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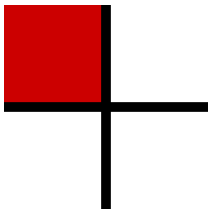
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## **The business of truth: Authenticity, capitalism and the crisis of everyday life**

Anna-Maria Murtola and Peter Fleming

The poet does not participate in the game. He stays in the corner, no happier than those who are playing. He too has been cheated out of his experience – a modern man. (Benjamin, 1940: 332)

In the early twentieth century Walter Benjamin lamented what he observed as the waning of meaningful, long-term human experience and the upsurge in its stead of short, isolated moments of existence. Building on the observation of Baudelaire that the metropolis represented a case of modernity in which movement obliterates social memory, Benjamin saw the ‘naked man of the contemporary world who lies screaming like a newborn babe in the dirty diapers of the present’ (Benjamin, 1933: 733). While Baudelaire was ambivalent about this aspect of modernity (since it also afforded the explorer of crowds the freedom to disappear in the present) Benjamin was even less impassioned. He linked it to the further regressive truncation of the modern subject and flattening effect of the commodity-form. The exploited worker was not only caught within the vertiginous forces of class oppression but also became a kind of half-living universal equivalent that cannot radically constitute itself via a historical reference. Indeed, the man without qualities exchanges the rich and painful political texture of a living past (and all of the intimations of a democratic future that it holds) for the fetish of pure phenomenological presence. In this sense, we are not only separated from what we are – a living inventory of a bygone multitude whose defeats and victories might be detected in a glance, a smile or gait – but also from what we might be in an as yet unmapped future. A prisoner of a perpetual present.

With this political inscription of the insular modern subject the question of authenticity, its loss and achievement, also becomes prominent. In the context of radical thought the notion of authenticity has a troubled past. Is it something that can be retrieved out of the wreckage of modern capitalism? Is it an ideological cipher that never existed but serves a certain function in the marketplace of bourgeois ideas, or can it be rethought through a notion of an inoperative community? The concept of social or personal authenticity as a co-ordinate for radical change undoubtedly waned during the heyday of post-structuralist thought, but it has seen a recent revival in some most unlikely places, such as that of the capitalist firm, popular culture and contemporary political campaigns. While revolutionary politics has often tried to rebuild experience from the rubble of the commodity-form, not even Benjamin could have foreseen what would come to pass in

the ideological permutations of 21<sup>st</sup> century capitalism. The concept of authenticity appears to have shifted from a problem of the humanist revolutionary left to one that is now at home in glossy corporate training manuals, team-building exercises of investment firms and advertising agencies.

One of the more bizarre aspects of the development of contemporary capitalism has been to prescribe to workers existential palliatives for problems that the regime of work itself has created. Business firms today are in the vanguard of attempting to re-establish the lost connection between self and experience so colourfully depicted by Benjamin, through a peculiar evocation of authenticity. From new-age spiritualism in the call-centre, tokenistic difference and diversity employment policies in consultancy firms, authentic commodities and marketing tactics, leftist eco-enterprises, chic counter-cultural rhetoric in IT start ups and so on, capitalism has claimed authenticity as one of its leading concerns. This recent evocation consists of an admixture of sources including spiritualism, airport lounge philosophy, the self-help movement, work-life balance programmes and a rally of techniques designed to help workers express the truth of themselves. It can also be found in a turn back towards an imagined past, one that seemed to make more sense than the fragmented reality we currently inhabit. What we have observed is that what was once an emancipatory response to commodification, rationalization and social and economic oppression has now itself been put to work as a perverse combination of commodity, business ideology and marketing stunt (Fleming, 2009; Murtola, 2011).

While it is important to note that not all firms in the global economy are engaged in the quest for authenticity, and straightforward coercion still remains the norm in contemporary capitalism, there is an interesting shift to be observed in how the capital-labour divide is being managed in western economies. An important element of this business version of authenticity is the way in which it is structured by a fundamental absence. The call for workers to express their unique identities found in recent business discourse, for example, turns on the assumption that all is presently not authentic and that something is missing and needs to be addressed. The same is discernible in the endless range of authentic commodities available on the market, ready to respond to consumers' cravings for an authentic experience. In other words, authenticity is more of a symptom of an abiding absence – the cause of which is seen to reside in us rather than the structural preconditions that make 'us' possible in the first place. What exactly is missing in the sphere of work and everyday life that might prompt this response on the part of capital?

We suggest that the way we address such questions has significant consequences for how we understand the politics of work and of everyday life more generally. As it enters the phraseology of corporate discourse the idea that we can now express our authentic selves in an environment renowned for its hierarchical and anti-democratic tendencies might appear to be a liberating gesture. Ironically, many of the attempts to 'humanize' such structures (commitment, empowerment, job enrichment programmes, etc.) often themselves create feelings of alienation as employees easily see through them. This unsurprising response among the workforce might result from a pre-emptive expectation regarding the brutal 'right-sizing' that frequently follows such initiatives. But workers also chide these maladroit attempts to soften the crunch of capitalist

employment because they ironically seem *unreal* and *counterfeit*. Like so much other dross proffered by consultants and pop-management pundits, the discursive facade of work is manipulated without going to the heart of the problem. What is the lack that appears to motivate authenticity programmes and schedules? Why does authenticity gain such prominence in the sphere of political recruitment and other marketing campaigns?

When it comes to the workplace, we argue that the answer lies in a fundamental lack of life at work, and this is perhaps an inescapable part of the capital labour process since life and work hardly ever go together. In this sense, the celebration of personal authenticity involving expressions of difference and diverse identities is both a continuation of past attempts to inject a modicum of life into work and an official response to earlier failures. Moreover, in the words of Adorno (1973), it trades in a ‘cult of inwardness’ so that the social logic of a broken system is resealed in the perpetually failing individual as an ethic, anxiety and even a ‘spiritual’ project in the case of the self-help industry. So this, then, is why we speak of the rise of authenticity as involving a particular response to the current capitalist crisis of everyday life.

If the ideology of authenticity is a suspicious corporate response to a structural crisis of experience precipitated by capitalism itself, then this special issue aims to register a kind of counter-response. We certainly are not advocating the wholesale abandonment of the concept, even though we are deeply distrustful of its current usage in particular in recent business rhetoric. This special issue presents papers that explore the discourse of authenticity in the context of everyday social and economic life, with particular emphasis on its analysis as a symptom pertaining to a crooked reality. While they are certainly not adverse to strictly philosophical meditations on authenticity, they do tend towards critically investigating particularly the emergent political economy of authenticity, in the context of contemporary work and organizations.

In the first paper, Ince studies the place of authenticity in the context of the spatial politics of the British National Party and shows how the party mobilises tropes of authenticity (and its ‘other’) for its purposes. He draws attention in particular to the community rhetoric in use and the contestations over ideas of community that take place between fascist politics and responses to it. Thus he points to the malleability of authenticity and the danger of an unquestioning embrace of it as a universally positive force, and discusses the implications for the possibility of a meaningful anti-fascist response. We think this paper is also useful for pointing to the broader tendencies in conservative political thinking in the United Kingdom (and beyond) that uses a bogus notion of an ‘authentic citizenry’ in order to maintain a racist polity and economic apparatus.

In the second paper, we move from authenticity as a way of policing the body politic to one that connects it with the body proper through the discourse of health. Cederström analyses the relationship between health and authenticity as currently discernible in managerial attempts to streamline employee interests with corporate aims. He shows how the imperative for employees to ‘be themselves’ at work is now also linked to a command to lead a healthy life, a goal perceived to be beneficial for both employee and corporation and visible in the use of various health promotion programmes. Thus

Cederström points to how authenticity at work pertains less to employees being asked to 'come as they are' and more to employees being encouraged to become their ideal selves – sublime, imagined beings of perfection – a goal perfectly compatible with the never-ending project of self-creation so prominent in capitalism more broadly today.

Echoing these 'bio-moral' themes, Spicer goes on to explore the relationship between the contemporary search for authenticity and guilt. Drawing on Basterra's work, he argues that this search for authenticity is tragic in form and can produce feelings of guilt, which are then sought to be alleviated through the use of various 'authenticity rituals'. These activities, he argues, involve an excessive focus inward, which in turn leads to the individualisation of collective, political struggles. Therefore, instead of liberation, the obsession with a search for authenticity leads to yet another form of oppression.

In the final paper of the issue Pedersen analyses the role authenticity plays in the context of a specific corporate recruitment campaign. He uses Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a social machine in order to explain the place and function of authenticity in contemporary economic life. In doing so he also points to the focus put on the need for employees to *become* themselves rather than to merely *be* themselves and discusses the role that this plays in relation to the corporate colonisation of employees' lives.

To conclude the issue, Moore presents in her note a stinging critique of the cooptation of authenticity by capital. She underlines the ambiguity that lies at the heart of authenticity today and the perversions that follow from the split between authenticity as perceived in terms of 'originality' on the one hand, and in terms of a copy that is 'close enough' to an original to be considered authentic, on the other. She shows how authenticity has been put to work in the marketing industry in a search for ever increasing customer loyalty and profits. Moore also points to how the current obsession with authenticity is perfectly aligned with the individualism at the heart of contemporary capitalism. She demonstrates the important role that media, and social media in particular, play in the contemporary processes of authentication at a time when we all have the chance to democratically participate in opinion-based journalism on the Internet.

The papers are, therefore, very sceptical about the nature of authenticity and its many articulations in and around the world of work. It is seen as a kind of Trojan horse for rendering the subject more susceptible to the broader socio-economic vicissitudes of a system that appears to be out of control. Techniques of authentication – which appear to have an inbuilt proclivity for failure – therefore contain strong ideological elements that bind us even firmer to the very things we wish to escape – our unhappiness, restlessness and deep suspicion that all is not well.

But does this mean that there is nothing salvageable here pertaining to the political uses of authenticity? While the following contributions certainly forward strident criticisms of the concept, we see two possible ways in which it might be redeemed. The first pertains to a more socialized understanding of what the 'truth of oneself' might mean. An open (or inoperative) and multitudinous community that both makes and is made by the individual might rearticulate us to a more radical notion of authenticity. This is

because, as a number of the following contributions reveal, including Cederström, Spicer and Pedersen, the pro-business version of authenticity evokes a kind of ‘false individual’ that is more about an oppressive sociality tethering us to our own domination through the sign of the subject. A disciplined and unavowable collective, on the other hand, would not hijack the truth of us for instrumental ends, but the opposite. Following Baudelaire’s observation that it is in the overflowing and anonymous crowd where we really discover ourselves, perhaps this is what Žižek meant when he suggested that ‘the dissolution of “critical individuality” in the disciplined collective leads not to some Dionysian uniformity, but rather clears the slate and opens up the field for authentic idiosyncrasies’ (Žižek, 2010: 373). Perhaps.

This raises another interesting point in relation to the contributions in the special issue: running underneath the variety of discourses of authenticity explored here is a pre-occupation with *inauthenticity*. That which is not pure, not healthy, not guilt-free and not fun. The authentic ideal maintains a symbiotic relationship with its horrible ‘other’ in an almost mesmerised fashion. Perhaps the remaining purchase of authenticity in any progressive political project might be found in its defetishised form. That is to say, where the source of this inauthenticity is not found in the ‘false individual’ (and their way of coping with the circumstances they find themselves in) but in the flows of social domination that keep us excluded from a transformative politics. In nominally transforming these sources of inauthenticity would we not also render the very idea of authenticity obsolete once and for all?

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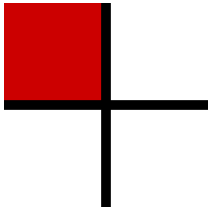
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## Contesting the ‘authentic’ community: Far-right spatial strategy and everyday responses in an era of crisis<sup>\*</sup>

Anthony Ince

### abstract

The idea that voting alone will eliminate far-right and fascist politics is fundamentally flawed. Politics takes place in the hearts and minds of people; in their streets, communities and homes. It inhabits the everyday constitution of authenticity and is partly articulated through the spatialities it produces. I illustrate this through a discussion of the recent history of British fascism’s decline and re-emergence, and its development of new spatial strategies. The British National Party’s re-branding mobilises around a particular idea of the authentic (white, British) community and subsumes into itself a dubious analysis of class divisions and interests. This re-branding can be seen as a particular form of territorialisation in the face of an increasingly fragmentary, mobile and globalised world, and is exaggerated in the wake of the global economic crisis which has had a disproportionate effect on working class communities. The struggle against the far right is in part a struggle over the spatial articulation of and claims to authenticity in differing understandings of working class values. Authenticity, I argue, is primarily a politico-discursive tool to which competing politics lay claim, perching on the ill-defined border between reality and artifice.

For the last fifty years, more and more of the people of Britain have watched with concern and growing dismay and sometimes anger, as an out-of-touch political elite has transformed our country before our very eyes. It’s not just a matter of mass immigration – although that’s the most obvious symptom of it – it’s handing us over to rule by unelected bureaucrats in Brussels; it’s turning the commonwealth of our country, our public services, into private profit centres for giant corporations; it’s banning St George’s Day festivals while encouraging everyone else to celebrate their festivals, usually with taxpayers’ money... The anger of the British people has been held behind dams, walls of lies, growing ever-taller and ever-thicker for the last fifty years. But tonight in the north-west of England and in Yorkshire, the British National Party, and hundreds of thousands of voters... have given their verdict of the dam of lies of the old party, and tonight the British National Party has breached those dams of lies. The words of truth and justice and freedom are once again flowing over this country. (Speech by Nick Griffin, BNP leader, Thursday 4th June 2009)

British far right and neo-fascist politics is not what it once was. The election of two British National Party (BNP) members to the European Parliament in June 2009,

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following dozens of BNP members elected to local government in recent years, represents a profound shift in the landscape of UK politics. Their intoxicating mix of far-right ethno-nationalism and populist social democratic rhetoric has garnered the BNP hundreds of thousands of votes, largely in working class former Labour Party heartlands, despite many months of left-wing and anti-fascist activity around the UK leading up to the elections.

This paper discusses the spatial strategies of this new wave of neo-fascism and the failures of left responses. I argue, in concert with an emerging and increasingly successful spatial strategy, that the BNP has been engaging in careful discursive warfare over the meaning of key working class political concepts, especially *community*. Using publicly available materials, largely online and in archived newspapers, I explore the spatio-discursive strategies that the BNP seeks to mobilise in relation to community and tease out an understanding of authenticity that is a powerful discursive tool in the politics of community. Through a discussion of the radical everyday theories of Henri Lefebvre and Guy Debord, I ask what this increasingly sophisticated spatial and discursive strategy can tell us about possible efforts to combat the rise of far-right politics among the white working class and the role of authenticity in the construction of grassroots community politics. Work in geopolitics concerning deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation also helps to shed light on the ways in which community politics are linked to broader processes of economic, social and cultural change in a globalised world.

'Community' is itself a hotly contested term. It can indicate communities rooted in specific geographical locations, as well as communities of common interest and transnational communities based on common ethnicities or places of origin such as diasporas. This geographical differentiation is important and is a tension that is felt throughout this paper. Emerging BNP strategy, I argue, links geographical and ethnic understandings of community, intersecting localist and particularist sentiments concerning place and territory with appeals to a sense of broader 'authentic' British ethno-national identity.

In contemporary policy discourse, the concept of community has become an increasingly important element in social welfare and planning delivery, understood as a means of organising service delivery and encompassing a range of (often antagonistic) actors such as voluntary organisations, businesses and working class populations in a certain area (MacLeavy, 2008; Holgersen and Haarstad, 2009). Diversity and multiculturalism have, in many respects and also among academics, become the watchwords of mainstream liberal understandings of community, in which communities are defined (and to an extent 'rated') by the range of different subjectivities cohabiting within them (e.g. Young, 1990; Amin, 2002).

The emphasis given to such politically-charged and contestable definitions of community in the discourses of both policy makers and civil society actors such as trade unions (e.g. Early and Cohen, 1997) has led some scholars to explore the politics and utility of the term. Following Nancy (1991), Panelli and Welch emphasise an individualistic need for community, arguing that

[i]ndividuals' negotiation of... everyday actions and spaces in order to reduce the (individual) experience of singularity can explain why the very real differences experienced within community lead to continuous reformulation of community rather than its destruction. (Panelli and Welch, 2005: 1609)

Here, it is argued that community is significant not simply *because of* diversity, but also as a way of *coping* with the potentially alienating effects of diversity. Such an argument also seems to challenge ideas in academia and policy that emphasise sites of 'encounter' – also known as 'micro-publics' (Amin, 2002) or simply 'contact' (Allport, 1954) – between different subjectivities as important means of developing a united yet diverse community. 'Acknowledgement of otherness', in particular, is claimed to be an important means of fostering diverse communities (e.g. Barnett, 2005), although some have critiqued the utility of simple encounters as means of achieving this (Valentine, 2008).

As this paper develops, it becomes clear that responses to the difficulties of living in diverse communities can also be powerfully constituted through a struggle over the articulation and practice of what is (or is not) an 'authentic' understanding of community. The focal point of this paper is the BNP's re-branding of neo-fascist politics in the UK. The paper explores the ways in which fascist and anti-fascist politics contest community as a site of struggle over claims to authentic readings of its nature, politics and history.

## Between a death and a rebirth

The global economic crisis of 2008-2009 has taken its toll on the British working class with 7.95 million people of working age unemployed or otherwise 'not economically active' (Office for National Statistics, 2009) and many more pushed into precarious and poverty-level employment (MacInness et al., 2009). In 2008 and 2009, the number of welfare claims increased significantly, as did the average length of time that people remained claiming benefits, putting greater pressure on state and Third Sector service providers (Clancy, 2009). Despite early 2010 seeing the UK economy officially rise out of six quarters of recession (Seager, 2010), the effects of recession linger for all but a privileged minority.

This economic crisis has not only caused widespread economic problems, but has also affected the UK socially and culturally. Coupled with the cultural and territorial insecurity that has developed out of globalised capitalism, discussed below, the recession has arguably become a crisis of both economy and identity. With hindsight, positive election results for the BNP were a side-effect of the intersections of broader insecurities of national identity and economy.

The success of the BNP in the EU elections heralded some level of soul-searching among the left and anti-fascist milieux. While some fatalistically lamented the rise of an unstoppable new fascism, others tried to downplay the significance of the election results, and yet others staged tired and fruitless protests. The left was divided and bruised. In this respect, then, the electoral success of the BNP was more than just an expression of their growing bravado in times of turbulence and crisis – it represented

the floundering of a troubled anti-fascist movement seemingly bereft of any effective counter-strategy.

This is a far cry from the late 1990s and early 2000s, when fascist politics seemed far less of a threat than it had been previously. After decades of often bloody street-based struggle, the numerically and tactically superior left – epitomised by the physical, confrontational tactics of Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) and the Asian Youth Movements (AYMs), alongside the larger broad-based liberal socialist Anti-Nazi League (ANL) – finally appeared to have won. In the case of the militant anti-fascists (who, although smaller than the ANL, were popular and well-organised), physical combat was the watchword of these battles for territorial control of key public spaces (e.g. Lux, 2006; Ramamurthy, 2006). This saw the proliferation of localised fascist and anti-fascist groups vying for the control of communities, streets, neighbourhoods and – those bastions of British working class social and political life – pubs (Bullstreet, 2001). As one AFA activist argued, 'only when they [the fascists] are too terrified to work in the estates and walk the streets can anti-fascists be satisfied' (see Martell, 1996: 14).

The largest fascist grouping of the era, the National Front (NF), had for many years an explicit spatial strategy of 'march and grow' (Lux, 2006). A large and visible street presence, argued the NF, was a necessary precursor to growth and greater control in key strategic territories. However, as the NF branched increasingly into electoral politics in the 1980s, the two-pronged spatial configuration of street and electoral politics became increasingly untenable. The visible presence of aggressive, badly-organised and anti-social young men (as they usually were) did not correlate with the perceived 'respectability' of electoral politics. This, combined with sophisticated tactics of surveillance, infiltration and confrontation enacted by anti-fascists, led to bitter infighting, fragmentation and massive shrinking of the NF and similar groups such as the British Movement. The failure of street-based fascism was largely rooted in this problematic strategy that sought to combine street control with electoralism, combined with the effective counter-strategies of the left. With the far-right in collapse, the left, it seemed, had won a major victory.

For some time during the late 1990s and early 2000s, self-congratulatory noises emanated from the left. The growing electoral successes of the BNP were variously dismissed as anomalous, bogus or a failure of the electoral system (e.g. Lowles, 2000; 2001; Taylor, 2001; Deacon et al., 2004). These self-congratulatory noises and the apparent disappearance of the most visible signs of fascism put paid to any serious, grassroots anti-fascist organisation in most areas of the UK. Most anti-fascism was increasingly enacted through cultural spectacles such as Love Music Hate Racism festivals and leafleting campaigns in specific areas during local elections.

However, fast-forward to 2009 and we can see a very different story. The collapse of the NF and the failures of the 'march and grow' strategy led to a period of careful introspection among certain leading sections of the far right (Hayes and Aylward, 2000; Copsey, 2007). The growth of the BNP as a 'legitimate' political party has left the formerly victorious left floundering without appropriate organisation, strategy or understanding of the realities of contemporary far-right organisation. Part of this is due to the simple re-branding of the BNP's political image (Copsey, 2004), but more

interesting is the reorientation and reorganisation of what we might term their 'spatio-discursive strategy'.

## The deterritorialised circus of electoral anti-fascism

In response to the increasingly successful reorientation of British far right politics towards electoral activity and slick PR, many on the left have devoted time and resources towards countering the BNP in its assumed new home. Parties, political groups and trade unions have all thrown their weight behind campaigns that attempt to cut off the rise of the BNP by cutting out the most visible signs of their growth: their increased electoral success. This tactic of trying to prevent the BNP from gaining parish and county councillors, MEPs and even boards of school governors by encouraging voters to 'vote for anyone except the BNP' has gained ground in recent years, and in many cases obfuscates any other possibilities for anti-fascist activity beyond the ballot box. A Unite Against Fascism strategy paper is indicative of this approach: 'The role of the anti-fascist movement is to alert the broad majority to the BNP threat [in order to make] the case for the largest possible anti-fascist vote' (Unite Against Fascism, 2010a: 3).

Meanwhile, the BNP has steadily increased its presence in the halls of power to a total of 56 local councillors, three county councillors, two MEPs and one member of the Greater London Assembly. This strategy of voting against the BNP – even if modestly successful in particular contexts – has regularly morphed into a strategy of voting for the Labour Party; the very party from whose disillusioned former supporters the BNP seeks to draw much of their membership. Moreover, it has repeatedly failed to address the *causes* of the BNP's rise. It is a strategy that has, in a sense, deterritorialised and fragmented most anti-fascist activity from specific spaces and places to the abstracted, individualised world of electoral politics. I argue in the coming pages that this is a strategy that has increasingly wrenched political organisation from the material realities and spaces of everyday life.

The concept of 'deterritorialisation' has a strong presence in geopolitical literatures on the effects and dynamics of globalised capitalism as 'the problematic of territory losing its significance and power in everyday life' (Ó Tuathail, 1999: 139). It is argued that globalisation's shrinking of distances through advanced communication technologies and growing connectedness of formerly separated economic markets leads to fragmentary and destabilising effects on identity, community and culture. This operates in particular through the growth of networks and institutions that destabilise the state (e.g. Debrix, 1998; Antonsich, 2009), but it has also a profound impact at the local level. This global deterritorialisation of social, political and cultural subjectivity is perceived to produce anxieties, uncertainties and confused identities; producing subjects of a global system over which people have little or no control, to which they cannot relate (in any traditional sense, at least), and which dominates much of their daily lives nonetheless. Papastergiadis, in the context of migration, explains that 'deterritorialisation has decoupled previous links between space, stability and reproduction; it has situated the notion of community in multiple locations; it has split



loyalties and fractured the practices that secure understanding and knowledge within the family and social unit' (Papastergiadis, 2000: 17).

Deterritorialisation, in a sense, is a process that transforms people's relationships with the places they inhabit and pass through. Individual places become increasingly co-constituted with other places elsewhere, through processes such as migration patterns or the impact of global capital flows. In turn, the way we relate to our local environment is changed through this proliferation of connections with elsewhere. It has implications not only relevant to the everyday experiences of *place*, but also for broader spatial imaginations of belonging, with state borders also becoming increasingly disrupted (e.g. Debrix, 1998).

With such decoupling of everyday spaces of identity formation from socio-political reality, it is not surprising, then, that the BNP and much of the far right elsewhere, oppose globalisation on precisely this basis. Their response can be understood as a *reterritorialisation*; an effort to root politics in the immediate, local and concrete. Some (e.g. Harvey, 1993; Gibson-Graham, 2003) have emphasised the latent potentialities of a reterritorialising political strategy as a means of developing positive place-based political subjectivities in the face of reactionary and exclusionary localisms of the political right. However, as the rise of the BNP illustrate, reterritorialisation is not a form of political organisation that is necessarily progressive in all cases.

Indeed, a number of writers have expressed concerns regarding the deterritorialisation-reterritorialisation binary. Elden (2005), for example, has critiqued many scholars of this idea arguing that although scholars seek to disrupt the stability of territory, such a binary often continues to reproduce established, quantifiable and calculative forms of territory that they are seeking to problematise. Ó Tuathail also criticises the binary between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, arguing that '[i]t is not simply that there is no de-territorialisation without re-territorialisation, but that both are parts of ongoing generalised processes of territorialisation' (1999: 143).

What appears to be a binary relationship is really constituted by a range of processes that operate and manifest themselves unevenly and differently across space and time. This range of territorialisations is often manifested through de/reterritorialisation in specific places at specific times, but may not operate uniformly and may not be solely understood as operating in one 'direction' or another over all.

Bearing these concerns in mind, there appear to be two forms of territorialisation taking place in the context of (anti-)fascist spatial strategy. First is a localised process of deterritorialisation of economic, social and cultural signification in numerous localities in the UK that gives strength to far-right and neo-fascist perspectives on ethnocentric nationalism. This process, often with its outward expression being mass migration to an area, is experienced aesthetically and through social and cultural changes for the most part. Secondly, anti-fascism has increasingly rejected its former territorial spatial strategy of community control. By this I mean that electoral campaigns are oriented towards atomised, individual voting choices, rather than emphasising collective, territorial forms of politics that tended to mark out the anti-fascist activities – especially

the militant anti-fascist tradition of AFA and the AYMs – of the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s<sup>1</sup>.

As a result of what the anti-fascists perceived to be a deterritorialisation of far-right spatial strategy, the organisation of anti-fascism changed, usually no longer rooted in a connection to place or community as it once was. Recognising the BNP's continued growth and improvement in electoral performance and public profile, there is clearly something missing from the anti-fascist response to the shift from street strategy to electoral strategy. But what?

### **Re-territorialising fascism, or, how the right is threatening to do the left's job, only better**

In order to understand the continued and increasing popularity of the BNP, it is necessary to investigate their spatial organisation and mobilisation, and their articulation of re-worked principles of working class (comm)unity. Through a shift to electoral politics, alongside growing working class dissatisfaction with the established parties, the BNP have sought to reconfigure traditional 'working class values' and working class history in their own image. In doing so, I argue, they are increasingly enacting forms of politics that have been largely promoted by the left in previous decades. While, of course, it would be problematic to say the least if one asserted that community politics originated with left-wing politics, it is fair to say that the history of working class urban community organisation since the late 19th century has often been dominated by the left. In this section, I explore the ways in which the BNP has developed a strategy that rests on communitarian principles often identified with left-wing politics, while imbuing within this strategy an idealised imagination of authentic British community.

The politics and discourse of authentic British community is central to understanding the BNP's increasing appeal. This image of community is rooted heavily in the forms of working class community self-help and social solidarity that were enacted most visibly during the Second World War, mobilising a 'spirit of the Blitz' sense of communities as territorial units in struggle against an impending (or already existing) foreign invasion. The party reinforces this discourse of Blitz community spirit in their use of images of Winston Churchill and Victory Day street parties in their propaganda. Indeed, following the recent EU election, the BNP declared 'VE Day', making a direct reference to this idealised – and, of course, largely imagined – wartime spirit of homogeneous community and cross-class (or classless) indigenous unity in adversity. The BNP London Branch leaflet (London BNP, 2008), below, is typical of this imagined sense of homogeneous community:

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1 Although it was against official ANL policy, certain sections of the ANL also enacted a militant strategy. This was often referred to as 'squadism' by those who wished to denounce these tactics.



(Image source: BNP leaflet, see also Hirsch and Taylor, 2009)

As this leaflet shows, the articulation of images and discourses of the 'authentic' indigenous British community is a major factor in BNP propaganda. The mobilisation of such a stark contrast represents a mobilisation of a particular image of authentic community; an image that is 'friendly, happy and secure' and, of course, exclusively white. Alongside visual representations of the BNP's ideal community, the BNP promotes policies of community-level politics that were once the mainstay of the left<sup>2</sup>. As their election manifesto (BNP, 2007: 8, 24) notes, the system of local government promoted by the BNP

2 This irony has not been lost on Nick Griffin, who once claimed that the BNP was the only truly socialist party in Britain (ANL, 2002).

would revolutionise the way local government is conducted. It would bring democracy and the decision making process back into the reach of the electorate and our communities... with the historic and organic and natural community boundaries that are embedded within our culture. Furthermore the process as a whole is true to our heritage as a modernised version of the venerable practices of popular representation found in our ancestral anglo-saxon-celtic society.

[...]

Promoting the culture, the history, of a district is a vital ingredient in helping to establish a local community feeling. These local cultures developed over centuries of human interaction. The liberal regime has deliberately tried to destroy local particularism in a bid for conformity and dull uniformity.

The authentic community, for the BNP, is based upon a fusion of democratic decentralisation and a return to the perceived socio-cultural values and practices of British ethno-national history. This is rooted in a distinctly territorial reworking of what 'authentic community' is, how it works, and what it is designed for. It functions as a means for identifying decentralised forms of decision-making as inherently British, and transforming the current form of government into an 'unnatural' construct of 'foreign' influence. Much of this speaks to the democratic tradition of many elements of the left, calling for a decentralisation of government to the grassroots and the centrality of community as a social, solidaristic unit.

Similarly, the BNP mobilise anti-corporate and anti-globalisation sentiments, appealing to left-wing commitments to good local employment, independence and creativity:

Culture of course is not just a historic entity. Our unique culture needs to be kept alive in the face of globalisation and standardisation. We will... ensure the survival of the traditional trades and crafts that have been passed down through the centuries. (*ibid.*: 25)

Here authentic community, culture and tradition intersect in places in the selective marketing of particular commodities – and ways of making them – as distinctively British. Anthropological arguments such as this not only affirm certain local historical lineages as 'authentic', but also seek to reify small-scale capitalist processes of production as also inherent in British national heritage. While, historically, craft production was arguably linked to economies that did not conform to the capitalist exchange economy that dominates the majority of the contemporary world, proposing to transplant such crafts into a contemporary economy inevitably foregrounds crafts as, essentially, small business ventures. The BNP's appeals to traditional arts and crafts therefore link petit bourgeois forms of production to an impression of communitarianism and cultural autonomy. Thus, in a sense, the re-territorialisation of community-based economies that the BNP propose in this quotation is at once a rejection of globalised neoliberalism and an assertion of the 'authentically natural' quality of small-scale capitalist enterprise.

Community has therefore become a discursive battleground, with the BNP appropriating and transposing left-wing working class norms and values into their particular brand of populist, cross-class national socialism. However, these appeals to community reside not simply in the discursive realm. Recent scholarship (e.g. Bowyer, 2008; Bailey, 2009; cf. Cobain, 2006) has shown how BNP activists are increasingly undertaking community-based activities in an effort to develop the forms of community



and the electoral support in key wards that they wish to see. The texts of BNP organiser guidelines and handbooks also demonstrate how the BNP is attempting to engage in such grassroots community-based strategies. For example: 'Use a local place name to emphasise that you are locals. Mention a couple of other local issues, such as high council tax, hospital/school closures, etc. It is important you mention local issues and issues other than immigration' (Eriksen, ND), 'Local issue leaflets are far more effective at recruiting than the national party leaflets' (BNP, ND: 18) and 'You have a responsibility to treat each other with respect and civility. We are involved in community politics and this starts with our own Nationalist community' (ibid.: 22).

The emphasis on a territorial understanding of community – on local areas and place-based issues – is clearly a key element of the BNP's spatial strategy and reflects a growing understanding of effective political campaigning that many other parties and organisations already use. It recognises and emphasises the role of place in the constitution of political subjectivity, refusing the stereotype of the monolithic, centralised political party against which many of the white working class have rebelled. Indeed, one leading BNP activist predicted as early as 1994 that this new community-based strategy would be a success:

[T]he BNP will almost certainly make its next breakthrough in a run-down working-class area. The people who have been abandoned by Labour and who have never been represented by the Tories will, in their desperation, turn to us... [W]e speak for the put-upon working-class. (Lecomber, 1994)

While 'march and grow' territorial politics are, for the most part<sup>3</sup>, long gone, the BNP policy of deliberate deployment of organisers in certain neighbourhoods to build micro-level personal relationships with community members is a clear form of territorialisation that allows the BNP access to their core target audience – the urban white working class. Their disproportionate success at local scales of government in white working class areas is a direct symptom of this reconfigured and reterritorialised vision of community, and it provokes a conundrum for those wishing to engage in anti-fascist organising, as Bailey notes: '[BNP] activists practising "community politics"... are carrying out day-to-day activism through community groups and councillors' work. Therefore, in some neighbourhoods, there is little possibility of marginalising these individuals through describing them as "extremist" or "fascist"' (2009: 3).

In areas where BNP activists have been able to embed their particular brand of community discourse and practice into the locality, their adaptation of authentic community is in danger of becoming accepted as legitimate at best – and accurate at worst. This reconfiguration of community and territory demands of us a careful re-examination of anti-fascist strategy. In order to do so, it is necessary to discuss how we

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3 Arguably there has been a small rejuvenation of street-based right-wing activity in the last year, following the creation of the English Defence League. Launched primarily to combat extreme Islam, their politics is rather more ambiguous than the BNP and there is a multitude of voices present within the organisation ranging from relatively mainstream jingoistic nationalism to outright fascism. As such, although a threat, it cannot be said definitively that the EDL represents a return to the street-based forms of fascism exhibited by the NF.

might go about understanding the complex and unpredictable terrains on which these struggles over the authentic community are taking place.

## Everyday political strategy and the authentic community

Through their community-oriented spatial strategy, the BNP are articulating and practising a new form of territorial politics; a form of politics to which anti-fascist groups have largely failed to respond. Moreover it is a class politics, rooted in (the BNP's particular version of) traditional working class values. Their careful representation and reworking of working class history and values asks us to rethink the role of authenticity in the spaces where class politics take place.

Crucially, rather than a reworking of values that reproduces authenticity as a quest for some sort of idealised 'unique' or 'autonomous' individual, the BNP strategy reproduces (a skewed version of) left discourses of collectivity, resilience and community. Indeed, much like the radical left in particular, the BNP rejects the managerial discourses of individuality and liberal notions of diversity. The radical left critique lies in liberalism's reification of difference and fragmentation of class unity. However, the far-right criticism is – through a related logic – rooted in a rejection of the 'collective individuality' of liberalism, most clearly represented in the pluralist discourses and policies of multiculturalism and equal opportunities.

Authenticity, as Lorimer notes, 'is neither eternal nor guaranteed' (1999: 519). The assumption of the left that their image of authentic community was indeed eternal and guaranteed, enshrined in the canon of Marxism and the classical anarchists, is a fallacy that has cost them dearly in the contemporary struggle against the BNP. Strangely, as the centrality of territorial community – of place and the local – has become more pronounced in this turbulent era of crisis and de/re-territorialisations, these precise sites of political mobilisation have waned in the spatial strategy of the mainstream left, focusing instead on cultural spectacles such as Love Music Hate Racism festivals and individualised, reactive electoral 'cut-off' activism.

What differentiates BNP strategy from the new electoral strategies of the left is not simply its geography – although it is arguably the most obvious outward manifestation of this difference – but also its connection to *everyday practice*. Politics, as a terrain of practice that resides in the everyday and usually localised interactions of people, is propagated, reproduced and developed over time precisely through these practices.

While they deserve far more exploration than a short article can convey, the entwined thought of Henri Lefebvre and Guy Debord is especially relevant to a discussion of authenticity, everyday life and political praxis. These libertarian-leaning French Marxists explored in detail the significance of everyday life to political praxis and our experience of social life. Lefebvre (2000: 16), referring to institutional politics and other representational establishments such as 'high' culture, laid out his perspective clearly:

[W]e refuse to see them as the substance and hidden being of human reality. We devalue them and revalue the mere residuum upon which they are built – everyday life; *either* we elect to serve 'causes' *or* we support the humble cause of everyday life.

For Lefebvre, politics is located in the residuum of human (inter)action, where established politics – such as governments, capital or trade union bureaucracies – are alienated products of localised social processes, aggregated, institutionalised and reproduced through everyday grassroots interactions:

Everyday life is made of recurrences: gestures of labour and leisure, mechanical movements both human and properly mechanic... linear and cyclical repetitions, natural and rational time, etc.; the study of creative activity (of *production*, in its widest sense) leads to the study of re-production or the conditions in which actions producing objects and labour are re-produced... or, on the contrary, undergo gradual or sudden modifications. (Lefebvre, 2000: 18)

Thus, everyday life is fundamentally a process of *becoming*; of organisation and re-organisation of the social through practice. Where the left had become complacent in its apparent victory over the NF in the late 1990s, it assumed an immobile everyday and, in turn, a fixed definition of authentic community. On the contrary, as Lefebvre reminds us, '[t]he everyday is neither the inauthentic *per se*, nor the authentically and positively "real"' (2002: 65). Elsewhere, he bemoans the way in which everyday life encompasses a sense of 'reality without truth' (Lefebvre, 1984, quoted in Highmore, 2002: 116), further problematising the linkage of everyday life to authenticity by counterpoising it against a philosophical quest for absolute 'truth without reality'. A Lefebvrian understanding of authenticity is therefore rooted in everyday practices that blur assertions of authenticity and inauthenticity.

Further deepening this assertion is Lefebvre's powerful theorisation of the *social production of space*. Space is, he argued, a complex social product of human interactions, values, desires and significations that tends to characterise a particular location or series of connected locations at a particular moment. Space is important because its social production structures perceptions and experiences, usually on an everyday level. Importantly, much like everyday life, since space is socially *produced* it is also always becoming; being contested, reproduced and shaped over time: 'If space is a product, our knowledge of it must be expected to reproduce and expound the process of production. The "object" of interest must be expected to shift from *things in space* to the actual *production of space*' (Lefebvre, 1991: 36-37).

This has a number of implications for the way we understand the authentic community. First, it means that authenticity – if it really does exist – is not atemporal or aspatial. If space is always in process, then the parameters surrounding what is an authentic treatment of said space are necessarily changing also. Second, it means that community – itself a spatialised phenomenon – is also socially produced. Third, if community is socially produced, it will be constituted in different ways across space. These assertions can pose a strong critique to any assertion of authentic community, whether from the left or the right, since authenticity becomes defined through spatio-temporal differences, according to the constellations of relations that make up community also differing over time and space. In this process, the confident and absolute connotations of authenticity fade away in the shadow of infinite possibilities for difference, change and contrast between spaces and times.

This discussion of Lefebvre raises the question of exactly how this spatialised blurring of authenticity and inauthenticity actually functions in practice. The spectacle, theorised

by Guy Debord of the Situationist International, is a powerful example of how the everyday production and contestation of in/authenticity might operate. Debord argued that the spectacle, an image-saturated totality which bombards people with subtle capitalist and consumerist propaganda, is a 'social relationship between people that is mediated by images' (Debord, 1995: 7) and therefore partly co-constituted with social processes. For Debord, it masks inauthentic fabrications of capital as desirable and authentic, reifying images as objects, and objects as images in an intoxicating cocktail of socio-cultural and economic pressures to consume (and to do so in a particular way). Its production is at once a process of extraction – from the everyday idioms, ideas and cultures of people – and artificial assemblage of multiple trajectories, tendencies and vectors in capitalist re/production of everyday practice and signification. The spectacle is therefore a fact of everyday life that embodies elements of authenticity and inauthenticity:

The spectacle cannot be set in abstract opposition to concrete social activity... [T]he spectacle, though it turns reality on its head, is itself a product of real activity. Likewise, lived reality suffers the material assaults of the spectacle's mechanisms... lending that order its positive support. Each side therefore has its share of objective reality. (Debord, 1995: 14)

It would be a mistake to read such an analysis at face value and propose that there is some sort of 'false consciousness' within capitalist society that dictates mindless drones in particular ways, but the value of the spectacle is how it exposes the ways in which authenticity can be shaped according to certain definitions. Debord describes a world where capital and state feed back to us that which was already ours. In turn, he and Lefebvre call for a response that emphasises the lived materialities that structure our understanding of the world, and a concomitant anchoring in the everyday spaces – such as community spaces – in which we circulate (cf. Merrifield, 2002). As a response to the complex in/authentic production of everyday space, the Situationist International proposed practices of *détournement* – the subversive diverting or hijacking of space – and *dérives* – literally, 'drifts' through the urban landscape – in order to expose and explore alternative visions of authentic life (see Pinder, 2005).

Although the Situationist International response to the problems of authenticity may not necessarily be relevant to understanding and combating the BNP's community-based spatial strategies, the thoughts of Lefebvre and Debord shed light on the form of authenticity that is enacted by the BNP. A common thread that runs through the materials and propaganda discussed above is an attempt to interpret history through a particular lens and apply it to certain spatial contexts. The ambiguity that surrounds the term 'community' – subsuming a multitude of differences into a singular, monolithic term (e.g. Holgersen and Haarstad, 2009) – is precisely what gives authenticity its power. By identifying a vague, contested term and ascribing to it an 'authentic' lineage, the BNP seeks to naturalise a particular understanding of community as *the authentic one*. If we follow Lefebvre in understanding spaces to be socially produced, through connections and relations that are in themselves contestable and always becoming, the community perceived as a territorial 'unit' becomes a clear target for a politics that understands history as a struggle to preserve a certain lineage linked to a territorial area. Indeed, facing a multiplicity of territorialisations and the proliferation of connections through globalised capitalism, struggles to preserve territorial lineages may arguably



become all the more important in efforts to make sense of the world and one's place in it.

Importantly, the authentic community, for the BNP, rests on an understanding of authenticity that, much like Debord's Spectacle, is in some way a fusion of artifice and reality. Attaching certain imagined cultural values of 'Britishness' to particular practices such as traditional crafts draws inspiration from historical fact (i.e. that Britain once had an economy based partly on craft production). However, this argument also constructs around itself a selective reading of history and an association of certain modes of production to a particular genealogy. In doing so, the BNP's approach uses authenticity as a means to blur the boundaries between everyday experiences and knowledges on the one hand, and political ideology on the other. Thus, for the BNP, the 'authentic community' is a discursive means through which they are able to embed their political principles into lived experiences precisely because community is a socially produced phenomenon that encompasses a range of in/authenticities at any one time. The multiple territorialisations taking place through communities, linking previously disparate places and populations in a variety of ways, makes this use of authenticity all the more powerful in the context of far-right politics.

However, this treatment of authentic community is arguably also true for traditional left-wing (or any wing) politics. Although, due to the internationalist politics that many on the anarchist and socialist left hold, the reterritorialising tendencies of left politics may not be articulated in the same ways as those on the right, it is clear that community is also a discursive terrain that is identified as powerful through its contestable, socially produced nature. Sentiments such as 'Celebrate our diversity – Unity in the Community' (Unite Against Fascism, 2010b) reflect a clear deployment of an anti-fascist authentic community discourse that is diverse and united *per se*. Another typical example is the following, from an anarchist anti-fascist mobilisation in East London:

Working class areas like Whitechapel where many ordinary Muslims and non-Muslims live and work in complete harmony will not tolerate divisive groups like the EDL [English Defence League], we live in an area steeped in a history of poverty and hard graft but also a history of standing up for ourselves. You can try and blame this on 'angry asian/muslim boys' or 'hotheads' but what these young lads represent, alongside all the locals who also joined them, is the East End spirit. (Whitechapel Anarchist Group, 2010: no pagination)

The anti-fascist left is therefore engaging in much the same contestation of authenticity as the fascist right, appealing not only to a certain definition of authentic community but also to an authentic tradition. Although their articulations of what constitutes the authentic community differ, the processes of producing a form of authenticity that, following Lefebvre, draw from everyday experiences of reality, are similar. Like Debord's Spectacle, both fascist and anti-fascist appeals to authenticity are products of the interactions between these lived experiences of reality and ideological constructs. If we understand space to be socially produced – by the complex, everyday interactions of people – we can begin to understand the authentic community as also socially produced; a terrain of discursive struggle around community as a term and practice that can be defined and practiced in a multitude of ways. Thus, even if authenticity is simply a politico-discursive tool rather than a concrete reflection of reality, it still has powerful effects on the politics of the spaces to which it is applied, especially when delineated by

vague terms such as 'community'. In light of these assertions, the next section discusses the way in which anti-fascist politics might develop as part of a broader political programme.

## Give up anti-fascism?

With the help of Lefebvre and Debord, we have now sought to understand the form of authenticity being mobilised by the BNP in the way it organises and practices its spatial strategy of community politics. I have also argued that such an approach to authenticity is by no means the sole preserve of the far right. Fundamentally, the analyses of Lefebvre and Debord affirm the centrality of everyday life to understanding how communities are constituted and discursively contested through spatial practice. Community, like everyday life, is practiced and shaped through complex webs of ongoing social interaction. While it is often imagined as territorially coherent and discrete in policy and media discourses (e.g. Nagle, 2009) – and this perspective is sometimes still reflected in reality – the heightened mobility and transnationalisation of community means that we can now no longer mask the sociality through which community is constituted and reproduced. In these social connections lie opportunities for forms of transformation of authenticity similar to those undertaken by the BNP to take place in new, emancipatory directions. The struggle for the hearts and minds of working class community (or any community, for that matter) is therefore partly a struggle for power over the discourse of authenticity in the spaces and places in which such community is enacted and (re)produced.

However, if we accept that this approach to struggle is correct, then we must consider the ways in which socialities can be shaped and reworked. Since community is constituted through sociality, it is ultimately bound up in connections – friendships, kinships, encounters, and so on – that are developed through everyday practice. The response therefore lies in the development of certain *relations* that are enacted through social connections and encounters within communities. As a result, this requires a careful crafting of social relations and connections that can re-cast discourses and practices of authentic community in particular ways. In other words, it requires a spatial strategy that in many ways mirrors that of the BNP: a community-based strategy that organises through existing social connections in particular places.

Without a doubt, this relation-based approach is neither new nor especially exciting. After all, anarchists (e.g. Bookchin, 1986; Bakunin, 2003; Gordon, 2007) and those at the libertarian end of the Marxist spectrum (Marx, 1975; Perlman, 1992; Vaneigem, 2003) have argued for such strategies to approach broader issues of political struggle for more than a century. The left's largely poor response to the rise of the BNP is in part a failure to respond to the changing nature of working class community in a world that cares little for fixity or solidarity that cannot be recuperated into capital.

At stake in this re-orientation of anti-fascist politics is nothing less than the entire anti-fascist project itself. In a controversial leaflet (Anon., 1999) distributed at the 1999 'Carnival against Capital' in London, attendees were encouraged to 'give up activism'. Activism, the pamphlet argued, is premised upon divisions and exclusions between the

(good, selfless) activist and the (bad, lazy) non-activist and rarely related to the interests and desires of these 'non-activists', thus reproducing the bipolar dynamic *ad infinitum*. Likewise, contemporary forms of UK anti-fascism are largely manifested through an equally self-aggrandising and ineffective strategy, rooted in a reactive and deterritorialised form of (non-)politics with little or no connection to the material spaces of everyday life for the BNP's target group.

Bearing in mind the imposition of binary distinctions, Paul Chatterton argues that we must 'step beyond both the "bad, devious subject" and the "good, conformist subject" towards the "non-subject"' (2005: 558). This rejection of categorisation, for Chatterton, can be utilised in order that one can 'not merely critique capitalist social relations but go far beyond them' (ibid.). This passage calls for a self-organised politics of what Chatterton, elsewhere, labels 'uncommon ground' (2006). If our everyday practices and encounters shape the social basis on which we might build alternative visions of the authentic community, or do away with it altogether, then the range of different subjectivities in a particular locality need to find or make space for engaging social encounters with one another. By articulating a politics of the non-subject on uncommon ground, it is important to bear in mind critiques discussed above concerning the insufficiency of simple 'encounters' (e.g. Valentine, 2008). The principle, for Chatterton, that circumvents this concern is self-organisation that encourages diverse groups of people to work together towards common goals defined autonomously by themselves. This is not an appeal to liberal or managerial discourses of 'diversity'; rather, it is rooted in a desire for non-subjects to refuse the forms of categorisation that both liberal discourses and BNP discourses impose on communities and localities. The conflation of difference (as a fact of life) with diversity (as a subject of policy) is a tendency that unites liberal and far-right approaches, admittedly with very different ends. The non-subject that Chatterton seeks to produce is at once a refusal to be categorised and an assertion that difference need neither be divisive nor fetishised. Such a tension between difference and collectivity can be a productive one, but also one that is difficult to enact in practice.

Bearing in mind Chatterton's approach to building uncommon ground and emphasis on self-organisation, there have been some examples of community-based organising in the UK that can be used as glimpses of possible future approaches to anti-fascist politics. Importantly, rather than focusing on combating fascism exclusively, these groups articulate and practice a politics of community in their own right and seek to avoid reactive forms of campaigning. As *Black Flag* magazine argues,

The traditional negative methods of disruption of far-right activities, of physical no-platform, of making it unsafe or counterproductive for the far right to operate openly must be allied to positive methods of political activity, of methods of directly intervening in working class struggles in ways that cut the ground out from the BNP and occupy the political space that they've already made inroads on. (*Black Flag*, 2008: 8)

The Independent Working Class Association (IWCA) is a non-denominational socialist grouping that was created out of the ashes of AFA. It was created as an explicit effort to build left-leaning alternatives to the place-based, working class community politics that the BNP currently strive to enact. Like the BNP, the IWCA strategy is a dual electoral and community strategy that has had some modest success in electing a handful of local

councillors and enacting a number of localised neighbourhood campaigns against phenomena such as drug dealing and gentrification.

The IWCA has also undertaken innovative steps towards what they call 'Community Restorative Justice' outside and independent of the police and judicial system. This seeks to tackle the causes of crime while also combating 'the resulting breakdown in the relationships which connect people with a community' (IWCA, ND) through mediation, collective discussion and a clear rejection of punitive or retributive forms of justice. Importantly, their politics rejects many elements of left as well as right-wing politics, preferring the principle of working class self-rule to the principle of anti-capitalism *per se*. Although it has waned in size and activity in recent years, the IWCA's approach to community politics is one that is based on self-management of working class communities and illustrates one model of how an autonomous grouping might create a progressive discourse and praxis within a community setting.

Another model of possible future community strategies is the approach taken by social centres – radical spaces rooted in certain communities to facilitate political, social and cultural collectivity and action. While many UK social centres cater exclusively to specific political networks and face a range of problems such as subculture, exclusivity and disconnection from their neighbourhoods, some are at the centre of dynamic grassroots campaigns over political issues facing the working class neighbourhoods in which they are based (see, e.g., Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2006; Ince, 2010). Like AFA, AYN, the IWCA and, indeed, the BNP, theirs is also a strategy of territorialisation, located in the tangle of everyday social connections in a particular locality.

Social centres in the UK are far less established than they are in countries such as Italy, but recent developments in social centre activism have seen the growth of related projects such as community gardens and alternative festivals that have sought to break out of the subcultural 'ghetto' in which many have found themselves. The benefit of social centres is that they provide a free physical space for communities to utilise for a variety of purposes, but they are also vulnerable spaces that rarely survive a sufficient amount of time to build meaningful, lasting relationships.

These short introductions to two approaches to self-managed community politics may not provide significant detail, but they do hint at ways in which anti-fascist politics can be a part of much broader political programmes. If community and everyday life are always becoming and in process, then these two examples are only the beginning of possible community politics yet to come. Given the shifting terrains of everyday social and political life, it is equally plausible that in other spatio-temporal contexts, the struggle against the far right may take on a variety of new modulations. However, to ignore the power of community, and the everyday social relations on which it rests, is to ignore a fundamental element in the constitution of the political itself.

## Concluding remarks: Everyday sites of struggle

The impermanent and contestable nature of authenticity in practice is reflected in its spatial articulation. If politics originates in everyday, collective practice and struggle, then it is crucial to interrogate the way we enact certain visions of authenticity in everyday spaces. The community – however we care to define it – is clearly a central node in the everyday lives of all people and, for the white working class, it is often exhibited in place-based urban territories. Careful analysis of the geographies of political praxis can help us to unpack seemingly mystifying conundrums such as that posed by the growing appeal of the BNP to sections of the British white working class.

This assertion that there is something politically and organisationally important about everyday life and its vicissitudes has been elaborated at length elsewhere, but this paper has sought to show how it has relevance to both analysis and praxis. It shows that there are no easy options in the development and enactment of meaningful political action and that authenticity is more of a rhetorical device for mobilisation than a tangible empirical 'fact'. The ambiguity of community, I have argued, makes it a prime concept and spatial locus into which competing political approaches can 'market' their own idea of the authentic community. As such, authenticity is relevant primarily as a politico-discursive tool, to which differing interpretations of the authentic community seek to lay claim. This means that static understandings of authenticity and failure to rework and adapt practices and relations over time can leave dangerous vacuums into which reactionary or conservative forms, in this case of community, can insert themselves.

Discussion of strategies and counter-strategies pertaining to community organising has led to thorny questions about the nature of authenticity and community in political practice. We cannot assume a fixed understanding of what community or authenticity 'is' – either spatially or temporally – since they are both defined by those who constitute it every day. Authenticity thus becomes a locus for struggle rather than an *a priori* quality to be objectively imposed on a certain space, concept or phenomenon. The struggle against the far right is in part a struggle over the spatial articulation and claims to authenticity of differing understandings of community.

Community, as I discussed at the beginning of the paper, is a term that is deployed in a range of ways. Policy discourses surrounding multicultural communities not only mask profound social and economic inequalities within communities (Valentine, 2008) but also expose themselves to far-right critiques. Linked to increasing social, economic and cultural insecurity surrounding the multiplicity of territorialisations taking place as part of globalised capitalism, the deployment of claims to authenticity can be a powerful political device for neo-fascist politics. At the same time, mainstream policy approaches also remain exposed to the development of subaltern politics that embrace different cultures and address inequalities and exclusions, while proposing an alternative politics to the false binary of liberal multiculturalism and reactionary nationalism.

In this paper, I also suggest that certain forms of praxis are necessary, while others are largely lacking in utility. Waving placards and denouncing the BNP as 'evil Nazis' is, of course, an easy option. However, it neither engages with the everyday experiences and relations of people, nor does it involve any consideration of the spatial and

discursive strategy and practices of the BNP itself. The authentic response – if there is such a thing – to the situation in which anti-fascists find themselves is also distinctly lacking in 'sexy' qualities of conventional protest activism; on the contrary, it requires careful, long-term organisation at the local level to build self-managed and sustainable grassroots relationships and projects. It requires an acceptance that authenticity is little more than a discursive tool for the articulation and mobilisation of political principles. It requires, I have argued, giving up anti-fascism as it is currently understood.

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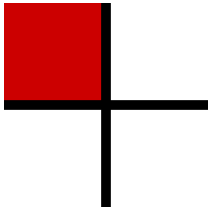


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## Fit for everything: Health and the ideology of authenticity

Carl Cederström

### abstract

This paper builds on a burgeoning body of work suggesting that contemporary work politics are increasingly based on an ideology of ‘just be yourself’, where employees are invited to express, rather than suppress, who they are. It elaborates the thesis that some versions of health promotion can be understood as part of this ideology. After demonstrating this complex and at times counterintuitive relation, the paper critically examines the way in which health and authenticity appear as moral demands within the workplace. Turning to psychoanalysis, two critical issues are being raised. First, the injunction to be oneself ironically results in alienation and frustration. Second, in the absence of paternal authority figures, new more ferocious superego figures will emerge.

There is something unquestionably good about feeling good. When the body is not screaming from pain and when the head is not seized by ill-spirited daemons we can concentrate on what seems most meaningful to us, whether this is to spend time with family and friends or indulge in pleasurable activities like yoga, French cooking or sex.

From this point of view, there are certainly good reasons for celebrating the advances in health care and other forms of therapeutic practices; not only do they keep us happier on a subjective level (insofar as they unburden us of mental and physical suffering), but they also entail benefits on a wider socioeconomic level (insofar as they decrease costs associated with nursing the sick and increase productivity by keeping able-bodied people at work).

In spite of this, there is a growing body of scholarly investigations that challenges the benevolence of public health and health promotion programmes. One such criticism is voiced by conservative neo-liberals who, following in the footsteps of Ayn Rand, argue that all forms of state intervention, health regulations included, are undesirable in that they impinge on the individual’s right to freedom (e.g. Davies, 1991). Another line of criticism comes from the left and concerns the uneven distribution of health services, which further increases the disparity between the underprivileged and the rich (Crawford, 1977; Wikler, 1978). Yet another form of criticism, which largely extends Foucault’s thesis of bio-power and governmentality, aims to understand the discourse of health as an insidious form of domination. This position involves situating health in a historical and socio-political context of population control, linking the medicalization of

health to regimes that see the body as a site of power, subjectification and contestation (e.g. Lupton, 1995).

It is on this last form of criticism that this paper will focus. It has proved an increasingly useful approach to the subject and has been discussed in organization studies and other critical investigations of workplace politics. Some of this research argues that health promotion is not neutral and for the benefit of all, but instead a way to further control the subject by promoting new forms of work ethics and ushering in managerialist ideals (Zoller, 2003; McGillivray, 2005; Kelly et al., 2007). Such analyses can be seen as part of a larger endeavour to critically examine the ways in which organizations attempt to colonize the body and produce particular forms of behaviour in order to enhance productivity (Hassard et al., 2000).

The aim of this paper is to extend these thoughts by making two consecutive arguments. The first is that pro-health imperatives, at least as they are articulated in more 'progressive' workplaces, draw on a discourse of authenticity – which is to say that the rhetoric of carefully looking after one's own health (both mental and physical) is part of a wider aim of looking after and actively crafting oneself; indeed, to be true to oneself. I will demonstrate how the relation between authenticity, health and self is a complex one – at times even counterintuitive. At face value, health and authenticity appear as an odd couple. Whereas health-ideals mainly aim to normalize the subject, authenticity aims to differentiate it. However, as health promotion has become more and more concerned with visible aspects of the body (building muscles, losing weight, etc.), it can perhaps also be seen as a means to express one's own, personal identity. And it should be noted that a discourse of authenticity is not unrestrainedly concerned with differentiation, but can also involve processes of normalization. As Fleming (2009) has noted, we are allowed to express our own selves and be transgressive, but only up to a certain point. Moreover, the transgressive elements are often limited to an aesthetic level, where the visible aspects of difference are all that are permitted.

In the course of this paper we will take a closer look at this complex interrelation. We will pay particular focus on visibility and moralization in order to disentangle the relation between self, health and authenticity. One way to make sense of this claim is to see how both authenticity and health constitute vital aspects of what some have called bio-morality (Zupančič, 2008; Žižek, 2008). Here, being authentic and healthy are indicative of virtue and morality: they indicate that one is not only true and sincere to one's soul, or personality, but also to one's body. The rise of spirituality and other new-age practices in the workplace have similarly modified the image of the body as something intertwined with the soul and thus morality. As such, authenticity (as perfecting one's personality) and health (as perfecting one's body) can be seen as interconnected.

The second argument, which flows from the first, is that when the injunction to be oneself melts together with the imperative to better health we arrive at a novel form of control, which creates a painful and alienating tension at the heart of the subject. Indeed, this is one of the critical remarks I wish to explore in more detail: that regulatory and patronising forms of control, such as promoting healthy eating habits, are now being packaged in a vocabulary of authenticity, through which it immediately

becomes legitimized as benevolent and in the interest of the individual. The demand presents itself not as externally designed and imposed, but as a call from within. One way of illustrating this is to look at how many corporations engage in educational practices with the aim of making employees more healthy, while at the same time encouraging employees to express a subversive edge and to be themselves – for example through game playing and other practices indicating a youthful spirit. What lies at the heart of this imperative, I will argue, is a contradictory call to both be oneself (through various forms of individualistic expressions) and someone else (by living up to externally imposed health ideals).

To further situate this contradictory command I will turn to a set of key texts in psychoanalysis, including some by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, which focus on the crippling ambiguity of moral imperatives. This furnishes us with a vocabulary to explain the difficulty with being oneself, which from the standpoint of psychoanalysis is seen as not just impossible but also as giving rise to new, more ferocious, superego figures (Žižek, 1999). Bringing our attention to these darker features of authenticity gives us further insights into contemporary work politics, which, though increasingly drawing on an existential vocabulary of freedom and emancipation, have nevertheless created new forms of what Fleming and Sturdy (2009) call neo-normative control.

In this paper I wish to extend these thoughts by arguing that health promotion at work can also be seen as part of the larger colonization of the self through the rhetoric of self-expression. When health is no longer seen as a paternalistic imperative imposed from the outside, but instead as a vital aspect of expressing one's own authenticity, then how are we able to call such initiatives into question? It is in response to this question that I believe psychoanalysis has something important to offer. It shows us that in the absence of a paternalistic super-ego, which openly embodies the Law, the subject has to internalize an unconscious sense of guilt which, by extension, leads to an even stronger form of super-ego, the one we have to bear on our own shoulders and fully internalize. What makes the work of Lacan particularly useful here is how it demonstrates the complex relation between external and internal demands. When external demands wither away, we tend to create them anew in an attempt to alleviate a sense of anxiety or to overcome guilt.

To make these arguments the paper is structured as follows. In the next section, recent research will be discussed that demonstrates the complex relation between subjectivity and power in the workplace. More specifically, these investigations deal with health promotion as a technology of discipline, where healthy attitudes are forged among employees, engendering what Kelly et al. (2007) call the 'corporate athlete'. Having briefly shown how the relation between the promotion of the healthy body and forms of control have been described in the study of organizations, I then move on to make the claim that the question of health is increasingly becoming part of a wider discourse of authenticity. This claim will hopefully become plausible with the help of a number of examples, all pointing to the close relation between health and authenticity. Drawing on psychoanalysis, I round off the paper by presenting a series of critical remarks against a discourse of authenticity.

## Colonizing the body: Health promotion

An important trend in critical studies of work has been to identify the way in which bodies are regulated and controlled in and around organizations (Hassard et al., 2000). Based on the assumption that the body has become an increasing interest of the corporation, these studies have sought to unpack the complex question of how different kinds of subjects are produced in relation to power, that is, how forms of management control produce different forms of selves, whether they are cyborgs, sexualized women or the hard-working entrepreneur (*ibid.*). When we begin to examine the role of the body from an organizational point of view, we are taken away from the bureaucratic workplace, in which work is primarily governed and secured by different forms of technocratic and rational techniques, into an ideological workplace in which a commitment to work is primarily secured through less overt forms of control (Jermier, 1998). Or to be more precise, while technocratic forms of control are still in place, they are now being extended and further reinforced by way of normative (and not exclusively bureaucratic) techniques of management (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004). The body is here colonized through what has been termed normative control (Etzioni, 1964), whereby employees internalize externally designed and imposed identities, which become the basis for a shared group identity.

The relation between body and organization has been critically analysed from a variety of perspectives. However, what will concern us here is only one such aspect, namely how different forms of health promotion programmes (as well as other less organized forms of promoting good health) operate as control mechanisms in the workplace. This involves the ambition of convincing the employee of the alleged benefits of good health (Kelly et al., 2007), but also the ambition of making this conviction appear as if it comes from the inside, as from the subject itself, and not from an external agency with intrusive and paternal overtones (McGillivray, 2005).

In order to put the question of health promotion in a critical light many have drawn on the work of Michel Foucault, particularly on the notions of ‘care of the self’, ‘governmentality’ and ‘biopower’. In his later work, particularly in the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1990; 1992; 1998) is concerned with the manner in which one shapes oneself as an ethical subject. Invoking the classic demand for ethical conduct, and the Greek ethos of making oneself, Foucault describes how the modern self is constantly involved in a number of techniques and methods, all of which aim to produce a specific (ethical) subjectivity. However, the care of the self as a practice of ethics and freedom is closely linked to power and should therefore be conceived together, or in opposition, to governmentality – which denotes the collected and organized practices aiming to craft a docile and normalized subject.

Drawing on Foucault’s notion of biopower, Zoller (2003) claims that work health promotion (WHP) can be seen to operate on two levels. First, it operates on an individual level, where the self becomes conscious and subsequently internalizes a set of normative judgments of the body (about what is normal and abnormal, healthy or unhealthy). Second, this judgment is diffused through social and political institutions, including corporations, where health promotion becomes legitimized as a social practice. Drawing on Foucault’s notion of biopower, as well as the sociological critique



of medicalization, Zoller claims that WHP ultimately aims to embody managerialist values, which by extension seek to create a more productive worker. The accent is placed on the individual and his or her endeavour to improve themselves. Thus, failing to live up to the demand of health becomes first and foremost a failure at the level of morality because it allegedly proves that the self lacks self-control (see also Crawford, 1980). Moreover, building on a case study from a Japanese automobile manufacturing plant in the Midwest and the building of an Associate Recreation Center (ARC), Zoller demonstrates how health was framed as a question concerning a desirable life-style attained through the hard work of self-discipline. That way, focus was diverted away from the risks associated with work (which was physically demanding) and instead placed on what was seen as sinful enjoyments, which might have a negative impact on longevity:

ARC programs depicted health in disciplinary terms as the achievement of longevity through conformity to rules, abstinence, and self-control. The risks articulated at the ARC involved traditional, Protestant conceptions of sin, so that pleasure (particularly alcohol and fatty foods) was the enemy to be battled by Associates. (Zoller, 2003: 185)

The injunction to have a healthier life-style was by many of the respondents seen as beneficiary. They showed an open appreciation for the programmes and some participants began repeating the words of the instructors. As for instance when Zoller asked one respondent about what might threaten good health, she received the following response: 'Being overweight, taking in too much sugar, I mean there's a lot of things that could really hurt you. Smoking, drugs, I stay away from both of them' (ibid.: 192). Others went even further in internalizing the pro-health ideals, like for example the respondent John, who claimed to be exercising at the ARC, 'Just for my own self, like working out I have a lot more confidence now' (ibid.: 194).

Underscoring the claim that organizations actively use health promotion in order to craft working selves, McGillivray (2005) draws our attention to how people not only accept discursive rules but also resist them. To make this claim she turns to Foucault's concept of governmentality and the argument that the subject is not passively subjected to power, but comes into life in and through power, both positively and negatively. As she argues, 'to focus upon governmentality and the subject is of particular relevance to this discussion of organizational wellness as it offers space for a reflexive subject rather than the disciplined, dominated one emerging from his earlier work' (ibid.: 126). This means that wherever we find power, we also find agency and even non-acceptance since 'the presence of contestation, conflict and resistance is constant' (ibid.: 127). In response to ideals of organizational wellness, McGillivray claims that there are at least four avenues: assimilation, docility, rejection or resistance.

Similarly, Thanem (2009) has studied how the managerial discourse of health promotion has been diffused also beyond the organizational domain. Linking what he calls neo-liberal managerialism (a discourse centred on empowerment and the employees' alleged ability to decide over their working lives) with Foucault's notion of governmentality, Thanem demonstrates how managerial values turn individuals into 'health consumers'. In this regard, he also extends recent accounts suggesting that management discourse has begun to colonize other spheres of life, normally associated with non-work (Hancock and Tyler, 2004).

What connects these studies is that they all point to the close connection between health promotion, self-empowerment and control. They do so by showing the ways in which bodies are colonized and disciplined by a series of power techniques, one more imaginative than the other. What interests me here, which has only tacitly been noticed in the context of organizations, is how the question of health is closely connected to, and often legitimized through, morality (Brewis and Grey, 2008). To lose weight, stop smoking and start exercising (often the primary focus of workplace health promotion programmes) are not just making you healthier, it is argued, but also more moral – by, for example, being able to play with your kids (without becoming exhausted), be more productive at work (no more smoke breaks) and to live longer (which always seems to be a moral achievement). That is, diligently practicing and internalizing externally designed techniques is a way to prove oneself moral. Although not an explicit concern for organization studies, this link has been closely examined in other disciplines in social and political science. As Brandt and Rozin (1997) have pointed out in a socio-political context:

Rather than seeing health or disease as random and inevitable, societies have throughout history developed complex and sophisticated explanations for the causes and prevalence of disease. Embedded in these explanatory frames are deeply held, if often unstated, sensibilities about right and wrong, good and bad, responsibility and danger. (ibid.: 1)

If we accept that health today is inseparable from morality, that feeling good is somewhat tantamount to being good, how then could one even begin to resist the imperative of health? When power is embedded in the template for the good life, what kind of resistance might we expect? Eating obscene amounts of deep-fried pizza and drinking gallons of soda would seem futile. To deliberately harm oneself does not appear to make much sense either. Indeed, to resist what seems to be inherently good for you, or what might even be seen as a way to express who you really are, is no doubt a difficult venture. Why would anyone wish to do such a thing? To put it rhetorically: why would one want to resist oneself? As we will see in the next section, this is ever more difficult if we add the idea of authenticity to the mix. Authenticity is bound up with positive connotations and has historically been considered an incontestable and inherently desirable ideal.

## Authenticity

Like health, authenticity is intimately bound up with the conception of the good life. What counts as the good life, however, changes with time and greatly varies across cultures. Albeit signifying something ultimately desirable, authenticity is a diverse and contested term that has a complex and conflicting conceptual history. In ancient Greece authenticity was primarily linked to the aesthetic and ethical project of making oneself a man of virtuous conduct (Guignon, 2004). Although authenticity was an earthly practice, denoting the strenuous struggle to remain true to a supreme good, it was nevertheless bound up with the Gods since, as Aristotle famously put it, ‘life belongs to the gods’. Thus, aiming to be authentic was tantamount to establishing a sincere and truthful relation to something higher than oneself, and to be worthy in the eyes of that higher power. It required engaged (intellectual) work and was obtainable only to those

who could successfully transform themselves into mature and responsible citizens of the *polis* – indeed a hard thing to do.

Now, while we could note various meanings in Christianity and the Renaissance, it is not until the Enlightenment that we begin to discern a modern conception of authenticity. This notion pits the authentic and autonomous self against an inauthentic society, which is assumed to restrain, deform and corrupt the self (Potter, 2010). Contrary to the ancient conception of authenticity, based on establishing a truthful relation to a community (and ultimately the gods), the modern self is assumed to contain an authentic and inner core, independent of the outside world. It is an uncensored self that boldly reveals his true self, without concealing anything. A key figure here is the French 18<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Guignon, 2004; Lindholm, 2008). Famously, Rousseau presents in his *Confessions* (the most famous of his three autobiographies) a warts-and-all self-portrait, describing among other things how he perceived himself as a coward that enjoyed being spanked – confessions which at the time (long before the advent of reality television) were outrageous. People's shifting and judgmental opinions were of little concern to Rousseau. The truth of oneself is to be sought within and not in the outside world. External influences are mainly oppressive and compel us to assume fake personas. The further removed from society, the more authentic – hence also Rousseau's admiration for the noble savage (Lindholm, 2008).

Against this background, authenticity and health appear as each other's opposites. Pro-health initiatives are typically shaped on a governmental level and directed toward a larger population. Even within the workplace, these kinds of initiatives tend to follow a top-down approach: created by managers as part of a larger effort to make the workforce more productive and targeted toward the individual employee. Meanwhile, authenticity concerns the individual's opposition to regulative orders issued from above (Potter, 2010). This is a key point. Society's suppression and corruption of the individual is a central assumption inherent in the modern conception of authenticity. The classic figure here is the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau, who left civilization for a life in wilderness and so escaped what he perceived as the artificial demands of society. Indeed, the struggle between the authentic self and the inauthentic 'masses' is also a key theme in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy. Classically, Heidegger (1962) separates the authentic self from the inauthentic self, where the former takes up an authentic Being-toward-death, and where the latter cowardly follows in the footsteps of *das Man* – shying away from the critical question of finitude and existence. In his later work, most notably in *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977), we can observe an intensified critique against disenchantment and the nihilism of social modernity, which to Heidegger posed a great threat to the self and his quest for authentic being.

To demonstrate how modernity produces a longing for authenticity, Charles Taylor (1991) sets out what he calls the 'three malaises of modernity'. The first is a loss of meaning that comes with the focus on individualism. The world has become disenchanted and people can no longer place themselves in relation to a larger order. The second is that the social world has become increasingly guided by 'instrumental reason', privileging economic and technological forms of calculation. The third malaise

– which Taylor sees as a direct outcome of the two former – is a loss of political freedom. In a world defined by individualism and instrumental reason, where people have little interest in participating in larger political causes and rather spend their days ego-googling, we lose control over the political situation.

If we accept the argument that modernity has produced a longing for authenticity, we still need to ask how this longing is manifested. With no attempt to be exhaustive, I will propose two broad categories of authenticity – ‘external authenticity’ and ‘internal authenticity’ – both of which constitute a response to the alleged ‘artificiality of the modern world’. The first type is concerned with establishing an authentic relation to the world, or what Emerson has called an ‘original relation to the universe’ (as quoted in Geldard, 2001: 15). Noting that modernity creates an inauthentic experience, one withdraws from the world, either theoretically (into oneself) or practically (buying a boat and sailing away). The second type is more concerned with visibility and self-expression, and rests on the assumption that the self contains a unique and idiosyncratic core. This type of authenticity is often endorsed in self-help literature. The starting point for these texts is, again, the assumption that the demands from contemporary society compel us to assume fake roles and personas. To survive in the intense and rapid environment, one has to stop listening to others and search for the answer within. A representative account is found in the work of Phil McGraw, better known as Dr. Phil, who suggests the following:

The authentic self is the *you* that can be found at your absolute core. It is the part of you that is not defined by your job, or your function, or your role. It is the composite of all your unique gifts, skills, abilities, interests, talents, insights, and wisdom. It is all your strengths and values that are uniquely yours and need expression, versus what you have been programmed to believe that you are ‘supposed to be and do’. It is the you that flourished, unself-consciously, in those times in your life when you felt happiest and most fulfilled. (McGraw, as quoted in Guignon, 2004: 2)

Contrary to external authenticity, which concerns a withdrawal from the social world, internal authenticity ‘needs expression’. That is, one’s uniqueness should not be hidden in the closet, but proudly put on display. All aspects of selfhood that feel authentic and testify to your idiosyncratic personality should be exhibited to the world.

Recent studies in organization studies have pointed to the emergence of a new managerial vocabulary based on the advice found in self-help literature and how-to manuals. Today, employees are offered numerous recipes for how to cope with stress; how to become more effective; how to establish a work-life balance; and ‘how to become yourself’ (Garsten and Grey, 1997). Although some organizational scholars have focused on how aspects of external authenticity are promoted in the workplace – particularly through the rise of spiritual practices at work, such as mindfulness or yoga – more attention has been placed on internal authenticity, where self-expression, non-conformity and difference are key (Ross, 2004).

In his analysis of recent permutations in workplace politics, Fleming (2009) raises a series of important questions regarding a new discourse of being yourself. For instance, does the vocabulary of authenticity, freedom and emancipation mark an end of managerial control? Is the employee of the post-modern firm finally free to express who he or she really is? And does this newly acquired freedom to ventilate anti-work

sentiments mark a new era for the employee, one in which selfhood is no longer suppressed? To these questions, Fleming responds *no*. Today new forms of control have arrived, so-called neo-normative forms of regulation, which are even more sly and beguiling. They address the self ‘the way it is’ or at least seems to be, thus obliterating the line between ‘professional’ and ‘personal’. Whereas the workplace was once associated with the suppression of the self it has now become the place in which the subject is not just allowed, but encouraged, to express herself. The motto is that ‘you come as you are’: you don’t have to be ashamed of revealing your eccentric side. On the contrary, the more awkward you are, the better. However, there are also limits to what can be tolerated by the ‘liberal workplace’. As when one employee brought space-cookies to the workplace he got fired, though he thought he was simply following the edict of the ‘just be yourself’ mentality (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). But the ‘just be yourself’ ideology is strained also in a more general way. Surely, the radical who is not complicit in the wider ideology of the organization (that is, working long hours to produce profitable products and services) is not welcome. In this respect, the expressionistic culture of ‘just be yourself’ must ‘rest upon a structural political economy of the firm for it to be congruent with the accumulation process’ (Fleming, 2009: 89).

### **Authenticity and health: How to become yourself by looking after yourself**

We have now noted how both authenticity and health can be used as techniques for exercising power in the context of work. But it is still unclear how these two terms are related and how they target the employee. The first thing to note is that health along with more general understandings of biological life has undergone a discursive transformation in recent years. As Rose (2007) has argued, medical jurisdiction today concerns much more than just illnesses and diseases; among other things, it also involves the ‘government of “risk”, and the maintenance and optimization of the healthy body’ (ibid.: 10). At the same time, there have been numerous attempts to empower the recipients of medical care, turning them into health consumers (see also Thanem, 2009). The availability of medical information is one such example, which has potentially turned us all into our own doctors. We can now evaluate our symptoms through surfing the internet or browsing the health section of a glossy magazine. This is not to suggest that expert medical discourse has lost its power. Indeed, medical science has perhaps a stronger social and political impact today than ever before. What it points to rather is how the scientific notion of the body has become widely employed in non-scientific discourses, concerned with for example consumption, lifestyle and self-expression. Here, aspects of medical science are translated into vivid images of the desirable and undesirable self and as such are bound up with moral discourses. Smoking is no longer associated with the image of Clark Gable in a dinner suit. Rather, it evokes an emasculated man with a pale face, yellow teeth and mottled skin who, in breathing through his narrowed airways, emits an annoying squeaking sound. Similarly, the well-nourished figure is by no means a sign of cultivated hedonism, as it might have been at the beginning of the last century, but rather a sign of stupidity, laziness and a weak will (Metzl and Kirkland, 2010). Although rooted in incontestable scientific claims (few would seriously make the case that obesity and smoking is particularly good for your

health), it is questionable if these emotionally laden images can be entirely explained by science. As Brewis and Grey argue in their analysis of smoking in the workplace and beyond:

[T]he medical knowledge that ‘smoking is bad for you’ has to be understood as slipping into the moral proposition that ‘smoking is bad’. This then has effects at the level of individuals because the stigmatization of smoking slips into the notion that ‘smokers are bad’. At the very least, the consequence is to render smokers abnormal and marginal. (Brewis and Grey, 2008: 984)

This moralization of health has been widely documented in the social sciences (Brandt and Rozin, 1997; Bunton and Petersen, 1997; Lupton, 1995). Aside from noting how health issues tend to be couched in a moralistic language of good and bad, these accounts also point out that health promotion is often complicit in the engineering of particular lifestyles and kinds of people. As such, health promotion is to a large degree targeted towards the individual subject thus rendering it, as Brewis and Grey note, abnormal and marginal unless he or she follows the direct and indirect commands of health promotion. What has only been tacitly implied by these studies, however, is how health has become more concerned with immediate visibility and expressions of the self. As noted by for example Zoller (2003), health promotion often concerns visible aspects of the biological body, such as smoking and obesity. We will come back to these issues in the final section of this paper, but we should observe already here that health promotion, as it operates within the domain of work, is closely linked to the visual appearance or *image* of the good, happy employee.

Another example of how the medical discourse has been complemented by non-scientific discourses is the increasing predominance of spirituality and Eastern thinking (see for example Žižek, 2008). Most significantly, this influence has engendered a ‘holistic’ conception of the body, whereby the body is inextricably intertwined with the mind, sometimes referred to as ‘bodymind’ (Benson, 1975). Life-style magazines and self-help books often subscribe to this understanding of personhood; and, again, these outlets rarely hesitate to give prescriptions as to how we can improve ourselves by for example losing weight, stopping smoking, getting an erection and learning how to sleep. What we see here is the diffusion of medical expertise, together with a transformation from biological health to moral well-being. As such, health is no longer restricted to a medical discourse but has been supplemented by a discourse of more general ‘well-being’, involving moral directives, in which everyone is his or her own expert.

In the meantime, we can notice how authenticity is assumed to be positively related to psychological well-being, both in academic literature and self-help counselling. Neff and Suizzo for instance studied 314 romantic relationships and found that ‘a lack of authenticity negatively impacted psychological health’ (Neff and Suizzo, 2006: 441). Goldman and Kernis (2002) reached a similar conclusion, namely that the experience of authenticity (measured according to the so-called Authenticity Inventory) has a positive correlation with self-esteem, life satisfaction and a sense of well-being. On a website offering ‘expert guidance and tools for self awareness, authentic living, holistic personal growth and well-being’, we find the following suggestion:



Authenticity is now considered as the most crucial and fundamental aspect of well-being and healthy functioning according to mainstream counseling psychology. Authenticity is not just a precursor to well-being but the very essence of health and well being. Psychopathology (mental illness) can be seen as a departure from authenticity. (Symram, 2010)

The key point here is that both authenticity and health are employed in a wider ideology of wellbeing (Baudrillard, 1998) or biomorality (Zupančič, 2008), or what Christopher Lasch calls a ‘therapeutic sensibility’, where people hunger ‘for the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well-being, health and psychic security’ (1979: 7). In short, authenticity and health are not just indicative of our internal integrity, but also our moral rectitude. But how does this play out in the workplace? To address this question I would first like to specify the kind of subject or personhood that is the target of this intersection between the healthy, the authentic and the moral.

While indeed all sorts of people are now affected by health promotions, it seems as if the subject in question – that is, he or she who is encouraged to improve his health through better eating habits etc. – is not necessarily the typical worker with serious back-pain, high-blood pressure and aching muscles. Rather, we find the corpulent office worker suffering from failing motivation and an existential experience of meaninglessness. Interesting in this respect is that health promotion programmes focusing their attention on desirable life-style choices might be employed to cover over other health related aspects, such as the physical dangers following from demanding labour or unsafe work-environments. Studying health promotion at an automobile manufacturing plant, Zoller (2003) found that even though the workers in question were carrying out physically demanding work, a prime focus were subjective lifestyle questions such as eating habits, alcohol and smoking. This diverted attention away from the actual work (which involved direct risks). Instead the question of health became a question concerning morality, lifestyle, visibility and subjective wellbeing, shot through by a Protestant vocabulary of secular sin.

Feeling good and being good are here fused. By working hard on improving one’s health one simultaneously enters a moral universe. As noted by Kelly et al. (2007) in their study of an IT firm: those actively engaged in practices of health improvement were also identifying with a series of other desirable signifiers, such as the ‘*professional, entrepreneurial, resilient, effective, athletic*’ (ibid.: 282, emphasis in original).

Given the focus on wellbeing, morality and other much sought after descriptions of personhood (‘athletic’, ‘entrepreneurial’, ‘professional’), we might assume that the subject in question is not the emasculated worker suffering from physically overwhelming labour. Of course, this kind of work is still pertinent and might also be subject to health promotion discourses. But the regimes of ‘biomorality’ that we are interested in do tend to be more attentive to the bored and unmotivated white-collar (or no-collar) worker, in style and attitude reminiscent of a socially apathetic teenager who has become flabby from eating too much junk food and spending too much time playing video games.

The description above is perhaps exaggerated. It could be used to describe someone like Homer Simpson as well as the numerous computer nerds, spending most of their time in

front of the computer and living on a strict diet of Jolt Cola, potato chips and pan pizza. For sure, it is interesting that this stereotypical image of the computer nerd has been slightly revised by a company like Google. Realizing that the typical computer nerd caricatured above would have much to offer the company, but wishing their unhealthy habits would disappear, Google decided to hire Charlie Ayers – a cook that before joining Google had served the classic rock band Grateful Dead. There were many reasons why Google hired Ayers, but one of the outspoken aims was to improve employees' eating habits and keep them close to work, which would increase their productivity. As Ayers explains:

It was a perk with a purpose. It would keep people near one another and their desks; prevent them from developing poor eating habits that would diminish productivity; eliminate the time they would otherwise spend going out to lunch and worrying over plans; and create a sense of togetherness. (Vise and Malseed, 2005: 194)

However, Ayers' role was not merely to make employees more productive through healthy eating habits. Equally important was to give workers the feeling that they were not at work, but in a kind of no-work space where play, fun and care could abound. Ayers explains that an important motive 'was to create the illusion you were not at work but on some type of cruise and resort' (ibid.: 197).

Few corporations are more immediately associated with 'the good'. Google's informal corporate motto is 'Don't be evil' (ibid.) and on their website dedicated to Google's internal culture we read, 'You can make money without doing evil'. Recently, after the cyber-attacks on its computer systems, allegedly orchestrated and carried out by hackers working for the Chinese government, Google has taken this one step further, now characterizing themselves as a major political power standing firm against repressive Chinese censorship (*New York Times*, 2010). (We should remember that as this is being written, Google continues to provide the Chinese people with a censored version of their search engine).

In addition to these interventions Google has also become famous for providing their employees with the good life. Stories of how employees spend their days engaging in extra-work activities like playing futsal, singing karaoke, skateboarding or even driving scooters inside the Googleplex have been discussed elsewhere (Cederström and Grassman, 2008). Hiring Charlie Ayers, it might be argued, combines a feeling of fun and leisure, at the same time making sure that the employees eat healthy and 'do no evil'. One way of analysing this is to suggest that healthy eating has become a precondition for achieving the 'just be yourself' corporate ideal. Google is an example where wellbeing, authenticity and health are intersected with the aim of engendering a more productive employee. This is done by promoting what we have called internal authenticity, which implies exhibiting glowing aspects of personhood of which health awareness appears to be a crucial one.

## Discussion: Visibility and morality

We have already explored the complex interplay between health promotion and the injunction 'to be yourself', as expressed in an ideology of authenticity. From a

Foucauldian point of view, health promotion has been explored as part of a process of normalization and the regulation of bodies and subjects. The subject defines and redefines himself in relation to desirable templates for being promoted by organizations, societies, institutions, etc. Authenticity, on the other hand, appears to follow a logic of differentiation, whereby the authentic individual is distinguished by his ability to break away from established norms and behaviours, instead acting independently from externally sanctioned guidelines for the good life, what Heidegger termed *das Man*. For sure, there are tensions between these two categories – insofar as one relies on normalization and the other differentiation – we should also note that each category contains its own opposite. Recalling the nature of the work health promotion programmes discussed above, where the accent was placed on desirable life-styles, we can see how health is now primarily concerned with the visible body. That is to say, rather than focusing on the hidden dangers potentially inherent in the job itself, the focus is now placed on the individual and his ability to assume a desirable, health identity. As such, we can observe how the adoption of health promotion is not exclusively couched in a vocabulary of normalization, but also one of differentiation. To illustrate this we have to look no further than life-style magazines, in which we routinely find instructions for better health (losing weight through efficient forms of diet and exercise, for example) placed side by side with injunctions to nurture our own, authentic selves. But we can also see this tendency in the anti-managerial language employed at Google, with a mixture of prescribed eating habits and promotions of authentic expressions of selfhood.

In the discourse of authenticity we can note a similar tension between normalization and differentiation. The non-conformist, with his seemingly deviant and quirky behaviour, is accepted only insofar as his skills and entrepreneurial behaviour can be included in the process of capital accumulation and render profits for the firm. Moreover, the authentic expression of the individual is often limited to the visible sphere. As noted by for instance Heath and Potter (2004), counter-cultural aesthetics have now become part of mainstream capitalist consumerism. Fleming (2009), albeit from a slightly different angle, makes a similar remark, arguing that the counter-cultural movement has gone from being presented as a threat to capitalism and the hegemony of the corporation to a vital aspect of the modern organization, where the life and creativity of immaterial labour are appropriated by the corporation and employed as strategic resources.

At least two aspects of our analysis appear relevant here. The first concerns visibility and the fact that both health promotion and the injunction to ‘become yourself’ rely on the visible image of the body, the aesthetic expression of selfhood and the adoption of desirable lifestyles. The second concerns control and the way in which health and authenticity are both employed for controlling and regulating identities in the workplace. If the former leans towards normative control (and the process by which individuals internalize prescribed values, norms and behaviours), then the latter can be more aptly characterized as what Fleming and Sturdy (2009) call neo-normative control (where the accent is placed on diversity rather than uniformity). To further unpack these two themes I will now turn to psychoanalysis, particularly the work of Lacan, which offers a fruitful analysis of the tensions between visibility and control.

### *Visibility and alienation*

If we accept the hypothesis that both authenticity and health aim to increase the visibility of the employee in the corporation, we might ask what the subjective effects of this process might be given that it is so-often couched in positive terms in the mainstream literature. As have previously been pointed out from a Lacanian viewpoint, visibility in the workplace is both alluring and dangerous (Roberts, 2005). It is alluring because it gives a jubilant sense of recognition and satisfaction. Being seen and recognized by other people is often characterized as an important deep-seated human need, and the nature and expression of this need spans a wide body of social and political scholarship (see for example Honneth, 1995). For instance, losing weight as a result of joining a work health promotion programme might produce encouraging and recognizing responses from others. It might well give rise to an ecstatic experience of being part of, and accepted by, the organizational norm. But visibility is also dangerous because it makes the subject more vulnerable to others. As Roberts (2005) explains, when an employee identifies with what first appears as a desirable self image, she soon becomes struck by a palpable sense of alienation and frustration. This experience stems from the fact that any self-image is ultimately cut off from the self; which, as Copjec puts it, 'places the subject in an external relationship to itself' (1994: 30). The key point is that the external image, as long as we remain attracted to its splendour, readily lends us to forces outside of power control. It becomes a moment of power.

This is also the key argument of Lacan's early text on the mirror stage, in which he describes the transforming experience of the subject, from jubilation to alienation, which takes place in imaginary identification (Lacan, 2006). Lacan's example concerns the development of a child, typically between the age of 6 and 18 months who, upon catching sight of her own reflection, becomes for the first time able to delineate his own person from that of others. But again, the initial experience of autonomy is soon transformed into alienation. Why? Lacan's response is that the ideal image that comes out of the reflection is one that is presented to the subject only as a gestalt, as an exteriority (ibid.: 76). In other words, the image is located beyond the reach of the subject. Hence, the subject cannot become his own image as the mirror stage opens up a terrifying gulf, what Lacan would later call the 'lethal gap of the mirror stage' (ibid.: 476).

Lacan's analysis of the specular ego and imaginary identification is relevant to the increasing concern with visibility noted earlier and, by extension, the expression of a desirable self-image via the discourse of health. His analysis challenges the assumption that recognition is ultimately desirable and brings our attention to the unintended effects engendered by these 'ego-enhancing techniques' (which, I would argue, is a fair label for both health promotion strategies and the injunction to 'be yourself' at work). In the context of corporations, in which a 'just be yourself' attitude reigns, the subject is not just exposed in a more encompassing manner, as for example Fleming (2009) has suggested; it also leads to an increased focus on ideals, such as bodily fitness, social success, prosperity, etc., where the authentic self is constantly urged to exhibit a radical edge (Žižek, 1999: 368). Drawing on Lacan's critique of leading ego-psychologists and particularly this group's far-reaching aspirations to engineer greater happiness and self-potency on the part of the patient, we might say that visibility in the context of work is

not so much creating new avenues for establishing authentic relations to ourselves, but forms of self-deception, misrecognition, narcissism, frustration and alienation. As Žižek (1989) points out, identifying with a specular image leads to an identification based on pure imitation, as when ‘young people identify with popular heroes, pop singers, film stars, sportsmen’ (ibid.: 117). This form of imaginary identification is paradoxical insofar as it on the one hand takes its cue from the ego, and on the other proceeds on the basis of imitation, that is, by way of usurping the identity and image of someone else.

Is not this paradox perfectly illustrated by self-help literature? Here we typically find advice along the lines of ‘be yourself’ or ‘become your own master’ alongside the opposite advice that we should imitate the rich and happy life of others (Cederström and Grassman, 2010). We can now begin to see how, from a Lacanian viewpoint, health promotion and the injunction to ‘be yourself’ intersect. Given that the demand for autonomy comes up against itself, it inadvertently results in new forms of imaginary identification (Žižek, 1989). Another way of putting this is to say that to achieve authenticity we should not look inside ourselves, as Dr. Phil prescribes, but merely *pretend* as if we are authentic (by copying the lifestyles that are deemed authentic by others). The result is that authenticity is obtainable only as pure exteriority. It comes to the subject in the form of what Lacan calls *Gestalt*, that is, as an external ideal image of which we are not part.

### *Control and the ferocious superego*

Apart from pointing to the dangers involved in visibility and the identification with a specular image, Lacan also offers a productive analysis of control, particularly through his close reading and far-reaching extension of Freud’s original theory of the superego. This theoretical construct is particularly useful for our analysis in that it provides insight into the dimensions of control in the absence of paternal authority. For instance, it shows how control appears even in situations where the paternal figure of authority seems to be absent. This is a key theme in psychoanalysis. In *Totem and Taboo* Freud pointed to this ‘return of control’ by explaining how parricide (the murder of the primordial father) did not put an end to authority, but rather gave rise to new forms of control, in which the replaced ‘invisible’ figure of authority, represented by the totem, becomes ‘stronger than the living one had been’ (Freud, 1950: 166). When Lacan, in *Seminar VII*, brings the murder of the father under discussion, he comments:

All the mystery is in that act. It is designed to hide something, namely, that not only does the murder of the father not open the path to *jouissance* that the presence of the father was supposed to prohibit, but it, in fact, strengthens the prohibition. The whole problem is there; that’s where, in fact as well as in theory, the fault lies. Although the obstacle is removed as a result of the murder, *jouissance* is still prohibited; not only that, but the prohibition is reinforced. (Lacan, 1992: 176)

*Jouissance*, or excessive enjoyment, is not unleashed by the act of parricide. The disintegration of one authority quickly leads to the re-emergence of new ones. As Lacan noted in opposition to Dostoevsky: when God is dead everything does not become permitted; instead everything becomes prohibited (ibid.). Is this not the case also in the so-called postmodern corporation like Google? While some enthusiastic commentators would like to see such corporations as ushering in a new kind of liberating atmosphere, characterized by tolerance and freedom of expression, others have been less positive.

Žižek, for instance, claims that the employee is ironically subjected to a stronger superego figure. As he explains:

They are under the injunction to be what they are, to follow their innermost idiosyncrasies, allowed to ignore social norms of dress and behaviours (they obey only some elementary rules of polite tolerance of each other's idiosyncrasies), they thus seem to realize a kind of proto-Socialist utopia of overcoming the opposition between alienated business, where you earn money, and the private hobby-activity that you pursue for pleasure at weekends. In a way, their job is their hobby, which is why they spend long hours at weekends in their workplace behind the computer screen. When one is paid for indulging in one's hobby, the result is that one is exposed to a superego pressure incomparably stronger than that of the good old 'Protestant work ethic'. (Žižek, 1999: 368)

Why is this superego stronger than the one found in more traditional work settings? Žižek's claim is that it involves, in his words, 'a kind of *direct "superegoization" of the imaginary Ideal*' (ibid.: 368). This means, firstly, that the liberty to 'be yourself' is transformed into the imperative to 'be yourself'. That is, the images associated with an authentic expression of self-hood become mandatory to wear, like a school-uniform. The second point is that the imperative takes on a more deceitful shape when the imperative comes from within rather than from an external agency. In this sense we lose our distance to the superego, because the very image of yourself, or rather the image of who you aspire to become, *is* the superego. Important to note in this regard is that the imperative to 'be yourself', like all other imperatives issuing from the superego, is impossible to fulfil. As Freud was careful to note, the superego is never content and may even be sadistic because it demands us not just to follow but also to deviate from the demand. Freud makes this clear in 'The Ego and the Id', where he writes that the superego's 'relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: "You ought to be like this" (like your father). It also comprises the prohibition: "You *may not be* like this" (like your father) – that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative' (1923: 34). The superego is erratic. It sets out models for how to behave and at the same time prohibits the ego from adopting these models. This ambiguity is further stressed in the work of Lacan in which we find the surprising line: 'Nothing forces anyone to enjoy (*jouir*) except the superego. The superego is the imperative of jouissance – Enjoy!' (Lacan, 1998: 3). So on the one hand the superego is the agent of prohibition; and on the other hand it forces us to enjoy. Only one thing is permanent about this agency, namely that it will remain insatiable. The more we follow the imperatives of the superego, the more disappointed it becomes, and the more ensnared we become since failure to be one with our ideal-image is a crucial feature of its function.

Recognizing the incoherent and unachievable demands of the superego is at the heart of psychoanalysis. It reveals how control is not reduced to prohibition, but also appears in the injunction to transgress. But when we follow the 'superegoic injunction to enjoy', we are not bound to experience a greater sense of enjoyment since commanded enjoyment by no means engenders more enjoyment. As McGowan notes in his book on the subject, 'the problem with the society of commanded enjoyment – what constitutes its danger for us – is not the enjoyment that it unleashes, but the barrier that it proves to enjoyment' (2004: 192). Rather than resulting in an orgy of excessive behaviour, the disintegration of the superego leads to new forms of obedience and 'this obedience



predominates precisely because it successfully disguises itself as its opposite – as rebellion, radicality, and difference’ (ibid.).

We can now begin to see how authenticity and health promotion form part of a wider discourse of bio-morality. The self implied in this discourse is one that carries the responsibility on her own shoulders. Moreover, drawing on psychoanalysis, we might argue that she is more directly exposed to the superego injunction to be authentic and healthy insofar as the superego has become part of the ego’s own self-image.

## Conclusion

Let us now summarize the argument. The driving claim of this paper has been that health promotion programmes might be conceived of as part of an emerging discourse of authenticity. Further, I have claimed that this results in new forms of control, described by Fleming and Sturdy (2009) as neo-normative control, which seeks to foster and manipulate diversity rather than uniformity. In order to lend some weight to this line of argument I have demonstrated how the accent on both authenticity and health signals a move towards visibility and moralization in the workplace, or what we might call the ‘moralization of visibility’. The perfect body together with a unique sense of expression is what is ultimately sought in the ‘just be yourself’ ideology. Radically deviant behaviour, on the other hand, is not.

The key theme under investigation has been the complex interplay between health initiatives and the quest for authenticity. To disentangle this relation I have pointed to the differences between authenticity (based on a logic of differentiation) and health initiatives (based on a logic of normalization). But I have also pointed to overlaps between these ideals. Apart from both containing contradictory relations to normalization and differentiation, they are both closely connected to visibility and a discourse of moralization. As such, we might suggest that health and authenticity, particularly when packaged together, constitute a vital part of what has previously been described as biomorality, in which, as Zupančič notes, we find the following axiom: ‘a person who feels good (and is happy) is a good person; a person who feels bad is a bad person’ (Zupančič, 2008: 5).

Highlighting the hegemonic force of this discourse of authenticity, as I have attempted to do in the paper, also leads to the more central question about the relation between life and work. Today the humane workplace has effectively blurred the distinction between life and the corporation (Ross, 2004). More and more corporations seek to attract creative workers, innovative thinking and entrepreneurial behaviour by infusing labour with aspects traditionally found outside work (Fleming, 2009). The idea is that work should not appear as boring and instrumental, but as an ongoing activity of fun, self-expression and creativity (which is perhaps why some corporations today look more like nurseries than traditional offices). Parallel to this, we can also observe how more stereotypical forms of managerialism have begun to seep into everyday life (Hancock and Tyler, 2004). Books like *Me, Inc.* (Ventrella, 2007) now offers advice on how to execute our life plans with the same care, organization and determination as corporations realize their business plans. Others have gone even further, suggesting that

we should model our love relations on the corporation, keeping track on emotional assets and debts (see Salecl, 2010). This paper should be read as a critical reflection of this socio-cultural transformation at work and beyond. Hopefully it can contribute to the emerging body of scholarship challenging the benevolence of this development.

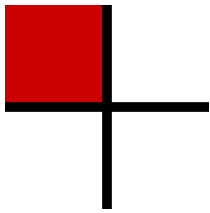
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## Guilty lives: The authenticity trap at work\*

André Spicer

### abstract

This paper argues that guilt is central to the contemporary fixation with personal authenticity. Building on Basterra's (2004) analysis of guilt and the tragic form, I argue the search for authenticity represents an act of agency, a struggle against external social determination. This struggle is embodied in a whole series of minor 'authenticity rituals' that we become passionately attached to. These rituals provoke compulsive self-monitoring within the subject. Instead of freeing ourselves from control, the search for authenticity actually deepens it in unexpected ways.

### Introduction

An emerging trend in contemporary western culture is the profound *guilt* we are supposed to experience given the 'false' and unhealthy lives we lead. This profound guilt, in part at least, stems from the feeling that we are somehow inauthentic. The desire to assuage our guilt by groping for authenticity can take many forms. It infuses television talk shows such as *Oprah* and *Dr Phil* (Guignon, 2004), various self-exploration technologies such as self-help literature (Hazelden, 2003) and forms of therapy that help us to discover our 'true selves' (Illouz, 2008). The theme of authenticity in broader culture has been brought into the economy. Employees increasingly demand the ability to express themselves at work and consumers demand products that are 'authentic' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Organizations have responded to these demands by becoming self-fashioned merchants of authenticity. Marketers seek to ensure that the authenticity of the products they sell is carefully managed and nurtured (Gilmore and Pine, 2007). Some companies have sought to brand themselves as ethically responsible employers that foster more humane and authentic working patterns (Land and Taylor, 2010). Employees seek to develop careers that allow them to remain true to themselves (Svejenova, 2005). Many mainstream firms have responded by incorporating aspects of social responsibility and work-life balance into their activities in a bid to allow their employees to be 'true to themselves' at work (Fleming, 2009). Even the CEOs of giant corporations are encouraged to practice 'authentic leadership' by remaining true to their values and communicating them in an open and inspiring fashion (George and Bennis, 2008).

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\* An initial version of this paper was presented at a symposium on Authenticity, University of Cambridge, May 2008. This paper has benefited greatly from ongoing conversations with Carl Cederström and Peter Fleming.

Why have so many become attached to this search for authenticity? To answer this question, I begin with the assertion that modern authenticity involves finding oneself through rebelling against oppressive higher powers (the Gods, Family, the Corporation etc) which we feel prevents us from being ourselves. Instead of celebrating this search as a form of liberation (Berman, 1972), I will argue that it actually involves a profound 'turn inwards' (Arendt, 1958) whereby social struggles are pushed back onto the individual. This results in the search for authenticity becoming an internal psychological struggle rather than collective political struggle. Sometimes this is a liberating 'event' where an individual fundamentally disturbs the symbolic matrix in which they live, cutting an individual's attachment to the symbolic co-ordinates that had entangled them (e.g., Contu, 2008). These breaks, however, can also carry the cost of a 'symbolic death' which destroys an individual's sense of self. Building on the work of Gabriela Bastera (2004), I argue that another important cost of the struggle for authenticity is *guilt*. The demand for authenticity is bound up with a feeling that we have never done enough. In order to assuage this sneaking suspicion, we engage in a whole series of minor 'authenticity rituals'. These rituals help us to feel like we are being true to ourselves. We become passionately attached to these rituals for reasons I shall explore and this results in a compulsive self-monitoring of everyday life. Instead of the struggle for authenticity freeing us from the various forms of control and oppression we find ourselves subjected to, it can actually deepen them.

In order to make this argument, I will proceed as follows. In the first section I will review existing accounts of authenticity and conclude modern authenticity involves rebellion against a higher order. In the second section, I will examine existing criticisms of authenticity, focusing on how authenticity involves a turn inwards. In the third section, I will argue that the modern search for authenticity can take on a tragic form through the experience of guilt. The fourth section explores how this guilt is discharged through a whole series of 'authenticity rituals' that we become passionately attached to. The paper concludes by drawing the argument together and offering some ways out of what I call the *authenticity trap*.

## Theorizing authenticity

The question of authenticity has been a preoccupation in the West for many years.<sup>1</sup> According to classical accounts, authenticity usually involves being true to some sort of higher scheme. For Plato, for example, one was authentic when one assumed the characteristics of an ideal. This was achieved through self-mastery of the kind that an ideal carpenter or ideal warrior might achieve (Taylor, 1989). In early Christian thought, authenticity entailed a display of fidelity to the demands of God. For instance in *Confessions*, St Augustine own journey to become authentic involves turning away from the base demands he is affronted with in the external world and heeding the true

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1 There are a number of excellent reviews of the concept of authenticity available. Perhaps the classic account of the development of the concept is Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*. In what follows I largely rely on this account to briefly sketch out the historical evolution of the modern concept of authenticity. Other accounts of the development of the concept of authenticity can be found in Trilling (1972) and Guignon (2004).

voice of God within his soul (Taylor, 1989). For St Augustine, fidelity to this higher power was to be found within oneself.

In *Confessions*, we find the seeds of the modern view of authenticity – being true not to some higher power but to oneself. Being authentic involves heeding the voice within, *despite* the directives of higher powers (such as socially proscribed ideals or the expectations of religion). According to this view, authenticity is seated within our inner world of the self and the forces that menace it are seen to come from the external world. The universe beyond our skin ceases to be a place saturated with meaning, filled with mysteries, and haunted by magical creatures. Instead, all magic, meaning and creativity lurk within. So, in order to become ourselves and be authentic, we must rebel against the demands of the external world tempting us to be people who we do not want to be (Guignon, 2004). Such demands mark the opening of modern forms of radical individualism and the assumption that our lives are something to be fashioned by us rather than by stultifying higher powers (Berman, 1972).

While radical individualism is frequently celebrated, it also comes at a significant cost. Instead of personal authenticity connecting an individual with broader ‘ideals’ which are shared in a society, it pushes an individual back onto themselves. An individual can no longer expect to find who they really are in the relationships they have or the institutions they reside within. This is because these ‘external’ influences are thought to pervert a true sense of self. Inner truth can only be revealed through a careful and detailed examination of one's own thoughts, desires, and motives. This kind of examination often involves significant effort and work and creates what Michel Foucault calls a ‘subject of inwardness’ (for a discussion see Taylor, 1984). An individual's private world becomes the space in which they are able to experience and discover the truth of themselves (Arendt, 1958).

Part of this culture of inwardness involves a sense that one of the greatest, and indeed most pressing possible tasks that we face is to discover who we really are. Much of the naïve pop-psychology that feeds the authenticity industry assumes that our true self is like some kind of lost tropical island which can only be rediscovered through carefully charting the dangerous waters of external temptations. However, these ideas have been repudiated by many recent philosophical treatments of authenticity (e.g., Taylor, 1989; Guignon, 2004). According to such critiques, one of the central themes associated with developing a sense of authenticity involves inventing plausible narratives of self. For instance, Charles Taylor (1992) argues that the modern desire for authenticity is often prompted by a feeling that our life is shattered and it is difficult, if not impossible, to piece our life together in a meaningful way. He suggests that reclaiming authenticity would entail the provision of a space where we can once again craft coherent narratives that bind our life together.

The task of crafting ‘authentic’ self-narratives is as difficult as it is pressing. However, this yearning for authenticity has fuelled a boom in all manner of expressions and explorations of who we really might be (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Many professional fields ranging from literature to religion to philosophy have adopted what Theodor Adorno (1964) calls ‘the jargon of authenticity’. Similarly, politics has increasingly become dominated by various movements who claim to allow us to express

some inner truth. We also seem to increasingly expect politicians to lead a true and fitting lifestyle. There are many consumer products including reality television, organic products, and a wide range of psycho-spiritual therapies that promises a return to the lost island of ourselves. Within the workplace, we also find that the theme of authenticity has become central to contemporary management discourse (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). For instance, some companies set out to market authentic products or services such as 'real country music' (Peterson, 1997). Others want to provide a workplace culture which allows employees to connect with their real values (Land and Taylor, 2010) and ensure employees can express their diverse and idiosyncratic identities (Fleming, 2009).

## **Towards a critique of authenticity**

Attempts to infuse all aspects of life with authenticity certainly appear at first sight to be an important step in addressing the loss of meaning we often experience in modern social life. Authenticity is conceived as a kind of magical cure-all for many of the tainted aspects of modern life such as meaningless work, empty products and valueless politics. The upshot is that authenticity has become an important theme that is difficult, if not impossible to call into question (cf. Adorno, 1964). After all, who would not want to 'be themselves'? In what follows, I will seek to question this apparently unquestionable good of modern social life by outlining some of the possible criticisms around the notion of authenticity.

Perhaps the most striking thing about cultures of authenticity is that they are often the result of careful manipulation and manufacturing. Notions of authenticity have been produced by a whole industry that includes motivational speakers, consultants, managers and media personalities who purport to champion cultures that allow people to 'just be themselves' (Fleming, 2009). This involves an attempt to create a sense of realness about what are ultimately highly artificial and constructed experiences. Perhaps nowhere is this manufacture of authenticity as widespread as it is in the cultural industries (Jones, et al., 2005). One foundational study of the tourism industry found that many tourists sought to escape from shallow experiences devoid of any genuine meaning (MacCannell, 1973). Many tourists have a strong desire to experience 'the real side' of a place they are visiting by venturing 'behind the scenes' of the façade. However, these back regions which tourists seek to experience are also carefully constructed, manipulated and managed by the locals. Thus the 'real' 'back stage' of a tourist destination is as much a constructed chimera as the inauthentic 'front stage'. Similarly, a study of country music found that many fans were very concerned about the music they listened to being real (Peterson, 1997). To cater for this demand for 'real' country music, music producers manufactured a sense of authenticity by using various motifs, styles, themes and even personas that were seen to embody the Southern rural roots of the country music. Underlying these two studies is the insight that authenticity does not just involve the presentation of cultural forms that are true to historical precedents. Rather, authenticity is fabricated through a process of often wilfully misremembering the past (Halbwachs, 1992). Real country music and real tourist experiences are carefully manufactured products. So too is a sense of personal



authenticity. Being true to ourselves therefore involves consuming a whole series of commodities and experiences that have been carefully managed and manipulated.

Because many opportunities to be authentic are manufactured, they frequently come at a significant cost. After all, the activities associated with authenticity require some time as well as resources. Resolutely attending Yoga classes, engaging in relationship counselling, attending Neuro-linguistic Programming courses to foster 'positive thinking', taking time out to educate children in an African village or trekking in Nepal all require significant material resources as well as free time. Indeed, historical commentaries on the rise of modern concerns for authenticity point out that it was largely born out of a middle class milieu who had time and resources to engage in periods of introspection. This is why Adorno (1964) points out that the search for and celebration of authenticity is a particular middle class conceit which the stable professions found so appealing in mid-twentieth century Europe.

One of the particularly striking things about the middle class proclivity for authenticity is that it significantly blurs the boundaries between public and private life. It involves projecting the internal search for authenticity into ever more public spaces. Almost any aspect of social life, even the most apparently inauthentic, becomes a potential zone for articulating our true self. For instance, employees seek to express and explore their authentic identities in their place of employment (Fleming and Sturdy, 2011). This encourages employees to bring what had previously been considered as private sentiments such as love, desire, and emotions into the workplace (Illouz, 2006; 2008). At the same time, we also witness the extension of the workplace into all aspects of our private lives (see also Fleming and Spicer, 2004). This can mean the number of hours and effort devoted to work time is radically extended. Many of the activities such as socializing, undertaking leisure activities and even romance become implicated with work. As our private life shifts into the public sphere it becomes denuded of intimacy and subjected to forms of cold instrumental calculation. Moreover, our public life becomes increasingly infused with emotive and highly personal expressions that had once been curbed by reason, rationality and due process.

Why is this a problem? Blurring the boundaries between private and public lives enables many aspects of 'private life' to be harnessed by the capitalist economy. This entails the commodification of aspects of life which are drawn from what had previously been considered to be the non-commodity sphere such as 'human beings, scenery, Cafes where people feel comfortable, tastes, rhythms, ways of being and doing' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: 444). By commodifying these 'authentic' activities which had previously been outside of the cycles of commodity exchange, it becomes possible to 'revive the process of transformation of non-capital into capital, which is one of the principal motors of capitalism, on new bases and, consequently, to meet the threat of a crisis of mass consumption that loomed in the 1970s' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: 443). One classic example of how this occurred is when management pressed into service aspects usually considered to be outside the workplace such as private identities, sexuality, and sub-cultural knowledge. By allowing them to 'just be themselves' (Fleming and Sturdy, 2011), employees make their rich social labour available to the managerial gaze. A whole range of previously uncommodified

labour that took place outside of work is harnessed by organizations to become an important way that corporations exploit value.

Another example pertains to the way consumers are now often intensely engaged in the production and innovation of the products and services they purchase (Arvidsson, 2006). The work of these highly involved consumers becomes an important source of value that is exploited by large companies. In many ways, cultures of authenticity merely represent a more complex instance of this whereby the emotion and the aesthetic labour of searching for and expressing oneself is captured by the organization. For instance, one study of a small clothing company found that employees' hobbies such as surfing and skateboarding were central to the company expressing its brand (Land and Taylor, 2010). By claiming employees' hobbies as part of the brand message, the company could make their products seem more 'real' and ultimately ensure consumers were willing to pay a premium price.

A corollary to blurring the boundaries between public and private life is a situation where working life is increasingly experienced as a kind of therapeutic activity. This means that any problems encountered in the workplace are not seen as caused by social structures. Rather, they are thought to be the result of an internal psychological yearning for authenticity. The consequence is what Hannah Arendt (1958) called the 'great turn inwards': a situation where we seek to address a traumatic social world through a confrontation with ourselves. Almost all points of engagement become a kind of internal struggle, something to be remedied through internal reflection. Instead of engaging in meaningful social struggles, the authenticity seeker turns back to themselves in an effort to work with their emotions, their worldviews and perhaps their most personal habits.

Despite the widespread celebration of being oneself, some critics have called this desire into question. They have pointed out that authenticity is frequently a carefully manufactured commodity which is produced by a vast culture industry. Consuming (manufactured) authenticity is not for everyone: it typically requires both time and money. Even for those who have these means, (manufactured) authenticity can have serious consequences for its consumers. It can mean that our innermost emotions become an object of public dialogue and deliberation. This can result in the colonization and commodification of our private lives. It can also mean that almost any social and political struggle comes to be projected within ourselves. This effectively traps the authenticity search within ourselves. In the following section I would like to explore how this authenticity trap works.

## The tragedy of authenticity

One reason why we get trapped by the search for authenticity is that it entails a degree of *enjoyment*. In an attempt to recapture our sense of lost authenticity we struggle against the codes of sociality (as mentioned above) and this creates an exhilarating experience some have identified as close to de-subjectification (see Contu, 2008). By overcoming boundaries, we may suddenly feel free and unfettered. But as Jacques Lacan points out, enjoyment, or more precisely *jouissance*, always has two sides (also

see Fink, 1997). There is the pleasure, but it is always too much pleasure insofar as it becomes painful. The excessiveness associated with transgression does not just involve an experience of freedom. It also evokes an experience of complete contingency. We experience this when we realise that things do not have to be as they are – they could potentially be rather different. Often this experience of contingency evokes a sense of horror as even our most stable certainties are washed away. This horrific experience can lead us to step back from the brink as our search for authenticity slackens.

In order to extend the idea that the search for authenticity both draws us in and repels us, I would like to now turn to Gabriela Bastera's (2004) argument that modern subjectivity (i.e., subjectivity which seeks to find itself, often through rebellion) takes on a kind of tragic structure marked by guilt. Let me briefly summarize how Bastera's work is useful for understanding the authenticity trap. The modern subject feels that they are denied their true self and seeks to win their authenticity by freeing themselves from an inauthentic structure. However, when they manage to wrench themselves free, they recognise that it is this very structure that gives them a sense of identity. This discovery, which is of course at the heart of many contemporary theories of the self, would lead our authenticity seeker to rue themselves for paying too high a price (their existing identity) only to receive a horrific void in return (the empty fantasy of a future self that may never arrive). The authenticity-seeker now needs to create an idea of 'objective necessity' that provides reasons for a return to this inauthentic identity. This engenders a deep tension between the attempt to escape from a counterfeit identity and the acceptance of us being dependent on this identity. This tension creates a pervasive feeling of guilt that effectively binds us to the very false self we sought to escape in the first place.

According to Bastera (2004), therefore, this resentful commitment to the very identity that we had once sought to escape is fundamentally tragic. The typical rationale usually given here is that when a character seeks to win their sense of agency (or in our case authenticity) by rebelling against the will of some higher power, they are punished for it. For instance, when an employee challenges a dominant identity, they are likely to not only face severe material consequences (such as losing their job or being sidelined for promotion) but also a kind of 'symbolic death'. This is because they lose the symbolic co-ordinates that had previously supported their sense of self (Contu, 2008). They lose an identity which provided them with a sense of symbolic support. Bastera breaks from this view and points out that the tragedy associated with the rebellious subject entails something more. It is a situation where 'autonomous action is reduced to a transitory challenge to the power of destiny, a short-lived resistance that only provokes fate's reinvigoration' (Bastera, 2004: 2). In other words, an attempt to challenge a dominant identity that one is invested in can momentarily provoke a sense of freedom, but ultimately strengthen the apparent dominance of an identity which we seek to escape from. To schematically summarize Bastera's argument, this tragedy involves a characteristic sequence: (1). a higher symbolic order exists; (2). a character enters the scene who then rebels against this symbolic order; (3). this rebellion gives them a sense of agency; (4). but it also leads to the collapse of the symbolic order they rebelled against; (5). this prompts their own realization that this symbolic order was ultimately empty; (6). this realization creates a sense of trauma in the character; (7). to assuage this trauma the character adopts a story of 'objective necessity' whereby they cannot do

anything but act in a way which reconciles them to the symbolic order they rebelled against; (8). they therefore give up on their rebellion, (9). and they remain tied to this existing symbolic order through a profound sense of guilt. In this sequence of actions the 'tragic subjects commit themselves to a conflict whose resolution always escapes them, since at a particular moment of each drama the weight of necessity disrupts the previous state of equilibrium, foreclosing any possibility of responsible initiative, or what is called human freedom' (ibid.: 19). In other words, the subject tries to rebel against a symbolic order to win their authenticity, but this rebellion is often cut short. They often return to this symbolic order and through guilt become even more profoundly tied to it.

What does this mean for our understanding of authenticity? At its most basic, Bastera's argument demonstrates that our search for authenticity is firstly a tragic activity. This is because we seek to rebel to find our true self, but during this rebellion we decide the cost is too high, and therefore we are never willing to completely grasp the authentic that looms before us. The symbolic order that we rebel against gives us our symbolic co-ordinates, providing us with something to struggle against and complain about. For instance, the overbearing corporate culture that an employee detests certainly puts an obstacle between them and 'being themselves'. But this self-same culture actually supports their identity and enjoyable fantasized future. Ironically, such obstacles to authenticity are actually the source of antagonism and feelings of 'being real'. The very things that make us feel inauthentic are those that allow us to hold on to the idea of authenticity. If a disaffected employee suddenly decided to leave their oppressive firm, they would no longer have something to blame for the loss of their real self. Instead, they would be faced with the unbearable sense of losing the very source of their lost identity (cf. Žižek, 1997: 204).

To break out of this tension, authenticity seekers might posit a sense of 'objective necessity' (Bastera, 2004). Appealing to such 'objective necessities' allows them to maintain their commitment and dependence on the structures they hope to escape from. Such stories of objective necessity involve people trying to 'create a tragic fate with which to cooperate' (Bastera, 2004: 36). These are typically narratives that explain why an authenticity seeker cannot make a final break from what makes them unhappy. Narratives of objective necessity are paradoxically crafted by the subject but cruelly place any sense of agency beyond their control. For instance, a potential corporate rebel might explain how they would like to leave the company and pursue a career as a guitarist if they did not have to pay the mortgage and have a penchant for expensive lunches. Similarly, a bored consultant might tell us they would love to spend a year in a Buddhist retreat finding themselves if only this would not damage their career trajectory. In each case, we notice that some desired break with an inauthentic identity is thwarted through an appeal to some external, uncontrollable force. The crux here is that an act of agency actually allows the authenticity seeker to surrender their agency.

This surrender often creates a profound sense of guilt that is fundamental to the authenticity trap. At a surface level, such guilt arises when authenticity seekers feel disturbed about the implications of being true to their selves. For instance, they might worry about how their rejection of the symbolic order might affect their lives. They might also worry about whether their rebellion might cut them off from others. They

might also feel guilt because their act tears at the very symbolic structure that nurtured them. For instance, a manager may have the grandiose fantasy that leaving work would in some way throw the whole system into disarray. This guilt can be embodied in the people they may have upset or a more pervasive sense that they have violated some implicit social contract. They may even feel guilty for not having been able to live up to their own heroic pronouncements of finding their true self outside of a stifling corporate world. In each case, we notice that the guilt is profoundly individualized and diffuse. The fault – whether it is for being too obsessed with the search for authenticity or not being authentic enough – lies squarely on the shoulders of the seeker him or herself.

While classical ideas about tragedy assumed the fault lies in some kind of tragic character flaw, modern concepts of tragedy shift the locus of blame from the rebellious mortal onto the Gods themselves (see Ricoeur, 1967). This leads Bastera to caution us strongly about seeing guilt as a strictly individual phenomenon. She argues that guilt actually originates in the structure that we sought to rebel against. Most self-directed workers are familiar with the guilty feelings that menace us when we feel that we should be working rather than engaging in frivolities like relaxation. Following Bastera, this feeling of guilt is not an individual's own. Rather, it is actually implicit within the configuration of contemporary self-directed work. Indeed, the very structure of many self-directed jobs means employees constantly feel guilty for not having done enough. There is always a lurking suspicion that we could have done more. Even though we find this experience of guilt unsettling, we cling to it. It is actually this sense of guilt that binds us to our work. This sense of pervasive guilt is a vital mechanism of control, particularly for relatively autonomous workers.

What is surprising is that 'guilt is the last thing we would be willing to renounce' (Bastera, 2004: 95). Why do we want to take the blame and suffer the emotional torment which inevitably follows? Bastera points out that there are three reasons for this. The first is that by representing ourselves as guilty we are able to hold on to the sense that we had some kind of autonomy and agency in the situation. By bearing guilt, we can feel like we caused something and had a heroic role of some sort. Therefore as painful as guilt is to us it also gives a sense of agency. By feeling guilty about work, we are able to feel that we might have a kind of control over it. Guilt gives us a sense that we have a choice. For instance it allows us to think that we choose whether or not we work outside office hours. Guilt enables us to avoid what is perhaps an even more unpleasant feeling that we have no control whatsoever over how much and when we work.

A second reason we are so attached to guilt is that by yielding to it we are able to maintain the broader symbolic structure we depend on. Guilt provides a zone of existential security of knowing that even if we are flawed the world itself is fine and one day we might be as well. Indeed, 'assuming guilt seems preferable to being enslaved by guilty gods' (Bastera, 2004: 33). By accepting guilt, we are able to assume that our sense of self is not completely defiled. It allows us to hope that one day it may conceivably provide us with the ability to truly 'be ourselves'. For instance, by accepting the guilt which comes with working in a job we know to be utterly meaningless, we are able to hold onto the sense that at least we are aware of its

meaninglessness. This awareness acts as a kind of guarantor that we still can perceive that another more meaningful work situation is at least potentially possible.

The final reason that guilt is so appealing is that it provides us a kind of alibi. Although we want to feel like agents, we do not want to be agents with responsibility. In order to remove this responsibility, we claim that our actions were due to some 'objective necessity' beyond our control. Thus, our sense of guilt comes down to a feeling that we could not change what happened since after all there was some kind of objective necessity. For instance, we might explain how we had to take a series of business flights during the year that created significant outputs of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, but nonetheless we feel very guilty about it. Such declarations of guilt act as a kind of alibi by showing that we have a moral consciousness and can recognise our wrong doings. But we also know that these wrongdoings were done under the behest of conditions that we could not change. Such guilt props up the notion that we are sensitive, intelligent and reflexive individuals who have a sense of right and wrong. But at the same time we are able to continue behaving as we would anyway (by taking long air flights, working for exploitative companies, consuming products made in sweatshops etc). By holding onto our guilt, we also hold onto the fantasy that we authentic-seeking individuals are somehow better than the inauthentic lives we find ourselves leading.

Guilt, therefore, binds us to the authenticity trap. I have argued that guilt is prompted by the search for authenticity – when we go looking for ourselves, we often must engage in the painful work of rejecting 'false selves'. However, these rejections are rarely carried through. These thwarted attempts to free us from a social symbolic structure which imposes a sense of false self upon us can give rise to feelings of guilt. These bind us to a symbolic structure we do not feel completely incorporated in. The result is that many authenticity searches remain trapped by a nagging sense of guilt that seems impossible to assuage.

## **Authenticity rituals**

Guilt certainly has its upside. Bearing the burden of guilt is a common way to hold onto a sense that we are striving for authenticity, but at the same time being able to explain away why we remain utterly complicit in the very system that we think makes us inauthentic. But in order to bear this burden, we must come up with ways of dealing with the guilt which binds us. So what exactly do we do with the guilt associated with our failed struggles for authenticity? How do we deal with the sense of concern we feel while wearing jeans made under terrible labour conditions or engaging in various forms of environmental degradation? The good old-fashioned way of dealing with this kind of guilt would be to repress it. We might do this by denying that we were even implicated in the conditions that we feel guilty about. For instance, when faced with the brutal fact that our savings are being used to fuel ecologically disastrous industries, we might flatly deny it. Or we might claim that this is simply a lie being circulated by far left radical groups or a competing company. But this repression of guilt has certainly gone out of fashion now. Today it is expression, not repression, that is the order of the day. In therapeutic societies when we feel guilt we are asked, nay expected, to talk about it, express it, and try to deal with it. The result is that there has appeared a whole discourse

in contemporary society around our guilt (Bruckner, 2010). Moreover, this discourse of guilt is implicated in phenomena as diverse as wars that took place many years ago to the fate of small children in a country on the other side of the world to our relationships with our parents to the conditions a homeless person sleeps in. All of this is potential fodder for contemporary guilt talk.

Putting guilt to work becomes one of the central tasks of any authenticity-seeker today. When they are called upon to express their feelings, they have a readily available discourse of guilt. Of course, guilt has often been a pervasive theme in religious discourses. However, guilt talk has taken on increasingly secularized forms. For instance guilt discourses have been noted with reference to broader historical traumas such as the Holocaust (Diner and Golb, 1997), race relations in the United States (Ellison, 1996), or European imperialism (Bruckner, 2010). Guilt discourses are also an important part of everyday life. Usually they appear in relation to intimate relationships (following a betrayal for instance) or health (with regards to smoking or overeating). However, the discourse of guilt has become increasingly prevalent within the economic sphere. For example, it has become increasingly common to talk about one's relationship to work in terms of guilt: we might declare 'I feel so guilty about working for that company', or express guilty feelings for not having done enough work. The sphere of consumption has also become increasingly infused with this guilt talk. A consumer might declare 'I feel guilty when I buy factory farmed chicken' or search out 'guilt free fish' that has been caught using sustainable fishing practices.

By drawing on these guilt discourses, employees and consumers are able deal with some of the tensions implicit in the perpetually failing quest for authenticity. On the one hand, they are able to acknowledge that they can somehow see through a particular economic arrangement. By doing this they can feel that they are 'aware', 'engaged', and 'caring' people who at least acknowledge the harm they cause. On the other, they are also able to continue their practical attachment to the state of affairs that makes them feel guilt (albeit with moral quandaries). So guilt provides a way of accepting responsibility while at the same time continuing to be embroiled in the situation that made one guilty.

But these simple expressions of guilt are often not enough. Feelings of guilt often require a form of behaviour to *embody* it in a particular way. Embodying guilt allows us to connect it to the perpetually failing search for the authentic. This gives rise to what I would like to call 'authenticity rituals'. These are a range of everyday behaviour that signals our guilt, allowing us to embody a measured degree of rejection of the conditions which we think make us inauthentic. These are measured rejections in so far as they allow us to resolutely cling to structures, identities and social situations which we think are problematic, but nonetheless embody our recognition that we are after all more 'real' than these phony or oppressive social forces.

Authenticity rituals in the workplace include all manner of minor activities that show we have a life outside the workplace and can somehow transcend the strictures of the corporation. For instance, employees may festoon their workstation with objects and pictures that express their real lives (such as pictures of their families or their hobbies). In other cases, we find companies actively encouraging employees to express

themselves at work and seek to build their values into the workplace through working on projects that fit their values or maybe just redesigning their office in a colour they like.

In the sphere of consumption, authenticity rituals are played out in a range of ways. For instance, organic diets become a way of thumbing our noses at our ecologically destructive food production system, enthusiastic quest for Fair Trade products waylay our regret about the inequitable global division of labour. Recent campaigns against throwing away food are a kind of minor protest against a disposable society. For sure, all of these things are worthy and important activities which are small steps to addressing seriously pressing issues which threaten not only our sense of personal authenticity, but also life on our planet. But what is particularly interesting about these authenticity rituals is the sheer degree of emotional investment built up around them. Disturbing an employee's personal items at workplace can be the equivalent to spitting in their face. Activities like recycling have become the post-modern equivalent of saying our daily prayers. If we miss a recycling day or mistakenly put a recyclable product into a disposable bin then we may feel that we have committed a kind of blasphemy. The result is that we redouble our vigilance and ensure that all recyclables are carefully sorted and placed out for collection. Throwing away food becomes a dirty secret to be carefully concealed.

What is particularly interesting about these authenticity rituals is that they are often particularly elaborate and involve considerable time, energy and emotional investment. Think for instance of the sheer effort people are willing to put into corporate volunteering, or the hours spent making an authentic southern French dish after their visit to the farmers market. The 'objective' benefits accrued might seem fairly minimal. However, the real benefits we get out of lavishing our precious time and resources on such rituals is that they make us feel like we are able to express that we care. But above all the time and effort allows us to do a kind of penitence that works through our guilt. Instead of absolving ourselves from guilt through confession we simply ensure we buy Fair Trade this week, visit yoga class, or scrupulously sort out our recycling.

Alongside the immense effort these rituals require there is a notably compulsive aspect to them. In many cases, people desperately cling to the most minor activities which express who they really are. Authenticity seekers insist on these rituals no matter how puritan and self-denying they may be. For instance, someone who sees television as a debasing experience may become highly agitated if they find themselves in a room with someone watching 'Big Brother'. Another person may prefer to go hungry rather than eat food not prepared using organic ingredients. A third person will simply refuse to have a companion drink Coca-Cola while dining with them. By compulsively clinging to these small rituals we can reassure ourselves that we do after all have a sense of agency and that there are some things that we simply must say no to. Indeed, the guilt that is generated from our defeated search for authenticity becomes embodied in these small compulsions. Not drinking Coke or strictly eating organic foods comes to stand in for, and perhaps replace, our lost sense of authenticity. As a result, when we are denied these minor rituals, we feel that we are losing our authenticity. The collapse of these small rituals can be literally experienced as a kind of collapse of our whole symbolic universe, our whole sense of self. Being forced to watch a Hollywood action film might



not just be experienced as a minor irritation, but as a profound disturbance of our sense of self.

The ever-present guilt combined with the effort we invest in the associated authenticity rituals binds us to them irrevocably. We can become literally obsessed with monitoring all these minute rituals in our lives (and others') in order to ensure that they express our need to be authentic. In other words, our close ties to these most insignificant of reflexive behaviours becomes enlivened and given significant weight by the guilt that struggles for authenticity produce. But this obsession with the most minor activities of our everyday life means that they function as a kind of highly charged political battleground. The result is that struggles are no longer fought over political ideologies. Instead, the politics we become passionately invested in are those that are closely related to our habits and bodies. Indeed we become deeply interested in what some have called 'bio-politics' (Foucault, 1978). Broadly put, this involves political contestation focusing on life itself (Esposito, 2008). This means political struggles take place around the most basic aspects such as bodily health and lifestyle. No big ideas here. The pressing political questions are no longer your position on patriarchy – it is how many burgers you ate this month or where you stand on spray-tanning. The increasing importance of this kind of bio-politics can be seen in the fact that many contemporary political movements today are focused on quotidian issues close to the body such as health, food and lifestyle. And one of the central demands which is often bound up with these bio-political movements is a demand for authenticity – real food, real wine, real music and the ability to live a real life which is not artificially clouded by various in-authenticities.

But with bio-politics also comes bio-power. While bio-politics involves the various struggles that take place around issues of life itself, bio-power involves various attempts to regulate, control and generally discipline this life (Hardt and Negri, 2009). Typically, bio-power entails various forms of regulating the most basic biological processes such as eating, sex, sleep, bodily movement and so on. It is exactly at this level where we find what I have called 'authenticity rituals'. And because we are particularly vigilant about these rituals they become the perfect target for various kinds of intervention and control. Indeed, in our search for authenticity in these minor rituals, we often go out of our way to find ways of regulating and controlling ourselves. And when we find this difficult, we are more than willing to call on all manner of experts who can give advice on disciplining ourselves in a way that allows us to 'be true to ourselves'. The result is that the modern search for authenticity produces a perverse outcome: it does not liberate us from a nagging sense of inauthenticity. Rather, it takes what we take to be authentic about ourselves such as ways of life and our bodies and turns these into a target of control. By doing so, it actually tightens forms of control in the most intimate and immediate aspects of our lives. What is more, we ourselves become the agents who desperately try to enforce this disciplined authenticity onto our own lives. The result is that by trying to be ourselves, we become trapped in increasingly tight, guilt-fuelled circles of trying to be authentic.

## Conclusion

Authenticity was once only a concern of a very small group of intellectuals and artists in the Metropolitan centres of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe (Berman, 1972). The idea this small circle shared was that it was good to be true to oneself (Trilling, 1972). They assumed that one's authenticity could be won by shrugging off the repressive force of higher order determinants like God, the State, the Family, and the Economy. Being true to oneself involved shrugging off an inauthentic sense of self imposed on us. As I have pointed out in this paper, the idea that the highest goal in life was the pursuit of authenticity spread during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It became one of the central ways that people sought to question a standardized, massified and industrialized society. Today, authenticity has been diffused through all aspects of society including economic activity. It is present in the marketing of products and services (authentic tourism, authentic furniture etc), management fashions (authentic leadership) and the culture industries (authentic blues music) to name just a few. In short, we live in an authenticity economy where the most valuable asset is keeping it real.

Building on Basterra (2004) I have argued that this is because struggles for authenticity take on a kind of tragic form: an initial rebellion against an inauthentic symbolic structure is often followed by the authenticity-seeker relinquishing this rebellion in order to reconcile themselves with this identity they rebelled against. The central issue that I aimed to address in this article is the role of guilt in binding people to a loathed identity and motivating people to adopt a whole series of rather minor rituals that display a sense of being real. Our compulsive attachment to these rituals is partially driven by the difficult realization that we owe a great debt to the very symbolic structures we seek to resist. To put this another way, we feel guilty because we realize that we are completely dependent on the various social structures that make us so inauthentic. We remain attached to workplaces that give us deadening work, patterns of consumption that deliver us manufactured authenticity, and other social relations that make us feel distanced from our true selves. And to gain some sense of distance from these structures, a nagging guilt develops about our relationship with them. But at the very same time as this guilt allows a sense of distance, it also binds us ever more fiercely to dominant symbolic structures. In short, being guilty allows us to experience authenticity. But at the very same time, it binds us to fake selves. This makes authenticity into a kind of trap that is difficult to escape.

The authenticity trap poses a rather difficult question: is it possible to find a way out of this apparently endless and fruitless attempt to grasp authenticity? Simon Critchley (2002, 2007) has proposed one way. He argues that we might replace our tragic responses that are so bound up in the struggle for authenticity with a comic one. He points out that when we are confronted with our inevitable shortcomings, we often repose on the kind of tragic mode which I have described above. We seek to rebel against a position, role or broader symbolic structure which gives us a sense of self. We reject the sense of self in the hope of winning authenticity. But the price of authenticity is a kind of (symbolic) death. To put it rather starkly, to win our (true) self, we must destroy our (existing) self.

Critchley's comic response does not simply mean a little gallows humour. A comic response to the authenticity trap involves a kind of self-deflation whereby we acknowledge not just that we cannot live up to our rather grandiose claims of purity, but that these claims are also preposterous and ultimately empty. This might happen by recognising that our claims to the purity of an authentic sense of self are not achievable. This is because all authentic identities are always riven with contradictions from the start. A comic response involves recognising that these contradictions are innate and irreconcilable. It involves laughing at just how crazy it is to expect that organic apples will somehow make us whole again. While the comic stance to the authenticity trap provides a way out of the impossible claims we make upon ourselves, it too can become a kind of trap of its own. This is because it involves a form of duplicity. Like cynicism, it too can become implicitly implicated in the very situation it makes fun of (Zupančič, 2008). So to be comic means to recognise the stupidity of a structure that we are trapped within in, to point this out, but to nonetheless continue to participate in it. Indeed, such a comic stance may in fact further entrench the authenticity trap because it allows us a sense of being above it while practically participating in it.

If comedy might deepen the authenticity trap, an alternative may be offered by reconsidering the most ancient narrative genre: the epic. Tragic attempts to grasp authenticity involve a rebellion against the demands of a social structure. Comic approaches to authenticity show the limited nature of our own ability to live up to those demands as well as the very emptiness of these demands in the first place. In contrast, an epic approach entails simply carrying out demands without any tragic rebellion or comic mocking. In classical epics 'the principal of action, which belongs to the subject or self, is, so to speak, projected onto universal powers (gods) from the outside (that is, from the other side); it is applied to them' (Zupančič, 2008: 24). This involves a situation where we project all our potentiality onto some higher power such as the will of the Gods or a social circumstance. We engage in action simply because that is what is required of us. We do not foolishly question this higher will, we simply execute it. The crucial thing here is to transform non-rebellion into a more cunning rebellion. Because we do not rebel, we do not get defeated. However, in not rebelling against what is demanded, the epic character never gains a sense of agency and subjectivity. The result is that they never become a proper subject with a will of their own. Thus by mechanically carrying out the demands which are placed upon them, they are able to escape from the liberal demand to 'just be yourself' (Fleming and Sturdy, 2011). This is because there is no self to be, only demands from some higher power to be carried out. Opting for such a position would render us as a passive mechanism of the Other's desire – an actor without agency.

By taking such a passive role, many of the questions that are bound up with tragic agency such as authenticity and guilt would disappear. But so too would the possibility of individual subjectivity and agency. Such a de-subjectifying move would certainly unsettle liberal modes of power that are fundamentally premised upon harnessing individual agency. It could give rise to post-liberal forms of power. One form this might take is a kind of Hobbesian power matrix whereby individuals give away their political agency to a higher power in return for not only peace with their fellow citizens, but also peace within themselves. That is, by giving their sense of agency away they will no longer be plagued with the all the pains, anxieties and guilt that come with a sense of

liberal agency (Salecl, 2010). This kind of move can be seen in all manner of situations from religious fundamentalism to the role of experts in even the most minor aspects of daily life (such as home decoration or pet care). In doing this, we are relieved of agency but also the feelings of guilt that this entails. But at the same time we give up on the possibility of democratic deliberation by concentrating power in the hands of those who we think should know best.

A second form of this post-liberal power might be of a Spinozian type whereby the individual becomes a direct embodiment of collective autonomy. Instead of gaining a sense of agency by rebelling against a higher power or through comic deflation, the actor would seek to directly embody collective agency (Hardt and Negri, 2009). Thus, the question is no longer about trying to win back one's authenticity through rebelling against a higher other. Instead, action would involve attempting to craft a sense of collective autonomy. Many of the traps of liberal politics disappear if we shift social struggles from the quest for individual authenticity to the quest for collective autonomy. In particular, feelings of individual guilt that binds us to a symbolic structure are replaced with practical questions of how we might craft autonomy (Fleming, 2009: 164-5). While this new question might indicate a more affirmative mode of politics, it also brings new tensions and traumas that might be embodied in struggles for collective autonomy (Böhm et al, 2010).

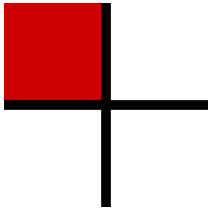
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## **‘A career is nothing without a personal life’: On the social machine in the call for authentic employees<sup>\*</sup>**

Michael Pedersen

### **abstract**

In this paper, the Danish company Danfoss’ recruitment campaign ‘a career is nothing without a personal life’ is read in light of the current call for authentic, self-expressive employees. The Danfoss campaign provides an example of the contradictory logic at work in the contemporary call for authenticity. On the one hand, it shows how the desire for authenticity of employees is expected to converge with the drive for organizational productivity: employees are invited to be whole persons at work, and the good employee is the employee who willingly takes responsibility for both personal and organizational interests. On the other hand, however, this ‘whole person’ is always construed as a subject to come. Authentic employees must, as the very sign of their future productivity, also express the fact that they have more desire than the current convergence between their own and the organization’s interests. In the case of Danfoss, this is exemplified by the focus on life outside of work as the prerequisite for a good career. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘social machines’, the article outlines this contradiction and argues that it in fact acts as the very driving force in the call for authenticity.

### **Introduction**

Original brands. Authentic managers. Employees that express themselves at work. Authenticity seems to be an increasingly central marker for an efficient and flexible organization. According to bestsellers such as *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want* ‘business today... is all about being real’ (Gilmore and Pine, 2007: 1). The leadership-literature raves about how people in turbulent times ‘want to be led by someone “real”’, constantly underlining how efficiency is measured by the ability of managers to energize and retain loyal followers by expressing and managing their authentic selves (Goffee and Jones, 2005: 87). Likewise, employees in more and more knowledge intensive industries are invited ‘to just be themselves’ (Fleming, 2009).

The argument for authenticity seems to hinge upon the notion that being authentic unleashes creativity into the production process and ensures that employees proactively anticipate the needs of the organization (Costea et al., 2007). It is thereby argued that

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authenticity, in the sense of being one's self, expressing one's inner core, being sincere and faithful to spontaneous feelings, gut instinct and inner ideas, is becoming a response to the question of what it means to be a value-adding, innovative and flexible resource today. Nevertheless, as Fleming (2009) has recently shown, this 'authentic response' also becomes a demand put upon employees. Inviting employees to 'just be themselves' becomes part of a form of (neo)-normative control designed to 'evoke the private sphere' (ibid.: 37) as something productive for the working sphere. We are, so to speak, *called* to express and conduct ourselves as authentic individuals at work. With this in mind, I will apply the concept of *social machines*, as taken from the works of Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1994, 1999), in order to describe how this call for authentic employees is crystallized in the Danfoss recruitment ad and to outline a contradictory logic at work within it.

The Danish industrial company Danfoss Group is a leader in the development and production of mechanical and electronics products and controls, employing over 23,000 people in 25 different countries. In 2007-2008 Danfoss ran a recruitment campaign in a variety of Danish newspapers and magazines. The theme of Danfoss' full-page vacancy ads consisted of two aspects: the headline 'A career is nothing without a personal life' and the following paragraph:

At Danfoss we have known for a long time that the experiences you have gained in your lifetime are a benefit to our company and your career. The whole person is at the top of the agenda. The life you lead while not at work can help provide you with the strength needed to create results. (Danfoss, 2007)

In fact, most often the paragraph came before descriptions of the vacant job itself. Even though the nation-wide campaign ended with the coming of the financial crisis in 2008, the construction of the employee as authentic did not seem to disappear from the corporate communication of Danfoss. In fact, the Danfoss homepage (2010) still talks about the responsible employee as a unique person with a full life.

This homepage and the recruitment ad will provide an illustration of an interesting contradiction in the call for authenticity. I will not, however, try to uncover the inner workings of the authentic response in Danfoss (that is, do they really mean what they say or is it just branding?) but instead use it as an example that exhibits terms of a contradiction in stark ways. This contradiction in the call for authenticity consists, on the one hand, of a logic whereby employees are called on to be themselves but only in so far as there are still 'many kinds of authentic expression that remain impermissible' (Fleming, 2009: 39). This logic works to make the subjectivity of the employee converge with the interest of profit-making, productivity increase and cost efficiency. What is called for is what Lazzarato (2004) calls a worker-monad: employees who express the stakes of the organization through their individual substance.

On the other hand, the call for authenticity also seems to express a logic that does not focus on the kinds of expressions which are permissible but rather tries to tap into and mobilize an 'excess' for the further subjectification of the employee. There is an appeal to the life of the employee outside of work as a kind of reservoir of new forms of self-expression that might become organizationally valuable. This logic, in short, operates with the employee as a subject in becoming. The call goes out for what Boltanski and

Chiapello term 'a nomad' (2005: 122). This worker-nomad is always moving away from how it currently expresses the stakes of the organization. The calls for both a worker-monad and worker-nomad imply both a convergence and a divergence between the employee's desire and the stakes of the organization.

In this paper this double logic is described as what Deleuze and Guattari (1983) in *Anti-Oedipus* call a social machine, a social machine that *produces, mobilizes and regulates* our subjectivity at work. In such a framework the call for authenticity is not a matter of the individuals' own authentic personal desire and their potential repression by the social. Having said that, however, the desire we usually ascribe to this subject should not be understood as a product of a social infrastructure such as ideology or economy. On the contrary, both the desire of the subject *and* the social infrastructure within which it manifests must be understood on the level of a multiplicity of machinic interactions that both constitute and dissolve this subject.

The overall question is therefore not, what does authenticity in the call for authenticity *mean* (that is, is it real authenticity or only institutionalized authenticity?) but how does the call for authenticity *work*? What kind of subject emerges in the call? What kind of relation between the employee's desire and the stakes of the organization does this call produce? And, finally, how does this call form the very way in which problems of authenticity are raised? The ontological mobility that the concept of machine allows also pushes how we normally understand ontology. Indeed, as an ontological concept, the social machine presents a notion of reality as dynamic, multiple and in a state of becoming. Nevertheless, by postulating such a reality, it also makes any insight into the structure of reality a context-dependent test that demands an experimental and perpetual effort by thought. It is such an experiment that this rather speculative paper attempts to set-up.

The paper is structured as follows. First, the call for authenticity is briefly introduced, followed by an introduction into the concept of machine as used by Deleuze and Guattari. With the Danfoss ad and webpage as points of reference the last and largest part of the paper then outlines the social machine in the call for authenticity. Especially its double logic of production is highlighted: how the employee subject is both produced as a 'worker-monad' and a 'worker-nomad'. At the very end of the paper the implications of this double logic are outlined.

## The call for authenticity

The call for authenticity can be seen in light of a general interest in making human subjectivity an inherent organizational resource. As Whittle points out, the interest in the realm of 'thoughts, feelings, beliefs and desires that comprise our self-understanding or self-identity' has, over the last thirty years increasingly been placed at 'the heart of the debates within management and organization studies' (2005: 1301-2). According to Whittle, 'The appeal of subjectivity, for managers at least, lies in the goal of controlling human behaviour (what workers do) by colonizing employee subjectivity (who workers are)' (ibid.: 1301).



Moreover, in new management strategies, concepts and programs the equation between corporate performance and the total involvement of the whole person in work has come to be regarded as one of the underlying principles of a successful form of organization (Costea et al., 2007). In short, new managerial technologies such as performance management, coaching, culture management, etc. have to a larger and larger degree focused on subjectivity 'as a preferred site for intervention' (ibid.: 153). Such technologies are designed to ensure that the employees actualize their 'own interest – for well-being, career, self-actualization – at the same time as they embody "the organization's desire for productivity, performance, cost and risk minimization"' (Kelly et al., 2007: 269). The call for authenticity continues this interest; the overall assumption in the invitation to be authentic is that 'when workers bring their whole selves to the work-place ("warts and all"), firms are able to exploit a hitherto untapped reservoir of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurial ingenuity' (Fleming, 2009: 2).

Authenticity, then, is a matter of bringing the spontaneous and private core into the workplace as it is this very spontaneity – the employee's true interests, desires and gut instincts, untainted by instrumental ends and rules on how to conduct work – that paradoxically come into the service of the interests of business. As Boltanski and Chiapello argue: when the 'exploitation of inventiveness, imagination and innovation' is of growing interest the demand for authenticity becomes a key factor in being a responsible and innovative employee (2005: 326). This interest in the employees' self-identity and self-expression at work is therefore not only managerial mumbo-jumbo around branding strategies and fashion fads (Costea et al., 2007). Instead, it is, as Costea et al. (2007) continue, part of a 'new logic' that 'underpins management today: *to govern work through subjectivity*'. This logic is becoming more and more visible today, especially within discourses on 'play and fun, as well as wellness, well-being and happiness at work' (ibid.: 250) which all orient themselves towards manifesting the whole person as the human resource.

The notion of the whole person as a resource is essential in Danfoss' recruitment campaign (2007). Whole persons at work are employees who bring their desires and beliefs, their private, non-working selves into the workplace by engaging passionately in the task at hand and by putting a personal touch on the work process (Danfoss, 2007). But there is also an interesting contradiction in the Danfoss ad that puts a twist on this logic. This is because there is an appeal for a convergence between the employee's inner self and the quest for organizational profit. However, there is also an appeal for the destabilisation of this convergence through the mobilisation of a notion of a life outside of the career, which is inherently advantageous to that career (Danfoss, 2007). You have to be a whole person at work. Nevertheless, in order to be so, you have to be *more than* the authentic person you are at work. This contradiction can be said to form the very dynamics of the call for authenticity. It is towards the logic of this contradiction that we will now turn with special reference to the concept of social machines.

## Desire and social machines?

Very crudely, the concept of social machines is employed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* to account for the ways in which the social is related to desire and how we become subjects in this very process. The critical aim of *Anti-Oedipus* can be understood as starting with the assumption that 'nothing ever starts in an individual subject' (Due, 2007: 87). In *Anti-Oedipus* this discussion of social machines is raised through a theoretical linkage between psychoanalysis and its interest in desire and Marxism and its interest in the effects of social infrastructure (Buchanan, 2008). In fact the inaugural thesis in *Anti-Oedipus* is that desire directly invests the social field and that the social reproduces investments of desire.

Such a thesis, as Buchanan (39) points out, demands two accomplishments. First of all, it accomplishes the introduction of the concept of desire into our understanding of what constitutes and reproduces social order. As Deleuze and Guattari maintain:

There is no such thing as the social production of reality on the one hand, and a desiring-production that is mere fantasy on the other... . The social field is immediately invested by desire, that is the historically determined product of desire... . Even the most repressive and the most deadly forms of social reproduction are produced by desire within the organization that is the consequence of such production under various conditions that we must analyze. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983: 28-29)

Desire, in other words, is not reducible to a human need nor can it be solely subjective. It is a world-historical production-force that penetrates every aspect of the social without ends or aims. It is what connects and creates all aspects of the social, but also what breaks down and upsets the social. It is, as Surin puts it: 'desire, which is always collective and social, that makes the gun into a weapon of war, or sport, or hunting' (2005: 26).

This brings us to the second accomplishment: to introduce the concept of production into desire and thus remove the boundary between the natural and cultural. This latter point implies that desire might be the 'untranscendable force, which renders everything else immanent to it' (Buchanan, 2000: 15), but it is not a state of nature clearly marked off from the social and cultural. The investment of desire is not an authentic unbound force or 'an undifferentiated instinctual energy but itself results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1999: 215). This implies that the social is interwoven with our innermost desire to such a degree that we must understand the social infrastructure as something that intervenes directly in the ontological fabric of our life. Whatever we think is most personal or indeed authentic about us, namely our desire, is always, for Deleuze and Guattari, something already assembled within the social. We always invest our desire in the social, but in this investment desire becomes inscribed with different signs and regulated along different paths that code and categorize it. As Smith (1997) points out, desire is therefore always arranged and assembled in a social manner and can only be conceived and grasped as such.

This means, finally, that desire and the social are best understood as abstract elements that enter into different assemblages resulting in the production of concrete subjects.

What the concept of *social machine* designates is a certain repetition in such a production. If we are to understand all this in terms of power we must say that the main achievement of the social machine is therefore not that it represses desire but, rather, that it reproduces certain investments of desire.

Posing the question of social machines in terms of size is to misunderstand the way in which such machines work. We have to understand the social machine as a certain kind of system reference. Understood as a system reference, the term social machine is primarily interesting as a term, which designates social life as a series of interlocking, overlapping, discrete systems of reproduction. By constituting a surface of presuppositions of what it means to act, feel and think, a social machine is what, in a particular context, assembles desire (Deleuze and Guattari, 1999). That is to say, the machine produces a condition of possibility for discussing the relationship between the employee's and the stakes of the organization: it forms what it means to be an employee subject. It makes the desire that flows through the subject into a question of whether or not this desire is authentic, of whether they converge with the quest for profit. But, perhaps even more importantly, it always poses the question of whether the employee and the organization converges too much, thus standing in the way of new forms of investment of desire that can bring about new forms of convergence between the desire of the individual and the stakes of the organization.

Two features of social machines are of particular interest in this case:

*What kind of subject emerges in this social machine?* What is an authentic subject supposed to be like and act like in order to be an authentic employee? In the social machine of authenticity, the authentic subject is paradoxically a split subject as the employee is both expected to be a worker-monad and a worker-nomad.

*How is the relation between the employee's desire and the stakes of the organization constituted when authenticity is the organizing principle?* Here, as we will see, the very contradiction or split between a worker-monad and a worker-nomad is related together in their very contradiction. It is important to understand that the social machine is not solely what performs the role of controlling and internalizing certain demands on the employee. It is rather what sets up and tries to mediate the conflict between the demands of internalization of a certain ideal of authenticity (*being a worker-monad*) and the demands of the employee's being something more than the self that it currently expresses (*being a worker-nomad*). The very assumption that the employee can be authentic at work in this way acts as an organizing principle by posing itself as the very problem that has to be responded to. When a machine is said to work at the level of problems, then this is exactly because it outlines the problems at hand and feeds off the different solutions to a particular problem.

The social machine's ultimate power truly does not consist in dictating an answer but, rather, in posing both the question and the possible answer. In fact, it is this power to pose the problem that guarantees its dynamic character: when one horizon of solutions breaks down, it poses the problem anew. 'In order to function' social machines

*must... not function well...* The death of a social machine has never been heralded by a disharmony or a dysfunction; on the contrary, social machines make a habit of feeding on the

contradictions they give rise to, on the crises they provoke, on the anxieties they *engender*. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983: 151)

As we will see, the call for authenticity works through two contradictory machinic processes – one producing a worker-monad and the other a worker-nomad. These two processes are related through the very presupposition that authenticity is what has to be dealt with throughout: either as a question of the authentic self-expression converging or folding together with the organizational stakes *or* else as a question of how new forms of self-expression might look in the future.

The more critical aim of outlining such a social machine of authenticity is not to provide instructions or directives on how to overcome it but rather to invite experiments with it and openings into it. Indeed, a critique of the social machine of the call for authenticity can only be achieved by understanding and enhancing the processes we are immersed in when part of this call. Criticism, then, is not performed by construing machines as entities which we then critique. Critique is rather a matter of intensifying certain aspects of the machines, not in an attempt to escape them, but rather in an attempt to make their effects take flight. It is never a matter of finding a way out of the machine but rather always a matter of unfolding the machines that are already at work. Exposing and dealing with these machines always takes place through an act of creation that intensifies and magnifies their fits and starts. We do not know in advance what we are and are not capable of as authentic employees and we do not know where the different assemblages of desire that animate the machine of authenticity might bring us. Precisely because of this, we must first of all enter into the machine in order to find out. With this in mind let us now turn to the social machine as it grinds away. With the Danfoss ad as the point of reference we will first look into the machine as it produces the employee as a 'worker-monad' – an employee who's individual substance converges with the interests of the organization. Then we will see how it at the very same time also produces the employee as a worker-nomad – an employee who is always something more than this convergence.

## The first process of the social machine of authenticity

Danfoss's slogan is 'making modern living possible', a slogan that also seems important for the way Danfoss sees its employees, at least when it comes to the recruitment campaign: 'A career is nothing without a personal life' (2007). We find this statement wherever we find Danfoss (2007) looking for people they might hire. Likewise, on Danfoss' homepage, we hear the following:

Life consists of much more than a job. We want it all. To have a career. To live a meaningful life where we can make a difference. To feel whole as individuals and pursue our ambitions to create our own unique lifestyle. The possibility to live a full life, in balance with the demands of work, is something you will meet no matter where you look in our company. This is because we believe that our success is made possible by employees who take personal responsibility to reach both their own and the company's targets. (Danfoss, 2010)

The importance of a personal and authentic touch to the organization, career and life as such, is clearly indicated in the Danfoss statements. Personal responsibility is, according to Danfoss, important as a means of achieving organizational targets. Personal

responsibility is also crucial as a means of employees feeling whole and pursuing their ambitions and just being themselves. What this implies is what Lazzarato (2004) calls a 'folding' together of the stakes of the organization and the desire of the individual within the individual itself. This creates a situation where the employee's individuality must be affirmed while the employee must simultaneously adhere to the interests of the organization (ibid.). As Lazzarato has suggested, such a relationship is perhaps best described as monadic because

the relationship of the individual with his/her activity tends to become a monad, a totality in itself... this relationship is no longer seen, at first sight, as a fraction, functionally determined, of the organic division of labor. It becomes global on its own account. (193)

The organizations' stakes (profit-hunting, minimizing cost, finding new and more efficient ways of producing) are here no longer applied through rules as in the case of Taylorism and Fordism. The organization itself becomes an abstraction, which must be reconstituted through the employees themselves. The authentic employee is a worker-monad, then, as it must internalize the different stakes of the organization but express them in an individual way so that they might have concrete meaning and result in an impact.

### *The authentic employee as a worker monad*

For the employee to become this monad a certain folding must take place between the individual and his or her working activity. As Lazzarato puts it, one of the truisms in many liberal workplaces today is that the employee must have autonomy to conduct its work, that is, 'having his/her own autonomy, responsibility, power of initiative and decision towards a client' (2004: 194). However, from a managerial perspective, in order for autonomy and the personal touch to manifest, the employee must do his or her work with respect to the overall organizational stakes. As Danfoss (2010) also indicates when claiming that their success relies on 'employees who take personal responsibility to reach both their own and the company's target'. Such targets are most often assigned from above through different mission statements, corporate core values or performance goals (Costea et al., 2007) but their impact is said to rely on the way the individual employees themselves condense, express, and reform such statements, values and goals within their daily work (Lazzarato, 2004).

This first machinic process in the call for authenticity reaffirms what we already know from the works of authors such as Kunda (1992), Costea et al. (2007) and Fleming (2009): if more and more work in the organization depends on the subjectivity of the employee then employees must *internalize* organizational stakes within them and do so willingly. As a manager from Kunda's study of the 'Tech' engineering firm states:

'Power plays don't work. You can't make'em do anything. They have to want to. So you have to work through the culture. The idea is to educate people without them knowing it. Have the religion and not know how they ever got it!' (Kunda, 1992: 5)

Be it through various ceremonies and manuals on corporate culture (Kunda, 1992) or through any other such therapeutic procedures such as coaching and performance management (Costea et al., 2007), the goal is the same: to tap into the thoughts, feelings, mindsets and gut reactions of employees (Kunda, 1992: 7) in the effort to

assure that employees 'take personal responsibility to reach both their own and the company's targets' (Danfoss, 2010).

*Folding the desire of the organization into the desire of the employee*

This machinic process, in short, works by creating and recreating what Costea et al. (2007: 250) call a context that distributes an 'opportunity and an obligation to self-express and self-explore' but also a 'platform for continuous (self)-monitoring'. Or, to put it in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari (1999: 129), this kind of machinic process works on the basis of a split between a subject of enunciation and a subject of statement. A subject, in other words, which expresses its inner mental reality on the one hand, and a subject which becomes conscious of itself and its choices through a social reality on the other.

The important thing in understanding the call for authenticity is that this machine produces the employee as a self that could be authentic before it tries to colonize this self through different internalization efforts. In short, the machine not only taps into the authentic subject – it also produces the authentic subject as that which is to be tapped into. So before it imposes something like the call for authenticity, first of all it produces authenticity as a problem that has to do with employees expressing themselves at work. The machinic process installs the employee as *a subject of enunciation*, a subject, which is capable of expressing its inner core. But this authentic subject is only the endpoint of a process in so far as the expressions are folded over by statements and modes of expression through which the subjects are expected to evaluate their self-expression (see also Lazzarato, 2006). They are, in short, also a *subject of statement*, a subject which monitors itself rather than just expresses itself.

The drive for employees' personal expressions, their authentic feelings, dreams and thoughts, their mental reality so to speak, is always folded over by a reality of social meaning, which regulates the various ways in which the employee relates to his or her own self-expression. We might describe this process as a machine of subjectification (Deleuze and Guattari, 1999, Lazzarato, 2006) that works by assigning recognizable predicates to the employees: these are your dreams, aspirations, passions and thoughts as they are categorized, measured and made permissible in terms of the corporate culture or performance goals. The machine does not determine how the subject of enunciation should become a subject of statement. It rather defines a grid that delimits the range of choices that can be made. It outlines which kinds of relations are plausible when the subject of enunciation, as Goodchild explains it, 'forms its consciousness of itself out of the statements which it is able to make as a subject of a statement' (1996: 148).

So for the employee to become a worker-monad the employee must first of all be constituted as what Lazzarato calls 'the absolute and individual cause and origin of its expressions, its words, its affects' (2006: 2). As the Danfoss (2010) webpage makes clear, taking personal responsibility for company targets requires that the employees 'feel whole as individuals' and 'pursue' their 'ambitions to create' their 'own unique lifestyle'.

The worker-monad is, in other words, only truly productive for the organization if the employee is first of all the subject of its own enunciations. Only if this authentic self, this unique individual, is in place can the machine set up a series of codified statements that outline and categorize the organizational stakes. Here the employee is confronted with various statements and signs from a corporate reality through cultural manuals, performance goals or the recruitment ad that are imposed upon the employee. This is done so as to make the employee as subject of enunciation into a subject that is bound to these statements in such a way that 'The subject of enunciation recoils into the subject of the statement, to the point that the subject of the statement resupplies a subject of enunciation for another proceeding' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1999: 129).

In this way the worker-monad is exactly what emerges in this folding together of the employee as a subject of enunciation and the employee as a subject of statement. All of this, as Lazzarato explains, makes the worker-monad the effect of both:

On the one hand, the individual brings the subjectivation process to its pinnacle, because in all these activities s/he involves the 'immaterial' and 'cognitive' resources of her/his 'self', while on the other, s/he inclines towards identification, subjectivation and exploitation, given that s/he is both her/his own master and slave, a capitalist and a proletarian, the subject of enunciation and the subject of the statement. (Lazzarato, 2006)

The effect of this seems to be that the more you invest of yourself as an employee in the world of the organization the better the result. Or, in the language of the Danfoss webpage (2010), if you find your unique lifestyle in the organization you also become empowered to take responsibility for the company's targets. But what we also see in the Danfoss (2007) ad is an indication of the fact that this process of overlaying the employee's so-called authentic self with a social reality must keep its dynamic nature if the authentic self is to keep retreating into the world of the organization. A life not lived in conformity with what the organization demands in its current situation is needed in order for new resources and inspirations to enter into the organization and thereby help to meet the challenges of the future organization (what is profitable, productive and cost-reducing in the world of tomorrow). What we have, then, is not only a division but a dynamic tension between the two subjects. This tension is necessary if the subject of enunciation and the subject of statement are to retreat and fold themselves into one another again and again. There must be something in the authentic self (the subject of enunciation) that is not yet actualized and categorised in fixed terms and statements in order for it to remain authentic. There must be a potential that can guarantee that the authentic self recoils once again into the reality of the organization and transforms this reality to make it more suitable for the economic challenges ahead.

## **The second process of the social machine of authenticity**

The Danfoss ad makes clear that being true to oneself and creating results in the long run demands a personal life outside of one's working identity. To bring passion and a personal touch to work requires having a life outside of work. In fact, the ad's headline suggests that this life is not just a resource for your success at work – it is a requirement (Danfoss, 2007). What the ad suggests, then, is that Danfoss's employees must be true to themselves to add value and create results, i.e. they must be and express themselves

as whole persons to reach their potential as good employees. But expressing yourself at work also demands that you are more than what you are currently expressing in the organizational setting. Good employees 'have a life' and are 'more' than their working selves; it is this life outside of work that makes the employee a good employee in the first place. This 'life' can be something that revitalizes the employee; it can also be something that develops him or her in ways that might at some point in time become productive for the organization. A career at Danfoss is only a career if it is built on a personal life. What you do outside of work, what you have done in the past and what you might do in the future: the experiences you accumulated and will accumulate, the interests you have and will have, the developments you have undergone and will undergo – this is the stuff which makes you a better *worker*. Everything that makes you a specific human being with your own singular biography and potentiality, this is the material out of which the Danfoss employee draws its strength (Danfoss, 2007). To be a whole person or authentic self at work is not just about bringing your personal touch to work but also about having a life outside work.

This appeal to more than what you are here and now at work, this call for making room for an uncategorized sphere of existence from where the 'life you lead while not at the work can help provide you with the strength needed to create results' (Danfoss, 2007) brings us to the second process in the call for authenticity. This process does not work by assigning the categories through which the employee-subject should express itself. Rather, it mobilizes an uncategorized sphere from which the employee-subject can emerge in new forms.

*A 'zone of neighbourhood' between the desire of the organization and the employee*

With its focus on social subjectification that objectifies the expressions of the authentic employee into a certain dominant world of meaning or corporate ideology, the first machine's logic is a variant of what Kunda (1992) calls normative control or perhaps even what Fleming (2009) calls neo-normative control. But with this second machine something else permeates the social subjectification. For social subjectification can only gain from tapping into the life of the employee if its production of subjectivity does not close in on either a particular employee's self-expression (mental reality of the subject of enunciation) or else a fully fleshed out and categorized corporate world (dominant reality of the subject of statement). Instead, these two realities are folded together.

This second process of the social machine of authenticity does not work by enfolding and enclosing the production of subjectivity within a certain individualized subjectivity as the first machinic process did. Rather it tries to pry open the individuated dimension of the employee's authentic subjectivity to access the surplus from which subjectivity springs, all the while regulating and directing it towards what might be productive for the corporation. The social stratification of the employees' self-expression no longer works in an effort to inscribe the employee's subjectivity into the dominant reality of the organization. Instead, it works by activating and putting into motion new forms of self-expression. In other words, an organizational stake is formulated through an utterance such as 'a career is nothing without a personal life' and this stake no longer directs itself towards folding the authentic self with the dominant corporate reality in



the effort to produce a particular self-image or self-expression. It works through the possibility of a future subjectivation of the employee by invoking a non-working self as a not yet actualized surplus for further folds. Where the first process of the machinery *assigns* the subjectivity with fixed predicates, this part of the machine *accelerates* the further production of subjectivity; new ways of being a subject of enunciation.

An indication of this acceleration is exactly what we see when employees at Danfoss (2007) are asked to separate the spheres of life and work *only in so far as* this discernment will potentially contribute to the enhancement of their career. This is rather paradoxical. The individual career includes the whole life of the employees; however, this career should also be set off from some parts of the employees' lives, at least for the time being. The employees should have a life outside of their career. The career is then only of value if it can be recognized as something authentic and personal. Indeed, it is the person's individual biography and experience that are recognized as beneficial for both the organization and the employee. What is 'outside' or 'more than work' is therefore exactly the personal or individual resource for good performance, i.e. what makes this particular employee unique and authentic.

Instead of an enfolding of the organizational stakes into the self-expressive authentic self, what we have with this appeal for an outside is what Deleuze and Guattari call a 'zone of neighbourhood' (1994: 18) between an employee-subject still in becoming (the experiences made and not yet made outside of work) and the abstract stakes of the organization (turning a profit, cost minimization etc.). This notion of zone refers to a domain where two aspects, A and B, enter into a relationship where they remain distinct but there is something undecided between them that forms a zone of AB, that neither belong to A or B. This zone makes A and B exchange features in ways that make it hard to discern where one ends and another begins, not because they lose their distinction and become blurred but rather because the distinction between them keeps changing. Rather than a convergence or fold between the pursuit of profit and the authentic desire of the employee, what is of interest in the call for authenticity in this second machinic process is the potential surplus, the not yet fully decided and determined exchange of features between an employee-subject still in becoming (new ways of expressing oneself) and the abstract stakes of the organization (new ways of turning a profit).

This function of this machine, then, is best described as that which connects the fragile and fragmented elements that mobilize the subject of enunciation and the subject of the statement. Therefore, we might describe this process as what Lazzarato (following Deleuze and Guattari) calls 'machinic enslavement', which is not 'the same thing as social subjection. If the latter appeals to the molar, individuated dimension of a subjectivity [the subject of enunciation as it is folded into a social reality], the former activates its molecular, pre-individual, pre-verbal, pre-social dimension' (Lazzarato, 2006).

In our case what the second machinic process, with its emphasis on the molecular zone, tells us is that the alignment of the organizational stakes and the authentic self that the first machinic process, with its social subjection, brings about must *never* dissolve the molecular zone from where the subject of enunciation emerges. Activating the molecular zone of exchange between the 'subject in becoming' and the abstract stakes

of the organization is what guarantees that the subject of the statement and the subject of enunciation keep recoiling into one another in new ways.

### *The authentic employee as a worker-nomad*

In the very call for authenticity, the first machinic process's constitution of the worker-monad is thus countered by a process that does not control the reactions and self-understandings of individuals by outlining the corporate world wherein they express themselves but rather focuses upon conditioning the development of employee subjectivity indirectly. As in the case of Danfoss, what is mobilized and tapped into is that which is not yet in the service of the company's overall vision of 'making modern living possible'. What is incited is a nomadic trait. That is, the authentic employee is not just a monad expressing the world of the organization in a singular way – it is also a nomad always looking for new ways of expressing these convergences between the employee and the organization.

The employee, like the nomad, must first of all change with the seasons. Employees must be on the move, change themselves over time with the challenges they meet. When one way of doing things no longer provides passion and profit, new expressions must be explored. The employee must be able to move the level of commitment and involvement from one task or project to the next. In fact, for the employee to be him- or herself in this process, it must always be able not only to perform, but indeed enjoy this act of transgression (see also Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 122). To be authentic is consequently not just a matter of looking inwards, but a question of testing and expanding the current borders of the self. As the Danfoss (2010) ad puts it, the aim is 'to feel whole as an individual and to pursue our ambitions to create our own unique lifestyle'. The employee must broaden his or her potential human capacity to make a difference in his or her job.

Secondly, the employee, like the nomad, inhabits many different spheres. Being an efficient employee demands that you are more than an employee. Having a life outside work becomes a resource when doing work, not only because of the revitalizing function of having a family, a hobby, or doing sports but because having these non-work activities develops competences and experiences that might help create organizational results. It is the lived life of the employee, including its different spheres, that is of importance for meeting the stakes of the organization. As Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 112) also argue, the employee of today should not only commit his or her blood, heart, and soul to one kind of activity, but also possess and express the ability to move on to new activities:

He is mobile. Nothing must hamper his movements. He is a 'nomad'. In this sense, all the sacrifices that are made have the effect of enhancing the streamlined character of entities – of persons, but also of things – in order to favour their reorganization when the next project comes along. (ibid.: 122)

The employee must be nomadic because this is what ensures a lasting way for employees to incite and manage the coordination at work via the use of their own capacities. So the machine outlined here works by making room for these not yet organized desires, thoughts and actions while also outlining the components for the

authentic employee-subject. This machinic system does not work directly by blurring the work/non-work distinction but rather indirectly by mobilizing the subject the employee might become by constantly reorganizing the distinction. It demands that the distinction is dislocated and displaced anew. The social machine in the call for authenticity is therefore not just a call for being yourself at work in the sense of finding that immobile part which can constitute a core in your self-expression. It is also a call for constantly modifying what this immobile part is. Being yourself at work is never attained but must be expressed again and again for it to add value to the organization.

## Implications

The social machine works by realigning these two machinic processes. Either there is too little authenticity when the first machinic process takes control or too much authenticity when the second machinic process takes control. By combining and levelling out these two machinic processes the call for authenticity makes authenticity the presupposition of what it means to be a productive employee, a presupposition that posits itself as the condition (being authentic at work and outside work) of the set of interests (working and making a profit) we in fact should desire.

The social machine of authenticity, in other words, determines whatever interests are at play. It forms the very problematic that surrounds the investment of desire into a question concerning the employees' desire to self-express and the organization's desire to outline the social categories wherein these self-expressions are understood and made conscious. So the social machine not only performs a repressive role (how is self-expression to be understood and which forms are permissible) it also distributes what is to be considered repressed (the authentic, self-expressing self). It is, therefore, in the very dialectic between two such instances of repression and repressed that a social machine operates. Stated otherwise, the seeming contradiction between being a worker-monad and a worker-nomad is part of a process where the social machine of authenticity outlines both what is restricted (self-expressions – the subject of enunciation), the restriction (the organizational stakes determining how self-expressions are understood – the subject of statement) and the transgression of this restriction (the mobilization of a zone of neighborhood that ceaselessly demands a re-articulation of the fold between the subject of enunciation and the subject of statement).

The real power of this social machine, in short, consists in making something as trivial as everyday decisions about work-tasks, and something as abstract as what turns a profit now and in the future, into a question of whether or not employees are authentic. It construes, first of all, the very presupposition of what it means to think about, act upon and feel about work: 'does work allow me to just be myself?'. Secondly, it construes what gets in the way of these thoughts, actions and feelings: 'what are the different kinds of organizational demands that get in the way of me being fully authentic at work?'. And finally it outlines how to solve this problem: being someone more than who and what you are at work becomes a condition for being yourself at work. In this way the machine converts problems at work (such as 'is this the best way to do the task?', 'which task is most important?' and 'is this task adding value to the organization?') into matters of an existential nature that have to be solved by the

employee-subject by looking deeper into itself and its life (such as 'is this because I am not good enough at my job?', 'Is this really what I want?', 'Should I find another job? Or get a new hobby?').

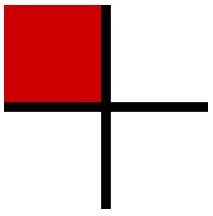
This is perhaps also the immediate danger of the machine at work in the call for authenticity. It presents any drop in productivity, creativity and passion for work as an existential issue concerning authenticity that can only be handled by the employees themselves. It treats potential problems with productivity as a question of authenticity. After all, a career is nothing without a personal life.

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## Authenticating the inauthentic

Anne Elizabeth Moore

In recent years, much of our economy – and now, almost the entirety of our global media – has come to rest on a public display of authenticity: ads that bemoan the notion of the sales pitch, heartfelt apologies by perpetrators of large-scale bank frauds or environmental disasters that run on the evening news, and the possibility that our own financial worries may cease when we are made the stars of our own reality television programs. These are all common aspects of modern life. Such transactions – for there is an economic side to each and every one of them – rely on the feeling that we’ve finally broken through commercialization and emotional manipulation and found truth, but are in fact part of a decades-old project that aims to engage us in individual relationships for the profit of others, eliminating in their implementation a concern for our neighbours or social situation at large.

If this seems like a bastardized notion of authenticity, it is important to note that there are multiple definitions of the term. One, sure, means original, genuine, or true, as in when something can be *authenticated*. It is when something conforms, thoroughly, to original means of production, and uses specific outlined materials. The other is slightly more complex: a reconstruction, a good-enough fake, a production that, because it aims to replicate an original, is deserving of acceptance or belief. In this way, Peruvian restaurants that are not in Peru are authentic; reproductions of Shaker furniture, as well.

That one of our most significant driving cultural forces of the last five years can imply both ‘truth’ and the intentional falsities that confirm personal belief systems known as ‘truthiness’ should appal. But it probably won’t.<sup>1</sup>

The newest communication systems, that in the US at least are rapidly replacing the old-fashioned telephone and even more old-fashioned meeting – YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, blogs and comment streams – also rely on a desire for authenticity. We join them enthusiastically, bolstered by the notion that we, ourselves, might communicate directly with Kanye West, Susan Orlean, Karl Rove, or Margaret Cho. Social media feels authentic because we make it ourselves. Moreover we do so unhindered by fact-checkers, editors, and publishers, and use it, more often than not, to convey our own

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1 Truthiness refers to a veracity rooted in a personal and emotional sense of rectitude or justice, not necessarily verifiable by third parties.

thoughts and feelings to each other in the course of a day. The ease of use allows us to forget that a business plan stands behind the design of these tools, and that algorithms often trigger the tagging of these minor events: as adult, as inappropriate, as terrorist. The experience of social media is made even more authentic by the presence of real-life stars. They provide opinions about the events of the day, or more likely their feelings, and this becomes a reasonable stand-in for a pool of facts from which we could draw our own conclusions.

In theory, this is a two-way system, as, we like to keep in mind, television was when invented. We can tell Susan or Karl what we're up to, too, because the myth of social media is that it hinges on one-to-one relationships between individuals. Defenders of social media believe this to be democracy, and use it as a talking point when the death of journalism is decried, or further frustrations with an ever-consolidating media system are voiced. Yet somehow, however authentic Kanye or Cho – or whoever updates their Twitter feeds – may seem, the sales pitch slips in anyway. Possibly emergent from our media darlings' too-frequent elbow-rubbings with ad pitchmen, the supposedly authentic reactions of a Karl Rove to his big-brand morning latte do not strike us as objectionable. Neither do we protest reality television, which through an extensive editing process, is underscoring the emotions of the players in a way that would be ludicrous to call real, but that perhaps we still think of as authentic.

It's part and parcel of the new authenticity – the popular version that conforms more to the second definition above than the first, the definition that vacillates, in sense, between 'factually verifiable by outside sources' and 'close enough'. For communications, both public and private, authenticity is being heralded as the mode à la mode. A 2008 *Ad Age* article sums up the argument for the new authenticity, cleverly colluding the governmental and big business drive toward convincing people to buy in:

Founding fathers start company (er, country) out of the back of a garage. Concept is brilliant in its simplicity – built on just a few key principles. Company grows slowly at first then has key innovation (say, the industrial age) that fuels major growth. Everyone who is part of it, loves it. Everyone who's not, wants to buy its goods. Company staves off a few big competitors (fascism? Soviet Union?) and gets really large and successful. So large and successful that in time, people look back and say "how did we get here?" And "what were those founding principles again?" When 81% of the people say America is headed in the wrong direction, we're a brand that just doesn't know who it is anymore. . . The best brands (and countries) today have street cred – some kind of soul rooted in something real and authentic. But cred doesn't come without a thorough understanding of the nuance of the true believer. Because whatever the field, true believers are the ones that define its authenticity. (Welch, 2008)

As I write in my 2007 book *Unmarketable*, this recent move toward authenticity is best exemplified by the 2004 invention of ad firm Saatchi and Saatchi's Kevin Roberts: Lovemarks. Lovemarks is a theory, a book, and, in a sense, a brand, but what it claims to be is an irresistible combination of mystery, sensuality and intimacy, that hinges on customers' perception of the trustworthiness of and emotional connection to a given good or service. Lovemarks is a theory about why we buy, and a way to get us to buy more. And it's owned by Kevin Roberts. True, countless others at various levels of advertising, marketing, media and government seem to have arrived at the same conclusion at roughly the same time – that no one believes either advertisers or politicians anymore. Yet this hasn't been taken as a signal to fundamentally change

either commercial methods or governmental policies. It's been taken as a signal to change their method of delivery. Roberts' unique attempts to brand this post-branding ethos – with books, lecture tours, online videos, and a social-media infused website – make it an irresistible case study of the elements of the new authenticity.

Clearly, social media is key, and becoming increasingly significant as print media declines in the US. (As I trace in *Unmarketable*, the drive toward regaining trust and increasing profit that underscores the plea for authenticity isn't limited to online social media, but any media that exists primarily as a means of communication among small social networks, such as zines, comics, graffiti, and pirate radio. The volume of these have decreased so dramatically in recent years, however, it's become very difficult to generalize about them.) This is because media that does not emanate from a solitary source passes horizontally from peer to peer and is not already pre-tainted with the foul whiff of advertising. The move toward authenticity, however publicly undertaken, is still a genuine one. That is, Lovemarks strives to connect itself emotionally to the concept of authenticity, but it also urges a more genuine one-on-one connection between brand managers, corporate decision-makers, and would-be consumers. It *is* authentic.

What is tricky, however, is that the desire to both seem to and to actually become more authentic isn't rooted in concern for bettering product, improving customer relations, or lessening environmental impact. Increased accountability, heightened transparency, and greater fiscal responsibility are similarly out. What's in is profit.

For this, of course, is about money. As Roberts told Douglas Rushkoff on *Frontline* in 2004, companies that adopt his Lovemarks approach 'are going to be the brands where the premium profits lie' (Roberts, 2004). In fact, he does not promise that Lovemarks will connect a brand to a desirable human quality. No, their purpose is to inspire a subhuman response, or what Roberts calls 'loyalty beyond reason' (this is the tagline of the term Lovemarks). Brands create identities we meld with our own, and thus a spending based on justification, a weighing of options, a conscious decision to adopt a certain brand identity. This, to Roberts, is a waste of time. Lovemarks, on the other hand, intend to instill a reason-free impulse toward a certain consumable good or service. Without hesitation, thought, or justification, Lovemarks intend to exploit your trust, for profit.

So Lovemarks create a sense of authenticity only within the pre-established field of consumerism. Vacillations of meaning within the term authenticity – from 'real' to 'real-seeming' – allow this moniker to stand, unmolested. Still, authenticity, put on display for purposes of proving authenticity, in order to establish a relationship of trust on which to build a more stable and long-lasting relationship of commerce, can only ever be an authentic expression of unauthenticable authenticity. The new authenticity, therefore, is an entirely stable structure, as long as we don't investigate its foundation.

Yet, however satiated we feel by the assurance that BP feels bad or that Margaret Cho really loves the band Girl in a Coma or that the Chrysler corporation understands our pain during this economic crisis and is lowering car prices because of it – or that Obama hears our concerns about the war in Afghanistan because he posted something about it

on the White House Facebook page – the fact is that no more third-party information is available now to the general public than it was a few years ago. In fact, there is significantly less. We do not, in fact, have any more information with which to gauge authenticity except that which has emanated from the same sources who strive to be perceived as authentic.

Our methods of receiving information, of course, have changed in recent years, but the actual sources of third-party information has, essentially, not. The *New York Times*, BBC, CNN, and MSN all made the top five in Technorati's March 2009 Attention Index, which lists the sites bloggers link to most frequently. The top 15 includes *Time*, *Washington Post*, the *Guardian*, and the *Wall Street Journal* ( – Oh, but the top linked-to site? Youtube.com. 'Cause, *dude, did you see the Daily Show last night? I totally transcribed it word for word on my blog* just doesn't cut it anymore.) (see Rao, 2009). At the same time as these same newsrooms are cutting staff, desks, and bureaus like it's going out of style. Who rushes to fill the void of such third-party information as one of the parties falls silent? One of the remaining parties, of course.

Which means something. We may *feel* better informed, more individually cared for, and more authenticated as members of our society, but the quality of available information about the products we purchase and the services we make use of: these are not necessarily improving. And rapidly dwindling governmental approval ratings in Germany and the US, citizen uprisings in Greece and South Africa, and rising unemployment and numbers of student protests across the globe means we don't feel our lives are, either. That is to say, we might be striving as a culture for greater authenticity, but our ability to authenticate anything at all has been cut quite short.

Unfortunately, we've seen in recent years that public devotion to well-branded worldviews supplants a desire for journalism, for facts, taking up space that could otherwise be spent exploring other curious avenues or, say, talking to our neighbours about their concerns. Although this has sounded alarms for many inside and outside media activism spheres, few arguments have been constructed that cannot be deflated with the question 'What exactly is your problem with Margaret Cho?' And the bottom line is, most of us don't have one.

The recent shift in media strategies to rely on the public display of authenticity is most visibly at work in the invention of 'embedded journalism' in the beginning of the most recent US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This mode of conveying information – opinion-inclusive and directly from an affected source – is a model of authenticity: Genuine, intimately shared (with you, the viewers, and thousands if not hundreds of thousands of other viewers), and wholly unverified by outside sources.

In essence, it is privatized. That no outside information usually impedes on the embedded journalists' report – no third-party fact-checking of the kind formerly prized in journalism. When the term 'privatization' is used today, it is believed universally to refer to business dealings. Of course, really, it does: Privatization is the process of transferring ownership of a resource from the public sector – the government – to the private – a business. A 1959 report released by the Pentagon, however, entitled



‘Psychological Operations: Cambodia’, contains an entirely different definition of the term ‘privatization’. One that melds most cunningly with the new authenticity.

When released, the Pentagon report intended to describe various social groups in the impoverished nation, teasing out which may be resistant and which submissive to a potential US presence (Shawcross, 1979: 55). Largely dismissive of the socially organized farming society – as, I suppose, we expect the Pentagon to be – fear of ghosts, corruption, and a mistrust of technology were all listed as counts against the likelihood that an American presence would be clamoured for by the Cambodian people. (Probably wise on their part, too: only ten years later, a massive, secret US bombing campaign would kill shocking numbers of them.)

Still, the Pentagon argued, there were options. If it could not win the Cambodian people over, it could aid the process of privatization, defined here as promoting ‘the preoccupation of the individual with his personal rather than his social situation’ (Shawcross, 1979: 55). We are more likely to read this now as a side-effect of commercialization: that a gradual crumbling away of social concerns occurred as technology, products, and an American (read: globalized) concern for individuation began to preoccupy the minds of people in the process of becoming superconsumers. But, sure, there are parts of the world where that must have been – was, *is* – premeditated and rooted in governmental policy. Where commercialization is, in fact, a side-effect of privatization in the Pentagon’s sense of the word. Divide and conquer.

It is incontestable that Cambodia was traditionally organized around villages, small social groups that acted as support networks during times of famine or political unrest. Following the decade marked by American bombings and four years of Khmer Rouge rule – after which almost three million people were dead, and those who remained alive had been wrested from families, forced to remarry, or were simply too sick to be concerned about anything but their own survival – resistance to American imperialism was no longer a major concern. The country now uses the American dollar, and opened, in 2008, its first Kentucky Fried Chicken. Few political organizations or groups have the strength to respond to rampant corruption, land-use violations, domestic violence, or other concerns that haunt the bulk of the citizenry daily. In other words, the Pentagon’s intention to promote privatization in Cambodia seems to have worked quite well. Nor does the drive toward authenticity contradict in any way the individualism on which global capitalism stands.

But what is at stake in the drive toward authenticity isn’t quite so clear from the outset as all that. Writing about photography, Susan Sontag theorizes the existence of an idealized world, our world but better – the image-world. It is the world where we belong only once imaged, and it is imminently desirable to be there. It is predominantly imaginary, in that we conceive of it as a social body, and we can verify its importance only when others acknowledge it. Yet only individually can we ever access it: when photographed, recognized, by technology, as unique.

She writes:

It is common now for people to insist about their experience of a violent event in which they were caught up – a plane crash, a shoot-out, a terrorist bombing – that it ‘seemed like a movie.’ That is

said, other descriptions seeming insufficient, in order to explain how real it was. [People] seek to have their photographs taken – feel that they are images, and are made real by photographs. (Sontag, 1973: 161)

The obvious question that arises is, ‘What *does* it take to make you feel real?’ The question is ridiculous at its face, the only logical response to whatever answer you might give being, ‘if *anything*, then what is your problem?’

Yet, identifying reality as something outside of lived experience is a common problem, especially now that we live not so much in an image world as in a thoroughly branded one – whether with Obama’s Hope or Pepsi’s. The image-world, an all-visual imaginary, is still a tad less hyper-real than the playground of brands we buy into in order to go about our daily lives. For in its ideal state, branding isn’t the physical marking on the cow so much as it is the awareness that the cow belongs somewhere in particular. Branding is primarily an emotional project, but an emotional project rooted in the logic of possession.

When I pose the question to my students, ‘What does it take to make you feel real?’ they respond, at first, properly: they know that as critical thinkers, an elite corps of creative minds, they are obligated to provide answers like ‘organic food’, ‘crying’, ‘sex’, or ‘talking to my mom’. Yet I often then reframe the question, because ‘feeling real’ has certain connotations, a hippie vibe, that imply a bodily sensation that does not entirely get at what Sontag means. So I present it to them in less didactic terms. ‘When do you feel validated as a participant in our society?’ They do not realize it at first, but their answers come as a string of technological innovations, mass communications devices, trademarked names. ‘When I make the news’, one said. ‘When people “like” my Facebook status’, another suggested.

We come at the matter from another angle again. ‘How many of you have cell phones?’ I ask. ‘How many, televisions? How many, MySpace pages? Twitter accounts? And which of these are you willing to give up, if you have them?’ ‘None’, is the answer. The explanation being: Because then we wouldn’t be participants in our culture. Because then we wouldn’t *feel real*.

So the sense of authenticity as genuine, as true, is carved out from both sides: When employed by media, PR, and advertising, it is set upon a shaky foundation that aims to support, eventually and only, commerce. Authenticity becomes perceptible to us, as individuals, only when verified through certain popular but mediated technologies that have come, more and more, to define communication. Not the communications *industry* anymore, mind you – communication *itself*.

‘Our era does not prefer images to real things out of perversity but partly in response to the ways in which the notion of what is real has been progressively complicated and weakened’, Sontag explains (1973: 160). This is doubly clear now, and could be stated thus: Our era does not prefer authenticity over reality out of perversity, but partly in response to the ways in which we are given to understand that the latter is just as good as the former.

‘A capitalist society requires a culture based on images’, Sontag (1973: 178) underscores, by way of explaining the social drive to live in the image-world. It is similarly more evident now than ever, when questioning the social drive to live in a world in which all territories are prepossessed and all actions profit others – our branded world.

But Sontag’s statement opens up a disturbing path of inquiry: what sort of society requires a culture based on believing available reproductions to be just as well for trying?

In an appendix to the published version of his play *Galileo*, Bertolt Brecht writes a treatise outlining five primary difficulties of honesty. (It is an updated version, for when it first appeared in print, he could find only three.) Still, ‘Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties’ provides an excellent dissection of pretenders to the throne of truth.

The difficulties, as Brecht sees them, are in short these: courage, keenness, skill, judgment, and cunning. Of these, only keenness concerns us. For it, Brecht claims, is necessary for discerning the truth in the first place, as distinguishable from a mere fact. The significant obstacle here is in ‘determining what truth is worth the telling’ (Brecht, 1966: 135). For example, he describes, ‘it is not untrue that chairs have seats and that rain falls downward’, but these are not ‘the truths that are worth writing about’ (1966: 136).

A current commercial describes an exciting revelation in mattress technology, which uses ‘authentic Swedish material’. Rick Bayless, born in Oklahoma City in the United States, first became known for his 1987 cookbook, *Authentic Mexican* (Bayless, 1987). Authentic Foods is a company that manufactures wheat and gluten-free food products. And authenticity.net is a marketing website with extensive theories, complicated processes, and heavy fees through which genuine relationships with your customers can, eventually, be achieved.

These are all accurate (enough) uses of the word ‘authentic’. But using a keenness inspired by Brecht’s demand for it, it’s clear that they still do not matter. However factual it may be that bits of your mattress, at some point, came from Sweden, or that no aspects of your Authentic Food is unprocessed (read: ‘natural’), what Brecht calls for is actionable information. ‘The kind of presentation of truth’, he writes, ‘which will enable men to act on the basis of that presentation. People who merely record little facts are not able to arrange the things of this world so that they can be easily controlled’ (Brecht, 1966: 137).

Yet a definition of truth as rooted in action does not always align with a full accounting of facts. For example, Brecht advises, if a country such as Germany has gone awry – a subject very much of concern to Brecht in 1935 – it is possible to say so plainly by supplanting the word ‘Germany’ with the word ‘Austria’. ‘Many things that cannot be said in Germany about Germany can be said about Austria’ (Brecht, 1966: 143), he advises.

So in a treatise devoted exclusively to the sole significance of eradicating ‘truthiness’ so that truth itself may flourish, in fact there are limits to what truths might be useful,

concessions to the self-same powers that seek to limit truth. But Brecht's warning contains a far more salient point: that the sense of justice we experience from 'truthiness' we do not always glean from truth. Sometimes, what is true does not seem factual. Most of the time, what is true is not in any way authentic.

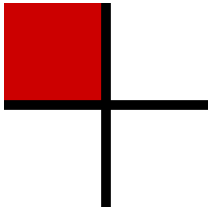
The truth is that authenticity allows for the vacillation between truthiness and mere fact that politicians and marketers have always been comfortable with. It privatizes our worldview, and, in allowing our individualized emotional response to command perceptions of honesty and genuineness, authenticity devalues the third-party fact-checker, the outside source, the village. It corresponds perfectly to the wan demands of a brand-obsessed culture, celebrity-driven media, and digital communications systems, creating a feedback loop where we no longer question why all interactions financially benefit others. Such questions do not feel real. In fact, we begin to wonder whether we should even ask them.

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## Liberalism and the governance of populations

Samuel Mansell

**review of:**

Michel Foucault (2008) *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the collège de France, 1978-1979*, trans. G. Burchell. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan. (HB: pp. 346, £20.99, ISBN 978-1-4039-8654-2)

*The birth of biopolitics* is the sixth instalment in the ongoing publication of the lectures given by Michel Foucault from 1971 to 1984 in his tenure as Professor of the History of Systems of Thought at the *Collège de France*. This volume is the first translation into English of the series of twelve lectures delivered from January to April 1979. It develops the theme of the previous year's lectures, of which an English translation was published in 2007 as *Security, territory, population* (see Foucault, 2007).

Foucault's objective in *The birth of biopolitics* is the historical exploration of the 'framework of political rationality' (317) in which 'biopolitics' becomes an issue for liberal governments. By 'biopolitics' he means 'the attempt, starting from the eighteenth century, to rationalize the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a set of living beings forming a population: health, hygiene, birthrate, life expectancy, race...' (ibid.). Foucault seeks to understand how 'liberalism', which is broadly 'concerned about respect for legal subjects and individual free enterprise', can take into account a 'population' (ibid.). For Foucault this appears as something of a paradox, as the 'technology of government' in which problems of life and population have been posed has 'constantly been haunted by the question of liberalism' (323-324). He aims to trace the development of liberalism to discover how the governance of populations has become a legitimate concern for liberal thought; in other words, how biopolitics can be made compatible with a liberal system of government.

Unfortunately, due to his concentration on the history of liberalism from its 18<sup>th</sup> century 'classical' form to 20<sup>th</sup> century neo-liberalism, Foucault says nothing else in this lecture series about 'biopolitics' specifically. The brief comments cited above are from his 'course summary' published after the conclusion of the lectures. As he puts it: 'This year's course ended up being devoted entirely to what should have been only its

introduction' (317). The reader might therefore be dissatisfied that the broad question these lectures purport to answer is never addressed here directly. Foucault anticipates frustration among his listeners, assuring them that 'in spite of everything, I really did intend to talk about biopolitics, and then, things being what they are, I have ended up talking at length, and maybe for too long, about neo-liberalism...' (185). It would be fair to say that these lectures are concerned rather with the gestation of biopolitics than with its birth.

If an explanation of how the governance of populations is consistent with liberal freedoms is not to be found here, what remains of interest is Foucault's attempt over twelve lectures to frame the question. An obvious way in which he might have approached the problem, but chose not to, is through conceptual analysis. His assertion that 'universals do not exist' (3) in the history of ideas suggests that an extensive analysis of the logical consistency of 'liberalism' and 'biopolitics' would have been contrary to his method. He insists on not using 'all those universals employed by... political philosophy in order to account for real governmental practice' (2) and sees liberalism 'not as a theory or ideology' but simply as 'a way of doing things... regulating itself by continuous reflection' (318). However, in the absence of any philosophical analysis of the key concepts of liberalism and biopolitics (based on stable definitions), one cannot see how Foucault could have known when his main question had been satisfactorily answered. His method appears to leave him unable to *identify* a system of government as liberal in the first place, and subsequently unable to assess the compatibility of biopolitics with the liberal ideas of that system. Given the range of perspectives from which liberalism was contested throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Foucault's assumption that a dominant governmental practice (i.e. biopolitics) must be consistent with liberalism begs an obvious question. Is biopolitics perhaps the effect of a *non-liberal* theory of government? Is liberalism actually the 'general framework of biopolitics' (22) as he claims, or are there more plausible candidates among the political ideas of Foucault's time? These elementary questions are left unconsidered in these lectures.

Foucault assumes that the governance of populations must be consistent with 'liberalism'. To show how this is the case he attempts to trace a two hundred year history of liberal practice from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present, with specific emphasis on German ordoliberalism and the neo-liberalism of the Chicago School. Despite his decision not to employ 'universals' he does use a consistent definition of liberalism around which his history takes a coherent shape. Liberalism is a practice of government which emerges in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and qualifies the early modern idea of *raison d'État* (or 'Reason of State') by proving that the 'self-limitation of governmental reason' (20) is the most effective means to a state's enrichment (102). Foucault takes great care in his opening lecture to distinguish liberalism from the theories of governmental practice predominant in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. These include the idea of *raison d'État*, in which a state establishing its independence from the Holy Roman Empire and Catholic Church was supposed to wield unlimited sovereign power in its own territory. In opposition to *raison d'État* a range of legal theories (including those of fundamental law, natural law and the social contract) are presented as external limitations to the power of the state. However, the new governmental reason Foucault calls 'liberalism' 'consists in establishing a principle of limitation that will not be extrinsic to the art of government,

as was law in the seventeenth century, but intrinsic to it: an internal regulation of governmental rationality' (10). Governments should constrain their power through an understanding of the most effective means for achieving their ends, rather than as a response to 'external' claims of legitimacy.

The principle of this internal regulation is 'economic truth' (22) understood as the effect of natural market processes, unimpeded by government, on utility and the wealth of the state. The free market is a 'site of veridiction' which must 'tell the truth' (32) and it is here that the science of political economy, of which Adam Smith's *The wealth of nations* is the most influential example, can show governments where the internal limitation of their activity lies. As Foucault puts it: 'Governmental reason will have to respect these limits inasmuch as it can calculate them on its own account in terms of its objectives and [the] best means of achieving them' (11). A government that ignores this limitation is not illegitimate, 'but simply a clumsy, inadequate government that does not do the proper thing' (10). As the market is now the site of truth and subject to the calculations of the political economists, the fundamental question of liberalism is 'the utility of a government in a regime where exchange determines the value of things' (47).

After providing his account of the emergence of liberalism, Foucault proceeds to discuss the rise of German 'ordoliberalism' following World War II. He gives a detailed historical account of the role of 'economic growth', through the market economy, in producing a legitimate state after the collapse of the Nazi regime. Whereas liberalism in its 'classical' (18<sup>th</sup> century) form argued that within a certain space market mechanisms should be left free from the interventions of a legitimate sovereign, in the Germany of the late 1940s and early 1950s the state itself has 'its real foundation in the existence and practice of economic freedom' (85-86). The market economy produces legitimacy for the new German state and enables 'the forgetting of history' (86).

Foucault is keen to distinguish this new form of liberalism from its classical forerunner. Market processes no longer work in opposition to state intervention but are the very source of the state's legitimacy and sovereignty. He describes a reciprocal relationship in which economic growth 'produces political sovereignty through the institution and institutional game that, precisely, makes this economy work' (84). It follows that neo-liberalism dissociates the market economy from the principle of *laissez-faire* supported by classical liberals (131). It instead embraces an 'active, vigilant, and intervening' liberal regime (133) which ensures that a competitive framework is enforced through active state policy, for example in preventing the formation of monopolies, and that social security is provided to those who cannot benefit from the market. This is broadly what is understood today as a 'social market economy'.

Foucault emphasises that government must act not on particular effects of the market economy (such as price levels) but instead must apply general principles to the *framework* of the market as a whole (140). He speaks of 'interventionism... as the condition enabling the formal mechanism of competition to function so that the regulation the competitive market must ensure can take place correctly...' (160). Furthermore, according to the 'Rule of law' or *Rechtsstaat*, this intervention must be framed by laws that limit the actions of the public authorities in advance (169). In other

words, the framework of the market is secured by the form of the law rather than by the sovereign will. This is an important political principle which has a dominant place in Hayek's (1944) *The road to serfdom*. Foucault's elucidation is particularly clear and impressive.

In the final lectures Foucault turns to the neo-liberalism of the Chicago School. He is careful to avoid the assumption that American neo-liberalism is a diffused version of German ordoliberalism, because 'the constant renewal of liberal politics' has been a constant in the history of the United States (193). And 20<sup>th</sup> century American neo-liberalism has features that distinguish it from the other forms of liberalism he has earlier spoken of. Unlike the opposition of the state and the market economy in classical liberalism, and the integration of the state and the economy in the 'economic constitution' (167) favoured by the ordoliberals, the Chicago school economists aim to apply economic analysis to the full range of social relationships. This is a complex undertaking which Foucault handles very well in these lectures. He speaks of an 'inversion of the relationships of the social to the economic' (240). American neo-liberalism involves generalising the economic form of the market 'throughout the social body and including the whole of the social system not usually conducted through or sanctioned by monetary exchanges' (243). Economists such as Gary Becker propose a model of *homo oeconomicus* in which the non-random responses of a person to changes in their environment can be studied by economic science. The broad scope of this approach allows economists to use 'the typical analyses of the market economy to decipher non-market relationships' (240) including what are typically called social phenomena such as an individual's relationship to his/her family, insurance and retirement, and even criminality.

Foucault spends some time discussing how the Chicago School neo-liberals use their model of *homo oeconomicus* to analyse criminality and 'human capital'. For the latter he presents the neo-liberal critique of the treatment of 'abstract' labour in classical and Marxist political economy. 'Abstraction' is not an effect of capitalism but of the economic theory being employed. The worker should not be seen as the object of supply and demand in the form of labour power but 'as an active economic subject' (223). From the worker's point of view, 'labor comprises a capital, that is to say, it [is] an ability, a skill: as they say: it is a "machine". On the other side it is an income, a wage, or rather, a set of wages... an earnings stream' (224). Every individual should therefore be seen as an *enterprise* with an interest in investing in his/her 'human capital'. As Foucault puts it: 'a society made up of enterprise-units... is at once the principle of decipherment linked to liberalism and its programming for the rationalisation of a society and an economy' (225). Foucault's treatment of these economic theories and their sociological implications is lucid and insightful, and justice cannot be done to it in this review.

The lecture series concludes with a discussion of the relevance for economic liberalism of Adam Ferguson's theory of 'civil society'. As a historical overview of liberal economics, and the political contexts in which its various strands have emerged, there is much that is valuable here. His analysis of the rise of ordoliberalism as a critique of Nazism, and the subsequent 'inflation' of this ideology to oppose Marxism, state socialism, Keynesianism, or any intervention in the free market process, is particularly



astute. His grasp of the sociological assumptions and implications of liberal economics, for example in his expounding of ‘human capital’, is often brilliantly intuitive and penetrating. However, what remains unanswered at the end of this series is whether Foucault’s exposition of ‘liberalism’ can be accepted as ‘the general framework of biopolitics’ (22). Earlier I questioned what seemed to be his *a priori* assumption that liberalism and biopolitics are consistent with one another. Even if this assumption is granted, and Foucault’s historical approach to the problem is an appropriate method, a major difficulty with the overall argument still exists. Namely, that the most serious challenge to biopolitics is posed by the strands of the liberal tradition that Foucault chooses not to consider in these lectures.

In his early lectures Foucault makes a clear distinction between, on the one hand, the concerns of natural right, natural law and the ‘social contract’ that constituted ‘external limitations’ to *raison d’État*, and, on the other, the internal ‘self-limitation of governmental reason’ characteristic of liberalism. He later acknowledges the importance of a ‘revolutionary’ theory of rights for liberalism, but argues: ‘The [system] that has been strong and has stood fast is, of course, the radical approach which tried to define the juridical limitation of public authorities in terms of governmental utility’ (43). He claims that this system characterises the history of European liberalism, and goes on to assert that ‘the problem of utility increasingly encompasses all the traditional problems of law’ (44). However, it can be argued that these ‘external limitations’ play a more significant role in liberal thought than Foucault allows for. To argue that they have largely been replaced by ‘internal’ considerations of ‘utility’ is highly misleading. To see this point one need only consider some of the major works of Anglophone liberal thought published in the decade preceding Foucault’s lectures. In his famous essay *Two concepts of liberty*, published in 1969, Isaiah Berlin considered Thomas Hobbes’s theory of a ‘free man’ in *Leviathan* to be the paradigmatic example of ‘negative liberty’ (Berlin, 2002: 170). John Rawls considered his *A theory of justice*, published in 1971, to be a continuation of the ‘social contract’ tradition of Locke, Rousseau and Kant (Rawls, 1999: 10). And Robert Nozick drew heavily on the natural rights theory of John Locke for his *Anarchy, state and utopia* (1974). These were highly influential works for liberal thought at the time of Foucault’s lectures (1979), yet in none is an understanding of ‘freedom’ or ‘liberty’ derived from calculations of utility.

Foucault’s conflation of liberalism with utilitarian free-market economics appears to lead him to problematic assumptions about the individual freedoms that he wants to reconcile with biopolitics. He says that ‘freedom in the regime of liberalism is not a given, it is not a ready-made region which has to be respected... Liberalism is not acceptance of freedom; it proposes to manufacture it constantly, to arouse it and produce it...’ (65). The suggestion that an individual is not free unless s/he is made so by government is not an intelligible characterisation of liberal thought. The very idea of ‘negative liberty’ consists in accepting an area in which the individual is master (Berlin, 2002), irrespective of the ‘management of freedom’ (63) by government. In Hohfeld’s famous categorisation of rights, a ‘liberty-right’ (which he called a ‘privilege’) ‘is to be free of any duty to the contrary. Thus, legally, I have the liberty-right to do x if there is no law imposing a duty on me not to do x’ (Jones, 1999: 17). Again this is not easy to reconcile with Foucault’s claim that freedom, for a liberal, does not exist unless it is

manufactured by government. And contrary to his claim that ‘freedom is not a universal which is particularised in time and geography’ (63), for liberal philosophers such as Nozick (1974) and Rothbard (1982) who draw on Locke’s inheritance of the Thomist natural law tradition, it necessarily is. St Thomas Aquinas wrote in his *Summa Theologica* that ‘the rational creature... has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end: and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law’ (c.1274: 997). Locke writes of ‘Reason’ as the basis for the Law of Nature that obliges everyone ‘[not] to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty or Possessions’ (1689a: 271). These are not marginal traditions in the history of liberalism, even from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century (one can think of the influence of Locke in the United States Constitution), and it is strange that Foucault overlooks their relevance in the context of these lectures.

If one considers how Foucault’s account of liberalism could be applied to the question of biopolitics in contemporary society, one is again presented with ambiguities. In the UK today it can be said that a range of technologies of government, which could be used for the biopolitical management of populations, have been criticised and resisted on grounds of civil liberties. These include DNA databases, the proposal for a compulsory scheme of identity cards, and the removal of *habeas corpus* (the lawful right to seek relief from detention without charge) for reasons of national security against terrorist attacks. These are all issues over which the Conservative MP David Davis, then Shadow Home Secretary, resigned from the House of Commons in 2008. A defence of civil liberties also appears to be a source of agreement between Conservative and Liberal Democrat ministers in the coalition government formed in May 2010. If Foucault’s analysis (or anticipation) of the challenge of biopolitics was accurate, then one would expect to find economic calculations of utility (or a variant of this) at the heart of these political concerns. However, arguments in defence of market competition or the price system do not appear at the forefront of the criticism of ID cards or the holding of terrorist suspects without charge.

Another strand of liberal thought which could be highly relevant for the governance of the populations of multicultural societies is that concerning, *inter alia*, the freedom of intellectual enquiry, the freedom of opinion and religious association, and the moral good of toleration, as expressed in John Milton’s (1644) *Areopagitica*, John Locke’s (1689b) *A letter concerning toleration* and J.S. Mill’s (1859) *On liberty*. Echoes of these works can be found in the ‘value pluralism’ of Isaiah Berlin (2002) and John Gray (2000). If the liberal concern regarding biopolitics was to be framed entirely in terms of utility and ‘economic truth’, as Foucault (1979) puts it, then the insights available from these perspectives would be largely missing from view.

In conclusion, these lectures offer an insightful history of the political and social context in which the central strands of liberal economics emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. A reader looking for an introduction to ordoliberalism and/or the basic ideas of the Chicago School could do worse than to read this volume. The editor (Michael Senellart) and translator (Graham Burchell) have provided a fluent translation packed with comprehensive information on the context of the course. The footnotes are extensive and scholarly, and a useful section on the ‘Course Context’ is supplied by Michael Senellart. In terms of Foucault’s stated purpose in delivering these lectures, the verdict

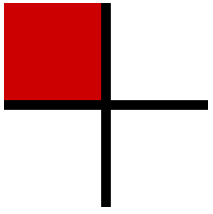
must be that he has been unsuccessful in this respect. If one seeks to know whether the governance of populations is possible under a liberal system of government, then this lecture series raises many questions while providing few, if any, answers.

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## Weariness of the self

Rasmus Johnsen

**review of:**

Alain Ehrenberg (2009) *The weariness of the self: Diagnosing the history of depression in the contemporary age*, with a preface by Allan Young. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press. (HB, pp. 345, \$29.95, ISBN 978-0-7735-3625-6)

### The contemporary phenomenon of depression

Is the increase in depression that has taken place over recent decades in Western societies a result of a fundamental shift in the way we understand ourselves? This is the question raised by French sociologist Alain Ehrenberg in his thought-provoking work *The weariness of the self*. According to Ehrenberg, depression is more than just a disease. The syndrome also provides us with a language in which we formulate and recognize ourselves, particularly when we fail to meet our own personal expectations and the demands for autonomy and personal freedom placed on us by contemporary society. In the Western world, Ehrenberg argues, the phenomenon of depression has become part of an internal grammar that assists the articulation of the challenges and boundaries of a new set of norms, whose ideals of individual sovereignty we are just getting used to. The rise of the disease, from its status as a secondary phenomenon often associated with other mental illnesses to a challenge that applies to everyone, is a symptom, not necessarily of an increased social pressure on the subject, but of a fundamental transformation in the way individuals understand themselves. Placing Ehrenberg's work somewhere in the field between the critical tradition of Axel Honneth and the problematizing work of late Foucault, this hypothesis offers to the reader not only a provocative perspective on depression but also an interesting contribution to a contemporary philosophical anthropology.

Ehrenberg's claim is that the threshold, which in the Rousseauian tradition of social philosophy can be said to mark the difference between the individual and the social, has shifted over the last century from being formulated primarily in terms of *conflict* to being put in terms of *insufficiency*. In the Freudian perspective on the individual psyche, which our age has partly inherited from 19th century, the individual was structured by the same conflict that held together the world of the social. Just as idea of the social was conditioned by the struggle between classes, the Ego in Freud's model of the personality was structured by the individual's ability to control impulses and guilt

complexes in the face of societal demands. This fundamental tension, which dominated the first half of the 20th century and resulted in neurosis and anxiety, has been replaced by the notion of a self that is ceaselessly challenged by its own sovereignty, faced with endless opportunities to realize and become itself. In other words, the sovereign individual of whom Nietzsche expected so much has conquered the West to the extent that it suffers under the burden of its own success. The democratized version of the Übermensch struggles with the anxiety caused by its own anticipation of complete autonomy. It is such a Kierkegaardian despair at the liberty to 'choose oneself' that, according to Ehrenberg, is formulated in the vocabulary of inhibition, exhaustion and dejection – in short, in the language of depression.

### Depression is a functional pathology

Together with Ehrenberg's earlier works, which have unfortunately not yet been translated into English, *The weariness of the self* is a major contribution to the anthropology of modern individuality. Ehrenberg demonstrates an impressive knowledge of his field and seeks to reveal the tensions between the arguments that make up the contemporary phenomenon of depression. As Ehrenberg himself acknowledges, such an objective is more politically than scientifically motivated. *The weariness of the self* is not, nor does it pretend to be, a treatise on clinical depression. Instead it aims to demonstrate and discuss what the syndrome may tell to us about modern society. Serving as a fundament for this exploration, it has at its centre a psychiatric-historical analysis of the dispute between Freud and his less well-known predecessor Pierre Janet, who is nonetheless considered by many to be the true father of psychotherapy. Engaging also with the historical development of the disease in popular media, Ehrenberg's study connects this dispute with social philosophical interests and contextualizes the work in a critical discussion of contemporary individualism. The conclusion that he reaches is that depression – as we know it today – is a *functional pathology*. Rather than describing a state of being, it refers to a mode of acting that defines the limits of the individual body and soul, beyond which normative demands are rendered illegitimate. This understanding of depression, which places the disease firmly within the psychosomatic tradition that perhaps began with the nerve illnesses of early industrialism, is both the strength and the ultimate weakness of Ehrenberg's work. Ehrenberg's argument is strong, because it allows for an original and critically provocative perspective on one of the greatest challenges to the health of the contemporary individual. His perspective goes beyond the neurobiological trends that dominate not only medicine and therapy but also the markets for anti-depressants. But this perspective is also one of the weaknesses of the work, because placing depression in this tradition runs the risk of conflating it with today's more obvious candidate: stress. The phenomenon of stress not only has firm roots in the contemporary organization of work and life; it also historically draws more evidently on the tropes of fatigue and exhaustion than depression does. Treating depression as an individual reaction to the ever-recurring question about how much good is good enough, Ehrenberg's analysis leaves this perspective on stress unexplored. As he is at the same time very careful not to adopt a normative position, the normative criteria for his analysis sometimes appear obscure.

## Is depression really a language?

Not engaging directly with his contemporaries in a normative fashion is no doubt the consequence of a methodological choice that illustrates Ehrenberg's indebtedness to Michel Foucault. Yet the social critical implications of arguing that contemporary depression is primarily a language spoken by those who succumb to social pressure, and their own expectation to live up to it, are so far-reaching that they ought to be addressed. Whether or not such an articulation necessarily consists in a justification of the distinction between 'normal' and 'pathological', or in a stronger focus on accounting for the social conditions that make up a good life cannot be clarified here. But that depression in Ehrenberg's social diagnostical perspective is treated along the lines of fashionable complaints like neurasthenia and hysteria in the late 19th century may be taken to imply that the disease should be treated less as an individual malady and more as an intricate means for the contemporary individual to formulate social critique. While such an assumption may certainly be valid, it is also in danger of cutting short the complexities of mental disease. Suffering, in such a perspective, is the response to an unarticulated problem in society, of which the researcher has the social critical privilege to bring to light, to articulate, interpret and explicate. To the individual dealing with this problem, the challenge becomes one of self-regulation within the context of a personal oikos. The phenomenon of depression, in other words, is entered into the sphere of the faculties, where well-being and health are the primary results of active and rational choice regulated by moral qualities, rather than being merely individual capacities. Disease, in such a perspective, is a signal of the insufficiency or mismanagement of the will. The question that arises from this position, of course, is whether depression can be reduced to a state that the modern individual escapes into, when it all gets to be too much, and whether it should be treated as a functional pathology along the lines of stress. My personal feeling is that most people who have known severe depression themselves or have met anyone who suffers from it would tend to disagree. Ehrenberg's focus on the grey area between normality and pathology in the case of depression permits him speak with a clinical vocabulary that may make us shudder; but it does not commit itself earnestly enough to the work that medicine has achieved in the field, when he concludes that psychiatry does not know what it is dealing with and that depression thus has only a strategic position in the field. Such shrill statements not only lack in credibility, they are also in danger of making hostages of the very people that they aim to speak on behalf of, by having them subscribe to a critical position that they did not choose. The depressive subject in *The Weariness of the Self* is too easily lost in a political struggle between classical, sociological positions (like the tension between system and life-world) that are not well equipped to explain let alone ease the invalidating psychical pain that severe depression causes.

## 'The weariness of being a self'

In spite of this critique, *The weariness of the self* is beyond doubt one of the most interesting publications on depression in recent years. A curiosity that may also have an influence on its reception is the subtle change of reference found in the title of the book. The original French title was *La fatigue d'être soi* (1998), which may be roughly translated into something like 'The weariness of being a self'. This title nicely captures

Ehrenberg's message about the self-identical individual's sense of inadequacy in a setting where the ability to articulate a self has become a social imperative. It also set the stage for Ehrenberg's important critical discussion of inhibition and the role of antidepressants as initiative regulators. The English title, on the other hand, does not seem to me to contain the same subtle meaning. In this it follows the German edition of the book that was published with a very programmatic foreword by Axel Honneth under the title *Das erschöpfte Selbst* [*The exhausted self*, 2001]. Given the differences between Honneth's critical theoretical project, within the context of which Ehrenberg's work was first introduced to a wider public outside of France, and the more diagnostic perspective of the Foucauldian tradition that is also a strong influence on it, one is tempted to conclude that *The weariness of the self* has already gained a reputation that makes it worthy of a position as a must-read for anyone with an interest in social philosophy.

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