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From 'authenticity' to iThenticity – The quest for 'truth' in a post-patriarchal world

Alessio Pisci
Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Humanities, University of Cagliari
alessio.pisci@unica.it, alessio.pisci@gmail.com

Abstract For centuries, the concept of 'authenticity' has been central to Western culture. In patriarchal Indo-European societies, the father had to certify that his paternity was 'authentic'. This was the unavoidable precondition to hand down power to the next male generation and preserve patriarchal supremacy. Nowadays, patriarchy is slowly being substituted by a more egalitarian social structure and all those voices which for centuries had to remain silent (women, homosexuals, ethnic minorities, etc.) are challenging the former hegemonic monophony of 'impartial truths'. However, the multiplicity of contrasting points of view coexisting in this new emerging global polyphony clashes with the old logic of binary oppositions, leaving the post-patriarchal human being 'stranded' in a world of Derridian undecidables. To tackle this problem, we could resort to the concept of iThenticity ('i' = 'interactivity'). Within this framework, individual discourses are not regarded as independent entities but rather as interacting constituents of a larger system which assimilates each single 'authenticity' into a polyphonic negotiation of new meanings that heterogeneously merge into a multifaceted iThentic macro-discourse. By its mere existence, each single sub-discourse (biased by default) proclaims the partiality of every 'authenticity' within the system and, thus, the inevitably partial nature of all the other sub-discourses. In the iThentic macro-discourse, the individual sub-discourses conflate into bigger super-signs capable of 'storing' more meaning. This partially narrows the distance between signifieds and their referents, it undermines binary oppositions and, consequently, makes undecidability easier to deal with

Keywords: authenticity, certification, hegemony, différance, binary oppositions, undecidability, iThenticity

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0. Introduction

This article aims at illustrating how the concept of 'authenticity' (one of the dominant values in Western societies) and the process of 'certification' (as 'authenticity' has to be certified) have contributed to shape Western culture. However, it shall also be argued that the system of 'authenticity/certification' is one of the main causes of the cultural and sociological predicament which Western societies are now facing.

My first hypothesis is that the 'authenticity-certification' paradigm, which might be regarded as one of the pillars of patriarchy, is now going through a crisis which might redefine the Western episteme, as absolute truths and dogmas are being replaced by cultural relativism. This may be why now it is often difficult to determine if something is 'authentic'. Fake news may be a symptom of this crisis. In order to illustrate this part of my thesis I will refer to the Derridian concept of *différance*[1] and Derrida's critique of binary oppositions[2].

My second hypothesis is that, in order to overcome this impasse, the ancient binary opposition 'authentic-inauthentic' could be replaced with a new paradigm in which all the individual 'authentic' discourses conflate into a bigger macro-discourse which I have called ïThenticity (interactive authenticity) (Pisci 2017).

1. Authenticity, certification and patriarchy

1.1 Authenticity

The noun 'authenticity' («the quality of being authentic» [ODE])[3] derives from the adjective 'authentic' («of undisputed origin and not a copy; genuine» [ODE]), which, in turn, comes from the Ancient Greek word *authentikós* via the Late Latin *authenticus*. *Authentikós* is itself a derivative of the noun *authéntēs* ('master' or 'author'), a compound of *autos* ('self') and *-héntē* ('accomplisher', 'achiever') (Devoto, Oli 1971: 240; Coromines 1961: 53). *-héntē* derives from the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root **senə-* ('to accomplish', 'to achieve') (Watkins 2011: 78). So, from an etymological perspective, *authéntēs* could be defined as someone who, relying on one's own authority, accomplishes things by oneself. The goals this person achieves will be 'authentic', or, in other words, «of undisputed origin and not a copy; genuine». However, inevitably, this 'authenticity' will have to be self-certified ('it is authentic because I say so and because I have enough power to enforce my self-certification').

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[1] «[T]he term *différance* […] combines the French words for *defer* (meaning *postpone*) and *difference*. […] Derrida's point and the meaning of his made-up word is that there is always a gap between signifier and signified, so that the continuous play of signifiers, instead of taking us closer to the signified, always defers the signified, thus keeping a difference between the signifier and the signified. *Différance*, therefore, is Derrida's name for the continuous gap between the signifier and the signified, the gap that keeps meanings from ever settling into something stable, the gap that keeps all meaning unstable» (Parker 2008: 96). See also Derrida 1967a, 1967b; Llovet, Caner, Catelli, Martí Monteverde, Viñas Piquer 2005: 74-81; Cherchi 2011: 77-84.

[2] *Différance* «marks what cannot be gathered up and contained by binary, oppositional terms, but must remain outside, where the outside is not exactly the opposite of the inside. Indeed, the coinage asks us to broach the possibility of thinking beyond the binary oppositions. Those pairings that so pervasively govern our thinking would include inside/outside, nature/culture, mind/body, but also present/past. Those binaries are produced and maintained by excluding a set of differences that cannot appear within that relationship and that are effectively suppressed by those operations of *différance* that secure the binary frame. These differences are supplements, remainders, ruins, barred from entry by a reigning discursive field, indefinitely deferred. And if the binary framing decides in advance what can be said to exist, what kind of concept or referent belongs to the realm of what is, then there is no reference to what is outside the field constituted by this positing, exclusionary procedure» (Butler 2016, trad. eng.: pos. 186).

[3] ODE = *Oxford Dictionary of English* 2010, 2017, 2019.

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1.2 Certification

The noun 'certification' is defined by ODE as «the action or process of providing someone or something with an official document attesting to a status or level of achievement». It derives from the verb 'to certify' which comes from the Late Latin *certificāre*, a compound of *cĕrtus* ('certain', 'sure', but also 'that has been decided') and *făcere* ('do', 'make'). *Cĕrtus* derives from the verb *cĕrnere* ('to separate', 'to discern', 'to notice', 'to determine' or 'to decide') (ODE; Devoto, Oli 1971: 522; Zingarelli 1917; Castiglioni, Mariotti 1966: 148, 404-405). Thus, from an etymological perspective, when we 'certify' something, we decide that the object of our certification is 'true' or 'authentic' (we 'make' it 'authentic'). For instance, a commission formed by university professors can decide that a student knows 'enough' of a given subject and consequently proceed to issue a certificate called 'university degree' which certifies (decides) that the student's knowledge is 'authentic'.

1.3 Patriarchy and the certification of authenticity

Why are authenticity and certification so important in our culture? My hypothesis is that they became crucial as a consequence of the rise of patriarchy and the Proto-Indo-Europeans[4]. In patriarchal Indo-European societies, the father (**pəter-*) had to 'certify' that his paternity was 'authentic' or 'genuine'. This was the necessary precondition to hand down power to the next male generation and thus preserve patriarchal supremacy. The reason is obvious: while women are biologically equipped to give birth to their own children, and it is thus not difficult to establish who somebody's mother is (even without a modern DNA test), men are not. Because of this 'limitation', in order to beget a legitimate heir they needed a woman who could give birth to it, and then they had to certify the authenticity of their paternity[5]. This is why marriage, whose purpose «was the production of legitimate offspring» (Harper 2013: 62), became such an important institution and women, who had almost no rights at all[6], became 'goods' which could be bought and sold[7]. The evidence can be found in the lexicon still used in virtually every Indo-European language to refer to layers of family organization. Let us consider some examples from the English language[8].

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[4] For an in-depth illustration and analysis of Proto-Indo-European culture see Mallory, Adams 1997, 2006; Benveniste 1969; Fortson 2004; Martinet 1994; Villar 1991; Campanile, Comrie, Watkins 2005; Dumézil 1979.

[5] According to André Martinet, «[e]l establecimiento del patriarcado resulta de la decisión del compañero de la mujer de asumir enteramente la responsabilidad sobre los niños nacidos de ella. Así pues, pide ser no sólo protector y educador de esos niños, sino también el progenitor. La única seguridad que pueda obtener en este sentido resultará del enclaustramiento de la mujer en un gineceo, o un harén, implicando este último [...] la existencia de varias compañeras femeninas. Cuando este enclaustramiento se revele difícil o económicamente poco deseable, le quedará al hombre el recurso de eliminar al niño cuya filiación no es segura, exponiéndolo al apetito de los depredadores» (Martinet 1994, spa. tr: 302-303).

[6] «PIE society was hierarchical. First, there was a general distinction between free persons and slaves; [...] The free segment of society was further subdivided into an elite class of kings, warriors, and priests [...]. Additionally, men outranked women; the society was patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal (with brides going to live with the family of their husbands [...])» (Fortson 2004: pos. 1521-1529).

[7] «In PIE society the husband's family had to pay bridewealth (also called bride price), the word for which has descendants in several branches. Several daughter cultures also attest a practice of "free" marriage in which no bridewealth was paid and the wife remained legally part of her father's family» (*ivi*: pos. 1561-1569).

[8] For the following etymologies see Watkins 2011; Roberts, Pastor 1996; ODE; Devoto, Oli 1971; Coromines 1961; Zingarelli 1917.

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The English word 'marriage'[9] comes from the Old French noun *mariage*, a derivative of the verb *marier* ('to marry'), which in turn descends from the Latin *marītus* ('husband') and ultimately from the PIE **mari-to-* ('provided with a bride'). **Mari-* is the PIE word for 'young woman', so from an etymological perspective, 'marriage' is the process of providing a man with a young woman (and not the other way round). The man will then be called 'husband', from the Old Norse *húsbóndi* ('master of a house'), a compound noun which combines *hús* ('house') and *bóndi* ('occupier and tiller of the soil', from the PIE root **bheuə-* ['to be', 'to exist', 'to grow']). A **mari-* is also a **swesor-* ('a woman of one's own kin group')[10], which later became the Old English (OE) *sweostor* and then the Modern English 'sister' (but also the Latin *soror* and then the Italian *sorella*). Marriage could normally be celebrated when the **pəter-* (< OE *fæder* < 'father') gave/sold his **dhugəter-* (< OE *dohtor* < 'daughter'), a **mari-/*swesor-*, to another **man-* (< OE *man(n)* < 'man') who then became her **wī-ro-* (< OE *wer*, 'man') and 'master of their house'. It should also be remembered that OE *man(n)* principally meant 'a human being'. A male person was a *wer*, while a female person was a *wīf*. Then *wer* was replaced by *man* to refer to a male individual and for a long time the two senses of 'male person' and 'human being' remained in use. Thus, *wīf* had to become *wīfman* (< 'woman') (ODE). In other words, men were 'human beings' par excellence, while women were simply 'female human beings'.

Newborn children had to be acknowledged by their fathers so as to become legitimate. In Ancient Rome, the *pater* acknowledged paternity by placing the baby on his knee and thus made her/him 'authentic' (or 'genuine', from the Latin word *genuinus* > *gĕnu*, 'knee') (ODE; Zingarelli 1917)[11] and legitimate. If this did not happen, the child was considered inauthentic/illegitimate and could not claim its inheritance. Paternity could be acknowledged even if the father knew he was not the biological male parent (for instance, when he needed a legitimate heir but had not been able to generate one by himself). What mattered was not objective truth, but the father's subjective truth, certified as 'objective/absolute' by his own male authority (which is what the *authéntēs* does). This sign, a representation of a referent in the real world, thus became the new accepted reality.

The perpetuation of patriarchy depended on the certification of authenticity, which, as a consequence, constituted the *sine qua non* of male supremacy[12]. It is for this reason that

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[9] B. W. Fortson explains that «[n]o single term for 'marriage' can be reconstructed; different legal kinds of marriage were recognized, including marriage by abduction» (Fortson 2004: pos. 1561). According to Mallory and Adams, «[m]ore solidly attested is **h₂wed(h₂)-* which means "marry" in the North-Western group […] and generally "bride" in Indo-Iranian. It is a special use of the verb "lead", indicating that the male led away the woman in the early Indo-European system of marriage, a system whose vocabulary might be later recreated, e.g. Lat *uxōrem dūcere* "to lead away a wife", i.e. "marry"» (Mallory, Adams 2006: 207). Georges Dumézil identifies three types of *manus* acquisition (marriage) in the Roman tradition: «*confarreatio* (a religious ceremony in which the bride was formally transferred from the authority, or *manus*, of her father to that of her husband), […] *usus* (a kind of common-law marriage that nonetheless assured the husband the power of *manu* over his wife) [and] *coemption* (a fictional sale of the bride to the groom, who thereby acquired legal authority over her)» (Miles 1995: 182). See also Dumézil 1979.

[10] «[T]his word designates literally a feminine being (**sor*) of the group (**swe*) […], but not symmetrical with **bhrāter*» (Benveniste 1969, eng. transl.: 165).

[11] Other scholars believe that *genuinus* derives from *genĕre* ('to generate') and ultimately from the PIE root **genə-* ('to give birth', 'to beget') (Devoto, Oli 1971: 1211; Watkins 2011: 27). In order to acknowledge a male child the *pater* could also take him in his arms and lift it up (Montanini 2010).

[12] For this reason, in the words of Kyle Harper, «[a]dultery was, from its origins, a crime against man, not God, and it never lost this sense in Roman society. […] Adultery was an act of theft, violation of another man's legitimate control of female sexuality» (Harper 2013: 42). Thus, according to Foucault, «[i]t was also in order to avoid the disadvantages of illegitimate offspring that extramarital liaisons were discouraged (for women, certainly, but also for men). Let us say schematically that in the classical texts the synthesis of

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'authenticity' and 'certification' not only became central to the Western episteme, but they also shaped it from its very roots in their own patriarchal image. This is why adjectives such as 'authentic', 'genuine', 'original', etc. are normally positive, while 'inauthentic', 'fake', 'forged', etc. are usually negative. In the end, however, people or things are 'inauthentic' only when they have been stripped of the necessary authority to be 'authentic', when they are not powerful enough to enforce their own 'authenticity', and so are left unable to rely on their own authority to accomplish things by themselves. 'Inauthenticity' is thus a stigma, the consequence of an act of violence which can literally destroy a person or cause an object to fall in value. Biologically, a child who had not been acknowledged by its father was still a human being, but a human being who was 'illegitimate' («not authorized by the law» [ODE]) and thus could not enjoy the same rights granted to those who had been acknowledged. Even though nowadays such acts of discrimination are not as common as they used to be, the ancient patriarchal authenticity/certification paradigm on which they were based still informs, at least partially, the way we act and think. Even now, in our culture what matters most is not the person or the objects themselves, but their certification of 'authenticity' (for instance, if two pairs of shoes are identical, but one comes with the logo of a famous shoe manufacturer and the other does not, the first pair will cost much more than the second – the extra sum of money being the price of the certification). This is why plagiarism and forgery are unanimously regarded as crimes, while a world without copyright laws and certifications would be almost unthinkable.

However, one might ask, if the positive value of 'authenticity' derives from its patriarchal origin, which was the main reason for the subjugation of women, what is then to be done in order to build a more egalitarian society? For instance, how effective can inclusive language really be, if it is used within an episteme which still holds in such high regard the two main tools ('authenticity' and 'certification') that made patriarchy possible? Is it viable to imagine a future where 'authenticity' and 'certification' are not as important as they seem to be now?

2. Certification and *différance*

As illustrated in a previous section (1.2), from an etymological perspective, when we 'certify' something, we decide that it is (or we 'make' it) 'true' or 'authentic'. However, in order for this decision to be enforced, one needs to have the necessary authority to do it. In modern democratic systems, when people have such an authority, it is because somebody else certified that they do. In turn, this 'second-degree' certifier needs to be certified by a 'third-degree' certifier, and so on, *ad infinitum*. It is thus that «the presence or fullness of [AUTHORITY] is always deferred from one [CERTIFICATION] to another in an endless sequence» (Baldick 1990: 171)[13]. This is how *différance* stops being a theoretical issue and becomes a dramatic problem in everyday life.

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the marriage tie and sexual relations was granted mainly for reasons pertaining to procreation. For men at least, it was neither the very nature of sexual acts nor the essence of marriage itself that implied that there should be pleasure only in conjugality. Apart from the question of illegitimate births, and allowing for the ethical requirement of self-mastery, there was no reason to expect a man, even a married man, to reserve all his sexual pleasures for his wife, and for her alone» (Foucault 1984, eng. tr.: 166).

[13] «The point of this neologism is to indicate simultaneously two senses in which language denies us the full presence of any meaning: first, that no linguistic element (according to Saussure's theory of the sign) has a positive meaning, only an effect of meaning arising from its differences from other elements; second, that presence or fullness of meaning is always deferred from one sign to another in an endless sequence. Thus if you look up a word in a dictionary, all it can give you is other words to explain it; so – in theory, at least – you will then have to look these up, and so on without end» (Baldick 1990: 171).

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In the past, this sequence was not infinite. On the contrary, in non-democratic societies it was, in fact, very short, as authority was taken by force and monopolized by the few in power and it was often granted by God himself (the ultimate authority). As ordinary people had very limited individual leverage, freedom (which is in direct proportion to authority and power) was also very limited. Moreover, when only very few people have the authority to certify, then their subjective/partial truths may easily reach the status of absolute/impartial facts. Those who dissent or rebel are punished, so as to preserve the status quo. One of the few advantages of such a situation was that it protected people from the uncertainty and the perils of *différance* and undecidability. A world where few 'absolute truths' reign supreme is not as complex as a reality which embraces cultural relativism. However, now, with the rise of democracy, things have changed: individual freedom has increased, and consequently, more people are being given (or are themselves taking) the authority to speak up and spell out their personal truths. Patriarchy is slowly being substituted by a more egalitarian social structure and all those voices which for centuries had to remain silent (women, homosexuals, ethnic minorities, etc.) are now challenging the ancient hegemonic monophony of impartial, absolute and collective truths, and ushering in a new polyphonic system of partial, subjective and individual truths. It could be said that the doors of perception have been (at least partially) cleansed, and now we are starting to represent the world as it is: infinite[14].

However, along with infinity comes *différance* and we still have to come to terms with this more complex situation. The new multiplicity of contrasting points of view coexisting in this emerging global polyphony clashes with the old logic of binary oppositions, and leaves the post-patriarchal human being 'stranded' in a world of Derridian undecidables. In this sense, it should not surprise that one of the most frightening fictional monsters created in the XX century is the zombie, a creature which is neither dead, nor alive. Thus, an undecidable, which, it could be argued, represents our fear of undecidability[15].

3. iThenticity

How can we leave behind the ancient patriarchal system of 'authenticity/certification' and break through the mental and cultural barrier constituted by the binary opposition 'authentic/inauthentic'? How can we make sense of undecidability and convert it from a frightening flesh-eating monster into a valuable asset? My hypothesis is that we could resort to a new paradigm which I have called 'iThenticity' (where the 'i' stands for 'interactive', thus 'interactive authenticity').

While within the 'authenticity/inauthenticity' paradigm each discourse is normally regarded as independent, with each *authéntes* striving to enforce one's own truth at the expense of other people's 'authenticities', within the iThentic framework this perspective is subverted: although individual discourses still strive for hegemony[16]

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[14] «If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. / For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern» (Blake 1977: 187).

[15] «Like all undecidables, zombies infect the oppositions grouped around them. […] The Zombie is […] fascinating and also horrific. It poisons systems of orders, and like all undecidables *ought* to be returned to order. In zombie movies, this return to order is difficult. For a classic satisfying ending, the troubling element has to be removed, perhaps by killing it. But zombies are already dead (while alive). You can't kill a zombie, you have to resolve it. It has to be "killed" categorically, by removing its undecidability. A magic agent or superior power will have to *decide* the zombie, returning it to one side of the opposition or the other. It has to become a proper corpse or a true living being. At that point the familiar concepts of life and death can rule again, untroubled. This is a restoration of conceptual order» (Collins, Mayblin 1996: 37-40).

[16] In the Gramscian sense (Gramsci 1975).

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(which is almost unavoidable), they are not regarded as independent entities but rather as biased and INTERACTING parts of a larger system which assimilates each single 'authenticity' but also each single 'inauthenticity' into a polyphonic negotiation of new meanings that merge into a heterogeneous representation of reality that is thus iThentic. The more perspectives are taken into consideration, the more accurate our understanding of reality will be. No discourse is completely true or completely false. Even the most unreliable piece of fake news can tell us much about the world we live in. As an example, let us consider the case of vaccines during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

Most immunologists and virologists who have dedicated their lives to find ways to fight illnesses – fatal ones in many cases – believe that vaccines are the best solution to deal with Covid-19, despite acknowledging that, like most drugs, they may have mild side effects and, in very rare cases might be mortal. However, they believe that, by far, the efficacy of these substances outweighs their possible but infrequent negative consequences. Nevertheless, there is also a minority of scientists who think that the side effects are not as rare as the other group believes they are and that, on the contrary, vaccines are in fact dangerous to human health. Thus, it would be better to rely on other types of drugs. Then there are other people who, despite not being experts, believe that the opinion of the second group (the minority) is more trustworthy. Some of them think that most scientists are in favour of vaccines not because they really believe in their benefits, but because they are in the pockets of pharmaceutical companies which make enormous profits by selling these products. Others are convinced that vaccines are part of a global conspiracy to enslave or even annihilate mankind. Finally, there are also those who believe that the coronavirus disease is not as serious as most scientists and doctors claim, and that the Covid-19 pandemic is not real, but it has been staged by those in power so as to control the people they govern and strip them of their rights and freedom.

Sticking to only one of these perspectives would be an 'authentic' approach. In order to make it iThentic the different points of view should be regarded as parts of a larger system: as partial and biased discourses which are not opposite to each other, but which refer to different aspects of the same reality they are trying to portrait and explain.

In this sense, we could define iThenticity as a superordinate multifaceted macro-discourse. When taken in isolation, each sub-discourse might give the impression of being an objective and uncut representation of reality. However, when we regard them as constituents of a larger system, their partiality becomes hard to miss. By simply existing, each sub-discourse (biased by default) proclaims the PARTIALITY of every other 'authenticity' within the system and, thus, the inevitably PARTIAL nature of each sub-signified/sub-discourse. From a theoretical point of view, this may seem obvious. However, complications arise when we try to move from theory to practice. The main difficulty is our unwillingness to renounce the patriarchal 'authenticity/certification' system, which is still held in the highest regard. In other words, we are still relying on ancient 'absolute', 'impartial' and binary tools to make sense of a world which, with each passing day, is becoming more and more relative, partial and undecidable. Mankind is entering into a new era, but it seems incapable of giving up its old ways of representing and interpreting reality.

The reason for this could be that, paradoxically, human beings miss the certainties granted by the old binary system, the loss of which is the price they have to pay to enjoy the new enhanced freedom that comes with undecidability. According to Walter Ong, when a society takes the major step from orality to literacy, it goes through a similar struggle:

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> There is hardly […] a predominantly [authentic] culture left in the world today that is not somehow aware of the vast complex of powers forever inaccessible without [iThenticity]. This awareness is agony for persons rooted in primary [authenticity], who want [iThenticity] passionately but who also know very well that moving into the exciting world of [iThenticity] means leaving behind much that is exciting and deeply loved in the earlier [authentic] world (Ong 1982: 15)[17].

Within the iThentic macro-discourse, the individual sub-signifiers and sub-signifieds/sub-discourses conflate into 'bigger' super-signs capable of 'storing' more meaning. This PARTIALLY narrows the distance between signifieds/discourses and their referents because each macro-signified/macro-discourse contains the meaning of all the single 'authentic' sub-signifieds/sub-discourses which constitute it. Moreover, at the same time, it undermines the system of binary oppositions. Even though they may not disappear completely, they decline in importance, thus making undecidability easier to deal with. Let us consider the previous example about vaccines:

Sub-discourse 1 (Majority of the scientific community)	Sub-discourse 2 (Minority of the scientific community)	Sub-discourse 3 (Ordinary people 1)
Perspective: <u>medical</u> ▪ Vaccines are the best solution for eradicating Covid-19. ▪ They may have infrequent mild side effects. ▪ However, in very rare cases they might be mortal.	Perspective: <u>medical</u> ▪ Vaccines have very frequent side effects. ▪ They are dangerous to human health. ▪ It is better to use other types of drugs.	Perspective: <u>medical/economic</u> ▪ Vaccines are dangerous. ▪ Most scientists are in favour of vaccines because they are in the pockets of pharmaceutical companies ▪ In order to make huge profits by selling these products, pharmaceutical companies disregard their terrible side effects.

Sub-discourse 4 (Ordinary people 2)	Sub-discourse 5 (Ordinary people 3)
Perspective: <u>medical/economic/political</u> ▪ Vaccines are dangerous or even mortal. ▪ They are part of a global conspiracy to enslave or annihilate mankind.	Perspective: <u>medical/economic/political</u> ▪ The coronavirus disease is not as serious as most scientists and doctors claim. ▪ The Covid-19 pandemic is not real, but it has been staged by those in power as a way to control the people they govern and strip them of their rights and freedom.

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[17] The original quotation is: «There is hardly an oral culture or a predominantly oral culture left in the world today that is not somehow aware of the vast complex of powers forever inaccessible without literacy. This awareness is agony for persons rooted in primary orality, who want literacy passionately but who also know very well that moving into the exciting world of literacy means leaving behind much that is exciting and deeply loved in the earlier oral world.» (Ong 1982: 15).

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iThentic macro-discourse
Perspective: <u>medical/economic/political/etc.</u>
When a new disease is discovered, scientists need time to study it and then find a cure. When different experts are working on it, they may come up with different hypothesis as to what the most effective solution is. The debate continues until a treatment has been experimentally proved to be the best possible option and everyone in the scientific community is convinced of its efficacy. Before a unanimous consensus is reached, different theories may be available. In the case of a global emergency, like the Covid-19 pandemic, the general public will inevitably turn to the experts to find a solution. According to the majority of the scientific community, in order to fight Covid-19, vaccines are more effective than other types of drugs, even though they sometimes have side effects that are normally mild but which might be fatal in some cases. These scientists are prepared to sacrifice an acceptable (for them) number of human lives because they are convinced that the casualty rate would be extremely higher without vaccines. They accept that 100% survival rate is not feasible at the moment, and so they choose the lesser of two evils. At the same time, a smaller group of scientists believes that side effects are not as rare and not as mild as the majority thinks they are. These scientists are convinced that it is better to treat Covid-19 with other types of drugs, which they deem to be less dangerous. When different options are available, people often tend to put their trust on those which are closer to their own beliefs. Some people do not trust doctors and medical researchers because they think that the majority of them are in the pockets of pharmaceutical companies and so will only conceive solutions which are economically profitable for those enterprises, even though there may be better but less financially rewarding alternative treatments. When a new effective drug is marketed, it normally benefits patients medically, and pharmaceutical companies economically. Some people mainly focus on the medical aspect, while some others tend to see only the economic and political sides. In the wake of the numerous medical scandals which have occurred over the years, their trust in pharmaceutical companies has been shaken to a point that they find it (almost) impossible to believe in any solution which benefits those institutions; at the same time, they seem to disregard all the lives that have been saved while simultaneously making a profit out of it. For them the medical and economic perspectives seem to be incompatible. Obviously, this does not mean that they are always absolutely right or absolutely wrong: as scandals are not something unprecedented, there is always a chance (however small) that a new one might erupt in the future. A third group of people mainly focuses on the political aspect. As domestic and global emergencies have already been used by governments to introduce measures which otherwise would have been difficult to enforce (Klein 2007), they think that the Covid-19 pandemic is not real but just another artificially created crisis to limit people's freedom.

In brief, people tend to focus on different specific aspects of reality and disregard the rest of the picture. Some tend to approach the Covid-19 pandemic and vaccines mainly from a medical perspective, some focus mostly on the economic aspect, and some others on the political side. The iThentic macro-discourse includes them all and it shows how, if observed as a whole from a distance, each of these categories interacts with the others and, by doing so, they create a situation of balance. By trusting vaccines, the vast majority of the general public helps defeat Covid-19; at the same time, those who focus on the economic and political aspects remind the world that in the past governments and pharmaceutical companies acted in questionable ways and so they might do it again. No matter how absurd these last two categories may sound, still they help to remind those in power that they are under constant scrutiny. Thus, if those minority voices were silenced, the elites who hold economic and political power would have less restrictions to keep their greed at bay. Moreover, the doubts expressed by those who do not believe in the efficacy of vaccines are a clear symptom of mistrust in the system, which is another important issue that the ruling elites should not disregard.

As this last example made clear, iThentic *authéntēs* are not required to give up their 'authenticity'. However, each individual 'authentic truth' becomes just one among the many other contributions to the iThentic macro-discourse, even though the individual *authéntēs* may still regard it as the most accurate one.

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4. Conclusion

A clear example of the ideal iThentic *authéntēs* is José Altamirano, the narrator of the historical novel *The Secret History of Costaguana* (2007), by the Colombian writer Juan Gabriel Vásquez. The novel relates the history of Colombia between 1820, «five months after Simón Bolívar made his victorious entrance into the capital» (Vásquez 2007, eng. tr.: 6), (thus right after independence) and 1903 (when the province of Panamá became in turn an independent country). In the novel, Costaguana (the fictional Latin American country created by Joseph Conrad in *Nostromo*) is Colombia.

To understand the structure of this work of fiction we can refer to Bachtin's model, which identifies two types of novel (Bachtin 1963, 1975; Baldick 1990: 169). One type was represented by Dostoevsky's novels, which are dialogic or polyphonic, as the 'voices' of the different characters are not subordinated to that of the narrator. This is not iThenticity, even though it may seem to be iThentic. Works such as these are a representation or illustration of what iThenticity looks like, but they are not iThentic themselves, because the *authéntēs* behind them is always the same one (the author), and to be iThentic a multiplicity of interacting *authéntēs* is needed. The other type was represented by Tolstoy's novels, which are monologic, because all the characters are subordinated to the viewpoint of the author. This is clearly an 'authentic' approach.

In *The Secret History of Costaguana* there is only one voice, that of José Altamirano (the narrator) so it may appear to be of the monologic type. However, there is a very important difference: as it often happens in postmodern historical metafiction, such as, for example, in *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie, the narrator often stops the narration to discuss its narrative choices and strategies, thus reminding readers that the text they are reading is a work of fiction: in the case of historical metafiction, it is just one biased version (the narrator's version) of events among many others (Hutcheon 1989). For instance, in Vásquez's novel the narrator repeatedly reminds the «Readers of the Jury» that:

> I'll decide when and how to tell what I want to tell, when to hide, when to reveal, when to lose myself in the nooks and crannies of my memory for the mere pleasure of doing so». (Vásquez 2007, eng. tr.: 4)

> «Here I speed up. For, as I have at times devoted several pages to the events of a single day, at this moment my tale demands I cover in a few lines what happened in several months (*ivi*: 32).

Examples such as this are countless in the novel. In other words, José Altamirano reminds the reader over and over again that this is HIS version of Colombian history and that there are obviously many others, which are exogenous, to be found outside the text and outside the narrator's 'authentic' sub-discourse. He is telling the reader his 'authentic truth', but unlike monologic novels he is being honest about it and he is encouraging the reader to compare his version to other interpretations. At the same time, unlike polyphonic novels, the narrator refuses to fool the reader with a representation of polyphony which might be mistaken for polyphony itself. He knows very well that the inclusion of other voices in the text would only be his personal interpretation and rendition of those voices, and not the voices themselves. In conclusion, José Altamirano wants readers to experience the real thing and not to confuse the sign with its referent. He wants them to pay attention to other *authéntēs* who might contradict him. He would like them to listen to other sources, and not to his personal representation of those exogenous voices. He strives to make them aware of the fact that what they are reading is just one of the many 'authentic' sub-discourses

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which constitute a larger iThentic macro-discourse and that, unless they are satisfied with seeing «all things thro' narrow chinks of [their] cavern» (Blake 1977: 187), they need to pay attention to the other surrounding external sub-discourses. By virtue of being acutely conscious of the partial nature of his 'authenticity', José Altamirano adopts an iThentic approach. He encourages his readers to come out of their cavern and shows them the tools they need to use if they want to break free from the 'authentic' chains which bind them. And by doing this, he gives us an ideal example of what I mean by iThenticity (obviously, my personal, partial, biased and 'authentic' representation of iThenticity, as I am the sole *authéntēs* of this article).

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