DISCUSSION

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A POSSIBLE PATH TOWARD THE RE-POLITICALIZATION OF FOLKLORE

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Abstract
This article discusses the issues raised by James M. Robertson in his review of Joseph Grim Feinberg's The Paradox of Authenticity: Folklore Performance in Post-Communist Slovakia*, which appeared in* Contradictions *(2019, no. 2). Focusing on the nature and form of a re-politicized folklore, the article argues that to make full sense of the question of authenticity in a modern folkloric movement, authenticity must be seen against the broader backdrop of the alienation inherent to consumer capitalist society. Folklore, it concludes, can become re-politicized by emphasizing people's participation in art as part of a broader countercultural movement that challenges the consumerist paradigm.*
Keywords
Slovak authentic folklore movement, authenticity, radical monopoly, participatory art, anti-politics, praxis, counter-finality

In his review[1] of Joseph Grim Feinberg's *The Paradox of Authenticity: Folklore Performance in Post-Communist Slovakia*,[2] James M. Robertson questions Feinberg's call at the end of the book for a "radical," re-politicized folklore that would draw on folklore's tradition of, to quote Feinberg, "playfully pushing against existing hierarchies from the

position of what is ‘low’ and excluded from the prestigious centers of culture and art.”[3] Robertson, questioning whether we can rightfully consider the enjoyment of folklore to be a means to a political end, asks whether it shouldn’t instead be considered an end in itself. Otherwise, he argues, we might only replace enjoyment with political utility, further empowering the reactionary forces – masquerading as the guardians of “apolitical” enjoyment – as they launch attack after attack on “political correctness.”[4]

In this essay I will argue that this dichotomy between their positions is largely illusory, because the subversive potential of a re-politicized folklore lies first and foremost in its realization as an end in itself – in this case, as a participatory art form. Moreover, I shall contend that its political application will come about in making this end in itself a universal value and common social practice. I will additionally argue that such a trajectory is inherent to Feinberg’s book, as it would be the ultimate realization of some of the goals of the Slovak authentic folklore movement that serve as the book’s focus. Such a radical folklore takes on a politically anti-political trajectory because, in the very act of trying to be an end in itself, it challenges the hegemony of consumerism in contemporary capitalist society. Indeed, if it and other such movements do not succeed in challenging this hegemony and the system that produces it, “authentic folklore” may have to settle for being little more than a hobby sustained by a few enthusiasts.

I

The authentic folklore movement emerged in post-communist Slovakia with the goal of “returning folklore to the people” by determinedly seeking out and studying authentic, traditional dances as they were actually performed in the course of village life, while eschewing the highly stylized, choreographed folklore ensemble performances typical of the Communist years. The “dance houses” that Feinberg details in the book are places where this abstract theorizing and archiving comes to practical fruition, providing a place where these dances can both be taught to newcomers and performed by experienced dancers without any direct thought being given to their being performed on a stage and to an audience. In other words, something like these dances were originally performed when they were the music and dance of the folk, when they were “authentic.”

Here is where the titular “paradox of authenticity” comes about, and where we start to realize how this represents both a problem and a potential solution to re-politicizing folklore. For the members of this movement know full well that no matter how faithfully

[1] James M. Robertson, “Review: The Paradox of Authenticity: Folklore Performance in Post-Communist Slovakia by Joseph Grim Feinberg,” *Contradictions: A Journal for Critical Thought* 3 (2019), no. 2, pp. 261–265.

[2] Joseph Grim Feinberg, *The Paradox of Authenticity: Folklore Performance in Post-Communist Slovakia* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2018).

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

[4] Robertson, “Review,” p. 264.

they might reproduce the dance and music of the "folk," as inhabitants of modernity, usually living in cities, they can never achieve the authenticity that they are striving for. Or at least can never achieve this model of authenticity, one in which, as Robertson describes it, authentic folklore "exists as an object of a premodern epoch whose essence can only be briefly glimpsed by modern devotees."[5]

However, against this model of authenticity, Feinberg raises the possibility of an authenticity that is a process of self-realization, in which the existential condition that arises from the real contradictions of modernity is addressed by consciousness creating its own essence. To illustrate this, Feinberg uses Jean-Paul Sartre's famous description of the waiter who is so perfectly acting out the role of a waiter that it soon becomes evident that he is *playing* at being what others expect of him. The waiter, in Sartre's words, is obliged to play "with his condition in order to *realize* it;" this obligation, Sartre adds, is no different "from that which is imposed on all tradesmen. Their condition is wholly one of ceremony. The public demands of them that they realize it as a ceremony; there is the dance of the grocer, of the tailor, of the auctioneer, by which they endeavor to persuade their clientele that they are nothing but a grocer, an auctioneer, a tailor."[6]

Nonetheless, Sartre's waiter need not internalize this demand. He can escape from his inauthentic mode by critically reflecting on his situation and becoming aware of his ability to be something other than what his condition demands of him. And it is this alternative, which Feinberg refers to as a "reflective" type of authenticity, that is proposed as the key to both overcoming the folklore movement's paradox of authenticity and its political inertia. Feinberg writes:

> Authentic folklore was something that existed in a world apart, a premodern world that is always on the verge of disappearance, a world toward which modern beings hopelessly strive. Could authentic folklore become, instead, that which is created in the process of this striving? Might we modern beings give up on the belief that folklore is hidden somewhere else and come instead to the belief that folklore simply *is* this striving for the authentic in a world where the past, as past, is gone?[7]

So far, so good. But though Feinberg is clear enough about the limitations of folklore trying to realize itself by digging up recordings and transcriptions of a past, premodern epoch and trying to re-create these songs and dances in the modern, or post-modern, epoch, he is not so clear in discussing what a folklore "striving for the authentic" would look like. Instead, a compelling and enlightening discussion of Kantian self-transcendence follows, tracing Alessandro Ferrara's reflections on "reflective authenticity" from

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 263.

[6] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), p. 102. Discussed in Feinberg, pp. 190–191.

[7] Feinberg, *Paradox of Authenticity*, p. 197.

Kant and Hegel through Heidegger, to which Feinberg himself extends the discussion to Kierkegaard and Sartre, leading to the conclusion that "the search for authenticity could be understood as an attempt to recognize creativity in cultural expression that is excluded, in multiple ways, from the public sphere."[8]

This too, however, is more of a direction than a concrete strategy, and doesn't tell us what folklorists can specifically *do*, and what it is they are specifically *pushing against*, to make themselves authentic in this sense. Curiously, not even the one concrete action that the Slovak folklorists have undertaken toward such a realization of folklore (even though it is the book's main topic), the dance houses, is discussed with this in mind in the book's "concluding unscientific postscript."

It is into this ambiguous zone that Robertson, reasonably assuming Feinberg's "re-politicalization" means a more overt politicizing of the folklore movement, jumps. Though Robertson is certainly sympathetic to Feinberg's argument that it is important we not allow folklore to re-politicize in the context of the new national conservatism, he raises objections to Feinberg's argument advocating, as he puts it, "a folklore oriented towards progressive political transformation." He suggests that a "politically conscious folklore" that, for example, attempted to subvert traditional gender divisions in Slovak dance might trigger the reactionary cultural backlash mentioned above.[9]

But Robertson goes still further, arguing that the apolitical nature of the folklorists Feinberg describes, and the more generalized anti-political tide it represents, might not be so undesirable after all:

> In an era in which political systems have been hollowed out of their social content and European politicians struggle, in Peter Mair's words, over who will 'rule the void,' authentic folklore's understanding of politics as an inauthentic intrusion into the social has a particular resonance.[10]

There are, however, various indications that an overt politicalization of folklore is not, after all, what Feinberg is proposing – up to and including the fact that he persists in describing the issue in philosophical rather than overtly political language. Thus, he argues that while it might, in the Sartrean sense, be in bad faith for a modern subject to strive for premodern authenticity, it would also be inauthentic for them to simply

> renounce all claims to authenticity and accept modern conditions just as they are, because this would also mean allowing oneself to be fully determined by

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

[9] Robertson, "Review," p. 264.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 265.

> external conditions; it would mean willfully ignoring the fact that modern subjects are able to struggle with these conditions and, within them or beyond them, to become something else.[11]

And it is in light of this, perhaps, that we can see the significance (beyond that of ethnographic study) of his extensive recounting in the earlier portion of the book of the authentic folklore movement. This movement aims to "return" folklore to the present-day spectators of folklore performance "through a dual project, which (1) performs folklore authentically for them, so that they might learn about what had been taken away from them; and (2) encourages them to enact this authentic folklore themselves at participatory events like dance houses."[12]

This is significant because, while authentic folklore might be, even on its own terms, an inauthentic striving after authenticity, it is an inauthentic striving that also challenges society's norms with the aim, at least on a very limited scale, of changing them. And it is there, I believe, that we might find the basis for the "re-politicalization" of folklore.

II

But first we need to address the question of what it is, specifically, that folklorism is to push playfully against. What it is, that is to say, that might create such a strong sense of inauthenticity that it would spur folklorists to overcome their paradox of authenticity and re-politicize folklore.

In Feinberg's text – focused as it is on issues such as folklore versus folklorism, authenticity versus inauthenticity, participation versus performance, and the concept of "the folk" versus that of "the public" – the backdrop of the "inadequacies of life today" is alluded to but never fully described. We learn, for instance, that the authentic folklore movement springs from "the experience of dissatisfaction with modern life and the struggle to make this life meaningful" and attempts to "to conceptualize a folk that exists in an authentic world set apart from inauthentic modernity,"[13] but no details are provided either on (1) how the folk arts were pushed to the fringes of society in the first place, or (2) what it is about modern life that makes it inauthentic with regard to folk music and dance.

Regarding the first point, for the purposes of comparison it is important to note the ubiquitous and participatory nature of music, dance, storytelling, and crafts in pre-industrial life. This was a time when, in the words of Karel Teige, the prominent theorist of the Czech avant-garde, "the peasant was the creator and bearer of folk art."

[11] Feinberg, *Paradox of Authenticity*, p. 193.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 76

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 177 and 132.

Writing in his 1938 essay on the position of art in capitalist society, *Jarmark umění* (The marketplace of art), he adds that a "century of capitalist industrialism" had gradually brought about "the wholesale *demise of folk art*" in industrialized countries. Thus, there was no longer "a locality far enough out of the way to allow the old folk art to live a full and invigorated life and not be under pressure from color printed fabrics and factory finished imports coming from the cities." It then follows that a worker (who, after all, might work in one of the very factories that manufacture these products) will fare no better in this regard than a peasant, and indeed the proletariat makes up

> a popular stratum that doesn't produce and cannot create original and refined folk art. The social and cultural relationships under capitalism – in the class monopoly on education and the specialization of artistic production – exclude the possibility of any sort of folk or amateur artistic creativity.[14]

To Teige's brief summary I will add that the spread of pre-recorded media in the form of phonograph records after World War II, as well as of broadcast media in the form of radio and television, meant that not just folk art but also the folk music and dance of the villages came under pressure from the imports coming in from cities. This pressure was only heightened by an increasing emphasis on consumer products under post-Stalinist communism[15] that culminated in the full blown consumerism that arrived in the wake of 1989.

Regarding the second point – what it is about modern life that makes it inauthentic in this regard – we might turn to the Croatian-Austrian writer Ivan Illich for his description of the "radical monopoly," which is when "any industry [...] becomes the dominant means of satisfying needs that formally occasioned a personal response."[16] The term "industry" here is key, as this is a monopoly that

> goes deeper than that of any one corporation or any one government. It can take many forms. When cities are built around vehicles, they devalue human feet; when

[14] Karel Teige, *Jarmark umění* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1964 [1938]), p. 44. From my translation of the work, which will be published later this year as *The Marketplace of Art* by RABRAB Press in Helsinki, Sezgin Boynik and Joseph Grim Feinberg, editors.

[15] According to Lubomír Sochor, under the "real socialism" of Czechosloviakia in the 1970s and 80s, a "[l]iturgical Marxism-Leninism based on the use of rites and public ceremonies is united with the values of an American-style consumer society in people's private lives." Lubomír Sochor, "'Real Socialism:' Ideology Turned toward the Past," *Contradictions: A Journal for Critical Thought* 3 (2019), no. 2, p. 227. This was somewhat mitigated in the case of folklore because, as Feinberg points out, the Communist state's approach to it, though focused on the performance spectacle, also aimed to involve large numbers of people in the performance process. Feinberg, *Paradox of Authenticity*, p. 41.

[16] Ivan Illich, *Energy and Equity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 45.

> schools pre-empt learning, they devalue the autodidact; when hospitals draft all those who are in critical condition, they impose on society a new form of dying. Ordinary monopolies corner the market; radical monopolies disable people from doing or making things on their own.[17]

Thus, just as the dominance of cars has reshaped the urban environment in such a way that it is now difficult for people in most cities and towns to ride a bike easily or safely, the recordings, films, videos, stage performances, and concert tours of the modern entertainment industry, all packaged and sold as consumer products, have reshaped the cultural environment so as to make it difficult for people to dance or make their own music.[18]

This means that even if a group of people decided that they were going to sing their own songs and dance their own dances – whether at work, at home, or on social occasions – they can't simply resume from where their great-grandparents living in a village might have left off seventy or more years ago. They would quickly find that, for the most part, they lack: (1) a common repertoire enabling them to sing and dance with one another; (2) socially and culturally facilitated occasions at which to do these things; (3) the custom or habit of doing them on the occasions that do present themselves; and 4) the basic skills of singing and dancing necessary to make it happen in the first place. Furthermore, even in contemporary Slovakia, where a tradition of folk music and dance remains relatively strong, the music and dances that people predominately, even overwhelmingly, listen to and see are the music and dance styles that are the cornerstones of the international recording and entertainment industry (for example, hip-hop, R&B, pop). However, these contemporary forms of popular culture do not lend themselves easily to a personal, participatory response; they were composed and choreographed in a world of recording studios and professional dancers with the intention of being listened to and watched, not participated in.[19]

In short, then, these authentic folklorists must not only work against the fact that the specific traditions that they promote are less and less a part of a common prac-

[17] And we can read here that "doing or making things on their own" – as with "a personal response" – has much in common with Feinberg's "authenticity." Ivan Illich, *Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), p. 42.

[18] This radical monopoly, however, is the culmination of a long, historical process of increasing specialization, and declining participation, in the arts. See my 1989 manuscript, G. S. Evans, "Art Alienated: An Essay on the Decline of Participatory-Art," which traces this phenomenon from the almost universal participation in music and dance characteristic of hunting and gathering societies to the almost universal non-participation in the age of consumer capitalism (online at tinyurl.com/h8w2zly [accessed Sept. 12, 2021]).

[19] For further discussion about these obstacles to making our own music and dance – these "barriers to entry" that the radical monopoly sets up – see the section "Aspects of Alienated Art" in Evans, *Art Alienated*, pp. 36–43.

tice, but also against the fact that contemporary common practice embraces no truly participatory forms of music or dance. Or, if such forms can be said to be a part of this practice, they are so simplified, requiring little or no skill (for example, the drunken singing of fans at a football match, or dancers doing little more than shifting their weight from side to side on the dance floor of a bar or disco), that they are of little help to the folklorists. Alternatively, they are of such an intensely *performative* nature (such as we see in popular TV competitions such as *World of Dance* or *So You Think You Can Dance*) as to be incompatible with the truly participatory.

III

We can see here the framework from which my argument is proceeding: the "existing hierarchies" that a 21st century folklore would playfully push back against are centered around the radical monopoly and the consumerist capitalism that gave birth to it. The question then becomes what might a politicalized, radical folklore – one which strives "for the authentic in a world where the past, as past, is gone" – look like in relation to the modest, localized, and apolitical resistance that Feinberg describes in the book.

Any answer to this will require a better understanding of what it is that inspires these acts of resistance in the name of "authenticity" in the first place.

Earlier I discussed how Feinberg had used the example of Sartre's waiter to facilitate our understanding of authenticity, and we will return to the waiter for the purpose of pointing out a key difference between him and the performers of authentic folklore. We might recall that the waiter plays with his condition "in order to *realize* it," and in this way is no different from other tradesmen who are obliged "to persuade their clientele that they are nothing but a grocer, an auctioneer, a tailor."

In the same way, we might superficially observe how folklore performers "play" with their roles in order to convince their audience that they are no different – at least for the duration of the performance – from the Slovak folk dancers such as one might have encountered in a village a hundred years ago.

But there is an important difference. It is safe to assume that the waiter wouldn't be playing that particular role in the first place if he didn't have to do it out of economic necessity. For example, to pay the rent.

This is not the case for folklore performers when they perform their roles. With few exceptions, this activity offers little or no financial reward, and so the participants are performers in these troupes out of choice, not economic necessity. In Sartre's terms, if they are playing with their condition in order to realize it, it is because, during the time of their performance, they truly *want* to be what the audience wants them to be – authentic performers of folklore.

There are, of course, various reasons why folklore performers might want to play these roles. For some it is primarily so they can dance and play music, for others it is so they can compete and perform in front of an audience, and for others, by Feinberg's account perhaps the largest number, it is so they can experience the camaraderie,

the "folkloristic life," and the "collective" of the folklore ensemble.[20] But, whatever the reason, it is certain that music and dance serve as catalysts and unifying elements for folklore ensembles and for the rich life that follows from it. Folklore participants are not, after all, simply collecting recordings and transcripts of folk performances and getting together to compare notes, something which would lead to a very different collective life. Rather, they actually sing and dance themselves, and have thereby managed to liberate themselves from the alienation of commodity culture, regaining their ability to fulfill their expressive needs. And it is this that helps to fuel their particular energy and dynamism, both when performing together and when partying together.

The importance of singing and dancing for the members of the ensemble is further emphasized by the fact that, though these authentic folklorists strive (if in vain) for a premodern authenticity in the sphere of Slovak folk *music and dance*, they are *not* striving for premodern authenticity in the sphere of Slovak folk *life*. In this sense, the post-1989 de-ideologicalization of folklorism within which Feinberg situates his book[21] serves them well: it serves to emphasize that they are not, by their own description, part of some romantic, back-to-the-village movement, advocating a return to an agrarian lifestyle or to "traditional" values. As Maňa Svoreňová, artistic director of Folklore Ensemble Hornád, put it:

> Folklore is not what you think it is. It isn't the romanticism that people associate with it. It isn't lyricism, those scenes of beautiful life that Lúčnica [the prominent semiprofessional ensemble] performs. People's lives were hard and rough. Folklore let them lighten this hard, heavy life.[22]

The traditions of the folk, she adds, were expressions of a difficult life to which we should not return, but their moments of beauty are something we can revive in response to the inadequacies of life today.

It is only, then, *certain* aspects of that life (in this case, singing, dancing, and playing music as a participatory act undertaken in a group context) that they are focused on continuing and reviving, indeed are *choosing* to focus on in their striving for cultural authenticity and against the inadequacies of contemporary life. And it is in the very specificity of this choice, and the fact that they have a keen interest in its participatory aspects, that we can see a key aspect of their progressive, post-capitalist potential in the political sphere.

Corollary to this is the fact that, as Feinberg points out, they choose to situate (even if unconsciously) their desire to participate in art *dialectically*. Thus, we might say that

[20] Feinberg, *Paradox of Authenticity*, pp. 108–111.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. xi.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

instead of authentic folklorists regarding folklore as merely representing their particular choice of a recreational activity to engage in, their "hobby" or "interest," with no more meaning, or lack of meaning, than activities such as bowling or ballroom dancing, they see it as being counter to the prevailing, consumerist version of modernity. Indeed, this might inspire some of their disdain for "inauthentic folklorism" – that is, the willingness of some folklorists to view their activities as simply a different choice in the smorgasbord of consumer activities on offer. A participant in the movement, then, considering modernity to be the very contradiction of folklore, would see their activity as carrying a far deeper meaning than that of a consumer choice. But how they further perceive, interpret and act on this sense of contradiction will determine the extent, if any, to which authentic folklorism might offer a progressive, transformative potential in the dialectical sense.

IV

Clearly, the authentic folklore movement in Slovakia has shown that a concrete praxis can follow from this sense of dialectical contradiction. The dance houses, despite their limited success, are one indication of this. Another is the degree to which the movement has transformed the Slovak folk dance world as a whole, shifting the emphasis from the choreographed, performative styles popular under Communism to a more traditional, participative style. And there can be no doubt that the movement has had success in creating moments of true participative authenticity that point not only to its capability of provisionally transcending the conditions of inauthenticity, but to its potential to play a real oppositional role with regard to the radical monopoly.[23]

But there is, of course, a considerable difference between small groups of people focusing on a highly localized resistance to a particular radical monopoly, and these same small groups taking the step of joining a broader resistance to radical monopolies in general. That is, becoming "re-politicized."

Feinberg addresses this problem from a dialectical point of view, suggesting that the authentic folklorists, having rejected the politicized folklore performances of the Communist years that embodied the "epic" dialectic of Hegel and Soviet Marxism, effectively embraced the "lyrical" dialectic of Kierkegaard. This lyrical dialectic, in which "participants can lyrically express their feelings toward authentic folklore without expecting grand historical forces to make them a part of authentic folkloric life" also has its tragic aspect, since "it accepts the inevitability of inauthentic life and yet continues

[23] See, e.g., Feinberg's description of a festival in Zvolen, in which, "every night, and for a good portion of every day, the festival attendees would party. All the ensembles were housed in the university dormitory. The common areas were perpetually occupied by ensemble members, and if a musician was among them, chances were that a song was being played and dancing was underway. By nightfall, the common areas were overflowing, and various groups of musicians, singers, and dancers formed throughout the halls and in the plaza in front of the dorm, wherever the noise from the other areas was quiet enough to allow another song to be heard," *Ibid.*, pp. 131–132.

to address this inauthenticity and continues to reach for some tentative experience of the authentic," thus unhappily resigning "itself to the long-term inaccessibility of authentic folkloric life."[24]

Neither seems to offer us a real path toward the re-politicalization of folklore. The former succeeded in "politicizing" folklore under the rigid ideology of state communism, but in a way that now carries such negative connotations that it would be of no help in re-politicizing folklore in the present day. The latter, the lyrical, is almost the quintessence of the apolitical, capable only of pointing "toward tentative resolution in exceptional moments."[25]

However, according to Feinberg there might be another way forward, latent in the sociality of "the folk":

> The idea that the folk is the collective creator of folklore strikes at the existentialist presupposition of separate beings who strive, separately, to transcend their isolation. The idea of the folk posits a notion of social existence. And in doing so it presents the problem of authenticity as a *social* problem. Within the framework of folklore, authenticity can be achieved or lost through the unfolding of society in history, not through the abstract development of individual beings or undifferentiated Being in undifferentiated Time.[26]

He then asks us, nearing the conclusion of the book and without providing any details, to "imagine a kind of folklore that is embedded in a *different* narrative of social change," one that doesn't pretend it can overcome all social tension like the epic dialectic, but that still "holds out the possibility of reconfiguring the social."[27]

And that is what I propose to attempt in these remaining paragraphs – to embed folklore within such a narrative. This is a task that might not be as formidable as it appears at the book's conclusion; I believe that Feinberg has overlooked a dialectical approach which might provide a bridge between the abstract development of individual beings inherent to the lyrical dialectic and the development of a progressive "folk" that achieves authenticity through the unfolding of society in the course of history. This would be the existential dialectic and social ontology of Sartre's late, neo-Marxist work, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, which in certain key regards can be seen, according to Frederic Jameson,[28] as a commentary on Marx's famous statement in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that "men make their own history, but not under condi-

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 198.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 198–199.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

[28] Frederic Jameson, forward to Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Verso, 2004), p. xxiii.

tions of their own choosing." It represents Sartre's attempt to situate the existentialist "presupposition" of the individual strivings of separate beings in the context of their (highly formative, and endlessly re-formative) social existence and, furthermore, to do so in such a manner that authenticity is ultimately achieved or lost, dialectically, in the unfolding of history – indeed, through the making of history and the transformation of society by social groups.

What makes this approach even more attractive in the context of Feinberg's book is that it allows us to continue our analysis of authenticity by way of the existential phenomenological approach that Feinberg utilizes (via Sartre) in describing the waiter and, to an extent, in his descriptions of the folklorists.

Just as we can say, then, that with the early Sartre the waiter achieves authenticity when he acknowledges his ability to be something other than what his condition demands of him, the authentic folklorists can achieve authenticity with the later Sartre when they acknowledge that the social field in which they are situated can be something other than what it is. Thus, on the positive side, authentic folklorists are being authentic *not only* by realizing their felt, personal need to dance, sing, and play music by learning and performing folklore, as the earlier Sartre might have allowed, but by also doing so in the social context of participatory folklore as a conscious act of rebellion against non-participatory consumer culture, that is, the radical monopoly. Further, by joining a group as a part of this rebellion (the authentic folklore *movement*, which can be seen in Sartre's terms as containing elements of the *group-in-fusion*), we can say that they have also taken a tentative first step toward a praxis that seeks, in terms beyond the immediately personal, to totalize and negate the givenness of the *practico-inert* (that is, to transform the "status-quo" of the material, social, and cultural field in which they act).

However, their bad faith, their inauthenticity, can be seen in the light of the later Sartre to consist in their failure to acknowledge to themselves the broader political implications of this radical act, in their ignoring of the fact that the high level of inauthenticity in the area of participatory music and dance that they have been resisting is matched by the level of inauthenticity in other realms of life dominated by radical monopolies. They are thereby not seeing the possibilities for alliances with other movements seeking authenticity against the radical monopolies of modernity, such as the Slow Food and Car-free movements, or in supporting a Universal Basic Income against the monolith of wage-slavery and full-time work.[29] And finally, they are not considering the fact that if they and others were to form such alliances, we might start to see something akin

[29] And whose associated concept of the "art of leisure" is a natural ally of those seeking to develop a new folklore in a world of economic surplus. For a useful summary of contemporary thinking in this area, see "The 'Future of Work' is important – but the 'Future of Leisure' is even more so," *The Alternative UK*, Mar. 22, 2018 (online at thealternative.org.uk/dailyalternative/2018/3/22/why-we-also-need-to-re-imagine-leisure [accessed Sept. 12, 2021]).

to the "counter-cultural" movement of the 1960s and 70s; namely, a serious attempt to de-totalize the ruling, consumerist paradigm.

Indeed, it can be argued in the framework of Sartre's concept of the dialectic that authentic folklorists must broaden and politicize their struggle for authenticity and, what is certainly far more difficult, succeed in changing society through their efforts. If they don't, they will not have the broader, participatory culture and framework, such as would have existed in a traditional Slovak village, to sustain their aspirations to folkloric authenticity into their middle and old age. They will, that is to say, fall into an all too familiar pattern: once they have stepped back from their immediate involvement in the highly defined and demanding world of Slovak folklore ensembles for reasons of work, family, and other "adult responsibilities," they will, over time, join the ranks of those who "once" danced and sang Slovak folklore.

On the level of praxis, this bleak but all too likely scenario would mean that the authentic folklorists, crushed by the sheer inertia or counter-finality of the practico-inert, will have used folklore merely as a momentary *escape* from modernity, a lyrical, youthful moment of resistance. Having failed to see authenticity as a social problem and then acting on it, they will thereby allow authentic folklore, in spite of their best intentions, to be *de facto* repackaged as just another harmless hobby or activity. And they themselves will likely only re-live, briefly and in a fragmentary fashion, their lyrical aspirations to authenticity at the occasional wedding party they happen to attend. In a worst-case scenario, all that will remain of their involvement in the folklore movement will consist of wistfully remembering their days in the movement as they watch the youthful contestants on the TV program *Zem spieva*, the Slovak folkdance version of *So You Think You Can Dance*, perform weekly on the Slovak television channel RTVS 1.[30]

[30] *Zem spieva* [The earth sings] is an extremely popular TV series in Slovakia, modeled, in Feinberg's words, "after shows like *American Idol* but dedicated entirely to folklore performance." Writing in the wake of the show's first season, in 2017, Feinberg adds that "[i]ts panel of expert judges was made up of leading authentic folklore advocates, and many of the people I knew during fieldwork would meet with success on the show, reaching a massive viewing audience" (Feinberg, *The Paradox of Authenticity*, p. 204, footnote 10). The series would seem to have all the hallmarks of becoming a particularly egregious example of what Sartre calls a *counter-finality*. This results from a situation in which the folklorists, aiming to create an authentic finality and perhaps even having some success in the endeavor, must then struggle to maintain their authenticity as their actions are in turn absorbed and totalized by the practico-inert, in this case in the form of the radical monopoly (in Sartre's words, "against [their] own action as it becomes other" (Sartre, *Critique*, p. 124)). In this case, the resultant *counter-finality* has plopped authentic folklore into a mass media format that is notable for its excessive hype and artifice – i.e., its *in-authenticity*. *Zem spieva* then potentially becomes an *anti-praxis* in which the public might well begin to see "authentic folklore" as little more than the premise of a slick, prime-time TV series. This, in turn, will force the authentic folklore movement to further transform its praxis to win back the finality it had previously won or face the prospect of being fully absorbed by the count-

On the level of theory, the authentic folklorists would thereby affirm Sartre's view, as summarized by Joseph Catalano, that "from a historical perspective, we can change our history only by changing our *being*, that is, only by changing our practico-inert field, from which the condition of the possibility of our praxes arises."[31] And Catalano adds here, consistent I think with Feinberg's assertion of a folklore that will reconfigure the social, that the "entire thrust of the *Critique* is that such change is possible," even if it will not be able to overcome all fundamental social tensions.

Whether such groups-in-fusion, acting together in a cultural and political resistance to the existing hierarchies, can contribute to the development of a progressive "folk" (or at least some meaningful version of it) in the sense that Feinberg means is a question that would require further exploration.

Nonetheless, I hope that I have at least sketched out here the utility of the later Sartre's existential dialectic and social ontology, not to mention Illich's concept of the radical monopoly, in addressing Robertson's objections to and elaborating on Feinberg's concept of the re-politicalization of folklore. And, perhaps, that I have additionally highlighted the importance of overcoming the consumerist paradigm – and the passivity and alienation that flow from it – if we are to fully regain our authenticity.

er-finality and thereby cease to be a force challenging the radical monopoly. For an interesting discussion on the question of counter-finalities, see Christopher Turner, "The Return of Stolen Praxis: Counter-Finality in Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*," *Sartre Studies International* 20 (2014), no. 1, pp. 36–44.

[31] Joseph S. Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume 1: Theory of Practical Ensembles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 152.