



The Manifestation of “The Other” and the Possibility of Self-Redemption - Reconsidering the Authenticity of Where Yellow Sails are Flying

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Abstract: Authenticity, as a research topic in the field of urban problems, is a concentrated reflection of many cultural anxieties caused by urbanization. This article selects the movie *Where Yellow Sails Are Flying*, trying to clarify the inherent logic and theoretical contexts of authenticity, including what it is, how to define its perceptual, imaginative and practical connotation in the ontology angle. And then pointing out that “human”, as the core of cognitive schemata in practice, has the meaning of otherness of others, so cannot be attributed to an object of “being” or theoretical reality. It not only contains Benjamin’s Messianic unknowable dimension, but also is closely related to the negation of the metaphysical system of presence in the post-modern context. Finally, authenticity, as a kind of cultural politics and practice, is considered to be a collection of blindness and insight, distorting the experience by generalizing and abstracting while displaying the fracture of the signifier and signified. It is only through multiple cultural perspectives can individuals escape from the history of “the other”. This paper also uses the relevant arguments of scientists or philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek, Zygmunt Bauman and Jacques Lacan to critically interpret the theory of authenticity.

Keywords: Authenticity; Existence; Otherness; Local Knowledge; Strategic Essentialism

In the 100-year history of Hong Kong films, “New Wave” and “Fresh Wave” show a consistency that most directors of “Fresh Wave” inherited the special local consciousness in New Wave. From the collective memories of *Sierra Leone in Weeds on Fire* to spiritual connotations of small houses in *Mad World*, space, as a miniature of spirit, shows the various uneasiness and anxiety of Hong Kong people in the global information age. *Where Yellow Sails Are Flying*, continues the perspective of the bottom, absorbing the “actor-film theory” of Satsuke Ogawa, emphasizing that movies, as objects, are also actors in the relationship of “affect” and “being touched”, where any change will affect the overall structure¹. Based on the discussion of this concept, the paper analyzes the status and survivability of people in modern society.

Traceability and reinterpretation of authenticity

Ontologically, the traceability of authenticity is closely related to the legitimacy of human existence. As one of the oldest words in Western philosophy, “being” in Greek has three meanings: “is” as a preposition, “being” as a possession, and “being” as an existence. Aristotle, starting from the first meaning, summarized Four Causes for existence and developed a set of ontological knowledge. With the decline of modern metaphysics, this way of defining had been marginalized in the knowledge system, until Heidegger reinterpreted it and distinguished the meaning of “being” from “being of being”, did it be rediscovered in the dimension of “human existence”. Time, represented by symbolic structure in the past, has been regarded as the foundation of “building” and “dwelling”, which provides the perception of and conscious for mortal men existing on the earth and authenticity.

¹ Feng Yan. *The world of Satsuke Ogawa*, Taipei: Yuan-Liou, 1984. p13-22.

With the accelerated flow of global capital, the question of authenticity becomes more serious: In the stage of monopoly capitalism, space is an important means of capital accumulation and mitigation of economic crisis, which causes individuals to face the loss of their homes and confusion of identity frequently. Accordingly, researches also show a cultural shift: Authenticity as urban spatial terms, initially for describing exploration repair and protection of cultural relics, was then interpreted as a kind of cultural power generated by capital, government, media and consumption taste in the process of urban space “gentrification”, leading to urban residents’ desire for authenticity (Sharon Zorkin, 2015). In the interpretation, connotations of space in material, culture and the legitimacy of the existence are highlighted and its relationship with social sentiment and thought are rethought. It initiates the critical thinking of the whole western metaphysical history and opens up problem domains such as “fact/fiction”, “partial / historical truth “and “reality/surrealism”.

However, as a cultural practice of traceability, authenticity includes two basic theoretical premises: Firstly, there is a time break from history to reality, where the meaning of the event changes. Destruction of the community not only means the disappearance of the old buildings but also proves the presence of history and individual subjectivity by their absence. Secondly, global politics and control systems have changed in recent decades, which triggered a new discussion on how does individuals under the new sovereignty paradigm embody the intrinsic authenticity and subjectivity. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* continued Foucault’s and Agamben’s interpretation of the “Right to Life”, pointing out that the new form of sovereignty and political paradigm is a centerless, marginal, and “imperial” ruling system integrating the flow of landscapes, establishing a flexible hierarchical order, and defining, expressing and absorbing all forms of social life. (Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, 2001).

Based on the internal logic above, the space sovereignty in the film, once monopolized by the state, has been handed over to borderless entities such as multinational banks, international institutions. As a result, the physical structure disappeared and replaced by quantized space production, along with the devaluation of geographical location and general rootless state of people (Marc Augé, 1999). Bauman linked this mobility to rights, social mechanisms and governance, and claimed a new hierarchy has been born, which promotes regional imbalance and transformation of mental structure (Bauman, 1998). Correspondingly, authenticity, as a comprehensive practice and expression of emotion, on the one hand, provides a pattern of behavior, directing the transmission of people’s feelings and social practice, on the other hand, evokes the individual sovereignty and democratic consciousness, which promotes transcendence to against immanence, desire to ablates order and spatial power structure to be shaken.

The appearance of the other and self-redemption

Along with the acceleration of capital operation in the age of new liberalism, social space in Hong Kong has been managed in a unified way: Historic communities and villages has been replaced by a large number of shopping malls, amusement parks and high-grade residential areas, while people who cannot keep pace with The Times have become a shackle of social progress and gradually been pushed to the edge of the city. The invisible order that causes the above enables us to see what we see while blinds us to how it works (Slavoj Žižek, 2014) . This view directly from Lacan’s theory of Mirroring Stage that “unconscious is structured like language, where there is the overall structure”, showing a strong tendency of structuralism. In the structure of the film, there is indeed a set of narrative mode of “invasion of free capital - destruction of symbiotic system”, which centers on the state of human existence.

This explanation of existence has never ceased to be discussed in Western philosophy. From Kant’s Practical Reason to Heidegger’s Ontology, although dasein is becoming increasingly famous, authenticity still occupies the core of research for a long time. The exploration of truthfulness, from Levinas’ view, in essence is a process of “otherness” when the so-called authenticity has been simplified and abstracted, so it is necessary to distinguish “the other “ in our mind from objective reality, and be cautious about the convention of multiple experiences. Previous theorists have elaborated on this, such as Benjamin’s Dialectical Image, Bakhtin’s Polyphonic theory, and Habermas’s intersubjectivity. In combination with the above statement, because such self-standing cognitive schema itself has the possibility of deconstruction, we should put authenticity in multiple tension structures for understanding.

In terms of concrete measures, Benjamin has mentioned the means of blasting in the preface of *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. The explosion occurred at the time “When the tension between the two poles of the dialectic is

at its greatest, the historical truth as a monad explodes from the historical continuum, giving social structures turbulence “(Benjamin,1940). The tension in the film is embodied as a perceptual phenomenon of survival and cognitive crisis, which, Paul Virilio believed, is caused by the conflict between the acceleration of modern civilization and the slowness of body perception (Paul Virilio,1995). Following the path of “social organization-capital-technology-racing”, Stiegler reasoned that the spatiotemporal compression and the perceptual field variation are caused by the acceleration of social functioning and technological progress and reached a conclusion that humanity will eventually lead to “systematic stupidity”(Bernard Stiegler,2018).

This concern with speed can be traced back to the Declaration of Accelerationism where speed is believed to be one of the internal parameters of capitalism. As a “supranational power”, it extends to economy and daily life, tightening the control of urban space and causing conflicts and rupture between man and the world (Williams and Nick Srnicek, 2013). This new form of control in the film is shown as the redistribution of cultural power and class in space, in which old districts and the commercial space respectively represent the stable traditional order and the modern society. As a result, spatial segmentation is transmitted and stabilized across generations through culture, technology, capital, causing discomfort in people’s life and emotion as well as making the resource distribution more solidified. In this sense, authenticity is different from the otherization of objects and the study of it provides a pluralistic schema of cognition with subject’s self-emotion projected, the bondage of historical subjectivity broken, self-image revalued and linked to the fate of other groups. This cognitive is benefit from the shift of perspectives. With the internal and outside perspective, authenticity is neither a pure speculative “being” nor a physical space, but a cultural practice in the sense of redemption, endowing discourse with revolutionary function.

Although this kind of thought embodies a strong sense of salvation, it breaks through the boundary between aesthetics and theology, representing interactions between the subject and the object in the complex social relations. Multiple relationships above, in the view of action theorists, are determined by a set of value norms in specific cultural systems. Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils said in their book *Towards a General Theory of Action* that in the stable value system, action and function, culture and symbol are inextricably linked” (Parsons, Talcott and Edward A. Shils,1951). This view absorbed the basic ideas of value philosophy, acknowledging the stability of “Signifier and signified” in a certain period while surpassing the category of value judgment. Under the guidance of this critical purpose and the perspective of skepticism, the continuity of time and the dimension of “Messiah” will be re-emphasized, the existing constraints is possible to be broken, and free will will be more widely recognized.

Reproduction of Authenticity: relative parallax and performativity

Because of the complexity of consciousness and practice, the understanding of authenticity should be nonessential. The western metaphysical tradition holds that there is ultimate meaning behind the appearance of things. Although the film does have a concern of ultimate meaning, a core argument and systematic narrative structure, it is constructive and realistic. Benedetto Croce reduced it to a kind of “knowledge formed in historical judgment and problem solving”, which reveals the spiritual nature of authenticity (Benedetto Croce,1938). But it confuses the view of history with history, said by many historians, leading to a new kind of religious metaphysics. Heidegger explores it more metaphysically. He clearly pointed out that modern knowledge system had led studies to the metaphysics of the presence, in which even poetry, a style of literature that deviates most from everyday language, cannot completely escape from the limitation of language system (Martin Heidegger, 1926). In order to overcome this limitation, details like flower plate, cheongsam and other objects and code words among neighbors deserves attention and should be treated as manifestations of existence as well as the starting point of studies. Meanwhile, the anxious emotions and social status, the constructiveness of Authentic discourse and its language system are equally important in the analysis.

Heidegger’s exposition of existence, in essence, was to construct the ultimate doctrine of being, which is inevitably criticized by postmodern theorists. Derrida overturned its argument about the absolute priority of being and named it as a profound “nostalgia” for the loss of presence. Through his expression, we can speculate that authenticity, as an imagination of primary language, cannot be fixed, because the fracture between signifier and signified is general in modern society. All the things we can refer to and the language we use, from Derrida’s point of view, are traces or differential sequences of signifiers, in which news reports of the community, yellow sails, and the children’s paintings

are only signs of the previous presence. In the post-modern perspective, the meaning of authenticity is fluid. From editing to screening, contents, structures, meanings, broadcasting places and personnel compositions are constantly changing. Correspondingly, signifier is sliding and tends to escape from itself. The deviation of the “signifier” from the “signified” is not a linguistic “mistake”, but a general situation, in which explanations for phenomena changes accompanied by variation of relationships. Subsequently, a symbolic system as well as sequence in the specific context formed. This kind of understanding preserves the consistency of community history and interpretation, negating the metaphysical system of the presence, and reexamining the history and sense of reality.

Based on the discussion above, we can take reproduction of authenticity in the film as a practice of performing discourse, which includes languages and actions. Performativity, derived from J. Austin’s book *How to do things with words*, was once the opposite concept of declarative discourse, and later introduced into the film industry by directors such as Juris Evans and Satsuke Ogawa. They emphasized the participation of creators and the position of marginalized people, breaking through the long-held imagination about the fairness of media. Images, as the node of the network, construct and condense various relationships, transcending the entity and the mixture of entities and becoming the source of all changes (Bruno Latour, 2014). In this network, authenticity no longer has a special status, as a node of the whole cognitive schema, pushing forward social practices in the confluence of human and non-human forces. Although the actor-network theory has been criticized by Lynch and Collins for its animism and mechanistic connection, it provides us with a vision of relational materialism, which may help us to overcome the dualism and transcendental tradition.

In the film, the network where authenticity is contained shows breaking and repairing of the connection between space and human. This relationship extends from community and residents, Hong Kong and citizens, to countries and cities, forming a concentric structure. Through the condensation of time and space and focus on fraction, it embodies the anxiety and fear of identity gap, manifested in some clips like Ru Hua separated from her lover in *The Rough Casket*, the end of the friendship between Xiang Zai and A Fen in *Xi Lu Xiang*, and the loss of community in *Where Yellow Sails Are Flying*. In the form of personal experience, Authentic traces reveal multi-level signifiers and a sense of powerlessness on the margins of the society, which then, as a kind of nostalgia, has a public significance. This temporary commonality helps to unite the resistance forces, promotes weak party to be aware of their disadvantages in the mainstream discourse and begins consciously accumulating scattered experiences, producing a “subject effect” with resistance characteristics (Spivak, 1985). In reality, they do give the audience a strong collective sense of Hong Kong people, which, as a driving force, promotes reflections on Hong Kong spirit and subjectivity and individual subjectivity.

However, there is an unbridgeable gap between individual experience and cultural commonality, and the process of generalizing is inevitably accompanied by abstraction, distortion and simplification. Spivak, therefore, emphasized that strategic essence must be erased after the task is completed, otherwise it will solidify the hierarchy and create a new round of inequality. However, the problem cannot be solved so easily. Between universalism and historical particularism, there is a difference between internal and external vision: The culture holder observes from the inside, easily lost in the details of the experience, while it is difficult for outsiders to grasp the essence of cultural objects due to conceptual and technical barriers. In response to this paradox, analysis should not be limited to existing knowledge, but focus on the process of knowledge generation (Kuhn, 1977), which inspired us to pay attention to the prejudice existing in any knowledge community and the context in which authenticity arises. Gertz later enlarged this view by advocating understanding human behavior from the symbolic forms of local language, imagination, social system and behavior (Gertz, 1983). This suggests that we need a “difference perspective” in which the real and the imaginary merge. In the mirror of authenticity, we can find a virtual space where the self is not present, perceive our position in reality and generate the sense of crisis, making it possible for an individual to deviate from the systematic trajectory.

To sum up, the proposition of authenticity is not limited to a local knowledge, a way of perception or a habit of thinking, but responds to issues such as the neoliberal economic system, the criticism of grand narrative, and the highlighting of the other concealed by language. Hence it naturally becomes a mirror to observe positions and tendencies of various subjects, power relations and operations of discourse. Along with the interweaving of knowledge and power in history, authenticity, as a strategic tool, provides a revolutionary power as well as a blind spot, so we

should take a multicultural stance and give full play to its potential of criticism and construction, while be alert to the trend of transcendental constructivism in the whole proposition.

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