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Quaderni della Sezione : Diritto e Comunicazioni Sociali

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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MESSINA

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**The Search for Authenticity:
Some Implications for Political
Communication**

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Working Paper n.33

Il Centro interuniversitario per le Ricerche sulla sociologia del diritto, dell'informazione e delle istituzioni giuridiche (C.I.R.S.D.I.G.) con questi working paper intende proporre i risultati dei lavori svolti nell'ambito delle ricerche sia metodologiche che applicative nel campo della sociologia del diritto, dell'informazione e delle istituzioni giuridiche. Tale centro è stato costituito dalle Università di Messina e di Macerata al fine di stimolare attività indirizzate alla formazione dei ricercatori ed anche per favorire lo scambio d'informazioni e materiali nel quadro di collaborazioni con altri Istituti o Dipartimenti universitari, con Organismi di ricerca nazionali o internazionali. I paper pubblicati sono sottoposti ad un processo di peer-reviewing ad opera di esperti internazionali. Direzione scientifica: proff. D. Carzo e A. Febbrajo.

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ABSTRACT

Authenticity entails a search for the real that pervades contemporary life. This concern expresses complex developments of modernity and arises in different fields of contemporary culture. This fact makes the concept seem sometimes dispersed and without a clear conceptual core. To overcome this difficulty, this report reviews the theoretical literature on Authenticity and the applications of the concept of authenticity in the fields of Architecture, Tourism, and Arts & Performance. This way, it tries to connect the long processes of formation of individuality in Modernity with the issues that arise in a wide range of case studies that imply the practical use of the notion. This work discovers in contemporary cultural phenomena the traces of longer developments that allow us to see the former under a new light. In the final part of the report, the former findings are elaborated to analyze the meaning of authenticity in the field of Political Communication

Il concetto di “autentico” racchiude tra i suoi significati quello di ricerca per il reale ed esso corrisponde ad un’aspirazione che pervade quantomai la vita contemporanea. L’attenzione per questo concetto è una manifestazione dei complessi sviluppi della modernità e la si rinviene in differenti campi della cultura contemporanea. Ciò, a volte, fa apparire il concetto disperso e privo di un chiaro centro. Al fine di superare tale difficoltà, il presente articolo propone una rassegna del concetto di “autentico” nei campi dell’architettura, del turismo, dell’arte e dello spettacolo. In tal modo, esso prova a connettere il lento processo di diffusione dell’individualismo proprio della modernità coi temi emersi in un’ampia gamma di studi di caso che implicano l’impiego pratico di questa nozione. L’articolo rinviene nei fenomeni culturali contemporanei le tracce di una lunga serie di sviluppi che ci consentono di guardare al concetto di “autentico” sotto una nuova luce. Nella parte finale della rassegna, tali sviluppi vengono elaborati al fine di comprendere il significato di “autentico” nel campo della comunicazione politica.

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The Search for Authenticity: Some Implications for Political Communication

Valentín Thury Cornejo

1. Introduction

The search for authentic experiences pervades contemporary culture. Whether it be through the performance of risky activities (Lupton & Tulloch 2002), traveling to historic places (Waller & Lea 1998) or just a return to natural practises as consuming organic food, our age shows strong signs of a drive toward the experience of the real (Spretnak 1997). In this cultural context, the authentic experience is a powerful drive that is increasingly penetrating the field of political communication. Sosnik, Dowd & Fournier (2006), for example, explains the success of George W. Bush in two consecutive Presidential elections in the connection that people felt based in what the authors characterize as the two most important gut values in the political landscape: authenticity and community. One of Sosnik et al's interviewees, when asked why she voted for Bush, answered: "I don't know". She was disappointed with the President, both because of Katrina's aftermath and how things were going in Iraq. Yet there was something about him that still struck a chord. "It's just the whole measure of the man", she said, "When I voted for Clinton, I did it on gut instinct. I look at a person, and I try to see through their eyes to their values. Who knows if I know everything on policy, but I can get a sense of who a person is". (Sosnik et al 2006, 57). Authenticity is a powerful rhetorical claim and politicians are increasingly using it. Claiming to be authentic involves constructing a bond between voters concerns and political discourse that makes the latter meaningful to the former. This way, political communicators piggyback on what everyday culture is showing them, that people are searching for authenticity in a multiplicity of different activities, and try to use the power of this appeal.

In a deep and personal sense, to be authentic means to be true to oneself and to one's own originality (Taylor 1992). To perform this task,

we look for experiences that connect with our “real” selves and to accomplish this mission those experiences need to be authentic. In this process, authenticity works simultaneously as the archetype guiding the construction of an individualized self and as an expression of the requisites of that development to be successful. We strive to be authentic, and to achieve that goal we need to have authentic experiences. Contemporarily, however, the evolution of societal trends makes people fear that “what they consider real is endangered –a fear that every experience they are offered in the modern world is trying to persuade them, shape them or cajole them” (Boyle 2004, xvii). Trying to counteract a simulated reality where signs of the real substituted the real itself (Baudrillard 1983), contemporary subjects seek to reconstitute their bond with genuineness. Yet this process is not set in a cultural vacuum. We are at the center of an “experience economy” where the production of value has shifted from the production, distribution, and consumption of material goods, first to services, then to information, and finally, to experiences (Pine & Gilmore 1999). In this context, the modern capitalist system tries to co-opt the search for authenticity, packaging the desire to escape the prison house of consumption in order to promote consumption itself (Guthey & Jackson 2005). This implies a commodification of cultural experiences, yet at the same time the constitution of that space as one where identities are “emotionally” constructed (Richards 2004). Taking into account these traits, it is no wonder that authenticity issues are salient in realms traditionally considered superfluous and frivolous – like fashion, entertainment, consumerism, and advertising.

These fields happen to be, not by chance, increasingly connected with recent trends in Political Communication, like celebrity politics or new forms of political advertising. It is at this point, then, that a return to the basics is needed. Although most authors agree on attributing authenticity a pivotal role in contemporary life (Grayson & Martinec 2004), analysts find it difficult to assess the nature that authenticity assumes in different fields and situations. What is authenticity? What are the original roots of this contemporary cultural search? Why is it today such a powerful drive? We have a sense of what the concept entails but we lack a thorough understanding of the phenomenon. This paper

will try to answer the questions posed and, by doing so, it will try to set the ground for the application of the concept to the field of Political Communication. The preparatory works to accomplish this objective will be twofold. First, I will put the contemporary search for authenticity in the larger frame of modernity. By surveying the works of Lionel Trilling, Peter Berger, Charles Taylor, Marshall Berman, and Walter Benjamin, I will try to set a background for a more detailed study of authenticity in some fields of contemporary experience. Second, I will review the theorizations and case studies that have been done in the fields of Architecture, Tourism and Arts & Performance. The literature in these fields underscores the centrality of the concept of authenticity and reveals aspects of the concept that reappear in the political ground. By reviewing it and elaborating the meaning of authenticity I hope to illuminate contemporary problems of representation and, consequently, lay the ground for a new agenda in the field of political communication.

2. Authenticity and Modernity

Several authors have taken authenticity as a central concept in their explanation of the formations of modernity. Authenticity is a cultural value that arises as part of the process of formation of the modern individual. Lionel Trilling, Peter Berger, and Charles Taylor have partially described this process in different ways, yet all of them stress the long-term formation of the concept of authenticity and relate its importance to a shift in the relationships between self and society. Their studies in this long process of cultural development explain the contemporary importance of authenticity. According to Trilling, authenticity has become part of the moral slang of our days, and that fact “points to the peculiar nature of our fallen condition, our anxiety over the credibility of existences and of individual existences” (1971, 93). At some point in social development, the noble vision of life is rejected because “we desire to escape the limiting conditions which it imposes” (p. 42) and liberate our selves from external opinions. This stance pervades contemporary artistic experience, where the artist ceases to be the craftsman or the performer, dependant upon the approval of the audience, and turns his reference “to himself only, or to some

transcendent power which –or who- has decreed his enterprise and alone is worthy to judge it” (p. 97). The work of art, then, “is understood to exist wholly by the laws of its own being, which include the right to embody painful, ignoble, or socially unacceptable subject-matters. Similarly, the artist seeks his personal authenticity in his entire autonomousness –his goal is to be self-defining as the art-object he creates.” (p. 99). The main idea of a universal order is thus seen as constraining the creative faculty of the artist (p. 130). In this sense, Trilling traces a line that goes from Rousseau to Sartre noting how embedded is in our culture the inculcation of society, as its prescriptions pervert human existence and destroy its authenticity (p. 161).

In a large comment to Trilling’s book, Peter Berger (1973) locates the meaning of authenticity in the complex relationships between self and society. He explains that pre-modern societies were characterized by a high degree of symmetry between self and society, between subjectively experienced and institutionally assigned identity. In the medieval civilization, for example, there was a hierarchical order that was cosmically guaranteed. In it, the individual experienced a world that was fully real, knew his own location in that world, and, consequently knew who he was. With the rise of modern institutions, these experiences of symmetry have been progressively shattered. Institutions have become more powerful but at the same time, they have become “weightless”, no longer serving as firm anchors for the individual understanding of self. The world of social experience has multiplied and the mirrors in which the individual look at him or her are constantly shifting. As a result, Berger argues, “both image and reflection take on an aspect of vertigo, that is, of unreality” (1973, 86). The division of social experience between a public and a private sphere first managed this problem of identity, where the intimate realm provided a balance to the discontents generated by the fragmented experiences coming from the world of modern institutions. Contemporarily, as instability has grown even in the private sphere, its function of interposition between the reality of the self and the unreality of the institutional world has weakened. Nowadays, Berger concludes, the opposition between self and society “has reached its maximum. The concept of authenticity is one way of articulating this experience” (1973, 88).

If Trilling's book used literature as a springboard for developing the concept of authenticity, and Berger's commentary translated the issue in sociological terms, Charles Taylor's *Sources of Self* (1989) makes us travel through the whole philosophical process of the formation of modern identity. Along the book, he describes the development of a new sort of inwardness -began by Saint Augustine and deepened by Descartes-, accompanied by an affirmation of the value of ordinary life – as a consequence of the Protestant Reformation. As Taylor describes it, “it is not so much a matter of what acts are special to the good person, but rather how one carries out what everyone does” (p. 279). At the end of the 18th Century, the self began to be defined by the capacities of the instrumental reason –with its related notions of personal dignity and responsible freedom- that implied forms of self-exploration and self-control. Running through all these processes is a trend to secularization that involved a discussion of the traditional moral sources. From a line that goes from Rousseau to German and English Romanticism, nature is considered an inner source. The emphasis is on becoming responsive to one's inner voice, understanding with feelings as well as with intellect. Sentiments are not merely motivations: they define ways of life and action. In this sense, Romanticism represents an expressivist turn: we must find and articulate the nature we find within us. In Taylor words, “expressive individuation has become one of the cornerstones of modern culture. So much that we barely notice it, and we find it hard to accept that is such a recent idea in human history and would have been incomprehensible in earlier times” (p. 376)¹.

A different approach to the issue of authenticity is expressed by those who adopt it under a critical stance. These authors tend to view the atomization of individuals in modern life and the transformation of society in an external limit to the individual, instead of a nurturing environment where that individual could fully develop his capacities. The common metaphor for this process is Weber's “iron cage of modernity” (Weber 2004). For Marshall Berman (1970), for example, authenticity “is bound up with a radical rejection of things as they are. It begins with an

¹ Along with the analysis of authenticity in terms of the emergence of modernity, some authors (Taylor 1992; Ferrara 1993, 1998) try to inscribe the concept in new theoretical models and solve the tensions that it embodies. In their view, authenticity is a central concept to elaborate on the current stage of modernity.

insistence that the social and political structures men live in are keeping the self-stifled, chained down, locked up. It argues that only if the old structure is renovated, or if a new one is built from the ground up –or if the old one is wrecked and nothing put in its place, so that men may live without any structure at all- only then can the self come into its own” (p. xix). It is in this sense that early in the 20th Century authors like Walter Benjamin (2002 [1936]) expressed their concern for the fate of authenticity in an age of mechanical reproduction. The process of massification and industrial production lead to the formation of a culture industry that ignored the genuine products of community and replaced them with manufactured commodities. In this context, authenticity will have a reactive power, an oppositional nature that will repeatedly appear in the form of resistance regarding cultural, political or economic impositions. This discourse has acquired centrality in some theoretical formulations of Popular Culture, where something is authentic if it has a connection with folk culture, that is, something that has grown from below and is “a spontaneous, autochthonous expression of the people, shaped by themselves (...) to suit their own needs” (McDonald, 2005, 40). Authenticity, thus, is opposed to culture industry, where the masses are “an object of calculation, an appendage of the machinery” (Adorno, 2005, 103).

3. Authenticity in Architecture, Tourism, and Arts & Performance

As the former review of theoretical literature on Authenticity shows us, the concept is pervasively present in contemporary culture as a trait that accompanies the development of the individual. In this sense, the authors reviewed help us to identify the deep trends that trigger the current search for authenticity. Notwithstanding the centrality that authenticity has in the development of modern identity, the concept has a differential impact through the different social disciplines. In this section, I have selected three fields -Architecture, Tourism, and Arts & Performance- where the reflection on authenticity appears at center stage and, consequently, the review of the literature will reveal aspects of the phenomenon that are somewhat hidden in other realms. In the architectural literature, for example, the term “authenticity” is related

with the “realness” of buildings and the connection with people that experience them. In Tourism, the literature deals with the same issue but in a way that stresses, at the same time, the contemporary needs that propel tourism and the rejection of staged forms of experiences. Arts & Performance literature deepens the insight on what constitutes an authentic experience and characterizes the elements needed to connect the performer with the audiences. In the three fields, as we will see in the following pages, authenticity is framed in terms of realness, rejection of staginess, and experiences that contribute to the formation of identity and those perspectives will reappear, under partially different forms, in contemporary experiences of politics.

3.1 Architecture

In the architectural literature, the term “authenticity” is applied to two different sets of issues. A broader approach, though also less developed, introduces authenticity as a concept related with the discussion of the general objectives of architecture as a discipline. What the design and construction of a building mean for people? What kind of experience is it supposed to generate? For Benedikt, a real architecture “is architecture especially read –so to speak- for its direct esthetic experience, an architecture that does not disappoint us by turning out in the light of that experience to be little more than a vehicle contrived to bear meanings: and, second, real architecture, if it must inevitably be an architecture about something (at least from the perspective of a designer or critic) is about being (very) real” (Benedikt 1987, 30). However, the question arises, what does realness mean? Benedikt describes four elements of a real architecture: a) presence (implying tautness, attentiveness, assertiveness; b) significance (achieved by being part of people’s lives); c) materiality (having “a palpability, a temperature, a weight and inertia, an inherent strength”, p. 44); and, d) emptiness (‘implies that a building (...) should be formed according to innate principles of order, structure, shelter, the evolution of architecture itself –and accident. It should be found useful and beautiful, as a tree”, p. 52). Along the same lines, Blundell-Jones (1992) stresses the connection between buildings and people. He argues that architectural authenticity

is “formed by a kind of resonance between a building and the beliefs or expectations, more often implicit than explicit, of those who use it” (p.30). In other words, buildings are meant to be used. Here, a responsive architecture is opposed to an autistic one. Generally, buildings serve a supporting role in framing social dramas and, doing that, suggest some uses while discourage others². To achieve this objective, they have to mesh with the expectations of users. When they do not do that, they are likely to seem alien to them: “within the view that all buildings are stage-sets, some are the set for the wrong play” (Blundell-Jones 1991). Hence, a “real” architecture is opposed to an “artificial” one (Benedikt 2001).

A second, more focused literature refers to authenticity as a criterion to judge the works of conservation and restoration of historic buildings. Here, the focus of concern shifts from the “realness v. artifice” dichotomy to the authentic seen as something that is in the past and needs to be preserved or recovered. The velocity of change that characterizes contemporary societies speeds-up historical evanescence, thus leading to a sensation of whole worlds that are slipping away (Gross 2002). This anxiety generates a nostalgia for the authentic that is expressed, for example, in “a nostalgia for ruins”. As Huyssen states “the desire for the auratic and the authentic has always reflected the fear of inauthenticity, the lack of existential meaning, and the absence of individual originality. The more we learn to understand all images, words, and sounds as always already mediated, the more, it seems, we desire the authentic and the immediate. The mode of that desire is nostalgia” (2006, 11-12). In this sense, the contemporary move towards the preservation of the remnants of the past is expression of our own anxieties about the present (e.g.: Peleggi 2005). This trend has led to the legal protection of authenticity (Assi 2000), precisely because of its ability to form our cultural identity. In this sense, it is the capacity to convey meaning what interests contemporary people and this is expressed in the way that they experience authenticity. For example, Jiven & Larkham

² A similar meaning of authenticity is sustained in Smith (1983) when he refers to our fellow citizens “that continue to take seriously the forms of traditional church buildings, capitols, courthouses, and mansions (such as the White House and Monticello), sensing, as did Emerson, the power of the archetypes that lie behind the institutions, the enduring modes of human relatedness, that the buildings symbolize. Therein, I am persuaded, is to be found the only basis for an authentic architecture” (p. 219)

(2003) express that, for people questioned in Guildford (UK), “architecture was interpreted in a way consistent with respondents’ personal histories” (2003, 77). In a study assessing the perceptions and attitudes towards fake historic architecture, Levi (2005) found that respondents did not evaluate historic-looking buildings as “architectural fakes” but as attractive complements to the existing historic buildings in San Luis Obispo, California. According to them, the general aesthetic experience of the view had more weight than the strict historical genuineness of the particular buildings³. These examples help us to characterize authenticity as a flexible concept, where genuineness is mixed with the expression of the self and the development of personality.

3. 2 Tourism

Authenticity has been a central issue of tourism research for the last decades and the issue has been thoroughly theorized, probably due to the role that experience has in the conformation of the act of tourism. In this sense, we can state that tourism is all about experiences, where the contact with the culturally other, be it for its location in another place or another time, provides tourists with powerful *stimuli* to construct their identities. For authors writing about authenticity, thus, to deal with this issue is to inquire about the meaning of the same discipline to which they belong. The search for authenticity in tourism is conceptualized against the backdrop of the situation of the individual in modern society, especially what their anxieties, fears, and aspirations are. In sum, how he constructs his identity and finds meaning in the surrounding world, and how he manages the balance between the ordinary and extraordinary in that process. We can distinguish in the literature on tourism, a concern about the foundations of the search for authenticity and an evaluation of the ability of the touristic experience to fulfil that modern need. This concern is thoroughly developed in the first writings on the issue, while later studies go deep in the complexities of the notion of authenticity when taken in the context of its current industrial nature. These issues are present, in some way or another, in all the literature but they are contextualized concerning two distinct

³ For a critique of the mixing of authenticity and inauthenticity in heritage restoration, see Kelleher (2004).

objects of touristic activity: the travel to other place and the travel to another time. While the first of these issues deal with what more strictly has usually been called tourism, the second one conforms to the new field of *Heritage Studies*.

The starting point for the discussion was set in the 60's by Boorstin's assertion of the inauthenticity of tourists' experiences. As he states, "the tourist... seldom likes the authentic (to him often unintelligible) product of the foreign culture; he prefers his own provincial expectations" (Boorstin 1964, 106). That would explain the appeal that hyper-reality, as described by Eco (1983) has on them. In this view, contemporary tourists are described in opposition to former travellers and the production of attractions has to be read through the lenses of commodification and McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2000). The two issues that Boorstin and Eco mention –motivation of tourists and authenticity of sites- are the axis that pervade all the literature regarding authenticity, although leading to more nuanced visions than those envisioned by these theorists. McCannell sees the motives behind the modern tourist as that of the medieval pilgrims: "both are quests for authentic experiences" (1973, 593). The problem, he continues to state, is that this goal is almost impossible to achieve. McCannell understands that tourists "are motivated by a desire to see life as it is really lived, even to get in with the natives, and, at the same time, they are deprecated for always failing to achieve these goals. The term "tourist" is increasingly used as a derisive label for someone who seems content with his obviously inauthentic experiences" (1973, 592). What we found at tourist settings, thus, is not "real" but "staged" authenticity, a space constructed to satisfy tourists' needs that transforms the search for authenticity in an impossible quest. This situation drives tourists to construct different strategies to deal with inauthenticity. For example, while some tourists are characteristically inauthentic, others are aware of the inauthenticities of the touristic role and experience anxiety and shame in being labelled as "tourists". In consequence, he or she avoids tour groups and, preferably, travels off-season (Redfoot 1984).

While Redfoot argues that there are different kinds of tourists regarding the degree of authenticity that they seek in their touristic experiences, Cohen (1988) not only finds different experiences of touristic

authenticity but contends that what is different is the same concept of authenticity. As he states, “intellectuals, here exemplified by curators, ethnographers, and anthropologists, will be generally more alienated, and more aware of their alienation, than the rank-and-file middle-classes, and especially the lower middle class, who will strive to attain the material gains which those beyond them already enjoy” (1988, p. 376). The latter, thus, will be less concerned with the authenticity of their touristic experiences and will be prone to accept the cultural products that are being offered to them by the touristic industry. Consequently, their experience could be triggered by a tiny vestige of what an expert would call “authentic”, but that “may suffice for them to play the make-believe game of having an authentic experience” (1988, 379). Pearce & Moscardo (1986) extended Cohen’s insights proposing that tourists can achieve an authentic experience not only by the contact with the site but also through relationships with people within tourist settings, that is, an “existential authenticity” instead of an object-related one (Hughes 1995; Wang 1999). Post-structuralist scholars who argued that authenticity is not an absolute to be received, but rather a social construction to be negotiated have developed this approach further (Waitt 2000; Baudrillard 1983). As Waitt summarizes, “for post-structuralists, the relevance of the distinction between the real and the staged tourism experiences is questioned (...) The only real accessible world is one which individuals construct through their interpretations” (2000, 847-848). In this sense, what empirical research seems to demonstrate is that the criteria by which tourist evaluates cultural attractions responds to their motivations and to the different criteria on authenticity that they bring with them (e.g.: Naoi 2004; Xie & Wall 2002)⁴.

⁴ Some studies have tried to go deeper in the meaning that the notion of authenticity has for diverse audiences. Waller and Lea (1998) asked British people about the authenticity of four possible touristic experiences in Spain. In “discovering the real Spain”, four factors were identified as relevant: a) culture (the experience should involve some direct contact with the distinctive culture of the place visited, in terms of historic buildings, traditional events, and local language); b) number of tourists (any experience involving large number of fellow-tourists was inauthentic by that very fact); c) level of independence (visitors who organize their own schedules are reckoned to have more authentic experiences); and, d) conformity to the stereotype of the country (a visit to Spain should involve some element of sunshine, bullfights, excitable locals, and so forth, even in the eyes of those who recognize that such stereotypes are frequently inaccurate). These factors were unevenly distributed among the participants, who constructed different meanings of authenticity with these

As we have seen so far, touristic experiences affected the cultural identity of both visitors and receptors, leading to a concept of authenticity more flexible than the related with the strict genuineness of the attraction. Yet the problem of cultural identity has another expression in the search that people perform not to know the Other, but their own past. We are in the terrain of *Heritage*. *Heritage*, as Tivers recounts, includes such diverse elements as mythical sites and characters (e.g.: Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest), reconstructions of real places (e.g.: the city of Ephesus in Turkey), locations where significant features no longer exist (e.g.: the Berlin Wall), museum collections, Medieval Fayres, community culture, vernacular building styles, and the ways of life of people in the past (Tivers 2002). Deeply related with the issue of cultural invention (Linnekin, 1991), *Heritage* constitutes a cultural industry that merges popular entertainment with a genuine search for a past already gone (Goulding 1998) –or that have never really existed. Cameron & Gatewood (2000) have shown in their study of the old industrial city of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, that people “explicitly desired to experience history in highly personal ways” (2000, 110; see also, McIntosh & Prentice 1999). Bethlehem provides them a vision of an earlier, less hectic time an oasis of small town America persisting in mass society and “tourists consume this image: their experience appears to be spiritual, rich, and meaningful” (Cameron & Gatewood 1994). Accordingly, in his study on New Salem, a reconstructed village in Illinois where Abraham Lincoln lived in the 1830s, Edward Bruner (1994) discovers that the place generates meanings for the visitors that might not have been predicted before the visit and that are produced through the interactions engendered in the place. Eric Gable and Richard Handler -in their work on Colonial Williamsburg (1996) - dialogue with Bruner and conclude that authenticity is a construction of the present that tells

elements. Their evaluation of their touristic experiences depended on the matching with their own concept of authenticity. Almeida Santos (2004) examined how college students in the American environment evaluated leisure travel articles, founding that they were no longer simply looking for authenticity of the “other” but were much more concerned in authenticating themselves as tourists. For example, they “desired portrayals that explored cultural realities but maintain a sense of underdevelopment” (p. 405) that fit their own understanding of the authenticity.

us about what people want to believe. If the place fulfills those expectations, we tend to think that it is authentic (DeLyser 1999).

One powerful mediator of this experience of authenticity in Heritage sites is the use of live “actors’ in the presentations (Crang 1996; Hunt 2004; Tivers 2002). From the visitor’s standpoint, the representations create a climate that allows visitors to feel the spirit of the age. Vikings markets, for example, “can be viewed as an attempt to replicate all the fun of medieval fair; and, while they are not true carnivals, they are carnivalesque performances which emphasize the body and bodily processes, the community, and their relationships with their environment” (Halewood & Hannam, 2001). From the analysis of traditional forms to new ones, tourism literature departs from a central concern on the meaning of authenticity and upon those foundations, develops a number of approaches that constitute more nuanced looks to different aspects of the subject. Nowadays, tourism is a widespread cultural activity that connects people with other worlds and realities. However, this core meaning is wrapped up with a commoditised form that, in some sense, hides that search and make the touristic experience a place for complex interpretation. The industrial form that it assumes, as the stress on the entertainment nature of the experience, heavily relate tourism to other contemporary cultural products. Trying to get to the core of this problem, the literature turned from more general reflections about the place of tourism in the current landscape of modern anxieties, to the analysis of the scope and mechanisms through which this authentic experience is acquired, and what does it really means for tourists. From a concern regarding the genuineness of the tourist product –that still is present in some authors-, the literature has moved to the study of the multiple aspects of the experience and how they are embedded in the process of meaning making. In this sense, the interest in the authenticity of the object is subtly replaced by the attention to the authenticity of the experience, and the latter is evaluated in terms of its contribution to identity construction.

3.3 Arts & Performance

The approaches given to the issue of Authenticity in the research on Arts & Performance are variegated and the articles range from Early Classical Music to Hip-Hop. The common trait of the articles is their focus on the impact of the authentic performance, that meaning that the act of communication is central to the evaluation of the authenticity of the meaning conveyed. In this sense, the articles reviewed are based in two different conceptions of authenticity, being the first one related to self-expression and the second to credibility. If the fields of Architecture and Tourism allowed us to see the relationship between objects and activities with identity formation through the notion of authenticity, the field of Arts & Performances will give us a communicative perspective on the issue. Consequently, the connection of this part with the analysis that we will make of authenticity and political representation is based on two facts. First, if performances are evaluated in terms of whether or not they communicate the real self of the performer or are faithful to the core values embedded in the work of art, politicians are judged and voted for the same reasons. Second, because of the performative nature of politics in a mediated era, the fields of Popular Culture and Political Communication are increasingly linked, making the transition between the two a necessary move. In this sense, the concern for authenticity in one realm could serve as a model for the second.

To start with what an authentic performance means, it is useful to look to the general frame of what a work of art is supposed to do. In this sense, Baugh (1988) states that “the distinctive function of works of art is to reorient the experience of the perceiving subject in accordance with what the percipient judges to be the organizational principle of the work. (...) The degree to which artworks do this, and make the totality of beings as organized by us in relation to our ends (our “world”) their own, is the degree to which they are authentic” (p. 479). In order to experience the world differently, the receiver of the work of art must assent to interpret it in the terms that the work of art establishes for itself. To obtain this assent, Baugh affirms, the work of art must address receiver’s way of being in the world as they are conditioned socially and historically. Most of the literature on authenticity on performance is under this frame:

What kind of performance allows the work of art to perform their task and transform our own world? Performance, thus, is better understood as the process through which the work of art enter the realm of our experience, the way in which we connect with the artistic meaning that is being conveyed.

One of the fields in which this issue generated some controversy was in the debate on whether or not Early Music must be played with original instruments (Burstyn 1995; Lockwood 1991). Against the trend that equalled authenticity with the use of certain instruments and the attainment to the strict intentions of the composer, Taruskin focused on the actual experience stressing the capacity of well played old instruments “in freeing minds and hands to experience old music newly” (1989, 203). In this relationship with original sources, authenticity works as a species of the genus credibility (Rudinow 1994). This relationship is complex in the case of genres like the blues, which is characterized by a compositional minimalism and a complementary emphasis on expressive elements. For Rudinow, “the essence of the blues is a *stance* embodied and articulated in sound and poetry, and what distinguishes authentic from inauthentic blues is essentially what distinguishes that stance from its superficial imitations –from *posturing*. (...) ... the authenticity of a blues performance turns not on the ethnicity of the performer but on the degree of mastery of the idiom and the integrity of the performer’s use of the idiom in performance” (p. 135). These studies lead us to the question about the essence of an authentic singing performance. Bicknell (2005) analyzes this issue under the credibility frame and argues that a vocal performance fail to be authentic when the “public persona of the singer inhibits the successful communication of whatever is crucial in the song such that the audience fails to be convinced” (p. 263). Yet, going deeper, Bicknell acknowledges a tension between the voice as an instrument of self-expression and the voice as musical instrument. In this sense, “when great performers sing the ‘right’ songs there seems to be little gap between the voice as expressive of self and the voice as musical instrument. It is all too easy to believe that the song comes ‘straight from the heart’, although the more sophisticated a listener, the more he or she is likely to be aware that professional singing is not mere self-expression” (p. 268).

In the field of rock music, live performances establish the authenticity of music for the rock fan (Auslander 1998). Rock culture is based on a romantic mythology, where the music must sound as truly expressive of the artist's soul and psyche, and as consistently politically and culturally oppositional. Auslander's thesis is based on the assumption that rock music is primarily a recorded form (p. 2). Therefore, "live performance contributes to the process of authentication in two crucial ways. First, to be considered an authentic rocker, a musician must have a history as a live performer, as someone who has paid those dues and whose current visibility is the result of earlier popularity with a local following. (...) The second, and most critical, reason that live performance enables the determination of authenticity is that it is only in live performance that the listener can ascertain that a group that looks authentic in photographs and sounds authentic on recordings really *is* authentic in terms of rock ideology." (p. 10-12) This trait separates rock from pop music, where the concern for authenticity is regulated by other rules –as the staging of live performances demonstrate-. Pop music, much of the time, works as the "inauthentic other" against which rock culture establishes its value (cf. Frosh 2001).

Authenticity arises as a central issue to evaluate the genuineness of Hip-Hop, specifically when referring to white male performance of the genre. Hip-hoppers construct their identity in opposition with the "inauthentic" other and, this way, fight against the threat of assimilation and colonization of this sub-culture. Paradoxically, then, "by invoking authenticity, one is affirming that, even though hip-hop music was the top-selling music format in 1998, hip-hop culture's core remains pure and relatively untouched by mainstream U.S. culture" (McLeod 1999, 146). The conditions of authentication pose a number of challenges to white people to perform hip-hop. One of them is the use of linguistic patterns that they have not been raised into, as white hip-hoppers have to adopt cultural signifiers alien to their own universe (Cutler, 2003). In a sense, then, to be authentic within the field of hip-hop, they have to perform and be "inauthentic" to their own self. However, Armstrong (2004) argues that this is not always the case. Analyzing the *Eminem* phenomenon he shows how "instead of deemphasizing his whiteness, *Eminem* makes it the cutting edge that defines his essence as a rapper.

His race becomes the taken-for-granted source and marker of his rap identity (...) *Eminem* cannot be inauthentic because he acknowledges the truth about himself” (p. 343). The twist of this performance, however, is that *Eminem* identifies with a “white trash” that has much in common with working-class blackness (White 2006). In this sense, “*Eminem* has adopted and used the codes and conventions of urban hip-hop to articulate the effects of post-industrialization on working-class masculinity –both black and white- in the United States and, judging by his global popularity, elsewhere as well” (White 2006, 74). By his performance, then, *Eminem* connects to deep layers of social and cultural phenomena.

3.4 Conclusion

So far, I have reviewed several works that analyze authenticity from a general perspective and I have linked them with different case studies in the fields of Architecture, Tourism, and Arts & Performance. By adopting this strategy, I attempted to inscribe the current significance of authenticity into the big narrative of modernity and show how the larger processes of the formation of individual self illuminates our contemporary cultural concerns. At the same time, I tried to show how our strive for the real and genuine makes our own a different stage in that development. In this sense, the literature reviewed locates authenticity as an identity issue. This process of self-construction where the concept of authenticity is embedded adopts several forms. Sometimes, what is stressed is an individualized search for meaning that longs for solid references anchored in the past or in community. Other times, that search is framed as a rejection from external constraints, be them those of the commoditized forms or of the institutionalized conducts. The background that gives authenticity its central normative power in identity construction lies in the failing importance of objective sources for the guidance of self. This disintegration of external references is what constitutes our “liquid modernity” (Baumann 2000) and results in a prevalence of the ethics of the moment, a *fin-de-siecle* hedonism (Maffesoli, 2004), where the subject constructs itself through his or her experiences. In consequence, there is a shift from objective references to

experiential ones that is anchored in the acknowledgment of the role of emotions in the process of identity formation (Richards 2004). The literature on the performative side of authenticity reflects this current concern and stresses the idea of connection between performers and his audiences. Here, the mediational value of authenticity comes to the center stage as the instrument that enables the content of the message to be trusted.

The traits that characterize authenticity in different realms of culture –self-fulfillment, genuineness, connection with the “real”, rejection of the staged- are translated to the political field as demands that citizens pose to politicians. In this sense, there are multiple queries regarding the way in which politicians connect with contemporary citizens and authenticate themselves as true representatives. Political life seems today to be pervaded by cynicism. What are the reasons of the extended mistrust of politicians? Why are so many people disinterested in voting? It is a common place to state that citizens suffer the malaise of political scepticism, due to the disruption between the field of politics and citizens’ everyday lives. However, as research in the field of political culture demonstrates (Eliasoph 1997; Merelman 1998), it is not that citizens are apathetic but that they experience politics differently that as it is conveyed by institutional channels. What seems to happen is that politics have changed and the needs of the citizens are no longer the ones that were central to former schemas of representation. Formal politics seem to be no longer the means by which large parts of the population try to fulfill their needs of meaning, as citizens’ concerns have developed from domination of nature to self-transformation (Giddens 1991; Merelman 2000). It is in this context, that the question about authenticity arises as central to understand these contemporary processes.

4. Authenticity, Political Performance and Representation

After this long journey searching the meaning of authenticity, we have arrived to our final destination. As we mentioned in the introduction to this paper, I will relate what we have acknowledged so far with the field of politics. I hope that this move will help us answer

questions such as: How is authenticity expressed in the political field? How is it manufactured in political messages? What is the relationship between authenticity, popular culture and politics? Is the appearance of celebrities in politics related in some way with the need for authenticity? What does authenticity tell us about the paradoxes of political communication? To begin to respond to these questions, the first task is to untangle the theoretical knot regarding authenticity claims in political communication and to do this, we have to relate the cultural interpretations that we have reviewed so far with the nature of political representation. My analysis will be based on the assumption that the evolution of both concepts is interrelated and, thus, one cannot understand one phenomenon without referring to the other. In this sense, I will argue that at the core of the problem is an increasing dissonance between the reality to which representation is dedicated to serve –governing and deciding in the name of the people about complex political and economic issues- and the expectations that people have of that relationship. To understand this we will have to go back to the foundations of the system of representation to evaluate its evolution and the challenges that it presents nowadays.

4.1 Dilemmas of Representation

Contemporarily, to analyze the status of representation requires an awareness of the myriad of cultural and political changes that have occurred during the second half to the 20th century. The decline of political parties, the boom of visual media, the fragmentation of traditional identities, all of them are larger trends in which our contemporary understanding of representation is embedded. One of the core issues at stake here is the modern notion of equality. In the long term, we have transformed from the hierarchical society of medieval age to a society of equals, expressed in the Democratic credo. Today, we are legally and symbolically equal (Taylor 1989). This is problematic to the notion of the representation because the concept is founded upon the existence of inequality. As Simmel explained a century ago, representation embedded alternative relationships of superiority and subordination. Citizens vote –and could fire- their representatives, but

once that election is made, the representatives exercise authority upon the former even by the use of force (Simmel 1964). The tension between the principle of authority present in representation and the general trend toward equality pervades our expectations on the relationship of representation. People expect politicians to be like them, but what they really need is –and consequently request- that they be superior to them and capable of providing solution to their common challenges.

The increasing relationships between the different spheres of government and civic society, the fragmentation of the public in a multiplicity of interests, the mutual influence between diverse realms of action, the need for functional specialization, all of them differentiate the current situation from the environment reigning at the time when the theory of political representation was conformed. The web of interrelated phenomena and their management as separate spheres of technical knowledge qualifies our era as one of rising complexity (Luhmann 1998). In terms of the relationship of citizens with politics, the inequality of knowledge is increased and the specialization required creates clusters of expertise of an elitist nature. Thus, citizens feel increasingly disconnected from public affairs that they no longer feel capable of understanding. Indeed, this process leads to the neutralization of political issues. As the scientific treatment of problems requires a distancing from them to treat them adequately, the complexity of contemporary issues implies their de-politicization in order to be solved. Politics, in consequence, no longer belong to citizens but rather to the professionals of politics, the ones who can deal with the issues. In turn, both professionalization and neutralization produces emotional distancing. (Elias 1987)

Concurring with the complexity of politics, there is also a change in political values. The economic and technological development has lead, in developed countries, to a satisfaction of sustenance needs for an increasingly large percentage of the population. This economic wellbeing, combined with the absence of war as a global and direct experience, rising levels of education, and the expansion of mass communication, have resulted in the development of “post-materialistic values” (Inglehart 1998). The detachment from the material substratum of life has a multiplicity of consequences, among others the erosion of fixed identities,

the blurring of ideological postures, the discredit of political institutions, and the importance of emotions in private and public life (Lupton 1998). That is why sociologists characterize our age as one of “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2000), where the traditional references are gone and the pre-eminent mood is the “crisis of meaning” (Berger & Luckman 1995). In this context, one of the major concerns of individuals is to construct identities that no longer are taken for granted (Melucci 1996). There is a powerful trend towards individual autonomy that plays simultaneously with other trends leading to massification, depersonalization, manipulation of information, standardized consumption, conformism, and apathy (Melucci 2001)

Politically, we live in an “audience democracy” where the electorate is represented as a public that responds to the stimuli that politicians throw to the public arena with an exclusively reactive attitude. It is the candidate the one who creates the different sections of the electoral mass from divisions that are latent yet not apparent. (Manin 1997) Representation becomes symbolic due to the impossibility of charging it with unifying concepts. Moreover, the conditions in which government is exercised makes impossible to forecast the conditions that the elected will have to tackle while in office. That is the reason why electoral platforms have fallen into disuse and with it, the ability of the voter of making a prospective choice. We vote for the ones that seem more capable of dealing with situations that we still do not know, instead of voting for a program that we know as inadequate from scratch. In a political schema where the stable harmonization of social interests become utopian and only transitory arrangements could be obtained, “there is a reinforcement of the macro-political elements of representation through electoral schemas, the symbolic-cosmetic discourse, and the competence through image strategies” (Porrás Nadales 1994, 61). The role of media is crucial. On the one hand, candidates could relate directly with their electorate, without the mediation of the political party. On the other hand, traditional political identities changed, making parties less representative than before. Voters opt for what they think is most important at that time, and will probably change that appreciation later. Politics are thus more unstable and the independent

voter enters the scene as a relevant character. Politics turns unpredictable for citizens.

What is the citizen's answer to the situation that I have been describing so far? Apathy and disaffection runs together with increasing claims of illegitimacy of public action. The increase in participation and self-expression, characteristic of our contemporary condition, (Inglehart 1998) is confronted with the lack of capacity of public institutions to fulfill the expectations that has been posed in politics (Luhmann 1990). These structural tensions make many mistrust political institutions (Pharr & Putnam 2000), as many see formal structures as opposing the development of life and self-expression (Simmel 1968). Without the mediation of institutions, personal leaderships are welcome. Bonds of trust are increasingly constructed between candidates and citizens, but as hard structures of belief become more flexible, that relationship is increasingly edified upon emotional aspects (Richards 2004). This situation paves the way to the emergence of issues of style and aesthetics. Media dynamics favour "personalised" forms of politics (Patterson 1994) and "politicians become stars, politics becomes a series of spectacles and the citizens become spectators" (Street 2004, 441).

Citizens and politicians converge in a place where they can no longer appeal to one another in the terms of former theorizations of representation. Authors have tried to theorize these changes in terms of symbolic and aesthetic representation, being their main statement that representation necessarily entails "appearance" and claims to "represent" can emerge in a variety of contexts and can be validated in a variety of ways. (Street 2004). Brennan & Hamlin (2000, quoted in Street 2004), for example, argue that voting has to be seen as an 'expressive act' instead of a merely "instrumental" one directed to specific policy outcomes. As such an act, vote allows the voter to identify with politicians and to seek out what the voters find 'politically attractive'. Pels (2003) finds political style to be a concept that adequately fits in the evolution that we have formerly described:

"Since aesthetic representation puts citizens and politicians at a distance and brings them in dynamic equilibrium, politicians are no longer required to be 'at one' with their electorate, but acquire a distinct professional profile and a larger area of discretion over and against those

whom they represent. Conversely, citizens are no longer required to submit to high-strung ideals of participation and competence, but may in good conscience decide to leave the political enterprise largely to the professionals (the right to political indifference). As a result of this mutual demarcation and protective shielding off of political positions, citizens acquire a measure of freedom of thought and action over and against ideological and programmatic forms of politics, which are often a politics “of and for politicians”, in the sense of being supported by rationalistic presumptions and overstrained expectations with regard to the average citizens’ propensity to political commitment and participation. Citizens no longer need to be educated to the level of ideological competence and personal commitment of the politician, but savour their independence and preserve a healthy distance from professional politics. But they simultaneously retain their capacity for political judgement, because the style of political conduct, precisely in its accidental and contingent detail, includes ample opportunities for trustful recognition and identification (or their opposites), supplying criteria that enable citizens to judge, without mastering technical details or specialist expertise, whether a particular person, party or policy does or does not ‘speak’ or appeal to them” (Pels 2003, 49-50)

Due to these substantive causes, theory of representation takes the road of popular culture as it is especially devised for conveying issues of style and connect with audience identity desires. Former categories in which political messages were expressed seem to be not working anymore. Instead, what we find, more and more, is a blurring of the distinction between news, opinion and entertainment (Williams & Delli Carpini 2004). New formats as soft news (Baum 2003) or talk shows with politicians (Illouz 2003; Jones 2005) are expressions of these changes and of the ways in which politics identifications are being constructed. Politics are increasingly seen as performative and discursive, since they take place in a mediated environment. At the same time, entertainment works as a means of injecting a dose of spontaneity in the scripted world of political communication. The star system and the political dynamics converge in a common place, and politicians learn from celebrities how to move in this new atmosphere. Celebrities, in turn, could use their existing symbolic capital in this new environment, making their transition to the political field smoother. A completely new stage is being constructed for the communication of political meaning. Politicians are increasingly aware of the means by which they must reach their electorate and the rules that govern the system. It is at this point where the concept of authenticity appears as relevant.

4.2. Authenticity and Mediation

The concept of authenticity, as we have already seen through this paper, is a complex one. Goldman and Papson (1996), speaking from the field of advertising, argue that authenticity has been transformed into one of “the most pervasive styles and motifs in our contemporary sign culture” (p. 140). Consumer culture, they explain, fragmented notions of self, identity and personhood originally generated from within capitalist culture itself. The rise of market capitalism depended on the construction of a possessive individualism that placed the independent, enterprising and productive self at the centre of the social order. In this sense, “bourgeois definitions of authenticity stress a self able to project unmediated, spontaneous expressions of personal identity” (Goldman & Papson 1996, 142). These ideals become contradictory in a culture that addresses individuals primarily as consumers. Consumers find themselves removed from the intensity of direct experience and the ideal of authentic individual identity. That is the reason why “today, authenticity represents the search for individuated space outside the commodity form and outside the spectacle” (Goldman & Papson 1996, 142). In an ever-increasing consumerist and mediated scenario, there is a growing movement to return to the natural, the unspun, the real. (Boyle 2004). For Boyle, the current desire for authenticity has to do with a craving for the real, which he recognises in different elements. “Real” means honest, simple and unspun. It has to do with beauty of places as opposed to the ugliness of non-places, and with rootedness in a tradition or in a place of origin. Real experience has depth, complexity and three-dimensionality: it is not ubiquitous or manufactured. (Boyle 2004)

Authenticity, thus, works as a cognitive and emotional cue in an over-mediated context (Couldry 2004). Audiences are increasingly immunized from the direct persuasive appeals of the messages and advertising is thus directed not to convince but to bring cultural resources that could serve as valuable ingredients in producing the self. (McQuarrie et al 2005). The condition for this to happen is that those resources must be authentic. In the case of brands, “they must be perceived as invented and disseminated by parties without an instrumental economic agenda, by people who are intrinsically motivated

by their inherent value.” (Holt 2002). The same happens in political terrain, as voters are reluctant to messages that try to obtain their votes. As Liebes states, “the general assumption underlying this perception of the public is that politicians’ attitudes are perceived as decided by personal interest. And media practices of horse race reporting, which relate to tactics and the odds of winning, only work to strengthen the cynicism, and socialize the public to suspicion.” (Liebes 2001, 502). In the political field, authenticity works as a source of certainty in the characteristics of the politician and a source of trust in his intentions. Without external political markers –e.g.: platforms, strong parties- and a candidate-centered environment, authenticity is a link that allows voter to know who he is really choosing. Moreover, the bond that it creates is principally of an emotional nature. We feel the connection with the candidate and we feel that it is real. In a nutshell, that is what authenticity is about.

If politics more and more resembles entertainment and politicians increasingly could be labelled as celebrities, it could be useful to see how stars construct their authenticity. Dyer (1991) underscores how authenticity “is both a quality necessary to the star phenomenon to make it work, and also the quality that guarantees the authenticity of the other particular values a star embodies (such as girl-next-door-ness, etc.)” (p. 133). The implied statement in Dyer’s argument is that stars work as hinges between different worlds and authenticity is what makes that function possible. Celebrities are cultural mediators, embodying the meaning that is conveyed in the message that they transmit (Moeran 2003). To make this message believable, stars have to be authentic. This poses one of the most notable paradoxes of their authenticity: we know that stars are produced, that they are manufactured and promoted, but it is in that spectacularised environment where the claim for authenticity is relevant. Authenticity, thus, is not a given fact but has a constructed nature (Jones, Anand & Alvarez 2005). Precisely, this nature is a consequence of the function of mediation that authenticity makes possible. Stars, for example, mediate between the worlds of fact and fiction and the gap between the two is covered by their authenticity. This attribute makes it possible to take that step with them. As the contemporary phenomenon of Reality TV demonstrates, evaluations of

authenticity are made in terms of the outcome of the viewing experience and not on the strict measure of genuineness. Authenticity is a mediating concept and its value is given in the fact, as Rose & Wood (2005) state, that “our television viewers used the images, props, actors, and practices depicted in programming as a testing board for their self-identities and social identities” (p. 295).

Mediation is the key concept when we get to the analysis of representation. This relationship constitutes a political circle, where the representative mediates in the process by which the multiplicity of citizens constitutes political society. This is not a process that has been performed once and lasts forever, as a naïve reading of 17th century’s contractualism could suggest, but one that is at the center of everyday political activity. Latour (2003) talks of a political circle that consists in “transforming the several into one, initially through a process of representation and subsequently through a process of retransformation of the one into several, what is often called the wielding of power but that I more bluntly call obedience.” (p. 149). At the heart of this process, lies the paradox of mediation. “She who talks in the name of all must necessarily betray those she represents, otherwise she will fail to obtain the transformation of the multitude into a unit; in turn, those who obey must necessarily transform the order received, otherwise, they will simply keep repeating it without implementing it (...) Assuming we demanded that politicians ‘talk truthfully’ by ‘repeating exactly’ what their electors say ‘without betraying nor manipulating them’. What would happen? The several would remain the several and the multitude the multitude, so that the same thing would simply be said twice (faithfully for information and therefore falsely for politics).” (Latour 2003, 151). Thus, the mediational nature of representation makes truth a too limited concept to explain the process going on. Once again, it is not mimesis what we ask of our representatives but a creative work with an identity outcome. The link between the different stages of the political circle is given by the connection of authenticity between voters and politicians, not by the repetition of instructions.

In this sense, authenticity is a concept that seems to slip from our hands. Where is it located? Is it in the discourse, in the speaker or in the experience of the person who listens? Initially, we could state that it

could be in the three of them. Montgomery (2001), for example, qualifies “authentic talk” in the public sphere as a kind of discourse where traces of scriptedness or rehearsal for performance are avoided, effaced, or suppressed. Richardson (2001) points out that “authenticity in discourse can be distinguished both from ‘truth’ and from ‘sincerity’. Sincerity and truth pertain to the content of spoken or written text, and the relation of that content to something else: to reality in the case of truth, and to the speaker’s beliefs in the case of sincerity. Authenticity is a different matter, for it has regard to ‘being’ rather than to ‘saying’.” (p. 483). In this view, then, authenticity works as an attribute of the speaker rather than one of the discourse. Liebes (2001), in turn, locates authenticity in a performance that leads to some outcome. In his view, authenticity is directly related to trust and how the politician demonstrates that he or she really cares for the receptors of the messages. In this sense, authenticity is partially in the person of the speaker, but more precisely in the experience of the person who feel the emotional connection. The ambiguity of the term, thus, makes it available to be used in different context. However, we think that the main meaning lies in the emotional connection between the two persons that makes one of them feel represented. Analogically, we define authenticity as the quality that enables a person to be the subject of the former relationship, and we name authentic the discourse that shows his or her real self. This way, when we get to a phenomenology of authenticity the precedence of meaning will be reversed: we will first make contact with the performance, which in turn will show us the person, and, finally, we will construct the relationship.

As we have noted before, authenticity is crucial for individuals because we need authentic experiences to construct our identity. The project of self-identity is deeply interrelated with politics, as the term “life politics”, coined by Giddens (1991) suggests. In his own words, “the narrative of self-identity has to be shaped, altered and reflexively sustained in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life, on a local and global scale. The individual must integrate information deriving from a diversity of mediated experiences with local involvements in such a way as to connect future projects with past experiences in a reasonably coherent fashion. Only if the person is able to develop an

inner authenticity –a framework of basic trust by means of which the lifespan can be understood as a unity against the backdrop of shifting social events- can this be attained (...) Life politics from this perspective concerns debates and contestations deriving from the reflexive project of the self.” (p. 215) Closing the circle of mediation, authenticity is important to us in discourse, persons and relationships, because is crucial in our own project of constructing our self-identity. Seen from this perspective, authenticity is an outside attribute that mirrors our inner development and is in the experience of the connection between our own project and external authentic performances, where the latter becomes essential. The acid test of authenticity, thus, lies in the idea of connection.

In his study comparing Big Brother viewers and Political Junkies in the British context, Coleman (2004) ask himself this question: when we hear calls for a reconnection between politicians and citizens, what does it mean? Firstly, he put doubts about the idea that people in other age were more connected than today. Secondly, he acknowledges that most politicians would like to reach more voters. He writes,

“The last thing that citizens want is to be reached more easily by politicians. Their idea of connection, if they have one, is that politicians should be seen to live in the same world as them: not necessarily to be like them, but certainly to know what is like to be them. Both politicians and citizens want one another to enter their realities: to see the world as the other experiences it (...) Citizens work hard at translating the often abstruse and beguiling messages emanating from politicians. They become frustrated by the opacity of political speech and irritated by its complacent, incestuous rhythms. Politicians are seen to be talking at, preaching rather than hearing. This does not feel like representation. For, like every other important relationship in life, being represented is a sensed as well as a rationally apprehended experience. Politicians spend much of their time trying to translate citizens’ messages into clear preference schedules and political policies. Politicians regard this ability to aggregate mass concerns into strategic action as one of their most important skills. The problem here, again, is with the most basic level of translation. Blunt instruments, such as opinion polling, focus groups and door knocking, rather than the experiential basis of their views and beliefs. Politicians are so busy trying to re-present that they often miss the drama of actual self-presentation. Popular culture celebrates self-presentation through music, slang, travel, gadgets or fashion. The political elite is not only often impervious to such trends, but dismisses them with condescension or contempt” (p. 756-757)

Citizens want to be reached, but they aspire to a connection in terms that are meaningful to them. Here, the ideas of mediation and authenticity show all their complexity, as they need to connect worlds that are progressively set apart. Yet this is not the only intricacy in this relationship. There is a need to mediate between what people are right now and what people want to be. As people are dedicated to their self-identity project, they need narratives that help them construct their subjectivity (Bennett & Edelman 1985). The work of mediation is located in the interactive construction of this subjectivity, as they are what makes political messages relevant to people. This is related with our former remarks concerning the nuances in the relationship between truth and authenticity. To say it again, reality is a measure of authenticity but is it not the only one. If it were, no mediation work could be done. This is clearly shown in the literature on portrait photography, where the artist who tries to capture the lay bare the soul of the subject (Guthey & Jackson 2005) mediates the dialectical process of the capture of reality through a mechanical medium. Importantly enough, the claim for an authentic connection requires more than mere information –or reality-. There is a need to appeal to an emotional connection that relates to the construction of the inner self; this process, as we have already seen, must be made creatively.

5. Conclusion: Authenticity and Political Communication

Throughout this paper, I have reviewed works that analyze authenticity both theoretically and empirically in the fields of Architecture, Tourism, and Arts & Performance. By adopting this strategy, I attempted to inscribe the current significance of authenticity into the big narrative of modernity and show how the larger processes of the formation of individual self illuminate our contemporary cultural concerns. In this sense, the literature reviewed locates authenticity as an identity issue. This process of self-construction where the concept of authenticity is embedded adopts several forms. Sometimes, what is stressed is an individualized search for meaning that longs for solid references anchored in the past or in community. Other times, that search is framed as a rejection from external constraints, be them those

of the commoditized forms or of the institutionalized conducts. The background that gives authenticity its central normative power in identity construction lies in the failing importance of objective sources for the guidance of self. In Architecture, for example, the analysis of authenticity is increasingly related to the subjective views of the people – the experience of authenticity- more than to the material values embedded in the object –the genuineness of buildings. Similar concerns are expressed in the literature on Tourism Studies, where the search of an authentic experience –travelling to other places or to the past- is the central interest of tourists. Performance shows us the perspective of the means needed to achieve the goal of an authentic connection between performers and audiences. The main implications of the experiences in these three cultural fields are that realness is not only being asked of buildings but it is one of the main claims that citizens pose to politicians in an over-mediated age. Moreover, the search of authentic experiences is not monopolized by tourism: voters want meaningful relationships with candidates that contribute to their process of identity-construction. In addition, contemporary characteristics of political environment transform politicians in performers whose main asset is their credibility.

Consequently, authenticity -as a modern claim to self-expression-takes on a higher political relevance in a candidate-centered schema. In a media-saturated age, with people tired of being manipulated and without clear external references in which they could base their identity construction, the search for genuineness is of paramount importance. People need to mirror their own self in politics, because of a turn toward life politics. Traditional references have eroded and political life appears more malleable and fluid. Large parts of citizenship seem to be no longer engaged to the political system, as the low voter turnout of recent elections demonstrates. Authenticity appears in this landscape as a trend that explains the current situation of apathy and that contains the seeds for a renovation. As authenticity expresses a search for a experience of the real, it contributes to show the limitations of a political system that is far away from the concerns of contemporary citizens. The claim for authenticity works as a force that claims for a more legitimate system and try to stress the connection between citizens and politicians. Yet at the same time, authenticity claims could be manipulated and

could create a spiralling sense of deception, as they would show the difficulties of real reform. It is because of this paradoxical nature that I have tried to show how authenticity is related to complex historical evolutions that are far from offering simple answers to the current problems. Indeed, this paper tries to show the multiple nuances that the concept of authenticity entails and it needs to be seen as a preliminary exploration of an exciting puzzle that goes back to the foundations of modernity.

The clearing of the thick conceptual foliage that hid the phenomenon has opened a number of paths for political communication. Especially, the study of authenticity arise issues concerning the nature and function of political communication, the current trends in which it is performed, and pose new questions to be pursued. If authenticity becomes the relevant variable to evaluate the status of the representative relationship, communication assumes a constitutive value. Authenticity works as an adjective that qualifies the experience of being represented that people are having. Contemporarily, this increasingly means the supremacy of the connection performed in the communication act upon the real contents that are expressed in that act. To say it plainly, political communication tends to be self-consummatory as it increasingly loses references to the political realities that are supposed to be expressed in the discourse. This is particularly true in wealthy environments where the concern for post-materialistic values is more acute and the real consequences of political action are felt only in the margins of individuals' lives. In this terrain, then, authenticity is paradoxical. It represents a drive towards a return to the real, but as it is expressed in an emotional connection between voters and politicians, it could make the formers' decisions be more detached from their real implications. This does not mean that the disconnection could be total, but it implies the warning that the constructed nature of authenticity could make the new relationship as artificial as the situation that it was devised to improve. The constitutive role of communication poses the question about the risks of using authenticity claims, because as Benedikt states (2001, p. 85), "the moment one tries to be real, tries to be authentic, and the trying is detected, the bubble bursts and inauthenticity spills out".

This danger explains some of the traits of current political communication. As Scamell & Langer explain, ‘the politicians’ response to audience scepticism, and the common view that they will say anything to get elected, has tended to be, not entertainment as for commercials, but plausibility: to make specific promises smaller and more credible, to take care not to leave a hostage to fortune, to attack the promises, reputation and record of opponents. Part of the attraction of negative advertising for politicians is precisely its plausibility: it allows specific knowledge/information claims that run with the grain of the audience discount.” (2006, 772). Political communication, thus, seems to have traded-off the configuration of political identities for the exclusive conveying of information. Examples of this trait abound in different political messages, but are expressed primarily in the current state of political advertising. Instead of assuming a mediational and creative role that could use a charismatically appealing storytelling (Holt 2004), what has prevailed is the use of plausibility. This approach has led to a formulaic approach to political advertising that misses the privileged spot that it has to analyze the way in which candidates present themselves to society. Authenticity appeals, in this sense, have been hidden by the overwhelming presence of negative ads and message that are devised to appeal exclusively to the political base of candidates.

In turn, what the emotional connection that authenticity claims seek to construct reminds us about is the theoretical frame employed to look at political communication phenomena. There is a tendency, both in industry and in scholar analysis, to a perspective that privileges the political knowledge meaning that is transmitted over the cultural and emotional significance of the ads in the public dialogue about representation⁵. The claim, most of the times, seems to be to give the voter elements to decide between different alternatives but that approach is made from a perspective where the two parts of the relationship have their identities consolidated. Conversely, authenticity works in the same

⁵ An expression of this approach could be seen in the analysis that K. Hall Jamieson made of Reagan’s ad “Morning again in America”, where her main concern was in translating the significance of the ad in terms of political information. In this way, she qualifies it as a ‘negative ad’ for the implications that it had in comparing Reagan’s achievements in his first term over the situation before he was President –thus, criticizing his contender, Walter Mondale- (Jamieson, 1996). Conversely, we think that his ads were iconic (Holt, 2004) in its creation of a powerful myth for the challenges that US faced in 1984.

act when identities are being constructed, that is, in the interactive process of communication. Thus, the study of authenticity requires a holistic approach to the field of political communication, especially one that takes into account what has been called a sophisticated discourse of emotionality. This is opposed to an understanding of emotions as an irrational force that can be pulled out by appeals as classic as fear, childhood innocence, human vulnerability or other designed to “pull the heart strings” (Richards, 2004). Nowadays, the process of identity formation is based in a more integral acknowledgement of emotions that sees them as “1. An intrinsic and continuous dimension of human functioning, not an optional or episodic response (...). 2. Complex and multilayered, and at times contradictory and obscure (...). 3. Not just expressive or cathartic but also reflexive (...). 4. Increasingly recognized as the ground of self-identity.” (Richards 2004) Contemporary commercial advertising works on these dimensions and political analysts are beginning to acknowledge that fact (Sosnik et al., 2006).

Summing up, the question about authenticity compels the field of political communication to ask itself about its own function in contemporary age, the state of its accomplishments and the methods that it employs for their inquiries. Importantly enough, a discussion about its nature could help to clear its relationship with the field of politics and redefine its meaning as a constitutive, instead of instrumental, realm. This encourages a set of questions regarding how authenticity is manufactured, the methods employed to perform the latter, and the risks involved in those strategies. Moreover, the analysis of how the question about authenticity is faced gives us a panorama of the state of art of the field of political communication, as our former remarks on advertising show. In this sense, two different moves seem to be necessary. First, to deal with authenticity it is necessary to produce a shift from the predominant cognitive framework to one that combines the emotional and cultural realms of the phenomenon. Second, the experiential nature of the phenomenon obliges us to concentrate more in the performative nature and its impact on emotions than in the content of messages. By these statements, I do not want to assume an “either or” posture. To the contrary, my aim is to pose the need to reconsider some aspects of the communication process that has been somewhat

underestimated in the literature⁶. Hence, as it does regarding contemporary life, authenticity poses intriguing questions both to the practise of political communication and to the form in which research is developed. As reality itself, authenticity compels us to cross boundaries. And that necessarily is a revitalizing move.

⁶ Some interesting moves have already been made in the direction proposed in the text, for example, the study of cultural pragmatics (Alexander 2004) and political style (Brummet 2006).

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Finito di stampare e legalmente depositato
nel Novembre 2008
presso il
Dipartimento di Economia, Statistica,
Matematica e Sociologia “Pareto”
Facoltà di Scienze Politiche
Università di Messina
Via T.Cannizzaro, 278 – 98122 MESSINA

ISBN 978-88-95356-22-6