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Music, Identity and the Strange Case of Authenticity
Muzika, tapatumas ir ypatingas autentiškumo atvejis

Abstract

The scope of the present article is to describe the notion of musical authenticity, starting from what seems to be the most important (and controversial) characteristics:

    1) Its role in musicological discourse;
    2) The (cultural, aesthetic, etc.) contexts of emergence;
    3) The theoretical definition of the concept, as related to its opposite (authenticity) and to other elements (engagement, disengagement, rhetoric);
    4) Its application to the context of national musical identity;
    5) Its nature as ethical and ideological category.

The methodological interface of the essay is mostly semiotic and philosophical, other than musicological.

Keywords: authenticity, inauthenticity, engagement, disengagement, Italy, ideology.

Anotacija

Šiuo straipsniu siekiama aptarti muzikinio autentiškumo sąvoką, didžiausią dėmesį skiriant, autoriaus manymu, svarbiausioms (ir labiausiai kontroversiškoms) jos ypatybėms:

    1) autentiškumo vaidmeniui muzikologiniame diskurse;
    2) kultūriniams, estetiniams ir kt. autentiškumo atsiradimo kontekstams;
    3) teoriniam sąvokos apibrėžimui, siejant ją su jos priešybe (neautentiškumu) ir kitais elementais (įjungimu, išjungimu, retorika);
    4) šios sąvokos pritaikymui muzikinio tautinio tapatumo kontekstui;
    5) autentiškumui kaip etinei ir ideologinei kategorijai.

Straipsnio mokslinė metodologija iš esmės yra labiau semiotinė ir filosofinė nei muzikologinė.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: autentiškumas, neautentiškumas, įjungimas (*embrayage*), išjungimas (*débrayage*), Italija, ideologija.

1. Introduction

The issue of authenticity is remarkably recurrent in both scholarly and everyday discourses about art, and particularly about music. Normally, possibly always, the label "authentic", as applied to works, composers, styles, performances or other things, bears a clearly positive ideological connotation (both in the epistemological and, as we shall see, in the political sense), as if it was a feature to pursue almost systematically, paradigmatically, when producing a piece of music. As Peter Kivy, somewhat ironically, suggests about musical performance:

> The highest praise one can bestow on a musical performance, in many influential circles, is to say that it was "authentic" ... "Authentic", then, has become or is close to becoming a synonym for "good", while seeming to confer upon a performance some magical property that it did not have before. It is the musical version of the doctrine of the real presence (Kivy, 1995, p. 1).

Apparently, the qualities associated with authenticity are most of the times of ethical type: authentic music is perceived as honest, real, uncorrupted, even "loyal" towards the audience. Many are the musicologists who addressed the issue of authenticity in explicitly ethical terms, in fact reminding of the importance (which I by all means support) of forms of scientific inquiry that are not only descriptive, but accept the challenge of being prescriptive as well. Eero Tarasti's "Existential Semiotics" is a very good example:

> ...We cannot exclude from the present investigation the vast domain of ethical problems. One cannot be satisfied, in general, with a study in which a phenomenon is reduced to some of its aspects, but even in a most abstract artwork we have to account for the whole weight of reality that has yielded it and which speaks therein through its own sign systems. The intentions of an author cannot be eliminated as a kind of intentional fallacy. The social context and the "ecoform" of an artwork cannot be left without attention as "extrasemiotic conditions" (Tarasti, 2000, p. 87–88).

For reasons I fail to understand, such an obvious and important consideration, not necessarily applied to art, still seems to be an exception among scholars and musicologists, semioticians being no exception. Tarasti is very right in underlining the importance, in what he calls the "discovery of ethics," of the subject and its foregrounding and disappearance: "Without the concept of subject there

is no ethical choice." (ibid., p. 88) The main application of this precept, in Tarasti's work, is found exactly in the chapter named "On the Authenticity and Inauthenticity of Art". For the purposes of the present essay, that chapter provides an excellent theoretical hook to reflect upon these topics.

2. Contexts and theoretical background

Following Umberto Eco,

the necessary conditions for a forgery are that, given the actual or supposed existence of an object Oa, made by A (be it a human author or whatever) under specific historical circumstances t1, there is a different object Ob, made by B (be it a human author or whatever) under circumstances t2, which under a certain description displays strong similarities with Oa (or with a traditional image of Oa). The sufficient condition for a forgery is that it is claimed by some Claimant that Ob is indiscernibly identical with Oa (Eco, 1987, p. 9).

In other words, a "case" for authenticity is given when an example of inauthenticity (a forgery, in Eco's words) is produced (see Fig. 1). That is to say, *Oa* becomes recognisable through the emergence of *Ob*. This is a rather important (and, as we shall see, controversial) point that certainly deserves further reflections (which I provide in the conclusions to the present article). At this early stage of my analysis, however, I shall focus on that variable "t" of Eco's model, the historical circumstances. A historical circumstance goes certainly beyond a strictly temporal context (Eco does not say it explicitly, but I have no reason to doubt he implies it), and refers, I believe, to a rather wide range of contexts. Or, at least, so we have to assume, otherwise the level of superficiality of a model including an exclusively temporal variable would be suspiciously high. A "circumstance" can be evidently also geographical, social, anthropological, and so on. A unitary interpretation could still be possible if changes within the variable occurred coherently, i.e., if a change in one sub-unit of "t" (e.g., the geographical one) provoked an analogous change in the other sub-units (historical, social, etc.). However, this is definitely not the case. Cover versions of a song can be issued in a different time, but in the same place as the original, or – more curiously – vice versa, as it was very common in Italy with Anglo-American songs during the 1960s (Fabbri, 2002, p. 193–196).
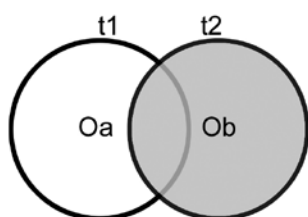

Figure 1.
The emergence of a case of authenticity/inauthenticity according to Eco, 1987

To say it all, we also have to grant Eco the implication that, by talking about subjects *A* and *B*, he is not invariably talking about two specifically different subjects, but in principle also about the same subject in two different circumstances. The production of the token (i.e., forgery), indeed, does not necessarily require a subject *B*, that is different from *A*. *B* may be a sufficient, but not a necessary condition for a forgery to be produced. The cases of live performances in popular music are prototypical. During their promotional tours, musicians perform several forgeries of their own material, in many cases transforming the songs in length, arrangement, form, harmony, rhythm and even melody, to create sheer stylistic clichés around the live version. The very famous riff of Deep Purple's "Smoke on the water", in the re-made live version issued on the "Live in Japan" album (the riff is totally different from bar 5 to bar 11), is not less famous than the original (original?) studio-recorded version. The same applies to the habit, nowadays almost praxis, of re-issuing old material with new arrangements, or even only with a different (usually digital) mastering of the original (usually analogical) tape.

Coming back to the variable "t", it is evident that authenticity and inauthenticity are features that apply at the same time to diachronic and synchronic categories, and therefore the "contexts", Eco's historical circumstances, range from the simplest and most obvious classifications to the most specific and pinpointed ones. Here is a brief list:

1. The most predictable circumstance for this dualism is certainly of geographical type, and regards the birthplace of a given type (form/tradition/genre/opus etc.), i.e., in most cases, the place where the given element was first found. One out of dozens of examples would be the quest for authenticity related to the rise of national schools in the 19th century. It is clear that a geographical circumstance is also an anthropological one: places mean also people, predictably enough.

2. Another rather obvious aspect is the opposition past/present, with its diverse nuances. The most typical of these refers to the time when a given type actually originated. That principle also includes the opposition original/remake (or re-arrangement, transcription, cover, etc., depending on the stylistic context). However, the opposition past/present is not the sole one to be displayed on temporal units, and there can easily be occurrences where the two elements of comparison are both located in the past. For a number of reasons there are, in music history, times and periods that are considered more authentic than others, as their intrinsic socio-aesthetic characteristics are claimed to have displayed more of the above-mentioned ethical connotations than the ones to which they are compared (the dualism baroque-rococo being a typical instance). Temporal dualisms can be expressed also in

terms of before/after. A very typical attitude (a cliché, in fact) in many fans of popular bands or musicians is to show appreciation for the "early work" of their idols, i.e., the time when they were artistically pure, and free to express their talent without the constrictions of the music business (see point 4 of this list).

3. Diverse oppositions emerge also in the realm of styles and genres, which we might define as a part of the level that Tarasti names "the inner properties of a musical work" (Tarasti, 2000, p. 125). Given tokens of such types are usually claimed to be more authentic than others, probably because they seem to be provided with those intrinsic characteristics that I mention in points 4 and 5 of the present list. That applies also to the macro-categories (like classic, romantic, jazz, rock, blues, etc.). Even when not tied to genres, stylistic choices are still passable to be labelled as authentic or inauthentic, as in the case of the opposition acoustic/electronic, period/modern instruments, etc.

Still in the category of stylistic choices, I shall also put the opposition simple/elaborated, as applied to arrangements. In folk music, a basic guitar-and-voice, "first-take", "plug-and-play" set-up are often considered more authentic than complex orchestra-based multi-tracks arrangements. In that sense, the white middle-class pompous versions of folks and ragtime provided by Tin Pan Alley in the early 20th century (see the crooning style or most Irving Berlin's output) is often referred to as inauthenticisation of such styles.

4. A further level to be considered is the socio-economic one, i.e., the impact of music on people in terms of social phenomenon and (when it is the case) financial business. Here, we find more dualisms evaluated in the form of ethical statements, and – once again – the issue of authenticity emerges. One case is the opposition between alternative/avant-garde/marginal music and the so-called "mainstream", that is, music produced and distributed on a very large scale. Predictably, the former group is often claimed to be more authentic, basically because it did not have to deal (and clash) with the cynical rules of the music business. Such an attitude can be extended also to the opposition indie/major, referred to small, independent recording companies, as opposed to big, multinational ones. And, of course, it is also referred to certain marketing strategies that bring the likes of Luciano Pavarotti to "mix" with mainstream-pop musicians.

5. The last category refers to the level of performance of the musical piece (with which Tarasti deals in a whole section, at pages 125–128 of his book). The given way to perform a work can be perceived as more authentic than another (and, here, criteria are legion: spontaneity, faithfulness to the composer's intention, a certain tendency not to "over-play", etc.). In popular music, this is also the case of live performances, as opposed to studio recording, or to musicians that are perceived as not really "playing" their music, like DJs.

3. Semiotic analysis

Quite simply, the notion of authenticity is intrinsically semiotic, in that it presupposes a relation between two or more elements, whose dynamics must be defined at the syntactic, the semantic and the pragmatic level. Summarising what we have so far we say that in order to apply the notion of authenticity within a discourse we need at least two signs (*A* and *B*) in reciprocal interaction, and this interaction is possible via a number of both fixed elements and variables. In Eco's model the variable is *t*, the "historical circumstance", while subjects and objects are to be considered constants.

Other important scholars have discussed the notion of authenticity. Among these, is the most important Lithuanian semiotician Algirdas Greimas whose theories are in fact the actual basis of Tarasti's application of the notion to music:

> *Applying Greimas again, one can speak of authenticity of time, place, and subject (or "actor"). Centrifugal and centripetal forces operate these three dimensions. Greimas calls the centrifugal force, which makes a text move in the inner or outer sense, débrayage (disengagement), and the centripetal force embrayage (engagement). Theoretically, authenticity is at its greatest when complete engagement prevails in all three dimensions: the temporal now (nunc), the spatial here (hic), and the actorial I (ego). Such a state has always been considered the ideal; it is the utopia of philosophers* (Tarasti, 2000, p. 118).

Now, not only such a model justifies the criterion of classification proposed in my list (giving, for instance, full credit to the spatial and temporal dimensions of points 1 and 2). It also appears slightly more exhaustive than the one proposed by Eco, for at least two reasons: first, it is explicitly aware that a notion like "historical circumstance" is incomplete (at least, it leaves no ground for misunderstanding); and second, it is flexible, in that it allows more articulated interpretations of the phenomenon of authenticity in music.

To start with, the notions of ego, hic and nunc are not as stable as one could expect. I have already mentioned the case of musicians re-performing their own material in live contexts or remix albums, but the issue is even more complex. What is an authentic piece of music? What is the entity one should take as a point of reference? For quite a while, in classical music, the score was that entity most of the times. However, nowadays, the absolute majority of musicians (experimental, popular, jazz, electronic, etc.) do not start their compositional process by writing a score

(in fact, some of them declare they are not even able to write music). The score of a modern musician can be many things, separately or at the same time:

a) A piece of paper, where the musician, depending on the genre, may write down lyrics, chords, ideas, or anything. For the remaining elements, it is not rare that the musician simply relies on his/her memory;[1]

b) The so-called demo[2]-tape, i.e., a rough recording of the very first draft of a work;

c) A computer file, constructed piece by piece, and portraying a more articulated demo, but still a demo, of the work. Such a file, if constructed in midi form, can be also transcribed into a score by specific softwares. But even when this is the case, I find it hard to call authentic a .pdf file constructed with the version 1.3 of Sibelius.

To this, we shall also add that the very thing that ends up in the hands (and the ears) of the receiver (the listener, the music-magazine journalist, etc.) is, or may be, a product that has very little to do with these approximate drafts.

What does this whole picture suggest? Certainly, most of the reflections one may propose were highly anticipated in the very famous essay by Walter Benjamin "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". In a few words, the advent of devices that allow a totally faithful and potentially limitless reproduction of an original artwork makes authenticity a rather relative concept. It is not in the purposes of this short essay to deepen this issue, but still I shall deliver a few open questions, hoping to prompt the reader into further reflection: Is irreproducibility and uniqueness the very essential feature in authenticity? What does really count as authentic, the (chronologically) original intention of the musician, or what s/he actually accepted as worthwhile to be presented to an audience, after a clear process of refinement? And finally, if the issue is (and it is) of ethical nature, what are the ethically relevant features for an artwork to be claimed as authentic? Is the ego/hic/nunc issue all about answering questions like: Who did it first? When did it happen first? And so forth? Or is there more, and maybe concepts like mediation, shaping and multi-articulation should be fully taken into account?

3.1. Engagement and disengagement

There is more in the Greimasian model on authenticity. The notions of engagement and disengagement open interesting analytical opportunities. Indeed, the connection between authenticity/inauthenticity and engagement/disengagement is definitely a dynamic one. And all combinations seem to be possible.

As we are moving into a Greimasian area, it makes sense to structure the four dimensions into a classical semiotic square, as in Fig. 2.
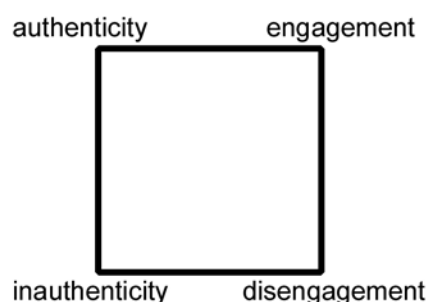
Figure 2. The dimensions of authenticity/ inauthenticity and engagement/disengagement, as framed in a Greimasian square

The square creates logical relations, which, in this case are of a pragmatic type, in that they link the semantic features of the four dimensions with the syntactic ones. As these relations are analogical, I took the liberty of re-arranging the Greimasian square into a Cartesian plan that possibly (at least in a visual sense) gives more credit to the unstable space that each relation occupies (see Fig. 3).
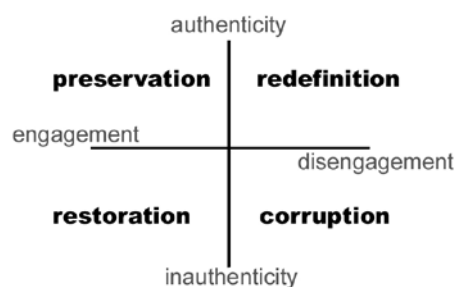
Figure 3. Semantic relations between the four dimensions

Let us now see, with the help of Fig. 3, the four emerging relations in detail. Of course, engagement-authenticity, and disengagement-inauthenticity are the most obvious combinations. The former pair includes fully acknowledged original artworks (where it is possible to point them with no doubt whatsoever), compared to which the object *Ob* (the one that raises the case) does its best to maintain the authenticity of *Oa*. I call this relation preservation, qualifying it as homo-semantic. In the disengagement-inauthenticity, I obviously refer to the quintessential forgeries. The relation is clearly hetero-semantic, and its pragmatics is a form of corruption.

Apparently, however, this is not the end of the story. For instance, how do we qualify the vast area of parodies, pastiches, tributes, etc.? They are of course (perceived and sometimes meant as) cases of inauthenticity, in that they present the basic schemes of Eco's model (*Ob*, rather than *Oa*; *t2*, in its already-defined more complex articulation, rather than *t1*; and, almost always, a subject *B* rather

than a subject *A*). However, do such cases always reflect a centrifugal tension, and thus a form of disengagement? It really does not seem so. In fact, in most cases, it looks like the exact opposite, with a force that is not only centripetal, but in fact philological as well. A combination of this type is pseudo-semantic, and its pragmatics is a form of restoration. Finally, and, however weird it may seem, it is even possible to construct a form of authenticity on the basis of a disengaging force. In several occasions (Martinelli, 2004 being the first one), I had the chance to discuss the notion of error aesthetics in electronic music, pointing out how the use of errors and accidents in the compositional process is often described by the authors as an attempt to "provide the humanity in this sterile world" (as Matthew Herbert declares in an interview, retrieved at the following internet link: www.magicandaccident. com/accidental/index.htm?2). Cases like this obviously provide a redefinition of the concept of authenticity, and are therefore forms of metasemantic relation.

To the readers fairly familiar with architecture, the fact that my proposed four categories are rather faithfully overlapping the basic four strategies for recovery and valorisation of endangered architectural areas has certainly not escaped their attention. If we think of, say, a gothic cathedral (*Oa*), and the way it is used in time (therefore creating at least a *Ob*, if not also a *Oc*, a *Od* and so on), we indeed end up dealing with one or more of the following possible strategies:

1) We may try to preserve, as more as possible, the integrity of the original cathedral (*Oa*), i.e., renouncing to intervene, but also trying to keep the cathedral alive, by for instance exploiting it very little;

2) On the contrary, we might corrupt the building by adding, time after time, elements belonging to the contemporary architectural styles (no need to remind how popular such a practice was in Baroque times);

3) We might also opt to restore the building, i.e., the acceptance that a total preservation is unachievable, thus the next best thing is an intervention that tries to be as respectful as possible to the original, not avoiding, though, the use of modern techniques and technologies;

4) Finally, through a rather fatalistic action, we might accept the idea that time-passing is part of life, and that several historical events (also catastrophic ones) just happen, and therefore the most authentic way to approach that cathedral is simply following its development, whatever shape this latter takes. If, for instance, the cathedral is bombed during the war, and partially destroyed, it might simply be redefined, and become, say, a memorial monument. The building acquires thus a meta-signification that points at *Oa*, while being now something else.

The Lithuanian musicologist Lina Navickaitė, in her forthcoming PhD thesis, provided a very interesting

application of this model in the field of musical performance, which is particularly relevant to any kind of study of authenticity in music (the act of performing itself having to deal from the very start with a potential case of inauthenticity). In Navickaitė's opinion, the case of preservation is well exemplified by the authenticity movement (the so-called historically-informed performances); the case of restoration applies to those instances where an objective approach to the score is made (Toscanini being one good representative of the category), even though with modern instruments. The case of corruption occurs in several forms of modernisation and/or romanticisation of classical repertoire; and, finally, the redefinition is called for when, for instance, we witness a radical change in the medium itself (computers, player-pianos, etc.) so that an actual new form of authenticity is created.

3.2. Rhetoric relations

Another form of *A-B* relation is of rhetorical type. The configuration that *B* takes while being inspired by or resembling (or else) *A*, refers to a number of rhetorical strategies, and it is thanks to the efficiency of the strategy/ strategies that the claimant is prompted to recognise the relation *A-B*. These strategies are:

1) The paraphrase when *Ob* is clearly imitating one specific *Oa*, generally for purposes of parody, homage, philological reconstruction, or other;

2) The metaphor when *Ob* ideally (metaphorically) reminds us of *Oa*, without having any particular, specific resemblance. The purposes are similar to point 1, except that, obviously, the philological approach is replaced by a different, consciously more vague, aesthetic strategy;

3) The synecdoche in the "part for the whole" form, when *Ob* refers to an entire class of authentic objects (a school, a genre, a form, etc.);

4) The quotation of which we have two different kinds: a) when (in a synecdoche context) there is one or more moments calling to mind a particular *Oa*; b) when, during an object not entirely classifiable as inauthentic, there is only a moment, or a part, that raises the authenticity case and qualifies the very object as an *Ob* (for this particular case, one might think of Berio quoting Mahler in his *Sinfonia*).

3.3. Analysis of the contexts: the case of *Italian* music

Coming back to the contexts of authenticity, it is perhaps time to point out that defining the contexts is not only a methodological necessity, but, in fact, another analytical task. Contexts are not only variables, inside which we identify one or more cases of authenticity. They are in fact a further field for theoretical investigation. I shall take, as an example, the first and most obvious variable of my previous list, the geographical one.

Is the geographical recognition of *Oa* a simple task based on pinpointing a specific area where allegedly a given musical object originated? How big (or how small) is this area? How are its boundaries defined? Do they coincide with the notion of country? Nation? Ethnic group? Community? Culture? Region? Focusing only on the *size* of the area, can anybody answer the question: Where did Jazz come from? The USA? Louisiana? New Orleans? Storyville district? A particular red light bar in Storyville? And, is there one single place where jazz was born? Or was it more than an unconscious cognitive consensus of certain musical ideas that eventually will become what we call jazz? Was it rising spontaneously in different places, more or less at the same time?

Also, is *Oa* an actual object, geographically-wise, or is it more some sort of cultural *topos*? Let me provide the example of my own country, whose historical conditions have been such that it is almost impossible to conceive a unified definition of the country as a *nation*. What is Italian music? How many kinds of Italian music exist? And, principally, is there such a thing as a musical *Italianness*? When I think about Italy as a musical context, I can think of at least six different semantic fields:

1) First and foremost, we have musical movements, genres or styles that were allegedly born in Italy (opera, bel canto, oratorio, *verismo*, etc.) or that had a strong affirmation in Italy, although born somewhere else (cantatas, madrigals, baroque instrumental music), or, finally, that were more or less specifically designed to promote Italy as a country or as a community (one may think of Verdi, for instance, or of the national anthem "Fratelli d'Italia");

2) A lot of musical and musicological terminology is Italian. *Presto con fuoco, allegro, moderato, finale, sonata, cadenza, intermezzo*, etc. This might not say a lot about music itself, but it says enough of the Italian presence and its importance in the musical world. Paradoxically, this piece of information collides with the fact that musicology, as a science, started in Italy only at the end of 19th century, thanks to the foundation of the *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, in Turin (1894).

3) Several foreign composers have been inspired by Italy for their compositions. Liszt had seven pieces about Italy in his "Années de pelegrinage", plus three about Venice and Naples in particular (between 1837 and 1859). Mendelssohn's 4th Symphony is nicknamed "Italiana" (1830–33), both because it was started in Italy and because it contained allusions to the Italian folk music, especially in the last movement, entitled (just to confirm point 2 of this list) "Saltarello". Bach wrote an Italian Concerto for harpsichord in 1735, and it was called so because it was written in the style of the Italian instrumental concertos of the early 18th century, etc.

4) Together with these examples, I shall also add those Italian compositions that seem to disengage from *Italianness*, compared to the national characteristics, yet they are quintessentially Italian. If we take such operas like "Aida" or "Turandot", for instance, we see that there is more interest in Orientalism and exoticism, rather than an attempt to follow an "Italian" tradition. But the fact is, if we ask people to name five Italian musical works, it is very likely that both these operas will be mentioned in big figures;

5) Another interesting thing we can ask people is, in general, what comes to their mind when thinking of "Italian music". A rather interesting experience that I made quite often in my courses. What comes up is a perverted-yet-balanced mix of stereotypes, trends, history and tradition. An interesting melting pot, whose database consists of the following words: opera, bel canto, San Remo Festival, O Sole Mio, Naples (as the Italian musical town par excellence), Luciano Pavarotti, Andrea Bocelli, Farinelli, Paganini, Puccini, Pausini, Eros Ramazzotti, singing in general (i.e., the fact that Italian people are normally perceived as people who love singing), "L'italiano" (i.e., Toto Cutugno's song), the mandolin, etc.

6) Finally, and that will turn out as a rather crucial point, most of the things that concern the Italian tradition are not easily identifiable with the country as such, but rather with a specific regional/local area within it. The schools (Venice, Naples, Rome, etc.), forms and functions as the Neapolitan Sixth, the *Siciliana* (the pastoral dance in 6/8, very popular in the 17th and 18th centuries), the *Villanella* or *Napoletana* (the vocal musical form from the 16th century), the *Ambrosian* or *Milanese* Chant, the *Veneziana* (another dance, from the 14th and 15th centuries). This particular picture may probably be a case for other countries as well, but it must be admitted that in Italy it has a quite strong emphasis. Italy, as I have mentioned, was an actual "nation" until very recently. In fact, whether Italy can be finally considered a nation is still a question discussed by historians, and some people do not hesitate to point out that Italians feel Italians only when the national football team is playing. Not to mention that, in the current political spectrum, there are still parties that are for federalism. Italy was not united until 1861, and Rome was added in 1870. The country acquired the modern geographical configuration only after the First World War. That configuration became official only in 1954, with the annex of Trieste, and the annex ceased to be a problem only in 1975 (when the Trieste issue was sorted out with Yugoslavia). The unification of Italy was not at all a wish from all parts of it. Most of the Southern regions did not really want to be united with the rest of the country, and they resisted the unification until very recently. Linguistically, one can talk about a real

unification only in the 1960s, thanks to a massive campaign promoted by the government via television and radio programs. Before then, people in, say, Parma would just not understand people from Cagliari: they were simply talking different languages. And I mean languages, not dialects. Therefore, to talk about the national character in Italian music is probably more complicated than talking about the regional or local character. These latter are more clear-cut and accurate, and certainly higher in number. One example is exactly Neapolitan songs, a genre whose origin, in the modern sense, is normally identified with the Piedigrotta Festival/Competition (with the first edition launched in 1839, when Naples was still, and somehow happily, under the Bourbons). It featured songs of the likes of "O Sole Mio", "Torna a Surriento", "Te voglio bene assaie", and authors like Donizetti, Pergolesi and Rossini. The genre, strongly circumscribed and connoted as "Neapolitan", became "Italian" only when Enrico Caruso popularised those tunes at international level, at the beginning of the 20th century, by becoming a star in New York (also thanks to the support of the Italian mafia, another important national "genre").

In one word, what we call Italy is, to say the least, the result of the combination of Greek-Etrurian-Roman traditions, with a long process of ethnic melting during the Middle Ages, and at least three important modern dominations (Spanish, French and Austrian). A typical Italian from Sicily might bear Arabic traces in his/her dark skin and Nordic ones in his/her blue eyes. It is certainly easier to recognise an Italian from the way she/he dresses than from the way she/he looks. What is Italy?

Once again, and still keeping in mind that what follows will be another over-simplification of a much more complex reality. Greimas may help us with his Semiotic Square (and I shall once again take the liberty of replacing it with a Cartesian plan, as in Fig. 4). If we take as logically opposed paradigms the idea of a national musical element and that of a regional one, we can easily construct a net of four possible relations:

1) **National/Regional** – This is obviously the most syncretistic combination, essentially based on a stereotypical (cultural and/or aesthetic) description of Italian music (and I mean stereotypical in a sense that is not necessarily negatively connoted). Caruso nationalising the local Neapolitan music (or later, Pavarotti) clearly falls under this category, and so does an event like the San Remo Festival with its attempt to decontextualise and unify different local musical cultures (e.g., among the rules of the festival there is also prohibition to use any local dialect).

2) **National/Non regional** – In this case, we have musical instances that provide an either intentional or de facto attempt to present a unified, coherent national product. Opera, bel canto, forms like the Italian overture,

the above-mentioned musical terminology, not to mention expressively nationalistic or patriotic approaches like in several of Verdi's works.

3) **Regional/Non National** – If there is a context when an at least approximate idea of geographical authenticity may emerge in Italy, that, I believe, relies in pure locality. The local schools, the mentioned forms and dances (Siciliana, Neapolitan, etc.), and similar elements seem to bear social, cultural, historical, anthropological and finally aesthetic elements that, it seems to me, approach most closely Tarasti's "utopia of the philosophers".

4) **Non-regional/Non-national** – This category features those musical instances with an explicit disengaging attitude, like the mentioned Puccini's exotic operas, or also musicians with a clearly cosmopolitan intention, as Benedetto Michelangeli or Toscanini. Obviously, also those works not properly Italian (like Bach's "Italian Concerto") fall into this classification that nevertheless seem to make an effort to convey elements and flavours that are (considered to be) typically Italian, and those (like madrigals) that, though originating abroad, came eventually to typify Italian music.
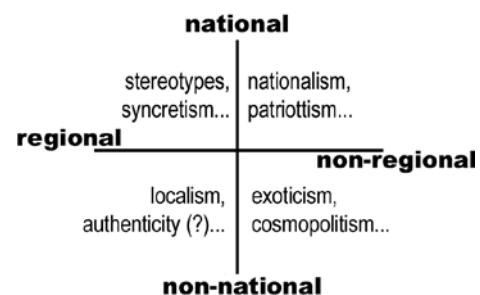

Figure 4. Italian music and the opposition National/Regional

So, again, what is Italy after all?

4. Conclusions

I shall conclude these few reflections with some specific remarks on authenticity as an ethical/ideological category, by far the trickiest of the problems related to the issue. Even a trivialisation of the leading questions present difficulties: is authenticity for progressives or for conservatives? For globals or non-globals? Does authenticity promise a revolution (epistemological or even political) or a reaction? The funny thing is that everyone seems to have good reasons to be a supporter/promoter/preacher of authenticity. And, inevitably, when an issue (especially a cultural one) is so transversal, the risks for a demagogical use of it are very serious.

I pointed out that, in order to discuss authenticity, one has to create a case, that is a relation between

Oa and *Ob*, according to which, on the basis of given values and perceptions, *Ob* reminds of *Oa*. Thus, what kind of case is authenticity? What is *Oa*, exactly?

I cannot help projecting a bit of my biosemiotic inclinations, in this case. A sign, however we define it, is a phenomenon of organic nature, also if we intend to use it in abstract and philosophical terms. Signs, trivially, are born, live and die. To die does not mean to disappear: it rather means, in common sense, to turn into something else, exactly as being born does not mean to be created out of nothing. The death of a sign corresponds, quite simply, to the point where a given number of vital sources, essential for its existence, cease to be active, so to say: expire. Sources are time, of course, but also space, feeding (I mean feeding as a metaphor of anything that motivates the existence of a sign, like the presence of interpreters, who designate a signification for it).

Now, as an organic entity, a sign is by fact a system of signs (a difference exists, if it does, only at a purely theoretical level). But, most of all, as an organic entity, and despite the changing processes occurring during its life (ageing, for instance[3]), the sign is still recognisable by one or more interpreter as that sign. Maybe, a bit older, with a few overused semiotic functions, but still, undeniably, that sign. However, when the sign actually dies (of course, I apologise for the insistence on such metaphors, but I will soon get to the point) we have a real, true transformation. It is not like the sign disappears, or ceases to be perceived and interpreted. On the contrary. But it is evident to nearly everybody that it has undergone a clear, deep mutation, particularly in the direction of an organic decomposition (dispersion, division, occasionally explosion).

Such process constitutes the very point when the sign can (or should) not be considered anymore in its integrity, which simply is by now lacking. The closest thing to an idea of integrity that is left at this point is a series of representations of that integrity (obviously, the more the interpreters of that sign, i.e., the greater its semiotic relevance, the more these representations): memory, documentation, the signs of that sign (performances, remakes, re-arrangements, etc.).

But what happens to the various pieces of that sign? Of course, and still conforming to Lavoisier's rule, each piece is recycled in or contributes to the construction of another sign system. The decomposition of a musical work clearly contributes to other works, in terms of single traits, compositional strategies, performance techniques, etc.

At the same time, though, another phenomenon occurs, of strictly cultural type,[4] which is inherently anthropological: the cult of the dead. The phenomenon of decomposition is mentally and socially managed in diverse ways, according to personal, religious, ideological and other inclinations, and only a strictly scientific attitude (in one way or another) succeeds in coping with the event in a fatalistic way. For instance, a typical case is the spiritual/religious tendency to believe that after death at least part of the sign will be immortal, therefore it makes sense to keep it alive in one or more of the following ways:

1) By believing in the existence of one or more transcendental aspects of that sign (therefore creating an ethical category to protect), aspects that are not empirically explicable, and that bring the sign itself into a dimension that is different from the tangible one (the latter admittedly impossible to achieve). The sign is thus transformed into an ideal (of beauty, purity, or else).

2) Trivially, by trying to (metaphorically) re-animate the sign, typically hoping that, as some point, things will return to that condition, when the sign was alive. It is the transition from conservation to sheer reaction or resistance.

Such attitudes, predictably, emerge also in the area of the above-mentioned sign's representations. Memory, meant as (often absolute) value, sometimes becomes accurate documentation and, sometimes, active nostalgia. Sometimes both.

In the light of these reflections, my (working) conclusion about authenticity (which I mostly intend as a form of intellectual provocation), is that the discussion around this issue is by fact:

1) Discussion around the state of health of *Oa*: Alive? Dead? Transformed? Decomposed? Immortal?

2) The assignment of ethical, ideological and sometimes demagogical type of one or more values to *Oa*, this latter becoming in most of the cases an ideal of truth, beauty, purity, etc.;

3) The assignment of ethical, ideological and demagogical type of one or more values to *Ob*, both as object in itself (whose aesthetic autonomy is now denied, not always with just reasons), and as related (i.e., opposed) to *Oa*;

4) The creation of a transcendental discourse category, while aiming to exist as dimension fails to define itself in spatial-temporal terms becoming a (rather dangerous) meta-dimension. What and where are "the good old days"? If a synth-guitar is less authentic than an electric guitar, which is less authentic than a classical guitar, which is less authentic than the lute, etc., at which exact point of human evolution (human? And why not going even further back in time?), shall we reasonably locate the famous tradition to preserve and re-install?

5) The assignment (often arbitrary, although often reasonable in aesthetic and cultural terms) of more or less precise stylistic codes (or at least prototypes) to art, in historical, geographical, social and strictly aesthetic sense. Such assignment creates one or more models (various *Oa*'s), on the basis of which a case for authenticity becomes possible;

6) Most of the times (always?), such case calls for attention only when one or more *Ob* appears. That is to say, using the previous metaphors, that the memory of the "dead" is somehow disturbed. *Ob*, in practice, creates a situation of conceptual "noise", opposed to a straight (musical, in our case) path that, because straight, was taken for granted;

7) This means that a case for authenticity is possible only on the basis of a claimed case for inauthenticity, or, forcing the comparison, that we remember of the old only when the new appears, we remember of simplicity when complexity appears, or even in the most reactionary cases that we miss regression only when progress appears.

Having said that, and finally in defence of the concept, one shall also establish some fair distinctions. First of all, a critical position towards *Ob* (as inauthentic) may also be the result of very pondered reflections, not only of a certain cultural laziness (as I clearly implied in my previous remarks). The rejection of *Ob*, that is, is not only aprioristic because it requires more mental effort than good old *Oa*. On the contrary, such rejection may be motivated by, for instance, the recognition of cultural and/or aesthetic dangers of trivialisation of the above-mentioned stylistic codes. *Ob* is here recognised as inauthentic most of all because it makes the class of *Oa* more banal and silly, and also because, by imitating *Oa*, is revealing a clear poverty of ideas and innovation. Moreover, similar reflections bring also to neatly distinguish between a "forgery"-type of *Ob*, and a *Ob* that, on the other hand, seems to have constructively approached the stylistic lesson of *Oa*, resulting in an aesthetically valuable, if not autonomous, proposal. One cannot certainly speak of Berio's quotation of Mahler's 2nd symphony Scherzo, as a forgery, although clearly an *Ob*.

The question remains open: my attempt was most of all in the direction of defining the concept in a perspective that hopefully will challenge its ideological sacredness.

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[1]   To some musicians, this approximation is even considered a point of strength. John Lennon and Paul McCartney would often say that if they were able to remember their own song drafts, which was a good indication that most probably the future listeners would have remembered it, as well.

[2]   "Demo" is short for "Demonstration".

[3]   Let us think about the label of "outdated" that is often given to certain works or performances.

[4]   Thus, in biosemiotic perspective, we are still dealing with a natural phenomenon, although admittedly a particular form of it.

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Santrauka

Ir moksliniame, ir kasdieniame diskurse apie muziką ypač dažnai minima autentiškumo problema. Kone visada epitetas „autentiškas" yra aiškiai teigiamos ideologinės konotacijos (epistemologine ir politine prasme) – tartum tai būtų ypatybė, kurios, kuriant ar atliekant meno kūrinį, reikia siekti kone sistemiškai, paradigmiškai. Pasak Umberto Eco (1987, p. 9), autentiškumas „pasirodo" tada, kai pateikiamas neautentiškumo (U. Eco žodžiais tariant, klastotės) pavyzdys. Tuo norima pasakyti, kad autentiškas objektas (U. Eco tai vadina „Oa" – t. y. subjekto „a" sukurtas objektas „O"), sukurtas istorinėmis aplinkybėmis „t1", tampa atpažįstamas pasirodžius neautentiškam objektui „Ob", sukurtam „t2" aplinkybėmis: tai gana svarbus (ir, kaip vėliau pamatysime, kontroversiškas) teiginys, neabejotinai vertas tolesnių svarstymų.

Iš pradžių Algirdas Julius Greimas, o vėliau ir konkrečiau – Eero Tarasti (2000, p. 118) autentiškumo svarstymus praturtino tokiais reikšmingais elementais, kaip įjungimas (*embrayage*) ir išjungimas (*débrayage*), taip sukurdami labai dinamišką schemą, kurioje: 1) autentiškumo siekiama laikantis įjungimo nuostatos (išsaugojimo atvejis); 2) neautentiškumas yra akivaizdus išjungimo nuostatos padarinys (iškraipymo, užteršimo atvejis); tačiau 3) neautentiškumas gali rastis ir esant įjungimo nuostatai (restauravimas), o 4) išjungimo nuostata gali sudaryti sąlygas atsirasti naujoms autentiškumo formoms (naujas apibrėžimas). Ši problema, pritaikyta konkretiems tyrimo objektams, atveria naujų problemų. Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjamas Italijos geokultūrinio konteksto klausimas ir įvairūs teoriniai niuansai, susiję su heterogenine istorija (ar itališka muzika yra nacionalinė, ar egzistuoja keletas regioninių italų muzikos rūšių?).

Galiausiai ir svarbiausia – autentiškumo klausimas priklauso sudėtingam etiniam ir ideologiniam diskursui. Koks tas autentiškumo „atvejis"? Koks ženklas iš tiesų yra U. Eco minėtas „Oa"? Straipsnyje siūloma spręsti šią problemą konceptualizuojant ženklą kaip organišką esybę, neatsiejamą nuo gyvenimo ir mirties procesų. Taip autentiškumą gaubianti diskusija tampa diskusija, sukoncentruota į natūralistinę *vs* spiritualistinę pozicijas. Kokia būtų sveika „Oa" būsena? Gyvas? Miręs? Transformuotas? Suskaidytas? Nemirtingas? Ir ar mes priimame tai kaip neišvengiamybę, ar mėginame aktyvuoti pasipriešinimo / konservacijos / reagavimo formas?