



Introduction: Narrative and Authenticity, otherwise

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The concept of authenticity has occupied theoretical thought recurrently and in various ways from Plato, who constituted a foundational moment in the attempt to consider it, until the modern times. A critical term pertaining not only to the essence of reality, but also to the ways it is possible to conceive it and act in and upon it, authenticity traverses, as well as defines, claims of legitimizing discourses relevant to most aspects of human experience. Indeed, authenticity is a concept that touches upon epistemology, cognition, ethics as well as aesthetics; to a certain extent, it is their covert or explicit theoretical presupposition.

From the outset, the platonic moment was crucial in the grounding and evolution of the concept of authenticity and its various reconfigurations thereafter. The specifics, the context and the possibilities of his philosophical system notwithstanding, Plato established a theoretical framework characterized by a primordial distinction that was to occupy subsequent thought for centuries to come: that between the original and the copy, between the authentic and the derivative. The question pertaining to the status of each domain, their properties or their *locus* got inevitably intertwined with that concerning the extent to which each may become available to us, or how we can accede to them; by consequence, issues such as that of representation, of its legitimation and validity, and, more broadly, of the forms and functions of the theoretical apparatus required in order to conceptualize the authentic and the derivative, or to arrive at the first through the second, gave rise to centuries of philosophical investigation. Yet one thing became constant: the elevation of authenticity and its reconfigurations or its paradigms into an ideal, and the resulting valuation of its perceived primacy in comparison to the fallen, inferior status of its derivative counterparts.

Once perceived in binary terms, human experience and the metaphysics it creates esteem the authentic highly and attribute to it cognitive, moral and aesthetic priority. Authenticity will become an ideal: it constitutes the goal to achieve, the essence to attain, for centuries after Plato and largely until today. At the rise of modernity, when the Western world turns towards the individual more consciously in what has been seen as a growing interest in “inwardness” and the “internal space” (Trilling, 1972; Taylor, 1989; Taylor, 1991), the autobiographical mode becomes pervasive and affects literary genres, themes and tropes. The literary and, more broadly, the artistic, cultural and even theoretical idioms from the 17th century on display a quest for interiority and introspection; the project of self-portraiture and the confessional vogue give rise to various forms and practices of autobiographical discourse. The uniqueness and

distinctness of the human being is no longer to be oppressed by religious, social, or cultural norms of being in the world, such as were the Christian or the humanist ideal, or even the Renaissance *honnête homme*; on the contrary, it is to be vindicated. Accordingly, the ideal of authenticity gives precedence to the individual as he or she truly is and not as he or she ought to be in public. The new ethics of autonomy (Schneewind, 1998; Dworkin, 1988) redefines fundamental concepts in the construction of the self, such as honesty, sincerity or truth, liberates the individual from culpability, heteronomous in that it is a result of his or her acting in an inauthentic way, and considers him or her free to govern himself or herself, capable of deciding for himself or herself, and unconstrained to yield to burdens imposed by culture or society (Varga and Guignon, 2007).

The fact that authenticity has been valued positively and elevated into an ideal in the course of history has not evaded criticism, from various directions. For Kant, for instance, the primacy of reason and rational thinking cannot be negotiated; any idea of authenticity cannot be constituted otherwise than as its result. More recently, the connection was made between authenticity and narcissism, that is, egocentricity and lack of empathy (Lasch, 1979); furthermore, the role of overvaluing the culture of authenticity and the cult of uncritical forms of the authentic have been associated with sloth, indolence, and lack of intellectual rigor (Bloom, 1987).

Evidently, it is not my intent here to trace the history, nor develop a theory of the concept of authenticity, which is also the history or theory of its critique. Among other things, such a grand project involves inescapably the question of the subject, that is, the very essence of philosophical interrogation. From the rise of modern autobiography in the beginnings of modernity to Nietzsche, Freud, Adorno, Sartre and Foucault, as well as many more modern and contemporary thinkers, the foundations of the transcendental subject creak recurrently and often perceptibly enough. Even for a thinker as deeply rooted in Western metaphysics as Heidegger, the subject is considered to be much worldlier than the tradition from which the philosopher himself sprang has frequently conceptualized.

These thinkers, and many others, diverge significantly in numerous ways, but what makes them converge all too often is their constant enquiry into the constructability of the self. The self emerges as created in the world or outside it, in the mind of the subject as a work of art or as a moral agent, in good or bad faith, in anxiety and despair or in care, in freedom or in convention and constraint. Indeed, for much of modern and contemporary thought, the project of the subject is its very construction as exploration of its possibilities to be authentic, whereas the default condition of the world in which it lives is inauthenticity. In this framework, it is evident that narrative constitutes an essential juncture in such a project: indeed, it is its epistemological condition. The fundamental distinction in the Kantian architectonic between phenomena and noumena and the modes of understanding corresponding to each domain, namely, the discursive and the intuitive, is made with the simultaneous acknowledgment that access to the second is not available to us, even if their existence must be presupposed, as reason dictates. Narrative in its most elementary meaning, as the power to attribute rational sense, is thus the only possibility, albeit a surreptitious one, to connect the two domains.

In a sense, the implication of the Kantian system is that narrative –not only as actualization but even as mere possibility– is one of the preconditions of knowledge, be it transcendental or empirical. Indeed, narrative is a constitutive factor of the human condition and the human experience. It is one of the organizational principles of language, and in that it organizes reality. We grow up with narratives, and we mold our identity in narrative form; we build our personal

and social bonds through narratives, and we crystallize our ways of belonging with them. Our aesthetic needs are satisfied and our aesthetic experience takes place through and in narratives. Simply put, as rational beings we are also narrative beings.

If, then, narrative lies at the core of the cognitive, moral and aesthetic procedures that pertain to our human nature, the concept of authenticity cannot be grasped outside it, or merely overlooking it. I have only alluded ostensibly that authenticity can be and has been considered in many ways, from a variety of perspectives and with different concerns; but focusing on its connection with its fundamentally narrative caliber has not been adequately emphasized. The contributions to this special section of *Nalans* aim at doing precisely that: offering fresh insights pertaining to this relation, they approach it in novel, previously unthought-of ways.

Evgenia Amey sets on to investigate the quality of the experience arising when travelers undertake a journey motivated by a mental background formed by literary readings or other media, such as film, television and games. Utilizing conceptual frameworks associated with, but not limited to tourism studies, cultural studies and human geography, Amey attempts to answer straightforward, yet intricate questions. Why are we incited to travel to a place, inspired by something we read in a book, something we saw on a screen, or something we lived in the fictional or virtual world? What do we expect to find in realizing this journey? How do we aim at relating to places or people, actual or imaginary, and how do we perceive this relation? On what foundations can the search for the authentic be grounded, and what kind of narrative constructs adequately the experience of authenticity we aspire to? For Amey, the personal factor is primordial: whether in search of factual or fictional authenticity, the way the subject attributes meaning to places and the experience of them relates to everyone's personal project of constructing the self: creating personal narratives is essential for our goal of living a more authentic life.

Xenia Tsiftsi enquires into what it can possibly mean, decades later, to experience the Holocaust – that unthinkable event in the history of humanity. As the actual people and places slowly disappear in the course of time, and against the moral imperative to remember as well as the personal desire to negotiate our past, Tsiftsi questions in what terms we can have an authentic experience of the unrepresentable misfortune of human history. What kind of authenticity do practitioners of *dark* or *darker* tourism aspire to in their quest for a real experience of the tragedy? How are the requirements for memory different than those of commemoration, and how are the real facts constituted against a notion of real evidence thereof? And what role does place play, when we compare a museum that aims at representing the real to the actual site that presents it? Is experiential authenticity more legitimate than existential authenticity? In Tsiftsi's article, the discourses of history, architecture, philosophy, cultural studies and memory studies converge in order to touch upon fundamental questions of ethics, materiality, appropriation and empathy, and disclose the key role of narrative in dealing with them.

Shelley Garrigan approaches the work of Cornelio Campos, a Mexican-American artist who lives in North Carolina, in the USA. In his struggle for survival and subsistence, Campos, who arrived at the USA as an illegal immigrant, also taught himself painting, and his work has been receiving attention increasingly. Campos's art is highly political and thematizes migration, immigration, and legality, endeavoring to give voice to forms of what we now call the subaltern (Spivak, 1988). Garrigan explores the idiosyncratic combination between the folkloric and the political element in his work and studies the ways in which they are performed, revealing the authenticity of the narrative which lies in their substratum. For Garrigan, Campos's work

epitomizes the creative exploration of three modes: repetition with difference, mobility, and incompleteness. In this context, performing the authentic indicates a genuinely ethical stand: it both vindicates the quest for a better fate and a better world and implicates the viewer who is called to assume the position of a witness, an actor, and an engaged individual.

Vladimir Boscovic demonstrates the fascinating ways in which philology constructs the narratives of literary history. Approaching the 17th century Cretan religious drama *The Sacrifice of Abraham* whose popularity has lasted even until today, Boscovic traces its written and oral aftermath, focusing mainly on the Serbian, Bulgarian, and Karamanlidik Turkish traditions. Boscovic shows how the Biblical story from Genesis 22 based on the theme of the sacrifice of one's own offspring, already present in many religious and literary traditions, travels in the late Ottoman world and even outside it. Questions pertaining to the "original" text and its status, to transtextuality and the mechanisms of literary influence and relations, as well as to orality, folklore and religion, are intermingled with broader questions of identity based not so much on difference, but on the commonality of shared cultural traits, practices and tastes. Sketching the narrative of authenticity of *The Sacrifice of Abraham*, Boscovic sheds light to one telling example of a truly transnational work in comparative literary history.

The contributions to this special section of *Nalans* study the relationship between narrative and authenticity in novel and original ways, opening up new perspectives for consideration. I believe we re-launch a question that needs to be addressed further; these contributions constitute a first step.

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