooting. It’s something that’s like fundamentally – it seems like, I know for myself maybe part of the struggle that I had spiritually even, like, with growing up Catholic and being a white, Christian, straight male in North America was that it always felt like there wasn’t like a profundity, it just wasn’t profound what I was finding within my faith, and I feel like I’ve recovered some of that with the ideas that the roots for some of this knowledge and the roots for some of this spirituality do go back that far. And then it’s neat reading, like, I’ve read the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the Sumerian text. And I find roots that remind of things that come up with the tarot inside of it. Like, I’m

like, that's cool, like you know. That's just really interesting to me. And I find that, yeah, like that excites me. Being able to root yourself kind of in such an ancient form of storytelling and all those, and astrology. (I.19)

The capacity to accept that, in the end, you sometimes will not or cannot know is also important in divination. At times there is no message that comes through because it is not the right question or the right time (it has happened to me more than once). Lesley reflected that:

I think that as the people who do it, we ought to remain somewhat in awe. We ought to have some level of questioning about what we do because when we get to that place where we think we're infallible, and yet, you know, the whole experience of being human tells us exactly the opposite, right. If it was about being infallible, that's why I really like that perception that we're here to experience what we already know to be true. (I.35)

There are limitations on what diviners can know; to be human is to contend with boundaries. As many repeated throughout our interviews, what they understand is deeply personal and they do not claim it as universal. C.F. explained that, "I don't believe that humans are capable of knowing this stuff. I don't think – I think that believing you know something is severely limiting to your potential" because it gives people a sense of security that limits them (I.5). Coming to this recognition emphasises that there are different types of knowledge and that all of them contain biases, limitations, and advantages. This perspective undermines criticism like that from philosophers Theodore Schick and Lewis Vaughn:

If subjective limitations might be distorting our experience, our personal evidence is tainted and can't tell us much at all. That is why anecdotal evidence – evidence based on personal testimony – carried so little weight in scientific investigations. When we can't establish beyond a reasonable doubt that a person was not influenced by these limitations, we aren't justified in believing that what they report is real.

Science is a systematic attempt to get around such limitations. It is a set of procedures designed to keep us from fooling ourselves. By performing controlled experiments, scientists seek to ensure that what we observe is not affected by these limitations. ([1995] 2005, 80-1)

Lett argues that the knowledge that comes from divination is “the subjective illusion of knowledge” while “science promises us objective knowledge itself” (1991, 320). However, it is this type of hierarchical structuring that ultimately limits human growth. He goes on to argue that “[w]hile some people may believe that the self-deception offered by divination is useful for some purposes (although personally I see no value in it whatsoever), it is far more useful for people to have objective knowledge that will enable them to accurately and reliably predict and control the world” (ibid.). There is much to unpack in a sentiment that is not unique to Lett. First, the idea that scientific knowledge is “independent of our goals, desires, hopes, needs, or fears; and unlike divinatory knowledge, scientific knowledge is self-correcting” (ibid.) suggests that divination is removed from self-correction when, in fact, this lies at its heart. Furthermore, the biases of those who seek out and utilise scientific knowledge are not free from human desires. Science does not attain full independence from humanity, if such a thing is advisable. As Goldstein notes:

The materialistic or rationalistic approach in the social sciences has not only forced a notion of supernatural belief as antithetical to modern thought and therefore destined for imminent demise, but has also meant that we found only that for which we were looking: a world that had forsaken popular belief and replaced it with “rational thought”. While the formula itself (supernatural belief \neq rational, therefore modern/educated = no supernatural belief) was apparently wrong and misleading, the central fallacy on which it is based – that supernatural belief and rational thought are dichotomous – was perhaps the most problematic premise. (2007a, 62-3)

Second, the question becomes why a knowledge that is intertwined with our “goals, desires, hopes, needs, or fears” is lesser. Why should that which is deeply rooted in the self and in self-knowledge be undermined? Additionally, many divinatory practitioners have systems of self-correction, complex structures that recognise the intricate nature of proof within larger systems. Goldstein acknowledges this when she writes that:

This exploration of embedded use of evidence is not intended to suggest the ontological reality of supernatural experience but rather to illustrate that these narratives are generally well-reasoned and more to the point, *concerned* with reason. In the narrative emphasis on evidence and rational belief, we can see that the personal supernatural experience narrative doesn’t exist *in the face of* modern scientific knowledge, but in content and structure it exists *because* of modern scientific knowledge. (2007b, 78)

Finally, the question of the reliability and predictability of the world must be addressed. That it is not predictable in any way that is consistent leads to the issue of control and what it means to seek to regulate it. Much of what makes the world challenging and unpredictable seems to come from a very specific desire to exert a force on it. It establishes an illusion of stability that is a thin facade over a chaotic world that will not be ignored forever.

Prove Me Wrong

Modern skepticism’s emergence, supported by a variety of disciplines and scholars, is not a monolithic entity and one should not assume that all scientific endeavours are against alternative practices such as divination. Donna herself identifies as both diviner and scientist (I.12). Many of the sites of contention emerge from what Magliocco terms *the scientific*: “a popular understanding of scientific consciousness

which has become a folk belief in its own right” (2004, 204). The feminist biologist

Lynda Birke writes in her book *Feminism and the Biological Body* that:

My focus is Western science, because that is what I know best. There are, to be sure, other sciences and other ways of conceptualising the ‘natural world’. But modern science and technology have enormous power, not only to name the world but also to exert influence over it for good or ill. That science assumes the mantle of universal truth, from which we must infer that descriptions of how bodies work are culturally neutral. They are not, of course; those descriptions are deeply embedded in the history of what we now understand as the natural sciences as these emerged at a time of Western expansion. (2000, 4-5)

These ideas are the ones that carry great cultural currency and form a shared language that emerges in critiques of divinatory practice. Words such as skepticism, science, reason, and logic come to be coded terms for that which is objective, rational, and academically approved. As such, they are placed in direct opposition to the supernatural even though, as we have seen, these ideas are not universal in meaning.

At its core, much of the work that modern skepticism has done to diminish these practices in modern society is undertaken with good intent by those who feel they have found the answers to the workings of the world and want to share them. They want to help people move beyond beliefs and actions that are deemed harmful, an idea that has a long history. Frazer argued in *The Golden Bough* that “the dispassionate observer, whose studies have led them to plumb its depths, can hardly regard it [superstition] otherwise than as a standing menace to society” ([1994] 2009, 54). Schick and Vaughn contend in their book on critical thinking, *How to Think About Weird Things*, that “there are consequences for holding fast to mystery against all reason [...] belief in alleged mysteries affects people’s lives, sometimes dramatically and not always for the good” ([1995] 2005, 338). History abounds with examples: the witchcraft trials; the reading of

congenital disorders as a sign of a supernatural, demonic, influence (Eberly 1991, 230); and the torture and murder of people like Bridget Cleary in 1895 Tipperary, Ireland, under claims of her being a fairy changeling (Bourke [1999] 2006). So, too, does the present. Recent examples include the cult panics, especially Satanic, that emerged in North America in the late twentieth century (see Victor 1993, Stevens 1996, Ellis 2000, Laycock 2013) and Slenderman and the attacks related to this legend (see CBC 2014, Chess and Newsom 2015, Peck 2015). As well, ongoing debates over how the medical establishment should deal with religious aspects of healing (see Lévi-Strauss [1963] 1967; Alver 1995, 27; O'Connor 1995; Hanegraaff 1998, 43; Bennett 1999, 1; Kwilecki 2004, 485; Valk 2012, 363) reveal the persistence of these ideas, even in the face of skepticism.

When one of the most famous modern scientists and skeptics, Carl Sagan, writes about working to disprove the supernatural, he cautions his readers to not forget the humanity of those who hold these beliefs, asking them to “temper our criticism with kindness” for those who do not have the cultural tools to understand what is happening (1996, 298). The problem with this kindness, especially when bestowed upon the “common” person by an academic, is how easily it becomes patronising. It could be argued that Evans-Pritchard was showing kindness to the Azande when he wrote that “[t]heir blindness is not due to stupidity: they reason excellently in the idiom of their beliefs, but they cannot reason outside, or against, their beliefs because they have no other idiom in which to express their thoughts” ([1937] 1976, 159). Maybe Frazer’s discussion of the “dull, the weak, the ignorant, and the superstitious” ([1994] 2009, 53) is tempered by his acknowledgement that “their errors were not wilful extravagances or the ravings of

insanity, but simply hypotheses, justifiable as such at the time they were propounded but which a fuller experience has proved to be inadequate” (ibid., 219). In discussing the ongoing presence of alternative medicine, Frank Davidoff writes of the concern of those in the medical profession of which he is a part that “[o]ur distress echoes the feelings of parents whose children reject their advice and values” (1998, 1068). But in the end, it is still one person declaring the right to speak for another and dismissing differing worldviews as products of ignorance.

Sagan’s call for a respectful hearing of beliefs and myths is unequivocally correct (1996, 298), and it needs to be emphasised that listening and understanding do not require condoning. However, he continues on to declare that “not all folk beliefs are equally valid” (ibid., 298), positioning himself as capable of discerning better than those who have had paranormal encounters which “ripple with gullibility” (ibid., 13), what their reality ought to be. For example, he makes the decision that ethnomedicine is valid, but other folk beliefs are not, based on his own engagement with and perceptions of the world. In the same way, Loudell Snow, an anthropologist, examines folk magic and commercialisation and concludes that the focus of the academic is not to ponder these beliefs but “to see to social change” that will make magic unlikely and the ongoing existence of “conjure men” unnecessary (1979, 55). Declaring them invalid or discounting their meanings, however, ignores their integral roles in people’s lives and realities, often imposing interpretations that are irrelevant because of their claim to rational objectivity.

Much of this debate, encouraged by skepticism, has great potential to expand our conversations by providing different perspectives. The problem lies in the predetermined

decision about what labels (divination, supernatural, rational, proof, real) get applied and by whom. As Bourke notes about Cleary's death: "There is no doubt that he [Cleary's husband] was responsible for his wife's death, or that narratives about fairy abductions played a part in his thinking, but 'superstition' simply labels what happened; it does not explain it" ([1999] 2006, 134). It is easy to forget the subjective nature of language and the meanings personally ascribed to these linguistic tools. Folklorist Gregory Schrempf is quick to point out that skeptics are "prone to lose sight of how much – most obviously in the heroizing, narrativizing, ritualizing, and celebrating – they are adding to the revered principle of rationality" (2014, 40). So when Schick and Vaughn rightly note that the unknown does not equate the supernatural, they also reveal their unquestioning acceptance of concepts of the rational and natural when they follow up by stating that "[w]hen faced with something you don't understand, then, the most rational course of action is to seek out a natural explanation" ([1995] 2005, 23). There is nothing inherently right about choosing science or the supernatural; they are both constructs that carry with them advantages and limitations and, as we have seen, divination and the supernatural are not divorced from nature.

Richard W. Santana and Gregory Erickson, scholars of literature and popular culture, (2008, 162) and Ellis (2003, 157) all recognise that for those who have faced the supernatural, the most rational explanations are that demons, ghosts, UFOs, witches, and the like, exist. People, writes Bennett, "continue to have experiences which demand explanations that science as we define it today cannot provide" (1999, 2). Science is not a perspective that should be excluded, and it is embraced by many in the New Age movement, and by many of my participants, for its potential revelations about the unified

world (Hanegraaff 1998, 62), but it must be recognised that it has its disadvantages, especially when engaging with complex and personal supernatural experiences. The lack of a system through which to discuss the supernatural, Hutton argues, is not to be regarded as a flawless western achievement (1999, 270). It ignores not only the supernatural, but also the role of skepticism within these systems of belief.

Proof is a topic that comes up when one converses with a practitioner. It has become almost a stereotype at this point to assume that their work is on the opposite end of the spectrum or that they would avoid proof altogether. This assumption does not reflect my interview results. When I spoke with Donna, this topic came up directly:

KARI: You're analytical, science-based. The concept of proof to you, how does that factor in?

DONNA: Yeah, that's a big deal for me. Proof is a big deal. Like that's why when I do readings I always really need them to tell me something. Well part of it too is things I feel and see. I remember the very first time I saw spirit, like, literally, it was white snow coming out of a person's head. That's how it came up. And I was like, whoa, okay, this is odd. Is anyone else seeing this? Because I had just got through doing my first psychic development; I was starting to really open up – okay, we're going to go with this, we're going to just let it go. Because part of it is just opening your mind and relaxing.

And so I was telling another colleague of mine, a real science-minded guy, and he goes – but yet he was still intrigued, right – and he goes, “read me.” And he touches me like that [touches Kari's arm]. “Read me”...And I said, “oh, it doesn't work like that,” and I touched him back and poom, right away, out of the side of his head pops this, like a head. It was a head of white snow, and I knew it was his mom. And I went [nervous laugh] and I started laughing like a fool because I was like, I didn't know what I was going to say...well, does anybody else see that? Holy shit, what the hell is that? And I'm drinking my coffee and I'm like [nervous laugh] and he's going, what the hell's wrong with you? Nothing, nothing. And I would kind of look sideways thinking it must be – but no, it was like, Donna, you're not believing what you see. You have to kind of believe that. But I right away wanted to see if it was some aberration in my eyes, you know. Because when you're not readily just going to believe something right away, it is tough.

It's kind of like proving it to yourself. I think it makes me a better medium in the long run because I don't reach. I really need to know, okay, this is what it means, or this is what it does, this is who it is, that kind of thing. (I.12)

The centrality of the personal experience and the accompanying recognition that it can only be accommodated in multiple realities shifts notions of proof from the exclusive domain of science to a shared concept that must include individual evidence.

The need for proof, or evidence, is an established part of being an evidential medium, a title that many claim in Canada. K.T. explains it as:

It is a medium who asks the spirit world for evidence of their existence, right. So for instance, I usually say, show me an object or a memory or an image so that the person I'm reading for knows that it's really you. And I think if you want to look up more about it, I'm just trying to remember what it's called, there's a college for mediums in the UK that I would love to go to, it looks very Harry Potter like, what is it called? Stansted. Stansted offers courses in evidential mediumship, and that's what I consider myself to be. I haven't had formal training in evidentiary mediumship yet, but other people have told me that's what I do, and it makes sense, right...I want evidence, right. I want to prove to people that what I'm doing is real and not just something that I'm making up out of my head or the same answers that I give to everybody, right. (I.29)

She notes that it is part of her job to ask the spirits for proof of who they are (I.28), and while it would not stand up in scientific understanding or legal systems, it is equally valid. These validation points, as Leah terms them, are very important for not only affirming for her client that her information is correct and that the spirit is present, but it is also crucial for her as well. "Because we need that," she told me, "we need that confirmation too, right? So, you know, my intuition gets messed up with my self as well" (I.35). Richard explains that:

And why we do it [mediumship] is to prove there is life after life; there's no such thing as death. Because the real you; your body dies. It's gone in two or three days, rotten away, right. But your spirit or your soul or whatever you want to call it lives on forever. And so we go home to the spirit world; this is where you came

from. And so we can prove that because where else would we be able to get the information like this is what this person looks like, right. And so it's amazing; so we're very proud of it that way. (I.46)

These systems of proof are essential to the effectiveness of the work of diviners.

One example that I saw play out at the Evening with Spirit was where flowers were provided to certain members. Richard and I discussed this in our second interview:

KARI: I thought the flowers were interesting. We talked a little bit about that but I'd love to get it on tape because I thought that was such a really unexpected but really lovely –

RICHARD: Yes.

KARI: aspect of the reading.

RICHARD: Yeah, and I do forget to tell people. This started when I started doing platform, you know, platform mediumship, it's three years ago now that I started it. Yeah, sorry, four years, the time flies. Anyway, spirit will forgive me if I – because I can't remember. Yes, it wasn't the first few weeks because I'd never done it before, literally so nervous because all of a sudden I had to do this to raise our rent. I moved from a place that was paying \$300 a month to \$1100. And we still do the same things, so I said, "oh oh." So we did Evening with Spirit. [...] So I think, I'm going to say maybe two months after I started it, all of a sudden, spirit started coming to me on the day, the morning of Evening with Spirit. [...] I call in spirit, I sit in the power, and I call in spirit and I say "okay, I'm going" – and I just talk to them like this, Kari, I say, "okay it's Evening with Spirit, I'm going to be working tonight; I need all your help. All of you who help in the spirit world please come tonight," and then I say, "if there's any people who are here now who have people coming to the show tonight," because they know, "and you want to give me some message upfront," that's the way – so I'd have three or four messages ready.

And what spirit did, when they started doing this, they would say to me: we want you to buy three bouquets of flowers. I go – I remember the first time it happened, I go why? They said, just do it. So I know to do it. And so when I get to the flower shop, this is uncanny. I'd go in and I'd go, what am I supposed to buy? And they'd just push me, okay, one of them, one of them, one of them. Then it got better. They would tell me, one night I know I had to get a dozen roses, a dozen red roses. And then the other two bouquets were just to go, be nice and colourful, and they told me the red roses were for a husband who was coming through, it was for their anniversary, he had passed. [...]

And it's phenomenal. It's an extra little gift. And so, it's another way, see we start looking at life a little different too, Kari, once you get involved in spiritualism, and you work at it and you practice at it, we look at things different, so when they told me to buy the flowers, and I believe in spirit so I'll do it, they're proving to me, you trusted us, right, here it is. And so the night I had to bring the roses like I had no idea who it was for, but I knew who, what the occasion was. And so there was a lady in there, she was, "oh my god, it was our anniversary and he always bought me red roses." So that was hers. And then I can't remember the other two. That stuck out in my mind and spirits done it ever since but I don't – it's just phenomenal. It's a phenomenal gift they've given me, and I learn from it, look at the trust. If you trust them they will do amazing things. (I.47)

Mediumship, in particular, requires systems established to ensure the efficacy of the messages. This act brings together the multiple forms of proof needed for both the audience and the medium alike and results in the manifestation of tangible proof during a heavily intangible process. The exploration of this idea resulted in the collection of many stories from my participants:

DONNA: One time a woman came in and her son had passed and I had that. I knew it was a disease but I heard AIDS right away. And I thought: oh my God, I'm not going to say AIDS, and she [the spirit] said, "no, you have to say AIDS." I didn't want to say AIDS but I had to say AIDS because that way she knew exactly who I had. So I said AIDS and connection. Oh! Because that was the first time I ever had somebody that passed that way, especially nowadays, right. And so it was, it's those kind of things that I have to pay attention to. So the skeptic had to step aside a little bit and just allow some of the stuff to come in. It's still a balancing act, though. I don't believe readily stuff somebody might just tell me right away. It's hard because sometimes I'll like, I'll measure it. I'm always measuring it. It's a battle, I don't know. It's my science side. (I.12)

ERIN: I had this one reading, who was it? I think it was her mom, her mom or grandma came through; she had passed. The lady that I was reading, it was her mom or grandma. Anyways, through the whole reading the spirit was showing me, so it was a picture in my head, so it was a toilet and a seagull, a big seagull upside down in it with its wings sprawled and everything. And I was like that is the stupidest thing ever; I'm not saying that because, you know what I mean, no, I'm not saying that. And I ignored it the whole reading; we went on to everything else.

It was a good reading, you know. And finally, at the end of the reading, she was getting ready to leave and I was like, oh shit, so I said to her, I'm like, "well, I don't know how this makes sense, but, you know, she's showing me a toilet with a seagull upside down in it." And the woman across from me started bawling. She put her head in her hands, and she just started crying, and she said, "that's what I needed to hear." She said, "now I know this is my mom." Like it was that piece of validation that she needed, and I'm going, oh, okay.

Well, apparently her mom or grandma, whoever it was, she was an avid animal lover, and she was walking one day, it was by the beach or something. [...] She came across this seagull, and its wing was hurt, and she took this seagull back to her apartment building, not her house, her apartment building, and she nursed it back to health. And she got one of those really big bird cages, and she kept a seagull in her apartment. And she took care of it. And one day she went grocery shopping, and she forgot to lock the latch. Well, the seagull got out and flew around the apartment and landed face down in the toilet bowl, and because it was so big it couldn't get out and it drowned. And this woman was just devastated over this seagull, right. So for her daughter now to hear that this was what she's showing me. Who else would have that experience? "You know," she said, "I just know. That validated for me that this is truly my mom." You know, so I know now to go – and that was right in my early days of reading, too, so I know now to, just whatever it is that I get, I have to tell them because it might be what you need to hear, you know. Even though I don't understand it, it might be what you need to hear. So it's just listening; it's hearing. (I.18)

SHANNON: 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. And so, you know, I was like, okay, this isn't important, like, 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 I just kept, oh, 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 was there. You know, because I'm like, really who dresses up their kid – you know, if it would have been, oh yeah, it's a ghost. It's Halloween, of course you're going to dress as a ghost or witch. You know, something like that that's pretty legit, but when it's spaghetti and meatballs, yeah, I'm like sweet. Like it was awesome, you know. So yeah, it was a really cool moment. (I.49)

With the topic of confirmation, however, also comes the issues of errors. Lesley acknowledges that people, including divination practitioners, make mistakes, much of which has to do with ego. The problem, she finds, is not being wrong but with the fact that many cannot own up to their mistakes. “I don’t like being wrong; we all have an ego and, you know, part of the way we’re raised is right and wrong becomes such a powerful motivator as do good and bad, success and failure [...] that’s why I say, you know, psychics, I said, I’m just like a quarterback, I don’t complete all my passes” (I.35). The folklorist Maxine Miska, in her study of a failed séance, notes that there is the place for skepticism that does not destroy the belief but helps to keep it in check (1995, 103), especially given the propensity of the mind to playing tricks (Hutton 1942, 83). The “recovered” memories that set off the Satanic cult scare reveal the need for psychological studies on suggestibility and belief (see, for example, Sagan 1996, De Rios, Dobkin, and Stachalek 1999, Hergovich 2003, Wilson 2010). Yet there are dangers when this research is presented as the cure for the supernatural “problem”: it assumes a binary where it is always otherworldly or not and that belief systems do not have their own structures for determining when there is supernatural influence. It silences the voices of those involved; universalises the rational; and, finally, forgets that while the “memory is a strange, unreliable thing” (Davidson 1963, 532), so too is the world.

An example Donna provided me from her own experience shows the ways in which certain definitions of what is rational and what is normal can be used to undermine a personal experience, even by those who have it:

Actually the pendulum was the very first thing I used; I got that in Salem. And we each got one, [her friend] and I. So after the guy [a practitioner she had gone to for

a reading] told me I was a medium, we went back to our rooms and I kind of hold the pendulum up and you ask it to say: show me yes, show me no. And then I said, “am I a medium?” And so of course it starts to spin and was going so fast and I went, “oh my God,” and I dropped it. [...] [laughs] So of course I said, we just got ourselves too psyched up, that’s all that was. That was just us freaking ourselves out. See and that’s how you rationalise stuff. But I thought, no really, it did spin. Regardless of how you think you freaked yourself out, that sucker spun. You know, so at the same time, you have to, kind of like, it did happen. Why it happened is the question. But it did happen. (I.12)

She found herself in a situation where the rational was in conflict with the proof of the situation. It was not, as is often supposed, that individuals manipulate their memories to justify belief in the supernatural. In this case it was the opposite; this reworking of her experience was done to justify western rationalism.

“One of the most puzzling aspects of Spiritualism, and indeed of psychical and paranormal phenomena in general,” Kripal writes, “is the confusing ways the seemingly genuine phenomena were unmistakably mixed up with the fraudulent shenanigans, and often in the same individual” (2010, 52). Declaring the diminishment of the supernatural is easier if proof of one person’s scam can be applied to everyone. For example, there is the tendency to assume that proving the Fox sisters (who are credited with beginning the American Spiritualist movement in 1848) as frauds means all spiritualists were frauds. However, argues Kenneth Pimple, an ethics scholar, “[m]odern Spiritualism can only be fraudulent if hundreds of thousands of mediums have perpetuated a tremendous, unbroken series of frauds over the last 150 years” (1995, 81-2). Furthermore, one of the most concerning aspects of skepticism’s “disproving” of the supernatural is the silencing of those involved. In a rush to refute a spiritualist, for example, the querent is often overlooked as they are assumed to be gullible and, even if they feel they have had a legitimate encounter, their narratives are not considered viable evidence. Doing so

overlooks the paradox wherein the reality of the false practitioner is not the same as the seeker's. If the latter receives the message they needed and declares the situation to have been real for them, then it is real, even if it was initially and intentionally constructed as fake.

Magliocco succinctly notes that rationality is a social construct (2004, 102); western rationalism cannot be regarded as the baseline for all human experiences throughout the world and history. Consequently, in bringing together science, rationality, proof, and the alternative, the supernatural is revealed to have equal claim to the rational, albeit while challenging broader definitions of this term. As Magliocco notes, the worldview of most of the Pagans she interviewed held that magic and rationality are not, in fact, contradictions but are complimentary: "Neo-Pagans resist this construction of reality based on materialism, pragmatism, and rationalism (as distinct from rationality). Neo-Pagans do not reject rationality, but rather the exclusion of certain ways of knowing and operating in the world deemed 'irrational', and thus inferior" (ibid., 201). This same perspective is not limited to any particular group but is reflected by many of the participants I interviewed, in their own constructs of systems of proof.

Bennett writes that "[i]t is my own belief that rationalism and supernaturalism are cultural options, competing discourses; and that neither is 'better' or less 'superstitious' than the other" (1999, 38). Abram encountered the humbling experience of the merging of the spiritual and natural when spending time in Indonesia witnessing a food offering being made to the spirits. He observed the ants carrying away the offering, and "I walked into my room chuckling to myself: the balian and his wife had gone to so much trouble to placate the household spirits with gifts only to have their offering stolen by little six-

legged thieves. What a waste! But then a strange thought dawned on me: What if the ants were the very ‘household spirits’ to whom the offerings were being made” (1997, 12). He reflects on this experience noting that “my encounter with the ants was the first of many experiences suggesting to me that the ‘spirits’ of an indigenous culture are primarily those modes of intelligence or awareness that do *not* possess human form” (ibid.). Within this example there is a tension that is frequently encountered by practitioners: that a scientific, rational, or logical answer should supersede a spiritual one. However, in many people’s experiences, the two coexist. Ants will naturally take the food offered, but they may also be supernaturally motivated.

In addressing skinwalkers among the Navajo, Toelken observes that they are regarded as a part of everyday life and not of the supernatural (1995, 57); therefore, the acknowledgement of their existence and influence is logical and not requiring systematic proof. If an action, such as magic, is regarded as working, it is not considered to be irrational (Magliocco 2004, 102; Lindquist 2006, 7, 171; McGuire 2008, 33). In fact, rationality is part of the supernatural or spiritual event: “people often immediately begin to try to figure out what such experiences mean, and that intuition and rational thought are both part of the experiential/cultural process we have labeled ‘unofficial’ or ‘folk’” (Mullen 2000, 133). To ignore science is ill-advised, but so too is the “naive objectivism of the scientific method with respect to the paranormal” (Kripal 2010, 227). For what, asks Betty, is really the most natural and rational response to the occurrences such as those within the body of a possessed person that he has researched. “Is it easier to believe human beings can do such things on their own with their bodies and minds [during possession], or that these things are unnatural and/or extra-human and can be done only

by something alien to them *using* their bodies?” (2005, 20), and why must the answer always be the same?

In the rush to impose upon others a rational explanation, the outsider can easily overlook the systems already in place within the culture that recognise that the supernatural is not the only option. Hood notes that the “evidence for the supernatural is elusive” existing within anecdotes, piecemeal, or “so weak it barely registers as being really there”. “But lack of scientific credibility does little to dent the belief” he writes, because “most of us have a supersense telling us that the evidence is really there and that we should simply ignore the science and keep an open mind. The problem with open minds is that everything falls out – including our reason” (2009, xii). In doing so, he assumes that all people who believe have no system of critical discernment. When people move beyond stereotypes and engage with individual experience, they challenge this perspective.

The question of the anecdote is one that is important for the study of folklore and the concept of proof because it is rooted in this type of information. Shermer writes that “[a]necdotes – stories recounted in support of claim – do not make a science. Without corroborative evidence from other sources, or physical proof of some sort, ten anecdotes are no better than one, and a hundred anecdotes are no better than ten. [...] what we need are controlled experiments, not anecdotes” (2002, 48). He echoes Lett’s argument that “[b]ecause paranormal beliefs are illogical, inconsistent, and evidentially unfounded, proponents of paranormal claims must engage in elaborate intellectual gymnastics to buttress their irrational convictions” (1991, 305). Yet what is missed is that there is a need for it all. It is important to move outside of a hierarchy where value is assigned to

knowledge and start to look at it all as pieces of people's lives. Instead of pitting different forms of knowledge against each other, diverse systems must be recognised as integrated into individual lives and are frequently communicated through stories. We live by and through anecdotes, our own and other's. Kripal writes: "Each of us, after all, is just such an irreducible, unrepeatable, unquantifiable Anecdote" (2010, 2), and divination provides a system of proof associated with them and their context.

Hilda Ellis Davidson, who took an interdisciplinary approach to topics of religions, particularly Paganism, notes in her study "Myths and Symbols in Religion and Folklore" that it quickly became evident to many in the social sciences that the beliefs of "primitive peoples" were "far from being fixed and simple" (1989, 131). In the literary scholar Louis Jones' discussion of "Evil Eye Among European-Americans", he details one diagnostic method which uses olive oil dropped in water to determine the nature of a concern. If the droplets remained separate, the problem was determined to be not supernatural but organic ([1981] 1992, 160), thereby recognising that not everything is attributed to the supernatural. Evans-Pritchard notes that the Azande will accept a supernatural cause of illness, death, or other misfortune, but not if it "conflicts with social exigencies expressed in law and morals" ([1937] 1976, 27). Most cultures that have supernatural occurrences also have methods to evaluate whether or not the event is of this origin. Internal systems are important and not every act of a divinatory practitioner should be focused around the need to "prove" something to outsiders. Many of the people I worked with noted that it did not matter to them whether or not someone believed them; they were not doing this to convert anyone.

Anne sometimes hears a voice in her head, a word that comes to her during a reading such as someone's name, that she associates with coming from "Jung's collective unconscious where there's this enormous piece, this mass of unconscious knowledge that we all can borrow from" (I.1). It raises the question: how do you prove a voice in your own head? Bader, Mencken, and Baker note this dilemma when discussing psychic readings at fairs:

We could continue by discussing the possibility that many psychics are master 'cold readers,'¹⁶ but to do so is somewhat missing the point. Neither the readers nor the clients were at the fair in the hopes of proving the reality of paranormal phenomena to a skeptical public. Public attend because they desire help and guidance and have not found the answer they seek through other means. (2010, 36)

Cold readings cannot be dismissed completely. While they are often seen as the act of charlatans alone, many of my participants openly integrate such methods in their practice in order to find new ways to work with their clients and identify their needs. As mentioned earlier, Ashterah faces frustration when confronted with someone closed off because it hinders her work. Consequently, any determination regarding its use in relation to fraud must refrain from broad generalisations and instead examine it within the context of a specific reading. Exchanging information reflects the divinatory process and is not necessarily an indication of a con.

Time and Time Again

¹⁶ In his chapter on the topic for the book *Pseudoscience and Deception*, the psychologist Ray Hyman defines a cold reading as "a procedure by which a 'reader' is able to persuade a client whom he has never before met that he knows all about the client's personality and problems" (2014, 41). It is achieved through methods such as making general statements and reading body language.

One of the key ideas of performativity is that there is significance in the single, non-repeatable act. In the same way that performance studies is transgressive and always in between and unstable (Schechner 1998, 360), so too is the performance itself. However, within the framework of western rationalism and Enlightenment ideals of academia, this act of replicability, or lack thereof, becomes a point of tension, especially when approaching a topic like divination. Amy Shuman, a folklorist, explains that “[s]cientific fields, concerned with the validation of findings, and the humanities, which base the suitability of subjects of study on the question of whether they are worthy of re-examination and retextualization, both require a subject to be predictably repeatable” ([2005] 2010, 11). Jackson notes the limitations to this approach: “[the] scientific method is useful only for investigations that are absolutely replicable [...] That never happens in a folklore field of study because nothing of importance is ever exactly the same” (1987, 57). No act of divination can be repeated; it is a contextual act rooted in the convergence of people, ideas, methods, and a myriad of other factors not amenable to the scientific processes of proof.

In western academic discourse, repeatability is recognised as a form of power. Judith Butler, the well-known gender theorist, draws attention to this idea when she notes that gender identity is “instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (1988, 519) and not an inherently natural state. In his book *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred*, Kripal provides an argument essential to my own approach. He draws attention to the challenges that are faced when discussing the validity of a paranormal experience:

To approach such phenomena as objective, quantifiable, replicable things ‘out there’ is inevitably to miss them, or to just barely see them [...] Bored sophomores staring at abstract shapes on playing cards [in scientific tests] is no way to elicit psychical phenomena. But love and trauma are. Consider...the classic case of telepathic dreams announcing the death of a loved one. Such dreams are not objects behaving properly in an ordered mechanistic way for the sake of a laboratory experiment. They are *communications* transmitting *meaning* to *subjects* for the sake of some sort of profound *emotional need*. They are not about data; they are about love. (2010, 24)

This emotional investment is a critical part of a divinatory experience for many people. Querents come to see someone about the loss of a loved one, about health fears, or the myriad of other ordinary concerns that are not easily reproduced within a decontextualised framework such as a scientific lab. The replicability that lies at the heart of western research is not possible because these things cannot be duplicated (Betty 2005, 25); nevertheless, they still exist and must be acknowledged.

The concept of evidence is called into question. Folklorists increasingly regard it as coming from non-repeatable events that have their own demonstrations of rational thought, such as the discussion and dismissal of alternative explanations for the supernatural incident recounted in an oral performance (Goldstein 1991; Thomas 2007, 29). Furthermore, there is a challenge in that evidence does not always come forth at a regulated time. Mélanie notes that:

I remember one dream that was very vivid. Really, really vivid, and I wrote it all out and I never figured it out. And it felt like an important dream, but I never got the ah ha from it. Never really, you know, so I still have it, you know, and every once and a while I'll pull it out just to see if it means anything, because that's the other thing. Because time is of no – you could have a dream 20 years ago and if it comes to your mind today, that's when it, because it's not time bound. (I.40)

Many of the practitioners noted that sometimes they are contacted months later by a querent who has finally understood part of the reading that initially made no sense, which

fits into Toelken's concept of cluster logic. As Goldstein explains, rational knowledge does not clarify or reveal a natural world hidden beneath superstitions (1995, 28), it simply creates another layer of understanding that is valuable but not absolute.

The idea of replicability and proof stayed with me throughout my fieldwork and was a point of contemplation during the Astrology retreat:

What happens when we expect people's lives and narratives and experiences to be within the confines of something that fact-checkable? And how do facts really integrate into our lives? That's rather – and again this all kind of comes back again to the idea of replicability and proof. And astrology is an interesting one because there is a sense of replicability and proof because there are certain structures in place. You can read a chart; there're standards for checking it. There's a process. But then there's also a sense of intuition and personal interpretation. Not just the sense of the person who is reading the chart, but also for the person who is having it read because what we hear is not always the same as what the person who spoke intended. And we filter it through. – And how do you replicate that moment? That adds another layer. So there are elements that are certainly replicable, especially with divination because you can always go back to a spread and say, well this is what a spread says and means, whereas certain other phenomenon is not as easy. But for someone saying, having a psychic vision, that's more, that's different. Not necessarily more complex.

I don't know what I think about replicability at this point. I think you have to go back to performativity and context and the idea that it's not possible to replicate every single detail. And then what would be proof? It goes back to what Elizabeth J. and I talked about Saturday night: the idea that certain aspects will be revealed in the chart at a certain time. And I wonder if that's more the intuitive side of things. Because the idea that to replicate something means that you capture its entirety or that it gives you the potential to understand the most – maybe that's where the problem is. That we have this hierarchy where to replicate is the utmost highest form of confirmation when, instead, we need to be looking at the idea of replicability as one aspect of a much larger, more complex construct of social and personal identity. [...].

So we have, in one way the chart can be replicated, but in another way it's reflective of a singular person at a singular moment, as are all forms of reading. And I would say that, going back to Elizabeth J's idea, the same thing in that you can do a tarot spread and you can have the exact same cards from day to day and

the meaning changes because the context changes. So is replication really proof and is it really worth going after? And how? And why? (June 15, 2015)

This issue came up in my conversation with Jessica who outlines some of the problems of applying a western scientific system of proof to acts of divination:

Well, I don't know. I've just witnessed way too much to say that it doesn't exist, and I just don't think the science is there to be able to appropriately test. I know that there's that guy, Rans? Mr. Rans [James Randi] like has a million dollars set aside for a psychic to *prove* that they're a psychic. And I'm like, well number one, you don't understand the art of the craft or the intuition that's involved, so your tests are already out of balance. They're not going to be scientifically provable because they're not, they're tested for science, they're not tested for anecdotes. And so right away it's skewed to the side of science, and I don't know; the ones that I know that are good, that are really good, they won't touch it with a ten-foot pole because they already know the bias that's there. So why would they go and try to prove something that they know that's not provable to somebody who refuses to believe that there's a possibility?

Now the reason why he is doing it, I totally get because he's after the charlatans, which I get, you know. I don't like them; they give me a bad name because they're out to slum somebody over, but it's also the same thing as a used car salesperson. I know very nice, lovely used car salespeople that really do try to make sure that they've got the best, but then you've got those sleezeballs that try to roll back the odometers and, you know, say that oh yeah, I'll put on a new oil filter and they don't, you know, so you get charlatans no matter where you go. And there's bad names attached to all of it, lawyers, you know. Name a profession, I can tell you I know somebody who's equally as good as bad. Professors, [some] professors are horrible...can't teach their way out of a paper bag. You know, what kind of education is that if I can't be taught? You know, so I get where he's coming from, but I think he's approaching it the wrong way because he's looking for that one person to prove to him that they're real. (I.24)

The role of emotion is something that folklorists developing early performance theory did not necessarily consider even though, as the folklorist Simon Bronner notes, the term folk carries with it its own emotional quality (1998, 431). Sawin critiques Bauman's work on verbal art for its lack of attention to emotion as a "crucial aspect of social 'experience'" (2002, 34). This topic is often identified in feminist studies because

of the common association of women with emotions and emotions with unreliability. Almost a decade before Sawin, another folklorist, Margaret Ann Mills, touched upon this when she wrote about the need to address what “feels right” about the experience of the subject experiencing the event (1993, 179), highlighting the “knowing” component of divination and veracity. This element of feeling is important to recognise in fieldwork, although it is often difficult to articulate and reproduce in writings. When the folklorist Diane Tye discusses recipes, for example, she brings up the issue of people cooking by feel and addresses what it means to write out the recipe (2010, 53), making it replicable and, therefore, shifting its meaning.

What finally needs to be recognised is that scientific explanations are not necessarily against divinatory experience. Cornelius, discussing dowsing and pendulums, writes about “a theory of amplification of subliminal knowledge through physiological responses. This type of explanation is often advanced as a possible ‘scientific’ theory of dowsing, and it might therefore explain any successes from this and similar experiences” (2010, 124). This theory is one of the reasons why pendulums can be effective at answering questions for an individual. I know it is certainly that way for me. It allows the user to bypass the conscious mind and go directly to the subconscious. In doing so, they are able to access an answer that they are not allowing themselves to otherwise hear for whatever reason whether fear, denial, guilt, or countless others. But, as Cornelius goes on to say, this theory is also limited: “it is not quite enough, because it does not capture the *sense and meaningfulness* that go with the experience” (ibid., 214). The personal experience, the emic nature of divination factors in as well. It is the feeling that Peter

talks about, the idea of knowing, of connecting that goes along with the actual divinatory act.

Ultimately, it is a question of framing and perspective. Donna, who works in scientific research, notes that there are points of intersection, such as a shared recognition of the presence of energy in the world (I.12). An attempt to understand what may not seem understandable from the outside. Dégh leaves her readers with the question: “What then is rational? Are we certain that the noises in old houses, the signs, screams, footsteps, the stopping and starting of old clocks, rocking chairs, and music boxes are not caused by restless spirits? No, we are not” (2001, 6). The folklorist Lynne S. McNeill picks this up when discussing Hufford’s approach to the Old Hag, or sleep paralysis:

Lots of people say that Hufford has “explained away” the supernatural belief with medical jargon, but that’s really not the case. What he’s done is show the connections between the traditional and the institutional languages used to describe the same phenomenon, and noted that both are equally accurate. We should wonder why we assume that the medical phenomenon ‘explains’ the traditional belief. What if the traditional belief explains the medical phenomenon? Rather than saying that someone experiences the Old Hag because they have sleep paralysis with hypnagogic hallucinations, maybe people experience sleep paralysis with hypnagogic hallucinations because the Old Hag has come to visit. Think about *that* when you’re falling asleep tonight. (2013, 64n35)

The question becomes one of how knowledge is positioned, what takes priority, and why. And sometimes it is a good idea to challenge our own inherent biases and question the tendency to place western responses at the top of the hierarchy of knowledge.

Chapter 4

Tell Me A Story: The Use of Language, Narrative, and Performance in Divination

We are sitting across from each other in the coffee shop, Peter and I, and he is telling me stories. The stories are about his childhood that opened him up to alternative worldviews and about his retirement spent as a tarot card reader. He tells me how he blends together what he sees in the cards and the energy of those for whom he reads, creating a piece of their own story that needs to be spoken. And then, pausing for a moment, he begins to tell me of a woman who needs to let herself dance, to let go of some of the stress, and play. Being this woman, I smile in the way that only someone in the PhD program can, someone who is perhaps a little too focused on the academic checklist. It was a smile to suggest, you do not understand. But, of course, he does, in his own way, and I come to in mine. “You need to breathe more as well,” he say. “Do that with me, just do it. In with the mouth and out with the mouth three times.” So we sit there together, strangers in a coffee shop, and breathe:

In

Out

In

Out

In

Out

In this space I sat with my experience. Breath became part of my story.

In that coffee shop we created space for our stories. Like our breath they expand and contract, doing so in order to encompass those who use them; able to shift, to sink deep into lived reality or become untethered from it completely. As became apparent from my interviews, divination creates this space as well. Through the ritual use of these tools and the liminal realms they conjure, this practice gives participants roots; they find a safe place to begin an act of self-narration that necessitates they uncouple from a linear reality and delve into questions of the profound and mundane.

The previously established idea of divination as a map that guides practitioners through their experiences also serves as a means for talking about this journey and all that it encompasses. While it is sought out for many reasons, among those I interviewed divination is primarily seen as an act of discovery that demands an engagement with the self, aided by storytelling. It accomplishes this goal through the creation of flexible languages to encompass lived experiences, the identification and creation of narratives, the processes of interpretation, and the performative element inherent to storytelling. These practices provide different mediums for the construction of identities, and the fluidity of storytelling merges with them to uncover hidden meanings in a life. In doing so, divination becomes interwoven into personal stories, a part of the narrative that it is constructing because, within the spaces it creates, such things are possible.

Dialects of Meaning

GUS: Language is not useful here, we need something else. (I.19)

JEAN: I'm not sure I have the language here. (Ure 1998, 7)

JESSICA: [This is] where my visualisation does not quite work with words. (I.24)

Again and again throughout my interviews, participants encountered the limitations of language when it comes to describing their lived experiences, and they are not alone. Toelken contends that a significant reason “we have difficulty discussing the supernatural is that we have almost no serious vocabulary for it, and that probably stems from our unwillingness to acknowledge its validity unless it has been codified for us in language which suggests that someone (the clerics, the theologians) has the issues under *control*” (1995, 57). The denial of a language that acknowledges divination is a denial of divination itself. Kingsley cautions that frequently words are not “only words” but “sometimes they have the power to open up a whole world – to give reality to things that have always been hovering on the horizon of our consciousness, just out of reach” (1999, 77). This absent vocabulary, consequently, is indicative of the marginal social status of practitioners and the challenges they must confront in order to claim their voice.

Any discussion of language is limited by the paradox that “the only medium with which we can define language is language itself” (Abram 1997, 73). This concept is paralleled in the sense that at times the only thing that can describe divination is divination or the emersion in the experience itself. As the anthropologist Richard P. Werbner notes, it “has a logic of its own” (1973, 1414). What is known through these acts does not fit within the linguistic confines and, even when the “right” words are found, their meanings can be strikingly different. Pearl encountered this in her own spiritual journey writing that:

I read quite a lot about hermeneutics while working to understand my midlife experiences with dichotomous interpretations of biblical texts and Sunday morning Catholicism. I became aware of biblical hermeneutics. Often it seemed I was reading a different language, a different scripture than those around me, and yet it was the very same Book. I discovered that, in the early Church, not only were there different translations of the Bible, there were also many interpretive decisions made about the acceptance of particular canonical works. Therefore, the relationship between hermeneutics and literary anthropology explained by Sumara (2002) felt right to me. (2008, 33)

Throughout her life she has witnessed how language itself transformed through new contexts and acts of reclamation. “Dreams have long been dismissed as irrational,” she notes in her thesis. “Could dreams be the repressed language of the feminine?” (2008, 112). It was similar to Shannon’s experiences within and outside of the church and how she felt encouraged or repressed through the words used:

And it’s kind of funny because in the church it’s okay to do that [laying on of hands for healing], but if you step outside of the church and do exactly the same thing, which is essentially what you do with Reiki – you can put essential oils on people, you lay your hands on them, you pray or connect with the universe to the person, right, so it’s pretty much the same thing, but it’s not in the four walls of religion, so then they’re uncomfortable with that. (I.49)

Whether lost because of neglect or hidden out of necessity, language associated with those in the minority or the fringes is often challenging to attain. The objects of divination allow for these systems to grow beyond these confines. Kay Turner observes this in her work with altars: “The home altar, for example, has for centuries encoded a visual language through which objects ‘speak’ to the distinctive concerns of women’s ‘hidden’ culture” (1999, 20-1). These visual languages, as she terms them, are rooted in lived experience and the relationship between the self and a world filled with meaning that emerges from our awareness of it and interactions with it.

In an interview about sacred play with Kyla, who belongs to the United Church while also comfortably residing in the realms of shamanism and magic, she discussed how she brings together different systems of belief and communities into her own lived experiences:

KYLA: I guess I have some informal connections with various folks who identify as Wiccan or Pagan. I have an interest in druidry; I find lots of the concepts and practices from that interesting and in alignment with what I feel is important.

KARI: And how do these different communities work together for you?

KYLA: For me, they're, to borrow language from somebody else I know, they're like different languages for talking about the same thing, or I sometimes think of it as different perspectives for looking at what I consider the great wonder, mystery, and delight of being alive on this beautiful planet. (I.33)

Semiotic scholars Edna Aphek and Yishai Tobin argue that “the language of fortune-telling cannot be viewed as a single entity” (1990, 37); indeed, it is to our detriment if we regard any words or their meanings in the singular. Instead, in the same way that definitions expand and worldviews layer upon each other, so too does language demand the same consideration.

Several scholars have looked at divination through a semiotic perspective. Aphek and Tobin regard the language of fortune-telling as “being a special instance of *omniscopus* (non-precise, non-specific, multi-purposeful) persuasive language” (1990, 4). The polysemous nature that Inna Semetsky, who holds a PhD in educational philosophy in addition to being an accomplished tarot reader, identifies in relation to tarot readings (2006, 103) expands to other forms of divination. Patrice, in reflecting on the mutable nature of tarot cards, told me that a single card will come up at various points in her life, and that each time she reads them, a different meaning emerges because the card is a

vehicle for what her higher guidance wants her to know in that moment (I.43). At times this fluidity is used as a critique and the idea of using non-precise or non-specific language reflects charges of cold readings that practitioners give general information that does not reflect the individual person. Their language, it is concluded, must be non-specific because they do not have specific information to give. This approach, however, does not take into consideration that these languages must be capable of shifting in order to accommodate the needs of those involved. Meaning comes not from the words themselves but from their contexts.

Divination complicates the concept of language by allowing different dialects or systems, altogether, to form around personal experience and worldviews. John Storey, a cultural studies scholar, writes of the structuralist argument that “language organizes and constructs our sense of reality – different languages in effect produce different mappings of the real” ([1997] 2012, 115). These multiple maps are necessary since, as already established, there are inadequacies in current linguistic systems in the face of multiple realities to be conveyed. It is further complicated for those who are mediums or who communicate with other spirits because these beings also become part of the process of creating a new way of sharing knowledge. This relationship works in two separate ways: 1) aiding in the creation of new languages, and 2) confirming and reinforcing the usefulness and value of these systems.

Jason explains the process of developing language with his tarot decks, a topic that emerged in our interview in a discussion about the source of this knowledge:

So, like, first developing the language with the tarot and then what I think the brain does, or how I think it all works anyways, okay. So, there's two main ways that I believe that people can approach the tarot, and there's an intuitive way, and

then there's the building of that language and [those] symbols and then using that intuitively. So I guess what I'm trying to say is either, however way you approach it, you end up in the same place eventually. So the person that's just starting with tarot that's using the imagery and is telling a story with that imagery may be using some symbols in there that they recognise and they've already made a language for that in their head. And then there's other people that study the tarot, learn the symbols, learn the different layers of it to create that library in your head for those correspondences, and then when you're reading the tarot, subconsciously those symbols can come through and hopefully will create some sort of message for the person that you're reading for. So I think there's a three-tiered system that brings us information, so I do believe it's coming from our soul, our higher self, if you want to say that. Guardian angel. (I.22)

There are languages carried within the individual that change with them. The process Jason describes in relation to developing new systems begins to counteract the historian Lawrence W. Levine's idea of sacred inarticulateness or "people's inability to explain their most sacred institutions in an objective discourse" (Fiske 1992, 158). It does not do so by simply creating new ways to explain these sacred discourses, but by also demanding that the limitations lie, at least in part, in the expectation of objective discourse. Lived experience, after all, is not objective.

As Simple as ABC?

KARI: Why don't spirits communicate more obviously or directly?

ERIN: I do not know. Because they're difficult. You know, I don't know that they're able to. To be physical, it takes a lot of energy, a *lot* of energy and that's why they say, I don't know if you've ever heard, they say 3 o'clock in the morning is the witching hour. Or like things typically tend to happen at night. That's because your house is quiet. You're not using any electronics. Your...TV's not on, you're not on your phone, you know. Your house is quiet, so they will draw on all that electricity that's not being used because it's all energy, right. So they'll draw on energy and that's when, you know, things will happen; TVs will turn on or, you know, all these stories that you hear about, right. It's because there's so much energy that they can draw from. [...]

So why they don't communicate more directly? I don't know, I think it's just difficult for them to get it across to us. And you know what, I think if more of the world was more open to it or more aware I think it would happen more frequently. Like once I started turning this on, it just goes. Once you're aware of it, it goes, and that's the same with everyone that I know that's in this field. Okay, once they start paying attention to it, they communicate a lot more openly and a lot more noticeably. (I.18)

It is a certain level of hubris to assume that a language can encapsulate human experience or to place that expectation on the spiritual entities with whom my participants engage. "Many ancient peoples have thought that the spirits or daimons do not have human language", writes Karcher. "Choosing a divinatory symbol gives them a voice. But the contact occurs only if something besides the human ego does the choosing. Chance lets the spirit decide. It links the spirit, the symbol, and the inquirer" (1998, 221). Kelliena for instance looks to her guardians to guide which tool or tools she should use in her readings (I.32). They create the link for her between the message and the querent.

Practitioners who work with spirits develop a complex system for communicating with them, one that is frequently personal and intimate. Leah explains it as if watching a silent movie in her head (I.34), while K.T. describes it as the experience of sometimes playing charades with those who have passed over. Investing time in these relationships, she explains, often leads to spirits using shorthand (I.28) meaning that it is not a definitive language but a continual process of working out information. Over the years Erin has developed a shared language with these beings:

ERIN: In terms of the mediumship, I should mention spirit, the way they kind of give me their messages. I'll see them, sometimes I'll see them, not full formed, but I'll see shapes of them. But throughout my life I've kind of come up with symbols. So, if you want to say I love you, they're going to show me, in my mind, a big red heart. If they want to say happy anniversary, they're going to show me a calendar followed by flowers. So I've come up with all these symbols that they use to communicate, okay. So with that and, it's kind of like charades with them

too. They'll do certain things so that I can get the message. Very strong energies I will hear, but that takes a lot for them to make me hear them. A lot of it is in my mind's eye. But yeah, no, sometimes it is really hard to decipher or to get that across for my client to understand [...]

And you know it's a physical thing with me too. I will feel things. Like if Grandpa Joe had pneumonia or died of lung cancer, whatever. First of all, if it's cancer they will show me a yellow flower. Right away, if they show me a yellow flower, I'll know it. And usually I get like an achy feeling in my bones, right. But if they had breathing issues, spirit will make my breathing laboured. I will physically feel that. Heart attack I will feel it in my arm, again, cancer I get this awful achy feeling in my bones, so they'll physically make me feel something until I hit it, until I, you know, get it, and then they'll pull off. Smell, I'll smell things, you know, that relates to this person. For example, my uncle, every time – he passed – I know he's around because I'll smell beer and cigarettes. Okay. And that's just how my uncle smelled, you know. He was a drinker and a smoker right. And that's how I know he's around. So you have to watch all of your senses because they can come through any way. And that's different for every psychic. I've had psychics where they strictly do...smell or, okay, it's clairvoyance where they just know in their mind's eye. So it's different for everyone. (I.18)

This system of communication is multi-sensory, shifting depending on the spirit, the querent, the medium, and the message. It is not objective; it is not bound by any grammatical rules or structures. This language is felt.

Erin is not the only one to incorporate a semiotics of sensation in her work. Both Donna and Diane shared similar stories:

DONNA: Sometimes I get really sore to my stomach, like if I have a suicide case I'll feel more anxious and I'll know, okay, this was one of those tragic departures. And I know that there's going to be some angst there in that reading. So, and it's kind of a heads-up for me. But that's how it comes for me. Some people get that swirly stomach every time there's the spirit. I don't. I just mostly get it for the ones that are really troubled. Other times I just feel, it's like a vibration around me or like someone is pushing on my head. Like, so if you were to push on your head, that's how it feels. Or they're touching my face. All of a sudden I feel them touching my face and I know they're there. Or I see them, yeah. But I feel them first. I almost always feel them first, I feel them arrive, okay. And sometimes they take my breath away (I.13).

KARI: So you often have then a physical reaction then yourself?

DIANE: Oh yeah, I'm after everything from being stabbed to drowning to having my neck broke, oh yeah. Yep, everything that you could think of (I.9).

Donna explained to me that this work demands an awareness of your own language, your own symbols and metaphors because this personalised form is what the spirit will use for communication: "You're dealing with a spirit that doesn't have a body, a voice box, anything like this. So they have to work through your energy and your memory base and all the signs you have in your head" (I.12). The vocabulary itself emerges from and within the individual.

Language is not divorced from our felt experiences, and it influences the divinatory dialects that are formed for and during these processes. "*We thus learn our native language not mentally but bodily*" writes Abram, the emphasis being his:

We appropriate new words and phrases first through their expressive tonality and texture, through the way they feel in the mouth or roll off the tongue, and it is this direct, felt significance – the *taste* of a word or phrase, the way it influences or modulates the body – that provides the fertile, polyvalent source for all the more refined rarefied meanings which that term may come to have for us. (1997, 75)

These acts have the capacity to move people beyond one of the limitations of language that Patrice identifies, how it separates them from the unity of the energy that surrounds them (I.43) and brings them back into wholeness.

In the same way that the tools are regarded as a mediator between the intangible forces of the universe and the querent seeking the information so, too, do the symbols the diviner uses represent "a language that mediates human and spiritual forces" (Karcher 1998, 216). They arbitrate between broader intangible emotions and their lived realities and become representations of life experiences that seem too vast to be reduced to words, grappling with experiences that overwhelm the ability to speak.

Miriam explained the versatility of the Godly Play sets, particularly in how they provide additional avenues for communication. “They do use the Godly Play stories in hospitals with children who are facing chronic and critical illnesses to help them have a language for processing what’s going on with them” (I.42). These tools, like those of divination, become a mediator between different individuals and their experiences because they do not always have words for the events, mundane and profound, that are part of everyday life, death included. Whether one believes that this life is all there is or that there is more, whether death ends or begins life anew, no one seems to quite be able to speak of it in a way that makes sense all of the time. Tools like divination step in with language that encourages those involved to not objectively define terms but to instead complicate the story.

Laura J. Olson, a scholar of Germanic and Slavic languages and literatures, and the folklorist Svetlana Adonyeva identify this same tendency in their book *The Worlds of Russian Village Women: Tradition, Transgression, Compromise*, focusing on magical practices that are rooted in these communities. As they write in regards to women experiencing pregnancy and labour:

Traditional magical practices supply the needed language to the mother who lacks the ability to describe her experience; they address her fears of losing control, of her feelings of being other or incomplete. At the very least they give order to the chaos of her feelings. Older women or matriarchs provide the younger woman with plots and scripts to communicate and interpret what is happening. (2012, 198)

Zeynep Kurtulus Korkman, a scholar of gender studies, comes to a similar conclusion, observing how Turkish divination practices “offer women an occult language to share the intimate pleasures and pains of femininity” (2015, 200). Silencing people is a powerful

way of not only reducing their experiences but also diminishing them to the point where they are no longer regarded as viable, or erasing them altogether. When people turn to divination and engage with the symbols they encounter it allows them to speak across the gap, as Kripal puts it, when writing about the connection between semiotics and the supernatural (2010, 25). Recognising the lack of language by offering new forms is the first step. The ways in which it is woven into narratives continues the process of articulation.

Finding the Story

“Everything brings us a message,” Irene told me during our interview. In the many decades she has been providing divination services to the Edmonton community she has come to realise that “no matter what you look at, you’ll see a message in it” (I.21). This worldview falls under what Kripal calls “hermeneutical mysticism”. He explains it in relation to the French writer Bertrand Méheust: “he experiences the world as a series of signs or meaningful events to read, interpret, and then write out again in his own written work” (2010, 201). Divination is, after all, “a genre of interpretive discourse” (Wilce 2001, 190) that situates the practitioner in the position of finding the appropriate messages and then integrating them into a narrative for the querent. The former is essential because it recognises that with all the stories surrounding each person, they belong to no one person alone; therefore, their meanings must undergo a process of integration. Abram pays particular attention to the ways in which these narratives emerge from the natural world to be read by those trained to pay attention:

The earthly terrain in which we find ourselves, and upon which we depend for all our nourishment, is shot through with suggestive scrawls and traces, from the sinuous calligraphy of rivers winding across the land, inscribing arroyos and canyons into the parched earth of the desert, to the black slash burned by lightning into the trunk of an old elm. The swooping flight of birds is a kind of cursive script written on the wing; it is this script that was studied by the ancient 'augurs', who could read therein the course of the future. (1997, 95)

Historically, more attention has been paid to the specialists, those who lay claim to the unique status of translator of messages (see Bascom 1980, Cryer 1994, Koch 1995, Nigosian 2008, Johnston 2008). However, within many Canadian contexts there is a growing recognition that everyone has the ability to understand if given the opportunity. Professional readers are not the gatekeepers of this knowledge, but its tradition bearers.

The problem with the narratives that emerge from divination is that many people lack the literacy skills to properly read them. Gus lamented that we are no longer taught to read symbols in our schools and often times do not even recognise their presence in our lives (I.19). Mélanie has noticed this pattern during her time working with energy healing and dream interpretation and through her membership in the United Church of Canada: "I hear people saying something, and I realise, oh, that's an all-that-is statement. That's wisdom. They're getting that wisdom from elsewhere, so you just start recognising that there's this whole level of communication going on that you might not notice if you're not into that" (I.40). The stories that emerge from divination have become so well hidden that it often takes someone else pointing them out for others to see them and bring them back into their lives.

Marlene teaches a course in order to remedy this issue. She works with her students to help them become aware of the languages of the world that surround them and how to begin interweaving them into their own lives.

I teach a class called Spirit Signs, which I'm turning into written material which is all about how you use your, like what happens around you is kind of like a mirror of what's going on. Like take cracked windshields, for instance. Most people here in Alberta do have a crack in the windshield, but if it's a low-lying crack, what the windshield represents is your ability to see the immediate future: the road, the immediate road ahead, right. When there's a crack in it, it indicates there's a flaw in the way we see things, maybe the way that we see the world, maybe the way we see the road, or maybe the way we see ourselves, right. The lower-lying it is, the less in your field of vision, the less obvious it's going to be. It's there, and it exists, and it's creating havoc [...] The more obvious the crack, the more it's actually apparent, like whatever the way you think or whatever, it's actually wreaking havoc in your life and not just you, but everybody can see it, right. If it is more on the passenger side, it's a crack in your perception in terms of how you see your partner or how you see the idea of love relationships in general, right (I.39)

Practitioners look at the world and recognise that there are stories unfolding all around them. They learn to make space to see them and work with their querents to engage in the process of storytelling.

Several practitioners lamented how the busy, technology-oriented lives of those in their communities blind people to these stories. They do not hear the language as it is; they expect it to conform to their needs instead of recognising that it exists both intertwined with and independent of any one person. Many of my participants argue that they need to let go of the popular cultural constructs, the mass generalisations, and begin to pay attention to how the world or spirits seek to communicate with individuals. Katrina told me a story that illustrates this:

There was a lady that came for a reading, and I was getting my cement poured in the front, so she walked around the side. And I said [during the reading], the sign from whoever it was, her father, her husband, I don't remember, I said, "he keeps giving you feathers but you're missing [them]." And she goes, "oh, I'll watch for them." So we walked out my back deck, walked down the side of my house; there was a feather on the ground, and I had walked to the front deck with her, and I said, "can you come back for a second please," so she came back. And I said, "you walked right past it." And she goes, "oh." And in the reading she was told that she's missing the feathers that he leaves. (I.30)

Even after receiving the message, the querent still did not recognise these stories woven throughout her life. It takes time to learn to see again.

Tarot, in particular, opens up the way for complex narratives to emerge due to the symbolically rich nature of the imagery on each card, as well as the ways in which meanings shift depending on their position in a layout. This idea was repeated throughout my interviews. Gus regards his process as “storytelling by reading the symbols on the card. And then also responding to the person that I’m with” (I.19). Heather draws on her background of art, religion, literature, history, and art history to weave together the story. She attributes both her nature as an introvert and her Irish background to her love of stories and her capacity for spinning engaging narratives that reconnect her querents with the larger conversations of the universe (I.20). Anne commented that to ignore the storytelling aspect of the reading results in her “just missing so much information” (I.1), while Donna is used to blending together disparate plots within her own life as a medium and scientist. Reflecting on the role of stories in her work, she highlighted the importance of the narrative exchange: “I’m a storyteller, so they [the querents] tell a story to me and that helps me to also get the images...when I’m doing mediumship.” She does not create one anew but finds new plots and meanings to be explored within the one presented to her. It is further complicated because “[when] I’m dealing with spirits who have crossed over, it’s like they use the pictures to tell me more information” (I.12). These images, much like those on a tarot card, become the language she uses to deepen the stories of her querents and draw their attention to the messages laid out before them.

It is not enough to find the relevant messages, there must be room for them to be explored and integrated into the querent's life. These narrative spaces are found throughout their worlds: ones that they discover and ones that they create when they do not encounter what they need pre-made. In her roles as a journalist and an astrologer, Lesley's work has centred around creating safe spaces for others to enter into and experience the power of personal narrative:

That's how I did most of my interviews [as a journalist], is I just conducted it like a conversation. I remember once interviewing a guy that was the Dean of Arts at the time, at the U of A. I had a people column, and I'd go out and find different people and just, you know, people who were contributing something that might not get a lot of attention, and at the end of it he said, "I really have no idea what you're going to do with this. It was an interesting conversation, but I don't know what you're going to do with it." Well, there's so much more you can do with it when you allow people to reveal themselves because everyone does want to, they just need the appropriate, safe place (I.35).

Unlike the stereotype of divination as fortune-telling that doles out a prescribed future or the fraud who uses the same generalised information for everyone, the act of storytelling amongst those I interviewed is focused on creating a narrative with the recognition that it is not set, it is not finished, and it is in a constant state of flux.

Divination participates in an act of story-sharing, one that also emerges in the lives of practitioners and their connection to the book itself. As Ellen wrote to me, "Thank goodness for the printing press and all the awesome people who share their knowledge" (I.17). This relationship extends to many of the alternative practices found in Canada. Luhrmann notes the power of literature to draw magicians into practice (1989, 86), and religious studies scholar Lisbeth Mikaelsson categorises the New Age movement as "a literary culture", since books are a central vehicle for spreading its ideas and an easily accessible one at that (2001, 94). Chas Clifton, an academic in the fields of English

and Pagan studies, as well as a practicing Pagan, makes the same assessment of contemporary Pagan witchcraft: “[it] owes a great deal to the written word. Beginning in the 1960s, a tide of how-to and journalistic books on witchcraft began to be published, and today that tide continues to flow, augmented by thousands of homemade Web pages” (2006, 3), which contain narratives of their own. Books guide people into the land of divination, helping them find their way into a topic that they, otherwise, may have had no opportunity to encounter.

The relationship diviners develop with books is unique to each person. Many of those I interviewed spend their lives surrounded by books of all types and perspectives, such as Ashterah and Fraezor who collect and read as many as possible (I.3). Others come upon significant books at the right time. For Lynn, one about astrology literally fell on her foot at a point in time when she was looking for guidance (I.38). Jean draws extensively upon *The Tarot Handbook*, having studied with its author, Angeles Arrien (I.23). For Sam, Crowley’s *The Book of Thoth* is of great significance (I.48), while Julie returns again and again to Javane and Bunker’s *Numerology and the Divine Triangle* (I.25). Michelle even came to our interview with a list of those that have been influential for her own development.¹⁷ As happened again and again during these interviews, we spent part

¹⁷ Her list of books: *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger is based on a BBC television of the same name broadcast in the 1970s. Both *The Tarot* by Nancy Shavick, that I had not encountered before, and *Tarot: Talisman or Taboo?* by Mark Patrick Hederman, written by a philosopher and monk, reflect the Michelle’s own spiritual connection to the cards. Some of the many writings of Liz Dean are included, particularly those focused on tarot, although, she has written on other topics including angels, as well as works from Mlle. Lenormand, who created the Lenormand deck. *The Edusemiotics of Images: Essays on the Art~Science of Tarot* and *Re-Symbolization of the Self: Human Development and the Tarot Hermeneutic* by Inna Semetsky appeared. Philip Permutt’s *The Crystal Healer* closed the list, reflecting Michelle’s interests in expanding her knowledge of healing modalities (I.41).

of our time together discussing the influences of the written word. Richard's experience transformed not only his spiritual path but his relationship with books themselves:

I hated school even, you know what I mean, so I wasn't a reader. But I went down, and I went to the psychic stuff and that sort of book area, and I picked out a book by a lady, and her name is Betty J. Eddie. I'll never forget it. And it was about how she was a mom of six, went to hospital in Seattle, and she was having her tubes tied; she'd had enough children, more than enough. But something went wrong, and she died for four minutes, and she went to the spirit world and when she came back, she wrote about her experiences. And that started me off. So then I was going to the bookstore every week [laughs] buying a book and trying to understand all of what is this. (I.46)

It is not just books that speak directly to the subject of divination that interest practitioners; the power of the story is as compelling to them as to anyone else. Elizabeth is always reading; the works of Paulo Coelho hold particular significance in her life (I.14). In both of our interviews, Julie and I had discussions about the novels she was reading and the ways in which she finds inspiration in these stories. Her love of reading led her to put pen to paper in the creation of her own book. Writing itself is of importance to many of them. Some, like Chris and Katrina, author articles and several have or are working on books, fiction and non. This is in addition to the centrality of journaling in the development of many of their skills. The act of creation that storytelling encourages extends to and parallels that of divination, and it serves as an ongoing source of inspiration.

Wood reflects on this ongoing relationship between divination and storytelling in *The Road to Delphi*, noting that the process brings us "quite suddenly into new territory: no longer that of magic or prediction but that of storytelling. Or to be exact, we find ourselves...in a place where predictions have to become stories, where the prediction depends on its place in the plot, acquires its final meaning only because of that placing"

(2003, 36). His focus on oracles can be extended to contemporary practitioners who conclude again and again that divination and the story are intertwined. They work in tandem to produce a message that is understandable and meaningful to those who seek it out and whose meaning is revealed when placed within a narrative context. This process begins through an act of discernment, finding the appropriate message for the specific individual and bringing it to their attention within a space where it can be of use and wherein the participants are able to open themselves up to truths outside of a tangible reality.

Between Truth and Fiction

Pearl chooses her words carefully and pauses frequently to contemplate possible unexplored connections within our conversations. At one point, when answering her own question as to whether channelled texts are true or not, she concludes that “whether they’re true or not, most of life is fiction anyway so I don’t know” (I.44). Divination does not rest easily on a single label of true or false; instead, it follows a literary tradition of recognising that there is more to a story than its adherence to facts. This constant negotiation of meaning and truth permeates folklore. Scholars of legends continue to recognise that stories are a point of intersection between the real and the imagined (see Mullen 1971, Brunvand 1981, Dégh 2001, Ellis 2004, Oring 2008, Metsvahi 2012). In her work with Pagan and New Age groups, Pike observes how they use storytelling as part of healing and creating spaces where individuals are able to “construct narratives of the self, ordered accounts of how they came to be who they are now and explanations of the troubles in their lives” (2004, 110). The intent is not a record of what was but a delving into what could be and what is needed.

Merili Metsvahi, a scholar of comparative religion, begins “Religious Legend as a Shaper of Identity” with the statement “Words create reality” (2012, 161). How individuals approach their narratives reveals information about the beliefs they convey as well as our own expectations and worldviews. While the power of stories is often recognised, when situated within divination the fictional element, as discussed in the previous chapter, it becomes a point of contention. It is, therefore, important to go back to Evan’s caution that what academics may find interesting is not necessarily shared by their participants or audience. Consequently, labels, even those of “true” and “false” or “relevant” and “irrelevant” must be used with great care so as not to reinforce larger, socially accepted ideas of reality that do not reflect individual, lived experiences.

Divination is often regarded by skeptics as an act of fiction-making or of only producing information ascertainable by cold readings (see Jerome 1977, Sagan 1996, Vyse 1997, Shermer 2002, Schick and Vaughn [1995] 2005, Hyman 2014). It is often regarded in a similar way to people’s consumption of popular culture. Approaches to it, therefore, often fall into assumptions about the naiveté of the audience. “Like Protestants fearful of Catholic images and Catholics fearful of the ‘excesses’ of the uneducated,” argues Colleen McDannell, a scholar of religion and history, “some modern thinkers have felt that the ‘weak’ easily fall prey to the lure of mass culture” (2012, 141). This perspective echoes sociologist W. Phillips Davison’s third-person effect hypothesis that “people will tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on the attitudes and behaviors of others. More specifically, individuals who are members of an audience...will expect the communication to have a greater effect on others than on themselves” (1983, 3). Believing that the viewer, whether of a television show or a tarot

card reading, cannot discern between the fictional and the real provides those on the outside with an acceptable explanation for why, in this scientifically progressive nation of ours, divination persists.

When one looks past assumptions of ignorance and is willing to accept the agency of those involved in a divinatory act, narratives open up to reveal the complex needs of querent and community alike. In explorations of divination by Park (1963), Drury (1986), and Tedlock (2001, 2006), new perspectives are gained into how divination serves the community – whether “believed in” or not – to air out grievances, resolve conflicts such as thefts, and empower those on the fringe with knowledge not otherwise attainable. In so doing, participants and querents alike are frequently situated on the margins or in the cracks of an external system that has failed them in some way. Divination becomes the voice of the scapegoat, the disempowered who take control of their lives, even if it is only through claiming the right to their own story. The powers these acts bestow make up the next chapter. For now, the focus remains on how through its function as an aspect of fiction (not intended to be read literally) we are able to learn about the concerns of those who create and consume these readings.

Stories do not lose their power when they are allowed to move outside of a fixed or literal meaning. Dreams, for Pearl, allow her to transcend into a different narrative state: “People go, oh that’s just weird. Well, that’s because they’re trying to make it literal, and it’s not literal. A dream is never A=A. It equals the world. It could have many, many possibilities.” For example, using transpersonal psychology’s interpretation of a house, when it appears in a dream she understands it to be a representation of the person’s inner world from the spirits through higher, middle, and lower consciousness. “So the

house [in a dream] simply represents my subconscious, if there's a basement, or my collective unconscious. The main floor is where I live, my consciousness. The attic is my spiritual consciousness or my whole, holistic consciousness. My collective, the whole world consciousness, which you can tap into through dreams" (I.44; clarifications provided in April 25, 2017 email).

Magliocco, in speaking of Pagan approaches to the origin stories of their religion, clarifies that "[t]oday most well-read Pagans and Witches realize the symbolic nature of their origin stories, and no longer accept them as fact. Yet these stories continue to have a powerful effect on individuals, even when they understand their metaphorical nature" (2004, 193). While there is often a tendency to be drawn toward large, mythic narratives, there are also what Shuman calls small-world stories that "recount a discovery that makes a large, unfamiliar, strange, and perhaps chaotic world seem at least temporarily familiar, ordered, and not so strange" ([2005] 2010, 91). Echoing Abram's own reflections on the stories scrawled throughout nature, she goes on to argue that:

Some small-world stories convey the sense that an ordinary connection may have profound meaning. Often, moving beyond the discovery of an unexpected connection, they claim a second discovery: the profound claim to have experienced the world as small or as destined. By making a possibly profound story out of ordinary events, small-world stories exemplify the blurred boundaries between the everyday and the exceptionally meaningful. As part of their commonplace status, they carry the assumption that anyone can tell them in a wide range of contexts and that anyone might have one to tell. [...]
Small-world experiences are anything but ordinary. They are the disruption of the ordinary, and insofar as they claim to carry a profound message of fate or destiny, they claim to find that message in ordinary life. (ibid., 93, 96)

Divination situates itself as a site of the small-world story, the ways in which the ordinary lives of people are intertwined with the profound, and recognising that destinies are typically found in the mundane.

Acting as this disruption of the ordinary, divination, as practiced by my participants, is rarely about a fixed narrative but is instead a fluid journey into the potential that often draws readers into non-linear and fragmentary narratives. In this context, Espen J. Aarseth's work on ergodic literature, in particular its invitation into a multilinear and interactive narrative, becomes particularly relevant. A scholar whose work frequently focuses on video games and electronic stories, he defines it as literature in which "nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text" (1997, 1). This term has been linked to the divinatory practice of I Ching because certain actions are required to unfold the text or message. It is equally applicable to other methods such as tarot. The rituals around conducting a reading (the formation and expression of the question, the way the space is set up and cleansed, the selection of tools, the layout of the tools, and so on) become part of the ergodic process whose meanings shift depending on the actions undertaken. Tarot cards are read differently contingent on the deck and spread used and each card's connection to those around it, as well as the questions being asked.

The narrative that emerges in a space created when divination and the ergodic meet, opening up opportunities for the story to develop and shift to meet the perspectives

of the participants. For example, a story begins to emerge with the appearance of a single tarot card:

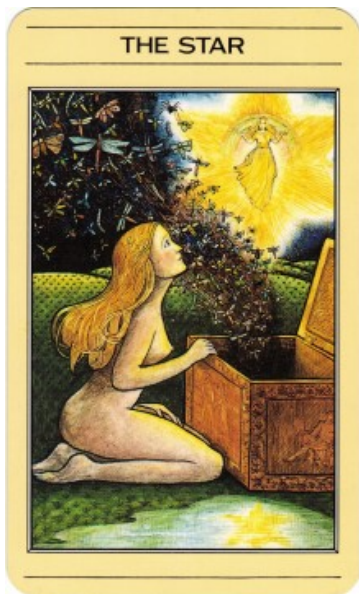


Figure 11: The Star, Mythic Tarot

It is not, however, static but shifts depending on the deck used:



Figure 12: The Star, Radiant Rider-Waite Tarot

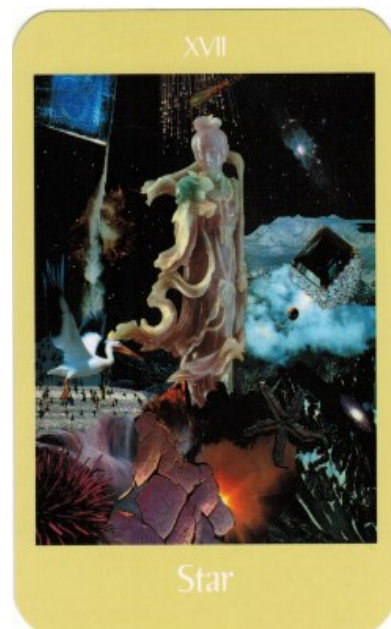


Figure 13: The Star, Voyager Tarot

The narrative expands as other cards are brought into the reading and read in relation to each other.



Figure 14: The Star and The Sun, Mythic Tarot

Finally, the story connected to each card alters depending on its placement in larger spreads, and the other cards present, such as a variation of the Celtic Cross outlined below:

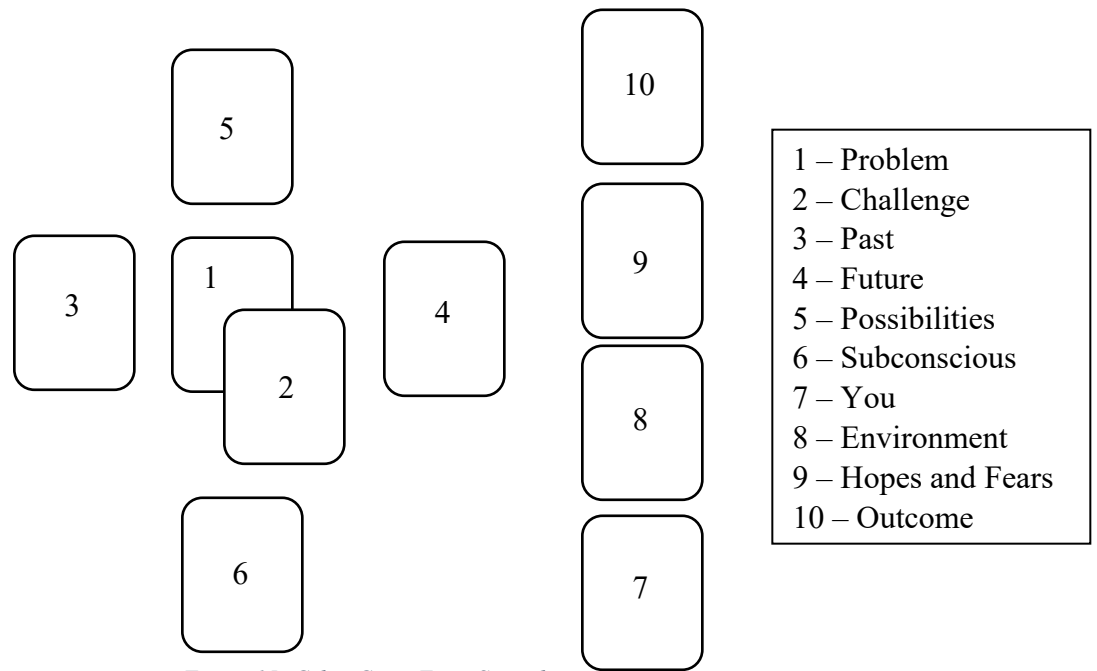


Figure 15: Celtic Cross Tarot Spread

The interpretation of the card can change multiple times in a reading. It does not lose past meanings but creates richer revelations as it is placed in relationship to others. Finally, the querent's specific question provides the frame upon which the entire narrative is built. Going through the process of storytelling with tarot requires a nontrivial effort and brings those involved outside of traditional narrative structures while still participating in the act of crafting a story.

Traversing the divinatory text requires an acceptance that, as Aarseth writes, the "object of verbal communication ... is not simply one fixed sequence of letters, words, and sentences but one in which the words or sequence of words may differ from reading to reading because of the shape, conventions, or mechanisms of the text" (1997, 51). As exemplified above, the contextual nature of divination means that the same spread can and will be read in multiple different ways depending on a myriad of factors. It opens up the text to varied interpretations that reject the static and challenge the expectation of repeatability as truth that in chapter three was recognised as being effective in scientific

studies but cannot be successfully used to test the efficacy of a divinatory act. Instead, what remains is a complicated narrative that is made deeper by demanding effort from those who encounter it, and proving to be as mutable as those who read it.

The Shared Story

Stories invite readers to place themselves into the life of another and to bring these experiences into their own and, in doing so, to create a new narrative. When I interviewed Debbie, a member of the Shambhala Buddhist Center in Newfoundland, for my project on sacred play she told me about the practice of visualisation. It is an exercise wherein you envision yourself as someone who is a representation of some aspect, like goodness, that you want to manifest in your own being. The purpose, she explained, is “to connect with that aspect in yourself” and to integrate it into your spiritual practice by “dissolve[ing] the visualisation into itself or into yourself” (L7; clarifications provided in May 9, 2017 email). In this way the participant comes to embody or live the story, helping them to “reach across boundaries that we don’t normally traverse” (Thomas 2007, 57). This visualisation is a process that is also important to many of those learning to read tarot cards. When Gus first began to teach himself their meanings he found the method he terms “the imagination moment” to be most effective:

At some point early when I was reading about how to do readings for people, someone wrote the words, like, to pretend that you’re walking inside of the card as if it’s a real world. So when you think of any of the cards, like – the one that really just strikes me strongly is the Hanging Man. The twelfth arcana, that upside down [...] I think about that, like if you walked into the situation where – well even if it, let’s say it is Jesus or Osiris or whatever. If you believe that Jesus was God or was the Son of God, and then you walk up and you see the Son of God on the cross and that person is dead. That person that you thought was a god was dead, and you’re looking at that and the idea of what that is and what that actually represents in the full breadth of the story. The only way that I’ve been able to fully, both psychologically, spiritually, mentally kind of connect with that is to do that

imagination moment where you feel like you're walking into the card and you're in the world of the card. And I do that when I do readings for people. I imagine that. I imagine that I'm stepping into this lovely world that Lady Frieda Harris [the artist of the Thoth Deck] has created for us, and then do that for each card, and then as I'm going through the cards I'll try to think about the relationships with them. And then I'm doing a reading for a person for their specific question. (I.19)



Figure 16: *The Hanged Man, Thoth Deck*

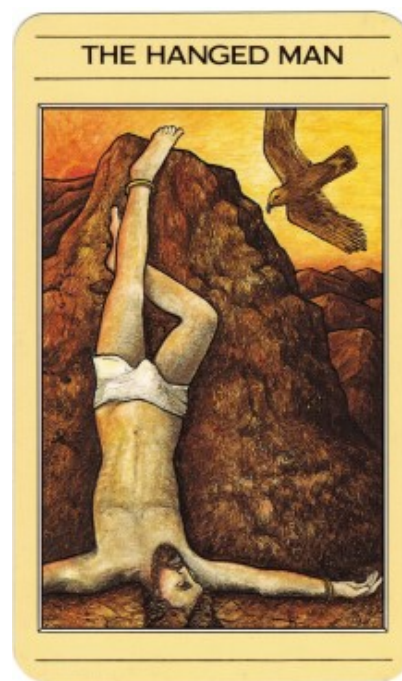


Figure 17: *The Hanged Man, Mythic Tarot*

In this process, practitioner and querent alike are given opportunities to step into the card and become a witness to the scene. By exploring the memories that emerge, the emotions that bubble or creep to the surface, and their reactions to these experiences, the participants are able to come to a deeper understanding of divination because they can enter the story.

Marlene is not content to tell a story to her querents; her divination is not a spectator sport. Throughout our interview her voice would rise every time she spoke

about people who came to her but took no responsibility for their own lives, seeming to argue with the memory of their presence and to momentarily forget about me.

So I think the whole game of divination is kind of, I guess, it's probably going to depend again on the practitioner, right, because, you know, there could be people that come like every month and that could happen for a year and a half until they get out of whatever rut they're getting in. But to me [every] year, you know, every month. I couldn't do it. [...] *I'm bored of your story, and aren't you bored of your story too? We need a different story. We can change it, you know.* "Oh I can't leave the job, the man, whatever." Your legs aren't broken, so the truth is actually, you're not willing to. That's okay, but next time you say it, it's not "I can't," it's, "I'm not willing to leave because I'm too afraid." That's your truth, right, and there's a funny thing that happens when we embrace our truth. Instead of "I can't", or whatever, no the truth is you're too afraid to. It's just different. We could work with that, we could work with our fear. We can talk about our fear; we can address our fear. We can't work with "I can't", right. So yeah, I guess I find the human condition really fascinating, which keeps me doing this. (I.39)

Ergodic literature is one attempt to recreate this experience. The reading of these texts, Aaresth explains, is "often portrayed, in contrast to codex reading, as a kind of co-authorship, with the reader creating her own text as she goes along" (1997, 77).

Divination offers a space for storytelling within personal lives wherein the authorial position frequently shifts from practitioner to querent and back again.

People share their stories, not only with each other on an individual level, but also with the other narratives found in literature and popular culture. This relationship between divination and narration shows up frequently amongst those I interviewed who were making these connections long before I wandered into their lives. In her thesis, Pearl applies her knowledge of dream interpretation to the writings of Carol Shields. In doing so she draws attention back to the languages that have become hidden, particularly as they relate to women's experiences and narratives. This goes back to her idea, discussed earlier, of dreams being the language of the feminine. Reclaiming fluency in the symbols

and metaphors that dominate the languages of divination opens up all literary genres to new interpretations.

Popular culture intertwines with divination. There are countless examples within movies and literature that utilise it as a narrative tool, but during my interviews these forms were also drawn upon when participants, especially mediums, were describing their experiences to me. Leah referred to the movie *Ghost*, telling me that it “is probably bang-on with having all the spirits in the room. That’s quite – I would say that I imagine that’s how it would be because they’re all there waiting to come through and talk” (I.34). K.T. brought up the movie *Ghost Town* to explain her experience of spirits waiting around for someone to see them (I.29). Shannon discussed the television show *Ghost Whisperer* and her reactions to watching it:

You know when I watch that show, it’s like, oh my gosh, it’s like watching me. I am Jennifer Love Hewitt. I am. Like this is, I’ll just, her life in the show is like my life. And I would bawl every episode. My kids are like, “why are you crying?” “Because they’re finally going to the light. You don’t understand; it’s so beautiful.” [laughs] Yeah, so it’s really funny, but that’s what happens. (I.49)

Popular media provides shared stories, spaces within the interview that allow me to begin to understand their experiences and to bring them into my own. There is also, as demonstrated in Shannon’s reaction, a power in seeing herself out there in the world, whether in a fictional format or not. It is an affirmation of her own lived experiences.

In one of my interviews with Richard, he identified the double-edged sword of popular culture when it comes to the growth of his own religion:

Because spiritualism has become more and more prevalent – I mean, twenty years ago you didn’t hear about it as much, now look at all the movies they’ve made in Hollywood. They’ve re-promoted it; they’ve helped, but they show it the wrong way because they show that, they have to for TV, a spirit coming and jumping

down in front of somebody. Well, it doesn't work like that; we see them in our spirit minds, our spirit eye. Well, for TV they have to show you that, so to scare you away a little bit. But at the same time they've promoted it; people are more aware. (I.46)

Jeannie Banks Thomas identifies this same concern: "Along with the prevalence of science as a means to explain away ghost stories, the packaging of the supernatural as entertainment has helped perpetuate the notion that ghost stories are trivial – that is, all they're primarily good for is generating a few goose bumps" (2007, 30). A similar conversation came up with Sam when discussing the influence of popular culture on Wicca:

KARI: So do you still think that popular culture has an influence on drawing people in or has that sort of abated?

SAM: Ah, yeah, that was an interesting thing. Yeah, it does, it does but it's a lot less strong. I mean, there really was this wave, quite noticeable, mostly of young women who are drawn because of the movie *The Craft* and the television show [*Charmed*] and also *Buffy* and by a couple of books like *Teen Witch* by Silver RavenWolf. And there was a whole wave there which was quite noticeable. Almost all of them have gone away, they've gone off to something else. Some who were drawn to it stuck around, of course, because they found something of value in the religion. It's hard to say. There's some of it, but not so much. And on the whole I'd really rather not get a whole bunch of people coming in who just, like, think you can change your hair colour or whatever other – or curse your boyfriend or whatever the hell else. That's not a good idea to curse your boyfriend; don't curse your boyfriend because it ends up cursing you too [laughs] which is sort of a negative thing. If you want to get the blow back, go ahead. I won't help. But popular culture, yeah, we're working hard to change that. (I.48)

Like most things in life the answers are not simple. Popular culture has the power to promote and give space to experiences with which people cannot otherwise engage. However, it can also confine them within the realm of one visual narrative or relegate them solely into a fiction that is not acknowledged as having any relevancy in one's lived reality.

“Personal religious expression,” writes Robert Glenn Howard, a scholar of rhetoric, politics, and culture, “is emerging side-by-side with the everyday in the vast public web of vernacular discourse made possible by computer networks” (2009, 404), as well as the popular culture these networks convey. It is, therefore, not unexpected to find divinatory narratives drawing upon them and to find the relationship reciprocated. In his article “‘For What I Have Done and What I Have Failed to Do’: Vernacular Catholicism and *The West Wing*”, Primiano enters into this discussion by exploring how votive candles are no longer used in American churches because they are a fire-hazard, yet on television churches are “always ablaze with flickering votive candles” (2009, 108). They become what the anthropologist Sherry Ortner calls summarising symbols, objects, usually sacred in nature, that work by “summing up, expressing, representing for the participants in an emotionally powerful and relatively undifferentiated way what the system means to them” (1973, 1339-1340). The candles signify the prayers and hopes and rituals of the church in ways that the audience is able to understand without requiring explication. They become short stories within a larger narrative. These symbols are particularly powerful because they are able to move between different genres and adapt to individual needs. Ranging from the grandeur of the haunted house (Grider 2007) to the intimacy of an altar (Turner 1999, 13; Magliocco 2001, 8), summarising symbols usher us into new levels of the narrative.

Many divinatory objects take on this summarising role in articulating the



Figure 18: *The Tower, Radiant Rider-Waite Tarot*

querent's lived experience. Participants, when describing themselves to me during interviews or explaining a certain decision, brought up their astrological signs as a shorthand explanation, or they referenced a specific tarot card that articulated the complexities of an experience. As she reflected on the constant flood of negative news and the growing sense of chaos she sees in the lives of many of her querents, Heather made sense of it by explaining that the world's in "a tower experience" (I.20). The Tower card expresses much more than what she was able to explain through words: the confusion of things falling apart, the sense of disaster, of foundations

crumbling, and human suffering. Yet, as a reader, she also knows that this card speaks to the potential of new beginnings that can only come about when past institutions are deconstructed. Hope and heartache find balance in a single image.

The Tower card takes on the process of narrativisation, a core term in the work of sociologist Ian Woodward's *Understanding Material Culture*, wherein the ways in which people discuss objects becomes a means for them to talk about "their lives, values and experiences" (2007, 152). Looking at the tangible world that surrounds us, he argues that we need these objects in order to "understand and perform aspects of selfhood, and to navigate the terrain of culture more broadly" (ibid., vi). The anthropologists Filip de Boeck and René Devisch make this connection in Victor Turner's work with Ndembu divination, arguing that "[i]n his view these objects form a kind of text, a commentary on

the facts of social life” (1994, 102). Objects take their place within this shared act of narration, able to connect individuals to different meanings and reveal the power of opening up personal stories to the input of others and transcending beyond the traditional structures of an ordered text.

Feeling the Story

*No words were spoken. Language would have choked them. – Kenneth J. Harvey*¹⁸

Objects allow for divinatory acts to transcend the need for linguistic structures and permit people to engage with their feelings. As discussed earlier, in establishing the languages of divination, emotions play a significant part, as they do in the creation of the narrative itself. For Gus, emotion is central to divination:

And it’s a narrative, so it should be fun. Narratives should be fun. There are jokes inside of narratives. And sometimes narratives are really sad, but you can usually pull really cool things out of those sad narratives. I mean, while I was walking over here I was listening to one of the saddest songs I know. It’s about a war veteran; it’s called “After the Parade”, and it’s after the parade is over who’s going to push my wheelchair? That’s kind of the point of the song. And it’s, the parade’s celebrating him but at the same time he’s worried about – I have blisters, I don’t want them to turn into callouses. And for the first probably thirty or so times I heard that song I wept, but yet I listened to it again. And again, and again, and then I learned how to play it on guitar. I learned how to sing it. Sang it about fifty times before I’d stop crying while I sang that. Why did I do that? There’s something that is attractive about those energies, just as much as the elation we have in life. It’s cool that with doing a tarot reading or any of the divination that there is that emotional complexity and passion inside of it.

¹⁸ This quote comes from Harvey’s novel *The Town that Forgot How to Breathe*. It is set in a rural Newfoundland community struck with a series of mysterious events including an illness that causes them to forget how to breathe that forces the inhabitants to confront their disconnection from their own traditions and beliefs.

Stories have the capacity to encourage an emotional narrative, shared feelings that are essential to our lived experiences even if they do not easily translate into languages and typical plot structures. Tedlock picks up on this challenge, reflecting that:

In any one instant during a divination, little or nothing may be said. Instead, a silent language of objects and signs may be used for the presentation of felt realities, for reflection, meditation, and interpretation. If words are used, they are often cryptic, poetic, and highly allusive, sometimes even spoken in a foreign or archaic tongue. The images these words and objects conjure are paradoxical and evocative; they create and are created by a sense of discovery. (2006, 72)

Those told through divination are narratives of feeling and draw attention to the contribution of emotions to larger systems of knowledge. Instead of being dismissed as irrational, as Pearl discussed in her own thesis, emotions are embraced and the story becomes a safe space for them to grow.

The co-narrative process of divination also demands that it be situated within the realm of emotion. Narayan, in discussing her experiences collecting stories from Urmilaji Devi Sood, describes the experience thusly: “But perhaps because Urmilaji sometimes talked, hand pressed lightly over mine, about the affection growing between us, I could also see and feel that stories were not just *about* relationships; they also *made* relationships” (1997, 3). It emerges in what Korkman identifies as feeling labour, “an emergent type of labor that renders them [divination practitioner and querent] intimate strangers” (2015, 196), and the ways in which stories allow people to experience the objects of their world and their past differently (Smith 2011, 2). “Without apology,” Dolby-Stahl contends, “the personal narrative makes a gesture toward intimacy” (1985, 48), and so does divination. During our interviews, practitioners often told me they feel more like counsellors; their purpose is frequently to give their querent space to speak, to

talk through their issues. Anne, for example, always keeps various resources available so that after the story is finished she can give the individual contact information for whatever services they may require. During this act of co-creation people, objects, and potentially, spirits weave together the personal narrative of a single life, placing at its centre the emotional needs of those involved.

Emotions take diviners beyond the problematic divides of truth and fiction. Represented by the element of water or cups in the tarot, they are reminders of the fluidity of experiences and the influence they have on even the most mundane of situations. Katrina, reflecting on the narratives that emerge during her readings and in her own life, concluded that: “my story is forever changing. Because the more I know, the more I know nothing. Yeah. And this is just an illusion.” But just because it is an illusion does not mean it is of no value. Instead, it needs to be regarded outside of the linear, nonrepeating sequences that emerge from writing (Abram 1997, 195) and draw from the transient power of oral narrative traditions. Davie, in her work with Protestant women, explains that “two of my informants disliked the idea of freezing their faith into language at all, because they saw words themselves as insufficient expressions or witnesses of their inner religious lives, and beyond that, potentially interpretable as sanctimonious or prideful” (1995, 83). My participants confronted this tension in their own creation of narratives with their querents, intentionally working to free them from absolutes. To capture the mutable or illusory nature of human existence, they embrace narratives that can adapt to emotion and let go of defined boundaries.

The narratives that emerge out of divination have to be more than traditional literature. Jean explained that “it’s beyond language; it’s beyond mental. It’s not in that

territory. So when we struggle to get it, sometimes we get entangled in thoughts. It's an intuitive, natural process" (1998, 7). This struggle is played out in the world on an everyday basis. Lawless encountered it when she spent time working in a women's shelter. In the resulting book, *Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment through Narrative*, she focuses on the importance of storytelling in the process of healing for victims of domestic abuse and notes the tension that exists between different narrative structures, particularly between external, institutional systems and internal, lived experiences. Contemplating her involvement in coaching women on how to turn their emotional and physical trauma into narratives that will gain them access to and success within legal systems and social supports, she finds herself conflicted:

Given the process of building a story for the benefit of services, I am interested in how a story of crisis evolves through the various stages of "using words" to gain safety, and I wonder two things: Why is the story she is taught to tell better than the one she came to be telling? And have we noticed that at the same time she is learning how to formulate words that will gain her services, which is a form of empowerment, we are, by telling her what to say, and when and how, serving only to disempower her once again by replacing her words with those created by the very institutions established to help her? (2001, 49)

This tension regularly plays out in court systems: the dismissal of certain narratives because they do not fit within the confines of pre-determined structures and the dismissal of victims because their emotions are not following a prescribed script. Yet divination provides a different form of narrative empowerment. It exists outside of these systems; consequently, it becomes a refuge for those who feel like they are otherwise overlooked or dismissed. Within the space of this ritual there is recognition that narratives have to come from a participatory process that does not prioritise one story over another and allows everyone to find their own process of telling it.

Making Sense of it All

Walking back to where I was staying in Edmonton after interviewing Lesley, I found myself trying to work out the academic desire for an ordered, linear narrative:

I think, again, just as there are all these voices and in some places they overlap, in a lot they don't. And I've been thinking...I'm going to have to address the idea of this desire to create hierarchy or right or wrong or the idea that they should all fit together somehow. And what happens if we get to the point if we have to reconcile with the fact that things don't necessarily fit? They don't necessarily make sense. That sometimes, as Leslie said, they just are. And what if, in fact, in our lives the things that we do, just, they just are. And that we all have different perspectives that just exist. And that somehow we all, we all don't have the same shared reality. Which is tricky and, I'm sure, maybe there's quantum physics that can explain it all, but for me it's just enough hearing all these different people and their experiences to recognise where things converge and diverge that I'm going to have to really emphasise that there isn't a right or wrong. One person's narrative is equal to someone else's and that it's all valid. (FN July 3, 2015)

Divination, as undertaken by my participants, is not an act of perfection. It demands a recognition that if the querent is flawed, seeking out answers in a struggle to break from past patterns and move forward into fuller potential, this same understanding needs to be extended to those who conduct the readings. Perfection is not the answer and, therefore, the act of interpretation has limitations. It is a challenge familiar to those who undertake fieldwork. As Marcus and Cushman argue, "[n]ot only must the ethnographer's conceptual and descriptive language make (common) sense to his readers within their own cultural framework, but it must communicate meanings to these same readers which they are persuaded would make (again, common) sense to the ethnographer's subjects" (1982, 46). In seeking to bear witness to the unseen, the anthropologist David J. Kim writes that divination "becomes a condensed metaphor for ethnographic borders and

liminal representations” (2015, 9). In the struggle to find ways to communicate the experiences of those we encounter, folklorists and practitioners find themselves as allies, working at the fringes of the articulable in order to make manifest the complex lives they encounter.

One of the few questions I intentionally brought up in my interviews was concerning the issue of interpretation and how they approached it. The answers I received reflected an awareness of bias and the limits of language (discussed earlier) that are familiar to any ethnographer:

JESSICA: But with all things, you know, you do have to take it with some grain of salt because it's channelled, the energy, and channelled information, it shows up differently for people, and that's the other thing that people don't realise is that because it's energy, using energy and interpreting it into words, the English language, or any language, is extremely restricting, so a lot of times I can see and sense and feel but how to be able to communicate that in a way that somebody understands can be very difficult. And not necessarily always understood fully. And so that's the other issue that you face as being a reader, too, because the energy is far bigger than we can even possibly imagine. (I.24)

C.F.: This information is coming from this person, right, and they have their own minds and beliefs and everything. I just call it a matrix, and you have to get that information into the medium's mind in a way that they can process it and understand it, and then they have to use their own language to communicate it to the person who's getting the reading, and they also have their own matrix for understanding, so there's so many, how shall we say, there's a lot of possibility for error, for confusion, so I'm not saying I never do it [mediumship], but generally that's not what I want to do. I mostly just try to access what I call universal intelligence or reading people, and I just look at energy, basically. (I.5)

ELIZABETH: I like to use the automatic writing because it actually flows through as words, so sometimes I make more sense. Sometimes the things I see, it's hard to communicate it. That's one of the reasons I started this - my art. My art readings. I thought, okay, at least you get a visual...for example, I'll meet with somebody; I'll see, I can make out actual places...you take the highlights of it and try to communicate it, but it's like watching a television show, seeing something on a screen, there's so much, and trying to communicate that to somebody in the next room. What, how do you communicate everything you see on that television screen? You can't. You can't. You can take out the highlights, and then

sometimes, sometimes it's not totally clear, so sometimes you get highlights, you try and take out the important parts, I guess. (I.14)

My participants attempt to mitigate these limitations by opening themselves up to multiple forms of this process. Elizabeth brings together visual, written, and verbal storytelling to create narratives that her querents can understand.

Furthermore, opening up a narrative to interpretation recognises that getting answers is not always the appropriate response to a question. For some, there is always information present, sometimes too much to communicate fully. But it is also, at times, absent because querents are asking the wrong question and, therefore, the appropriate framework for interpretation is not present. Lesley recognises that the answers she receives are rooted in her as much as those who seek her out:

So if you're looking to have someone tell you what colour your house is, what kind of car you drive, or how many children you have, I'm not the person that you want to come and see. And it took me a long time to understand: why don't I get that kind of information? Until it dawned on me: because I don't care. I'm much more interested in what your inner landscape looks like. Because what happens in here is reflected out there. So, telling somebody that they have a three-bedroom bungalow 20 miles outside of town, you know, it's like, oh yeah, to me it's like a circus trick. [...] I want to know what's moving and shaking in here, and how can I reflect back to you what your reality looks like so you can see it from somebody else's perspective, from a perspective outside of yourself? [...] And I've taken the same, so when you've asked this question, if you see a negative reaction in me, it doesn't mean that you're not going to win the lottery, it just means I hate that question. And I think that sometimes my approach might be slightly unnerving for people because I'm not going to let you believe that my response was anything but personal. I don't like that question, and because I don't like that question I'm probably not able to answer it. And people really need to learn that there are other forms of abundance in life, and before you win the lottery, go and read all the case histories of the people who won all that money, and they didn't have a clue how to accept the abundance that came their way, and they blew it all. (I.35)

In order to help the querent get out of their own way, a common experience throughout the entire divinatory process, practitioners come up with various strategies.

Elizabeth has her clients shuffle a deck of cards while she is doing automatic writing (I.14). Both Irene and Donna have their querents do a drawing exercise which also reveals information about the person but can, as Donna explains, additionally allow them to relax and get over the anxiety of seeing a medium for the first time. Irene had me do this exercise, drawing five different objects: a sun, a moon, a tree, a house, and a lake:

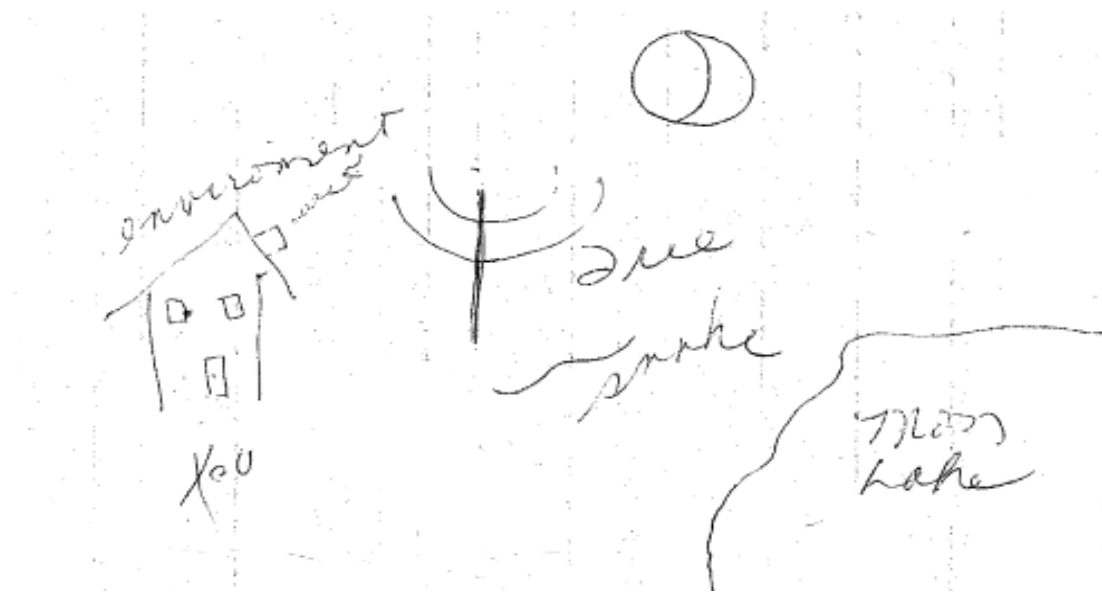


Figure 19: Drawing Exercise

Each object holds a different meaning that can also serve as a way to begin a conversation. The house, for example, is you; the lake is your mother, and so on (See Appendix E for a full discussion of the picture and her process of reading it, as well as for Donna's approach to the exercise). It allows them to get a sense of who the person is,

forming a context for further discussion while relaxing the querent and engaging them in the narrative process.

One of the challenges of interpretation is what to do with difficult messages. Anne approaches it by remembering that she gives querents the information as compassionately as possible, but the responsibility is theirs because “I’m assuming that if you come to see me you’re there for the truth and that I owe that to you” (I.1). Diane, like many, tries to keep the readings focused on the positive and open, always holding attention on the recognition that just because they do not like the information does not make it wrong (I.9). Being positive is not the same as ignoring hard topics but is, instead, about choosing how to present the material.

Elizabeth explained the importance of being positive in the process of conducting a reading by telling me why she will not do a reading on someone in a crisis situation:

KARI: So why? Is it to do with the energy, or is it that they’re in a crisis situation? How does that impact what you do?

ELIZABETH: I need my readings to be in a very positive space. So before each reading I do a clearing, like I said, it’s a set time...at least a couple days in advance, and so when people come to see me they’re kind of fresh, they’re kind of feeling good, and it’s going to be a more positive situation. If somebody meets with me and they’re really frantic, it’s a lot of negative energy, so it’s a lot of negative energy for me to absorb. It’s a lot, it almost puts a block, because there’s so much negative energy so it’s hard to kind of get out of that space. So they’re not going to get as good of a reading as if they’re calm. Just like if you made a decision in life, are you going to make a better decision in life if you’re frantic or if you’ve just had a lovely afternoon in the park...it’s just a big difference, right. (I.14)

But everyone is different which is why not every querent and practitioner are a match.

Heather reflects that:

I've mellowed over the years. Because, you know, it's part of my personality; I don't really sugar-coat things, and...I've found I've had to tone down that aspect because, well I think honesty is the best way to go, and I like to have it all laid out in front of me or at least have an opportunity to look at it, I've come to believe very few people actually think that way or live that way. (I.20)

Marlene echoed this approach, telling me that "I think I'd rather a client walk out of my office and be really pissed off and change than love me and stay stuck forever" (I.39).

Leah, in considering the differences between Australia and Canada, has found within the latter country there is a greater expectation of gentleness. She has heard of some of her own querents talking about bad experiences, about how being given negative feedback, such as you are going to die, leads them to forgo reading for years, if they ever return (I.34). In reflecting on a reaction much like those Leah shared, Mélanie told me about her own encounter one summer:

Oh, [laughs] so one time, this was, I don't know, five or six years ago. So we were still living in Calgary, put it that way, so I'm still working with my friends, and so our family, our kids and we all met at the cottage that we used to – it was kind of like cottages in a lodge area that we went to when they were growing up. So we all decided to meet there. And that week there was this, I guess, I wouldn't call her a medium, I don't think, but anyway, this person who was doing readings. And all week, and so for \$30 you could get a reading. So I'd never done this before so I went in, so there's a bunch of us sitting around waiting for our turn and the woman says, now, when you go in there if you don't want anything negative let her know right at the beginning and she won't" [...]

She gets started and she's saying, all my kids, they're all in these terrible relationships and lawyers have been called and, you know, people are this and that, and it was just the worst reunion I ever had, and you know, of course I go back and the family said: how was it? And I said, it was all right, it was good. All this terrible stuff about my kids. And one of the things she says is somebody when they're driving home is going to have car trouble. So anyway that turned out. My son and his wife, they had car trouble on their way home. But, so I couldn't figure this out. Like I'm thinking, you know, I'm here with my kids and they're having these terrible lives and, you know, I'm not picking up on it and all this stuff. So anyway I go back to Calgary, and I'm telling my friend about this and she says, "oh," she says, "I think she was picking up your prison energy" [Mélanie was

working in a prison at the time]. So when I went over everything she said it all fit in with my prison energy, you know. So that really shows you how it carries. She doesn't know nothing from nothing because she doesn't know me at all. But my kids are all within 100 feet of where we are, you know, they're all there, and so I'm thinking she's picking up my kids, but she's picking up all this stuff, and she's putting it onto my kids. So that's what, like when I'm saying things when we're doing our practices, I know that I don't really understand what I'm saying, and so the person on the table has to sort out how, what, how that's meaningful for them. That was a good experience to have; [laughs] anyway, that's the only time I've ever gone. (I.40)

Regardless of the fit, regardless of the way that information is presented, the key is to come out of the experience willing to be changed. The message is useless if it is not heard.

How, many practitioners are forced to ask, do I present this material without re-interpreting it through my own expectation? Jessica notes that she does filter some information, particularly if it involves someone not present at the reading, "because if it doesn't directly impact you and doesn't have to pertain to you, then it's really quite frankly none of your business" (I.24). C.F. explains this approach as "just because you know somebody's password doesn't mean that you should go into their email account and start reading their emails" (I.5). Going beyond those ethical considerations, K.T. tries hard to not interpret the meaning while giving the message but to work with the querent so they can interpret it together (I.28), situating it contextually within that individual's life. Leah notes that she cannot read for people she is close to because she will start to interpret for them, something she even struggles with in sessions with strangers:

I often say to people in readings, the message is not for me, they're for you, so as long as you understand what I'm saying – because some of it's fragmented. I kind of say it's like seeing a silent movie in my head, and I have to try and describe the things, and we have to kind of learn as readers to not interpret what we're seeing because you might see something and go, oh, that's a red jumper, or that's stupid,

I'm not going to say that, but that could be really significant to the person you're reading for, so you really need to translate everything that you're seeing and hearing (I.34)

Donna explained that part of learning to use her skills was learning to not dismiss any of the message as “dumb” because the message is not for the reader but for the querent

(I.13). Richard describes the “one big secret about mediumship” as:

When spirit comes through us, first of all, I think I told you, we have no control who comes. It's just, if they come, we're there to be used. So when they come, any information they give us, Kari, it should not make any sense to us, it's not our message. And some mediums make the mistake of trying to understand the message. That's not our job. So if we give you information that's for you, *you* understand it because it's your message, it's your loved one, and they're telling you things that you know about this person. How the hell would I know it, right? But mediums do that and they'll go, okay, and then they'll start trying to make it fit and that's wrong. Just, all we have to do, we're like an echo, we're like a parrot, you tell us something and we tell it. We just keep saying the same thing. Oh, okay, they're saying this, right. And I see this, that's all we do because we have no business changing it. It's actually one of the biggest no-nos. Because it's the same things as, let's say, on earth somebody said to me, “will you give this message to Kari?” and I changed it. What good is that? Right, so, it's the same thing. (I.47)

Ultimately it comes down to trusting that the message is the right one. One of the ways this is mitigated by some, like Sam and Gus, is that they do not ask for any questions before they start doing the reading. Sometimes Sam will ask afterwards, if he is curious, but he conducts the readings without them to prevent a biased interpretation (I.48).

Tied into this issue of bias is the question of whether or not practitioners read for themselves. I do and am comfortable doing so, although I would never say it is a perfect thing (however, perfection, as one astrologer I consulted many years ago reminded me, is boring). Many participants read for themselves; other do not, for a myriad of reasons. Anne finds it very difficult because she lacks objectivity and will often draw on other books to offer interpretations of the cards to help offset her subjective perspective (I.1).

Debra sometimes reads for herself by pulling a tarot card for herself but never a full spread because “it’s very easy to bend the cards to what you want. So I find, if I’m going to do something, it’s usually picking a card for the day or doing a very basic three-card spread that will show you maybe the event and the influences. But I find if I go much deeper than that, then I’m trying to make the cards say what I want them to say” (I.8). And, as Julie noted, you miss the important stuff (I.27).

Elizabeth J. also agrees that “[y]ou cannot do readings – it’s very hard to do readings on yourself because you’re biased and you doubt too much. And you would say, okay, was that really me? Was that really what it said or was it really what I wanted it to say? No, you cannot, it’s like you cannot operate on yourself either” (I.16). Peter argues a different perspective; after all, he asks, “Who do you know best? You know yourself better than anybody.” He goes on to make the recommendation, however, that people need to be careful not to be too hard on themselves “because you’re your own worst critic and you really want to lay the boots to you, sometimes, if you know what I mean” (I.45). Heather also does not have a problem with reading for herself because “that’s how I learned. That’s how I learned, and part of my own psychology and my family’s psychology is, you know, it’s kind of like those cartoons where they saw off the head and put it up. I’m quite happy to do that. Truly, I mean, I find it fascinating” (I.20). For her, it is not a problem to confront her own biases, but a delight.

Jason sees a compromise, recognising the bias of reading for yourself and hearing what you want to hear but also acknowledging its power as a tool for personal development. He advises pulling a card or three cards a day, journaling about them, thinking about them, and integrating them into your daily life – a method I frequently

employ. Jean is fond of doing a three-card spread for herself wherein the cards represent the body, mind, and spirit (I.23). Katrina does not often do readings for herself because of her own lack of impartiality, but she does receive personal messages although, she reflects, she does not always pay attention to them (I.30). Sam does readings for himself, recognising that he is biased. Like Jean, he likes to do the three-card spread. In the end, he tells me, “I trust my own understanding of it well enough. I mean I know I can never be completely sure that I’m not just trying to tell myself what I want to hear, but I’ve been doing it for long enough now” (I.48). Ellen, a palm reader, compares her approach to that of shrinks staying out of their own heads: “I don’t dwell on my own hands. I monitor things and certainly pay attention to the changes that keep happening and act on the information, but I am not obsessive” (I.17). As with so much in life, it is not an absolute binary. Instead, it is a situation of blending together systems and recognising that every approach has strengths and weaknesses. It is, in many ways, about finding balance.

Interpretation is a messy process, and it can take time. First, the information may be for issues that have not yet come up. Messages are not always for the present moment. As discussed earlier, it is a common refrain amongst those I interviewed that days, weeks, or months may go by and then a querent will contact them to let them know the message now makes sense. Second, practitioners also have to contend with what Erin terms psychic amnesia. She explained it to me through the example of her own husband when he went for a reading:

Before I started doing this full time my husband went to a reader – and talking about psychic amnesia. He, for a living, he owns a bread route. So he delivers bread to restaurants, hotels, all that stuff, right. And he went to this medium, and she recorded it. And so I’m listening to this cd after the fact, and I’m listening to it driving to work. And she says to him, because his grandpa came through, and she

says to him, “well grandpa’s showing me dough, like dough. Do you deliver pizza for a living?” She said, “it’s like bread dough.” And he’s like, “oh no, I don’t know what that could be.” And I’m listening in my car; I’m like: you deliver bread, you moron! But in the moment, he said he was just caught up in the moment that, just, your mind goes blank, right. So it’s just, yeah, you definitely hear from people after the fact, they’ll be like, actually, no, yeah, I know what you’re talking about now. (I.18)

Third, life changes. As Jessica notes, when she is asked if her reading will come 100% true “I’m like no; they’re like why? Because maybe you’ll change your mind. Maybe – because there’s free will. And free will, it’s a killer, it really is” (I.24).

Often times this messiness of human life is seen to be distilled or reduced through divination, especially the newspaper horoscopes that provide only a few short lines of information. However, when looking at individual practices it becomes clearer how they are adapted to individual experiences. Interpretation is not a singular process but involves multiple sources of information and layers of meaning that are integrated together. They can include the experiences of the reader and querent, the different tools that are used, and the communities within which they are formed. Sam explained it in this way:

KARI: Where do you think the information comes from?

SAM: Well, damn good question that. There’s a magical concept called an egregor. [...] when a group of people start doing things together they develop a group mind. You can sometimes see this emerge quite spontaneously and spectacularly, for example if you’re in a crowd of people and suddenly they all become very angry and a riot ensues, or they’re all suddenly very joyful and there’s dancing in the streets. Or, for whatever reason, a whole bunch of people are caught up together in a kind of group experience and they generate together a group mind. Now these things, when they emerge spontaneously just evaporate quite quickly, but if you’re in a magical group like a coven, covens deliberately set out to create a group mind. To share experiences, emotions, and energy together so that all the members of the coven together can, first they can donate energy to this group mind, but they can also draw from it, and a well-functioning group, well-functioning coven, or magical lodge, or even a Masonic lodge, will have this coherent presence whenever they start doing ritual. Cast a circle and click, there’s

a coherent presence which everyone can share in, and that's called an egregor. That's a name for the group mind. It may or may not be conscious; it often comes to be almost like a demi-goddess, conscious with a benevolent liking for everybody who's in the group and a capacity to store energy and to have energy drawn from it. I believe that there is an egregor that's associated with each of the different tarot decks, especially the ones that have been in use for a long time and the ones that are in use by a lot of magically inclined people. This one [Rider Waite] undoubtedly, very much the Thoth deck. The Thoth deck, because in Thelemic groups and the Order of Templi Orientis and its various offshoots, they use the Thoth deck exclusively and they do use it with magical intent. It has a very strong personality and presence to it. But most of the decks don't because most of them, people are using them as parlour tricks, right. So that's where I would say, I would say that the information comes from the group mind that has been generated over many years of use by these decks, around these decks. (I.48)

These are not static spaces of absolute meaning but reflect the complexities of human interactions and meaning-making.

After attending the Evening with Spirit, I contemplated the ways in which the community shares narratives to support interpretations, as well as the ways in which they diverge:

[the other reader] tends to tell more the story, create more of the narrative of what [they've] seen. [They] say a lot: I feel, I feel. So it's very sensory. Richard tends to get a lot of, he does as well but his isn't necessarily the same level of coherent narrative? That isn't the right word. Narrative. So it's different processes. Neither's right or wrong because what's really gained by creating these hierarchies? But, instead, there's a sense of different ways of connecting, and he talked about the fact that sometimes some will have three or more spirits come through in a session because they're just not hearing it the first time or they're just not getting through and so, if it's really important, people will just keep presenting the information until one of the ways resonates. And isn't that just terribly human? The idea that we struggle sometimes the way in which something is communicated and so we have to hear it in different ways or we have to hear it repeat[ed] until we understand it or until we absorb it... So, again, to me it was about this interweaving of stories and narratives and meaning and concept of truth coming from an internally established system that has to be respected. And again it also comes down to which meaning each person gets out of it and takes with it and builds their lives around. (FN June 27, 2015)

Sharing the Story

Divination, Heimlich notes, “has always been an idiom for a performative speech act” (2010, 171). The act itself is not the focus of this section; instead, it is about how performance takes participants out of the text in the same way divination moves them into an expanded world. “Performance is not a text – or, rather, not *merely* a text”, writes Deborah A. Kapchan, a scholar of performance studies. “Performance is so intricately bound up with the nonverbal attributes of sound, taste, shape, color, and weight that it cannot be verbally mapped – only alluded to, only invoked” (2003, 121-2). The same could be said of divination, which is not just the tool, or the reader, or the question, or the querent. It is intricately bound to the single, unrepeatable moment when everything lived, felt, feared, and hoped comes together.

This concept of performance emerged with the anthropologist Milton Singer’s idea of cultural performances. First published in 1959, it was an umbrella term he used for events such as plays, concerts, or lectures that were central and reoccurring “types of things” within the communities he observed during his fieldwork in South India (2003, 61). It continued its growth under the influence of Victor Turner, especially his work on ritual, and by other folklorists including Dell Hymes, Abrahams, and Bauman who all “sought an understanding of cultural performance in terms of the marking of certain activities as different from the everyday” (Maxwell 2008, 66). Weaving in and out of disciplines, like divination, it has come to be identified by different names, terms, and ideas such as enactment (Abrahams 1977, 80-1); verbal art (Bauman 1977, 8); the performer’s influence upon the other participants (Goffman 1959, 15); the potential for

unification (Bauman 1977, 5); a moment of semiosis or meaning-making (Mechling 1993, 276); the transmission of “social knowledge, memory and a sense of identity” (Taylor 2003, 2-3); and the process of valuation (Taves and Bender 2012, 11). Perhaps its most succinct, but by no means simple, definition comes from Bauman’s introduction to *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*: performance is “the doing of folklore” (1972, xi). Given this complexity, it is best to take Hymes’ approach and not seek out the impossible, single definition. Instead he draws our attention to “an essential element common to all these approaches” – the shifting of focus from the text to the communicative event ([1974] 1981, 128-9). It is the action and the context, not the text, that had proven to be central.

When looking at how the performance is framed it is important to recognise that, especially within divinatory contexts, it is not limited to the ritual of the reading event itself. Aphek and Tobin expand the boundaries of the reading ceremony to encompass the entire encounter between the reader and the querent, including the latter’s process of selecting a reader and initiating contact (1990, 69). This extension reflects Goffman’s recognition of both the front part of a performance (that which is visible and regulated) and the back part that exists behind the stage (1959, 22, 112). In this second space there is a great deal of power over the visible aspects of the performance that often goes unnoticed if the boundaries are assumed to contain only what is seen by the audience (Stoeltje 1993, 141).

The desire for a stereotypical performance in the most general sense is one that can drive individuals to see a practitioner, but it is not an experience that most of those I interviewed are interested in providing:

KARI: Are there those then who want the stereotypical experience of the fortune teller?

ANNE: Yes, yeah. In which case I'd say, you know there's a place called New Orleans. I would do that, I would go see a voodoo reader in New Orleans, yes I would.

KARI: Yeah.

ANNE: No shit. Because there's no other reason except for the jazz and the food to go to New Orleans. Voodoo. Cool. Yes! (I.2)

However, it does not mean that there is anything wrong with seeking out this experience.

As discussed above, not all querents and readers are a good fit. Those who do not want to provide this particular performance will not. The right reader and client will find each other, eventually.

Jason does recognise the appeal of this performance and does not regard it as hindering the knowledge that is its ultimate goal:

KARI: You've mentioned a few times this idea of the tarot experience, people coming in for the experience.

JASON: Yeah.

KARI: What do you mean by that?

JASON: Well, I just look back on when I did readings...I've been reading since ten years old until now, but I've never – I've had three tarot readings from what we called professional tarot readers. What I mean by that is people that work in shops for money. So, for me the experience was, I think it's just more for entertainment, you know. It's the idea of going in, having someone tell you a little bit about yourself. Maybe getting freaked out a little bit if someone knows a little bit about you and, you know, that's exciting. You may go with a friend. A lot of best friends will come in and so...then I try to approach it a little more like fortune-telling. And it's not like – you're still receiving information, it's still valid. But I will use the cards in a different way and I, I developed a method with the Lenormand method that I kind of use with the tarot as well. So it's having that one card is the main adjective and then the card next to it is a bottom card and we're talking about basic, everyday stuff instead of – so, for instance, if I see a card that looks a little bit like electricity and we see the death card, well, maybe

they had power outages in their house or something. So you can approach the tarot very much in a fortune telling way. (I.23)

Rooted in context, Jason's work adapts to the needs of his audience without him feeling that he needs to compromise his own position.

In considering the idea of performance, Jessica has made some changes to her own readings, integrating different methods beyond the tarot:

KARI: And how do you go about deciding what method to use? Is it the client who comes to you and says I want a card reading or I want a tea leaf reading or?

JESSICA: Well, I did tea leaf readings to begin with but I found that they were very short as well, because I'm able to get a lot of information out very quickly, as you can see [she had just completed a short reading for me].

KARI: Yes. [both laugh]

JESSICA: Because spirit just doesn't, I mean, they have a different time frame than I do. And people still value time with money, so you know, I've moved, I've included the tarot to extend that time, so it's more about the time rather than the information for me. How do I give them the time that they are looking for? So if I'm doing like a hotline and time is in essence I'll be really good because I can [snapping fingers] you know, flip it out really quickly. But if they're sitting down for me and they're expecting half an hour or they're expecting an hour, then, yeah, I'd better be able to kind of give them something.

People also like visuals, they like to see that something's going on, that you're just – because otherwise they think that you're making it up. So again it's a psychological thing about people and just, you know, seeing something work. So seeing the pendulum. So if they see the pendulum moving and not my hand, you know, and they're asking a question and I'm just holding my hand there and the pendulum's just going like crazy, and I'm just, then they know that there's something else going on, you know, so it provides that additional confirmation as well. (I.24)

As already discussed, the tangibility of the tools is significant and, as will be explored in the next chapter, so too are financial considerations. When money is brought in, and when there are timeframes placed around the experience, different methods allow for Jessica to expand the performance, including giving something tangible to those who come to her. It

is not a deception or intended to demean the querents, but instead recognises that divination often exists within a realm of the intangible – often within people’s minds and temporalities – and using languages and meanings that are not always easily shared. To engage in the experience of divination requires that there are ritual spaces wherein everyone can participate. Performance creates this space.

While Abrahams may regard as a fiction the possibility to “break through into performance or game, even ritual, at any moment in our everyday lives” (1977, 108), it is becoming increasingly apparent that the potential is there. Certain divinatory acts require longer periods of time for preparation, but others emerge in what McGuire terms the “mundane celebrations of sacred time” (2007, 68). Tea leaf reading, for example, can be part of a specified ceremony or an act of spontaneity during a normal cup of tea. The reading itself need not be regarded as a sacred act, and it is important to acknowledge that what may appear to the folklorist as a ritual process need not be defined thus by those who are undertaking it. Meaning is indeed rooted in context.

Of particular interest when looking at the porous boundaries between the everyday and the ritual are the concepts of performance and rehearsal put forth by the public folklorist Olivia Cadaval. “The difference between performance and rehearsal,” she writes, “is the difference between ‘is’ and ‘as if’” (1985, 190). One could argue that the practice remains in the everyday, ready to be transformed into ritual at a moment’s notice, and once it enters into this space it can no longer be rehearsal. Yet divination challenges this divide. A rehearsal may be practice for the act of reading for someone else in the future; however, the act may still have value to the practitioner during the rehearsal, in

which case it is both the rehearsal (as if I were reading for another) and the performance (I am reading for myself).

By examining the expectations my participants have of a performance, it is possible to explore the significance of a divinatory act for everyone involved. For some it is playful game done solely for entertainment; for several of my participants it is a serious spiritual act that allows them to communicate with a divine (external or internal) force. And for many it moves freely among all possibilities as ideas are tested and beliefs are brought forward or lost. It becomes part of Goffman's cycles of disbelief-to-belief and belief-to-disbelief (1959, 20). In her examination of Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser's article "Strategies of Coding in Women's Culture," and their discussion of how women use coding to subvert and survive (1993), Mills focuses on the importance of deniability that is involved in the performances of many women (1993, 179). In divination, especially where it is not socially or legally supported,¹⁹ the ability to deny certain meanings or identities is important. Additionally, if the message received is frightening, the performance can be returned, at least superficially, to that of a game that carries no weight in the world outside the ritual space.

The labels used to situate those involved in the performance are often more complex than they first appear. One example is the guardians, or spiritual advisors, who guide Kelliena. They help her choose particular tools for a reading and also provide her with information throughout. Where, in the event, are they situated? They are not part of

¹⁹ As part of wide-spread updates to the Canada criminal code initiated in 2017, Section 365, a fraud law specifically addressing witchcraft and fortune-telling (Government of Canada 2016) will be finally removed (Platt 2017).

the audience who is the client; they are only present for the reader or performer. In many ways they serve as a performer for Kelliena who becomes, momentarily, part of the audience. At other times Kelliena and the guardians are a performative team, as discussed in Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959, 77-105). There are layers of performance occurring for various individuals during this one event that are not obvious to even all of the participants, let alone the folklorist.

Even more challenging is the performative event involving practitioners reading for themselves which has been a common practice throughout the history of divination. Johnston notes that many acts in ancient Greece belonged to both the professional and the everyday individual because they "could be carried out by most people, even if some were better at them than others" (2008, 115). The practitioner, thus, serves as both the audience and performer in the same act, and if they are invoking a deity, that spiritual being is also involved and may serve, at least in some way, as an audience. At other times this being may be the performer who is involved in the manipulation of divination tools in order to communicate a message. The question of the objects involved also adds an additional layer of potential participants because some regard the items themselves as having an innate personality or active role. For example, Bascom notes that they become participatory when a client in Ifa divination, wishing to keep their question from the reader, whispers it to objects in the diviner's bag ([1969] 1991, 54). The diviner and their tools, thus, become a team.

Another audience/performer dynamic that emerges in divination is the assumption of the passivity of the audience or querent. To treat them as such is to fall into the trap that Jay Mechling, a scholar of American studies, identifies with textual analysis, that it

“ignore[s] the real power of audience members to resist, rewrite and withdraw” (1993, 285). The folklorist Kwesi Yankah is quick to point out that in certain African performative events the performer faces potential hazards from the interactions with the audience whose approval can bring about rewards, but whose derision will lead to “culturally-affirmed penalties and sanctions” (1985, 136). Professional diviners must also be looked at from the viewpoint of their responsibility to their audience. If the client is looking for entertainment with no personal investment it may be enough that they evaluate the performance on aesthetic qualities. However, for those who are coming to a reading with a more serious intent there is no guarantee that it will be enough.

Vladimir Klyaus, who works at the Institute of World Literature in Moscow, notes that charms “represent a unique genre of folklore: in contrast to other folkloric genres, the narrativity of charms is not exhausted by the texts themselves. The ‘charm’ is not only expressed by words but also exists outside their bounds” (2009, 71). This approach is not quite as exclusive as he claims and is applicable to divination as well; it reflects how the text and context intersect but also how narratives expand outside of the text itself. This echoes Dégh’s reminder that “[a]t this point we should also remember that when we speak of the ‘text,’ we are referring not only to a product of direct oral exchange but also to a more stabilized merchandise communicated through other-than-oral means to a much larger audience” (2001, 11).

“In the end,” Bell writes, “a performance approach does not usually offer a definitive interpretation of a set of ritual actions. Indeed, it is better at conveying the multiple ways in which such activities are meant and experienced, as well as how such multiplicity is integral to the efficacy of ritual performances” (1998, 218). Divination

embraces this method, delving into performative spaces in order to reveal layered worlds and individual potentials that emerge in various forms of power and empowerment.

Chapter 5

Who Controls Your Fate? Divination's Relationship to Systems and Structures of Power

What does it mean to be powerful – filled with power? Is it an external force wielded to subjugate, manipulate, or harm? Or is it the capacity to work against these forces and claim the self as valid? Do diviners foster or limit it within their querents? There are no simple yes/no answers to these questions. Instead, delving into this theme with those practicing it here and now necessitates attention be paid to the shifting interplay of ideas often accompanying power and divination: commodification, gender, and the role of the personal. Practitioners interact with different aspects of these power dynamics, challenging and being challenged by them. Paying attention to these factors reveals a complex portrait of an act that is not a single, one-way street of charlatans taking money from the gullible (although this is, unfortunately, sometimes a reality). For if, as Storey writes, “[p]ower produces reality” ([1997] 2012, 132), then what lies ahead are yet more layers of the complex worlds that are navigated through the processes of divination.

The Almighty Dollar

The connection between divination and money is an intricate one. It is not surprising, however, given the complex relationship many continue to have with money and consumerism that prompt studies such as: “Money, Sociability and Happiness: Are Developed Countries Doomed to Social Erosion and Unhappiness?” (Sarracino 2012);

“Time, money, and happiness: Does putting a price on time affect our ability to smell the roses?” (Connors, et al. 2016); and “Can Money and Happiness Cohabit?” (Jones 2005). It is of particular note when money is associated with the intangible elements of individual lives where its very physicality seems not to validate the practice but to serve as an undermining force. Instead of granting it legitimacy or acting as a mediator in the way that the tools themselves do, the exchange of currency for a reading becomes a central point of criticism. If one truly has “the gift”, it is reasoned, then one is obligated to share it freely and not seek any form of financial gain. Yet, not charging money also leads to a de-legitimation of these practices by assuming that they have no value within a capitalist society, leaving the practitioner in a situation of negotiating between these various tensions in order to come to terms with their own relationship with the financial component of their work.

A significant part of this ongoing process of discussion comes from the ways in which people define many of their experiences in economic terms, often creating a dichotomy such as the philosopher Richard Burke observes in his article “‘Work’ and ‘Play’”. He argues that we have created a system wherein “work is whatever you get paid for, and play is everything else” (1971, 34). This same duality is ratified within acts that are often understood as having a spiritual component and are, therefore, expected to be removed from the crassness or mundanity of the consumerist world. I frequently asked those readers who were or are professional (charging money for their services) about this relationship, curious if they had faced these challenges and, if so, how they resolved them. In general, their responses fell into two categories: 1) how money validates their

work for the practitioner and querent, and 2) the importance of exchange within the context of the divinatory act.

While Gus does not yet charge for conducting tarot readings, it is something that he is considering for the future. When discussing the relationship between money and divination he explained that “when you put money down for something, you are treating it with some level of seriousness” (I.19). It places more pressure on the practitioner to treat their work as serious because they need to ensure that they are providing their querent with a quality experience. Donna discussed this aspect of transitioning to professional reader:

Once you start charging, your game has to come up, [...] now you're, people are paying for something, they want a service. It puts pressure on you too, so this is why often it was easy to do it free because there was not, oh, if you're right, you're right, if you're wrong, you're wrong. It's like, it was play. But now when you're actually expecting somebody to pay you for a service, you really have to make sure you deliver, so it's an incentive. (I.12)

Within her statement is this pervasive separation of play from monetary gain; here, it is a way of marking the transition from one status to another. It is also a necessary distinction given the way divination is frequently dismissed as “just” a game. Money serves as a way of differentiating it from play, serving as a marker of professionalisation, and giving diviners a new linguistic form through which to articulate its significance.

Prices for sessions range from person to person and involve multiple factors. If one conducts readings through a metaphysical store, for example, then financial concerns are frequently left to the owners. If working for oneself, it depends on where the person lives, what services are offered, the skills and experiences of the practitioner, the tools required, and so on. In other words, the same factors are taken into consideration for those

conducting divinatory readings as any other business, particularly those in the service industry. K.T., in fact, credits her own experiences owning restaurants with her husband with helping her come to terms charging money for her services (I.29). Fitch argues that “it should not be assumed that the prospect of making money indicates fraud; if this were the case, there wouldn’t be an honest person alive – scientist, ufologist, or otherwise. Money is not indicative of fraud, but it is indicative of an industry” (2013, 191). Regarding divination as part of an industry does not demand that it be reduced in value but, instead, considered as yet another part of society to be drawn upon in the same way as any other service.

The question of fraud does hang in the air, though, whenever money is exchanged for divinatory services. A quick search online finds numerous news stories providing just such examples. In 2016, the Canadian news program *W5* conducted an investigation into fraudulent fortune-tellers and psychics (see Rinaldo and Jarratt 2016, Brunet and Brito, 2016), focusing on those who charged thousands of dollars for their services. Two years earlier, *The Atlantic* published a piece asking, “When is Fortune-Telling a Crime?” (George-Parkin 2014), centred around an American woman who gave a fortune-teller over \$50,000 to lift a curse. As Jessica recognised in chapter three, charlatans do exist, as they do in any profession; however, the topic of deception in divination is as complex as any other part of this practice. It involves not only the official legal system but also individual practitioners who establish their own guidelines for what constitutes trickery, the interwoven expectations of the querent, and the context of the reading itself.

From a legal perspective, there are challenges in approaching the topic of fraud in relation to divination, the first being that “[i]t’s hard to prove someone can’t really tell the

future” and, according to police, “victims won’t come forward, for fear of looking superstitious, stupid or staggeringly naïve” (Rinaldo and Jarratt 2016). Since the practice is marginalised, or discounted, it not only leads to those who have been taken advantage of remaining silent, but it makes it more difficult for querents to determine what to look for in order to ensure that they find a legitimate reader. On June 14, 2017, the Edmonton Police Service circulated a list of indicators of fraud: “unrealistic promises to solve personal and financial problems, requesting money up front for performing healing rituals, gaining confidence, and presenting a plan requiring thousands of dollars in payments, and claims to remove black magic or witchcraft” (Parrish). While these behaviours align with the guidelines provided by my participants for identifying a charlatan, their approach is frequently rooted not in the strict categorising of actions but in the emotional experience of the querent.

In our second interview, Richard addressed this topic: “the thing about it is they [the querents] trust you to have the truth and to tell you the truth. If I’m not honest then I can really screw you around, and I can harm you.” He spoke of a woman who came to him who “was so fearful. And this guy was charging her money to get rid of the spell. He didn’t get rid of it the first time; she had to keep coming back” (I.47). These ideas will be discussed further in this chapter when looking at personal power, as well as in the next one on healing, but the general consensus of those I interviewed is that no one should leave feeling afraid or dependent upon the diviner. Additionally, Richard noted a warning sign that was frequently brought up during my interviews: a reader who positions themselves as the savior, the one (and likely the only one) who can lift the curse or banish evil energies, but for a price. “It’s horrible,” he explained, “because it’s not a fact of, oh I

can't, Kari, unless you pay me \$200. I've let you go away frightened, you know what I mean? It's horribly destructive, so that's the dangers we, that's the things we hate about it because they are, they're there and they give us a bad name" (I.47).

Korkman, in her work on female-centred coffee divination in Turkey, observes that the "taken-for-grantedness of fortunetellers as charlatans and their clients as dupes reflects an underlining assumption that divination labor does not produce value" (2015, 197). It is an issue that has an insidious ability to undermine the confidence of those with whom I worked. Part of the process of recognising their own worth and their contributions to their communities emerges from their ability to charge a fee for their readings.

ELIZABETH J.: It's about value and worthiness. So, am I good enough? Do I deserve to be paid that much? Am I really giving that person that much value? (I.16)

K.T.: I think you almost have to learn your value and experiment with it because, for instance, psychologists feel just fine about charging you \$180 an hour, right...like for my mediumship stuff, I'm offering people a chance to resolve issues that they couldn't resolve in any other way unless they know how to do it themselves. (I.29)

In charging money, practitioners are recognising the value of their time and skills, as well as the results of their work. It becomes a conscious act against ongoing dismissals of their practice that are all too easily internalised.

When Julie first became involved in energy healing, she worked with a group that she eventually had to leave because of their emphasis that the labour must be free.

Between doing the healings and her job as a nurse she was working up to 20 hours a day and finally reached the point where "I said to the universe: you want me to do this, you've

got to pay my way” (I.25). Marlene also brought a similar experience of being overworked that shifted her own relationship with money:

KARI: Have you ever struggled with charging money for your services?

MARLENE: Because I did it for free for a long time it wasn't really so much of a struggle because...I'm working fulltime, and I've got a young son, and I don't have time for doing your reading, right, because again, I was, when I wasn't charging I was probably in my early 20s maybe. Yeah, early 20s, 21, or 22. And I had a lot of people and I was really into it then, it was my thing. But it got to the point that my time got valuable, right, so it was like, I don't love this enough to want you to come to my house and hang out after my kid to goes to bed, which means I wouldn't get to bed until midnight, and I have to start work at seven. And it was, so it was, when it became, like, I'm not doing this for free anymore, you know, that was kind of how it went. (I.49)

The relationship between value and money also factors into how the querent constructs their understanding of the practitioner's skills.

PETER: If you're really too cheap then they think, well, what's wrong with this person? (I.45)

FRAEZOR: It's hard to have them pay money for it, it really is. Unfortunately, a lot of people don't see value in something unless you charge them money for it. So yeah, it's always about economy...it's got to cost you seventy bucks, and then they go away happy or they're not going to pay attention to it. (I.3)

KATRINA: [during her first time reading at an expo] We were probably the lowest charging people. We were the least busy. So we raised our price, and I was swamped. We raised it a little bit because people [equate] money to quality. (I.30)

WENDY: Sadly, we only respect and give value to information we pay for. (I.51)

What they and others have discovered time and time again is that if they undervalue their work, so will others. Many come to recognise that money is not static in meaning; it is part of an ongoing process of negotiation. Richard explained that while “money has nothing to do with it” – the desire to undertake the work that he does – he is still left with the practical concern that “if you provide a place, it has to be paid for”. One of the

solutions is that the work he does for Evening with Spirit is voluntary; all the money goes toward the church, particularly paying rent. Practitioners do, after all, live within societies structured around financial obligations. He will not, however, receive payment for the healing work that he does, and if individuals wish to contribute he asks that they donate to the church (I.46). Debra explained that one of the oaths she took when she was initiated was that she would not receive money for her teaching; however, she does charge for expenses (I.8). For those that do both healing and divination, I found that the majority were comfortable charging for the latter but not the former.

In this discussion, there are parallels to the traditions of charming which often hold that charmers cannot or should not charge money for healings (Davies 1998, 44; Lovelace 2011, 41), although they can accept gifts. This attitude seems to continue to pervade North American approaches to (alternative) spiritual practices. “In the United States,” the religious studies scholar J. Gordon Melton explains, “healing has generally been seen as something one does for free, as an expression of one’s faith. In contrast, in such places as England, Brazil, and the Philippines, Spiritualist healers have operated as professionals who work within communities that value their services” (2001, 76). And yet, as C.F. notes, “people charge money for everything else in the world, why should a reading be any different?” (I.5).

Money, moreover, is not just about the recognition of the value of the reading and those participating, but also frequently part of the process. When I asked Elizabeth if she struggled with charging money, she responded that:

Not at all. You have to. And I’ll tell you why. There has to be an exchange. There has to be, when you offer a service, if you have a good or a service, there needs to be that exchange or there’s no appreciation for it. And I don’t mean that in a way,

but people appreciate it, there needs to be that exchange. You're offering a service; there needs to be an exchange. I personally have very, very reasonable rates; I don't know if you know much about some of the other people who do this kind of stuff in the city, like some people are very reasonable and then there's some people, I don't know who could afford to see them. So I'm not charging – I'm very reasonable. When people needed me, I don't do any upselling, I'm not selling them any spells or candles or anything like that. I want people to leave a session with me feeling like they got their money's worth, you know, it was worth it. (I.14)

Her answer not only brings up the importance of recognising the worth of her work, but also of the need for an interchange between those involved. Mikaelsson identifies this in her study of New Age practices: “money is increasingly becoming an invisible stream of energy in the world” (2001, 108). Pearl echoed this reframing, recognising that while there is a need to move away from the materialistic aspect of money because “energy doesn't need to manifest in the form of money”, it still must be recognised as “a medium of energy exchange” (I.44). This medium is one that is particularly resonant within Canadian society.

Julie regards energy transfer as central to the work that she does and explained this approach by telling me a story. It is one she connects back to Buddhism about a traveller journeying to see a master in order to learn from him:

Well, he was travelling through the wilderness, and he was very, very, very tired, and he kept struggling on and on and finally gets to this dwelling, and he knocks on the door, and he says, “I need to see the master.” And so he gets in, and he's all about to see the master and find out what he's supposed to do and find out what he wants to know [...] [he's sitting with the master] and [a woman] comes in with tea, and she passes him a cup, and then she pours the tea, and the tea...gets right up to the top and then it flows over. He says, “stop, stop, stop. My cup is too full.” And the master says, “how can I tell you anything?” You know, you need to be willing to give some of that up in order for you to take care of yourself [...]

That's why [when] I had two of those people [who] wouldn't do anything for me, and I would not do it. I could have done it for nothing, I mean, it's not anything to me. It's the benefit to them. Anything I said would have no merit, you know, in

the scheme of things, in their head. Oh, she's not going to charge me so it's not going to mean anything. You know. We think a Toyota's okay but maybe a Bentley's better because it costs more. I mean, that whole idea in your mind, if it doesn't cost a lot, it doesn't have value. (I.27)

Again, there is a connection with identifying the value of the services being offered, but it often becomes secondary to the recognition that there needs to be some sort of exchange in order for the information to be meaningful. When diviners are just beginning and are practicing on friends and family for free, the exchange is not based in the materiality of currency, instead they gain experience and confidence. As they improve and move forward, the manifestations of this energy may shift to financial, but the exchange still remains a central component to the entire process of conducting a reading.

This act of interchange and its role in passing on messages is exemplified in an experience Lesley had several years ago when the querent was not happy with the information that was given:

So we're ten minutes to the end, and she said, "well, you know, there's this man." And of course, immediately I know she's romantically interested in him...so I just look at her and I say, "you're going to cause yourself a world of hurt. You're married, he's married. You have children, he has children." "Well, yeah." And I said, "and he's not going to leave, he's not going to leave his wife." So then she proceeds to tell me, "well, I did a tarot reading and the tarot reading said he's a good match for me." And I said, "well, that very well may be true; however, look the reality of your life. If all things were being equal and there was no other impediments, then it would be fine." Well she was so angry, and I knew she was angry [...]

So then when she walked out, she didn't say anything, [...] She kept on calling; she wanted her money back. She wanted her money back because I'd talked about myself. As we were sitting down I said, "yeah, the weather's pretty crappy and I have to drive to Sherwood Park when I'm done." And that's the only thing I said – anyway, so, the real reason was she was mad. And she didn't want to – she wanted to, the only way she could completely reject everything I said was not to pay for it. (I.35)

According to Lesley, this denunciation resulted in the exchange being denied and the message rejected. The cup, if we are to consider Julie's story, remains full and there continues to be no room for anything new.

This process within divination is a gift exchange which, Shuman writes, is "one of the most documentable and yet culturally complex events for folkloristic study" (2000, 495). The intricacy comes from inner systems (the contextual meanings that money and divination represent to those participating), as well as external forces that dictate what the expectations are or should be. While it may seem to be a static entity, money proves itself to be an adaptable symbol. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz identified this intricate relationship when studying Balinese cockfighting, observing how the money used to gamble on these fights takes on "a symbol of moral import" (1972, 16) that is often easily overlooked by those outside of the act. It is not just about the material gains of the winner; there is always more beneath the surface.

Several of the people I interviewed were willing to replace money with other items in exchange for their services, destabilising any concept of it as the driving force for a professional reader. Gus has traded readings, giving one in order to receive one (I.19), and Lynn frequently accepts hair and nail treatments, massages, and jewelry, especially when she is working in Mexico. She frequently gives away these items to others if she has no need of them (I.39), emphasising that it is the exchange and not the product that is of importance. Anne told me that:

I will also bargain. There's a lady at work who will make me banana bread. Or those marshmallow squares with peanut butter. [addressing this woman] "Yeah, how long do you need? I'm here for you. Do you need an hour? Yeah, that's good; we'll do an hour. You just have to give me one little peanut butter square." She's

got me wrapped [around her finger] because it's not always about money, right.
(I.2)

There are, of course, limitations to where bartering can take you. As Dona reflected, “today you cannot walk into the grocery store or gas station and ask to read palms – they would call the police” (I.10). Money has become the most expected form of trade. And yet, compensation for many practitioners is only limited to the creativity of those involved. The energy exchange works because it is something that is of value not just from an external, socially constructed perspective, but also from a personal one.

This reciprocity becomes further complicated when readings are situated within a commercial space such as a metaphysical bookstore. In these places, money is the assumed object of exchange. While it can make it easier because the reader often does not deal directly with the transaction, it can also be challenging because of this mediator. Anne explained that she felt captive when working in a shop because of the pressure to do a reading for anyone who came in, even if she felt that it was someone who was vulnerable:

Yeah, because you're still trying to make a living but you don't want to exploit them, and I found the same thing too with some of the people who would come to see me were on AISH [Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped] for mental health issues, and it was just, I just wanted to say to the proprietors to the shop, can we please not do that? They were never violent; they were never unpleasant; they were some of my best behaved, most pleasant customers, but I just felt like such an asshole taking money from these people who were getting, who were on a reduced income. And I couldn't tell them anything that they would find useful. One guy just really liked to come in and talk about how he wanted to be a Templar Knight. Well, that's nice, but I don't want your forty bucks, you know, I can't take that from you. So I made it a rule that I would never take more than a half an hour from these people, that there was no way I would take an hour's money from them. But, yeah. It's sad sometimes. (I.1)

Within this situation, Anne found herself having to reconcile with an uneven interchange; what she was taking from her querents was too much. She now commonly does readings out of her own home, giving her the ability to say no to someone. Lesley came to this same realisation, moving from working out of another business to operating out of her home “because I was not able to do what I really wanted to do because there were time constraints” (I.35) that were externally imposed, again limiting the exchange. The empowerment that is supposed to emerge from a divinatory reading (to be explored further later in this chapter) is undermined for numerous reasons: financial, time and, for many practitioners, the simple loss of the ability to follow their own instinct and to say no.

It is easy to slip into stereotypes; however, the store is not necessarily a site of unmitigated, predatory, capitalistic evil. For Peter:

I get word of mouth where I read at the bookstore; [it] is awesome; people are great; the energy is great. People go there for readings, people go there for magic, they go for stones, they go for knick-knacks, they go for books, they go for everything. And that is a wonderful place; the staff is wonderful; the owner's wonderful. I have nothing but good things to say about them. Because they've helped me a lot, so that's one thing. (I.45)

When folklorist Dorothy Noyes, in her article “Group”, cannot bring herself to get excited about the marketplace and resigns herself to living with commodifications that ultimately imprison (2003, 35), she oversimplifies and overlooks numerous things. Many divinatory communities are created and supported in the marketplace because they have no preordained spaces. In specialty stores practitioners find the safety of others who understand and who speak the same language; they also find the practical tools and skills required to pursue their own desires, all evidenced in Peter's experiences. These sites

must be considered by any folklorist seeking to understand divination, and they demonstrate how commerce can help support, not imprison, the local community and how these groups can thrive while still intertwined with commercialism. To regard it as otherwise is to deny agency to those participating. Additionally, one cannot look at the store without recognising that it is interconnected to the home. Viviana Zelizer, a sociologist, argues that households are “central sites of production, distribution, and consumption” (2005, 337). Within a divinatory framework, with many people studying and conducting readings in their places of residence, this perception is certainly true, reflecting a merging of pre-industrial revolution cottage industries with globalised commercialisation for creative approaches that bring together the economic and the personal.

Constructing the Object

The issue of replicability is once again of importance, this time as it relates to the mass production that has had an impact on cultural development. The ability to copy an object for sale is regarded with suspicion and, within religious contexts, an imposition of the pecuniary upon the spiritual. It is important to remember Lévi-Strauss’ “first lesson of anthropology in economic matters...there is no single form of economic activity but several, and they cannot all be placed on a single continuum” (2013, 64). Expansion motivated by religious desires for conversion, entwined with economic concerns, have long been a part of world histories. This interplay between religion and economics as a part of our past is studied in the medieval historian Patrick Geary’s article on “Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics” ([1986] 2013) and Johnston’s discussion of the centrality of many oracles to larger entertainment complexes in ancient

Greece (2008, 35-37). And while divination is not always spiritual, its roots are often in the religious and, therefore, it is part of this tension between belief and commerce.

In discussing the study of material culture Woodward draws attention to the binary of consumption as either good or bad that, while complicated by current academics, still has a hold in questions of spiritual practices when it comes to divination. The latter, he argues, is the more dominant myth and includes “assumptions that consumption is associated with homogenisation, opposed to sociality and highly individualistic, opposed to authenticity, and creates particular diminished forms of selfhood” (2007, 101). Societies, Foucault reminds us, establish multiple “systems of opposition” (1999, 89) that ultimately reduce the intricacies of life to make it controllable, and scholars often find themselves struggling to keep an equilibrium between these two points of opposition. Waldron’s article “Witchcraft for Sale!” accurately assesses the fact that commodification of the sacred has altered the Witchcraft movement (2005, 33). Yet, in attempting to untangle the differences between gifts and purchases and the obligations ensuing (ibid., 43), he falls into the deception outlined by McDannell – the assumption that “whenever money is exchanged religion is debased”. In doing so, she argues, “we will miss the subtle ways that people create and maintain spiritual ideas *through* the exchange of goods and the construction of spaces” (2012, 137). It is a disservice to those who experience its benefits, as well as the genuine, individual concerns of those who have found it to be an act of debasement.

An object of consumption used by divination practitioners goes through a process of commodification. When dealing with this type of item it is easy to assume that it is rendered static, removed from its original social contexts through global trade, and that

upon the exchange of money it no longer holds value. However, as many scholars have noted, purchase does not signify an end nor remove the object from cultural value. Storey notes that “what is needed is *not just* an understanding of how production produces a repertoire of commodities for consumption, but *also* an understanding of the many ways in which people appropriate, make meaningful, and use these commodities, *make them into culture* in the lived practices of everyday life” (2003, 55). Within the context of divination, it is critical to understand what happens after what the folklorist Henry Glassie terms as “the last stage of consumption: assimilation” (1999, 59) because this is hardly an ending to the creation of meaning.

Glassie writes that, during the process of commercialisation, “the object goes from its creator to its consumer. Consumption, like creation, collects contexts in which the meanings of the artifact consolidate and expand. Communication and consumption always mesh, and in consumption the sequence of contexts continue within which the meanings of the creator are eclipsed by the meanings of the consumer” (1999, 57) or, as Woodward puts it: “Consumption, then, is about meaning-making” (2007, 96). As evidenced through the centrality of the exchange within the process of divination, meaning is made, in part, because of commercialisation. Appadurai notes this when he writes that the approach to consumption as the “end of the road for goods and services” is an illusion (1996, 66), negating the personal experiences and needs of those who are directly engaged with these objects.

With divination, it is after the time of purchase that value begins to emerge through the interrelationship between the diviner and the tool. Woodward argues that the object is decommodified as it is incorporated into daily life, with the potential of

recommodification (2007, 103). A divinatory tool is purchased but then becomes recommodified during readings for others; commodification becomes part of the performative event. Moreover, commercialisation has long been part of the process of not only product exchange but also of ideas. Social historian Owen Davies' discussion of the *colporteurs*, or peddlers, who spread grimoires throughout France emphasises how, along with the tangible objects, they also carried knowledge of "other places, other worlds" (2009, 98), much as contemporary diviners do. To dismiss the buying and selling of objects is to also banish the knowledge gained not only from the goods themselves but also from the process, or context, of their purchase.

It is important to recognise the uses which exist after the point of consumption because objects continue to be transformed. While it might be simple to look at the procedure of turning spiritual acts into commercial products and conclude that they are stripped of any personal value, this analysis is insufficient. When critics look to divination, particularly the relationship between money and the tool that emerges in special journalistic reports about psychic frauds, they frequently overlook the complex relationships that emerge, remaining oblivious of the ongoing system of transformative meaning that extends far beyond a single monetary exchange. They do not pay attention to how objects become cherished (Woodward 2007, 146-7) but create a dichotomy whereby money negates worth.

Any act of consumption or commercialisation, and the objects which accompany them, cannot be regarded as simple or static. John Fiske, a media scholar, uses the example of the television, which can be seen as an object that renders performance moot and audience passive, but it can also be "used to increase, enrich and further densify the

texture [of life]” (1992, 156). This densifying process is alluded to in the folklorist Robert Cantwell’s discussion of the loss of breathing room resulting from commercial communications (2001, 64-5) that quickens the pace of life. In this situation, divination offers insight into the negotiations between the new technology and the need for space to breathe. Readings are now increasingly being offered online and through Skype, methods that are associated with the quickening speed of life. At the same time, the act of reading is one that offers space to breathe and contemplate, to pull away from the increasing commercial pressures of the everyday and reflect on the self.

What does it mean, in western capitalist societies where money signals value, for divination to be turned into a commodity? I cannot help but wonder if this process has normalised divination by bringing it into the mundane world of economics. After all, parts of the act are now easily reproduced. With the proliferation of New Age and alternative spiritual purchasing options, it is no longer strange to see tarot decks and divination how-to books sold in regular bookstores. Heather brought up this change that she has observed since she bought her first deck of cards: “now you can walk into any bookstore and find whole sections. There was nothing thirty years ago” (I.20). Divinatory tools are becoming less othered and more normal, regardless of how individuals approach them. This thought is, of course, not meant to suggest that the process is not without concerns; instead, it proposes that much more is going on beneath the surface.

Yours to Take?

Questions of appropriation go hand-in-hand with ideas of consumerism and become more contentious when linked to spiritual concerns. With the growth of mass marketing, the number of options for divination tools is increasing; methods that belong

to numerous cultures and practices from around the world are finding their way into new markets. These processes of de- and re-contextualisation raise concerns about the appropriate response to adopting someone else's tradition for one's own use, especially if one is profiting from it. The concern over the "commodification of the authentic" (Bendix 1997, 4) and the culturally significant, especially religious, is ongoing within various communities (see Eller 1995 and 2000, York 2001, Magliocco 2004, Pike 2004, Goldstein 2007b, Rountree 2014), and the answers are rarely simple. Often the tendency is to create another binary situation within which the evil capitalist west is stealing from the pure and helpless "others" of the world. While it is crucial to tackle issues of exploitation, both past and present, these essentialising narratives often prove inadequate, ignoring the actual interactions of those involved (Waldron and Newton 2012, 65) and falling into the trap of romanticising the other.

During my interviews there were times when this issue came up, particularly in my conversation with Jessica, to be discussed later. Frequently, however, because of the personalised nature of divination and its tendency to emerge from lived experiences, the overt issue of direct cultural borrowing was not part of our discourse. Acknowledging this reality does not, however, suggest that it is not part of the divinatory community nor that it should not be of concern. In particular, there are two significant components to this ongoing conversation that are of relevance to a discussion of divination and power within the largely white communities that I worked with and am part of: 1) Magliocco's concept of culture as a possessing entity, and 2) the overall fragmentation of belief systems that results in what was earlier discussed as the cafeteria-style approach to constructing worldviews and the ways in which practitioners engage with these realms.

In discussing the tensions between Pagans and those who accuse them of cultural borrowing, Magliocco draws on Kapchan's (2002) view of culture "as both a possession and a possessing force" (2004, 217). Those who claim that they have always been part of the Pagan movement – that the culture possesses them – have a very different outlook than those who have continued to witness the taking – possessing – of their culture, often without consent or compensation, to be integrated into systems that have or continue to subjugate them.²⁰ For the purposes of my research, the concept of culture as a possessing force is relevant. Both Irene and Richard, for example, have indigenous spirit guides even though they do not have indigenous roots. Within the context of their experiences, these beings choose to appear to them, serving as a possessing force. For others, it is the realisation that a method such as astrology makes sense to them in a way that nothing else has that harkens back to this Pagan idea of always having part of this particular system, even if they were ignorant of it for so long. It is *their* language.

Frequently it is not an entire culture that one finds themselves being possessed by but, instead, fragments. "Typically," Magliocco found, "borrowings do not take the form of exact reproduction; the aim is not to imitate or defraud but to combine elements from different sources to create a new, coherent whole" (2001, 69). She reflects what Lesiv refers to as a new religious system formed from syncretism (2013, 126). As earlier discussed, the lack of vocabulary and traditions available to explain the experiences of diviners leads them to the need to seek out other forms of expression, sometimes through the borrowing of ideas or terms from other cultures that better fit with their lived

²⁰ See Pike 2004, pages 165-6 for an example of the tensions between New Age and Indigenous groups in North America.

understandings reflecting, again, its possessive power. For example, in encountering a particular spirit animal, a person may read about its meanings in multiple cultures and bring together meaningful parts of each in order to understand its specific relevance to themselves and their situation. It is something that K.T. experienced in her own life witnessing how cultures blend together different practices depending on their needs:

Yes, I was born here, but I've lived in many places in my life. And, I spent two years in Nigeria [as a child], and it was very interesting because I became very interested in the, I lived in a small village actually in a very rural part, a part that is now quite Muslim fundamentalist, I gather. From what I can recall in the news. But the traditional divination practices and, for lack of a better term, their shamanic-type practices, their original practices, were very much alive and well there and all over the place. You were expected to have, choose either Christianity or Islam, but then everybody was doing everything they always did anyways, right. So that wasn't even seen as a religious thing, it was just kind of what you did. You could go to the market and buy lion dung and fur as a charm to make you stronger, and that kind of stuff, right. So it was interesting because that kind of then somehow worked its way in too, right. And I was very, my parents took me to lots of, there were like ritual things and stuff like that. So it was an interesting part of my own personal education, to open my mind up to there are different ways of, or maybe there's unseen worlds, right. (I.28)

This approach is a dominant practice in many western feminist spiritual movements (Eller 1995, 2000), and has led to Kay Turner coining the term “femmage” to describe it. The word is “a play on ‘collage’ and ‘assemblage’”, defined as “women’s artistic process of collecting and joining seemingly disparate elements into a functional whole” (1999, 98). It is, Bruce believes, “the future of spirituality”:

For example, in Christianity it was taught that Jesus died at the cross to satisfy divine wrath because of the sin of humanity. Well, to me, that's divine child abuse. [both laugh] Boy, what kind of God, the father, would give up his own son? It's, that's, it was based on a view of the atonement that we get from the Middle Ages. We don't need that anymore. So that's what I mean by fragments. You can't take the whole Christian tradition and say, oh well, we'll want to perpetuate it. No! Because some of the ideas, some of the concepts, some of the myths are harmful. Not in the interest of our freedom at all. So one has to be discerning, one has to be critical. Hermeneutics interpretation always involves

first of all critique, deconstruction, and then construction. So it's a matter, I think, of lifting up fragments that are going to enhance our own humanity and retrieving them from various traditions and putting them together. (I.4)

It is this process of bringing together the fragments to enhance humanity that underlines the central motivation of many practitioners.

Jessica and I, both white with our ancestry rooted in the British Isles, had a long conversation about appropriation and the process of rebuilding a spiritual identity when one leaves behind that of their birth. During the interview she outlined the processes of balancing her needs with those from whom she learns:

So, yeah, so I mean, and so everything I do has, *everything* I do is appropriated. Even the knowledge and information is appropriated through different sources. But I take it from sources that are willing to share with me, and I treat it in the way that they want me to treat it in. So I have a few native friends back home that have integrated themselves into western society and – but still practice the spirituality of, you know, their native ancestors, and they have taught me things and shared things with me that they don't mind me using, and they understand the energy exchange for money. And so I practice those things in the way that they have indicated to me how they want me to continue practicing.

So smudging is something that I do, and I practice it in the way that I was taught it, in order to respect the ancestors of the person that taught me. And I think, you know, yes, it's cultural appropriation because it's not part of my culture, but it's been integrated; it hasn't been oppressed to achieve it; it's been integrated to achieve it. So, so that [sighs] maybe it's a form of justification, but that's how I'm able to keep going and do what I do, is by respecting it. If I run into a sacred way of doing something that a group is doing and they don't want me to do it but I'm okay with witnessing it, then I respect that request. I don't think everybody does, but I'm one of the ones that do, and so, because I do understand and basically know that everything that I do is appropriated. (I.24)

In an age when the flow of information is becoming more pervasive, it is significant that for Jessica the learning must come from someone within the community who is willing to share it directly with her. In doing so, this – hopefully – results in a process of exchange instead of complete appropriation. Although, as she acknowledges, this is perhaps simply

a way for her to justify taking what she wants without feeling associated with those who exploit these cultures.

Jessica finds herself in the company of many alternative practitioners of Paganism and New Age customs who contend with the question of should “‘white people’...only borrow myths and deities from their ‘own’ cultural heritage” (Pike 2004, 19). While it can be applied to any culture, it is important to focus on those that hold a dominant position within western society and the religious authority they have long wielded in its development.

JESSICA: Because really, otherwise I would be back in Church trying to muddle my way through Christianity because that’s where my roots lie, but that’s not who I am, and so it’s like, well do I go back and try to be somebody I’m not, or do I work with the energy that I know that works for me? And that’s where the whole human rights thing comes into play because it’s, you know, my right as an individual to be able to have freedom of religion and even that document was appropriated [laughs] from a variety of different systems and is actually based in colonialism, so, I mean like there is absolutely zero way that we can get away from it. (I.24)

For her, it is key to recognise what she has taken and that it was not from her culture.

Acknowledging the pervasiveness of appropriation, however, is not an excuse for these actions but an extra pressure on her to consider her position and the ways in which she can mitigate further harm while not reducing her own spiritual growth. She does so first, as outlined above, by being deliberate about the means by which she learns them; second, she brings this same intentionality into how she utilises them in her own life.

The exchange of money is often a site of contention within questions of cultural borrowing, with good reason. The ability to take the sacred of another and turn it into your own source of profit, usually through a process of replication that involves an act of decontextualisation, is a serious concern. Jessica chooses not to charge money for any

acts or services that involve borrowed traditions, such as smudging. For her, it ultimately returns to being rooted in a concept of respect that involves dialogue with the original holders of the knowledge (I.24). It is not possible to exist in a world without appropriation, so the focus needs to be on how to intentionally approach it.

Folklorists grapple with issues around who gets to control knowledge. Whose voice is allowed to speak and whose is heard? With the growth of the internet it is not possible to keep all things a secret, but that does not mean that everyone has a right to everything. Where the limitations are, however, is a complex question. In my own research, many participants bypassed it altogether simply because the tools they use emerge from their own cultural heritage and, more frequently, from themselves whether within the tangibility of creating their own personalised cards or the immaterial spirits who guide them. There are no simple answers. Rather, they are contextual and deeply personal and, because of this, must remain part of the conversation.

More Than One Narrative

While the percentages are changing, and they do shift from person to person and area to area, divination in central Alberta, as well as many other Canadian urban centres, is heavily dominated by women. Alternative spiritual practices have often been a refuge for them, allowing them to manipulate and subvert gender norms in order to engage with spiritual practices and connect to systems of power otherwise denied. Their traditional roles in magic were often as medium, sryer, or crystal gazer, positioning themselves as passive vessels through which spirits speak (Butler 2011, 158-9). Bennett, in her work

with elderly women in England, found that psychic powers were still seen as more acceptable because they fit within the framework of the traditional female characteristics of “patience, watchfulness, and knowing compliance” (1999, 67). It is a role that, on the surface, fits within larger gendered social norms. Moving deeper, however, reveals how women were freed to do and say things outside of the limitations placed upon them.

Female subversion became especially prevalent during the popular Spiritualist movement of the nineteenth century when channelling spirits allowed women to take on positions of authority previously denied to them (see Owen 1989, Braude 1993, Bourguignon 2004, McGarry 2008, Butler 2011). It has, however, a more expansive history within divination practices. Within my own Master’s research on the vernacular divination practice of tossing an apple peel, the subversion of traditional roles became apparent (Sawden 2008). “Female competence,” Lanser asserts, “seems to have been virtually coextensive with competence at domestic tasks” (1993, 37). It is, therefore, not surprising that many divination practices, especially those focused on romantic relationships and those found in rural cultures where marriage was central not only to individual lives but community survival, also had an aspect of domesticity to them. Methods involving skills in the kitchen were prevalent, such as the ability to peel an apple skin in one unbroken strip – to be thrown over the shoulder and interpreted as the initial of a future spouse – or the tossing of a pancake in a pan. The latter is a method that the Irish writer Maria Buckley recorded as being accorded first to the eldest unmarried daughter in order to indicate the luck of the upcoming year (2000, 19). The result is directly linked to her ability to fulfil her domestic role. Reflecting back on Drury’s assertion, discussed in chapter two, that participants would influence the outcome of love

divination acts (1986, 213), it is no stretch of the imagination to think that, as a coded protest against matrimonial expectations, participants could break an apple peel or carelessly toss a pancake to “supernaturally” signal their own unmarried status as easily as they could influence the practice to support a relationship.

As with most systems of coding and subversion, they remain hidden from those who seek to investigate them. Braid recounts his own encounter with the gendered division of traveller socialisation that often found men outside by the fire and women inside, venturing out only to serve tea. To an external observer it appears as if the women have a subordinate role. However, as he learned, this is not the only interpretation and certainly not their truth:

This comment should not be interpreted as devaluing women because they serve men tea – a point made clear by an English Romani woman when she commented that she might take tea out to the men at the fireside, but only because that meant the men had no reason to disturb the truly important conversation of the women inside the trailer. (2002, 60)

The women are exerting power and control over a situation that is much more complex than it first appears and only becomes apparent through the personal narratives of those involved.

There is, Lawless argues, a master narrative “that privileges male *behavior* over female *experience*” (2001, 12). This emphasis plays out in many ways including concepts of fact and proof that have already been discussed. To return to Lawless’ work with victims of domestic abuse, this power imbalance between cultural and personal narratives is most clearly apparent in a system which expects the possibility of a whole truth that will align with externally verifiable facts. In discussing how their experiences are treated within the legal system, which regards them as a “confused story” that cannot be trusted,

she writes that “gradually, as we cajole and urge and support her [the victim] through ‘the system,’ we facilitate the work of those who seek to create a coherent story, a story that will ‘fly’ in court, that will gain her services, that will satisfy the prosecutor, that will be in language others have devised” (ibid., 38). This tension between legal and communal or individual truth is not new²¹; after all, the truth “of historical legends is not identical with the ‘truth’ of legal documents and history books, and official documents themselves are not necessarily ‘objective’ reports” (Alver 1989, 149).

There is, Sidonie Smith and Julia Waston argue, a “truth value beyond the accuracy of particular facts” (2001, 30) that proves the external gaze to be inadequate. This decoupling of truth from fact is something that the sociologist Gail Kligman notes in her study of rites among Russian peasant women: “All brides must be virgins, even if it takes a chicken’s blood to prove it” (1988, 107). She reveals how blood is coded to represent acceptable social norms, but the basis of which is an act of subversion; it is a lie and a truth at the same time. Often relegated to “other” cultures that exist outside of western constructs of knowledge, many of the institutions within Canada are not set up to recognise these complexities, even though they are still present. Instead, they seek to establish a single narrative that is based on what can be externally observed instead of what is internally experienced.

²¹ See, for example, the historian David Warren Sabean’s exploration into the burial of a live bull at the crossroads by German villagers in response to a late eighteenth-century foot and mouth epidemic. Officials sent to determine the “truth” behind these actions were confronted with “[c]onflicting testimony, unexpected lapses of memory, evasion, and prevarication [that] made it impossible to get at the ‘truth’ of the matter which for the commissioner amounted to assigning clear responsibilities to the actors in the drama” (1984, 174).

Divination, as established through this thesis, is a felt experience. In order to succeed it must involve an engagement with feelings and with the self, things that have been traditionally associated with the feminine and devalued accordingly. Korkman focuses on this concept when discussing that of felt labour: “divination [in Turkey] is predominantly performed by women in the service of women. This feminized feeling labor is socially constructed as an unskilled and unproductive activity that is devalued as empty entertainment at best and criminal charlantry at worst” (2015, 201). The supernatural has long been situated within the realm of the emotional and the non-rational. Karl Bell, a historian, observes how, as modernity became the ideal to be sought, magical practices became gendered. “This,” he wrote, “not only contributed to perceptions of gender but the gendering of modernity itself as essentially rational and masculine, the past associated with feminine irrationality” (2012, 168). For those who find themselves on this “wrong” side of history, the questions become: what do you do when you exist in a world that does not provide fulfilment? How do you come to terms with your own experiences and needs? How do you claim your power?

For some, they turn to divination. They embrace the idea of entering into the fringes in order to reclaim themselves and their own power. Lesley told me of one querent engaged in this struggle:

So this young woman comes in and has a reading with me. And she’s got some challenges in her marriage, and we’re talking about, you know, she’s very talented herself in a healing way, and we’re talking about that, and I’m showing her possible pathways that she could take and what her gift looks like. Because lots of time women don’t just, really don’t see themselves clearly at all. We’re not supposed to. We’re still not supposed to. (I.35)

Divination provides a mirror and a space for self-recognition because if one cannot even see oneself, what hope do they have of engaging with the world beyond them?

As was outlined in chapter three, divination does not require a rejection of the rational for that of pure emotion; instead, there is a need for both and a recognition that they are not mutually exclusive. For Katrina this means that the binaries are abolished entirely and the concept of divine feminine and masculine become labels not inherent to men or women, but ways of identifying aspects of the self. For her, the heart is the divine feminine; the head is the divine masculine. While this may superficially echo stereotypes that have been used to limit all genders, for her it is part of a larger process of finding a balance between them (I.30) instead of reducing oneself to the one that is a biological match.

Divination often straddles the boundaries between the domestic and the official or institutional, between the traditionally female and male. This capacity is found in the range of tools that encompass everyday household items, as well as ones that are specialised such as tarot cards or astrology. They often occur within mundane spaces, participating in the creation of a business out of the home. In McMullin's book *Anatomy of a Séance*, he recognises that much of the content of these séances were "focused upon the mundane exchanges and events that make up typical domestic life" (2004, 136). He later wrote that they, along with spiritualism, were "a truly democratic religion, one that could be practised in small home circles" (ibid., 160). In these spaces that were traditionally associated with female authority, women were able to merge it with spiritual power and gain a voice.

In reclaiming the domestic space, balance continues to be maintained. Most of what divination seeks, for those whom I interviewed, is to keep this equilibrium and to see all parts of the self as important. When recognising the role of divination in the lives of women and in the domestic spaces, I am not suggesting that women are to be rooted in these places or that it reflects some element of an intrinsic identity. It is not an assertion that women are inherently more emotional than men or belong in the home. It is, instead, a suggestion that what is oft overlooked by the larger culture is of value and should be welcoming to and a part of every life, regardless of gender or any other of the countless labels created in order to define the self. Everyone needs emotion; they all should be able to claim their domestic space as equal to any other. As feminist discourse has been emphasising for years, within patriarchal hierarchies, everyone is trapped within pre-imposed identities.

Anne's thoughts on the gender dynamics within divination, particularly the ways in which men find themselves excluded from the process, were echoed by many of those I interviewed.

KARI: I'm intrigued. You said most of the people that come to you are women, and I've found that with a lot of the people I've talked to. Why do you think that is?

ANNE: I think because women are much – are encouraged or given permission, perhaps, to be in touch with their intuitive side. They're allowed to be emotional, they're allowed to consult their intuition, whereas men, no, no. They're supposed to be the Mr. Spocks of our species, and that's so wrong because when a man comes to see me and he's open to the experience, they're a riot. They really, really get off on it – and I don't mean that in a sexual way – they really, they get invested and they're really committed, they really enjoy it. And they find it just as helpful and cathartic as the women. And I feel – and I can always see it. Especially the first time they get that, hey, this really is right. That's absolutely true. That's really wicked, and then they're instant converts. So it takes you like

fifteen minutes to win them over, but then the lightbulb goes on and they're fantastic clients.

But society really has a hard time letting them be open to that experience. Oh, you see a tarot card reader. What are you, some kind of fag? Or whatever. It's just – but like I say, if they could just be open to it, men are every inch as intuitive as we are, just as we can be every inch as logical and lead from the head as they. So, and women are also encouraged to pamper themselves. So going to see a tarot card reader is a little bit like spa day. If a man wants spa day, he's going to go to the game, you know. It's really unfortunate. [deep, masculine voice] I'm going to look at the truck. The Ford, okay honey? Or whatever. Or I'm going to watch the game or eat some Cheetos, where a woman's allowed to get her mani-pedi and, oh, let's go see a tarot card reader; oh, let's go see a medium, which I'm not, by the way. (I.1)

In our next interview, she returned to this theme when we were discussing the concept of power in divination: “I think a lot of times that's why men are like – remember we talked last time about how men are just shut right off quite often. I think that's because men are really unaccustomed to dealing with women with power, especially power they don't understand” (I.2). Reacting to this situation, they disassociate themselves from the forms of power that have been claimed by women in order to maintain their own systems and deflect any threat to their “masculine” identity. Peter acknowledged this same issue, telling me about how men are equally intuitive to women, but they hold it back (I.45); they are not allowed to be emotional in the same way as women. According to this way of thinking, any system that embraces emotion, like that of divination, is marked as lesser along with those who participate within it.

Many practitioners, however, mentioned seeing an encouraging shift. Not only are there more people seeking them out, there are more men coming for readings or becoming practitioners themselves. K.T. and Katrina both have a growing male clientele perhaps, they both mused, because of their tendency to work in male-dominated fields

such as, in Katrina's case, the military (I.28, I.30). Irene now has men coming for readings on a weekly basis, up over the years from one every three to four months (I.21). It is a gradual progress, but for many of them it is important not only in helping individuals on a personal level gain a better grasp of their own identity, but also in destabilising gendered binaries. If all genders are recognised as having emotions, of being intuitive, as well as rational, and of needing spaces within which to explore these experiences, then feelings and all that is associated with them, including divination, stop being gendered and become a normal human experience.

It is often easy to think of secret knowledge within the context of larger, global forces: hidden organisations with the power to manipulate institutions, wielding power over people from the shadows. It brings to mind conspiracy theories and Dan Brown novels. Yet the participants I interviewed believe that secret knowledge, particularly for women or minorities, is often that of the self, of one's own identity. Divination, particularly due to its adaptive ability that allows anyone to be able to learn it, offers an avenue to navigate these inner waters, reclaim spiritual authority from any external system, male-dominated or otherwise, and resituate back within the felt realities of those who employ it.

Making It Personal

Intertwined with the concept of gender empowerment is that of personal power. The sociologists Helen A. Berger and Douglas Ezzy assert that the self-identity has

become “a central project of contemporary society” (2009, 501), an idea that fits with the concept of individuation, as described by Johnson:

the term Jung used to refer to the lifelong process of becoming the complete human beings we were born to be. Individuation is our waking up to our total selves, allowing our conscious personalities to develop until they include all the basic elements that are inherent in each of us at the preconscious level. This is the ‘actualizing of the blueprint’ of which we spoke earlier. [...] At the same time, individuation does not mean becoming isolated from the human race. Once we feel more secure as individuals, more complete within ourselves, it is natural also to seek the myriad ways in which we resemble our fellow human beings. (1989, 11)

Many practitioners work with querents on this very same mission. Frequently, diviners have been regarded as those set apart from the ordinary members of society (see Tedlock 2005, 25; Peek 2010, 31), gifted with something unattainable to most. However, Katrina maintains that being psychic is a birthright (I.30), summing up the approach of the majority of my participants. Ashterah reflects that these boundaries were created by institutions who wanted to take on the power of the intermediary and deny each person’s natural ability (I.3). Divination, she contends, is available to anyone who seeks it out.

In wresting this ability out from beneath the layers of social condemnation and neglect, the self becomes centralised. To claim personal power, however, the ego must be acknowledged and become part of this larger and ongoing process of balance, without which personal growth is not possible and is frequently hindered. At the time of our interview, Katrina was working on an article about being selfish, reframing it as “a beautiful gift to give yourself” and, again, challenging social constructs of identity and behaviour that no longer work for her. She explained it with this example:

So if you and I are going out for lunch after and we go to McDonalds because you want to go to McDonalds, for whatever reason, you like McDonalds. And I go,

“I’d love to go with you.” And I sit there, and I pick at my food, and I don’t eat anything, and you notice and you go, “what’s wrong?” And I go, “McDonalds’ food gives me migraines”; it does, so I don’t eat it. You go, “why didn’t you tell me?” Well, no, I want you to be happy. I wanted to do it for you. So are you feeling happy now that you’re eating and I’m just sitting there playing with my food? Most likely not. So how did I honour you? If I honoured myself saying – and I’ve done this – friends at work they would be going to McDonalds, I’d say, “okay I’m going to Subway, I’ll meet you over there.” “Why?” I said, “McDonalds gives me migraines.” They all come to Subway or I’ll go to Subway, and I’ll meet them. It’s not to change their plans, it’s to honour me. (I.30)

As with all other elements of divinatory discourse, the concept of selfishness and ego are rooted in context. Instead of resting comfortably within binary absolutes, Katrina wants to redefine, or at least expand, its meanings. For her, selfishness is an apt description for self-care. It is, after all, difficult to engage in a practice that is deeply rooted in lived experience if one is in denial of the importance of the self.

The significance of honouring the self, however, does not give carte blanche to those involved to disregard or demean others who are on their own path or to resituate the diviner back amongst the select few who have access to this select knowledge. Making this distinction reflects tensions between labels and definitions. For Katrina, there is a need to reclaim what “selfish” means; it includes the honouring of the self. For others, however, a different word is required altogether. The selfish will always encompass the negative aspects of a self-centred approach and, therefore, concepts of self honouring or self-care that support personal growth and development do not belong to it.²² K.T., for example, warns that the ego gets in the way when encouraging the development of these abilities:

²² My thanks to my mother, Christine, for her personal reflections on the limitations of the word “selfish” that leads her to seek out terms that better reflect her lived experiences.

And again, it's to prove to themselves because the biggest barrier is generally you think it's all in your imagination. And that's partially what imagination is, actually. It's guides and connection to that other side. And their ego or their intellect which tells them that it can't possibly be correct or true or there's no way they could know that, so that's the purpose of the homework is when they come back, they've convinced themselves to some extent, oh, this is a real thing, I can do this. I can consciously do this. So that's what I try to do in that beginner class. (I.30)

This issue is one that Richard has seen play out in many of the classes he teaches for those who wish to learn to become mediums:

We had a twenty-year-old guy, and he goes, "yeah, my guide is Tutankhamen." Oh really! Another person: "my guide is Jesus Christ." Wow, good for you. What's wrong with John and Mary, right? They're real people that – they're your guides, not these guys. No, they're not.

But people want to do that, and we find out, so they're only there for glory and look at me, I'm great, and all that. It won't work. So we just say to them, "okay." We allow them to stay for the six weeks, but usually it becomes too hard for them because if your ego is in the way and all this, it's not going to happen, I'm sorry, right, see. Because it's the wrong thing, in what we do anyways. You've got to be able to be humble; you have to be able to be very healthy. You have a love for a fellow human being and want to help them. All of those things have to be there and then, because then you can be given true feelings. (I.47)

Richard believes that these individuals lack balance. Their quest is not to discover the value of the self but only to find a sense of validity through an association with a famous figure, thereby undermining the entire process.

Lesley expressed concern about the tendency for the divinatory community to become ego-driven, regarding it as a consequence of the tendency to create binaries that constrain individuals into categories:

And understand that as a human you probably do have a bias. You have a bias based on your personal experience. Is that really a bad thing? You know, part of the challenge I have is this notion that – I mean I think our purpose of being human is to incorporate our connection to our soul and our connection to being human all at the same time. Not choose one over the other, and we always, you know, it's about the duality. Because we live in the third dimension duality is

unavoidable, it's everywhere. So we just can't stop thinking in the either/or context, it's either this or it's that. You're either ego-centered or you're spiritual. Another one of my pet peeves. Well, what happens if you're a spiritual being having a human experience? What happens then? Right? (I.36)

Katrina argues that it is necessary to recognise the importance of the self; however, it is a process of balancing the elements of the individual, physical and spiritual while maintaining awareness of the ease by which one can come to dominate the rest.

Embracing Self-Power

The self-identified primary role of the diviners participating in my research is one of helping their querents to regain the power that they have, in some capacity, lost. It is the right to access their own abilities, particularly psychic, and to define their own sense of identity. For these practitioners, acts of divination provide just such a space and a tangible means through which to engage them in this process. Of equal importance, divination grants them the permission to seek out this information.

WENDY: It is amazing how many times people will say "I always wanted to" or "I knew that I just needed affirmation". Even a 15 minute palm reading can change in two months gives them hope, it is one of the most impactful things I tell people. (I.51)

HEATHER: I think a lot of that stuff has been squashed, been undermined, you know. I think we all had the power, I think we still have it, you know. I think it's just underutilised. (I.20)

DONNA: [psychic abilities are] a bio-mechanism in the sense that we need it for survival sometimes. (I.12)

K.T.: Everybody has the [psychic] ability [...] we mostly trained it out of ourselves because we emphasise rational thought in this society, right. Of course we all have it because how the hell did we survive? And get away from, you know, the saber tooth tiger; how did we find water when it wasn't anywhere around us, right? We all did this, and we all have that level, and we all know that because, you know, if you're ever in an accident or something, sometimes the little voice tells you, ah, do this or, you know, don't trust that man, or whatever. So we all, we tend to get in touch with it in our times of greatest crisis or be like,

oh, help me, anybody, right, like if you're injured or something you're going to be calling anybody that can help you, so that's going to go out to your own guide, angels, all those folks, but it's almost like when we're in crisis we end up relying on them, right. But yeah, we totally do, and to some extent I think it's like anything else. Some people are going to have more of it or more ability than others, like singing or something, right, any other kind of talent. But everyone can train it and make it much more conscious and use it consciously. (I.28)

Kelliena encourages all of her querents to watch their own lines on their palms and see how they change. Part of a palm reading with her is learning how to read your own hand in order to take control of your own experiences (I.32). She does not want to claim exclusivity over this type of knowledge. Subsequently, her work counteracts common critiques of divination that, if ever were true, are no longer the case: that divination demands surrendering what Gillen describes as “a measure of self-determination”. His claim that it “should therefore not flourish in cultures imbued with ethical voluntarism of the salvation religions or the humanistic rationalism of science” (1989, 423), overlooks how divination provides a means through which many reclaim a part of their own agency in a world that has consistently told them that their lived experiences are not real or the knowledge they seek is not available to them.

Being a diviner has provided Jessica with numerous occasions to connect to individuals who share her world views and others who hold very different ones from her, leading her to recognise that part of the process is “just allowing the person to be real for who they are”. She went on to tell me of a woman she conducted a tea leaf reading for who created this space for embodiment:

I picked up her tea leaves and her tea cup was filled with fairies. Just filled with fairies everywhere, and I was like, “oh my god.” And she's like, “what?” And I'm like, “I see fairies.” And she grinned like she was a three-year-old on Christmas morning. You couldn't have seen so much joy coming from a person. It was just

like, I'm like, "okay, so fairies are a little out of control in your life; are you missing things?" She goes, "all the time!" I'm like, "okay, boundaries," you know.

So you kind of enter into this fairy tale world with people, but it really connects with truly who they are. And stuff that they don't talk about; stuff that they don't let anybody know about, like this woman's like, "I don't talk about this with anybody, are you kidding me? My family thinks I'm nuts. Any time I mention fairies they roll their eyes; they think it's absolutely ridiculous." But for her it was real and true. You know, so I find as I – the more I do it professionally, the more I realise that, you know, it's allowing people to be true to who they are versus, you know, kind of conventional standards or norms that are created. You can't believe in fairies because nobody's ever seen them, so they don't exist. Well, neither does God, but yet we seem to accept that into our world [laughs], but we won't accept fairies or dragons? Like, it seems kind of backwards in a way, you know; it's like we'll accept one supernatural idea but not other supernatural ideas, and so I just see myself as being able to help people establish these communications and then also kind of allow them to experience a lot of things that they already know for themselves.

So it's kind of like a check-in point for them; it's a verification, almost. Because if I can see it, and they already kind of know it but haven't really kind of engrained it into themselves, it just kind of helps them take that on and go, yeah, okay, yeah, no, I got the confirmation I need to be able to continue doing what I need to do, or the direction I need to go. And so that's why I love doing what I do. It provides people the ability to move forward rather than be stuck or go backwards. (I.24)

Jessica's work is not to hold power over another but to allow them a space where they are free of any external forces of predetermination. Here they are able to recognise what they need and the limitations of what has been available to them thus far.

Divination, as practiced by many in my study, is about breaking down the boundaries of what one is supposed to be and providing opportunities to explore who one wants to become when freed from the social constraints that have limited them thus far. In doing so individuals are often left to confront the ways in which they disempower themselves, frequently through the expectations that they bring with themselves into a

reading. Lesley has found that many times those who bring their experiences to her or “the raw material of your life”, as she calls them, expect her to take control of the process and tell them what to do. Such an outlook does not fit with her approach: “I’m not going to be there to do something with it; you’re going to be the person that’s there to do something with it” (I.35). This does not mean that she is not part of the process, but that it is one of collaboration and the power and accompanying responsibility does not lie with her alone.

K.T. defines her readings as “a co-creative event” (I.28). It is important to recognise them as such, not only because many have been cut off from the ability to access this knowledge themselves, but also because people often need others to help them confront the challenges in their lives. It is the same reason why many, as discussed earlier, do not conduct readings for themselves or, for particularly difficult topics, seek out others to help them with the interpretations. Marlene characterised a great deal of her work as helping people “[own] your shit”. She cares about the well-being of her clients, and at times that requires her to push people, to be blunt about the patterns she sees in their lives. She explained: “We need emotional impetus to transform”, which is all too easy to avoid when left to our own devices (I.39). It is a matter of getting people to be able to recognise their own power and be part of the transformative process instead of expecting the practitioner to have all the answers.

In her book *21 Ways to Read a Tarot Card*, Mary K. Greer, a popular author among those I interviewed, writes that:

I began reading the tarot almost forty years ago. During this time, I learned that people have the answers to their own questions far more than they realize. I stand in awe of the innate wisdom in human beings. As a reader I call myself a

“midwife of the soul” (a term first coined by Sigmund Freud), because I use my skills and knowledge of the cards to ask questions so that the querents’ responses “give birth” to their own wisdom. (2010, xi)

This model of “midwife” fits with Bruce’s outlook on spiritual experience moving away from the guru to the wisdom seeker, the latter of which creates a democratised approach to the search for hidden knowledge. Throughout our interview, Irene came back to the three approaches to life that her mother gave to her: “why not, and what if, and I can do anything unless proven otherwise” (I.21). It is an attitude she has carried with her throughout her career, ensuring that limitations are not accepted but tested. Using these questions with querents allows her to challenge any of the boundaries that they have placed upon themselves and push them to think outside of the box.

Discussions around the regulation of practitioners often focus around the concern that they are taking advantage of the vulnerable or desperate (Davies 2008, Dias 2010, Parrish 2017). It is important to recognise the ways in which individuals can and have been victimised by those they or society perceive to be fraudulent readers. These conversations are going on within the communities and are a reason why Chris has worked so hard to establish official systems of training and certification. And yet, within this concern is also the danger of dismissing individual agency; a patronising assumption that an unengaged outsider is best able to determine how one should spend their money and how their experience should be interpreted. Additionally, this attitude is tied into an assumption that the “superstitions” of the past make us vulnerable to these manipulations in a way that rational western thought does not. Bennett addresses this concept when she discusses the “medicalization of mourning”, noting how within western society it is easy to hold the idea of grief as an illness that can be managed by others, the result being that

“control is taken away from the griever and assumed by others” (1999, 91) who, no matter how well meaning, are stripping them of power. There should always be concern about who holds power in a situation, but it cannot be assumed that this differential is only harmful when in the hands of those on the fringes of the socially normative.

The practitioners I spoke with expressed ongoing struggles to ensure that they do not take power away from their querents. One of the ways that they do this has already been discussed: the exchange of energy, often in the form of money. While from an external perspective this seems to be the symbol of their manipulation, situated within the context of the reading it is a necessary part of maintaining a balance of power. Other participatory acts consist of having the querent select the tool(s) to be used or having them shuffle and select their own cards. Several have rules around how often they will do a reading for someone. Irene has found that they can become an addiction “because you trust them [the diviner] too much, you’re not willing to look at anything else” (I.21). Ashterah normally will not do more than two readings a year for a person unless there are extenuating circumstances, ensuring that they do not become too dependent on readings (I.3) because, as Donna explained to me, unless there is a crisis there just is not any new information to share (I.13). Peter, however, leaves it with the client: “when you need a reading is when you need a reading” (I.45). Anything can limit the querent if they use it to exclusion, but it does not mean that they neglect or shun the tools altogether.

The encounter that many practitioners have is not one of actively taking power but of querents trying to give it to them. Katrina told me about a time she was doing readings: “I had a person at one of the expos come to me and say, ‘tell me why I should have a reading with you.’ I said, ‘why should I? Why don’t you check yourself, and if it feels

right come back; and if it doesn't, enjoy the reading with whomever you go to" (I.30).

Kelliena always begins her sessions with a statement that the intent is not to make decisions but to "help and remind them of their own gifts" (I.32). Over and over again in these conversations the emphasis was not on what is often stereotyped as a typical or fraudulent reading – the intentional seeking out of the vulnerable to exploit them for financial gain – but an ongoing process of negotiating power and ensuring that there is a balance between all those involved that honours both reader and querent.

Lesley commented that querents do not always have an understanding of what is going to happen during a reading, particularly that it is supposed to be a co-creative process. She recounts having someone come in and tell her that: "I've been told that I'm not supposed to tell you anything", placing herself in a challenging position where she is being given power she does not want.

Well, and the challenge for me is that if you've decided to set that boundary I don't believe it's my right to cross that boundary, so how are we going to do this? How are we going to do this? And after about 10 minutes she said, "well, I think you're asking too many questions." And you know what, and I said, "I understand what you're saying; I've explained to you how I work." Well this is the kind of – I said, "well, you should have the kind of reading that you want. And obviously you're not going to get it here so, you know, I think it's best we end it." And so, as we're walking out the door, and I said, "and that won't cost you anything." And she said, "really?" I said, "really." Like, I'm not going to charge – yeah, and I suppose that would have been well within my rights to charge her for the ten minutes, but what's the point? But you know, quite frankly, I just wanted her to go away. Because it's like, okay, you want me to be a performing seal; I'm not. That's not how I do this. If you don't want to open up to me, if you shut yourself completely down, how the hell do you think anybody's going to be able to read you? And I don't know, there are probably people who can, because they don't, because not all intuitive or psychic people or people who do divination operate on the same – because I'm not going to cross that boundary. (I.35)

According to Lesley and others I interviewed, the very act that many querents think is protecting their own power is actually shutting them off from the process of self-discovery.

Power is not absolute, nor are our definitions of it. Through the fostering of the personal, it becomes apparent that there are a variety of different manifestations of power that we encounter throughout our lives. Foucault puts it best when he writes: “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms, it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” ([1977] 1979, 194). In telling her own experiences with abuse and assault, the singer Tori Amos reflects that “[r]eal power is about exchange, not subordination” (Amos and Mattera 2009), a balance that diviners work to maintain, often through an exchange of energies manifested in different tangible forms, such as money and ideas. At the core of their work, however, remains an ongoing engagement with power and ensuring that it is balanced and participatory.

The importance of claiming personal power and seeking out ways to reclaim what has been lost emerged during many of my interviews. Again and again I was told that we need to get out of our own way. The power is everyone’s to claim if they are willing to take the chance and break out of the norms that, while comfortable in their familiarity, do not adequately encompass individual complexity. It was made apparent at the end of one conversation with Katrina:

KARI: Is there anything else that has popped into your head that we haven’t touched on?

KATRINA: For people just to trust themselves; there is no right or wrong. It's just an experience. The labels restrict us; and just to honour themselves because when they're honouring themselves, they honour all. That's about it. People are their own worst enemies; they get in their own way. [...] We are powerful beyond means. We are amazing when we get out of our own way. (I.31)

Chapter 6

Here There Be Dragons: Addressing the Dark Elements of Life Through Divination

For my Canadian practitioners, divination is frequently linked with questions of good and evil, fear and victimisation. The popular cultural uses of Ouija Boards and the tarot cards of Death and The Devil, among others, heighten this expectation but bely the greater complexity at work. While those I have worked with strive to stay positive and work for the betterment of the querents who seek them out, they do not shy away from confronting the hardships of life. Doing so is necessary for healing and, subsequently, re-evaluating the concept of the victim both personally and culturally. Furthermore, divination requires participants to question their assumptions about good and evil and what it means to walk into the dark spaces of their lives.

By Any Other Name

It came to pass during my interviews that I was no longer surprised to hear the experiences of divination interwoven in larger life stories of neglect and abuse. Not every person, of course – I never factored it directly into the questions that I asked – but it emerged in several of our conversations. Moreover, for those who have not been personally affected it is also present in the challenges their querents bring to the reading in the hopes of guidance or resolution. It became apparent that suffering is intertwined with divination, particularly in how querents and readers alike work to reconcile with their experiences of it and move forward. These practices and the worldviews that they construct are a key way of addressing the concept of victimhood. In particular, they

identify how the idea of the victim is constructed in society, the failure of many institutions to adequately address these concerns, and the processes of self-reclamation that are undertaken by those who find themselves adapting or confronting this label.

When exploring the concept of the victim it is important to acknowledge that there is a gendered component, especially within the context of Canadian divination practices. The role of woman as helpless is one that has historically dominated cultural discourse, such as the presence of the damsel in distress. Its association with the supernatural adds additional complexities. Spiritualism, as noted earlier, provided avenues of power for women who sought to enter into spiritual discourses that had long been closed off to them because of their associations with weakness. The passivity of the medium fit well with the assumed character of women. Beyond that, there is a long tradition of regarding women as more vulnerable to the workings of evil, emerging from narratives such as Eve's temptation in the Garden of Eden and generalisations of women's physical weakness as spiritual (Steadman 1965; Reis 1995; Caciola 2003; Tasca, Rapetti, Carta, and Fadda 2012). Even in contemporary scholarship there remains a gap in how women are regarded in relation to the epic heroic quests to battle monsters.

In his book *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears*, Asma writes that "[m]en tend to respond to fear and vulnerability with aggression [...] To a young boy, monsters are exciting and alluring. They are invoked daily as the imaginary foes of the playground. Anyone, I think, who has raised a boy gets this point. When the boy becomes a man, however, he feels keenly, rightly or wrongly, that monsters have become his responsibility, part of his job" (2009, 25). Such essentialising statements reflect socially constructed norms that continue to preclude women from the role of monster

hunter. They also overlook the demons that are faced by the “fairer sex,” part of whose horror is their ability to be unseen by these male “protectors” or who may be, even more terrifyingly, embodied by those who claim to fight evil. Of further interest is the footnote to the above quote:

Some ancient narratives celebrate the female monster killer, such as Atalanta, who kills the Calydonian Boar, but most monster combatants have been male. With the onset of new popular narratives about female monster killers, such as Buffy Summers in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Ripley in the *Alien* series, one suspects that the traditional gender-based division of labor will change. One wonders, however, whether the biological division of labor (the consequence of androgenic hormones in males) will continue to trump the cultural changes and preserve the age-old masculinity of warriors. (2009, 288n9)

Within this book, the women who battle monsters are relegated to a footnote, justified by biological determinism. What is particularly troubling, however, about this type of narrative is that it leaves women in a position of being told to fear what is in the shadows but not be allowed to engage with it or be provided with the proper tools to do so. They are told that they do not have the capacity to confront them and must wait, as a victim, to be saved. Through divination there is an ongoing engagement with the monstrous by all who partake, even though its roots in the everyday often lead these conflicts to be overlooked in favour of the more epic manifestations.

Within academia there is a temptation to assign the status of victim to others; in doing so, we risk denying them any form of agency in their own lives. The labels used, the theories constructed, the definitions affirmed – all of these are tools that wield a harmful power if used against, instead of with, those whom we study. This idea is explored in the anthropologist Kirstin C. Erickson’s article “They Will Come from the Other Side: Prophecy, Ethnogenesis, and Agency in Yaqui Narrative”. She focuses on the

telling of the Talking Tree story, “a mythic history that prophesies the arrival of the Europeans and the ensuing baptism and ultimate transformation of the Yaqui people” (2003, 466). In looking at how this narrative is constructed, Erickson finds challenges to the dominant story that situates the Yaqui as victims of European colonialism. Instead, she observes that within the story the Yaqui have “an alternative history: one that presents Yaquis as agents rather than victims, and that *refigures* the relation of Yaqui Selves to Yori Others in the process of ethnogenesis (ibid., 467). What unfolds in this tale is that the Yaqui are aware of what is going to happen and are not helpless to external forces but are, instead, actors in the ongoing processes that transform their identities.

Divination, particularly in relation to the soul contract, takes on the role of the Talking Tree in many people’s lives. It reframes their life narratives and shifts them from being a victim to being an agent in all that they encounter. The renunciation of this label of victimisation came up throughout my interviews:

IRENE: I never had a childhood, that’s why. And if I didn’t make supper my father would beat me. I’ve been raped; stabbed, left for dead. I’ve gone through a lot of shit in my life, but I’m not a victim. I know that everything [that] happens, I planned it. I planned it, and you’d think, why would anybody plan that? There’s two reasons: one, it’s either going to break you or make you. You become wise and you can help others, you know, because I have found over the years, too, and I don’t know if you’ve noticed it, maybe because I’m so much older, but I would say in the last ten years, people play at victim really strong now. They think they’re a victim of society, they’re a victim of not having money, they’re a victim of this. It’s almost like, if I – I don’t want to take responsibility for my life. It’s easier to say, you did this to me, right? So I’ve tried everything I can to empower people, because if you can’t empower them you destroy them in a sense, because they go for this reading with so much hope, hoping that people are going to give them all the answers, and I’ll say to them, are you okay? Are there any questions? Do you need clarification on anything? Most of them leave my office crying because I’ve made a difference. I’ve told them: this is what you can do. Here’s some options. Do what feels right, not what I say but do what feels right. Because if it’s not in your heart then don’t do it, and don’t let people control you. (I.21)

KATRINA: So I have had birthday cake ice cream in White Rock, and I have been raped; they're equal experiences; they're just different. We can play the victim role or we can step into our power; it's our choice, you know. It's incredible; this is the hardest school, this is the hardest experience because we have free will and choice. And we get to choose how we react; there's so many people trying to take control of others, or situations, and the only thing we can ever control is how we feel in this moment and how we react to this moment, that's it. And if we're just in this moment, the world opens up, it's incredible. We open up. (I.30)

Divination takes on a role to help them come to terms with what has happened to them, to explore the larger narrative and counter anyone who seeks to continue a process of removing their power. Shedding the identifier of victim, or drawing attention to its insufficiencies, does not mean that what has happened to them is regarded as acceptable or that their suffering is insignificant. Instead, it is about taking back control over their own lives and having the right to interpret its meanings for themselves.

Furthermore, the experiences that would typically cast them as victims are regarded as the impetus for the strength of the abilities that they currently have:

DONNA: And, but I did have a lot of crap happen throughout my life. Like I had, you know, a lot of, I guess, trauma growing up and stuff, so I think that probably honed my skills a little bit because you tend to, it becomes a defense mechanism, you know. You hone your abilities for psychic awareness, especially if you're in an area, like say if you're in an abusive situation. I had an abusive marriage. And it was almost like I could drive home and know how the evening would go. So it was like you could protect yourself or you guard yourself when I got there, that kind of thing. And I found through my readings and stuff, the people that are most attuned to this seem to be ones that have come from that background because they trained for it. It's like they fine-tuned those extra senses to walk in a room and know if it's safe, you know. They just feel the energy off of other people. (I.12)

MARLENE: Prior to that, I think all kids are intuitive, you know, and when you grow up in a house where it's not necessarily stable some of your senses develop a little bit more strongly than others, you know. You have to check in emotionally with the adults in the room to kind of know what to prepare yourself for, because, you know, all of that uncertainty. So I think in my case the conditions were

perfect to develop something that, you know, maybe in a very healthy environment might not have ever had a chance to develop, right, because difficulties and conflicts and hardship create very multifaceted human beings if they have the power and the strength to find their way through all of that. So metaphysics became my escape, right, and to be able to, like, look at something higher, to be able to not get all caught up in the mundanity of things and see it on a higher level was a really good thing. I'd never considered doing it for a living, really at that point, and you know, not for a long time, so nature, [was a] place that was safe. And spirituality. Those were kind of the two things that anchored me. (I.39)

Both Marlene and Richard suspect that some of the ongoing addiction issues in our society are due, at least in part, to a lack of a spiritual connection, however it is personally defined. They theorise that individuals who do not feel that they fit into their communities and who have not found their place in the world are using drugs and alcohol as an attempt to mitigate this lack (I.39 and I.46). Lesley noticed that her own psychic abilities started emerging after she was diagnosed with PTSD and depression (I.35), and Julie reflected on how the absence of her parents telling her that her experiences were wrong allowed her to continue to connect to the spiritual in ways that were denied many other children (I.25).

Practitioners find themselves having to negotiate a complex system of agency that emerges from institutions that have failed them. Consequently, one of the reasons for divination's longevity is that it identifies and addresses failures of current social structures. The ethnologist Laura Stark writes in her study of Finnish charming that:

It is no surprise, then, that descriptions of magic recorded in rural Finland paint a vivid picture of persons who perceived themselves to be vulnerable and unprotected. In modern society, the individual is protected by laws, practices and institutions which safeguard personal boundaries. These include laws against fraud, defamation, slander, assault, batter, intimidation, violation of privacy, and more recently in some Western societies, laws against sexual harassment, stalking, and the physical punishment of children. Early modern individuals, by contrast, had to protect *themselves* from threats, and magic provided one means of doing this. (2009, 5)

She later returns to this idea: “Yet if nothing outside the self guarantees individual rights, then the individual must contain *within himself* the means to secure these rights, and the result is a very different sort of self” (ibid., 13). She is not the only one to recognise this interconnection and the ways in which alternative systems recognise power differentials and provide different options for approaching the anxieties of life, such as in astrology (Bauer and Durant 1997, 55), magical texts (Betz [1986] 1996, xlvii), and magic and ritual (Smith 1982, 63; Rieti 2008, 18).

The anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff’s work with Jewish seniors cannot help but take into consideration what it means to survive atrocities. “Survivors”, she writes, “have a heightened desire for interpretation, for finding the comprehensible elements in that experience” (1980, 25). As already established, divination provides narrative spaces. What becomes apparent in looking at the lives of many individuals, however, is that it is not just about creating or reclaiming these narratives but recognising that the external systems have failed. The laws that are supposed to protect all citizens are shown to frequently fail, particularly for minority populations. Therefore, individuals turn to other systems to find answers and gain control. What those I interviewed have done is significant; not only are they seeking to empower and heal themselves, but also to provide these same opportunities to others who have found themselves falling through the cracks.

Seeking out a practitioner for help in working through the pain of one’s past and learning how to confront the monsters in one’s life does not allow the querent to become or remain passive. As discussed in the previous chapter, divination among those I studied is not about wielding power through a prescription of fate. Reflecting this idea, John A. Robinson wrote in his article “Personal Narratives Reconsidered” for the *American*

Journal of Folklore, that the “listener is not a passive receiver of a tale” (1981, 71). The querent is the hero of their story and, as folklorists know, heroes frequently require helpers to guide them along the path. Storytelling, whether through memories or soul contracts, is one such act of participation, and divination is a process of reclaiming the agency to come to an understanding of what has happened in their life. For all the struggles that Elizabeth J. has encountered in her life, she told me that it “has been awesome. I mean, it may sound like a terrible journey but, really, I love it. I wouldn’t have it any other way” (I.16).

Be Well

To require healing is to admit to imperfection. It is to confront the fallibility of self and the reality of death. Diviners have long had a role in helping individuals navigate the challenges of becoming well. Whether it is through identifying a remedy for their suffering, the opportunity to move beyond the label of victim, or the occasion to avert physical ailments, their role cannot be divorced from that of healer, a relationship that has a long and complex history. In the ethnologist Monika Kropej’s “Charms in the Context of Magic Practice: The Case of Slovenia”, she highlights that it was not uncommon for healers to also have divinatory abilities (2003, 66). Bourguignon notes that one of the central roles of possession-trance religions is that of “diagnosis and healing” (2004, 562), while Paul Cassar, a medical historian and psychiatrist, focuses on the various practices of those on the Maltese Island in order to meet one of “the basic needs of the human personality”: the relief of anxiety (1964, 28). It is, therefore, easy to think that because modern biomedical systems are now established in Canada, these methods, or this

particular motivation for seeking them out, would be diminished, if not disappear altogether. Instead, while traditional charmers and healers may no longer hold the same level of prominence in the community, their role has been taken over by diviners who step in to fill what many are identifying as the limitations of this larger medical structure (see O'Connor 1995; Davidoff 1998; Kaptchuk and Eisenberg 1998; Hanegraff 1998, 42-61; Betty 2005; Harrington 2008; Knight 2013).

In the same way that individuals come to identify failures in the judicial structures that do not protect them from harm, nor give them sufficient narrative tools to heal from their suffering, so too are the weaknesses of what Magliocco terms “Western biomedicine” revealed. She explains:

Western biomedicine does not generally address the issue of meaning, because it treats the body and illness as objects, separate from the person who experiences them. By contrast, in many alternative healing approaches, the body and illnesses are assumed to be laden with meaning. Indeed, part of the healing process consists of discovering the meaning of a person's illness episode and then addressing that meaning through embodied practices. (2004, 142)

Although none of my participants claim, or want to claim, the title of doctor, they do see themselves as contributing to the question of meaning within illness and participating in the process of healing. For Anne, it is giving people a “little heads up” (I.1) about something for which they may want to seek out help. Jessica explains her role:

it's about centering them and balancing them and then directing them to get the appropriate help that they need within the medical system. Because the one thing I will never say is that I am a certified counsellor or psychiatrist or psychologist or doctor. So I may pick up on something, there may be something that you need to get investigated, but it doesn't mean that, you know, I'm going to be the one that diagnoses you, either. And I think that there can be a balance between our rational, medical system and what people like myself do. There can be a balance. I don't believe that they have to be mutually exclusive. (I.24)

This sentiment is in keeping with Alver's findings that patients will seldom bypass the doctor completely in favour of a folk healer, but instead undertake parallel treatments with both (1995, 25-26). Practitioners do not situate themselves in competition with western medicine, but as a complimentary force.

Within Canadian divination practices, storytelling is as much part of healing as it is divination. When faced with an illness, the power of the name is often very important and powerful. The word "cancer", for example, is evocative, especially for those who have experienced it themselves or witnessed it in others. In order to take control over such terms, and all that is associated with them, the patient needs resources. Greer, among others, recognises that to name something "helps you own it and thus connects you to what you know about it" (2010, 4), but this is only the first step. The person needs to be able to bring forth their own contextualised meanings of these words, frequently utilising storytelling toward this end. Pike has identified this proclivity within the Pagan movements she has studied:

Because illness challenges one's sense of identity and undermines one's reality, healing narratives provide coherent form for the chaos of illness and suffering and weave together fragments of the past, which may include past lives as well as childhood in the current lifetime. New Agers and Neopagans recall stories of past lives in ritual, hypnosis, through the messages of channeled beings, and in dreams. Memories are reconstructed to fit healing narratives as individuals understand the past through the lens of the present. (2004, 112)

The parallels to the ways in which divination practitioners approach their work, particularly the foundational role of personal narrative, are evident. These acts of interpretation or reinterpretation are not illusions intended to divorce people from reality, but instead to recognise that their reality is shaped by what McGuire terms the profoundly

human experience of illness (1990, 286) and requires treatments that recognise its entirety.

In their work on narrative, the anthropologist Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps, a psychologist, discuss the difficulty those with chronic or debilitating conditions have in finding “active listenership”:

Listeners, whether professionals in the field of medicine or friends and family members, resist narratives that deviate from the canonical plot that illness is only transitory. Physicians often halt a story that comes uncomfortably close to disclosing the chaos and terror accompanying illness. Friends and family express the fear that the teller will become a narrative wreck, i.e., disintegrated in the course of relating events that have no clear logic or resolution. (2001, 277)

A significance of these narratives is that they address larger contexts of illness and meaning and are not just situated within the cause and effect of medical science. The story becomes a site for uniting all of the information into something that makes sense to the individual undergoing the experience. Most importantly, this coherency does not have to be, and often is not, shared by those outside of the patient or their worldview.

Healing is a deeply personal act that not only involves numerous people but also changes depending on the needs of the individual. When discussing constellation healing, Elizabeth J. reflected upon this complex process that works to alleviate both physical and emotional problems for the benefit of “the whole family, living and dead”. Our ancestors, she explained, are “calling for healing” as much as the living (I.16). Richard and I had a similar discussion wherein he explained that healing is an ongoing process:

KARI: Do spirits, are they ever seeking a resolution when they come through?

RICHARD: Totally. And sometimes, again, it’s not our business to tell people what to do, but because we understand it – the only time that we ever interfere, and we won’t even tell the person what to do, is this. So the spirit comes through to somebody in the audience and on earth that spirit has treated them very badly

and when the spirit, or person, passed away they never got a chance to reconcile, right. So they come through and they will say at the time, "I'm sorry for how I treated you." Now, what they're doing, and this is really important. That spirit now is in the spirit world, and they cannot move on until they make this right. So they've come over to ask for forgiveness. And we've had people say, "oh, they were horrible; I'm never forgiving them," right. We'd say, "that's your own business," we won't tell [them what to do]. We explain to them why, we say though, "if you can find it in your heart to forgive that person because that's why they've come, they've actually admitted now that they were bad to you, they're saying, please forgive me because they said we're stuck and we have to move on." They need that healing in the spirit world...because we all have to make everything right. And so it does take the karma away, right, so, and then when the person knows that, they go, "oh okay, that's different." And we leave them at that.

But we've had people, I mean we've had, it's fairly recently where a dad had sexually assaulted, interfered with his daughter, and for many years. Well, I can understand, she just didn't want, and she was, "why did he come?" "Well," we told her, "listen, you're thinking of the physical human being; this person, the real person is the spirit...and they're totally sorry. They're telling you: I'm really sorry." But that is, I have to admit, something very hard to get over. So we would just explain it to that lady and say, "you know, it's up to you." She may, it's none of our business. If she does later on, she may then go okay, well then, right. All she has to go is, "oh, I forgive you." They can hear you. Or she might not. And there's nothing we can do about that. But they do come for that reconciliation, totally, all the time.

Yeah, and it's, it works the other way around too. Let's say somebody has passed and they were very close to you, Kari, but you happened to be out of town when they passed. And you're saying, "oh my god, I'm almost there, and I wasn't there when they passed." They will come to us and say, "Kari, please don't be worrying over that because we're with you anyway. And you had to do your job"...And also, many times, and this is proven, even when a family is around the person that the doctors go, look, they're going to pass, right. Many, many times, the spirit will wait. Everybody will go for coffee, and they'll pass then, when nobody's in the room. Some people can't take it, even when they're out there. It happens more than not.

My own friend, his mom was dying, oh about four years ago, and she was quite old and I mean, at the same time, the family was taking shifts, there was always somebody with her. And he went in, I think he went in at midnight, and he was going to stay until eight in the morning, and he's with his mom, she's fine. Well, she's actually not fine, she's kind of in a coma. Right. Anyway, five in the morning, goes, oh, I've got to go put some money in the meter. That's when she passed, when he left. And when I talked to him after, I said to him, "okay, think about this." Because he was annoyed. He was upset. I said, "this is what happens,"

and I said, “no.” I said, “think about this; you were with [your] mom, you were with her every moment...I bet you were dreading her passing, weren’t you?” And he said, “yeah.” I said, “listen, as much as you even prepare yourself, you’re never ready for that.” So I said, “your mom knew you better than anybody, so she chose to make it easier on you. She’s going anyway, so you went to do the meter and she goes, I can go, I’m gone.” Right. Now, they’ll often come back and say that, Kari. They will come back many times and say, “stop worrying about that. It was my time to go and I did it for this reason. I didn’t want you to suffer.” So when you come back, even though you go, damn it, they’re gone. What do you do now? And it’s not as hard on you.

KARI: Right.

RICHARD: People make it hard on themselves because they say, “I wasn’t there.” But it’s not about that, yeah. But that happens all the time, yeah.

KARI: It goes back to what you said about being no coincidences.

RICHARD: None. Absolutely, absolutely. None, you’re right, and so that’s totally right. Everything is – I’ve always said, the spirit world is the most organised place in the universe. And they do, because they’ve everything planned out. And oh, we’ll do this and this will make this happen. No coincidences.

KARI: So they’re seeing the big picture?

RICHARD: Totally, they’re seeing the big picture. (I.47)

As evidenced through the way Richard explains this process of healing, it is apparent how important he sees the narrative to one’s ability to heal. His role is, in part, to be able to reveal these larger stories and put all of the individuals in contact with each other so that they can access the information they need to heal, whether on this side of the veil or the other.

As with divination overall, there is a general consensus that healing is something every person has the capacity to do; however, with the current institutions, individuals are often removed from this innate ability. Fraezor’s primary work is that of a healer; his main tool is sound, merging it with the influence of traditional Chinese medicine and the

idea of balance. Like Marlene, who mused that sickness is the self saying: “pay attention to me; you could die” (I.39), Fraezor explained that what he does is help people attend to what is happening to them. “What’s changed? What’s influencing? And it can be mental; it can be physical, emotional. And what I do is teach the body to heal itself. I can’t do that. You can heal it. You just forget you can heal.” Rooting it in this approach is the recognition that the process of recovery must also be individualised. Fraezor has found that while “the symptomology is the same,” the cure will vary from one person to the next. It is a tricky process, and it is why intuition is so important “because it may look like the same thing” but require a different treatment (I.3). Divination is one such means through which people can seek out further information about what is happening to them. This, in turn, aids them in finding the right tools or resources to heal themselves, however they choose to do so.

Healing is recognised as equal parts mental and physical; an equilibrium must be obtained. For many, this balance is not being upheld within broader medical institutions, particularly when it comes to mental health. Stigmas around divination and alternative spiritual practices, for some, intersect with those regarding mental health. Just as Julie had concerns with how doctors, particularly those specialising in psychiatry, might regard her “other” job of energy healer, Donna spoke of having to come to terms with her own fears about entering into mediumship:

I figured I might be dealing with the devil or something, so, yah. And also, didn’t want to be thought of as crazy because, it’s not like I’m hearing voices chit chat to me like you would if you had a mental illness like schizophrenia, you know, where they’re telling you to do things or, you know, I’m seeing them sit there beside you, that kind of thing. No, it doesn’t work that way. Yeah, I know I’m of a sound and sane mind, so that helps. [both laugh] (I.13)

During our interview, as well as in her thesis, Pearl was candid about her own struggles with finding a way to come to terms with her own mental illness, highlighting how it needs to be personal and draw from a multitude of sources:

Memories of my own medical narrative flood...The narrative includes a never-ending series of prescriptions for everything from little red “rheumatism” pills beginning when I was six—the body doesn’t forget pain—and Phenobarbital at 16. I was quiet then. I still remember the constant aching pain. The pills didn’t help. Tonics. Iron tonics. Vitamin tonics. Later, Valium. Then, Tranxene. Over many years, dozens of prescriptions from doctors, therapists and psychiatrists for different drugs including anti-depressants. Drugs whose names I don’t remember. I didn’t write everything down then. I also know well the effects of oppression, that is, despair, as “sin” to be confessed to the priest...Both the doctors and my parish priest were angry when the medical cures didn’t work. (2008, 134)

So I read – I did what I call bibliotherapy. Because I had been the psychiatrist route; it wasn’t helpful. They just do drugs. But when you mask your inner voice with drugs, it’s like when you tell small children that they don’t see angels or they don’t see little people or they don’t see whatever it is they don’t see. Well, they do see it. And little kids see amazing things. When my husband died in 2000, my one grandchild was two. Now granted, Bill was only 56 when he died, so at Christmas – and he died at the end of September. [Her grandson] was two in July. At Christmas dinner, it was a tough time. So [he] looks at everybody and [tearing up] says, “I don’t know what you guys are crying about. Grandpa’s sitting right there.” So I often think they see things that we have closed our minds off to. So I have had so many experiences like that, and so many dreams that lead me through, I uncovered a preverbal molestation that, through channeling, that and I have a voice that talks to me, and in my world that’s part of my dream world, but the work that I do now with people with dreams, I like to let them come to that. That’s not, I don’t like to, what I would say, interfere. I believe in do no harm. Don’t be telling people what you heard for them because you put it in their mind and it may not be what they need. You don’t know what other people need. (I.44)

Her overall perspective is to support people on their journey but not interfere with the process itself. She respects the individual path, including the dark places that healing often takes us.

K.T. identifies an important part of her work as aiding those who have “totally checked out from mainstream society because it’s so painful for them” (I.28). People who

have strong mediumship or empathetic abilities but are not aware of them or have not been allowed to embrace them suffer. Part of the pain is due to the erasure of significant portions of their identity, another part is from the inability to protect themselves from the constant bombardment of other people's emotions, energies, and spirits. Even those who do not suffer in such extreme ways struggle to feel whole when they have to deny parts of themselves if they do not feel that what they experience, whether it is seeing ghosts or accessing intuitive knowledge, is permitted. Betty, in exploring the relationship between mental illness and possession and how western society comes to terms with it, reflects on the separation of these experiences:

As for civilizations taking a backward step, it is hard to see how giving mentally ill patients the treatment they need could be a backward step. Much of the world is mystified by the West's refusal to acknowledge the existence of spirits and takes a dim view of any therapy that excludes spiritual healing from the picture. It is possible that the West took a backward step long ago when, under the spell of scientific materialism, it dogmatically refused to give spirits their due. Millions of us might have been harmed by this refusal. (2005, 25)

The solution is not to come up with one definitive answer but instead to recognise that each person may require a myriad of forms of healing that must take into account the lived experiences of the patient. It is achieved, in part, through active listening to the querent and any spirits accompanying them.

To be well is to have the right to define it within a lived context. Each individual must have the autonomy to make that decision, recognising that what causes the problem or imbalance is not always dramatic and through prevention can be mitigated before becoming more serious:

LEAH: I often get that question a lot from people, of how do I stop being so exhausted. Or you get the draining people. But, in reference to that, I also tell people you also need to do a spiritual spring cleaning, and we need to remove

some of those, spend less time with some of those people in our life that are exhausting or lower energy, because lower energy brings your own energy down too, so we want to be with people that are high energy, so the ones that kind of make you feel good when you're around them and you laugh a lot and you just feel good about yourself, and validated. Because there's a lot of people out there that will make you feel like that but we get stuck in these relationships with people who don't bring out, aren't there for our highest good, and they bring down your vibration. Or we're in a relationship with that person in a romantic setting and then you're stuck at that vibration and you can't progress. Particularly doing this work, you need to be with someone who's – it's not about better or worse, it's about different levels. (I.34)

This right also means that everyone should be given the opportunity to heal. Julie spoke of this when explaining to me her past work with sex offenders and how she approached the challenges of helping them to rectify themselves:

So even when I was, when I started working with the sex offenders, it was all about – I saw that they were men, you know. I saw broken people with such good energy but no way to express that goodness. And people, the people I worked with would say, “oh, they're all scum.” And I said, “you can't look at them and say they're scum in here with me and go out there and try and treat them. You can't do that. They can see right through that, that's the energy that pulls them down”...I used to get this all the time – but I slowly, over the years, I saw so many sort of swing over to one side, and I remember one fellow saying to me, “I don't know how you can bear to talk to me.” And I said, “why is that?” “Well, I've done all these bad things.” And I said, “well, there's so much good in you.” “Well, I don't know where that is.” I said, “I can tell you. If I can give you your heart and get you to love that heart, you will never offend or hurt anybody again,” and they didn't, you know. (I.27)

Within her work is the balance between reconciling who the person is with what they have done while recognising the right of everyone to seek healing regardless of the harm they, themselves, may have caused.

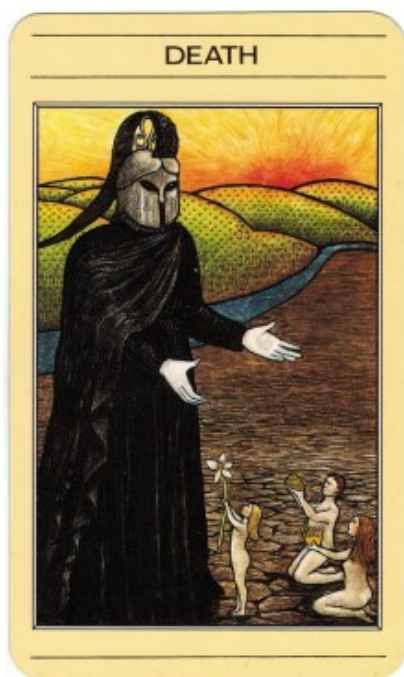


Figure 20: Death Card, Mythic Tarot

Tarot, in particular, allows for this confrontation with the darkest elements of the self in a space that becomes transformative. While the Death card is iconic among them, and it shows up in popular culture because of its visual impact, it is very rare to confirm someone's upcoming death in a reading. Anne has occasionally encountered this topic in her readings, and while it is an uncommon occurrence, it is memorable. In particular, here was one experience, she told me, that illustrates the complex relationship between death and wellness:

So most of my readings end up being pretty optimistic, pretty joyous. And there's been a couple times, but that's a whole other issue, where you have to find the words. I mean, this one guy came in and had the Death card and the Tower card and the Ten of Swords, and I'm just like, "so things are going to get way worse for you before they get better. Can I ask you what's going on?" And he said straight up, "oh, I was just diagnosed with terminal brain cancer." I'm like, oh that would have been nice to know first but thanks. "Yeah," I said, "well, you know, pay attention to what your doctor tells you and if you really want, you know, explore some other alternatives for pain relief, and acupuncture might help you." I said, "whatever feels good for you, do it." Subtext, because you've only got this long. But he knew that, but yeah, that's pretty rare. (I.1)

The healing that she could provide him was not a cure for the tumor but, instead, alternative options for recognising the dark turn of the journey ahead and, more importantly, a



Figure 21: Death Card, Thoth Tarot

space where the fearful specter of death could be acknowledged.

Mediums, of course, deal with the topic of death on a regular basis. However, in doing so they, along with many other practitioners, transform its meaning. Part of the curative process is confronting the reality of mortality and death itself, and recognising that it is part of healing. Kingsley writes that “[t]o heal is to know the limits of healing and also what lies beyond. Ultimately there’s no real healing without the ability to face death itself” (1999, 91). Blauner’s article “Death and Social Structure” was published in 1966, wherein he discussed the ways in which modern society has changed how we understand and treat death, and the ways in which it is separated so that it “rarely interrupts the business of life” (379), controlled through bureaucratization” (ibid., 384). Topics of past lives and soul contracts allow for a reframing of death and life and everyone’s relationship to them, human and divine. The now-clichéd idea that God is dead takes on a different meaning for the practitioners I interviewed. For them, death is not an end but a transformation; it is a part of life that is defined by its capacity for metamorphosis.

Good and Evil Are Inadequate

Foucault posits that “[e]very society establishes a whole series of systems of opposition – between good and bad, allowed and forbidden, lawful and unlawful, criminal and uncriminal; all these oppositions, which are constitutive of every society, are reduced in the Europe of today to the simple opposition between normal and pathological” (1999, 89). Within divinatory acts, these oppositions frequently arise. When beginning to engage

with mediumship, one may be left to wonder who they are getting in touch with – popular culture construct of possession and demons remain in the periphery of possibilities.

Additionally, they may question whether the ultimate means and goals by which these practices are undertaken are for one's own good or whether they are being manipulated by negative forces. The result, however, for those who persist is the letting go of binaries is that the set meanings of these words fall away and are transformed into something much more reflective of the complexities of those who undertake such practices.

In talking with him about tarot, one of Gus' friends explained that "it's not white and black; it's not good and evil; it's beyond those things. It's kind of beyond the binaries of life that we kind of try and simplify things into" (I.19). It has influenced his own reading of the tarot cards and his approach to interpreting the challenging cards in the deck like The Tower, The Devil, and Death. As he says:

I do sincerely believe that there are not positive or negative cards. I think sometimes that's a bit of a misnomer and kind of a simplification of what's going on inside of this, in this symbol. So really making sure that it's always being presented as that really complex picture. Because that's life, you know. Sometimes, like, that idea of there being cause and effect in life, I find that view really problematic, just simply, like philosophically of how our logic works as humans. I don't think it works like that. If someone says my – I was dating this girl, the reason it ended was because on this day – blank. I think that's such crap, I don't buy that. Like there's so many things that come into human relationships, and then even your relationship with yourself. And then I mean, there is just so much, the complexity that's in our lives. When you think of the material world that we're living in, and like then the physical world that we get to be a part of, and then our own psychology and our relationships with people inside of all of that. Like, I mean, it's just so complicated. And so for me, it's so important, like what I think is part of the nice part of this divination process of reading the cards is sharing that complexity. Because spiritual is more complex than what we try to think of it as. We try so hard to simplify our world to make it understandable, and I try to make sure that I am communicating the complexity as much as I can. (I.19)

After all, as Leah told me, fear and love are close together (I.34); the things that matter most to us, that hold the greatest influence, are not tidy.

LESLEY: I still don't understand how some things can be the work of the Devil and everything else is God. If God created everything, it means he created everything. (I.35)

LYNN: In the fourth dimension, you question the light and the dark, right. So you start having experiences of both. (I.38)

MARLENE: I learned that there is really no good and no bad, that whatever we're experiencing is there for a reason. It's a test, maybe, most often it's a natural effect of the fucking decision that you've made your entire life [laughs], and it's how we deal with that. (I.39)

JESSICA: Energy's just energy; [laughs] words are just words. It's the emphasis on what we, what energy we attach to those words, is depending on whether or not they're positive or negative. (I.25)

Johnson, drawing on his Jungian background, supports the deconstruction of binaries and reminds his readers that:

Each of us has a great multitude of distinct personalities coexisting within one body, sharing one psyche. We also know that the human mind experiences the world as a duality: We divide the world and our own selves into darkness and light, 'good' and 'bad', and we stand eternally in judgment, siding first with one side, then with the other, but rarely undertaking the terrible task of integrating all this into a whole. (1989, 36)

These concepts are contextual, shifting meaning not only from person to person but also dependent upon which realm of reality they are emerging from.

Katrina does not deal in good and bad, but she is quick to clarify that this approach is not equally applied to spiritual and human realms, the latter of which needs an element of justice in order to assure the functioning of society and individual wellbeing. She connects this approach back to the concept of the victim wherein her ability to shed this label does not equate dismissing abuse as acceptable. "I don't believe

in right and wrong. On a spiritual level. On a human level, have I had things that I would classify as that? Absolutely” (I.30). In part, this is because she feels there needs to be a distinction between what is bad and what is evil; the former leads to growth, allowing people to confront and then release the fear that holds them back. Lesley presented a similar perspective:

Everything all fits together and, you know, it’s taken me to recognise that things are just what they are. You can spend way too much time putting things in categories, deciding whether things are right or wrong, good or bad, success or failure, and it really leaves us always, I think in some ways, always behind the 8-ball. Because sometimes things are just what they are. They’re not a commentary on your value as a human being, and I mean, you know, it wasn’t easy for me to come to that simply because, I mean, I was sexually abused as a baby and it’s hard for people to understand – but it is what it is, right. And it took me a long time to try to figure out, because of course I would have wanted to know what the purpose of that was which leads us into a discussion of karma. (I.35)

From Lesley’s viewpoint, when confronting what is negative it is not important to dwell in the space but to transform it, to recognise what it has the potential to become. Many of the practitioners I interviewed had the worldview that evil is not static and not permanent.

When regarding the world in terms of energy, as many of the diviners in this study do, the concept of good and evil are repositioned within it. Higher and lower vibrations become the way in which these ideas are understood, not in an attempt to pass judgement, but in order to understand. Elizabeth J. contextualises this approach within the energies of a relationship: “In order for them to be in a relationship, their energy has to match. So one of two things is going to happen: he’s coming up or you’re going down, right? So whoever’s the strongest, and right now it just seems to be a lot of the time that the negative person seems stronger and can pull you down” (I.16), whether intentional or not. In such circumstances, the lower energy is not inherently evil but is not a good match.

Avoiding snap judgements within this system of energy requires an awareness of the pervasive idea of the hierarchy. It is a frustration for Lesley “because hierarchy even finds its way into this happy little world [of divination], right. You know – there’s a hierarchy of angels – no, there’s not. But then, I’m an Aquarian so I’m very in favour of egalitarianism” (I.35). Reflecting back on the layers of reality that K.T. drew out, it is easy to understand how these systems of ranking are formed, and what became apparent through my interviews is that they should not be accepted without enquiry nor naively dismissed.

Questioning the binaries between good and evil and the concepts, themselves, does not mean that they are disregarded altogether. Many do acknowledge that there is a darkness in the world. C.F. walked away from his own work for a while after encountering what he calls “the dark side of this” which “took me to a place I didn’t want to go” (I.5). In many ways it is nothing they can control; they can only be intentional about how they position themselves in relation to it:

DONNA: And you always work in the light. I don’t know anything else because I’ve never really tried the other side of it, and I wouldn’t do that because you don’t want to tempt it either. I don’t know. Some people say there is no, there is nothing else. But I always say, well then why do we pray for protection? If there’s nothing else, if there’s no darkness. Some would say, well there is no dark shadows and things. I say, well then why bother praying for protection? Why do all this ceremonial stuff, why not just, okay, let’s go. So there must be something, you know. And it would make sense to me that yeah, it was like this darkness and perhaps some things, you know, just want to keep you in the addiction, want to keep you there, right? So that would be more your negative vibrations kind of thing. They’re playing on your guilt, your fears, because that’s, usually, if you’re really fearful and doubtful, that’s when you’ll get those really scary dreams and get, kind of feels like visitation sometimes, come to you that are not pleasant. (I.13)

JULIE: If there’s good, then there’s evil [...] I don’t want to dwell there. Okay, I’ll give you that there’s got to be duality, that there’s a polarity. I’ll give you, if

I'm seeing good, then there's got to be bad. But let me get hold of the good and make it better, you know. Make that – elevate that. And as you elevate that, then the bad, if there is bad or the evil or whatever, will then dissipate [...] So then I get told, well that's kind of a Pollyanna way of looking at it. But it is, but I don't see any reason to dwell on the other" (I.27).

Jessica situates herself as a "light worker" which she explains as "people who are trying to spread good will" (I.25). Intent is important, as is recognising personal power when entering into what is often a frightening space because of its foreignness to the person and resulting from the ways in which they have frequently been separated from practices like divination. In recognising the negative, however, there is not an equal requirement that it dominate their experiences.

Richard is frustrated by this fear, due, in large part to his own childhood growing up in Irish Catholicism under the threat of hell and damnation. Much of the work he does now is with those who are interested in joining or have recently started attending the Spiritualist Church. He tries to help them move beyond the anxiety that has emerged from a popular cultural construct that reinforces these binaries:

KARI: Do people coming into Spiritualism have that myth or that fear, like does it exist within the Spiritualist practice that you have to kind of work through?

RICHARD: Yes, a lot of people that come for the first time, yes, have a fear of that. People even have the fear of meeting their guide, and they're interested because that's, it's an interest that brings them to us [in] the first place, but I've had a few people who, teaching them to meet their guide, and they're so scared. "I don't want to do that." "Why?" "Well, I don't want somebody want to jump out in front of me." Right. And I said, "no it doesn't happen like that." You have a spirit eye right there [touches just above and between Kari's eyebrows], that's where you see them, how you see them. So then once you tell them that, but you have to – but they come in with this fear of, because of TV and all this that, bingo, a curse just flies up in front of you. Well, no they don't do that [laughs], so yeah, you have to get people out of that. Of course, possession, they've heard all the things about the occult and all of that. But this is not the occult. This is from the highest good, the highest source, so no. Everything we do, and every person that comes

through comes with love. And once we get them to understand, then their fear goes away. But they certainly do come with that. (I.47)

Donna reflected on this relationship between good and evil and popular culture, noting that “TV does a good job of scaring us”. She does not watch those types of stories because she does not want to dwell in that space and does not want to manifest that fear in her own life (I.12). Negative energy, Leah cautions, is like Velcro, “it’s really tough to get it off when it’s on you” (I.34), so it is important to be aware of one’s relationship to this contentious topic.

Most of those I spoke with had not had negative encounters, or if they had, it was a rare, albeit significant, occurrence. Leah recollected having some bad experiences in her childhood home where previous tenants had had negative encounters that turned violent. During the time she lived there she was frequently ill, had difficulties breathing, there were infestations of spiders, she had outbursts of hatred toward her family, and there were various spirit sightings by her mother (I.34). However, this was the only significant example she could remember. Erin also had an adverse incident during one of her readings:

One time I did have one that was a little bit, okay, this is the only time that anything physical has happened. I was getting ready for a reading and I like to meditate before my clients come over. I like to take half an hour. I’m really busy being a mom, being everything else that we do. My husband owns his own business, so it’s, our lives are really hectic. I like to take half an hour and just zen out and just concentrate on that person. I don’t want to know anything about you before you come to me. I want to know your first name and that’s it because I don’t want any part of my ego to get in the way. I don’t want to see your picture, I don’t want to know your last name, nothing. I just want your first name.

So I was meditating on this lady’s name. And right away I felt a father figure come through. It felt like it was her dad. But there was something that kind of – it made me feel uneasy. He made me feel really uncomfortable. So I kind of, I pulled back and I said, no. And I kind of had that feeling that she didn’t want to

hear from him anyways, okay. So I kind of said, “no, I’m not doing this.” I asked him to move, but he wouldn’t really fully leave, okay. So I’m making dinner – she still hadn’t come for a reading – I’m making dinner for my son. And I was getting him his food and I leave, I grab the food and I leave the kitchen, and I’m carrying it to his table and out of nowhere I just hear a smash, just like a bone-chilling, glass-shattering smash. And my back’s towards the kitchen, and I stopped dead in my tracks because I could feel glass hit me, right, and I turn around and from my kitchen all the way to my dining room there was a million pieces of glass. And I’m going, what the hell was that? Like, where did this come from? And I didn’t know, the glass had broken so small that I couldn’t tell what it was.

So of course my son comes running in and I’m “no, no, go out there.” I get him out, I get both cats out of there so they don’t, you know, get into it, and I get a broom and I start cleaning up, and I’m going, what the hell is this? Like, I can’t even tell you how much glass was everywhere. It was in my toaster, like it was literally everywhere. So I’m wiping it all up, and I find a larger chunk and it looks like, I had a big glass cake platter and that’s what it looks like, it looks like the edge from my cake platter. And I’m going, well what the hell? How would that happen? My cake platter, which was probably about, I don’t know, about that big, so two inches thick, was sitting on top of my cabinets in the kitchen. Okay, so it’s on the very top. You need a stool to stand up there. On top of the platter, though, is the glass cake cover. Like, you know the dome covers. And it’s very heavy. It’s a very heavy cake cover. And I’m going, and I look up there because I find this piece of it, and I’m like, that looks like my cake platter. And I look up there, well the cake cover is still up there, but the cake cover was on top of the platter. So how, you know, this doesn’t make sense to me. So I’m going, what the hell? And I sweep it all up, and it took me forever, and I get up there and sure enough, it has somehow come out from underneath the cake topper, and it looked like, the way it was shattered, it looks like in like midair, and I thought well maybe it got really hot up there or really cold, because it was winter. So I thought maybe it just got cold. But there was not a single piece of glass on the cabinet. It was just bizarre. And then right away I could feel this individual still there. This spirit that was there. So I told him, I was like, “no.” And I was mad at this point, and I’m like, “no, that is a breach of my rules, you know, that goes way beyond my boundaries. You get out. I will not read you. I will not.” And that’s when I call in my guides and, you know, let’s get this guy out of here, kind of thing, right.

So, my husband came home, took my kids, whatever. She came in, I did her reading. We started and right away again he came in. So I told her, I said, “look, I’ve got to be honest with you here. Your dad’s passed right?” And she said, “yep.” And I said, he, I felt like there was, you know, when my gut’s feeling the alcohol abuse with him, and I was definitely feeling addiction and I got that he was an abusive individual. And I flat out told her that. And she said, “yeah, I really don’t want to talk to him. I cut him out of my life years ago. I’ve got nothing to say.” This is that. And once she acknowledged that, then he left, but he

wasn't going anywhere until, do you know what I mean. So that's probably the more, the most negative one that I've had. Certainly the only time that anything physical has happened. (I.18)

Her experience fits with the overall sense that the spirits of those who passed on keep the same characteristics as they had in this life. Those drawn to violence or harm may carry these tendencies on in the next world. It requires caution, therefore, when working with them, but it does not require any more fear than any regular, day-to-day interactions with people.

The Ouija Board

Imagine their deep hunger, deep as the dark,
For the blood-heat that would ruddle or reclaim.
The glass mouth sucks blood-heat from my forefinger.
The old god dribbles, in return, his words.
-Sylvia Plath, "Ouija"

It is almost obligatory to bring up the Ouija Board when talking about divinatory tools and their relationship to good and evil. Perhaps no other object so fully symbolises the popular cultural notion of this binary than this one. "Almost since its invention in the late nineteenth century," writes Ellis, "the Ouija Board has been associated with the threat of demon possession" (2000, 64). It came up in several of my interviews, often accompanied by a warning. Anne told me that "I don't play with the Ouija Boards. It's just crazy shit; you're just asking for trouble, I think", because "I think because we just bought into it, and I think that it's a really excellent conduit for those mischievous entities to – such as they are -- I mean I really think that it's pretty rare" (I.1).

Richard explained that while everything in the Spiritualist Church is done for the highest good and all spirits come in love, he did have a negative experience when he was

a child that directly relates to the Ouija Board. To him they are “the most dangerous things in the world” because “when I work with spirit, or any of us, and we get prepared, and it’s always for the positive. We call in our guides, and we always say all of this work is for the highest good of the person I’m with or my highest good, etcetera. I only work with the highest good” (I.46). Richard feels that use of this tool, marketed as a game, often does not include the proper preparation to ensure that the highest good is being sought out. He told me of the time when his mother created her own Ouija Board:

My mom made her own Ouija Board, and she just made it out of paper, like a yes and a no on the paper and the alphabet. And we used to have a little drinking glass, and I don’t know why they would do this, but they would ring the rim, and it would make a noise, a screeching noise. I don’t know what that was about, but anyway, spirit was supposed to come.

Now, twice when I was doing this, when I was in my teenage years, and when I’d come home, and I might come home early on a Saturday night, because we’re all working during the week. My dad would be in the pub for another two hours, but my mom said, “come and do the Ouija Board.” So my older sister at that time was involved, with my mom, and then my younger sister and me, and my grandmother who came through to me many years later...came through. And this is before I emigrated to Canada, and she told me I was going to emigrate to Canada, right. So that was good. But then on another occasion a spirit would come through, and how they would do it at that time – because my mom wasn’t a medium, she couldn’t ask questions to get answers, so she would ask questions of the spirit and then they would, they’d go to each letter and spell it out. It was very laborious, right, and you’d write and, oh, that’s what the message is.

So this time, I remember, they asked, “is someone here?” And the glass goes yes. “Who are you?” And it wouldn’t tell us, and it wouldn’t leave, and that’s what the problem is, but what happens is, there’s certain, there’s different levels in the spirit world. So if you went to the spirit world and you’re, let’s just say...you were not a nice person on earth. Okay. You were negative, you may have robbed a few things, you may have done stuff like that. You would go to the lowest level in the spirit world, but they are the type of spirits that love to jump in and play tricks on people. They can never possess you. This is something people don’t understand, but people have the spirit, oh my god, they’re attached to me, you know what I mean. But they can annoy you, and I’ve felt this presence with me for about a week, and I go, oh my god, how do I get rid of this? Remember, I’m only a kid, in my teen years. I was frightened, and I never did it again with my

mom. And I told her why and actually they were frightened too because it wouldn't respond, yet the glass is flying all over the place. They wouldn't go; they wouldn't tell us who it was. So they were playing tricks.

KARI: Right.

RICHARD: And a lot of people use those boards all over the world and they're very dangerous. That's where you can get a negative energy come in and, but like I said, they cannot harm you. But it frightens a person, and you can get sick of it. (I.45)

Given the number of years that Richard has spent as a medium and the countless spirits that he has encountered during this time, it is telling that the only negative experience he recollects is based around this particular tool.

Several reflected on participating in Ouija practices as teenagers, a typical experience for individuals that age within North America. Treva commented that she and her friends "did Ouija and, yeah, Ouija was something else; that's a bit scary actually. Opening yourself to things maybe you shouldn't open up to in the Ouija. I'm not sure but it's, yeah, too much unknown. Opening to a realm. This [runes and pendulums] is comes more from what I feel is one's own wisdom, one's own interior wisdom" (I.50). This distinction is important; it reflects the ways in which my participants contextualise their tools and situate divination as a source of personal power and not of fear. Donna remembers playing with the Ouija and knowing, instinctively, that she should protect herself while doing so (I.13), while Mélanie recollected "the one time we really seemed to be talking to someone, and that was just like more than I could deal with, you know. There was nothing scary, really, about it, except it just seemed strange" (I.41).

The practitioners I interviewed feel that like all tools of divination, this method holds great power. Moreover, because of the confluence of popular culture, marketing,

and accessibility, it has become a focal point for constructs of good and evil. Jessica reminded me that “it’s no more evil or disingenuous than tea leaves, you know, it’s just another tool” (I.24), and yet it seems to draw people toward the potential of harm because, Lesley explained, “I think it’s always dangerous for anybody to use a tool that they don’t understand” (I.35). She went on to expand upon this idea in relation to this particular object:

That’s why I don’t like Ouija Boards, because they’re playing with stuff they don’t understand. It’s not a joke. It really is a very powerful instrument, and if you’re not clear what you’re doing with it you can cause all kinds of damage to yourself and other people. It’s the same as, you know, when people, I’ve known people who’ve started studying astrology and after six months they’re reading other people’s charts. Well, it’s not a chart you’re reading, you’re talking about a person! (I.35)

It is not the tool itself that is of frequent concern among these practitioners but the ways in which it has been de- and re-contextualised within the framework of a game. In doing so, individuals have been encouraged to wander deep within potentially dark lands without the proper preparations or maps to guide them. There is the danger that they may become lost.

Endarkenment²³

“There are so many darknesses”, writes Barbara Brown Taylor in her book dedicated to this topic. Letting go of its singular identity is a transformative act that allows a movement beyond superficial definitions. Some contain evil, but many hold a

²³ In *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, Barbara Brown Taylor, a religious studies scholar and Episcopal priest, explains this term: “Reading this [Jung’s writing on darkness], I realize that in a whole lifetime spent with seekers of enlightenment, I have never once heard anyone speak in hushed tones about the value of *endarkenment*” (2014, 86).

great deal of potential. In the same way that Gus found moving beyond the binaries of good and evil allows him a greater power of interpretation within tarot, so too does Bruce draw attention to the potential of the dark cards of the tarot deck:

Every card suggests something, some transition in your life, some change. That's why the Death card is not a fearful card, because we all know that things end and things begin, so death is...a beginning of something, death as a rebirth. There is nothing scary in tarot cards, at all, although occultists might make it seem like it's scary. (I.4)

Death is one of the darknesses of human experience; it is a part of the life cycle that everyone must participate in. Within the Pagan movements that Harvey studies, he finds this same recognition as they move beyond dualism and reconcile what it means to integrate darkness into their spiritual and, consequently, personal lives:

Pagans are not dualistic: they neither wish to banish darkness nor see darkness as symbolic of badness, 'evil' or even 'that which is unbalanced'. Their celebrations typically honour the fertile darkness, the womb from which the light returns, the earth in which seeds will germinate. Sometimes Pagans refer to "the dark side", meaning those things which they would like to outgrow, move on from or leave behind; perhaps things which they find unhealthy or restrictive. These are typically faced, named and worked on rather than repressed or repented from. (1997, 7)

Intrinsically tied to divination practices like water dowsing, this darkness takes people deep within the earth; it is where they find their roots.

Another one of the darknesses is the shadow itself. Pearl looks to Jung to help her articulate this concept, writing in her thesis that he "preferred the poeticism of the word shadow [...] The shifting, slippery nature of the shadow is not that of the binary. Rather it is like the nesting of spirals" (2008, 147). Jungian psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz also looks to him to understand what it is: "the personification of certain aspects of the unconscious personality" that should not be clung to in a literal fashion but explored for

its metaphoric potential. “When we speak of the shadow,” she writes, “we have therefore to bear in mind the personal situation and even the specific stage of consciousness and inner awareness of the person in question” ([1974] 1995, 3-4). It is a contextual, liminal space that brings individuals into an awareness of the self. How much of a person is shadows, slipping between identities? It is a question I have found myself contemplating more than once. The tarot card I selected one day in October of 2012, was The High



Figure 22: *The High Priestess, Mythic Tarot*

Priestess. In the Mythic Tarot deck she is based on Persephone, from classical mythology, who became the Queen of the Underworld after being abducted by Hades, and hence spends time dwelling deep within the earth in the dark spaces.

On that day, I wrote:

Everything right now revolves around the interior, the inner self. It is so easy to become trapped within but never really exploring the space, just staying hidden. So much of what I desire, who I want to be, comes from this place, but then so does the fear. [...] This card made me think of the dream [where I am going to descend into the earth] because of the idea of going into the darkness. It is necessary, but intent is important. Perhaps that is a key to embodying myself (the good, the bad, and the in between). What matters is the intent that drives the journey.

To know oneself necessitates walking into darkness and confronting the shadows that they find, not only deep within but also surrounding them, in the everyday world.

Being willing to work with these spaces requires a confrontation with the hierarchies that continue to be constructed, as well as the labelling and categorising of aspects of the self as good or bad. It is an act that frequently results in people residing in comfortable places of ease while disregarding that which frightens them. In considering

the many roles of dreams within a person's life, Pearl writes that they "may help to undermine the privileged position of the intellect and the upperworld of ego and help us begin to attend to the underworld, the world of the soul" (2008, 20). Finding wholeness does not necessitate that either aspect overtake the other, but it instead establishes a balance between them, achieved, in part, through the ability to recognise the difference between that which is harmful and that which is challenging.

Darkness and evil are not the same thing. The latter, negative force, closes people off. Peter has found that "if I said one thing negative in a reading, you're going to forget everything [else] I said" (I.45). It is, therefore, up to the practitioner to find ways to present that which is difficult without allowing it to be dismissed out of fear. What closes the querent off to transformation is not for their highest good, but sometimes they need help discerning between that which will cause them harm and that which they do not want to recognise because it will require them to face aspects of the self they may find unpleasant. Jason has found that his approaches have changed over the years that he has been reading cards:

There's a new approach that I take now, and then there was an old approach. And what changed – I'll kind of fill in that blank there. So the first approach, I used to, you can take any card and spin it into a positive light. And so, not that I don't do this anymore, but I am more conscious of it because sometimes the messages are so important to hear, and it's not me saying, you know, how is my business going to go, and it looks terrible. I'm not going to say, well, you're going to burn and crash, but we're going to look at other avenues and how to support that transition, and then I will say, you know, like there is a lot of energy being wasted – like if there's a card suggesting energy being wasted on something, then we can talk about what those are in that situation and why, and then we can open up other doors to alleviate some of that. So it's approaching it, like truthfully, but then supporting some layer or solution out of it, whereas the old me would have maybe sugar coated it a little bit and brought some sort of positive aspect.

So what changed is that, nothing of personal experience with me. I was just reading a book from one of my – I think it was Marcus Katz, have you ever heard of him? [Kari nods] Yeah. Love him. Anyways, so reading his book, and he was telling a story. I'm going to screw up the story, very paraphrasing here. Like, I'm going to screw it up. But it was basically saying like, he read a person, told the truth about the messages he was getting, and it ended up saving a person's life. So this person was suicidal and she needed to hear the harsh truth, and so, from that day forward he decided to say it how it is, so to speak. And I think there is some value to that. Of course, it can go the other way, you say how it is and maybe somebody kills themselves. So, I know that sounds terrible, but I hope that's not the case, and with most tarot readers, you open up the conversation with, you know, this is not set in stone, this is a tool, yada, yada, and you kind of explain to them what your approach with the tarot is. And my approach has always been read the bad but support it with the good stuff in order to look at it.

Just because it's a bad card, again, doesn't mean that it's a bad message. The Devil is not a nice looking card. It's kind of, and in some ways it's bad. But at the same time, realisation of that card being played in your life can set you free. So, so I don't stay away from the bad part. I never take any bad parts out. I went to a tarot symposium in Portland, and there was a table discussion, I guess, with some of the professional tarot readers and teachers and authors and everything, and so one of the authors had said, "you know, I'm not afraid to – I'll go to a party to read tarot and I'll take out some of the bad cards so it doesn't freak people out." And I don't. I think that they're important to be in there, and then, you know. You're still reading somebody. You're still having a conversation with them. You can explain to them that it's not a bad card, but it's a necessary card to be in there. So I don't go with that approach. I think that anybody's going to get a tarot reading is going to get the full experience. (I.22)

Jason believes that until people take the time to actually confront the darkness in themselves they will continue to be unable to differentiate it from evil because everything looks the same. Bruce has developed criteria for determining how to treat information by asking "is this harmful?". Is it something that liberates the person, providing us with an avenue of freedom, or does it cut us off and hold us down (I.4)? Treva encountered this in her life during her time with a cult that utilised many of the tools she continues to use to this day: "we did aura balancing on each other, and we used crystals, and we used hands on, and heat and cold, and so, and you can feel it...it works. So it, you know, kind of

keeps you on the hook in a way” (I.50). Leaving the cult required that she engage in a process of determining what is and is not harmful that cannot be easily grouped under the umbrella of a single belief system. Such experiences are why it is essential to recognise the contextual nature of divination and its relationship to personal underworlds. In one situation a crystal liberates; in another it enslaves. Everyone needs to have the knowledge to discern which is which.

Stepping into the Unknown

The first card of the major arcana of the tarot is The Fool. In the Rider-Waite deck and many of those based on it, he is seen at the edge of cliff about to step off into the unknown. This is the beginning of the tarot journey and reflects a process that extends beyond this specific tool. Divination opens up liminal spaces, and they can be dangerous. Here diviners and querents are able to step outside of the everyday and enter a time of transformation, but that does not mean they will be kept sheltered. Instead, it usually demands that they face things in themselves, their lives, and their world that they do not like. These are things they would rather ignore and keep hidden. And it means that they have to be willing to step forward into a frightening abyss.

Liminality permeates the study of folklore, particularly belief studies, and of particular influence has been the work of Victor and Edith Turner, who establish three major aspects or components of the liminal process, interwoven with practice but still distinguishable:



Figure 23: *The Fool*, Radiant Rider-Waite Tarot

(1) the communication of the *sacra*, the Latin word for sacred things – we would speak of symbolic objects and actions representing religious mysteries, frequently referring to myths about how the world and society, nature and culture, came into being [...] (2) the encouragement of ludic recombination [...] (3) the fostering of *communitas*, a direct, spontaneous, and egalitarian mode of social relationship, as against hierarchical relationships among occupants of structural status-roles. (1982, 202)

Within divination these interplays are exhibited on a regular basis. When he is acting as a medium, Richard intentionally enters into a state of balancing between worlds in order to connect with all who are present, living or beyond. After attending the Evening with Spirit, I asked him about this process:

RICHARD: And when we go on stage, as you've seen us, yes we're very with it with you know, we can laugh and joke and all that. But at the same time, we're in a zone because we've sat in the power.²⁴ Does that make sense to you? Because we've done it, because we do it on purpose because we've got to stay, we've got to keep that connection with spirit.

KARI: So you're balancing in that boundary between the two different worlds?

RICHARD: That's totally right. It's like one step in this world, one step in the other world, and that's right. Exactly, exactly. Yeah.

KARI: Is it hard to do?

RICHARD: No, it just takes time. It's just taken a little bit of practice. It's like anything else, because you don't even have to visualise because with spirit, if you're going to do mediumship, first of all you have to have trust and faith. Even if you can't see it, you have to know and believe they're there, right. They can prove that to you with information they give you and all that. So one of the biggest mistakes is people come along to me and say, I haven't seen my guide.

²⁴ Richard explains sitting in power:

It means sitting with spirit. So instead of when we meditate to calm ourselves down and just to quiet our mind because when we do that, Kari, we can quieten our mind. We'll never get rid of all of the thoughts; you can't, it's impossible, but to quieten our minds enough that we can hear spirit. That's how a medium hears spirit. Now, we do that for purpose when we go to do work, like when you saw us on the platform that night doing that work, and because we're going to call in spirit, we're open to them to give us messages and all the rest...Now, sitting in the power means we don't really meditate. We do calm ourselves down with a couple deep breaths, and we raise ourselves up [energetically], and we ask spirit to come and sit with us, not for messages or anything like that, it's just, we do it to make connection to spirit. To make it stronger. (I.47)

Who cares? It doesn't make any difference, right, but they think they have to. So, everything is practice. It's like if you've never meditated, you can learn to meditate, and it takes a little practice. (I.47)

Gus brought up Victor Turner's work on the liminal and its importance, particularly in the rituals he has created around his readings. Ritual, he explained, is a process of "stepping into the unknown", being brave enough to step off the edge of that cliff with The Fool. He recognises that this undertaking requires that he be even more attentive during a reading: "You're asking to get to know the unknown, so the more focused I can be, I find the more effective, the more people can get out of it (I.19). Liminality demands a careful equilibrium between the chaos of the unknown and the focus required to plunge into its depths which is why people often need assistance, someone to, as Jean terms it, "hold the space". This person, she explains, "will take a torch with me into my deep caves and make sure that I get back out again" (1998, 7). While these spaces may be necessary, they are not always safe and must be entered into with intention, preparation, and caution.

Bruce also discussed Turner and liminality throughout our interview, bringing it into connection with divination and the importance of diviners to the larger society:

You know, Victor Turner is a really good source, still, I think. I mean, he's an anthropologist who has been dead for a long time, but his books came out maybe in the '60s and '70s. He does a lot of study of ritual, and he did a lot of study of pilgrimages and he developed the term "liminality". So you've probably come across that in a lot of literature. "Limin" means, it's a Latin word meaning threshold, and he thought that, on the edges of any organised society you find artists and practitioners of divination for example, who are liminal people because they are on the edge. They are neither here nor there, they're betwixt and between, those are terms that he uses. They explore possibilities that the ordered culture doesn't really consider. That's why you find that such artists are sort of bohemian types. You know, they don't fit in. Tell me the name of any tarot card reader who really fits in anywhere, you know. No. Because you're exploring possibilities that are on the edge. But the society feeds off of people on the edge, you know.

Societies renew themselves through their artists. So they may even reject their artists, writer or philosopher or whatever, might reject it, and he goes off and still publishes, writes, and then a few years later, suddenly he's great, [laughs] and they lift him up as being really important, you know? So that liminal aspect, that's really something to explore in this divination thing. Because diviners or divination people are really liminal people. The most creative people are. And one of the ways that Victor Turner explains it is, think of initiation amongst aboriginal people. So a young person who is seeking to be initiated, he's part of society, part of the community, the ordered community, but then he or she goes off into the wilderness and participates in a sweat lodge, or by themselves, being alone, solitary, is important. And then everything they took for granted in terms of their community is lost. They are out there going through ordeals. But then they come back, they come back and when they come back they are reincorporated into the community and the community is better for it, and some of them might have discovered on their trip that they are candidates to be elders because they experienced some phenomenal things, and they have great stories to tell. Maybe they can be a shaman. So that experience of going out there in the wilderness on a trip is what Victor Turner calls liminality.

And I think that's really important for the study of divination, that liminality is, seems to be always there. Yeah, some of us, and then some of us become liminal characters for our whole life [laugh] so we find ourselves never able to fit in very well. I don't know what it is. Maybe because you've seen something else, seen through the hypocrisy of ordinary life and it just doesn't – so there can be probably a fallout from exploring the sacred and the occult and your own sacred path which may lead you to a place where it's hard to find incorporation back into ordinary life. Yeah. But, but like Vincent Van Gogh, maybe after you're dead they'll discover your great art. [both laugh] (I.4)

It was Bruce who suggested that I get in touch with Jean; he had brought her in to speak to his classes when he used to teach about tarot and the occult at the University of Alberta. During our interview, she reflected on what his perspective of liminality has meant to her:

The gift that Bruce Miller brought into my life was that he gave me the concept of the liminal. Being on the edges. And his respect and value for people who live on the edges of society was clear and clearly articulated, and it wasn't a word I was familiar with. The concept I was living, but his stance on it, about how the teachings and the practices and perhaps the lifestyle as well, people that live on the edges of a conventional society are enrichment for the center. Bring what's

liminal in the center and create a more well-rounded whole, and it was, it gave me a piece of myself back, yeah. That was Bruce Miller's gift to me. (I.23)

What a great and terrible burden to be what society needs but cannot bring itself to acknowledge.

Fear Itself

So what do practitioners do with this space and what they encounter therein? Pearl reflected in her thesis that “[s]ome arts and entertainment media safely reveal the dark side, the collective shadow of human nature which may explain our fascination with monsters, science fiction and horror movies” (2008, 178). To this selection of arts we can add that of divination. It allows “recipients to engage with a shadowy sketch of their most intimate selves at a safe distance” (Korkman 2015, 206) that recognises “the dark side of divination” that comes from being “a borderline activity” (Karcher 1998, 221).

Additionally, its connection to these darker elements, especially in popular culture and among those of certain religious communities who are against such practices, emerges out of its past connection to necromancy, the calling upon the spirits of the dead that frequently evokes ideas of “ghosts, the underworld, and the powers of darkness”, and “creates repulsion, fear, and horror” (Nigosian 2008). During the medieval period, writes Davies, “the term necromancy, originally a means of divination by summoning the dead, began to be used to describe...demon conjuring” (2009, 22-23). Mediumship is now far removed from the use of this term, but the fear of “demon conjuring” is always hovering in the shadows.

When people begin to intentionally develop their mediumship abilities, they find themselves in a heightened state of liminality wherein particularly strange or frightening things happen. Donna explained her own experience:

And I did have some, she [her mentor] says, you might get a few really vivid, scary dreams in the next little while because that's kind of common when you first open it. And it is, it was kind of weird, it would be like, in my dream I would dream about this real dark thing coming in and I'd be like, whoa. And you're supposed to leave your bedroom as off-boundaries. You shouldn't meditate there or anything like that because that's where you want to sleep. And I'm very clear, I always say, "you know, you can come to me in a dream but don't be standing over my bed in the middle of the night. I don't want none of that." [...]

So, a couple of scary ones. The negative energy would come in but then right away I would feel this really calm, peaceful stuff coming through going, you're fine, they got this. Which would be, push it away. I was like oh, okay. So it was kind of almost me accepting that this was okay to do. Okay, because I think the negative activity was my fear. *I don't know, should I be doing this?* You know, so it was almost like a metaphor, in a way for, like, no, it's okay, just accept it. It just is part of who you are. So I thought, oh, okay, we'll start, we'll just let it go and maybe try and not be so sceptical all the time. Just like, let's just roll with it and see what happens. And, because of that, then things started to come in more dramatically. (I.12)

Her daughter-in-law, Erin, also had striking encounters with spirits that she regards as testing her, seeing how far they could push her and what they could get away with:

I know when I first started doing this, when I first started doing mediumship out of my home, you know, I was told be careful when you first start doing it because they're going to see how far they can kind of get in, right. Because you have to set all kinds of boundaries. Like I said, when I was a child growing up I would wake up in the middle of the night and they would be in my room, okay. So one of my rules now is you do not come to me at night, you do not come into my bedroom, you do not go into my kids' rooms. And they're usually pretty good at that, but you have to set those boundaries for them. I tell them, "I will work for you, I will give you the messages, but it's on my terms, okay." So I was told when I first started doing this that just, you know, in the beginning be careful, you know, they'll kind of see how far they can push you.

And so I remember one morning, it was in the summertime because it got light out at 4:30, 5:00 in the morning when the sun started coming up. I was up that night with just bizarre dreams, and that's usually how I can tell something's trying to

get in because I'll just have really wacky dreams. And my son was up having weird dreams too. So usually if it's both of us there's something going on, right. So I got him into bed, I crawl into our bed, it's about 4:30 in the morning, light's just starting to come through the window, and you know that state when you're just [about] sleeping but you're not. You're kind of half there. That's where I was. I remember opening my eyes, I could feel a female in my room. I opened my eyes and she was standing at the edge of my bed, at the foot of my bed, just overlooking me. And she was really not pleasant looking, okay. And I just never, I did not get good vibes from her at all. So I was like, no, get out, ignoring you, my protection prayer. Whatever I need to do. And I could still feel her there. So I'm like, well, I'm just ignoring her. I'm just not paying attention; she's just going to leave. I know that I'm protected, she'll leave, whatever, right?

So then I roll over and I'm facing my husband. My eyes are shut, and I open my eyes and, again, I'm sleeping but I'm not, right, and I open my eyes and I'm looking at my husband's face. Well his face turns into her face and he, or she, smiles, and it's just this creepy smile and she says, "I can help you if you let me show you how." And I was like, "nope!" [laughs] Not happening. I do not need your help, right. And this is when I was just developing, so that's what she meant. I think she was just being, you know, because you're always going to have that negative that just likes to see how far they can work you, right. And I was like: nope, not happening. You're out of here, kind of thing. And I got up, I turned the hallway light on and all that and it went away. And then once I stood my ground then, nothing like that happened again. That was really the only time, in the beginning where, you know, anything tried to really get through. (I.18)

The message that came from these stories was not to avoid mediumship or divination because of what one might encounter, but to be prepared and recognise one's own power in the situation. Many things in life have the potential to cause harm, it is why people must be intentional and act with as much knowledge as possible. The key is that individuals confront them.

In his preface to Shermer's *Why People Believe Weird Things*, the paleontologist Stephen J. Gould writes:

Only two possible escapes can save us from the organized mayhem of our dark potentialities – the side that has given us crusades, witch hunts, enslavements, and holocausts. Moral decency provides one necessary ingredient, but not nearly enough. The second foundation must come from the rational side of our mentality. For, unless we rigorously use human reason both to discover and acknowledge

nature's factuality, and to follow the logical implications for efficacious human action that such knowledge entails, we will lose out to the frightening forces of irrationality, romanticism, uncompromising 'true' belief, and apparent resulting inevitability of mob action. Reason is not only a part of our essence; reason is also our potential salvation from the vicious and precipitous mass action that rule by emotionalism always seems to entail. Skepticism is the agent of reason against organized irrationalism – and is therefore one of the keys to human social and civic decency. (2002, x)

Here is a return to the essentialising force of binaries. For my participants, however, divination asks them to not get rid of darkness but to go deep and engage *with* it, again recognising that it is not the same thing as engaging *in* evil. Hederman picks up this argument: "If the twentieth century has taught us anything, it is that not only is it unhealthy to neglect the unconscious part of ourselves, but it may even be 'sinful', if we understand this word as 'missing the mark', or effectively ignoring the call to be human". Doing so, he continues, makes us "a danger to ourselves and to others". It is a peril that emerges out of neglect because "whether we mean it or not, even with the best intentions in the world, we end up doing evil" (2003, 21). It is not enough to call for reason, particularly one that is rooted in a very specific worldview. Instead, it requires a willingness to confront what we are capable of outside of binaries and pay attention to the frightening internal forces that exert such influence upon them.

Johnson shares this perspective, reminding his readers that courage is required "to go to the 'bad' side of ourselves, to acknowledge it as part of ourselves, to consider that it could have a constructive role to play in our lives" (1989, 37). Divination is a part of this process, guiding those involved into the shadowed sides of themselves that they may not want to confront but need to in order to be whole, and, consequently, an effective member of a society that also needs this same restoration. Astrology, for example, is built upon

engaging with actual night, using it to guide people into dark places of metaphorical and literal meaning. Tarot cards bring individuals face-to-face with The Devil and ask them to consider their own relationship with him and what ability they have to transform it, because they always have power.

In Taylor's book, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, she challenges much of the narrative of darkness established in western culture, the labels placed upon it, and what happens when people shut it out of their lives:

Most people do not know what they mean by 'darkness' except that they want to stay out of it. Just say the word and the associations begin to flow: night, nightmare, ghost, graveyard, cave, bat, vampire, death, devil, evil, criminal, danger, doubt, depression, loss, fear. Fear is the main thing. Almost everyone is afraid of being afraid. Beyond that, no one's list is exactly like anyone else's. It fits the way a shadow fits, because darkness is sticky. It attracts meaning like a magnet, picking up everything in its vicinity that is not fully lit. (2014, 5)

Yet, she goes on to write, "when we run from darkness, how much do we really know about what we are running from?" (ibid., 57). What lessons are lost when one refuses to step out of the light? I can only imagine for Erin and Donna that their lives would be significantly diminished if they had chosen to hide from mischievous spirits at the beginning of their journey instead of confronting them and moving on.

The relationship between literal and metaphorical darkness is one that Marlene drew my attention to during our conversation. Because of her upbringing in the country she learned "to not be afraid of the bush in the dark, no matter how dark it is, no matter how thick the bush is. I still carry that with me today...I'm not afraid" (I.39). It is not surprising that this comfort with the night would translate into a desire to engage people in their own dark spaces. She is not content to let them dwell in fear-filled patterns.

Reflecting on this interview I am left to wonder if my own willingness to delve into this

topic emerges, in part, from a similar upbringing in the country where the dark of night was not a dreadful thing. It is a space I have always found myself drawn to. Some of my most treasured childhood memories are of winter “midnight walks”. On particularly clear winter nights when the moon was (nearly) full, my parents would bundle me and my sister up, and we would go walking out into the night. In this space I was introduced to new sources of light that did not have the vibrancy of the sun but cast a different glow on the world as it reflected off the snow, recasting shadows in this haunting light. These walks gave me a new perspective on night and darkness itself, as does divination.

As evidenced from numerous stories, it is naïve to argue that there is nothing in the darkness that can cause harm. Yet, much of the time, a person’s greater fear should be what they lose out on if they hide away from it. Taylor confronts this realisation when she reflects on her reaction to hearing something outside of her bedroom door one night:

All these years later, when I think back to whatever was snuffling outside my door, I wonder if it was a lost thing or a lonely thing that was looking for some company. It was certainly a dark thing, but that does not mean it was a bad thing. It did not harm me. My fear did that. It did not even open the door, which was not locked. All night long, it sat outside my door waiting for me to decide whether to open up or not, and I decided not – a decision that has come back to haunt me in a whole new way. (2014, 162-163)

She is left to conclude: “At this point I am more afraid of what I might leave out instead of what I might let in” (ibid., 186). There is the desire to avoid that which will cause us pain or discomfort, even if it is for our good or the betterment of others. Anne has encountered situations where people ask her to take out the Death card before doing a reading – in those cases she uses a different deck instead (I.2). Yet, again and again, my participants brought me back to the realisation that there is a need to confront what causes

fear. The following two stories from Pearl perfectly illustrate the power of facing our nightmares:

[Story 1]: I've had mother's phone: "my kid is having huge nightmares day after day." "Well, do you want to come out to the farm or do you want me to give you a simple reading over the phone?" "Well, I'll try the simple one," you know, because I'm going to charge them \$75 bucks if they come. And I'm thinking, well, this kid is 12 years old, he's not doing work in dreams, unless he's an unusual child. Anyway, so it's very simple. You say, "have you got a big sheet of poster paper?" "Well, I can get one." "Ask your child to draw the nightmare. Just willy-nilly draw it, not looking for a work of art, we're looking for a drawing. Because once you honour that nightmare, it may never return."

[Story 2]: My daughter is into it [dream interpretation]; my 7-year-old grandson was having nightmares about a coyote chasing him; so he had had a tonsillectomy and this nightmare started, what he called a nightmare. So he's at my house during the couple of days he's recuperating; while mommy takes the other boys to school, [he] stays with grandma. So all of a sudden he's got tears running down his cheeks and he goes, "I can't make this nightmare quit, Grandma." "Well, okay, just a second. Tell me the nightmare." So he tells me. This wolf just, this coyote just keeps chasing him, and chasing him, and chasing him. Now there's been an episode in the farmyard in the fall where he and several of his little friends were playing outside on the bales, because they were living with me at that point in time, and they could hear coyotes yowling in the background, and this little friend of his went running, screaming hysterically into the house. "There's wolves, there's wolves, there's wolves." "Oh honey no, no child, those are coyotes over on the lake, and they're singing." He's not going back. So he makes a big incident about it. [Her grandson] is now having this nightmare. So I say to him, "well, I tell you what. You close your eyes and wait until the coyote comes again and then you turn around and you say to him, what do you want?" So, okay, we get real quiet. He's very seriously waiting for this coyote to show up. His eyes fly open and he says, he said, "he's come to give me my voice." "Oh," I said, "well that's pretty cool," because he's got tonsillitis so the coyote was the inner world trying to heal his tonsillitis. It's like, well, well that's kind of neat, isn't it? (I.44)

When confronted with monsters, divination teaches that everyone has the power to face them. In doing so, sometimes participants are able to successfully defeat them, other times they learn that the shadows do not hide harm but are in fact seeking to give them a piece of themselves back. These are not the epic battles depicted on television and movie screens but are, instead, intimate journeys of self-confrontation and discovery.

Conclusion

If I tell you that I practice divination, what do you know about me? More importantly, what do you have left to learn? This thesis barely scratches the surface of what divination has come to mean to some in Canada and what it has the potential to become. There is no simple answer in response to the question of how this practice continues to thrive in a society whose institutions ignore, at best, and, at worst, condemn or mock its presence. Nor should we seek out such simplicity; it does a disservice to the voices of all involved, regardless of opinion. What is apparent is that divination is not rooted only in the past or in cultures outside of North America, any more than it can be relegated to the fictions of popular culture. No group or person can lay claim to that which is traced across continents and through centuries and continues to be integrated into individual lives and communities.

Ethnographic approaches, particularly folkloric, are of particular use when exploring this topic, as has been made evident throughout my research. Practitioners and fieldworkers find themselves in similar situations as they seek out the stories of others, discovering in these narratives new maps to guide them through the complexities of life. Both find themselves engaged in what Enguix terms the productive exchange of ethnography “where collaboration and negotiation of meaning are constant” (2014, 91). While there are always concerns about the insider-academic, witnessing this interplay within my own research has enriched my work and challenged my own perspectives as practitioner and scholar which would have otherwise been left unchanged. I found myself simultaneously stepping into familiar lands only to find them re-formed around me as

others tested my definitions, my approaches, and my goals. Such is the privilege of listening to the stories of others. Encouraging this dialogue is, therefore, one of the purposes of this work; it is my intent that it be the beginning of many greater conversations that will include a growing number of voices, academic and diviner alike.

This thesis strives to bring a few of these voices together to demonstrate the richness of their experiences and the intricate nature of divination in their lives. In doing so, I contest the idea that newspaper horoscopes and the one-dimensional fortune-tellers of popular culture are the scope of this practice. It is not, nor has it ever been, so simple. In his epilogue to “Roman Opinions about the Truthfulness of Dreams”, the classicist W. V. Harris comes to realise that “[a] perhaps unexpectedly complex history has emerged” (2003, 33). Such a conclusion, however, should not be a surprise when exploring the practices of any peoples at any time. Folklorist Michael Taft is quick to remind his readers that “there have never been ‘simpler’ times or ‘simpler’ people than ourselves” (1983, 12). Thus, it is not advisable to regard divination as ever being an act easily defined or one that has had greater or lesser intricacy at any point or within any culture in history. Goldstein, Grider, and Thomas make the following argument when discussing the traditions of ghosts, but it is no less true about divination: “commodification, popularization, technological change, cultural brokering, fragmentation, and decontextualization have always been as much a part of the tradition as have the spirits [or in our case, the tools] themselves” (2007b, 227). At the same time, however, there needs to be a form of rootedness to ensure that we are not consumed by countless possible paths to our destination.

My research is structured around a need for foundations and a desire to wander down as many of the different trails of personal experience as possible. The main geographical site, methods of seeking out participants, time constraints, and an emphasis on practitioners all brought focus to my research; non-directional interviewing ensured that narratives could unfold in the way that best suited the participant, given the limitations of the interview structure. Ultimately, they came together to reveal the ways in which divination thrives amongst individuals from different backgrounds, religious affiliations, genders, and regions, many of whom found themselves connected with contemporary urban communities in Alberta. These settings, and the work of those dwelling within them, emphasise that they do not shun modernity or place themselves in competition with other systems of knowledge, but instead situate divination at the heart of conflicted and multifaceted human beings who continue to seek out new ways of self-understanding and transformation.

Money is such a human thing – Kelliëna (I.33)

Divination reveals a tension between the tangible and intangible and requires a study of the ways in which humans find themselves connecting to the objects that surround them. This exploration begins with the tools that are central to the very definition of divination, even though their presence does not always produce the expected functions. Throughout this study their roles have become necessarily complicated, as is the inevitable outcome for any object to which folkloric attention is paid. Meaning is not inherent to these items but a product of the specific contexts and cultures that hold such sway over performance and theoretical approaches to them (Zumwalt 1988, 139). While

always a part of the processes of seeking out knowledge, their roles are various and mutable.

The divinatory objects presented throughout this research serve as the tools through which individuals intentionally access information otherwise unknowable, serving as the impetus for or source of this knowledge. In doing so, they also act as a mirror to the participants; the tools chosen reflect the individual who selects them. After all, as Lesley observed, “which ever one speaks to you the loudest is the one that’s meant for you” (I.36). This conversation is not limited to the practitioner alone; querents choose which type of reader and reading best suits their needs, reflecting the ongoing need for them to claim and recognise their own personal power.

When confronted with the inadequacies of language, these tangible and intangible items of folklore present a new system of communication that bridges these gaps. At times it creates new terms; other times it bypasses language for symbols and emotions, that which cannot be articulated. Taylor’s opening statement to the “The Rose and Astrology” acknowledges this potential in relation to astrology: “[it] is, first of all, a language of symbols. Although vulnerable to misinterpretation, those symbols communicate truth beyond the capability of words” (2008, 93). Thus, they serve as a mediator of the intangible and become a site where all those involved – potentially including different beings both human and spirit – are able to find a connection and communicate.

Those objects which retain a physical component, as opposed to tools such as dreams, are not reduced to a static identity. For one practitioner the images on the tarot cards are read, for another they are the intermediary between spirit and querent. In the

same way that there is a lack of a unified sacred text or established dogma that allows for easy classification in practices such as witchcraft (Gaboury 1990, 133), divination is also rendered from set spaces or sacred texts. Instead, the tools of choice serve in their stead, and their authority resides deeply within the contexts of their use. They are situated within the framework of individual performances that are undertaken by these contemporary diviners. This recognition does not negate their influence but instead resituates sites of power from external systems back into the internal, lived realities of all involved.

Recognising the multifaceted nature of objects in divination opens the way for reconsiderations of this practice's relationship to money. Commonly situated in opposition to the spiritual, divination challenges this binary (among many others) and the perceptions people have about this very human aspect of their lives. My participants revealed how money, and particularly the exchange of it, comes to mirror the roles of divinatory objects. It contributes to the creation of the ritual space by acknowledging the value of the act for all of the participants. Charging for their time requires a conscious recognition of their worth and that of their divining. The element of exchange makes tangible another significant element of the intangible forces at work: the energies that are involved in divination.

The layered worldview that emerges as central to any understanding of the divinatory processes in this thesis are made up of these energies, differentiated through their vibrations. In this context the exchange is not a debasement of the spiritual "purity" of an act or an indication of the dishonesty and greed of the reader, but a part of the process by which the reading can occur. These elements of exchange, as Rieti terms them,

extend far beyond the witch lore with which she associated the act (2008, 4); they exist throughout folk practices, including divination. This specific transaction demands a movement beyond any reactionary stances borne out of genuine concerns about commercialisation and instead ask for recognition that no object, not even currency, holds only one meaning.

I've discovered that [the quality of] joy...has an energy pattern that feels different [in my experience] than generosity, that feels different than hope. They all [each feeling and emotion] feel different, and it's because they feel different that we know that, oh, I'm feeling hopeful; we know that because we [innately] know how hope feels. – Patrice (I.44; clarifications provided in May 9, 2017 email)

Embracing the emotion of divination does not require one forgo systems of proofs, a questioning mind, or rationality in whatever construct it exists for the practitioner. Instead, balance becomes key for, as Ellen reflected: “A balanced life is an elusive quest” (I.17). As evidenced throughout this work, any act of divination is part of Korkman’s feeling labour (2015) that remains situated predominantly with women. Those within my research use it to encourage all people to connect to their intuitive, or emotional, potential. While frequently employing the descriptors of “feminine” or “masculine” characteristics, they are less about embracing stereotypes than about subverting them to highlight the ways in which social expectations disrupt one’s equilibrium by dictating fixed identities that exclude potential instead of embracing it.

Divination upsets Blauner’s principle of bureaucracy that seeks to order both regular and extraordinary events into “predictable and routinized procedures” (1966, 384). Such contestations are due, in no small way, to the introduction of the emotional

component. The repetition that is favoured within systems of proof and knowing is no longer tenable when confronted with the lived, felt realities of life. The result is not, however, a discarding of these structures but a reconstruction of them from within to ensure that they accurately reflect the contexts unique to divination as a whole and each specific performance, not in an attempt to deconstruct scientific models but to recognise their limitations and address these gaps. One such site of intersection is that of energy, where Donna finds union: “And for science people, energy they can believe because you can’t, energy can be neither created nor destroyed, so it’s always there. So when someone dies, it’s not out of the realm of belief that their energy remains and that there’s, the energy is still behind” (I.12). Whether measuring these energies through scientific means or individual feelings, bringing together these approaches promotes a more complex understanding of a world that refuses to be static.

Feelings destabilise definitions. Throughout this thesis, I returned to the recognition of the limitations of labels while acknowledging their necessity in order to conduct any research. An essential component of folklore, particularly the movement toward self-reflexivity and an openness to studying those within your own community, is that it demands that meaning not be divorced from the emic. Instead of simple dichotomies, everything, even reality itself, is recognised as “an indeterminate concept influenced by imaginative and symbolic processes” (Tedlock 1987, 1). Any attempt to divorce emotion from fact will fail to capture the complexities of meaning which is why, for many practitioners, there is no desire to situate themselves in opposition to other systems of knowledge. Instead, they strive to ensure that their insights are given recognition and remain an option for those seeking to develop their self-awareness.

Emotions deepen definitions. They create space wherein the insufficiencies of language to articulate the complexities of life are countered. Other forms of communication, such as that of divination, are identified as essential for encompassing all that exists beyond the surfaces externally constructed. The emotional resonance that emerges from the experience of recognition, however, should not be disassociated from the process of definition but incorporated into it. Knowing something by how it feels, as Patrice emphasises, is part of identifying it and constructing its meanings. In the same way that while “Folklore escapes clear definition...its aura gives it an immediate emotional resonance” (Ó Giolláin 2000, 2), divination also survives, not because it can be defined, but due to the fact that it is a destabilised and destabilising entity that draws significance from individual, unrepeatable, felt experiences as much as it does from the objects and rituals themselves.

Can you do this? Yes. Can anybody do this? Yes. Are we all open to the point where we're capable of accepting it? And it's the acceptance part that's the problem. – Fraezor (I.3)

Once definitions are destabilised, gender boundaries are traversed, and accepted systems of proof are opened up, the concepts and structures of power become sites of transformation within divination. This practice becomes a site of inclusion instead of a hierarchical structure, but only if the individuals involved find ways in which to claim it for themselves. This reconstruction is made possible by the ongoing quest for balance between the querent and the practitioner both laying claim to the elements of power that are theirs within divination and working in a collaborative manner to bring them together.

As with money, it is another process of exchange whose result is to build up and not to tear down. The insights that the querent receives are matched by the “deeply nourishing experience” gained by practitioners like Jean when individuals come to her, and her cards, for guidance (I.24). When both of these roles are fulfilled by the same person conducting a reading for themselves, an equilibrium is found between the desire to seek and the capacity to know. In such circumstances it connects them to “the parts of us that are very different” (Lesley I.36). In so doing, divination creates power within; those who use it become empowered.

The contemporary practitioners who participated in this work upset the guru-centred methods that often dominated past approaches to and stereotypes of occult (or secret) knowledge within which divination has frequently been situated. Like those serious Victorian students of the occult that Owen writes of in “The Sorcerer and His Apprentice: Aleister Crowley and the Magical Exploration of Edwardian Subjectivity”, diviners are “drawn less by the glamour of exoticism” than the promise of “secret knowledge and a hidden realm of alternative spiritual wisdom”. However, unlike those who have come before, their work does not emerge from a desire for “privileged access” (1997, 101). It questions the exclusivity that has been utilised to maintain power structures. In reflecting on the classical myth of Cassandra, who is cursed by Apollo with a gift of prophecy that will never be believed, Wood writes that “the future Cassandra sees is not a privileged apparition. It is the future anyone could see if they could bear to look” (2003, 112). The power belongs to everyone, if they are brave enough to claim it.

For the women who have been and continue to be drawn to divination, this process of reclamation is critical by granting them powers frequently stripped away:

spiritual connection and authority, control over one's body, strategies for working through trauma, and acknowledgement of emotions that have been used to dismiss their experiences. It is power that is open to all peoples. It recognises the presence and equality of different characteristics long relegated to the single, binary genders as part of all human experience. The success of divination depends, in part, on the ability to open up to all aspects of the self. It becomes, as Elizabeth told me, "just another way that I connect" (I.14) to external and internal worlds and all who reside within them. There is great power in being able to claim your own emotions, as there is in being able to participate in acts that not only contribute to this affirmation but serve as representations of your worldview, even if it is not one that is shared by the larger institutions.

One of the most significant forms of empowerment through divination that emerged in my research is from its narrative potential. It serves as one of the powers Jeannie Banks Thomas ascribes to stories, to "help us reach across boundaries that we don't normally traverse" (2007, 57). Whether these are boundaries that are rooted in gender stereotypes, social expectations, past experiences, or any of the other myriad of ways which limit individuals, the divinatory space frees them from any limitations by permitting explorations into the what-ifs that are a part of this practice. "Art", after all, "accepts as a given the ambiguity of the human person" (Hederman 2003, 20) and of the world itself. The act, or art, of divination encourages participants to begin the process of deconstructing the binaries of fact and fiction and playing with the potentials therein.

Divination stories are self-focused, encouraging attention to be placed on the development of the individual – by some an act of reclaiming the term "selfish", by others through the seeking out or creation of new words – in all their forms and times. These

stories often bring in past lives and future potentials, and narrative space becomes one of the few ways in which the vastness of layered worlds, spirits, various timelines, and the deconstruction of linear time itself can be effectively articulated. Fate is counteracted; the story is always changing. Constellation therapy tells its participants that they can heal the traumas of the past, and the numerous forms of divination available remind them that there are narratives unfolding around them that may be for their own benefit, or may belong to others. Engaging in stories furthers the process of balance as a co-creative event involving the querent, the practitioner, spirits, and tools that are used in order for the seeker to better understand themselves and their place in a world that may not otherwise make sense.

Everyone has the right to belong – Elizabeth J. (I.16)

Divination provides different means by which individuals are able to find a sense of belonging, whether within a larger community or among the different layers of reality and the beings who dwell there. Erin explained that “I feel like I’m on the right path for the first time in my life because for so long I suppressed it, I hid it, I was scared of that judgement. And now that I am able to be myself, I feel like I’m just on the right path” (I.18). She is giving voice to a common sentiment among my participants. For those who interact with spirits or find meaning in tarot cards, being in a world that disavows this possibility and, therefore, does not provide any guidance for navigating such experiences frequently leads to a loss of identity and feelings of isolation.

Boundaries are shifting, in no small part due to the growth of globalisation, the internet, and the publishing industry that make known the numerous alternative options

for self-knowledge and, consequently, new options for what it means to belong. Since “newer communities have become increasingly divorced from such geographically definable contexts” (Hammer 2001, 43), there are more alternatives for finding spaces wherein one fits. Groups are being defined by something more than a single time or place. Practitioners find themselves in communion with different entities, seeking out their soul families from lifetime to lifetime, and connecting with individuals in this realm who speak the same divinatory languages. The Edmonton Astrological Society is one such intentional community created by those who have found commonalities together. In these places, however, there is also recognition that to belong does not demand conformity. The desire to learn about these topics is what binds them, not the expectation that they are all on the same path.

Divination opens up opportunities to ensure that all beings find a place where they belong. For mediums who communicate with the dead, their work includes helping the spirits move from a community of the living to one beyond, and to work with those who are left behind who must find new ways of belonging in a group whose membership has been shaken by death. Part of this is achieved through the worldviews that are constructed; understanding what energies and entities belong where is part of the larger map that guides many practitioners. This capacity does much to diminish the fear that may emerge from encountering such beings. Gregory L. Reece, an independent scholar on new religious movements, asserts that “ghosts do survive, but they do not always maintain their power of fright, their ability to terrorize” (2012, 39), divination is a participant in this process of countering negative associations emerging from numerous

sources such as the Protestant fracturing of the supernatural into the realms of good and evil (Bennett 1999, 143) and the popular narratives found in our cultures.

Darkness belongs to us as much as the light. As evidenced throughout this work, it is not the same thing as evil, even though it is frequently perceived as fearful. In order to find belonging in the self, it must first be recognised within the self. All parts must be acknowledged. For Smoley and Kinney, the shadow “simply consists of what we can’t accept about ourselves” ([1999] 2006, 8). When confronting difficult times whether from external or internal forces, divination is a source of support and insight. Through it the concept of victim is reconfigured; individuals remain active agents seeking out different solutions for these issues, and rejecting any placement of the label of victim upon them when it only serves to demand passive acceptance. To belong, therefore, is to recognise that every aspect of life is part of the journey; it has a place even if it is not what the individual wishes it to be.

One of my favourite sayings is: it is what it is, and it’s perfect, no matter what it is. It’s an experience. – Katrina (I.31)

Divination and the people who use it are complex. Divinatory acts are more than what appear on television or in the movies, and they refuse to remain within any geographical or temporal boundaries. This thesis draws attention to its multifaceted roles and, in so doing, begins to uncover some of the reasons for its continued survival within societies where it is assumed to be a relic of “backward” thinking. I am in agreement with Goldstein, Grider, and Thomas’ conclusion for the survival of hauntings: “Their persistence is due, at least in part,” they write, “to the serious cultural meanings and

issues they raise through time and over generations” (2007b, 227). Divination is adaptable and not restricted to religious requirements or specific tools. Its limitations are only those of the individuals who use it and those who study it outside of the contexts within which it continues to thrive.

Ethnographic approaches need to be central to the study of any alternative practice. Their emphasis upon extensive fieldwork framed around the experiences and perspectives of practitioners best counters the limited and often fragmentary study of divination in academia. The voices of those who are active participants are the foundation of this work; through their generosity of time they shared with me why divination is of value to their lives and their communities. It serves as a part of a much larger worldview that integrates narratives into its formation of individual and shared realities, all of which have a place. Instead of dismissing other systems of knowing, it demonstrates their weaknesses and provides solutions. It serves as a site of ongoing dialogue about the functions of currency, the issues of sharing and appropriation, and even the very inclusion of certain tools. Those who create and carry on these traditions cannot be reduced to stereotypes. They challenge and learn from each other, transform methods to fit their personal needs and, in doing so, continue to affirm that divination does not belong only in the past or to those who dwell outside of Canada. It belongs to everyone.

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Appendix A: Interviews

All interviews were conducted by me. Primary divinatory methods are listed for those who are practitioners (this does not necessarily encompass all of the services they provide) as well as whether or not they have or currently provided divination services professionally.

Interview 1

Participant: Anne

Date: June 18, 2015

Time: 7:00 pm

Location: The Carrot, 9351 118 Ave NW, Edmonton, AB

Primary Method: Tarot

Professional: Yes

Interview 2

Participant: Anne

Date: July 27, 2015

Time: 7:00 pm

Location: Green Frogs Pub, 9349-118 Ave NW, Edmonton, AB

Interview 3

Participants: Ashterah and Fraezor

Date: July 25, 2015

Time: 1:00 pm

Location: Second Cup, 111th Ave & 142 St., Edmonton, AB

Primary Methods: House cleansing (both), card readings (Ashterah), meditation classes (both), sonic healing (Fraezor), channeling (Fraezor), Akashic records (Ashterah)

Professional: Yes

Interview 4

Participant: Bruce

Date: June 19, 2015

Time: 3:00 pm

Location: Original Joe's, 102nd Avenue, Edmonton, AB

Primary Method: Tarot

Professional: No

Interview 5

Participant: C.F.

Date: August 10, 2015

Time: 4:00 pm

Location: Sacred Arts, 5006-50 St., Camrose, AB

Primary Method: Psychic/energy readings
Professional: No

Interview 6

Participant: Chris McRae
Date: June 23, 2015
Time: 1:30 pm
Location: Chris' home, Edmonton, AB
Primary Method: Astrology
Professional: Yes

Interview 7

Participant: Debbie
Date: October 23, 2014
Time: 3:00 pm
Location: Shambhala Centre, 120 Le Merchant Road, St. John's, NL

Interview 8

Participant: Debra
Date: July 7, 2015
Time: 9:00 am
Location: Her business, AB
Makes and sells divinatory tools, reads tarot for herself

Interview 9

Participant: Diane
Date: February 26, 2014
Time: 11:50 am
Location: Diane's home, St. John's, NL
Primary Method: Palmistry
Professional: Yes

Interview 10

Participant: Dona Piercy
Date: February 19, 2014
Email Interview, Dona lives in Edmonton, AB
Primary Methods: Palmistry, tarot cards
Professional: Yes

Interview 11

Participant: Dona Piercy

Date: July 24, 2015
Time 1:30 pm
Location: Dona's home, Edmonton, AB

Interview 12

Participant: Donna
Date: June 26, 2015
Time: 9:30 am
Location: Second Cup, 8303-112 St., Edmonton, AB
Primary Methods: Mediumship, tarot and oracle cards
Professional: Yes

Interview 13

Participant: Donna
Date: July 24, 2015
Time: 9:30 am
Location: Second Cup, 8303-112 St., Edmonton, AB

Interview 14

Participant: Elizabeth
Date: June 9, 2015
Time: 1:30 pm
Location: Bogani Café, 2023-111 St., Edmonton, AB
Primary Methods: Mediumship, tarot, tea leaf readings, art, channeling
Professional: Yes

Interview 15

Participant: Elizabeth
Date: July 31, 2015
Time: 2:30 pm
Location: Bogani Café, 2023-111 St., Edmonton, AB

Interview 16

Participant: Elizabeth J.
Date: July 29, 2015
Time: 7:00 pm
Location: Tim Hortons, 10700-104 Ave., Edmonton, AB
Primary Methods: Professional development, dabbles in card reading and astrology
Professional: No

Interview 17

Participant: Ellen
Date: February 9, 2014
Email interview, Ellen lives in Ontario
Primary Method: Palmistry
Professional: Yes

Interview 18

Participant: Erin
Date: July 6, 2015
Time 1:00 pm
Location: Starbucks, Miller's Blvd., Edmonton, AB
Primary Methods: Mediumship, tarot and oracle cards
Professional: Yes

Interview 19

Participant: Gus
Date: August 16, 2015
Time: 7:00 pm
Location: Starbucks, 130 Cornerstone, 6800-48 Ave., Camrose, AB
Primary Method: Tarot
Professional: No

Interview 20

Participant: Heather
Date: July 30, 2015
Time: 10:00
Location: Tim Hortons, 11084-51 Ave., Edmonton
Primary Methods: Tarot, palm reading, pendulums/dowsing
Professional: Yes

Interview 21

Participant: Irene
Date: July 13, 2015
Time: 10:30 am
Location: Tim Hortons, 10084-51 Ave., Edmonton, AB
Primary Methods: Mediumship, card readings
Professional: Yes

Interview 22

Participant: Jason
Date: July 15, 2015

Time: 7:00 pm
Location: Starbucks, #5, 10370-82 Ave., Edmonton, AB
Primary Method: Tarot
Professional: Yes

Interview 23

Participant: Jean
Date: July 22, 2015
Time: 1:30 am
Location: Zuppa Café, 9843-110 St., Edmonton, AB
Primary Method: Tarot
Professional: Yes

Interview 24

Participant: Jessica
Date: May 26, 2016
Time: 10:00 am
Location: Room 3036, Folklore Department, Memorial University of Newfoundland
Primary Methods: Tarot, pendulum, tea leaf
Professional: Yes

Interview 25

Participant: Julie
Date: June 10, 2015
Time: 10:00 am
Location: Tim Hortons, 11084-51 Ave., Edmonton, AB
Primary Method: Numerology
Professional: Yes

Interview 26

Participant: Julie
Date: June 16, 2015
Time: 3:00 pm
Location: Edmonton Astrological Society Annual Astrological Weekend

Interview 27

Participant: Julie
Date: June 25, 2015
Time: 10:00 am
Location: Tim Hortons, Edmonton, AB

Interview 28

Participant: K.T.

Date: June 24, 2015

Time: 11:00 am

Location: Second Cup, 7477-101 Ave., Edmonton, AB

Primary Method: Mediumship

Professional: Yes

Interview 29

Participant: K.T.

Date: July 28, 2015

Time: 11:00 am

Location: Second Cup, 7477-101 Ave., Edmonton, AB

Interview 30

Participant: Katrina

Date: July 22, 2015

Time: 9:30 am

Location: Starbuck's, Miller's Crossing, Edmonton, AB

Primary Methods: Mediumship, tarot, tea leaf, pendulums

Professional: Yes

Interview 31

Participant: Katrina

Date: July 29, 2015

Time: 11:00 am

Location: Tim Hortons, 11084-51 Ave., Edmonton, AB

Interview 32

Participant: Kelliena

Date: February 5, 2014

Time: 1:45 pm

Phone interview, Kelliena lives in Nova Scotia

Primary Methods: Palmistry, tarot

Professional: Yes

Interview 33

Participant: Kyla

Date: November 15, 2014

Time: 6:35 pm

Phone interview, Kyla lives in Alberta

Interview 34

Participant: Leah

Date: July 12, 2015

Time: 1:00 pm

Location: Second Cup, Jasper Ave and 112 St.

Primary Methods: Mediumship, tarot, energy clearing

Professional: Yes

Interview 35

Participant: Lesley

Date: July 3, 2015

Time: 2:00 pm

Location: Lesley's home, Edmonton, AB

Primary Method: Astrology

Professional: Yes

Interview 36

Participant: Lesley

Date: July 23, 2015

Time: 2:00 pm

Location: Lesley's home, Edmonton, AB

Interview 37

Participant: Linda

Date: November 12, 2014

Time: 6:45 pm

Location: Skype Interview, Linda lives in Alberta

Interview 38

Participant: Lynn

Date: June 24, 2015

Time: 3:00 pm

Location: Remedy Café, 10310-124 St., Edmonton, AB

Primary Methods: Mediumship, astrology, palmistry

Professional: Yes

Interview 39

Participant: Marlene

Date: July 16, 2015

Time: 11:00 am

Location: Marlene's office, Edmonton, AB
Primary Methods: Tarot, astrology
Professional: Yes

Interview 40

Participant: Mélanie
Date: August 5, 2015
Time: 11:00 am
Location: United Church, Camrose, AB
Primary Method: Dream interpretation
Professional: No

Interview 41

Participant: Michelle
Date: July 25, 2015
Time: 8:00 PM
Location: Starbucks, Jasper Ave. and 109 St., Edmonton, AB
Primary Methods: Tarot
Professional: Yes

Interview 42

Participant: Miriam
Date: October 15, 2014
Time: 1:00 pm
Location: Cochrane Street United Church, St. John's, NL

Interview 43

Participant: Patrice
Date: July 8, 2015
Time: 2:00 pm
Location: Second Cup, Jasper Ave and 112 St., Edmonton, AB
Primary Method: Tarot
Professional: No

Interview 44

Participant: Pearl
Date: July 21, 2015
Time: 1:00 pm
Location: Tim Horton's, 11084 51 Ave, Edmonton, AB
Primary Method: Dream interpretation
Professional: Yes

Interview 45

Participant: Peter

Date: July 15, 2015
Time: 2:00 pm
Location: Second Cup, 122 St. and 137 Ave., Edmonton, AB
Primary Method: Tarot
Professional: No

Interview 46

Participant: Richard
Date: June 24, 2015
Time: 6:30 pm
Location: Tim Horton's, 11084-51 Ave., Edmonton, AB
Primary Method: Mediumship
Professional: Yes

Interview 47

Participant: Richard
Date: July 22, 2015
Time: 6:30 pm
Location: Tim Horton's, 11084-51 Ave., Edmonton, AB

Interview 48

Participant: Sam
Date: July 7, 2015
Time: 2:00 pm
Location: Sam's chaplaincy office, University of Alberta
Primary Method: Tarot
Professional: No

Interview 49

Name: Shannon
Date: July 24, 2015
Time: 7:00 pm
Location: Tim Horton's 11084-51 Ave., Edmonton, AB
Primary Methods: Mediumship, intuitive readings, channeling
Professional: Yes

Interview 50

Name: Treva
Date: August 4, 2015
Time: 1:30 pm
Location: Treva's home, Camrose, AB
Primary Methods: Tarot, runes
Professional: No

Interview 51

Name: Wendy

Date: March 3, 2014

Email Interview, Wendy lives in Alberta

Primary Methods: Numerology, tarot. palm reading, mediumship

Professional: Yes

Appendix B: Conducting a Reading

ANNE: And typically what I do is I'll determine the spread, and we'll go through it, and a lot of tarot readers will just sort of give them a general synopsis, I go through each card with them so that they can see where I'm getting the information from: this is the significator, this represents this, and this card means this in this position, and then when we look at your past or whatever. So then I go through the whole thing. After having done each of the individual cards then I will look at how many swords they had; I'll take a look at the suites that were prominent, what numbers were prominent, how many major arcana cards, what that means, explain that to them. And they're certainly welcome to take notes or record it. Lots of people like to check back, some things don't make sense until months later sometimes, so they're welcome to do that. And then, if they have any questions, I invite them to ask. If, after the first reading, they still had some questions or if they want clarification we can do another spread. And when they feel satisfied that their question has more or less been addressed, sometimes with resounding results, then we can, I'll just keep reading until our time is finished. And then, I just thank them for coming and they pay me and they go away [laughs]. Until next time. Until next time. There's a lot of repeat business, so that must say something, I guess. I'm hoping. (I.1)

ASHTERAH: So they [other readers] just kind of do it by rote almost. And I don't do card readings like that. I will do what they call the Celtic Cross, a ten card layout. And I'll say, okay, I'll hand you the cards, and I'll have you focus on whatever it is you want to ask, and you can shuffle up those cards. And that just gives me a couple of minutes to tap into your energy and figure out on some level because it doesn't usually happen consciously for me, on some level, what's going on with this person. And I'll say, "we're going to do several spreads, so focus on the question you want to ask first." So it's either my job, my kids, my love life, those are the three biggies. And I'll lay the cards out. Usually I can give them, right off the top, okay this is a question about romance. [Gasp] Yes! And we go from there, and it's not generally an issue. Sometimes I'll pick a card though, and there's a real hodge podge on the table, and I'm not getting any clear direction as to what they want to know about, and I'm going," okay, this could be about business, but it could also be about family." "Well, don't you know?" I said, "well, if it's business there's this, this, this, and this, and if it's about family, then you need to look at this and that and so and so." "Oh." "I asked you to focus on one question." "Oh well, I guess I was thinking about a lot of things." "Alright, well, we'll just start the process over." So if I can get them to focus, it makes it a lot easier for me to give them an answer that they're going to be happy with. And that's why they come, it's because they want answers, and they want to go home happy. [laughs] (I.3)

DONNA: Whereas if somebody's ready, they're looking for an answer, it's a much better reading a lot of times because they're kind of open and relaxed and it's so much easier to read someone's energy when they are relaxed and open. Sometimes people just get anxious and nervous because they're not used to talking to a medium who communicates with the dead. So what you do, or I do, when they come in is I have them draw a picture [see Appendix E for a full description of the drawing exercise]. So I take an 8x8, 10 piece of white paper and I split it, divide it into three sections, open it up and I have them draw me a scene. And in the scene they put a snake and a bird. And while they're doing that, and they almost all tell me that they can't draw and, oh, this is, like, you know, they haven't drawn, coloured since they were six or something like that. And I said, "yeah, well, let's pretend you're six again and just draw whatever, use whatever crayons you want." And it's crayons they use.

And so they go ahead and they make their scenes and while they're doing that, I can kind of, they relax. I feel them relax. I feel them kind of open, and I went, ah, here we go. And a lot of times before they've come I've taken their name, their first name, I only ask for first names. Otherwise people think you're googling them. You know, they're right away – because you're first go-to is going to be skepticism, I think. Like, whenever somebody's telling you stuff that seems a little out there. So I don't like to get too much information from them because I don't want them thinking I've googled them before they've arrived. So I have their first name, and I might have meditated, and I'll take whatever notes I get just off the name before they arrive. And then when they arrive, like I said, I get them to do the photo – the picture – and as they're drawing their picture, now I'm really connecting and whatever else communication.

I do a lot of automatic writing, and I also do a sketch. I usually start with a little stickman sketch because I use the stickman to kind of direct me to what side of the family the people that I have are from. So if they show me they are on the right side, that's the mom's side. If they show me they're on the left side, that's the dad's side. And that helps me figure out who they are. Because what people don't realise is when you're dealing with, well, for me, the mediumship part of it. It's like you have a bunch of strangers in your living room, and you don't know how they're related yet; you don't know how they're connected. They can talk to you, but you still don't, I mean. This is like in real life, if there's real people in your house and you don't know them you still take a little time to figure out where the connections fall. Well, it's no different for a medium when you have spirits coming in. If you have one it's great because at least you can focus on that one. But if you get more than one, two, or three, you kind of want them to, okay let's

move you around so I can see how you fit with this client. And who are you? And what's your message is? So if you're talking, if I get two talking at once I can tell who it is, okay. So, because you don't always visually see them. Sometimes it's hearing; it depends on how it comes. Or I see them, but I still don't know them, unless you look exactly like you, kind of thing, then I don't know how you fit yet, unless they tell me. And sometimes it's like, they're waiting; sometimes they're watching me. I don't know whether they're trying to see if they trust me with information, okay.

So, and then they'll start communicating. Once it opens it's like a floodgate; it comes in really nice and quick. But the whole time this person's drawing this picture, they have no idea that this is what I'm doing in my head. I am just like, "okay, who are you? What are you here for? Where are you sitting?" You know. "What's your message?" Blah, blah, blah. I'm having a big conversation. And it's only for three minutes, two, three minutes. And I'm writing the entire time, usually, when I'm getting this information. And then when they're done their picture they pass it over to me, and then I'll go with either whatever's the loudest. Sometimes the spirits are kind of like, "no, let's get to it right now." That's fine, I start talking about who's here, who I have, that kind of thing. And I leave the picture for later. Or if you get quieter ones, or somebody who hasn't had that many people that have crossed over that they can validate. Because everybody has dead people, but they don't necessarily know them that well. Like it could be a great, great grandmother; it could be a grandma they didn't know. So it's really hard to validate that information. Like you might be able to describe them, but they might not acknowledge that. They might not really connect with that. Or they could very well tell you what you just ate for dinner, but that has no meaning, that has no connection to that relative, you know what I mean. So it almost sounds more like psychic information, not mediumship. There is a difference between the two.

And, lose my thought there, oh yeah, so, if I'm not getting too much as far as information from their people that have crossed over, I'll go to the photo and kind of just do more of an intuitive read on the picture. And then often times that will again relax further, and then I'll make a further connection that way. And then, after I'm done, I talk about twenty minutes, maybe, or so, with their, about their loved ones and their messages. It depends on how much there is. Usually it, sometimes it can go on for forty minutes, you know. And then I'll move to cards; I'll kind of wrap up with cards. Or if it's a little bit less, like they're kind of quiet, they're there but they're not speaking a lot, I might only be ten, fifteen minutes, okay, and then I'll move to a card spread which will help because then they're using the images on the cards to give me more information, to convey to me, because I'm very visual. That's how it works for me. Yeah.

And then at the end of it, so I usually go through about two spreads. One card deck that I use, I've had since – it's from 1940. The card deck, I found it in an antique store. So I really enjoy using that deck. You spread them all out, and they go in, there's 32 cards, and they all get spread out. And the one has the Queen of Hearts and there's a King of Hearts. So the Queen of Hearts is for if you're doing a female client, that would represent her. And the male, her loved one, would be the King of Hearts and vice versa, obviously. If it's a male client then the King of Hearts is him as well. And then where they fall from each other, you just read the cards that are around that person. And you can also read the cards that around their loved one. And that's it for that particular spread. And then I do a typical tarot spread which is using the Celtic cross...I do that. And that's kind of it. I wrap up with that tarot spread at the end. (I.13)

PETER: I use my own spread, and what it is, I just throw them [tarot cards] down, and I just read them how I feel that I need to read them. And they just jump up. The cards just, you know, sort of what they need to hear, sort of I look at them, and they sort of tell me where I need to go, and then I just take it from there. So I usually have two or three different spreads that are my own. I know everybody started with the Celtic cross and they went – but you know, you can do your own, and it works just as well. It's not as if okay, this means that; you can make whatever they want to mean to you individually and to you intuitively, so that is something that I feel that you can do on your own. I feel that generally, the fifteen-minute read, the spread is my own. The yearly forecast I do it my way, so it's basically my own. I got an idea of it from a book, but I sort of expanded on it, but I did it my way as well. So I use all of the cards in the yearly forecast, and I take it from there. So I'm not using a spread in the book; I'm using my own spreads, and usually it's just – the amount of cards, it just depends how I feel. Sometimes I tell you to pick ten cards, sometimes eleven, sometimes twelve. So it's not about this is the amount of cards, it's whatever I feel. So you may come with your boyfriend, and you may choose eleven cards, and I may say, ten cards for him. So that is something as well, so that is, it is all intuitive, like this. So it's not – it's got to go – I feel that whatever flies will fly in the right hole, and if it's alphabet cereal, it will sort of come out as, in what you need to hear. So I do my own spreads. (I.45)

ELLEN: When I start a reading, I start with the back of the hands. The process begins with the client gently shaking the hands and then placing them on the table with the palms down. This allows me to see the spacing of the fingers and the thumbs. Spacing is indicative of extroversion/introversion; daring/caution; responsibility or lack thereof depending on which fingers are involved. Length of fingers is another detail that I pay

attention to as is the shape, colour, and lean of the fingernails. Are there any hangnails and are the knuckles smooth or pronounced? As I turn the hands over I note their feel and determine if the skin ridges are fine or course. Then the lines, I start with the life line, then the head line, followed by the heart line. If present the fate/destiny line and any other markings that are present. Then the mounts – Venus, Neptune, Pluto, Luna, the Plain of Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Apollo and Mercury. Then the back of the fingers and their segments.

I am talking the entire time I am reading the hands, unless of course the client is also speaking the entire time which has happened! Thankfully most often the client waits until the reading is over to ask questions [...] And so it will go throughout the reading with each area being interpreted in sequence and then followed with a three point highlight that hopefully will assist with the major challenges current in the client's life. (I.17)

KARI: Can you maybe talk me through how you do a reading? Do you have certain rituals for working with tarot?

SAM: Generally speaking, no I don't. That is, I will take my deck, which you'll notice is bound up in a silk cloth. I don't know why, I just learned how to do it that way. I don't necessarily think that silk is like this incredible miracle material, but whatever. I'll take the cards out; I'll shuffle them a little bit in my hands, mostly just to neutralise whatever energy might be clinging to them from previous readings. And then I will say to the person whom I'm doing the reading for, "think of the question that you want to ask. Don't tell me what it is, just think of it and make it as clear as you can to yourself. Because if you ask a fuzzy question, you'll get a fuzzy answer. If you ask a clear question, you're more likely to get something directly useful. Then take the cards and shuffle them. After you've shuffled for a while, continuing to think about the question. Take some of the cards, flip them upside down, and shuffle them in." I like to work with both reversed and upright cards. Some people prefer to just use straight-up cards, but I do find it useful to have the reverse cards in there as well because they point to obstacles, roadblocks, and difficulties their person is going to run into. Whereas if it's all sunshine and butterflies, then it's not that useful to them.

Then, after you've shuffled the cards, I say, and that's why I like working with a smaller deck, by the way. Because it's a heck of a lot easier to shuffle this than the larger deck – I've got a larger Rider Waite as well. I say, "okay, put the cards down, break them into three piles. Tell me which pile I should start with." Okay, and then I start dealing off of that pile. I use the Celtic Cross layout most often because I'm used to it, but also because

it includes past, present, future, stuff that's coming in, stuff that's going out...and the unconscious, your circumstances, family and friends, hopes and fears and then an outcome card. I also often toss three cards in as whole cards around if I need some elaboration on the outcome; they'll give me some idea as to what are some of the factors that will be really important.

You know, so I read significator – I mean I could walk you through the whole thing, you probably know this because you read tarot. [Kari affirms] You know, I do the significator. Now sometimes what I will do is I will shuffle out just the major arcana and ask someone to choose a significator from them, if there's a particularly important issue that they're trying to deal with, or something, or sometimes I'll just pull it out as part of the regular deal. It differs. Most often, I think I ask them to pull out a significator for themselves. Read the significator, read the circumstances around the question, read the immediate past, near future. Then deal with the factors that are, have been active, are becoming less important, and the factors that are coming in. Probably go back at that point and talk a little bit more about the immediate future, you know, so I bounce back and forth.

I've found often – and I let my intuition do it. I mean, I know what the meanings of each of the cards are. After all these years, fuck, of course I do, and I know what the positions mean, but often pairs of cards will present themselves to me; they'll say, okay, obviously this death card, you know, this death card obviously relates to this high priestess card, so you, and I don't know why it might, but it obviously does for some reason, so I will speak of the pairs together. Do an overall interpretation and then ask them if they've got any questions that arose from any of this stuff. If the outcome is unclear to me, or I think that I might have missed something, then I will look at the three whole cards that I put up. Because that will give me an idea. I generally assume that the outcome is about six months from now, something like that. Near future but not immediate future, and so that will give me an idea of what other factors will have entered in at that point. And that's it.

I don't use a whole slew of associations. Like I said, Crowley's book, he gives, he's big on correspondences. His book on correspondences is – I have also. But you don't actually need to know, you know, use twenty or thirty different factors. Find the ones that make sense to you. For me, the numerological stuff, you know, the ones all mean beginnings and things, the twos all mean balancing different parts of the question, the threes mean synthesis, breaking through out of a period of decision making, you know, and all that stuff. And each, and the suits, the associations of the suits. I use the very conventional ones. And yeah, and the major arcana of course, being the most important factors in the person's life, sort of the purposes and deep meanings and the gods acting in your life or however it comes to me. So that's pretty much – everybody develops their own set of

associations in the cards of course, and that's important because they are not a scientific tool, they are an intuitive tool, so the whole point is to find a way that you fine-tune your own intuitive response to whatever the cards are telling you. (I.48)

KARI: So can you walk me through sort of the different services you offer?

SHANNON: Mm hm. Sure. Okay, so I have my mediumship. Which is, which I like to call, I call that soul connecting because I'm connecting with another soul. And so what that entails is just someone coming to me, and then I have like a – I'll have a white candle lit because they're [the spirits] attracted to light. I'll have different crystals around depending on what crystals I intuitively picked beforehand because I'll invite them, and I'll ask them, okay, I know your loved one's coming here today. What do you think we should be dealing with? Should we be dealing with love? Should we be dealing with this or that? You know, then I'll pick crystals. I also have card decks that I'll bring out because sometimes I'll do a card reading after to kind of give them extra comfort or messages through the cards as well because sometimes the spirits like to do that. I have, and I make sure that I sage everything to protect, and I call on Archangel Michael to come and protect us because we don't want any – you know, we just want to be focusing on the good, and we don't want any waywards coming on their coattails, and then we have another issue to deal with. So yes, so then I light and do all that and then have the music playing in the background and they come in.

It takes me a few seconds to connect, and then I start asking them questions. And I ask them to let me know, to clarify what is making sense or not. You know, like, numbers will come up, and I'll say, does the number four mean anything to you? It could be the month that they died, it could be anything. And a lot of times their name will come up but it will be a first, middle, or, like I never know if it's their first, middle, or last name so I'll just come right out...And then they'll go, "okay, yeah."

And, so then we go from there, and sometimes, there've been a few times where they haven't given me a name, but if they know by their mannerisms or what they're saying, and then, yeah, that lasts about, well it's lasted anywhere – I like to block off an hour of time because that's usually long enough. But I find that when I'm dealing with children that have crossed over, like it's been a three-hour session because there's so much healing that needs to take place between the parent and the child. So I just go until the child's like, "okay, enough of this. I'm good, everything's all good." Right, because they don't – I don't ever rush it. I don't have like my little timer there going, okay, it's been an hour,

speed it up spirit, let's just keep going. Ten minutes and counting; we're on a timeline here.

Yeah, so yeah, most of them usually last an hour, you know. And then I give them their paper, all the stuff that I wrote down and everything and they go, and there's usually been crying. And sometimes I'll get emotional and all that too, but it's not mine. I learned to recognise that it's not my grief, that it's the person who crossed over. It's either in relation to how they felt when they died or the person who's there. Sometimes I'll feel pains, you know, like in my throat, or I'll get headaches, or I'll get pains in my chest. Different things like that. It will be in relation to how they died. Which is also a good sign for the person to go, oh yeah, I know who that is then. Right, so it's more identification, sometimes.

KARI: And when would you bring in the cards?

SHANNON: Whenever I'm intuitively led. Usually it's at the end, when we've gone through it, and they've asked some questions and like, I'm feeling that it's winding down and then they'll go, but oh there's a message in the cards for you, so then I'll get the cards out, and I'll shuffle them, and everything and whatever ones fall out...And they're just more, like a validation because sometimes it's, the cards will say, like, I'm still with you, I'm not dead, or I'm always beside you or it's not your fault. You know, different things like that that were totally in relation to the reading. It's just like, yeah okay, you know what, you need to believe this. This is so important. If there is nothing else that you take home with you, this is what they want you to know.

So, and I've also done readings. I can do readings on the phone as well because energy isn't limited by that. So I can give them the same kind of – so yeah, it doesn't change. But sometimes the phone readings are more, they're more lighthearted, I suppose, they come through, there's more humour involved. (I.49)

The diagram illustrates the concept of vibrational energy levels, showing a progression from low vibrations at the bottom to high vibrations at the top. The levels are labeled A through H, with corresponding entities or states associated with each level.

- Level F:** Archangels
- Level E:** angels
- Level D:** spirit guides
- Level C:** power animals
- Level B:** ghosts
- Level A:** low vibrations
- Level G:** fear, sadness, despair
- Level H:** (represented by a large, dark, scribbled area)

Additional labels and descriptions include:

- Left side (vertical axis):** joy, gentleness, peace, high vibration (top); low vibrations (bottom).
- Right side (diagonal axis):** Archangels, angels, spirit guides, power animals, passed over.

K.T.: Literally the vibration.

KARI: Oh, okay, it's just –

K.T.: Yeah, and I'm sure that science will catch up and prove this at some point. So higher vibration, I go also, I'm a very kinesthetic person in this I work, so I go by how it makes my body feel as well, right.

[A] So, here's us on this plane, on our 3D world, let's put it like this. So this is where we exist, and we have to vibrate on this dimension where we exist, and you know from physics that everything is vibration, right, we know that already. So we exist in this world and our bodies are here.

[B] And just around us, as you probably know, we have our energy field, our personal energy field, and that's where, that includes our different chakras, right, in our bodies which are related to different emotions and things we do. So we have that, and so we exist and go about our daily lives, our emotions and things are kind of in here and, like I said, if we're angry or if we injure ourselves we get energy stuck in different places in our body, too, so we can see that.

[C] Now, if I turn on my little spider senses and I'm looking at you I will start seeing things that include – now your passed-over folks are on one of the lower vibrations, and I think that's because they used to be people, right, and those aren't scary as soon as you realise that you talk to people every day, and they're just people that used to be people, right, so people are people. Some are creepy, some are nice, some are mean, they're all the same. Generally, and I won't go into this too much, but generally people's personalities stay the same because when they're coming through they have a message for you because they want you to recognise who they were, right, but they tend to evolve as well, as they're there, right, so they have a slightly higher vibration, let's argue. So, folks who have passed are kind of here, let's say – I'm a visual person. So let's say their vibrations are there, so they're slightly higher than so because they're transitioned, right; they don't have a body so, and anything that brings you into the corporal, the body, is going to be lower, right, because it has to exist here on this vibration. But as soon as you don't have a body, you go up a little higher. So those folk are right there, let's say.

[D] And I would also say your power animals are kind of about here because animals have a – I don't want to say they have a slightly lower vibration, but they're a little more connected with us in the corporeal somehow. Then, so we'll just say power animals down here. And again, this isn't an exact science, but – and those are the folks who passed over. And the reason I knew these folks were different, too, was their vibration was different; I could tell they weren't guides. And so once they were telling me who they were along with what I could feel I realised, oh, these are different things.

[E] So your spirit guides, who some people think were people who used to live on the earth but transitioned and took on this role, they're a little higher, they're up here. And for me sometimes I think they were, but sometimes I don't think they were – so I'll call these your spirit guides. But they are your main folks; these are with you all the time. Their job

is to tell you what you're doing here, to point out things if you can quiet your mind down enough to perceive that, and I think that's where most of the divination comes from, right. My perspective, they're the ones who are having cards show up a certain way, right, because they're pointing in different directions; they want to show you the way. Then you have, up here, and again it's a different vibration.

[F] The thing I forgot to mention about my background is I was the result of a teenage pregnancy where my mother was part of a very religious family which kicked her out, like kicked her out of town basically. She was thrown out of her [home], so my parents, I don't know if they were very religious to begin with, my mother might have been, actually. I haven't talked to her much about it because for many years there was so much bitterness about it, right. So, I had no use for religion. Also, I would go to church with my Grandma, super fundamentalist. And it was overwhelming. Also I was told that I was a bad sinner, I was going to hell. So that doesn't help either, especially when you're a small child. So I really didn't want to have anything to do with angels because they were associated with religion. So when I started feeling angels I was like, I wonder what that is. They have almost a more pure energy. And I actually don't think you can do this work unless you can feel all the different vibrational aspects. So let's say they're up here. So there's angels and then there's archangels, which have higher vibration. And again, you'll read some stuff that agrees with me or maybe doesn't agree with me. [...] So, these things, I mean, here you can feel gender, obviously. They'll come through with gender. These don't have a gender at all. They exist on a realm – like you can give them names like Archangel Michael, but it's just a label. And that goes for all these things except for maybe those passed-over folks might be a tad more attached to their name. [...]

[G] KARI: So is this where the ghosts fear they're going to go? Is that?

K.T.: Well, and you know what. It's so weird, actually, as I was saying that. I actually don't, the ghost situation is a little ironic because I think they're basically living hell. Because their fear is the cut off from love, but what are they really doing to themselves? Because this is all universal, when you get up here, this is all unconditional love, and that's the craziest thing about this work. Once you get a blast, sometimes I even get it from people's deceased folks, I get a huge emotional download and I'm like, "oh my god, I wish you could feel this." Because this, when you get up here [pointing on drawing] with the archangel, this is like, I almost view it as, I'm not a scientist so I don't know what the highest level of light is, but let's say you have the hottest, like nuclear, thermal nuclear infrared, whatever the hottest kind of heat is, it's unconditional love. So it has all the powers of love, but it can also burn away negativity, sadness, all the low vibrations because it burns so hot and strong. Not in a bad, but in a really good way, right. So everything is amazing. So, maybe the concept of nirvana where it's like nothingness, right, but in a good way, nothingness because it's all love, it's all good, or it's all neutral or whatever stage you get to at that point. So I think they're actually just creating their own hell. They're perpetuating some weird thought pattern that was instilled in them when they were alive, so really they're fearing what's going to happen up here because

they don't know, because they can't, because they're so afraid. So really, their own fear is trapping them.

[H] So, but this [the 'don't go here' label], I thought, you know I don't really know that there's a bunch of levels down here because I don't think there's hell. There's definite, in my way of thinking about this world, there's definitely dark creatures that thrive, but again they're just low vibrational. This is how they know how to survive, but I don't, there's a million levels down here. Maybe you could, whatever, conjure those up into being, but yeah, it's just, so I'm going to, this, this even as a joke indicates that there's some power there, right, but I think it's honestly, it's just more like – and if you want to google the, I forget what it's called, if you want to put emotional vibration scale, or something like that, you'll see on that, that up here is joy, love, peace, whatever. And again, it's kind of stereotypical because it is stereotypical, right, we know this as humans, we just know this instinctively. No one has to explain this to us, even a tiny child will know this, right, so the lowest ones really are fear, sadness, despair, so then there's everything in between here. Right, so, and you were asking me something about, I can't remember something about – maybe not, I can't remember. (I.28)

Appendix D: Michelle's Affirmations of Tarot

I stopped reading because I had a bit of a wrestling with it... So I got my degrees. I then said, "oh, I'm going to go to Vancouver and learn computers." Because that was that thing that I couldn't do. So when I went there I was living with two ladies, good friends of mine, the Goldsmiths. And they worked for the Catholic Church there, that's how I managed to find a place to live because I just contacted the local church and said, "whoever had a room, I'd go." And at the time I was telling them, you know, "I do this tarot thing," and they were like – and I said, "but how do you feel about that?" She goes, "I feel that people" – Margarete said to me some lovely advice; she said, "I feel that people are given gifts by God, and there's a purpose and a reason for why you're doing what you're doing and why they read your cards and what they represent to you. And if it comes from a good, pure intention, that's what it is." Lovely advice. I thought, okay, but I still wrestled with that a little bit because I couldn't have got, not that I'm scared of the tarot or the idea of it. At the time it was more about I felt so into it and so involved in it. As soon as it became something it was set apart to me. If that makes sense. It was like, an inner child, and there it is. And I thought, hmm, that's how I relate to it now...

But it took about, what was it now, Wyatt's eight, seven. My nephew's seven or eight and my sister... she was in a serious accident. So she had an accident when she was pregnant, and it was terrible. She was hit by a drunk driver, a head on collision. And she was pregnant with Wyatt. And when he was born, he had all these complications; he kept going in and out; they kept thinking they were going to lose him. His heart stopped three times. And they had given medication... to kind of keep him alive. And it was just, it was too early, she couldn't deliver. It was just kind of very stressful; it was horrible. And at that time I remember going to Vancouver, this is when it happened, I was in Vancouver – and thinking to myself. I sat there, but I still did my tarot, but I wasn't active in it, like reading for people, doing too much. And I remember sitting there saying to myself, I'm just going to send him energy. And not knowing what I know now about energy and light and that kind of power and strength... I thought, I'm just going to do that. So, of course, when I did that I became incredibly exhausted and tired and drawn and worn out. But I promised. I said, "God, I will do anything to help people if you'd just save Wyatt." Because nobody had ever died or passed in my family; it just hadn't happened. And I came back from there and this... And I was so sick for probably, oh my gosh, it must be six months. Exhausted. I thought I'm at death's door, and I slowly started to get a little better. And then I started to get my energy back. It's still some issue.

And then we were living in a house, because we were renovating our own – I have a 1926 old house... it's beautiful. It's like Edwardian. You go in, it's like turnkey. It's exactly how it, how it was. The front room, everything is lovely. It's got the hardwood, the high ceiling, the antiques, the vintage fronts, the bonnet on the fireplaces, copper. It has like, at that time the Olympics were a big deal so there's Olympiad imagery everywhere. And the gentleman that built Rutherford house, one of the archi – not the architects but the finishers, he's the man that lived in the house, so it's lovely. Anyway, so that said, we

were out of the house while they were lifting it. We decided to do a massive renovation of the house...the basement, a new addition, to make it more modern. But this lovely front room we kept intact. And I was, we were renting the house to do that because I was working on all the carpentry. I did carpentry for seven years on the house. And all my hands were just a complete mess, they were like a man's hands, it was horrible. And it's weird because I always look back and say, well Jesus was a carpenter. And one of the reasons I think for that was it's a very methodical process because you have to be careful. Because when you use tools, and I used a lot of hand tools because I'm scared of power ones. When you do fine finishing or any kind of work, you must be concentrating, but you could hurt yourself. So it's this funny balance where you have to be careful yet you're creating something beautiful.

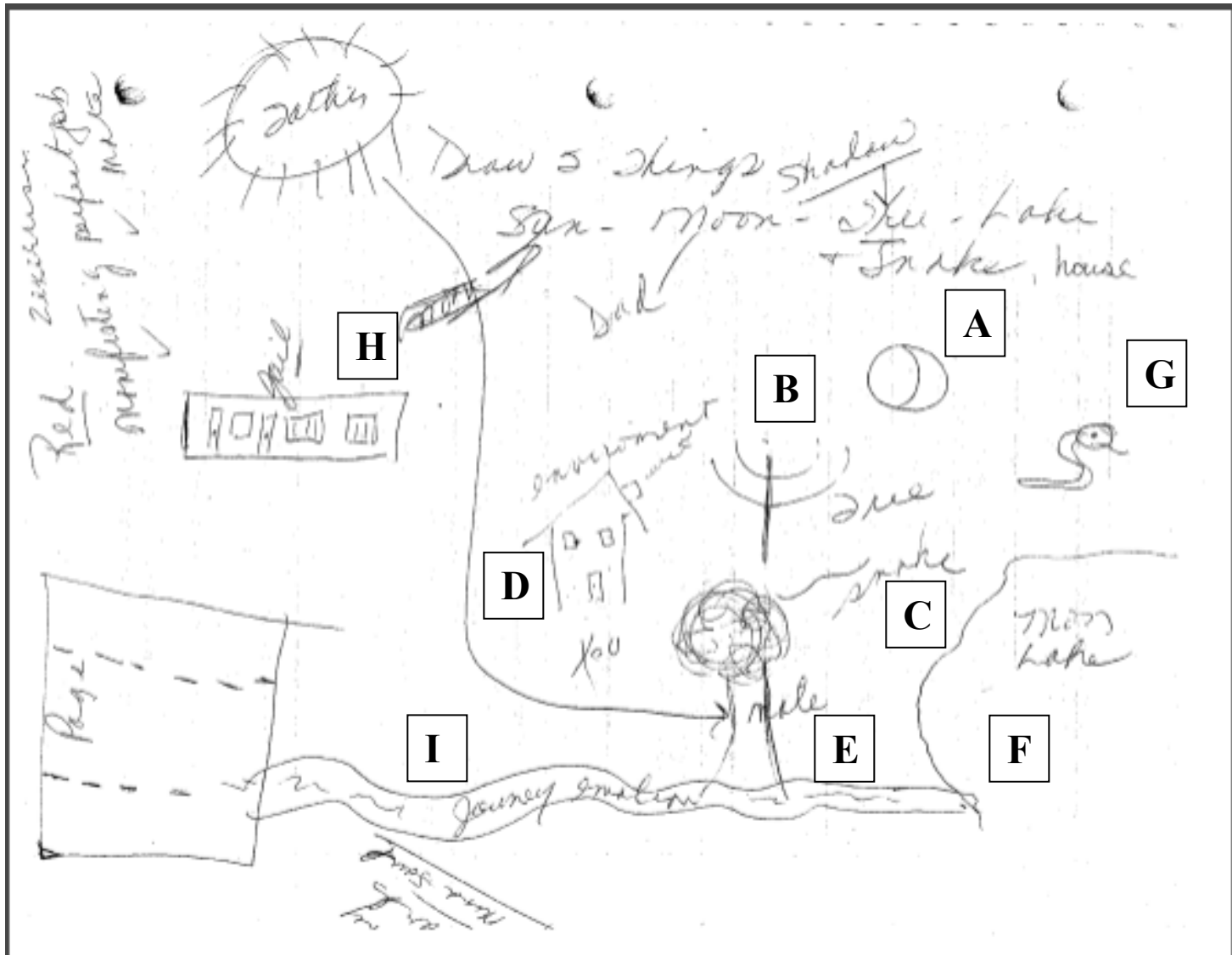
So, I was in the house, and I had the weirdest thing come up to me...because I had worked on the house that day, my husband had come home from work, the kids were there, and it was crazy, I was like putting stuff on the table and then I heard this sound. And it's the weirdest thing that ever happened to me probably since my grandmother, it was like [makes static sound] static. And I thought, I wonder what that is? I know my Vitamin D's low but something's going on. I'm having an attack here. Something's happening. And I'm just standing there, and I heard this white noise, that's how it started off. And then I heard this voice. And it was my dad's voice, and then it wasn't my father's. It's weird. It was my dad's voice, but yet I didn't know the voice, but I equated it with my father. It said, "are you not grateful for everything that I've given you?" And I went, and it slammed me, like right in the heart chakra, just smashed me, this feeling. And I went, and I said, and right away I said, "yes, yes I am grateful." Because I responded [laughs] because that's just what I do because I'm weird.

So I responded to it, and then it was like all of a sudden, it was like wheels turning; I saw images in my head spinning, spinning, spinning. And it was scenes of people I went to school with, people I'd passed in the street that morning, mom when I was little, something I had done, a gift I had gotten at Christmas. It was like this crazy kaleidoscope of images that were just popping up in my head. I thought, oh my God, I'm having a seizure. That's all I could think outside myself. I'm like, I'm having a seizure. I was so caught up in it. And then, it just, as soon as it happened it just went high, high, high up in my head and then was just passed. And I'm like [gasps] it was like an epiphany or something, and I went, "I've got to call my mom."

And so I called my mother because, and [her husband] was like, "are you okay?" Because he must have heard me doing, grabbing the phone. I grabbed the phone. And I just, I didn't respond. I picked up the phone and I called and I said, "mom, mom I've got to tell you what just happened to me." She said, "what is it?" I said, "mom, I can't speak." She said, "what's going on?" I was crying uncontrollably. Yet, I couldn't stop myself from crying. It was like tears were pouring out of my eyes, out of not, you know how you cry out the sides of my eyes, coming down. And I was like, I could feel a tightness that I couldn't even speak. I said, "mom, I can't speak," in a whisper, what just happened to me. She said, "do you know what today is?" And I said, "what is it?" She said, "it's Wyatt's

birthday.” And I’m like, “oh, really.” So to the day I made a promise, had I done anything. Okay, worked on the house. Had I done anything with my deck, no. Had I helped anybody, had I healed anybody going forward? No. So that was my wakeup call. So I started slowly doing it. (I.41; clarifications provided by email on May 18, 2017)

Appendix E: Drawing Exercise



Irene's explanation of the drawing exercise (I.21):

IRENE: Okay. Okay, I tell them to draw five things. And the things are the sun, the moon, a tree, a lake, and a snake. Okay. Draw those things. It can be in any way you want. It can be in the form of a picture, it can be whatever.

KARI: Alright. [drawing]

IRENE: Oh, I forgot the house.

KARI: A house?

IRENE: Draw a house. [...] [pause while Kari draws]

KARI: I've got everything?

IRENE: Yep. Okay. So, the sun represents your mom. The moon represents your dad. Your house represents your environment. Tricky one. And this is?

[A] KARI: That's the sun and the moon.

IRENE: That's the sun and the moon.

KARI: And the moon.

[B] IRENE: Okay, so they're there. And what's this?

KARI: That's my tree.

IRENE: Okay, this is the tree. [C] And this is the snake?

KARI: Yep.

IRENE: Okay, what most people will do is they'll put this in picture form. They'll draw a nice lake and snake and the moon at the top and all the, right. So these people when they do that, they're very artistic. And so, a bit of a fairy-tale sometimes as well, too. Now, let's go this way.

[D] I'm going to start with the house. The house represents you. It's one of the biggest things in the picture, right. When you see there's no smoke coming out of the chimney [Irene draws in smoke], you don't have smoke. There's no doorknob on the house. It shows you're extremely private. You're very close to – you don't socialise a lot. You don't socialise. There's no path. So if there was, if I was in danger, and I was running down the street, I wouldn't go to your house because there's no path to it. And there's no, in this case, it wouldn't be too bad because you have a door. This means that you have the tendency to be very reclusive. You do need the windows to see out, what's going on in the world. But you are more reclusive than not. Right. Now, the house which is y-o-u.

[E] The tree represents your mate. I think there's something wrong with your mate. [both laugh]

This is what most people will draw [draws a tree]. You know, something like this?

KARI: Right.

IRENE: Okay. So, when you have a solid trunk on a tree it means you're seeing a solid man. Often this can represent someone like the father image. So when they have a bushy tree on it, it means they're usually very good looking, and they could be very tall as well. In this case he's unidentifiable. You have no image whatsoever what man you want to marry. [I am not interested in marriage.] So I would say, your tree is looking pretty sad. So, it means that there's all these gaps in it and there's not a lot of clarity. And that's where you are in your life, a little bit. You're not quite sure of certain things. Whether it's a relationship or what you want.

[F] Now the lake. I haven't done this for a while. Okay, the lake is your mom. Sorry about that. The lake is your mom. Should have put her over here, wherever I had her. The mother is usually the biggest thing in the picture. In this case she is here, the lake. There's no waves in the lake so it means you probably have a very good relationship with your mom. So there's no arguments around it. So she's there for you and very, very supportive. When you look at the snake, the snake is not in the lake, which is good. But the snakes are people who try to cheat you, or not to trust. So it's here between a male and a female, which can be your dad, for example. And your mom. So it shows that you were very trusting of people, and it's also telling you to be aware of the snake of the people who are not that trusting. But your parents are pretty nice people. Which is the next one here? Okay, the snake also represents your sex life. So where's your snake?

[C] KARI: There's my snake. [pointing on the page]

IRENE: There's your snake. You can see you don't have a very good sex life [I am asexual], it's kind of flat lined. The more curves in a snake, the more, the nicer the sex is. The better the sex is. [...]

[G] If you have a face on a snake – here's an eye. [Irene draws a snake] [...] So let's say, this is the snake. When the snake has an eye on it, it means it's not a curiosity, but you didn't do nothing. When it has a tongue, it means it likes to talk. So you must be talked out with me, right.

[H] Now, I had somebody draw a house like this once. [Irene draws a house] And more windows. I looked at this and I said, you spend most of your life in prison. That's what it was, she spent her life in prison. So what I'm trying to get at, everything can have a message. Even if you took elements like this and made cards, it has a message. So the first thing you would look at, what do I think that means? Right. So I want you to think outside the box as much as you can and have fun with it. It blows you wide open.

[I] When you have a stream of water going like this, it can represent a journey of great emotion because water is emotion right. So it can be water's emotion. This is water. And here you're very grounded. So this is very interesting if you asked some of your friends. You'd be surprised what you pick up in a picture, right. Then it's, yes – so your mom is the lake, sorry to take this. The sun is usually your father. The sun is the father. I haven't done this for years. The more your sun's up, brightness of your father, the more that, the

nicer he is. Now if the father is near the tree, your mate, there are similarities between the man you'll marry. So it's interesting. So there could be a similarity to your mate. So that's why you sort of get to draw the five things across and see where it goes.

[A] KARI: So what's the moon?

IRENE: The moon represents the shadow, and that shadow can be in all of us, and we can have a shadow. If the moon is touching the tree, the shadow could be coming from your boyfriend. If the shadow's coming from the lake, it could be something with your mom. So it represents the secret, silent side of ourselves. But otherwise, you can do anything with almost anything.

Donna's explanation of the writing exercise (I.13):

So I take an 8x8, x10, piece of white paper and I split it, divide it into three sections, open it up, and I have them draw me a scene. And in the scene they put a snake and a bird. And while they're doing that, and they almost all tell me that they can't draw and, oh, this is, like, you know, they haven't drawn, coloured since they were six or something like that. And I said, yeah, well, let's pretend you're six again and just draw whatever, use whatever crayons you want. And it's crayons they use. And so they go ahead and they make their scenes and while they're doing that, I can kind of, they relax. I feel them relax. I feel them kind of open, and I went, ah, here we go. [...]

KARI: You had mentioned that when you had them do the picture that you have them put a snake and a bird in.

DONNA: Right.

KARI: So why do you do that?

DONNA: So the snake and the bird, they have two meanings for me. And it actually just helps them focus because now they're thinking "snake" and "bird". So the other stuff they're drawing in the picture, they're no longer paying attention to. So I pick up a lot of other things from other things they draw, okay? It's a little bit of a psycho thing, psychoanalysis. So the bird represents their soul. So how do they draw themselves? Do they draw themselves on the ground, in a tree, flying, with a group of birds? An owl, a robin, what kind of bird do they draw? So the bird represents how they feel about themselves. The snake is sexuality. So, it reveals a lot of how creative they are, how they feel about themselves, self-esteem wise, how are they connected? Some people will draw this big-ass snake you know with, like, eyelashes and the whole bit. And they're making it really flamboyant. And you just know right away this is a very outgoing person. Somebody who is very comfortable with themselves and, you know, takes on the world,

they're all good. And then others you'll get, barely see the darned snake, they've curled it up so tightly.

Also where they place it on the page. If they put it – because I've divided the page in three partitions, the first part of the page is the past, the middle part is the present, and the last part of the page is the future, so I could see where they've drawn themselves, you know. Sometimes if they draw a big solid tree-trunk, often trees represent families, so the bigger the trunk the more solid the trunk, the more solid that relationship is, the more solid that foundation is, okay. Sometimes the sun represents the father to me. But sometimes what they do is they'll colour the sun but maybe they'll leave a big hole in it; they won't colour it all. So to me that means okay, you have a gap in your relationship with your father, you know.

And it's funny, it's just all in a picture, and you're just like, bang, bang, bang, just nailing it. A lot of that is intuitive, too, though. You look at it and you just, I just get a sense. I said – and a bit of mediumship because I'll say to them, “tell me what this picture means, show me what this means, like give me the” – and the colours they use, all sorts of things have a lot to do with, I guess you're kind of looking at their personality. It's almost like a personality perspective, and how they grew up, and how they view their life. Some people are so literal; they will draw you a bird, and they will draw you a snake and nothing more. And you know okay, you're dealing with somebody who takes what you say, that's how it is. Black and white. And other times you'll get some people that, my God, there's not an inch of a page that's not coloured, and they've had like three minutes. Because they all get about the same time. Two, three minutes, that's it. Enough time to draw; they get going, I get my tape kind of ready, and I start writing stuff. And about three minutes and I'll look up and I'll just say, “finish your thought with what you're going to do there and we're going to start,” because then some people get all panicked [mimics frantically finishing a drawing] they're like, “oh my God, I never finished,” and others are like, “good, I'm done.” You know, they drew their two things and, okay, I'm finished. So it's really interesting to see how they handle the picture but it disarms them and that's what I want. I want to get them off that anxiety. [...] And so they're not expecting that, that kind of throws them off a little bit, which is good for me because then, now, it's kind of like I've got that guard, that armour off so I can, let's see what's really going on with you, okay. And that's what I do in my readings, and I think I got way off track from what your questions was. I can't even remember what it was.

KARI: Nope, it was about the bird and the snake.

DONNA: Okay, bird and snake, yeah.

KARI: So those are the two constants in all of the pictures.

DONNA: Always. Yeah, I always use those. And if a person comes back to me for a repeat reading I won't do the picture, right, because obviously I've gotten that information. And, I mean, I kind of don't remember anything about that person because

the notes I take I give to them. I'll remember them somewhat; I might know that their mother passed. I might remember who passed for them. Which helps sometimes because then you don't have to waste time trying to figure out, well, who's passed. Now you just focus on who they have a message again, or somebody else here, right, because sometimes that spirit doesn't really come back; it's somebody else now. When I get repeat clients they come in and we chit chat and then we just start. I'm like, okay, let's go. By now they're relaxed; they know me; they feel safe. And that's the biggest thing. The first time they come they don't know me, they don't know what's going to happen so they're a little anxious, so doing that calms them down and now, the next time they come back it's not needed because they're good.