The Metaphysical Problem of Authenticity in Organization Studies

Analyzing and reversing the logic underlying the contemporary conception of authenticity in organization studies based on Deleuze’s reading of Plato

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Executive summary: Authenticity has become a central hallmark for many contemporary organizations. This master’s thesis analyses and reverses the logic underlying the contemporary conception of authenticity in organization studies based on Deleuze’s reading of Plato. The dominant discourse on authenticity in organization studies have been preoccupied with two positions, namely the essentialist and the social constructivist view. While the essentialist view holds that authenticity entails being faithful to the inner true self, the social constructivists view argue that the self is constituted through social practices and engagement in discourses. Thus, the idea of inner true self is a contingent construction. However, I will argue that the social constructivist conception of authenticity is not radical enough. Although agreeing that the idea of the inner true self is problematic, the social constructivist critique nevertheless fails to inherently challenge the concept of authenticity. Instead, it reveals the apparently authentic as inauthentic. By doing so, the social constructivist critique operates in the conceptual scheme authentic/inauthentic.

In order to overcome the concept of authenticity, I develop the concept ‘simulacrum’ based on Deleuze attempt to Reverse Platonism. The simulacrum is neither true nor false; neither authentic nor inauthentic. By doing so, this master’s thesis manages to think beyond authenticity in organization studies, which will be exemplified by CEO-portraits. Yet, the master’s thesis emphasizes that Deleuze’s Reversed Platonism has several implications for ethics and normativity that are relevant for organization studies.
1. Introduction: The Paradox of Authenticity

This master's thesis raises the metaphysical problem of authenticity within organization studies. While organization studies have been preoccupied with two positions concerning the nature of authenticity—the essentialist view and the social constructivist view—this section demonstrates that both these accounts operate within the conceptual distinction authentic/inauthentic. In response, I propose using Deleuze's reading of Plato as the point of departure for analyzing and reversing the logic underlying the contemporary conception of authenticity. I will argue that Deleuze's conception of the simulacrum enables us to think beyond the categories authentic/inauthentic within organization studies.

1.1 The Authentic Organization

Authenticity has become a central hallmark for contemporary commercial organizations (Edwards, 2010). Corporations operating in knowledge intensive industries seek employees who are willing to express their true identities at work (Fleming, 2005), who are capable of producing original products (Gilmore & Pine, 2007) and leaders who make decisions based on their fundamental values (George, 2003). Instead of complying with social norms and internalizing the values of the organization, the employees are invited to express their individual beliefs and desires within the workplace (Fleming, 2005). Even some commercial companies accept that their employees articulate anti-capitalist attitudes (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011). Tracy and Trethewey explain that what “was once considered private, namely the workers’ thoughts, feelings, and emotions, now routinely serve as fodder for organizational and managerial intervention” (2005: 172).
What is authenticity? The authentic is the true opposed to the false; the natural opposed to the artificial; the original opposed to the copy. In order to be an authentic employee, it is therefore necessary to convey one’s true core, consisting of fundamental values, beliefs and desires, within the organization (Pedersen, 2011). This is also the case for leaders. As Sparrowe explains, authentic leaders manage to achieve consistency between their “true selves—as expressed in values, purpose, or voice—and their behaviors” (2005: 423). However, I will demonstrate through three examples that authenticity has become paradoxical in contemporary organizations.

1.2 The Paradox of Authenticity

Guthey and Jackson (2005) analyze CEO- and Top executive portraits. These portraits are designed to present an authentic visual image of the organization. Yet, Guthey and Jackson observe that the photographers producing these portraits often employ virtual effects, edit the images and stage the location in order to fabricate an atmosphere of authenticity. Although the audience may experience them as authentic, CEO portraits often expose the stylistic conventions used by the photographer which “renders such authenticity impossible” (Ibid., 1059). For example, the portrait of Hans Edvard Nørregård-Nielsen, a former CEO of New Carlsberg Foundation, ironically calls attention to the fact that the photographer Per Morten Abrahamsen deliberately has manipulated the image. So rather than being natural and objective, the portrait, in a sophisticated manner, reflects upon the constructivist nature of photography.

Fleming (2005) analyses the cultural management technologies employed at the call-center Sunray in order to create a fun and playful workplace environment. Through various culture programs and corporate rituals, the employees at Sunray are encouraged to “just be themselves” rather than conforming to the established social norms and values of the organization (Ibid., 57). For example, the employees were invited to dress up as their favorite superhero in order to express their true identity. But if authenticity entails originality and realism,
then this is paradoxically since the employees are encouraged to be authentic though replicating factious cartoon characters. Furthermore, while Sunray apparently aimed at establishing a liberal work environment, Fleming demonstrates that the management practices constituting the “just be yourself” culture does not remove control but rather reinforce it in more refined manners. Only certain expressions of individuality where permitted and it became mandatory to be authentic (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011: 191).

Bill George, a former CEO at Medtronic and currently a professor at Harvard Business School, argues that authentic leadership is the solution to the challenges confronting contemporary organizations. According to George, authentic leaders neither try to imitate nor replicate others (2003: 12). Rather, they act based on their inner true values. However, although authenticity is supposed to represent the natural and true, on George’s account, it is nevertheless necessary to comply with certain practices in order to be authentic, such as “get physical exercise, engage in spiritual practices, do community service, and return to the place where they grew up” (George et al., 2007). Paradoxically, even though authenticity is contrasted to imitation, it is necessary to imitate George’s leadership model in order to qualify as an authentic leader.

These three examples support Vannini and Williams’ (2009) thesis that contemporary organizations ironically invest resources in producing what in principle cannot be manufactured. Whether it is CEO-portraits (Guthey & Jackson, 2005), management technologies (Fleming 2005) or leadership models (George, 2003), they all confront the similar paradox: Rather than discovering authenticity, organizations construct or fabricate authentic atmospheres, visual images, leaders and employees. But constructing authenticity is a contradiction in term. This has lead scholars to argue that authenticity is nothing but a “socially constructed phenomenon” (Vannini & Williams, 2009). In a similar vein, Peterson claims that “authenticity is socially constructed rather than an attribute of that which is called authentic” (2005: 1083).
1.3 The Metaphysical Problem of Authenticity

What is the underlying logic enabling the paradox of authenticity to occur in contemporary organizations? Instead of merely dismissing the concept of authenticity as a social construction, this master’s thesis discusses authenticity as a metaphysical problem within organization studies. Hence, I will argue that the paradox of authenticity is rooted in a metaphysical problem discussed by Deleuze in relation to Plato’s philosophy.

- **The Metaphysical Problem of Authenticity**: How do we separate the authentic from the inauthentic?

According to Shamir and Eilam, authentic leaders are “originals, not copies” (2005: 397). But how do we distinguish the authentic leader from the inauthentic one; the real from the fake; the genuine from the fraudulent; and the original from the copy? As Shamir and Eilam notice, in “art, like in leadership, it is often difficult to distinguish the real from the copy” (Ibid., 408). The problem of separating the authentic from the inauthentic; the copy form the original is, according to Deleuze (2004a), the fundamental problem of Plato’s philosophy. In this master’s thesis I will analyze and reverse the dominant discourse of authenticity in organization studies based on Deleuze attempt to fulfill the task of modern philosophy defined by Nietzsche as *Reversing Platonism*.

Concerning the ontological nature of authenticity, the dominant discourse in academic and popular organization studies has been preoccupied with two positions. On the one hand, there are scholars advocating an essentialist conception of authenticity (e.g. George 2003; May et al. 2003; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). According to the essentialist account, authenticity entails being faithful to the inner true self. These scholars and practitioners confront the paradox of authenticity already outlined. On the other hand, there are scholars arguing that authenticity is basically a social construction (e.g. Guthe and Jackson, 2005; Peterson, 2005, Costas and Fleming, 2009; Jones et al. 2005; Sparrowe, 2005; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005; Vannini & Williams, 2009).
Although Tracy and Trethewey (2005: 168) associate themselves with ‘critical organizational studies’—largely drawing on postmodern theories in order deconstruct commonly held convictions—ironically, the assumption that authenticity is socially constructed is under no circumstances called into question. If the category ‘postmodernism’ has any meaning at all, its rationality is based, as Cooper and Burrell emphasize, “not on finding answers to problems but of ‘problemizing’ answers” (1988: 101). This continuous problematization should certainly include the very idea that authenticity is socially constructed.

Based on Deleuze’s reading of Plato, I will distinguish between the Platonic logic of model/copy and the Deleuzian logic of difference/repetition. This shift of logic has profound implications for the conception of authenticity in organization studies. On the first account, following Plato, the authentic ‘thing’ bears resemblance to the model, while its inauthentic ‘simulacrum’ is reduced to a false copy. This logic implies that a phenomenon in the organization should be evaluated according to its degree of resemblance with an external model. Thus, the CEO-portrait is authentic if it corresponds to the real leader; employees are authentic if they express the inner true core; while leaders are authentic if their actions mirror their fundamental values. On the second account, following Deleuze, the distinction between the authentic/inauthentic is rendered meaningless in favor of a conception of the simulacrum as a system of internalized differences.

I will argue that the social constructivist conception of authenticity is not radical enough, because it operates in the Platonic logic of model/resemblance. In the dialogue Statesman, Plato defines the statesman as the “herdsmen of humanity” (1999). However, several claimants present themselves as the true statesman. In order to separate the authentic statesmen from the inauthentic ones, Plato’s strategy of argumentation is to reveal the inauthentic statement as a false copy. Thus, the inauthentic statesman presents himself as real, but is dismissed by Plato as a false copy—that is, a simulacrum. Ironically, although the social constructivist critique is supposed to render the very idea of authenticity
meaningless, they nevertheless operate as the loyal servants of authenticity by revealing the simulacrum as a false copy. Guthey and Jackson’s (2005) discussion of CEO-portrait is a case to the point. Thus, portraits instantaneously presenting themselves as authentic are revealed as ‘chronic inauthentic’ (Ibid., 1077).

Peterson (2005) provides various examples of apparently authentic business concepts in the global cultural industry that are actually inauthentic. However, citing endless examples of products and business concepts proclaiming to be genuine which actually are inauthentic due to their socially constructed nature does not inherently challenge the concept of authenticity. Quite the opposite, this argument rather maintains within the conceptual distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic. The only difference is that what is commonly considered authentic is conceived of as inauthentic. Paradoxically, the social constructivist critique is caught in the very logical scheme it opposes.

This is precisely the problem Deleuze confronts with the project of Reversing Platonism. Plato argued that Socrates was authentic and the Sophist inauthentic. If Deleuze had supported the Sophist in favor of Socrates, he would remain within the logical scheme authentic/inauthentic. Instead of a reversing Platonism, Deleuze would only succeed in a modifying Platonism. Thus, Deleuze argues that in order to profoundly Reverse Platonism it is necessary to develop a fundamentally different conception of the simulacrum. Correspondently, in order to overcome the concept of authenticity it is not sufficient to reveal the apparent ‘authentic’ as an ‘inauthentic’ construction, because this argument remains within the conceptual distinction authentic/inauthentic.

How do we manage to think beyond authenticity in organization studies? In this master’s thesis I use Deleuze’s reading of Plato in order to analyze and reverse the logic underlying the conception of authenticity in organization studies. I will argue that Deleuze’s conception of the simulacrum enables us to think beyond the categories authentic/inauthentic within organization studies. Thinking beyond authenticity will be exemplified by CEO-portraits.
1.4 Outline of the master’s thesis

This master’s thesis henceforth consists of 9 sections, proceeding in the following order:

Section 2 reflects on the function of philosophy in organization studies and the methodological approach of this master’s thesis.

Section 3 follows the emergence of authenticity in organizations. Employees and leaders should not comply with the social norms of the organization, but rather express their true self within the workplace. Furthermore, the section proposes a definition of authenticity.

Section 4 reviews the key philosophical criticism towards the idea of the authentic self within organization studies. This criticism has lead critical scholars to argue that authenticity is a social construction. However, the section emphasizes that it remains to reveal the underlying logic of authenticity.

Section 5 discusses the metaphysical problem of separating the authentic from the inauthentic based on Deleuze’s reading of Plato. According to Deleuze, Plato manages to separate the authentic thing from its inauthentic simulacrum by appealing to the ideas.

Section 6 analyses the problem of separating authentic leaders from inauthentic ones in Bill George’s leadership theory. This section reveals the logic of the essentialist view of authenticity.

Section 7 analyses Guthe’s and Jackson’s discussion of the paradox of authenticity in CEO portraits. By doing so, the logic underlying the social constructivist account is revealed. But this section argues that this approach is not radical enough.
Section 8 presents Deleuze’s attempt to *Reverse Platonism*. Instead of reducing the inauthentic simulacrum to a false copy, Deleuze argues that it is based on a system of internalized differences. By re-conceptualizing the simulacrum, we manage to radically transgress the logical scheme authentic/inauthentic.

Section 9 draws the implications of Deleuze’s *Reversed Platonism* for organization studies. The section argues that the CEO portraits are not representations of the real leader, but rather autonomous phenomena that must be understood in their own aesthetic organization. The section also provides a concrete example.

Section 10 discusses the implications of Deleuze’s *Reversed Platonism* for ethics and normativity. While Plato solved ethical dilemmas by appealing to the ideas, this section raises the question: What is ethics without transcendent principles?
2. Method: Philosophy in Organization Studies

This section reflects on the function of philosophy in organization studies and the methodological approach of this master’s thesis. However, the section does not provide an exhausted account of these issues because the question of how to approach authenticity in organization studies is the key concern of this whole thesis. Nevertheless, I will lay out the basic structure of my methodological approach.

2.1 Organizational philosophy

What is the function of philosophy in organization studies? Spoelstra (2007) distinguishes between philosophy for organization and philosophy of organization. On the first account, philosophy operates as under-laborer for organizational studies by providing methods and paradigms for empirical research. The problem with this approach, according to Spoelstra, is that philosophy does not contribute with anything constructive and substantial within organization studies itself. Instead, philosophy is reduced to being merely an “assistant of the scientists” that is located outside actual research (Ibid., 20). On the second account, however, philosophy operates as a “productive force within organizational studies” by creating concepts (Ibid., 16, original italics). This master’s thesis attempts, following Spoelstra, to use philosophy as a productive force within organizational studies.

How can Deleuze’s philosophy be used for this purpose? According to Deleuze and Guattari, philosophy is the art of creating concepts (1994: 2). Concepts are not some readymade entities that can be discovered. Thus, there is no “heaven for concepts” (Ibid., 5). Rather, concepts must be formed, invented and fabricated. Concept, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize, are only “created as a function of problems” (1994: 16). The concept/problem scheme is essential for
understanding Deleuze’s reading of Plato. As I will discuss in section 5, Plato developed the concept of the ‘ideas’ in order to solve the problem of separating the authentic ‘thing’ from its inauthentic ‘simulacrum’.

This master’s thesis uses Deleuze and Guattari’s concept/problem scheme in order to discuss the metaphysical problem of authenticity in organization studies. If authentic leadership is the solution to the problems confronting modern organizations, as George (2003) believes, then the ability to separate the authentic leader from the inauthentic one is of crucial importance. In section 6, I will argue that the George developed the concept ‘inner true values’ in order to solve the problem of distinguishing the authentic leader from the inauthentic one.

Yet, the ambition of this master’s thesis is also to think beyond authenticity in organization studies. So instead of proposing a clear cut method or approach for solving this problem, I intend to radically redefine the problem itself. By doing so, I offer a new way of conceptualizing the problem rather than solving it. If the function of philosophy is to construct a concept that enables us to think beyond authenticity in organization studies, then it is tempting to directly ‘import’ concepts from Deleuze’s metaphysics into organization studies. However, such an approach would go against the very nature of his philosophy and involve no learning. As Deleuze explains:

We learn nothing from those who say: “Do as I do”. Our teachers are those who tell us to “do with me”, and are able to emit signs to be developed in heterogeneity rather than propose gestures for us to reproduce. (2004a: 25)

Moreover, as Jones and ten Bos emphasize, importing philosophical concepts into organization studies does not necessary make organization studies philosophical (2007: 8). In order to avoid this mistake, I will try to ‘think with Deleuze’ within organization studies (Kristensen, 2010: 26). In order overcome Platonism, Deleuze does not strive to distance himself from Plato, but rather to reveal the “anti-Platonism at the heart of Platonism” (2004a: 156). Similar to Deleuze’s immanent critique of Plato, I have tried to discuss the conception of
authenticity in organization studies in order to think beyond the concept itself. I will develop the concept ‘simulacrum’ within organization studies in order to overcome the dichotomy between the authentic and the inauthentic.

Echoing Deleuze, the method of philosophy, according to Spoelstra, is not ‘discovery’ but rather ‘experimentation’ (2007: 25). Philosophy is different from science because it does not strive to accurately represent objective reality. So rather than empirically describing organizations, philosophy in organization studies should engage with reality by creating concepts that enables us to explore new ways of thinking about organizational phenomena.

If one concept is “better” than an earlier one, it is because it makes us aware of new variations and unknown resonances, it carries out unforeseen cutting-out, it brings forth an Event that surveys [survole] us. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994: 28)

Yet, it is important to emphasize that, due to the lack of space, I will not be able to experiment with thinking beyond authenticity on all organizational phenomena. So I have chosen to primary focus on CEO portraits in section 9 because they are often visible within the organization. However, I believe it would be possible to extend my discussion to other phenomena. But that would lie beyond the scope of this master’s thesis.

2.2 The use of examples

In order to reveal the logic underlying authenticity in organization studies, I use George (2003) in section 6 as an example of the essentialist view on authenticity and Guthey and Jackson (2005) in section 7 as an example of the social constructivist view on authenticity. It is therefore find it necessary to clarify the status of these examples.

The advantage of using a particular example is that it provides an in-depth understanding of the unit of analysis, which is necessary in order to reveal the logic underlying the conception of authenticity. However, the particular example has traditionally been accused of being unable to provide general
knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 1996). According to the logic of induction, it is not possible to deduce the general from the particular. Hence, George’s (2003) leadership model cannot inform us about the general logic of the essentialist conception of authenticity. Although I acknowledge that George cannot be held accountable for all versions of the essentialist view on authenticity, I do not use George as a particular example of a general tendency. Rather, I seek to discuss the general logic of authenticity expressed within George’s account of leadership. The general logic of authenticity is, so to speak, immanent in George’s leadership model, although it gets a particular expression in his theory (see also Pedersen, 2009: 75). The same principle applies to my discussion of Guthey and Jackson (2005) in section 7.

I have chosen to focus on George (2003) account of authentic leadership due to his widespread influence on among academics and practitioners (see Gardner et al. 2011). I have chosen to focus on Guthey and Jackson (2005) for a slightly different reason. I believe that their argument adequately illustrates the social constructivist critique of authenticity.

2.3 Philosophy and organization studies

During the past decades, organization studies have become increasingly differentiated, complex and fragmented. The grand narrative of the organization has been substituted with a plurality of small narratives. As Jones emphasizes, “the new consensus about organization studies seems to be that there is no consensus” (2003a: 504; see also 2010). However, it is important to emphasize that my primary interest is not in the organization as an empirical object, but rather in the concept of authenticity in organization studies. In this master’s thesis, I use the notion ‘organization studies’ in a broad sense, covering various debates and discourses, including leadership studies, critical management studies and debates on subjectivity, resistance, culture and aesthetics in organization studies. I have chosen to focus on these debates because they draw attention to the complex problem of separating the authentic from the inauthentic.
The literature on authenticity in organization studies is extensive. I have chosen to relate the metaphysical problem of authenticity to philosophical-inspired organization studies, in particular that of Deleuze, Foucault, Lacan and Žižek. It is therefore necessary to clearly the status of philosophy in this project. This master’s thesis draws heavily upon the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Plato. I have chosen to focus on this relationship, because the central concern is precisely the question of distinguishing the authentic from the inauthentic. In addition, Deleuze’s conception of the simulacrum provides the basis for thinking beyond the authenticity in organization studies.

I have related my discussion to debates in which Foucault, Lacan and Žižek are frequently cited. However, the use of for instance Foucault in organization studies relies on selective readings and specific interpretations (Fox, 1998; Jones, 2002). It is therefore important to emphasize that my interest is not in Foucault, Lacan and Žižek as such, but rather in the way their theories are presented in organization studies. So in fairness to these philosophers, it is necessary to stress this limitation of my discussion. This explains the lack of primary reference to some of these philosophers.

2.4 The relevance for philosophy and business administration

There are three dimensions to this master’s thesis. First of all, it has a clear philosophical aspect. The reconstruction of Deleuze’s reading of Plato and the discussion of the metaphysical problem of authenticity makes part of this master’s thesis is a philosophical groundwork. Secondly, it has importance for business administration. Business administration includes leadership and organization studies. The Western post-capitalist society, according to Drucker, is precisely a ‘society of organizations’ (1993: 44). Moreover, corporations are incessantly focusing on authenticity in their pursuit to motivate employees,

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1 There have been several other attempts to use Deleuze’s philosophy in organization studies (e.g. Styre, 2002; Sørensen, 2005; Linstead & Thanem, 2007; Pedersen, 2009; Kristensen, 2010).
facilitate creativity and promote efficient and ethical leadership. Finally, this master's thesis is a cross-disciplinary project, because it tries to integrate philosophy in organization studies. Although authenticity primarily is a philosophical concept, in recent years it has become the focal point of business literature (e.g. George, 2003; Pine and Gilmore, 2007). Therefore, combining the philosophical theories with business literature and organization studies provides the opportunity for discussing authenticity as a metaphysical problem within a business administration context.

On a theoretical level, this master’s thesis is a contribution to the ongoing academic discussion of authenticity in organization studies. But I will also claim in section 10 that it has implications on a practical level. There is an intimate link between theory and practice in business administration, because business models can have a huge influence on practice (Ghoshal, 2005). Yet, the practical implications of this master’s thesis is not to propose straightforward procedure for action, but rather draw attention to a new field of problematization which invokes us to think about ethics in new ways.
3. Authenticity and Organizations

Authenticity has entered the corporate agenda. But what enables the metaphysical problem of authenticity to emerge in organization studies? In order to answer this question it is necessary to outline the context in which authenticity becomes a concern for organization studies. This section traces the emergence of authenticity in contemporary organizations. However, the notion ‘authenticity’ is ambiguous. Therefore, this section also discusses the concept itself and proposes a definition of authenticity as being faithful to the inner true self.

3.1 Towards Authenticity

Novo Nordisk (2011) attracts recruitments by offering them the opportunity to “realise their potential”. Mærsk (2011) can help you “achieve even your most ambitious career goals”. Microsoft (2011) invites you to “do what you love”. The workplace is today presented as a privileged site of self-fulfillment and self-actualization (Costea et al., 2008).

Work, however, has not always been appreciated as an end in itself. On the contrary, in the ancient Greek polis, work was seen as an obstacle rather than a facilitator for attaining a Vita Activa—that is, a life devoted to political matters (Arendt, 1998: 12). But in modern time the notion of labor has been radically altered. From Locke to Marx, labor developed into “source of productivity and the expression of the very humanity of man” (Ibid., 101). Yet, in the early stage of the industrial revolution, work was primarily valued as a prerequisite for obtaining material goods. Nevertheless, Taylor thought that Scientific Management was in the mutual benefit of the employee and the employer because it secured the “maximum prosperity” for them both (1967: 9). But even though Taylor believed otherwise, the doctrine of Scientific Management intensified rather than neutralized the conflict between the workers and the managers (Hjorth, 2009).
By the end of the 1970’s, a new conception of the worker emerged, according to Rose, “around a new psychological picture of the employee as a self-actualizing ego whose personal striving could be articulated into the organization of the enterprise” (1999: 104). Instead of assuming that workers are naturally lazy, which lay implicit in the management tradition after Taylor, McGregor argued that the “average human does not inherently dislike work” (2006: 65). Given the right conditions, employees would naturally seek the ‘intrinsic reward’ of work. Thus, corporations should strive to commit and involve their members within the organization (Walton, 1985). Since the 1980’s, therefore, there has been a “stable culture tendency of management discourses to capture subjectivity in its general agenda” (Costea et al. 2008: 661).

In order to synchronize the employee’s beliefs and desires with the overall agenda of the corporation, critical scholars have argued that organizations install homogenous cultures, containing shared value systems and collective identities (du Gay, 1996). This is done in order to secure commitment, involvement, loyalty and high performance. Organizational cultures based on family- and team-metaphors, according to Casey, promise self-fulfillment to the employees combined with increased productivity for the corporation (1999).

Discursive practices, Casey explains, are “formative of subjective being” (ibid, 159). Subjectivity, in this context, refers to the “the thoughts, feelings, beliefs and desires that comprise our self-understanding or self-identity” (Wittle, 2005: 1301). Language does not simply report objective facts, but rather operates as a system of differences that constitutes subjectivity (du Gay, 1996: 47). For example, shifting the administration discourse, such as the use of ‘team-leader’ instead of the traditional notion ‘manager’, secures “organizational control through the use of cultural media—in this case, the positive and seductive meaning associated with leadership” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: 620).

Through culture programs and management discourses, organizations promote a set of values, beliefs and preferences that the employees are expected to
embrace and internalize. Borrowing the concept from Habermas, Casey (1999) describes this process as *colonization*: in the course of participating in culture programs and being subjected to various management technologies, the worker’s self becomes inscribed and incorporated into the normative structure of the organization. Thus, a corporate family-style culture secures dedication and devotion among its members. So despite the rhetoric’s of these programs, Casey claims that the sole intention is to improve productivity.

### 3.2 Authenticity in organization studies

Today, however, many organizations encourage their employees to express their inner true self within the workplace rather than conforming to the corporate culture (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009). Instead of joining the corporate family (Casey, 1999), employees are invited to “just be themselves” (Fleming, 2005). This is also the case for leaders. In order to become a successful leader, according to George (2003), one should not imitate others but rather be oneself. Following this development, there has been an increased focus on authenticity in organization studies. However, it is important to emphasize that not all organizations strive for authenticity (Murtola & Fleming, 2011). But, as Pedersen notices, authenticity seems to be “an increasingly central marker for an efficient and flexible organization” (2011: 62).

Studying the organizational culture of the call-center Sunray, Fleming observed that the employees were encouraged to express their individual personality within the workplace. A manager at Sunray explained that “Young people find our culture very, very attractive because they can just be themselves” (Fleming, 2005: 57). The company celebrated diversity and individual differences. “Everyone is different”, a HR manager said, “and we make sure that people can express themselves and will be accepted for who they are” (Fleming & Sturdy, 2005).

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2 In 2005, the journal *The Leadership Quarterly* dedicated a special issue to “Authentic leadership development”. The same year, *Journal of Management Studies* dedicated a whole issue to authenticity in the culture industries. In 2011, the journal *Ephemera* released an issue on authenticity. Also in a Danish context, authentic leadership has drawn attention (e.g. Tanggaard & Elmholdt, 2011).
Individual life-styles, including clothing, hairstyle and tastes, as well as sexual and ethnical diversity, were not only allowed but also proactively promoted by the company. On one occasion, the employees were asked to bring an item to work that expressed their personality.

According to Fleming and Sturdy, the underlying principles of this new “just be yourself” culture are fundamentally different from the previous corporate cultures, such as the ones analyzed by Casey (1999). While the homogeneous corporate cultures where based uniform values, collective identities and shared goals, the new “just be yourself” culture is based on diversity and differences between its individual members. Thus, the workers should “love being in the company rather than the company itself” (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011: 183, original italics). Employees’ should express their personal values rather than the company’s values; their own attitudes rather than the company’s attitudes; and they should express their own personality rather than comforting to the identity of the company. In short, this new corporate culture is based on authenticity.

Authenticity entails that the worker brings their “spontaneous and private core into the workplace” (Pedersen, 2011: 65). One reason why authenticity is promoted by contemporary organizations is that the private self is conceived of as the source of creativity and motivation (Costea et al., 2006). Value creation in knowledge intensive businesses depends on continuous innovation (Drucker, 1999). But innovation, in turn, depends on the generation of novel ideas. The ability, therefore, to foster creativity within the organization has become a key factor in order to succeed in modern capitalism (Mumford, 2000). Thus, creativity has become strategic resources for gaining competitive advantages (Hjorth, 2009).

Due to the importance of creativity, activities traditionally contrasted to work are today conceived of as potential sources of value creation. For example, labor has traditionally been defined as the “opposite of play” (Arendt, 1998: 127). But for contemporary firms, play has become a potential engine for business (Sørensen & Spoelstra, 2011). Google, for example, allows its employees to play
PlayStation and foosball during work-hours because it stimulates their imagination (More, 2011). But what links authenticity to creativity? Since the time of Rousseau, the division between the inner and outer self has been associated with the dichotomy between the child and the adult (Guingnon, 2004: 43). While the child is conceived of as naturally playful and imaginative, the adult is restrictive and uninspired. If employees are able to express their authentic self within the organization, then the firm can explore their potential for generating unexpected ideas (Fleming, 2009). Authenticity, following this logic, “unleashes creativity into the production process” (Pedersen, 2011: 63).

In recent years authenticity has become a key concept of popular business literature. According to Gilmore and Pine, authenticity is the “primary new source of competitive advantage” (2007: 3). Authenticity is fundamental for business due to the rise of the experience economy. Consumers do not only demand low price and high quality, but also an authentic experience. Without the ability to produce original and genuine products, the organization will lose its competitive edge. Modern society, however, is increasingly experienced by consumers as unreal and inauthentic (Ibid., 43). There is an elevated demand for authenticity but yet the market seems to offer too many fake products. However, this gap between the high demand and lack of supply for authenticity forms a huge unexplored business potential. And Pine and Gilmore offer a guide to develop an authentic business concept.

The leadership guru Bill George, a former CEO of Medtronic and currently a professor at Harvard Business School, embraces authenticity as the solution to the challenges confronting modern organizations. George literally tanks Enron and its former CEO Jeffrey Skilling for providing the necessary kind of “shock therapy to realize that something is sorely missing in many of our corporations” (2003, 1). What is missing is authentic leadership—that is, “leaders who have a deep sense of purpose and are true to their core values” (Ibid., 5).

Authentic leaders are not only advocated due to their efficiency for business, but also due to their moral capacities (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Authentic
leadership includes the ability to perform ethical deeds (Ladkin and Taylor, 2010; Gardner et al., 2011). May et al. even argue that authentic leaders “generally know what the ‘right thing to do’ is and intend to act according to that knowledge” (2003: 254). While authentic leaders have high moral standards, inauthentic leaders are driven by self-interest (Michie & Gooty, 2005).

We can see that the reason why authenticity has entered the corporate agenda is threefold. First of all, employees are believed to be increasingly motivated and creative if they are able to express their true self within the organization. Secondly, leaders are believed to be morally responsible if they are able to lead based on their fundamental values. Finally, due to the rise of the experience economy, consumers seek authentic products.

3.3 Authenticity in culture and society

The call for authenticity in contemporary organizations can be situated within a broader cultural context. The transition from the modern industrial society to the post-industrial society has, according to Erickson, “led to increased interest in authenticity” (1995: 121). Taylor (1991) identifies the three malaises of which have evoked the longing for authenticity (also see Cederström, 2011). The first malaise is individualism which has caused the ‘centering on the self’, resulting in less concern for others and society. The second malaise is the primacy of instrumental reason which reduces every aspect of life into the language of efficiency and cost-benefit. The final malaise is the feeling of loss of political freedom due to vast bureaucracy resulting in alienation from the political sphere. Because of the growing tendency to assume social roles in society, being oneself has increasingly become the center of attention in popular culture (Guingnon, 2004: 4).

Talk show hosts such as Dr. Phil and Oprah Winfrey frequently appeal to the category the ‘true self’ when striving to help people though their traumatic life-crisis. However, authenticity has not always been celebrated in popular culture. Quite the opposite, Guingnon shows that the call for authenticity is of fairly
recent date. The project of personal development was generally aimed at becoming “something you were not yet” (2004: 2). Contrary to this approach, the discourse of authenticity advocates that you should become your inner true self. But what is the inner true self?

3.4 What is Authenticity?

Etymologically, authenticity derives from the Greek term authentikos referring to the original, genuine and principal (Harper, 2011). Its original meaning is still preserved in the contemporary conception of authenticity and the Greek root is acknowledged in leadership studies (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). In its ordinary usage, the idea of authenticity suggests being “original” or being “faithful to the original” (Guingnon, 2008: 277).

According to Costas and Fleming, the modern idea of authenticity derives from 18th-century Enlightenment, in particular Rousseau’s account of the true self as the “inner voice of moral conscience” (2009: 357). Although he did not use the notion himself, many scholars attribute the concept of authenticity to Rousseau (e.g. Guingnon, 2004; Lindholm, 2008; Potter, 2010).

*The Oxford Dictionary* identifies four different definitions of authenticity (OED, 2011):

1. **Authentic as being in accordance with fact, as being true in substance.**
2. **Authentic as being what it professes in origin or authorship, as being genuine; genuineness.**
3. **Authentic as being real, actual; reality.**
4. **Authentic as being authoritative or duly authorized.**

Authenticity as being in accordance with facts and being genuine corresponds to being faithful to the original and being the original. However, these definitions are more different than what it initially seems. Suppose that you prepare a dish based on an original recipe. Then your dish would be faithful to the original, but it would not be the original recipe itself. Although noticing that this distinction
is not always recognized, Harper explains that “authentic implies that the contents of the thing in question correspond to the facts and are not fictitious; genuine implies that the reputed author is the real one” (2011). Thus, the distinction between the original and the authentic is crucial in the context of this project. It is precisely this conception of authenticity that Guingnon elaborates on when he states that:

To say that a person is authentic is to say that his or her actions truly express what lays at their origin, that is, the dispositions, feelings, desires, and convictions that motivate them. (2008: 278)

In addition to these conventional ways of understanding authenticity, there have been various attempts in philosophy to radically redefine the concept. In the existentialist tradition, for example, the concept authenticity has been the subject of a long discussion. Instead of being faithful to the inner true self, being authentic, according to Golomb, means inventing “one’s own way and pattern of life” constructed through narratives (1995: 19, original italics). Narrative approaches to authenticity have been discussed in leadership studies such as Sparrowe’s (2005) use of Ricoeur and Shamir and Eliam’s (2005) focus on life-stories in authentic leadership. Ferrara proposes a model of authenticity without the notion of a true self (1999). However, authenticity in the existentialist tradition has also encountered criticism. The jargon of authenticity, according to Adorno, is more or less “flowering non-sense” because it mystifies being and ignores the concrete there and now (1973: 67, 92)

Authenticity, as we can see, occurs in various contexts with diverse meanings. It is therefore difficult to generalize concerning the nature of authenticity, because there are multiple definitions of the concept (Moore, 2011). Even in leadership studies, Shamir and Eilam notice, there is no single accepted definition of the authentic leader (2005). Although acknowledging that there are various definitions of authenticity, I will propose the following definition: \textit{Authenticity entails being faithful to the inner true self}. 
The inner true self is a constellation of fundamental values, natural desires, potentials and abilities located within each individual. Authenticity should not be confused with sincerity. In order to be authentic, it is not sufficient for the individual to express the values that it holds. In addition, the value must be true. This conception of authenticity will be discussed in section 6. I have chosen to focus on this definition for the following reasons: First of all, as I will demonstrate, this is the definition of authenticity dominating popular business literature, such as George’s (2003) account of authentic leadership. Secondly, this is the definition underlying academic discussions on authentic leadership (e.g. Avolio, 2004; Ladkin & Taylor, 2010). Finally, this is primarily the account of authenticity that has been the target of criticism from the social constructivists (e.g. Jackson & Guthey, 2005).

The idea of authenticity implies that the subject is an autonomous fixed substance. However, the notion of the inner true self does not have much support in philosophical inspired organization studies. Rather than being natural and true, critical scholars argue that the self is a radically de-centered and contingent product of discursive and social practices (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Next, we will look at why critical scholars find the idea of authenticity problematic.
4. Critical scholars in Organization Studies

Authenticity has been defined as being faithful to the inner true self. But this essentialist view on authenticity does not have much support from critical scholars in organization studies. Why do critical scholars in organization studies find the idea of the inner true self problematic? This section discusses the philosophical-inspired criticism against authenticity in organization studies.

4.1 Foucault and normative control

In order to overcome the inherent conflict between the manager and the employee, modern organizations strive to commit their members to the strategic goals of the enterprise. Optimizing workers’ satisfaction and productivity is not mutually exclusive.

On the contrary, the path to business success lies in engaging the employee with the goals of the company at the level of his or her subjectivity, aligning the wishes, needs, and aspirations of each individual who works for the organization with the success pursuit of its objective. (Rose, 1999: 56)

But how do organizations manage to coordinate the employees’ individual preferences with the overall strategic goals of corporation? Several critical scholars have argued that corporations form and shape workers’ desires and beliefs within the workplace environment in order to synchronize their subjectivity with the overall corporate agenda. This is done through normative control, which is “the attempt to elicit and direct the required effort of members by controlling the underlying experience, thoughts, and feelings that guide their actions” (Kunda, 2006: 11). Rather than securing humanity, management technologies, such as Human Resource Management (Townley, 1993), Performance Appraisal (Newton & Findlay, 1996) and Total Quality Management (Casey, 1999), are designed to incorporate the employee’s subjectivity into the productive logic of the organization.
The traditional radical humanist critique of modern work-life presents the organization as the site of alienation and inauthenticity (Seeman, 1959; Hochschild, 1983; Sloan, 2007; Tonks & Nelson, 2008). For example, in hierarchical organization, Even suggests, employees may experience alienation in the sense of “self-estrangement from their work roles” (1977: 81). Service workers required to express certain emotions at work, according to Ashforth and Humphrey, can lose touch with their authentic self, because they are unable to recognize their true feelings (1993: 92). The concept alienation originates from Marx and refers to, among four different kinds, the “estrangement of man from man” (1959, 32, original italics). The metaphor of alienation presupposes that the employees are separated from an authentic core. But Foucault inspired organization studies reject any essentialist account of human nature (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006).

Based on Foucault, Knight and Willmott argue that worker’s subjectivity is produced through involvement in the power-relations (1989: 537). Thus, the employee’s identity, desires, values and attitudes are generated by the control mechanism and technologies of surveillance within the organization. Yet, control in contemporary organizations is neither restricted to direct managerial intervention nor bureaucratic rules. In addition to these formal and visible forms of control, organizations uses more sophisticated methods for governing their employees. Drawing on Foucault, Knight and Willmott claim that workers’ subjectivity is constituted through a plurality of “disciplinary mechanism, technologies of surveillance and power-knowledge strategies” (1989: 549). This has profound implications for authenticity. Erickson defines authenticity as “commitments to one’s self-values” (1995: 127). But the crucial point is that the values held by the subject are neither natural nor true, according to Knight and Willmott. Rather, they are partly the product of engagement in power-relations and influence of management technologies. There are various examples of such disciplinary arrangements.
Human Resource Management (HRM), according to Townley (1993), serves to render the employees as knowable and governable objects. Workers are measured, tested, analyzed and calculated through various practices associated with HRM. While relying on the assumption that individuals are autonomous units that can be objectively studied, Townley demonstrates that HRM operates as a disciplinary technology, which produces subjectivity (ibid, 529). HRM distributes and arranges the employees in a conceptual space according to the variables of the measurements scales (e.g. high/low performer; productive/unproductive; skilled/unskilled). The measurement scales offer a set of categories through which the employees evaluate and acknowledge their main weaknesses and strengths. By doing so, Townley argues that HRM generates information that becomes a part of the workers’ self-understanding (ibid, 536). Consequently, by classifying, ordering and analyzing the employees, HRM shape and constituted their subjectivity.

Because the employees need to conform to the variables of the tests and measurement scales in order to qualify as high performers, the HRM technologies influence their behavior. The classification schemes, therefore, function indirectly as a disciplinary mechanism. With reference to Foucault, Townley states that the “individual becomes subject to habit, rules, and orders; he or she operates as ‘one wishes, and with the techniques, speed and efficiency one determines’” (Ibid., 531). In this way, the knowledge produced by HRM becomes an instrument of power. So although HRM was supposed to provide conditions under which employees could achieve self-fulfillment and self-actualization, it is nothing but a new technology for increasing productivity, according to Townley.

4.2 Lacan and the Mirror Stage

Despite its success, Foucault-inspired research in organization studies has encountered various criticisms. I will focus on two interrelated problems. First of all, critics have argued that Foucauldians fail to account for human agency. Several scholars have opposed what they believe to be “Foucault’s deterministic
view of subjectivity” (Bergström & Knights, 2006: 352). Newton, for example, claims that Townley’s analysis of HRM suggests that the members of the organization act as “unthinking ‘pre-programmed’ puppets of their discourse” (1998: 427).

According to Sveningsson and Alvesson, corporate cultures and discourses are often highly ambiguous and indeterminate (2003: 1176). Therefore, they do not have determinate effects on its subjects. Rather, the employees need to maneuver and navigate between different and conflicting discourses. Instead of being casually determined, worker’s desires and beliefs are subjected to a continuously struggle within the organization. In a similar vein, Bergström and Knights’ research suggests that subjectivity is constituted in a “mutually interdependent relation of agency and discourse” (2006: 370).

The second problem relates to the connection between subjectivity and language. According to Knights and Willmott (1989), the subject is the product of engagement in discursive practices. However, Newton (1998) argues that Foucault-inspired studies lack a plausible account of why the subject is influenced by discourses. As Jones and Spicer ask, “why is it that subjects accept, indeed actively desire to construct themselves in relation to discourses?” (2005: 224, original italics). In order to explain the psychological mechanisms connecting the subject to the disciplinary arrangement of the organization, several scholars have turned towards psychoanalysis, in particular Lacan and the theory of the mirror stage (e.g. Roberts, 2005; Arnaud & Vanheule, 2007; Driver, 2009).

According to Lacan, the ability to distinguish between the self and the world depends on the acquirement of language (Johnsen & Gudmand-Høyer, 2011). However, prior to learning a language, the child encounters himself in a mirror, an experiences which is essential in the formation of subjectivity (Roberts, 2005). Through this pre-linguistic experience, the child identifies his own self-image, which provides the basis for his subjectivity.
The crucial point is not simply that the self is composed in relation to the other. Rather, what the mirror stage demonstrates is that the process of arriving at self-consciousness involves a fundamental misrecognition. The child confuses the reflected image in the mirror for his real self (Jones & Spicer, 2005). By identifying with the image, the subject locates itself where it is not: “outside me in the depth of field of the mirror image” (Roberts, 2005: 628). In this way, the child profoundly mistakes the image reflected in the mirror for his real self, which for Lacan is defined as radical ontological lack (Ibid., 629). The disciplinary arrangement of the organization, according to Roberts, offers precisely a mirror in which the subject can constitute an identity.

Without dwelling further on the psychological mechanisms connecting the self to discourses, it is important to emphasize that the introduction of Lacan in organization studies poses a response to the first criticism of Foucault. The radical humanist account of human agency presupposes an authentic human core capable of conducting independent decisions (Alvesson, 2009). However, following Lacan, Johnsen and Gudmand-Høyer (2011) argue that a fantasy, as the mirror stage example demonstrates, is a necessary condition for subjectivity. Thus, subjectivity depends on the transformation from the self as radical ontological lack to a symbolic fantasy. I will return to this argument in section 10.

4.3 Irony, cynicism and resistance

Cultural programs and management technologies, as Townley (1993) and Casey (1999) demonstrate, are designed to commit the employees to the normative conditions of the organization. But is the process of colonization always successful? Empirical studies indicate that strong corporate cultures promote cynicisms rather than commitment and devotion among the employees (Kunda, 1996). Apparently, the management technologies are not as efficient as Townley and Casey seem to suggest. But cynicisms and irony, scholars argue, paradoxically sustain and stimulate the disciplinary arrangements of the organization rather than impede the process of colonization.
Investigating the technological company Tech, Kunda (2006) noticed that the employees often kept an ironic distance to the corporate culture. They cynically described their work-day as “life in the trenches” and the workplace environment as an “engineer’s sandbox” (Ibid., 28). Management ideologies were satirically labeled “the bullshit that comes from above” and the corporate rituals were referred to as childish “song and dance” (Ibid., 158). Through irony and cynicism, the employees distanced themselves from their corporate identities.

Parody, cynicism and humor have been interpreted as strategies of resistance within the workplace (Fleming, 2005). In order to resist colonization, managerial domination and normative control, employees distance themselves from the corporate culture through “inauthentic play-acting” (Garrety, 2008: 82). Thus, resistance has gone underground and gets more sophisticated expressions in humor, parody, satire, hidden transcripts and offstage discourses. Cynical McDonald’s employees wear ‘McShit’ T-shirts underneath their uniforms (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). This phenomenon is often called dis-identification: employees distance what they consider to be their authentic self from the organization (Costas & Fleming, 2009).

Cynicism presupposes a distinction between the corporate self and the private authentic self (Collinson, 2003). While the corporate self carries out the assigned duties and responsibilities, the authentic self keeps an ironic distance to the corporate values (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009). In this way, cynicism functions as a defense mechanism for shielding the authentic self against the corporate culture. Kunda, for example, interprets the irony as an attempt to protect the “backstage-self” from the corporate culture (Fleming & Spicer, 2003).

But splitting the self between the corporate identity and private authentic self is not necessary a successful strategy for avoiding managerial domination. Although expressing cynical and ironic attitudes, the employees nevertheless
participate in the corporate rituals, perform their social roles and carry out their job assignments. Therefore, Contu argues that resistance through cynicism is nothing but *decaf resistance*: “Decaf, because it threatens and hurts nobody. It is resistance without a cost” (2008: 370).

Drawing on Žižek, Contu argues that resistance through irony and cynicism are “inherent transgressions” of the power relations of the organization (2008: 367). Inherent transgression signifies that although the cynic employee contests the management technologies of the organization, he or she nevertheless does so within the general framework of the technologies themselves. So instead of disturbing the disciplinary arrangements, irony and cynicism enables the power relations to operate within the organization. The reason is that irony and cynicism stimulate the fantasy of the worker as an autonomous and authentic subject, even though he or she is incorporated in the disciplinary arrangement of the organization (Johnsen et al., 2009). In this way, cynicism facilitates the disciplinary arrangement of the organization.

### 4.4 Authentic employees and neo-normative control

Although employees are allowed to express their personal self within liberal workplaces, this does not eliminate control. The “just be yourself” discourse presupposes an authentic self liberated from the corporate culture. Yet, although the employees at Sunray were able to express their personality within the organization, Fleming and Sturdy noticed that “only certain expressions of it were permitted” (2011: 191). Furthermore, it became mandatory to be an authentic self within the organization. In this way, self-actualization becomes a demand placed upon the employees (see also Honneth, 2004). Moreover, the call for authenticity contributes to blurring the distinction between the private and the public sphere (Spicer, 2011). The public display of private convictions, values, desires and beliefs within the workplace only contributes to incorporating these aspects of the employees into the disciplinary arrangement of the organization (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009).
Fleming and Sturdy (2009) suggest the term ‘neo-normative control’ to describe the process through which employees are subjected to control in liberal organizations. While normative control was designed to install shared values among the members of the corporation, neo-normative control regulates subjectivity though incorporating employees’ private self into the organization. However, normative control and neo-normative control are not mutually exclusive. Quite the opposite, they share several characteristics, in particular their method. Neo-normative control can be conceived of as the colonization of workers’ authentic self. Fleming (2005) emphasizes that the ‘family’ metaphor (“Sunray is a happy family”) operated alongside the “just be yourself” discourse at Sunray. Thus, employees were invited to be an individual within a family-like culture. But while normative control strives to establish uniformity within the organization, the aim of neo-normative control is to promote and regulate individual diversity (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009).

The call for authentic employees, according to Pedersen (2011), involves a fundamental contradiction. On the one hand, employees are expected to be a worker-monad, which involves that every individual employee should express the overall agenda of the organization (Ibid., 63). On the other hand, in order to be an authentic self, it is necessary to be something more than the corporate self. Thus, the employee needs to be a worker-nomad, which implies that the subject have beliefs and desires independent of the organization. Consequently, authenticity paradoxically demands simultaneously ‘convergence’ and ‘divergence’ between the employee’s values and the organization’s values.

The “just be yourself” discourse within the organization, however, does not automatically contravene the tendency of employees dis-identifying with the corporate culture. Nevertheless the attempt to invite worker’s authentic self into the organization, Flemings’ (2005) research indicates liberal work environments may also evoke cynical attitudes also the among employees. Several of the employees at Sunray expressed cynical attitudes towards the liberal culture and “just be yourself” discourse by imitating the voices of the
managers, labeling the workplace as a “plastic, fake kindergarten” and making fun of the corporate values (Ibid., 58-59).

Yet, although the employees manage to separate the corporate self from the private self though irony and cynicism, the private self does not automatically qualify as the authentic one. On the contrary, some workers experience that their authentic self is precisely their corporate self, according to Costas and Fleming (2009).

While the cynical worker can get on with their job secure in the knowledge that they possess a noncolonized reserve of selfhood, others are troubled by the realization that even this ‘truthful’ inner preserve is problematic. (Ibid., 354)

In such a situation, the worker realizes that the idea of the authentic self dethatched from the organization cannot be sustained, because his true self is nothing but his corporate identity. But the corporate self is not what the employee wishes to become. Consequently, “the authentic self (‘who I really am’) is paradoxically experienced as inauthentic” (Ibid., 362). As we can see, the complex process of separating the authentic self from the inauthentic one becomes a continuous struggle within the organization.

4.5 The Social Construction of Authenticity

Although authenticity has emerged as a phenomenon in contemporary enterprises, the essentialist conception of authenticity (being faithful to your true inner self) does not have much support in philosophical inspired organization studies. Foucauldians suggest that the human self is neither naturally given nor true by nature. There is no inner true self because what seems to be most private about a person—that is, his or her feelings, desires, wants, beliefs and attitudes—is produced by involvement in power-relations, social practices and discourses (Knight & Willmott, 1989; Townley, 1993; Casey, 1999). Self-knowledge is only accessible through a language that is always already socially and historically mediated.
Following Deleuze and Guattari, Pedersen argues that what is presented as authentic is always “something already assembled within the social” (2011: 66). Neither does Lacan inspired research in organization studies provides much bearing for the concept of authenticity. On Roberts’ (2005) account, following Lacan, authenticity is “crafted imaginary” (Costas & Fleming, 2009). Even worse, following Žižek, Contu (2008) argues that authenticity is a fantasy nourishing the management technologies of the organization. Du Gay states that “identity and subjectivity are constituted discursively”, which implies that “all forms of work-based identity and subjectivity are fundamentally contingent” (1996: 6).

Under the broad category poststructuralist theory, several critical scholars in organization studies have argued that the idea of the authenticity is a socially constructed phenomenon (e.g. Tracy & Trethewey, 2005; Guthey and Jackson, 2005; Peterson, 2005; Collinson, 2003; Costas and Fleming, 2009; Jones et al. 2005; Sparrowe, 2005; Vannini & Williams, 2009). Generally, however, the term ‘social constructionism’ is both “obscure and overused” (Hacking, 1999: VII). Yet, it is widely used and has broad support in organization studies. My interest here is not in social constructionism as such, but only in the local claim that authenticity is socially constructed. The basic idea behind this claim is that what is considered authentic is a historically and socially contingent construction, constituted through social practices and discourses.

Due to social constructivism’s widespread support in the social sciences, Tracy and Trethewey (2005) wonder why contemporary culture maintains the idea of the true self. The reason, they explain, is that poststructuralist studies have failed to make a profound impact on the dominant discourses.

However, dismissing authenticity as a social construction does not provide a comprehensive account of the logic underlying the contemporary concept of authenticity. The failure to explain this is not because of ignorance, but mainly due to focus. Nevertheless the increased focus on authenticity in organization studies, it remains to reveal the logic underlying of the contemporary
conception of authenticity. The metaphysical problem of authenticity—*How do we separate the authentic from the inauthentic?*—is precisely the key concern of Plato’s philosophy, according to Deleuze. The next section, therefore, will present Plato’s theory of authenticity through Deleuze’s lenses in order to reveal the underlying logic of the contemporary conception of authenticity.
5. Plato: The Metaphysical Problem of Authenticity

This section discusses the metaphysical problem of authenticity through Deleuze's reading of Plato. According to Deleuze, the problem of separating the authentic thing from its inauthentic simulacrum is the focal point of Plato's philosophy. The concepts developed in this section will be used to discuss the contemporary conception of authenticity in organization studies.

It is important to emphasize that this section presents Plato’s metaphysics through Deleuze’s lenses, not Plato as such. Although repeatedly returning to Plato in *Difference and Repetition* (2004a) and the appendix of *Logic of Sense* (2004b), Deleuze’s treatment of the founder of Western philosophy is surprisingly brief and concise. Instead of quoting specific passages, Deleuze mainly discusses the broad lines of Plato’s arguments. I have therefore found it necessary to reconstruct Deleuze’s interpretation of Plato. In this section, I have focused on a passage from the *Republic* (Plato, 1993), because it adequately illustrates Plato’s procedure for solving the metaphysical problem of authenticity.

5.1 The Problem of Authenticating

Nietzsche defined the task of modern philosophy to *Reverse Platonism* (Deleuze, 2004b: 291). But why is it so important for modern philosophy to overcome Platonism? Whitehead famously stated that the European philosophical tradition “consists of a series of footnotes to Plato” (1979: 39). To overturn Platonism, therefore, does not simply involve dismissing a philosophical theory, but rather reverse the basis for modern thought. If the aim is to revolt against the common sensual understanding of authenticity, then Plato’s philosophy is unavoidable.
But what does it precisely mean to overturn Platonism? The question is more complicated than what it seems at first instance. There is no shortage of criticism of Plato’s thoughts throughout Western philosophy, spanning from Aristotle to Popper. Turning Plato on his head is not necessary the answer either. Plato famously opposed essence to appearance. But reversing this distinction so that appearance is preferred to essence would merely lead to a “quagmire of positivism”, according to Heidegger (Smith, 2006: 90). Instead, Deleuze seeks to reveal the underlying motivation of Plato’s philosophy. Reversing Platonism, Deleuze states, entails tracking down Plato “the way Plato tracks down the Sophist” (2004b: 291).

The fundamental problem of Plato’s philosophy, according to Deleuze, is the problem of rivalry in the Athenian democracy. The problem of rivalry is the “problem of measuring rivals and selecting claimants”, Deleuze explains (2004a: 72). Since all free men could lay claim to truth in the polis, Plato confronted the problem of separating the true claimant from the false claimant; Socrates from the Sophist; the thing from its simulacrum; the original from the copy; the authentic from the inauthentic (Deleuze, 2004b: 291). Deleuze notices that the entire universe of Platonism is dominated by the problem of authenticating—that is, separating the authentic from the inauthentic by “drawing a distinction between the thing itself and the simulacra” (2004a: 80). While the thing is authentic because it bears resemblance to the perfect idea, Plato claims that the simulacrum is inauthentic because it lacks such a resemblance. Thus, the simulacrum is a false pretender on Plato’s account: it proclaims to be a true original but in reality it is nothing but a false copy. But how does Plato proceed in order to disclose the simulacrum as an inauthentic copy?

5.2 Separating the thing form its simulacrum

In the Republic, Plato discusses the problem of separating paintings from the material objects in which they imitate. Socrates provides the following example in order to demonstrate that artistic expressions and craftsmen products are
merely copies of perfect ideas: Suppose that God, a jointer and a painter each produce their own version of a bed (Plato, 1993: 597b). God would first create the perfect idea of a bed; then the jointer would manufacture a material bed based on God’s idea; while the painter would merely draw an imitation of the jointer’s product. After agreeing that only God has produced a genuine real bed, Socrates asks Glaucon (597d-e):

“What about the jointer? Shall we call him a manufacturer of beds?”
“Yes.”
“And shall we also call a painter a manufacturer and maker of beds and so on?”
“No, definitely not.”
“What do you think that he does with beds, then?”
“I think the most suitable thing to call him would be a representer of other’s creations.”
“Well, in that case”, I said, “you’re using the term ‘representer’ for someone who deals with things which are, in fact, two generations away from reality, aren’t you?”

While the jointer’s product is authentic, because it corresponds with God’s perfect idea, the painter’s picture is inauthentic because it only corresponds with the material bed. The material bed resembles the idea; the painting resembles the material bed. Consequently, the painter’s product—and art in general—is nothing but a copy of a copy. But this implies, Plato concludes, that paintings are inauthentic copies. For Plato, paintings are nothing but simulacra—that is, “rebellious images which lack resemblance” to the idea (Deleuze, 2004a: 342). No wonder Gadamer considered Plato to be the harshest critic of art throughout Western philosophy (2004: 112).

In this example, Plato introduces his most central concept, the concept of the idea. According to Deleuze and Guattari, a concept is always the function of a problem (1994: 16). If this is right, then the concept of the idea is introduced in order to solve the problem of rivalry. By appealing to the idea of the bed, Plato manages to distinguish the material bed from the painted picture of the bed; the authentic from the inauthentic; the thing from its simulacrum.
However, if material objects derive meaning from resembling ideas, while simulacra lack such resemblance, how do simulacra acquire meaning at all? Why does not the painting of the bed bear a direct resemblance to the idea of the bed? The problem confronting Plato is to justify the assertion that the jointer produces an authentic bed while the painter merely produces an inauthentic imitation. Thus, the crucial question to determine, therefore, is whether the painter’s artwork manages to represent the real bed or the appearance of beds. Socrates further inquires with Glaucon into the nature of art (2003: 598a-b):

“Here’s another distinction you’d better make: do [painters’] try to represent [beds] as they are, or as they appear to be?”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“I’ll tell you. Whether you look at a bed from the side or straight on or whatever, it’s still just as much a bed as it ever was, isn’t it? I mean, it doesn’t actually alter it at all: just appears to be different, doesn’t it? And the same goes for anything you can mention. Yes?”

“Yes”, he agreed. “It seems different, but isn’t actually.”

“So I want you to consider carefully which of these two alternatives painting is designed for in any every instance. Is it designed to represent the facts of the real world or appearance? Does it represent appearance or truth?”

“Appearance,” he said.

This part of the argument is of immense importance for Plato. If, similarly to the material object, art was endorsed with resemblance to the idea, then there would be no ontological difference between the thing and its simulacrum; material objects and art; the authentic and the inauthentic. The original and the copy would be completely indistinguishable. However, since painting only captures a certain aspect of the bed, Socrates argues that artworks are always incomplete compared to the material objects in which they try to imitate. What renders poetry and artistic expressions inauthentic, therefore, is they only bear secondary resemblance to the idea. This is the case due to the fact that the connection between the idea and the simulacrum is mediated through the material object. Art only captures appearance. Based on this line of argument, Plato concludes that art is “two generations away from the throne of truth” (2003: 597e).
We can here see that Plato constructs a three step hierarchy of being. On top of the hierarchy is the perfect idea, created by God and situated in the realm of ideas. On the next level is the thing—that is, the material object—which is endorsed with resemblance to the idea but nevertheless is lower ranked. On the lowest stair of the ladder is the simulacrum. The simulacrum is a false copy: it proclaims to bear resemblance to the perfect idea, but is fortunately exposed by Socrates as a false pretender. Rather than corresponding to the idea, the simulacrum is a copy of the thing. The simulacrum resembles appearance but not the actual being. Consequently, the simulacrum is a secondary copy. This hierarchy of being provides the basis for conducting normative evaluations. Because the thing connects with the idea, it qualifies as the good. The simulacrum, however, is dismissed as bad, because it deceives us with illusions (Plato, 1993: 600e).

### 5.3 The Method of Division

According to Deleuze, Plato only manages to separate the thing from its simulacrum by employing the Method of Division. The function of the Method of Division is to select among rival participants, all proclaiming to the represent the authentic, good and pure (Deleuze 2004a: 72). Although Plato is supposed to represent the shift from mythos to logos—that is, explaining the world in terms of rational arguments instead of mystical narratives—Deleuze notices that Plato ironically introduces a myth in order to separate the copy from its simulacrum (2004b: 292). Deleuze acknowledges that myth and dialectics operates as distinct forces in Plato’s philosophy. Yet, Deleuze argues that the Method of Division integrates both these components in order to separate the thing from its simulacrum (2004a: 74). While the myth provides a foundation for Plato’s theory, dialectics performs the function of selecting between the different claimants within the myth.

In the previous example, Plato constructs the myth of the mystical creature God who creates a perfect idea of a bed. Only by appealing to God’s perfect idea of the bed, Plato is able to distinguish the material object form its simulacrum. The
myth of God’s creation provides a model within which Socrates is able to apply his dialectic procedure in order to disclose the simulacrum as a false copy. The reason why the painter’s picture is inauthentic is because it lacks resemblance to God’s idea of a bed. Thus, Socrates’ apparently rational argument that pictures are inauthentic is only valid given the assumption that there exists a divine idea of a bed. The myth is therefore an integrated element in the process of selecting between the different claimants, because it permits the construction of a matrix according to which different claimants can be judged by the help of Socrates’ dialectical procedure (Deleuze, 2004b: 292).

The myth allows for the construction of a transcendent idea which serves as a basis for separating the thing from its simulacrum; the authentic from the inauthentic. Although transcendence had previously figured in the form of imperial or religious myths, Plato’s conceptual innovation was to invent a type of transcendence that was “capable of being exercised and situated within the field of immanence itself” (Deleuze, 1997: 137, original italics). Introducing transcendence into philosophy, according to Deleuze, is the “poisoned gift of Platonism” (Ibid.).
This figure summarizes the key elements of Plato’s discussion of the authenticity by illustrating his procedure for disclosing the simulacrum as a false copy. By constructing this matrix, consisting of three essential components (the model, the thing and the simulacrum), through appealing to a myth, Plato is able to demonstrate that the simulacrum is a false copy, because it lacks resemblance to the model. This figure will now be used to analyze the essentialist and social constructivist conception of authenticity.
6. The essentialist conception of Authenticity

The previous section raised the metaphysical problem of authenticity within Plato’s philosophy. According to Plato, the thing is authentic because it bears resemblance to an external model while the simulacrum is inauthentic because it is false copy. In this section, I will raise the metaphysical problem of authenticity within authentic leadership studies.

- **The metaphysical problem of authentic leadership**: How do we separate the authentic leader from the inauthentic one?

6.1 Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership, according to the leadership guru Bill George, is the solution to the problems confronting contemporary organizations. George is considered both a practitioner and popular business scholar. His book, *Authentic leadership*, is a BusinessWeek bestseller and contains six pages of praise, including Jeffrey Garten, dean of Yale School of Management, and Roger Enrico, former CEO of PepsiCo. George’s book is based on his personal experience as a CEO of Medtronic, as well as his reflections upon what makes a successful leader. The answer is straightforward:

After years of studying leaders and their traits, I believe that leadership begins and ends with authenticity. It’s being yourself; being the person you were created to be. (George, 2003: 11)

George advocates what I identify as the essentialist conception of authenticity. The essentialist view holds that being authentic entails being faithful to the inner true self (see section 3.6). Authenticity, according to George, entails “being in touch with the depths of your inner being and being true to yourself” (2003: 40). George is not the only business scholar advocating an essentialist conception of authenticity (e.g. Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio et al., 2004;
Chan et al., 2005; May et al., 2003). Yet, I have chosen to focus on George’s leadership model due to his widespread influence on authentic leadership studies and among practitioners.

I will now use Deleuze’s reading of Plato as an analytic framework for exploring George account of authentic leadership. So what I suggest is that reading George through Plato helps us reveal the underlying logic of the essentialist conception of authenticity. By doing so, I bring into play George as an example of the essentialist conception of authenticity (see section 2).

Before analyzing George’s leadership model, it is important to emphasize that my thesis is not that Plato and George’s accounts of authenticity are identical. George and Plato operate in completely different contexts—Plato within Athenian democracy and George within modern leadership—and their models contain completely different elements. Plato’s key concept is the ‘idea’ and George’s key concept is the inner ‘true value’. Instead of being faithful to an external model, the contemporary discourse of authenticity advocates that one should be faithful to the internal true self. The concept of the self as a subject is an invention of modern times (Rorty, 1979). Plato, however, belongs to pre-modern thinkers. However, despite all their differences, I will argue that Plato can help us reveal George’s method for separating the authentic from the inauthentic leader.

6.2 Distinguishing the authentic from the inauthentic leader

In order to become an authentic leader, according to George, one should not adopt the style and traits of past successful leaders. If you try to imitate the character of others, you are, as George experienced himself, destined to fail

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3 There are various other formulations of the essentialist conception of authenticity is leadership studies. Avolio et al. argue that “the essence of authenticity is to know, accept, and remain true to one’s self” (2004: 802). “Knowing oneself and being true to oneself”, according to May et al., “are the essential qualities of authentic leadership” (2003: 248).

4 Published in 2003, George’s book, Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the secrets to creating lasting value, has 318 citations according to Google Scholar. Gardner et al. state that George’s book has “contributed greatly to the emergence of both practitioner and scholarly interest in AL” (2011: 4).
(George, 2003: 12). Instead, authentic leaders use their natural abilities and make decisions based on their true values. George provides several examples of authentic leaders: Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King Jr. and John F. Kennedy, just to mention a few (Ibid., 13).

George argues that authentic companies are more efficient than inauthentic ones (Ibid, 7). Yet, similar to Plato, authenticity is for George primarily a question of ethics. Distinguishing between the authentic and inauthentic provides the basis for separating the good from the bad. Generally, authenticity in leadership studies includes strong moral components (Gardner & Avolio, 2005; Jackson, 2005), such as commitment to one’s true values (Chan et al., 2005). May et al. (2003) even argue that authentic leaders have a special capacity for navigating in moral dilemmas. For example, George tells the story that he once was offered the opportunity to acquire a company which had placed headquarter offshore in order to avoid U.S taxes. “As I walked out of his office”, George explains, “I held onto my wallet and decided to cancel further talks with him” (2003: 4). George concludes that trust and integrity is more important than financial reward for authentic leaders.

The incarnation of the inauthentic leader, according to George, is the former CEO of Enron, Jeffrey Skilling. Skilling was sentenced to 24 years in prison after the scandal of Enron, being convicted for fraud and insider trading. The important thing is not whether George’s description of Skilling is correct or not. Rather, what is interesting is the function that Skilling serves in George’s leadership model. Skilling is the symbol of everything that is wrong with modern enterprises: Focus on short term financial reward rather than securing long term values. For George, Skilling is a false copy: he claims that the function of the leader is to exploit loopholes and push beyond the law. But an authentic leader, on the other hand, has “a deep sense of purpose and are true to their core values” (2003: 5). Skilling can therefore be conceived of as the equivalent to Plato’s Sophist. Skilling is the simulacrum, because he claims to be a true original but is actually a false copy. But the basic problem confronting George is to qualify the assertion that he is the authentic leader while Skilling is the
inauthentic one. How does George manage to separate the authentic leader from the inauthentic Skilling?

One of the key characteristics of an authentic leader, according to George, is consistency. “There is nothing worse”, George declares, “than leaders who preach good values but fail to follow their own advice” (Ibid, 38). Authentic leaders, in contrast, practice what they preach. But are inauthentic leaders inconsistent? This does not necessary seems to be the case with Skilling. As George notices, a former classmate of Skilling revealed that he would argue in class that the business leaders should break the law if it was financially rewarding. Therefore, Skilling was consistent in his behavior, as he employed precisely this strategy—though unsuccessfully—with Enron (Ibid, 21).

It is important to emphasize that the problem of separating the authentic George from the inauthentic Skilling does not emerge because they are so different. Quite the opposite, the resemblance between George and Skilling is striking. Both are former CEOs of huge American enterprises. So similar to the way the picture of the bed imitates the material bed, we can see that Skilling shares several characteristics with George. Hence, the reason why George so strongly wants to be distinguished from Skilling is that they are associated. Without further comparison, the simulacrum was the subject to a long theological discussion for precisely the same reason. Satan is not problematic because he is completely different from God, but rather because he “imitates God so well” (Smith, 2006: 101).

6.3 The inner True Values

In order to separate the authentic leader from the inauthentic one, George introduces the concept of the inner true values. The challenge confronting authentic leaders, on George’s account, is to recognize their true self—that is, the inner true values, passions and underlying motivation (2003, 19). “In the inner circle are your true values” (Ibid, 16). The true values include integrity, leading with the heart (caring and empathy), and collaboration. Although
acknowledging that values are shaped through experience, personal development is more accurately described by George as “a journey to find your true self” (Ibid, 27). Now, it is essential to understand the difference between true values and personal preferences. True values are not necessarily personal preferences; they are not whatever a person desire at a given time and place. If values were equal to preferences, then the desire for money could be a value, such as in the case of Skilling. But the craving for personal wealth is not a true value, on George’s account. Values are not subjective entities, but objective qualities.

Nothing illustrates this point better than George’s discussion of feedback. According to George et al., authentic leaders are “willing to listen to feedback—especially the kind they don’t want to hear” (2007: 102). They present the story of Charles Schwab’s former CEO, David Pottruck, who was told by his boss that his colleagues did not trust him:

That feedback was like a dagger to my heart. I was in denial, as I didn’t see myself as other saw me. I became a lightning rod of friction, but had no idea who self-serving I looked to other people. Still, somewhere in my inner core the feedback resonated as true. (Ibid)

However, throughout his professional career, George did not always respond to feedback. Quite the opposite, in order to remain an authentic leader, it was necessary to ignore response from coworkers and supervisors, explaining that he listened “carefully to their advice but quietly rejected it” (2003: 30). George’s account of feedback seems to be contradictory, given that authentic leaders should simultaneously listen and not listen to feedback. So how do we separate the authentic feedback from the inauthentic feedback? The key phrase to emphasize in Pottruck story is that the feedback “resonated as true”. Although not immediately acknowledging that there was a problem, Pottruck sensed that there was a lack of correspondence between his convictions and his true values.

The universal status of the true values is also important in order to justify the moral assumption underlying George’s account of authentic leadership. Many
leaders throughout history have had unique and charismatic traits but nevertheless been highly unethical in their behavior. The difference, therefore, between authentic and inauthentic leaders are not that the former are originals and the latter are copies. Rather, the fundamental difference is that authentic leaders are true to their values, while inauthentic leaders, such as Skilling, are false copies, because they lack a connection between their actions, preferences and convictions, on the one hand, and their true values, on the other (George, 2003: 75).

Here the similarity between George’s and Plato’s procedure for distinguishing between the authentic and the inauthentic is striking. Recall that Plato installed the concept of the idea in order to separate the thing from the simulacrum. While the thing was faithful to the idea, the simulacrum lacked resemblance. The concept of the idea provides the transcendent fixed-point from which different claimants can be evaluated. Correspondently, George introduces the concept of the true value in order to separate the authentic leader from the inauthentic one. While authentic leaders are faithful to the inner true values, inauthentic leaders compromise them. We can see, therefore, that the true values serve a crucial function in George’s leadership model. By appealing to the true values, George is able to distinguish between the authentic and the inauthentic leader.

Recently I [...] described Arthur Anderson [the firm handling the auditing of Enron] as a tragedy, saying ‘you can spend fifty years in establishing your reputation and lose it in a day.’ A Dutch student challenged my characterization, ‘No, Bill, Anderson didn’t lose it all in a day. They sold their soul to their clients over the last five to ten years by compromising their values more and more, just to make money. What looks to you like a giant step in destroying documents was to them just another step in sacrificing values for greed.’ He was quite correct. (Ibid., 75, my italics)

Similar to Plato’s concept of the idea, the concept of the true values provide a concept from which George can evaluate different leaders. “To be inauthentic is to betray one’s own relationship with oneself” (Chan et al., 2005: 7). Consequently, Skilling is inauthentic because he sacrifices his true values in the “quest for personal gain” (George, 2003: 1). If Skilling had consulted his true
values and remained faithful to them, the scandal of Enron could have been avoided.

**Figure 6A: George’s model of authentic leadership:**

By constructing this matrix, George can rationally argue that Jeff Skilling is an inauthentic leader because he lacks a connection to his inner true values. Yet, it is important to emphasize the difference between Plato’s concept of the idea and George’s concept of the inner true values. While Plato’s ideas are situated in the realm of ideas, George’s values are situated within the personal core of the individual. Thus, the true values are embedded in the subjective self. The location of the inner true values is different compared to Plato’s ideas. Nevertheless, the true values represent a transcendent category, because they are situated beyond experience. While Plato installs an external transcendence, George installs an internal transcendence. As George argument implies, Skilling was equipped with the true values although he neither followed nor recognized them.

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5 The distinction between internal and external transcendence would deserve a longer discussion then what I have done here. There is an interesting transmission from Plato via Augustine to Kant. Augustine operates with the idea of the true self (Spicer, 2011), but it nevertheless depends upon a relation to God. Kant, however, presents the self independent and bounded nuclear atom; a “dimensionless point of pure thought and will” (Guingnon, 2004: 17). Due to the lack of space, I will not be able to explore this issue further here.
6.4 The myth of the Moral Compass and the true North

The inner true values provide a transcendental fixed-point from which leaders can navigate in ethical conflicts. But how do we identify the inner true values? George evokes the metaphor of a ‘moral compass’ guiding the leader towards the ‘true North’ in order to describe the function of the values.

These values define [leader's] moral compass. Such leaders know the ‘true north’ of their compass, the deep sense of the right thing to do. Without a moral compass, any leader can wind up like the executive who are facing possible prison sentences because they lacked a sense of right and wrong. (Ibid, 20)

A compass is a navigation instrument. Although you are lost in the wilderness, confused about in which direction to go, the compass always point out the right direction. In a literal sense, George believes that values serve a similar function in ethical dilemmas by designating the right decision. George is not the only one who uses the metaphor of the inner self as a moral compass. Carly Fiorina, former CEO of Hewlett Packard, gave the following answer when she was asked about her source of strength in dealing with the problems concerning their merger with Compaq:

And I guess at a personal level - I used this phrase a lot inside the business, but I think leadership takes what I call a strong internal compass. And I use the term compass because what does a compass do? When the winds are howling, and the storms are raging, and sky is cloudy so you have nothing to navigate by, a compass tells you where true North is... Do I believe we're doing the right things for the right reasons in the right ways? And sometimes that's all you have. (HP, 2003, italics added)

Recall that Deleuze argued that Plato constructed a myth in order to separate the thing from its simulacrum. In a similar vein, George presents the allegory of self as a moral compass. By evoking this allegory, George manages to explain the function of the values, as well as establishing a foundation for them. Just as a compass designates the true North, the inner true values designate the morally right decision in ethical dilemmas. However, the allegory is basically a myth, because it is constructed through the narratives and metaphors. Far from being
exclusive, Munro (2005) argues that myths are often integrated components of leader’s self-understanding.

The mythology of leadership is not only to be found in the ancient myths referred to by the academics; it is also a key element in their own belief system, or at least that us the massage they are disseminating through their work. (Ibid.)

The myth of the moral compass serves as an integrated part of George leadership model, because it provides a justification for the universal status for the inner true values. Without the myth, George would not be able to claim that Skilling was deviating from the course towards his true North. The authentic leader navigates based on his inner moral compass, while the inauthentic leader ignores it, causing him or her to head in the wrong direction. Therefore, the myth forms a foundation on which George can distinguish the authentic from the inauthentic leader.

6.5 The logic underlying George’s account of authentic leadership

Reading George through Plato enables us to reveal the underlying logic of the essentialist conception of authenticity. In order to attain authenticity, it is necessary for the leader’s actions, decisions and utterances to resemble the inner true values. Therefore, different leaders can be evaluated according to their ability to resonate with their true self. If we translate George leadership model into Plato’s three categories: the model, the thing and the simulacrum, the logical scheme will be the following:
The myth of the moral compass provides a foundation of the inner true values, which enables George to argue rationally that the inauthentic leader is a simulacrum. The inauthentic leader proclaims to be the true original, but is actually a false copy—that is, there is a lack of resemblance between the inner true values and the leader's actions and convictions. Yet, stating that the authentic leader is an original is not sufficient in order to separate the authentic leader from the inauthentic leader, such as Jeff Skilling. In order to justify the moral assumption underlying George's leadership model, it is necessary to install a transcendent model: the true self consisting of a set of fundamental values. However, as I have argued, this model is constructed through the myth of the self as a moral compass.
7. The social constructivist conception of Authenticity

The previous section revealed the underlying logic of the essentialist conception of authenticity by analyzing George’s account of authentic leadership. While the essentialist conception of authenticity has support in popular culture, among some practitioners (George, 2003) and academics (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), many scholars in organization studies regard authenticity as a social construction. In this section I will therefore discuss the social constructivist conception of authenticity. In order to reveal the logic underlying the social constructivist account, I will explore Guthey and Jackson’s analysis of CEO portraits.

On the social constructivist account, authenticity is claimed to involve a fundamental contradiction. Consider George (2003) leadership model. The inherent contradiction in George’s model of authentic leadership is that although authenticity is supposed to be opposed to imitation, you nevertheless have to imitate his leadership model in order to qualify as an authentic leader.

Ironically, programs that are designed to help people get in touch with their true selves, supposedly motivated by emancipator ideals, often have the effect of pressuring people into thinking in ways that confirm the ideology of the founders of the programs. (Guingnon, 2004: 5)

In order to become as an authentic leader it is necessary to execute certain social practices, such as “get physical exercise, engage in spiritual practices, do community service, and return to the place where they grew up” (George et al., 2007). Apparently, without being spiritual one cannot become an authentic leader. Paradoxically, rather than being faithful to the true self, it is necessary to be faithful to George’s leadership model in order to qualify as an authentic leader.
7.1 The identity of the organization

Because modern corporations often outsource their production, engage in various activities and operate in fluid networks, it is often difficult to articulate a stable and coherent identity of the organization (Guthey & Jackson, 2005). Organizations, now complex and differentiated systems, are often dragged between two incommensurable demands. On the one hand, the organization must be mobile and suited for rapid change in order to meet the demands of changing markets (Atvesson, 1990). On the other hand, the organization needs to communicate a consistent identity to its stakeholders, such as employees and consumers, in order to appear authentic. Yet, Gioia et al. (2000) argue that an unstable identity can be beneficial given the need to adapt and respond to the stakeholders’ shifting demands. If the identity of the organization is not flexible and dynamic, it rapidly “stagnates in the face of an inevitable changing environment” (Ibid, 65).

In order to construct an authentic visual impression of the corporation, organizations produce portraits, photographs, artwork and pictures. Thus, images are used to display a perceptible representation of organizations, which figures in internal and external communication (Jackson & Guthey, 2005). In addition to providing financial information about the company to its stakeholders, annual reports also “convey the personality and the philosophy of the firm to readers” (Anderson & Imperia, 1992: 113). Following this development, there has been an ‘aesthetic turn’ in organization studies (Griffey & Jackson, 2010) and researchers have incessantly drawn attention to the inherent connection between identity and images (Strati, 1992; Gioia et al., 2000).

7.2 Exploring the paradox of CEO portraits

According to Jackson and Guthey, CEO portraits constitute the “family photo album of corporate capitalism” (2005: 1058). In order to discuss the connection between identity and images, they analyze CEO- and Top executive portraits
taken by the critically acclaimed photographer Per Morten Abrahamsen. Ideally, these portraits provide an authentic visual image of the organization.

Photographs construct and certify who we are to the point where identity has become ‘inconceivable without photography’... The corporate quest for a human face and the voracious appetite of business media drive the production and circulation of visual images of business leaders. (Guthey & Jackson, 2008: 84)

Authenticity, in this context, entails representing “one’s self accurately, to be true to one’s unique and self-contained identity” (Guthey & Jackson, 2005: 1066). Thus, CEO portraits are authentic to the extent that they manage to accurately mirror and resemble the true self of the leader. Conversely, the CEO portrait is inauthentic if it fails to generate an accurate representation of the real person.

When the camera was first introduced in the 1830’s, the photographic image was celebrated as the victory of realism. While painted pictures—as Plato argues—are always inexact compared to the material object, photography provides the opportunity to “produce accurate images of what was in front of its lens” (Wells, 2004: 13). Photography captures and represents the exact nature of the objects without subjective interpretation of the artist. If previous artistic expressions lacked authenticity due to inaccuracy, then photographs provided the most exact representations of material reality. However, as time progressed, scholars and artists became aware of the constructive nature of photography (Ibid., 23). Rather than being objective and accurate, photographs are often fabricated, manipulated and staged. This is also the case concerning CEO portraits.

According Jackson and Guthey, CEO portraits immediately seem to be authentic, because they “appear to represent an accurate depiction or visual replica of objective reality” (2005: 1066). Yet, upon a closer inspection, Jackson and Guthey reveal that the artists shooting these portraits often employ virtual effects, edit and manipulate the images, invoke the CEO’s to pose in front of the camera and stage the location in order to fabricate an atmosphere of
authenticity. In order to demonstrate this point, Jackson and Guthey analyze a portrait of Hans Edvard Nørregård-Nielsen, Chairman of the New Carlsberg Foundation, taken by Per Morten Abrahamsen.

**Figure 7A: Portraits of Hans Edvard Nørregård-Nielsen and Bill Gates**

On the left is the portrait of Hans Edvard Nørregård-Nielsen, former Chairman of the New Carlsberg Foundation. The photo is taken by Per Morten Abrahamsen. On the right is a portrait of Bill Gates, former CEO and currently chairman of Microsoft. The portrait featured on the cover of Times Magazine, 13 January 1997. The photo is taken by Gregory Heisler.

Jackson and Guthey notice that the portrait of Hans Edvard Nørregård-Nielsen unintentionally operates as an effective parody of Bill Gates famous portrait covering the *Times Magazine* in 1997. “The two photographs share a striking formal resemblance, and both subjects wear identical glasses and tilt their heads in precisely the same manner” (Ibid, 1071). So rather than being authentic and original, Guthey and Jackson emphasize that Abrahamsen’s portrait of Nørregård-Nielsen is actually an imitation or replica.
In the portrait of Nørregård-Nielsen (see figure 7A), Guthey and Jackson also notice that his head is “tilted awkwardly into a picture frame” (2005: 1071). Thus, the portrait itself seems to draw attention to the paradox of authenticity by exposing the frame, signifying that the portrait is staged and fabricated rather than natural, objective and true. In this way, the portrait, in a sophisticated manner, reflects upon the constructivist nature of photographic images.

While [Abrahamsen’s] portraits function to establish an authentic connection with their subjects, they paradoxically highlights how the intrusion of stylistic and photographic convention – including the presence of the photographic frame itself – renders such authenticity impossible. (Ibid., 1059)

Authenticity is impossible, they argue, because CEO portraits will only appear authentic if they are fabricated and staged. So Guthey and Jackson conclude that “individual identity itself, like corporate identity, is a socially constructed institution that requires care and maintenance” (Ibid., 1069). CEO portraits may establish an authentic atmosphere and connection to the audience, but they simultaneously expose the corporation’s “chronic lack” of authenticity (Ibid., 1057).

Many CEO portraits appear to project the visible presence and authenticity considered crucial for organizations and their top executives. But these same photos can undercut the artificially constructed nature of photographic representation, corporate self-promotion, and CEO image. (Guthey & Jackson, 2008: 89)

The discussion of the social constructivist conception of authenticity in organization studies could have been extended (e.g. Fine, 2003; Vannini & Williams, 1999; Jones et al., 2005; Beverland, 2005). Peterson (2005) presents various examples of business concepts which apparently proclaim to be original and genuine but is actually fabricated and constructed. Although authenticity involves remaining ‘true to the self’, this representation of the self is nevertheless fabricated through social processes (2005: 1989). While rock the boy-band ‘N SYNIC, for example, is widely considered authentic, Peterson demonstrates that it was constructed by professional managers. Fine (2003) argues that self-taught artists fabricate authentic personality by creating
bibliographies which contain unique life-stories. Rather than an objective quality, what count as authentic, Peterson (2003) and Fine (2003) agree, is ultimately determined by the subjective perception of the audience.

These sociological accounts are important contributions to investigating “what strategies are used for creating and defining authenticity and how these strategies shape our understanding of what is authentic” (Jones et al., 2005: 894, original italics). But these accounts do not inherently challenge the concept of authenticity. Rather, they only demonstrate certain phenomena which are considered by certain groups as naturally and real are actually constituted through social processes. Hence, what seems authentic is disclosed as inauthentic. Ironically, although the social constructivist critique is supposed to reject the idea of authenticity, it operate, in a similar way as Socrates, as loyal servants of authenticity by disclosing the simulacra—for example, country music (Peterson, 2005), luxury wines (Beverland, 2005), biographies (Fine, 2003)—as a false copies.

7.3 The logic underlying the social constructivist account

What I will focus on now is the logic underlying Guthey and Jackson’s (2005) argument that CEO portraits reveal organizations as chronically inauthentic. I will argue that social constructivist conception is not radical enough. Although the social constructivist conception of authenticity is supposed to render the idea of authenticity meaningless, they nevertheless remain in the conceptual distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic.

There is, of course, an important difference between Bill George, on the one hand, and Guthey and Jackson, on the other hand. George believes that the model of the true self actually exists. The true values are embedded in the human self. Guthey and Jackson carefully emphasize that the model, similarly to the picture, is a social construction. Nevertheless, the logic which Guthey and Jackson employ in order to demonstrate that the CEO portrait is a construction involves disclosing the image as a false copy. Rather than resembling the model,
the portrait resembles Bill Gates. However, Guthey and Jackson’s thesis extend beyond this claim, because they argue that CEO portrait will only appear authentic if they employ visual effects which constitute an atmosphere of authenticity. It is important, once again, to emphasize that I think this argument is important in the discussion of authenticity. Yet, I believe we need to take one more step in order to overcome the dichotomy between the authentic and the inauthentic.

The concept of authenticity relies on a binary logic between the authentic and the inauthentic. It is not possible to claim that something is authentic without presupposing the idea of the inauthentic. Conversely, it is not possible to claim that something is inauthentic without the idea of the authentic. Consequently, if CEO portraits highlight the organization’s “chronic lack of authenticity” (Ibid., 1057), then the argument rely on the idea of the authentic. In this way, Guthey and Jackson’s argument remains within the conceptual distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic. The only difference is that what is considered authentic is now disclosed by them as inauthentic. Therefore, the CEO portraits, on Guthey and Jackson account, are Platonic simulacra: they proclaim to the authentic and original, but are dismissed as false copies.

In their discussion of organizational identity, Gioia et al. (2000) argue that identity, on the postmodern account, is not a fixed substance independent of time and place. On the contrary, identity is a social construction, produced though social interaction and discourses.

In short, the relationship between identity and image is turned upside-down when seen through a postmodern lens; instead of emerging from organizational depth and origin, identity becomes a chameleon-like imitation of images prevailing in the postmodern marketplace. Organizational identity, thus, moves from a stable and distinct origin toward a copy of images of dominating organizations. (Gioia et al., 2000: 72)

While identity on the modernist account is a fixed substance underlying the various projections of the organization, the postmodern understanding of identity emphasizes the fluxed, unstable and socially manufactured character of identity itself. With reference to Baudrillard, Gioia et al. concludes that “image
and identity both ends up as illusions” on the postmodern account (2000: 73). But what does it mean that something is an illusion?

The emphasis on illusion in this context is only one half of the story. In a similar vein as authenticity, the concept of ‘illusion’ relies on the binary opposition reality/illusion. If something is an illusion, as Plato believes is the case of the simulacrum, then it is, per definition, opposed to reality. While the simulacrum is an illusion, the thing resembles reality. The other side of the story, therefore, is that if we really want to overcome the dichotomy between illusion and reality, then the image can neither be illusion nor reality. It cannot be an illusion, because it fails to resemble an external model. It cannot be reality, because it resembles the model. Baudrillard (1994) has captured this point. Therefore, Gioia et al. (2000) profoundly misunderstand Baudrillard when they claim that he thinks that the image is an illusion.

Baudrillard’s position is precisely that the image is neither illusion nor reality. On the contrary, he argues that “illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible” (1994: 19). The image has transgressed the very conceptual distinction between illusion and reality; the authentic and the inauthentic. Baudrillard draws the implication from this argument that the image does not become an illusion, but rather reality—not in the sense that it that it corresponds with an external model, but rather that the image is the very real itself.

Images are no longer mirror of reality, they invested the heart of reality and transformed it into hyperreality where, from screen to screen, the only aim of the image is the image. The image can no longer imagine the real because it is the real; it can no longer transcend reality, transfigure it or dream it, since images are virtual reality. In virtual reality, it is as if things had swallowed their mirror. (Baudrillard, 2005: 120)

If the aim is to overcome the metaphysical conception of authenticity, then the social constructivist account is not radical enough. While the social constructivist account is supposed to overcome the essentialist idea of authenticity, they continue to disclose the simulacrum as a false copy. The image is an ‘illusion’ (Gioia et al., 2000) and CEO portraits are ‘chronic
inauthentic’ (Jackson & Guthey, 2005). But the idea of illusion and the inauthentic is only possible given the idea of reality and the authentic. Therefore, the social constructivist account is caught in the very logical scheme they oppose. Hence, we need to develop a new understanding of the simulacrum in order to overcome the metaphysical idea of authenticity. Next, I will therefore discuss Deleuze’s attempt to *Reverse Platonism*. 
8. Deleuze: Reversed Platonism

This section discusses Deleuze’s attempt to *Reverse Platonism*. While Plato claims that the simulacrum is *inauthentic* because it lacks resemblance to the model, Deleuze argues that the simulacrum is based on a system of *internalized differences*. In this way, Deleuze radically re-conceptualize the simulacrum. *Reversed Platonism*, as we will see, entails breaking down the entire Platonic hierarchy of being, so that the thing does not possess any superior status compared to the simulacrum. Deleuze project of overcoming Platonism, therefore, renders the metaphysical concept authenticity meaningless, because the simulacrum has transgressed the logical scheme in which the distinction between the authentic and inauthentic is rooted. Following this line of argument, Deleuze challenges both the essentialist conception and the social constructivist conception of authenticity that will be discussed in the next section.

8.1 The Sophist

Deleuze considers the dialogue *Sophist* to be the most “extraordinary adventure of Platonism” (2004b: 294). The dialogue, featuring Theaetetus and a visitor from Elea who is not named (henceforth, the Stranger), enquires into the nature of the Sophist. Contrary to the previous dialogues, Plato does not introduce a myth in order to disclose the Sophist as a false copy. Rather, this dialogue is intended to reveal the true nature of the Sophist. However, by doing so, Deleuze argues that Plato applies the *Method of Division* paradoxically: its function is not to disconnect the simulacrum from the perfect idea, but rather isolate the simulacrum as an autonomous phenomenon. The Stranger explains that they agree about the name ‘Sophist’, but they need to reach an “understanding about the thing itself in terms of a definition” (Plato, 2008).
In order to define the nature of the Sophist, Theaetetus and the Stranger strive to determine the art in which the Sophist practices. They eventually agree that the Sophist practices the “art of persuasion” (Ibid.).

Stranger: “And that sort, which professes to form acquaintances only for the sake of virtue, and demands a reward in the shape of money, may be fairly called by another name?”

Theaetetus: “To be sure.”

Stranger: “And what is the name? Will you tell me?”

Theaetetus: “It is obvious enough; for I believe that we have discovered the Sophist: which is, as I conceive, the proper name for the class described.” (Ibid.)

Yet, the definition is incomplete, because the Stranger and Theaetetus manage to propose several other definitions which seem to be in accordance with the Sophist’s true nature. The Stranger therefore concludes that the “multiplicity of names which is applied to him shows that the common principle to which all these branches of knowledge are tending, is not understood” (Ibid.). Although the various definitions seem to capture the essence of the Sophist, Theaetetus and the Stranger eventually manage to reveal the common principle which unites them. The Sophist is the producer of false appearances and false images. Whatever the Sophist produces, he “deceives us with an illusion” (Ibid.).

However, by proposing this definition, Plato confronts a paradox. The true is that which really is (Being) and the false is the opposite of the true, the Stranger and Theaetetus agree. However, non-being cannot exist, the Stranger explains, because it would involve a contradiction in term (“non-being is Being”). But if the true is being and the false is non-being, how can the simulacrum exist at all? Thus, if the Sophist is defined as a false image, Plato is forced to admit the existence of non-being. The Stranger explains that:

Stranger: “A resemblance, then, is not really real, if, as you say, not true?”

Theaetetus: “Nay, but it is in a certain sense.”

Stranger: “You mean to say, not in a true sense?”

Theaetetus: “Yes; it is in reality only an image.”

Stranger: “Then what we call an image is in reality really unreal.”

Theaetetus: “In what a strange complication of being and not-being we are involved!”
Stranger: “Strange! I should think so. See how, by his reciprocation of opposites, the many-headed Sophist has compelled us, quite against our will, to admit the existence of not-being.” (Ibid.)

The conclusion is devastating for Plato, according to Deleuze. What Deleuze suggests is that Plato himself realizes that the Sophist is not simply a false copy, but rather “places in question the very notations of copy and model” (2004b: 294). The final definition proposed by Theaetetus in the dialogue ironically blurs the distinction between Socrates and the Sophist. The Sophist, Theaetetus states, is an “imitator of the wise”, but who possesses no knowledge which forcing him into self-contradictions (Plato, 2008). But this definition could equally well be applied to Socrates.

The final definition of the Sophist leads us to the point where we can no longer distinguish him from Socrates himself—the ironist working in private by means of brief arguments... Was it not Plato himself who pointed out the direction for the reversal of Platonism? (Deleuze, 2004b: 294)

So Plato reaches the point in which it is impossible to separate Socrates from the Sophist, because he realizes that both are beings. By questioning the nature of the simulacrum, Deleuze reveals nothing but a purely anti-Platonic tendency at the “heart of Platonism” (2004a: 156).

**8.2 Re-conceptualizing the simulacrum**

The reason why Plato encounters the paradox of the existence of non-being is because the simulacrum operates in a fundamental different logic than what he assumes, according to Deleuze. Instead of dismissing the simulacrum as a false copy, Deleuze argues that the simulacrum is based on a system of internalized differences. The simulacrum is a system in which “difference relates to difference through difference itself” (Deleuze, 2004a: 347).

As we saw in section 5.1, Nietzsche defined the task of modern philosophy to *Reverse Platonism* (Deleuze, 2004b: 291). Deleuze is now finally in the position to determine what precisely Reversing Platonism entails: “Overturning
Platonism, then, means denying the primacy of the original over the copy, of model over image, glorifying the reign of simulacra and reflections” (2004a: 80). Simulacra must arise and “affirm their place among icons and copies” (Deleuze 2004b: 299). While the Platonic universe was organized according to a three-step ladder hierarchy of being—ideas, things and simulacra—Deleuze draws the implication that the project of Reversing Platonism entails that “Being is univocal” (2004a: 44). Deleuze further elaborates:

Being is said in a single and same sense, but that being said, in a single and same sense, of all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities. Being is the same for all these modalities, but these modalities are not the same. It is ‘equal’ for all, but they themselves are not equal. (2004a: 45)

Simulacra are similar yet different. In virtue of the differences, they are similar. They are similar in so far as they are different. Deleuze argues that “things are reduced to the difference which fragments them, and to all the differences which are implicated in it and through which they pass” (2004a: 80). In other words, the simulacrum is nothing but differences. Because the ontological difference between the ideas, things and simulacra is erected and eliminated in the process of Reversing Platonism, Deleuze draws the implication that “every thing, animal or being assumes the status of the simulacrum” (Deleuze 2004a: 80). In short, things are simulacra themselves. This renders, according to Deleuze, the Platonic hierarchy of being meaningless:

No series enjoys a privilege over the others, none possesses the identity of a model, none the resemblance of a copy. None is either opposed or analogous to another. Each is constituted by differences, and communicates with the others through differences of differences. (Ibid., 348)

While Plato’s metaphysics was characterized by a sound foundation provided by the transcendental ideas constituting the essence of objects, Deleuze’s ontology implies a radical ungroundedness. The simulacrum has “no prior constituted identity” (Deleuze, 2004a: 80). There is always a cave behind the next cave; behind the mask there are only additional masks. Deleuze states that “difference is behind everything, but behind difference there is nothing” (Ibid., 69).
We can see that the simulacrum and the inauthentic are not equivalent expressions. Rather, the simulacrum has transgressed the very logical scheme in which the distinction authentic/inauthentic is rooted. To discuss the simulacrum in terms of authenticity is therefore meaningless, because it is neither an original nor a copy; true nor false; Good nor Evil. It operates in fundamentally different categories. The simulacrum does neither derive meaning from resembling an external model nor corresponds with a transcendental idea. Instead, the simulacrum generates intensity based on its system of internalized differences. In this way, the simulacrum is “an image without resemblance” (Deleuze, 2004b: 295). The simulacrum is self-referential: it resembles nothing but itself. But if the simulacrum operates in a fundamental different logic than model/copy, why do simulacra nevertheless seem to resemble each other? This is the case, according to Deleuze, because the simulacrum produces an effect of resemblance through its system of internalized differences (2004: 143).

What does Deleuze understand by the concept ‘difference’, which constitutes the structure of the simulacrum? Western metaphysics have failed to conceptualize difference in itself, according to Deleuze. For Aristotle, a difference occurs “between two things” (2001: 841). Difference is therefore subordinated to identity on Aristotle’s account. The problem with this conception of difference, according to Deleuze, is that identity itself presupposes differences (2004a: 80). It is not identity that constitutes difference, but difference that constitute identity. Therefore, a concept of difference built on identity is unacceptable. According to Deleuze, Hegel basically inherits Aristotle’s concept of difference (2004a: 55). Even Saussure, who claims that “in language there are only differences”, is only able to think of difference “without positive terms” (2004a: 255). Instead, Deleuze seeks to understand the productive nature of the differences.

For Deleuze, difference is “that by which the given is given” (2004a: 280). The real consists of both the virtual—that by which the given is given—and the actual—the given (Deleuze, 2004a: 176). Deleuze’s concept of the ‘virtual’
should not be confused with what is commonly understood as *virtual reality*. Neither is the virtual a transcendent category—that is, something *beyond the real*. Quite the opposite, the virtual is immanence, because differences are internalized in the simulacrum. Difference is an *intensive quality* (Deleuze, 2004a: 281). “Pure differences are continuous variations that cannot be fixed in terms of forms, concepts or functions” (Williams, 2003: 147). This, of course, makes it difficult to define precisely what a pure difference consists of. However, the basic idea can be illustrated with an example.

When we experience white light, the sensation does not express a transcendent idea of white light. Thus, white light does not acquire meaning from resembling the Platonic model of white light. Rather, white light reflects a whole spectrum of colours. Thus, white light is the actualizations of a virtual multiplicity of differences. However, the various colours constituting white light are not autonomous components, but differences themselves. Therefore, white light express a multiplicities of intensities, although it is actualized as singular sensation. Thus, white light is different from the multiplicity of colours which constitutes its virtual dimension (Deleuze, 2004a: 264). Actualization of the virtual in the actual takes place through difference or ‘differenciation’. Deleuze believes that the same principle applies to colour in general, as well as society and language (2004a: 258). Deleuze explains:

> The idea of colour, for example, is like white light perplicates in itself the genetic elements and relations of all colours, but is actualized in the diverse colours with respective spaces; or the idea of sound, which is also white noise. (Ibid.)

### 8.3 Practical implications

Without dwelling further on the concept of difference, it is important to demonstrate the practical implications of Deleuze’s *Reverse Platonism* regarding authenticity. In order to appreciate the fundamental difference between Plato and Deleuze, it is necessary to recognize the different logical scheme in which they operate. The logic of model/copy must be contrasted to the logic of difference/repetition.
Modernity, according to Deleuze, is defined by the “power of the simulacrum” (2004b: 302). Consider Andy Warhol’s picture of a *Campbell’s Soup I* (see Figure 8A). On Plato’s account, Andy Warhol’s picture should be evaluated according to its ability to resemble the idea of a can. The procedure for assessing the picture involves constructing three-ladder hierarchy of being. The idea of a can will figure on top, the material soup-can will represent the copy of the idea, while Warhol’s picture is reduced to merely a copy of the material soup-can. This is the case, since images in general only derive meaning from resembling material objects. In spite of the perfection of the picture, Warhol’s artwork is inauthentic, because it lacks a direct connection to the idea. Thus, the logic of model/copy invites us to evaluate Warhol’s picture of the soup-can based on its external relation to the material objects in which it represents.

*Figure 8A: Warhol’s Campbell’s Soup I and Marilyn Monroe (hot pink)*

On Deleuze’s account, however, images should not be evaluated according the logic of model/copy and their degree of resemblance. The distinction between the authentic and inauthentic is rendered meaningless in favor of universalized simulacra. Pictures do not generate meaning due to their external relations with ideas or objects. The challenge confronting art, therefore, is not to resemble reality. On the contrary, the task of every artwork is to become reality itself. This requires that the artistic creation achieves the status of an autonomous phenomenon. Therefore, Deleuze argues that the “difficulty facing everything is to become its own simulacrum” (2004a: 81). This is precisely what Warhol’s pictures manage to achieve, according to Deleuze:

> Pop Art pushes the copy, copy of the copy, etc. to that extreme point at which it reverses and becomes a simulacrum (such as Warhol’s remarkable ‘serial’ series, in which all repetition of habit, memory and death are conjugated) (Deleuze 2004a: 366)

Deleuze’s remark on Warhol can be interpreted in a very literal sense. Consider the famous portrait Marilyn Monroe (hot pink) (see figure 8A), in which Warhol experimented with the technique of silkscreen printing, often used in industrial production. The basic idea of silkscreen printing is that a stencil shaping a pattern is laid onto a canvas, so that a silhouette is formed when ink is transferred. Where the stencil does not cover the substrate, ink will be printed onto the canvas. This can be done in reprinted series, so that different colors and formations are printed into the canvas. In Warhol’s case, he used a stencil shaped as Marilyn Monroe. However, Deleuze’s point seems to be that somewhere in the process of repeatedly copying layer by layer of the picture of Marilyn Monroe into the canvas, Warhol’s painting detaches from the real person. Thus, the connection between the painting and Marilyn Monroe is eradicated. Warhol’s Marilyn Monroe (hot pink), therefore, is neither a copy of a concrete person nor derives meaning from resembling external models. Rather, Warhol’s picture has attained the status of an autonomous phenomenon in modern society. No wonder Baudrillard acknowledges Warhol as the “greatest simulator” (1994: 43).
In a similar vein, Warhol’s *Campbell’s Soup I* is therefore neither authentic nor inauthentic, because the picture resembles nothing but itself. *The picture is reality*; it is a simulacrum in the Deleuzian sense. Deleuze and Guattari argue that the “work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself” (1994: 165). When confronted with an artwork, the Deleuzian question is not what does it mean, what does it signify or what is it a metaphor for. Rather, the question is what does the artwork manage to accomplish and what affects does it produces. Instead of interpreting the artwork, it should be experienced as a sensation.

It is important to emphasize the difference between Deleuze and what commonly is referred to as perspectivism, often associated with Nietzsche (“there are no facts, only interpretations”, see Smith, 2007: 69). On the perspectivist account, a single object can signify various meanings, because the observer can project subjective convictions onto the object. Truth is therefore relative, because it depends on the subject’s standpoint. Rather than the subject, Deleuze argues that it is the differences within the simulacrum which enables various points of view. Thus, the different perspectives are contained in the simulacrum itself, because it is a system of differences. Perspectivism, Deleuze and Guattari argues, does not signify the “relativity of truth but, on the contrary, a truth of the relative” (1994: 130). In this way, Deleuze avoids absolute relativism (“everything is equally valid”) and the Habermasian trap of falling into a *performative contradiction* following such a statement (if everything is relative, then the sentence ‘everything is relative’ is also relative) (Habermas, 1996: 70). The truth of the simulacrum is that it contains difference rather than essence.
9. Beyond Authenticity

The previous section presented Deleuze’s attempt to Reverse Platonism. Contrary to what Plato believed, the simulacrum is not, according to Deleuze, a false copy. Rather, the simulacrum is a system of internalized differences. Because it does not depend upon a transcendent model, Deleuze demonstrates that the simulacrum has fundamentally transgressed the conceptual distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic. In this section, I will explore the implications of Deleuze’s argument for organization studies.

9.1 Redefining the problem of authenticity

Deleuze’s Reverse Platonism provides the basis for inherently challenging the logic underlying the contemporary conception of authenticity. Recall that authenticity involved presenting “one’s self accurately, to be true to one’s unique and self-contained identity” (Jackson & Guthey, 2005)—that is, being faithful to the inner true self. A CEO portrait, according to this logic, is authentic if it manages to represent accurately the real leader. However, Guthey and Jackson’s (2005) social constructivist critique emphasized that although these portraits immediately seem to generate an atmosphere of authenticity, establishing a connection with its spectators, upon a closer inspection, it is revealed that they are actually fabricated and constructed.

However, following Deleuze, we can now see that the real problem concerning the authenticity of the CEO portraits is not that they are constructed. This criticism keeps the idea of authenticity intact, because it fails to inherently challenge the distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic. Although certain CEO portraits are disclosed as false copies, it does not imply that all portraits are inauthentic. Rather, the real problem is already stated in the very definition of authenticity. The definition of authenticity assumes that the portrait derives sense from resembling an external model. More precisely, the definition of authenticity assumes that the CEO portraits derive sense from
resembling the real leader. The fundamental problem with the definition, therefore, is the very idea that portraits bear any direct connection to the real person.

An analogy to the relationship between a map and its territory can help to clear this point. A map is supposed to represent a territory. Therefore, the territory is commonly believed to constitute and precede the map. Correspondently, the idea of authenticity presupposes that the inner true self precedes the representation of the person. But this perspective ignores the opposite effect—that is, the way a map defines the territory and, thus, the way the portrait defines the leader. The boarders and height curves of the map are not naturally carved into the territory. Rather, the boarders and height curves are designated by the map. But by making this argument I am caught in the game of authenticity. Now it is the CEO portrait that is authentic rather than the physical person. Both these positions, (1) the person precedes the portrait and (2) the portrait precedes the person, therefore, operate in the logic of model/copy.

According to Baudrillard (1994), something much more radical has happened in contemporary society. The map generates a resemblance so perfect that it is impossible to separate it from the territory. By doing so, the map absorbs the very relation between itself and the territory—and, hence, is disconnected from the territory. Consequently, the simulacrum becomes a copy without an original. Baudrillard describe this condition as the hyperreal, defined as “absolute correspondence with itself” (Ibid., 47). The hyperreal, therefore, dissolves the very distinction between reality and illusion. The simulacrum is hyperreal—that is, it is “no longer anything but operational” (Ibid., 2). According to Wells, the photographic image conceived of a simulacrum must be understood as an autonomous phenomenon.

If a simulacrum is a copy for which there is no original; it is, as it were, a copy in its own right. Thus, in postmodernity it may be that the photograph has no reference in the wide world and can be understood or critiqued only in terms of its own internal aesthetic organization. (2004: 23)
If viewed as a simulacrum, then the photographic image cannot be criticized for lacking resemblance to the model, because it has no external references (Massumi, 1987). By radically re-conceptualizing the simulacrum, we manage to turn the whole problem of authenticity on its head. While the discourse of authenticity poses the problem of the image as a question of accurate resemblance, Deleuze argues in the direct opposite direction: The problem of images is precisely to detach themselves from the originals and “affirm their place among icons and copies” (Deleuze 2004b: 299). Constructivism, Deleuze and Guattari explain, “requires every creation to be a construction on a plane that gives it an autonomous existence” (1994: 7). So the problem of the simulacrum is not to resemble reality, but rather to become reality itself. The challenge confronting the CEO portrait is not to represent the leader accurately, but rather to become the leader itself. If managing to acquire the status of a simulacrum, then the CEO portrait operates as an autonomous phenomenon, producing an independent effect.

Consequently, the problem of the simulacrum is radically redefined from a question of resemblance to a question of difference. This reconfiguration of the simulacrum signifies a profound shift of logic from the Platonic model/copy to Deleuzian difference/repetition. By evoking the Deleuzian conception of the simulacrum, we manage to alter the problem of authenticity radically. I will now give a concrete example of how an analysis of CEO portraits could proceed based on Deleuze’s conception of the simulacrum.

### 9.2 The portrait as a leader

In 2008, the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* released a fascinating story (Kluge, 2008). Eight years earlier, Fred Kavli had sold the company he had built from scratch, making him a fortune (Alper, 2008). Kavlico is a producer of high-technological sensor devices used in airplanes, cars and industry. Its headquarters is located in Los Angeles. On its web-site, Kavlico writes:
Established in 1958 by Fred Kavli, a Norwegian immigrant, Kavlico was originally located just north of Los Angeles in Chatsworth, California. In 1986, Kavlico relocated the entire operation to its current location on a more than 40 acre site in Moorpark, California. (Kavlico, 2011)

Fred Kavli’s autobiography is a fairytale. After obtaining an engineering diploma in 1955, he traveled to America, the land of opportunity. He had no money, but high ambitions. In order to make his boyhood dream of running his own company come true, Kavli posted a two line add in the Los Angeles Times: “Engineer seeking financial backing to start own business” (Iron, 2005). He soon got positive response and in 1958 he founded Kavlico. Business immediately took off. Today, Kavlico is a multibillion company with more than 4,000 employees worldwide. After selling the company in 2000, Kavli established The Kavli Foundation which finances advanced science projects and a yearly award, The Kavli Price. Times Magazine (2007) has described him as the new Nobel.

On this particular day, however, Fred Kavli is back in the company where he served as the CEO for more than four decades. Only once since retiring as their CEO, Kavli has visited Kavlico’s headquarters in Los Angeles. He is sure no one knows him. Why should they? Things change quickly in this business. Probably most of the employees he once knew has quitted and moved elsewhere. The company has also grown during the last eight years.
Fred Kavli is in the middle of the picture (wearing a dark suit and red tie). He is together with three employees at Kavlico. On the left is Phil Hauser. The photo is taken by Stein J. Bjørge. © Aftenposten.

Fred Kavli stands on the parking lot together with the news team from Aftenposten. As he walks towards the entrance of the office building, a stranger approaches him. “Fred Kavli, you’re my hero!” His name is Phil Hauser. “Thank you for creating this wonderful company which I work for” (Kluge, 2008). As Kavli enters the building, two women sitting in the reception outburst “Is it really you?” They have never met Kavli before, but seen his picture many times. The president of Kavlico, Chuck Treadway, explains: “Fred Kavli is our mythical figure. On every important occasion we tell the story again: It begins like this: ‘In 1958, Fred Kavli came from Norway and he founded this wonderful company’” (Ibid.).

Aftenposten’s story witnesses of the fact that Fred Kavli has attained the status of a simulacrum in Kavlico. Articulated though myths and portraits, he has become an autonomous phenomenon within the organization. In this context, the receptionist’s question—*Is it really you?*—when Kavli enters the building is totally misplaced. The question presupposes that the physical person precedes the myth and portraits, in a similar way as a territory is supposed to precede the

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6 The quotations cited from Kluge (2008) are originally in Norwegian, but I have translated them into English.
map. However, one could make the opposite argument, claiming that it is the portrait and the myth rather than the physical person which constitute the identity of Fred Kavli. Thus, the real Fred Kavli is the myth and the portrait. Either way, we ignore the actual effect produced by the simulacrum.

The real leader is neither hidden behind the myth and the portraits nor is the myth and the portraits hidden behind the leader. Rather, the leader is immanent in the myth and the portraits. In this way, the myth and portraits are self-referential: they exist in and for themselves, with no references beyond their own aesthetic organization and operational dispositions. The myth and the portraits produce an effect, but his effect does not draw its supremacy from an external source. The myth and the portraits are simulacra. This is why Fred Kavli could operate as an effectual myth in Kavlico without his physical manifestation being present. So we should pay attention the function this myth and these portraits serve in constituting a shared history, purpose and vision for the organization.

The simulacrum Fred Kavli has been real in the organization, fully operational in the form of the myth and the portraits, even though the physical person has not been present. Probably, it is risky for the physical person Fred Kavli to return to Kavlico, because he may disintegrate with the myth. It is not risky because the simulacrum depends on his existence, but because it absorbs him in its relations. Now the myth also includes the moment that the legend returned to Kavlico. The company depends on a myth, but the myth itself does not any more bear any relation to the real person. To ask if the myth of Fred Kavli is authentic—Does it correspond to the real person?—would totally ignore the actual function this myth serves in the organization. Without having met him before, Phil Hauser, employee at Kavlico, thinks that Fred Kavli is his hero.
According to Griffey and Jackson (2010), a portrait can function as a virtual leader due to its effect and influence upon the employees. This is possible, they argue, because the portrait can “ensure that leaders can be represented well beyond the space and time that they actively inhabit” (Ibid., 135). For example, Griffey and Jackson analyze the portrait of Queen Victoria. During her lifetime, Queen Victory never visited New Zealand, although it was one of Great Britain’s colonies. But her portrait, strategically composed in order to represent her authority, was placed in the Treaty House, providing a “graphic example of an effort to manipulate the portrait’s function as a virtual leader” (Ibid, 153). Similar to the way the myth of Fred Kavli could be fully operational in Kavlico without the presence of the physical person, the portrait of Queen Victoria could manifest authority in New Zealand even if she never set her foot on the continent of Oceania. Once the portrait was installed in the Treaty House, it produced an effect independent of the physical person. This does not imply,
however, that the physical person is irrelevant. Rather, what I suggest is that the portrait cannot merely be reduced to a copy of the real person.

Although not occupying a formal position in the corporate hierarchy, Fred Kavli does, as the CEO reveals, serve an important function in the organization by figuring on portraits and being the main character in their corporate myth. Griffey and Jackson (2010) believe that this analytical approach towards CEO portraits, which they call “Art as Leadership”, goes hand in hand with emphasis on the paradox of authenticity (Ibid., 155, original italics). The fact is that the question of authenticity is not really relevant at all in this context. Rather than discussing the relationship between the CEO portrait and the real person, “Art as Leadership” actually manage to transgress the logic scheme between the authentic and the inauthentic. Setting the question of who is the real leader aside—the portrait or the person?—the CEO portrait produces an effect independently of the relation to anything but itself. Although these portraits are constructed though artistic conventions, the challenge confronting the portrait is not to resemble reality but become reality itself.

9.3 Disneyland and the simulacrum

The constructivist view of authenticity is supposed to represent a critique of the concept (Vannini & Williams, 1999). While Tracy and Trethewey (2005) claim that post-structuralism have failed to make an impact on organizations’ practices and discourses, the idea that authenticity is socially constructed has certainly not been ignored by popular business scholars.

According to Gilmore and Pine, we live in a world that is “increasingly filled with deliberately and sensationally staged experiences—an increasingly unreal world” (2007: 1, original italics). But postmodernism, they argue, has rendered the idea of objective reality meaningless. Nonetheless, there is a subtle but yet profound difference between “what is real and what we perceive to be real” (Ibid., 18, original italics).
All human enterprise is *ontologically* fake—that is, in its very being it is inauthentic—and yet, output that enterprise can be *phenomenologically* real—that is, it is perceived as authentic by the individual who buy it. (Ibid., 89, original italics)

In order to illustrate this point, Gilmore and Pine present the following example: Even is a young boy who deeply admires Disney cartoons. However, when visiting *Disney’s Animal Kingdom* for the first time, he is utterly disappointed, because the theme park features living animals rather than cartoon ones.

To someone who had been on a safari in Africa, Disney’s Kilimanjaro would seem entirely fake; to someone who has experienced wild animals only at a zoo, Animal Kingdom could seem quite real. To young Evan, however, something else factored into experience: this Disney offering was inauthentic not because it was artificial (and Disney), but because it *wasn’t* artificial (and Disney) enough. (Ibid., 9, original italics)

What is interesting about Gilmore and Pine’s argument is that they transform the social constructivist critique of authenticity into an efficient marketing strategy. Although authenticity is socially constructed, Gilmore and Pine argue that organizations should take advantage of this fact and exploit the opportunities it provides. The distinction between the ‘ontological fake’ and ‘phenomenological real’ provides unexplored business potential. If every experience is constructed, then companies should become better at fabricating products and services which consumers’ perceive as original. This is a perfect example of how social critique of capitalism is absorbed and incorporated into the capitalist logic (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006).

Although Smith (2006) rightly emphasizes that Deleuze and Baudrillard’s conception of the simulacrum should be carefully distinguished from each other, their theories share the essential characteristics. Similar to Deleuze, Baudrillard argues that the simulacrum is constituted in differences “without origin or reality” (1994: 1). However, while Deleuze sees the quest of modern philosophy to overcome Platonism, this project, according to Baudrillard, has already been accomplished at a cultural level (Merrin, 2001).
The real illusion of Disneyland, according to Baudrillard, is neither that the plastic castles are imitations of European medieval ones nor that the cartoon figures amusing the visitors actually wear masks and costumes. This is obvious. Rather, the real illusion of Disneyland is that there is no reality.

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and the order of simulation. (Baudrillard, 1994: 12)

Once you enter Disneyland, you enter the world of fiction. Once you leave the parking lot of the theme park, you are entering reality—that is, the real America. The distinction between the real and the imaginary is symbolized by the entrance gate of Disneyland. However, Baudrillard argues that the ideological function of Disneyland is to maintain the distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic and conceals the fact that ‘America is Disneyland’.

Baudrillard’s culture critique is even more radical than social constructivism, because he argues that the very distinction between the real and the fake has dissolved in contemporary culture. There is no way we can distinguish between the authentic and the inauthentic. However, this analysis raises a crucial question: If Baudrillard and Deleuze is right; if the simulacrum operates beyond the distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic, how should we then conduct normative evaluations and perform social critique? In the next section, I will explore the normative implications of Deleuze’s Reversed Platonism.
10. The Normative Implications of Reversed Platonism

Deleuze is aware of the fact that Plato’s motivation for disclosing the simulacrum as a false copy is exclusively ethical (2004a: 334). Authenticity and ethics are intrinsically linked, on Plato’s account, because separating the thing from its simulacrum provides the basis for conducting normative evaluations. This is also the case in authentic leadership studies. Separating the authentic from the inauthentic, George (2003) claims, provides the basis for distinguishing the good leader from the bad one. While Costas and Fleming believe that dismissing the “essentialist baggage implied by the idea of authenticity” (2009: 358) relieves a burden, I will emphasize that there is a flip-side of doing this.

Introducing the myth gave Plato the great advantage of solving the problem of rivalry by appealing to the ideas. If the simulacrum is to affirm its right among the icons and copies, it must be evaluated not according to its resemblance to the model, but as an autonomous phenomenon. Consequently, there is neither a privileged position nor an ultimate foundation, no transcendent principle such as realm of ideas support normative evaluations. The fundamental change of logic, therefore, has profound implications for normativity. How do we evaluate the simulacrum without appealing to the Platonic model? How do we evaluate leaders without transcendent categories?

10.1 The normative assumptions of Foucault-inspired studies

Before addressing the problem of conducting normative evaluations in the aftermath of Deleuze’s Reversed Platonism, it is necessary to explain why normativity is a concern for critical organization studies. There is a tendency in critical management studies, according to Alvesson (2008), to sympathize with the employees of the organization, because they are the innocent victims of
managerial domination. Radical humanists describe organizations as “psychic or cultural prisons, where people tie themselves collectively to certain constraining versions of the world, turning ideology into reality” (Ibid., 15).

The Marxist criticism of industrial capitalism holds that “under the capitalist mode of production workers are alienated from their human nature” (du Gay, 1996: 12). However, the traditionally radical humanist criticism of the workplace as a site of alienation (Seeman, 1959; Even, 1977) presupposes an authentic self which the employee is estranged from. Alienation, according to Rea, is always constituted in “relation to a normative ontological conception of the preferable, or authentic, self” (2010: 10). However, in Foucault-inspired studies justifying a strong normative engagement is not without difficulties. The idea of human nature has been dismissed as “metaphysical fiction” (du Gay, 1996: 51). Without the concept of the authentic self, the metaphor of alienation seems to fall to the ground. So how do Foucauldians legitimize their criticism of organizational practices?

This problem is clearly present in Townley’s work (see section 4.1). One the one hand, Townley dismisses radical humanism, because she believes that, following Foucault, “man is an invention of recent date” (1999: 301). So the idea of ‘humanity’ cannot provide a stable basis for conducting normative evaluations. But on the other hand, Townley insists that certain management technologies are ethically deficient. For example, Townley addresses the lack of moral concern in a document articulating the ‘Core Competencies for Public Service Managers’. Reading the document, Townley explains “prompted a degree of anger that for a time was difficult to explain” (1999: 286). By demonstrating that Adolf Hitler would qualify as a highly competent leader according to the competencies scheme, Townley concludes that the document is morally suspect.

What is the source of authority for judging Hitler as an unethical leader? Although most intuitively agree that Hitler’s leadership was immoral, what justify this normative assertion is unclear. If humanity is a too unstable basis for justifying Townley’s normative engagement, on what basis can HRM be
criticized for producing subjectivity, alienating employees and molding their beliefs? The implicit humanism underlying Townley’s analysis of HRM is perhaps inherited from Foucault himself. At least, Žižek argues that one finds precisely the same problem in Foucault’s writings:

Foucault liked to present himself as a detached positivist, laying bare the common mechanisms that underlies the activity of passionately opposed political agents; on the other hand, one cannot avoid the impression that Foucault is somehow passionately on the side of the ‘oppressed’, of those who are caught in the machinery of ‘discipline and punishment’… (Žižek, 1999: 203)

We find exactly the same tension in Townley’s analysis of HRM. While claiming to merely describe the disciplinary mechanisms operating in the organization,7 nevertheless she seems to sympathize with the oppressed employees who are subjected to managerial domination. Žižek’s remark on Foucault witnesses of the fact that by importing a philosopher into organization studies you are not only inheriting their concepts but also their philosophical problems.

10.2 The Real Act of resistance

Employees in contemporary organization often experience a split between the corporate self and the private self (Johnsen et al., 2009). In organizations characterized by strong corporate cultures, employees may withdraw their authentic private self from the prevailing norms of the organization in order to avoid colonization (Kunda, 2006). However, based on Žižek, Contu demonstrates that irony, cynicism and parody are inefficient strategies of resistance (2008) (see section 4.3).

Žižek criticizes the idea of ‘universalized simulacra’,8 because it fails to take into account the distinction between appearance and simulacra which is immanent to experience (1999: 232). Consider Contu’s analysis of resistance: Although

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7 Townley explains that the Foucadian method in organization studies should be a “political analysis of the how” power works (2005: 647).
8 Žižek (1999) here refers to Ranciere (1999: 104) that refers to Baudrillard. But Žižek repeats this distinction in his book on Deleuze, stating that “Phenomenal reality ... designate the way things ‘really’ appear to me ... opposed to mere subjective/illusionary appearance” (2004: 44). It is beyond the scope of this master’s thesis to discuss this epistemological question in detail.
workers believe that they successfully manage to shield their authentic self through parody, irony and cynicism, such practices ultimately reproduce the power-relations that they are intended to oppose. Here Contu’s argument relies on a distinction between appearance and reality. What appears to the workers is not necessary the case. But even if we consent to this Žižekian distinction, we cannot escape from the fact that there is no transcendent principle to fall back on when evaluating the simulacrum. Žižek is aware that there is no ‘Real Self’ lying underneath these ‘phantasmic identities’ (1999: 399).

So if parody, irony and cynicism amount to nothing but decaf resistance, what are the possibilities for performing efficient resistance within the organization? What would be a real act of resistance? According to Contu (2008), a real act of resistance would alter the very symbolic structure that regulates our subjectivity. Contu attributes this conception of an ethical act to Lacan, but it is more accurately found in Žižek’s interpretation of him:

For Lacan, there is no ethical act proper without taking the risk of such a momentary ‘suspension of the big Other’, of the socio-symbolic network that guarantees the subject’s identity; an authentic act occurs only when the subject risks a gesture that is no longer ‘covered up’ by the big Other. (1999: 313)

Normally, people act within the established socio-symbolic structures. By doing so, the words they utter basically belong to language. Žižek’s point is that in order to perform an authentic act it is necessary to challenge the very social network which regulates their subjectivity. However, this ethical act, Žižek explains, risks the “entire social existence, defying the socio-symbolic power” (1999: 313). An authentic act, Contu suggests, would be a real act of resistance. So in order to perform a real act of resistance one need to, as Contu emphasizes, “break with all that seem reasonable and acceptable in our liberal postmodern world” with consequences beyond comprehension (2008: 377).

There is clearly a sense of heroism underlying this conception of the real act of resistance. Similar to the way that the hero of a Hollywood action thriller goes against what everybody believes, even defying the authorities, in his quest for
justice, the real act of resistance challenges the establishment. But there is a crucial difference between the Hollywood hero and Contu’s rebellion. The hero acts because he or she truly thinks the outcome will be justice, while Contu’s rebellion cannot anticipate the consequences of his or her action in advance. Moreover, in the end, the Hollywood hero’s act appeals to common sense justice; while the real act of resistance alters common sense itself.

If the consequences of the real act of resistance are unforeseeable and unpredictable, why would anyone engage in such an activity? There is no guarantee that the outcome will be more preferable for the subject than before the act was committed. Quite the opposite, the “heroism of the act”, according to Žižek, should assume the outcome to be “from Bad to Worse” (1999: 464). This is also a crucial question in the debate of resistance: Why is resistance desirable? Underlying the discourse of resistance is the assumption that somehow resistance is intrinsically good. Resistance, it seems, becomes the very transcendent principle in Contu’s argument.

10.3 Turning the traditional critique on its head

Introducing Lacan in organization studies, according to Johnsen and Gudmand-Høyer, has the consequence of turning the “traditional critical perspective of HRM on its head” (2010: 332). While many scholars criticize management technologies for producing subjectivity, Johnsen and Gudmand-Høyer argues, following Lacan, that the fantasy of a coherent and fixed self “works to shield humanity against the terror of being”—that is, the traumatic lack (2011: 339).

What Johnsen and Gudmand-Høyer suggest is that, from a Lacanian perspective, HRM technologies cannot simply be dismissed as ethical deficient for injecting fantasies, because this process is a necessary condition of subjectivity as such. Hence, subjectivity depends on the transformation from the self as radical ontological lack to a symbolic fantasy. Lacan, therefore, challenges what radical humanists have identified as the lack of the ‘H’ in ‘HRM’ (Bolton & Houlihan, 2008).
Lacan’s theory of subjectivity provides a theoretical framework within which the organizational setting may depart from its status as a scene for alienation and become instead a privileged site for the drama of individual subjectivity at work. (Johnsen & Gudmand-Høyer, 2010: 332)

A normative evaluation of management technologies cannot be based on the opposition between fiction and reality, because the subject’s being depends on the support of a fundamental fantasy. The relationship between Lacan and Deleuze is complicated, especially due to Deleuze and Guattari’s criticism of psychoanalysis (2004; see also Smith, 2004). While Lacan defines the subject as radical lack—that is, the “subject is haunted by the suspicion that it has no content, no positive identity” (Hoedemaekers & Keegan, 2010: 1027)—the simulacrum, however, as the example of Fred Kavli demonstrates, is always characterized by surplus of sense in virtue of its internalized differences. “There is no event, no phenomenon, word or thought which does not have a multiple sense”, according to Deleuze (1983: 4).

In spite of these differences, Deleuze’s Reversed Platonism seems to arrive at some of the same conclusions as Johnsen and Gudmand-Høyer’s use of Lacan. As we saw in section 4.4, the problem of separating the authentic private self from the inauthentic corporate self has become a continuous struggle for members of contemporary organizations. But the simulacrum, according to Deleuze, has transgressed the very logic scheme in which the distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic is rooted. Deleuze’s Reversed Platonism therefore provides the basis of thinking the relation between the corporate and the private self, not in terms of authenticity (the one being more true than the other), but rather as an internal relation between different selves. Neither the private nor the corporate self can be dismissed as a false copy. Quite the reverse, both selves operate in their own internal logic and organization. But if the simulacrum cannot be dismissed as a false copy, how do we proceed in order to evaluate it?
10.4 The Ethics of Immanence

Deleuze’s *Reversed Platonism* decomposes the entire Platonic hierarchy of being. Yet, Deleuze does not claim that the doctrine of univocality of being renders the problem of selection meaningless. But Deleuze argues that we need to employ “completely different methods of selection” (1997: 137). However, the selection will strictly be among simulacra (Williams, 2003: 82).

There is a hierarchy which measures being according to their limits, and according to their degree of proximity or distance from a principle. But there is also a hierarchy which consider things and being from the point of view of power: it is not a question of considering absolute degree of power, but only of knowing whether a being eventually ‘leaps over’ or transcends its limits in going to the limit of what it can do, whatever its degree. (Deleuze, 2004a: 46)

Deleuze here points on two different ways in which the simulacrum can be evaluated. The first approach suggests that one evaluate simulacra according to an established immanent principle. The second approach suggests that the simulacrum can be evaluated according to its limits. This local measurement will evaluate the simulacrum according to its ability to realize its potential.

Smith (2007) develops an *Ethics of Immanence* based on Deleuze’s philosophy. The simulacrum, Smith agrees with Deleuze, cannot be evaluated by appealing to transcendent principles (“abstract universals”) (2003: 308). Transcendence is the problem of ethics, because general laws restrict simulacra. Justifying moral assumptions, according to Critchley, cannot “begin from the datum of the human being as an end-in-itself” (1999: 67). Nevertheless, Critchley argues that Levinas’ concept of the ‘Other’ provides a normative basis for humanism. “Levinasian ethics is a humanism, but it is a humanism of the other human being” (Ibid.). But the Levinasian idea of the Other, Smith emphasizes, is precisely what the ethics of immanence should strive to avoid, because it is the “paradigmatic concept of transcendence” (2007: 68).

Instead, the ethics of immanence should focus on the ‘mode of existence’ which a certain form of life implies. Yet, it is nevertheless necessary to determine when
a mode of existence expresses a good way of life. This evaluation, Smith explains, should be based on the “intensity of their power” (2007: 67). So Smith proposes ‘power’ as a criterion from which simulacra can be judged.

The selection, in short, must be based on the purely immanent criterion of a thing’s power or capacities, that is, by the manner in which it actively deploys its power by going to the limit of what it can do, or on the contrary, by the manner in which it is cut off from its capacity to act. (Smith, 2006: 115)

Following this approach, a hierarchy will be established that ranks simulacra from ‘reactive’ to ‘active’. While the active simulacrum manages to ‘deploy its power by going to the limit of what it can do’, the reactive simulacrum ‘is cut off from its capacity to act’. The normative question to ask, therefore, is what is the simulacrum able to accomplish? Ethics is transformed from the question “What must I do?” into the question “What can I do?” (Smith, 2007: 67).

The “good” is an overflowing, ascending, and exceptional form of existence, a type of being that is able to transform itself depending on the forces it encounters, always increasing its power to live, always opening new possibilities of life. (Smith, 2006: 115)

However, the distinction between ‘active’ and ‘reactive’ is not without problems. Notice that although Deleuze argues that it is possible to arrange the simulacrum according to immanent principles of ‘power’, he does not unconditionally claim that a high degree of power is intrinsically good. Furthermore, Deleuze emphasizes that reactive forces do not necessary become active by going to the limit of its potential (1983: 68). There is not only a quantitative difference between forces, but also a qualitative one. Moreover, establishing a hierarchy, according to Deleuze, can also “designate the triumph of reactive forces”, because it is the “reign of law and virtue” (1983: 60). If the ability of one simulacrum to optimize its power conflicts with another simulacrum, then which simulacrum should be preferred? And by introducing a hierarchy between reactive and active forces, do we not simply install a transcendent principle?
10.5 Towards a new field of Problematization

It lies beyond the scope of this master’s thesis to provide a comprehensive discussion of these questions. Yet, it is necessary to appreciate the radical normativity of Deleuze’s metaphysics. The fundamental ungroundedness of Deleuze’s philosophy also involves a fundamental normativity. If concepts are ultimately created, then the very activity of philosophy is basically ethical (Goodchild, 1997). But instead of proposing a clear-cut answer to the problem of normativity that emerges in the aftermath of Deleuze’s *Reversed Platonism*, I will argue that thinking beyond authenticity leads us towards a new field of problematization. As we have seen, by radically re-conceptualizing the simulacrum, we confront what Lyotard identified as the postmodern ‘crisis of legitimization’ (1987: 8). Neither the business leader nor the critical scholar can seek reassurance in transcendent principles, because “the only thing that can transcend a social practice is another social practice” (Rorty, 2000: 7).

According to George, authentic leaders serve all their stakeholders, including consumers, employees and shareholders. Thus, he believes that there is “no conflict between serving all your stakeholders and providing excellent return for stakeholders” (2003: 104). But stakeholders often formulate incompatible demands towards the organization. For example, the community’s interest in preserving the environment may conflict with the company’s utilization of natural resources. So what should leaders do in ethical conflicts?

In ethical conflicts where two demands conflict with each other, values are not able to guide the leader, because they are indeterminate. One of George’s (2003) values, ‘caring’ may equally designate ‘caring for the environment’ as ‘caring for the shareholders’. Therefore, the leader needs to make a choice. This zone of *indecidability*—“being caught between two irreducible demands”—is precisely where the question of ethics emerges, according to Jones (2003b: 231).

George solves the problem ‘Who is the good leader?’ by appealing to an element—that is, true values—which lies beyond the problem itself. The inner
true values are created through an analogy between the self and a compass. By doing so, George substitutes concrete relations (the ethical dilemma: how should companies respond to stakeholder demands?) with an abstract relations (the ‘self’ and the ‘moral compass’). So instead of formulating the question as the problem of separating true and false pretenders, one should instead view the problem as the selection between different leaders.

According to Bauman (1993), no moral principle can solve ethical dilemmas. Although the moral agent rely on a certain norm, for example, when making a decision, he or she is nevertheless responsible for preferring this norm to others. Ultimately, the plurality of social norms and the impossibility of transcendent principles make the leaders responsible for their own conduct. Consequently, on Bauman’s account, the postmodern crisis of legitimization leads to a radical individualization of ethics, because “no one else but the moral person themselves must take responsibility for their own moral responsibility” (1994: 14).

Honneth (2004), however, argues that the process of individualization has undergone a ‘paradoxical reversal’ in contemporary society. While the process of individualization initially was intended to free society’s members from the traditional social ties, as well as increase their autonomy and enable social mobility, today, being an authentic self, as we saw in section 4.4, has become a demand placed upon the subject.

[Self-realization has] become a feature of the institutionalized expectations inherent in social reproduction [so] that the particular goals of such claims are lost and they are transmuted into a support of the system’s legitimacy. (Ibid., 467)

On the one hand, following Bauman (1993), ethics is radically individualized, because the moral agents are ultimately responsible for their agency. But on the other hand, following Honneth (2004), being an individual has become a tremendous burden placed upon the subject in contemporary society. So the leader within the organization is dragged between the infinite ethical demand of being responsible for his or her actions and the unbearable responsibility this
implies. Furthermore, in the wake of the postmodern society, Sloterdijk locates a new form of cynical subjectivity that responses to the crisis of legitimization and the lack of alternatives by being “ironical about its own legitimation” (1987: 112).

Cynicism proceeds by way of a diffusion of the subject of knowledge, so that the present-day servant of the system can very well do with the right hand what the left hand never allowed. By day, colonizer, at night, colonized... (Ibid., 133)

The postmodern cynical subject, defined as an enlightened false consciousness, is immune to traditional ideological critique, because it is fully aware of modern times “suspension of reason” (Ibid., 217). Yet, the cynical subject is nevertheless obliged to act. So in order to describe this contemporary phenomena of cynicism, Sloterdijk re-articulates Marx’ definition of ideology from “they do not know it, but they are doing it” into “they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it” (Žižek, 1989: 19).

They know what they are doing, but they do it because, in the short run, the force of circumstances and the instinct for self-preservation are speaking the same language, and they are telling them that it has to be so. (Sloterdijk, 1987: 6)

Contrary to what Bauman’s position indicates, the point of Deleuze’s philosophy is not to reduce ethics into individual responsibility, but rather a critical assessment of the conditions under which a problem is constituted as a problem. Deleuze explains that the “problem of critique is that of the values of values, of the evaluation from which their values arise, thus the problem of their creation” (1983: 1). While Jones (2003b) draws on Derrida in order to reflect on the problem of responding to stakeholder demands, a further analysis could focus on the conditions for this problem to present itself as a problem. The context of Baumann’s individualization of ethics, Honneth’s emphasis on the paradoxical reversal of the process of individualization and Sloterdijk’s discussion of cynicism could form a point of departure for a problematization of the postmodern crisis of legitimization within organization studies.
11. Conclusion

Authenticity has entered the corporate agenda. Corporations seek employees who are willing to express their true identities at work, who are capable of producing original products and leaders who make decisions based on their fundamental values. Authenticity is promoted because the true self is conceived of as the source of creativity and motivation. Moreover, leaders are believed to be ethically responsible if they make decisions based on their fundamental values. But how do we separate the authentic from the inauthentic; the original from the copy; the real from the fake; the genuine from the fraudulent?

Concerning the nature of authenticity, organization studies have been preoccupied with two positions. On the essentialist account, authenticity entails being faithful to the inner true self. On the social constructivist account, authenticity is claimed to involve a fundamental contradiction. Although the authentic is supposed to be natural and true, upon a closer inspection, it is revealed that organizations fabricate and constitute authenticity. Thus, what is conceived of as authentic is actually a contingent construction.

This master’s thesis has analyzed and reversed the logic underlying the contemporary conception of authenticity in organization studies. Through Deleuze’s reading of Plato, I have argued that the idea of authenticity operates in the scheme model/copy which relies on the logic of resemblance. Thus, Platonic logic of resemblance invites us to evaluate an organizational phenomenon according to its degree of resemblance with a transcendent model. In the leadership guru Bill George’s leadership theory, an example of the essentialist position, we found that a leader is authentic if his actions and convictions reflect his inner true values. Yet, I have argued that George installs the transcendent categories of the inner true values through a myth of the self as a moral compass.

Although agreeing that the idea of the inner true self is problematic, I have demonstrated that the social constructivist conception is not radical enough. Ironically, although the social constructivist critique is supposed to render the very
idea of authenticity meaningless, it nevertheless operates, in a similar vein as Socrates, as the loyal servant of authenticity by revealing the simulacrum as a false copy. This is the case, because the social constructivist critique reveals the authentic as inauthentic. For example, CEO portraits that instantaneously present themselves as authentic are disclosed as ‘chronic’ inauthentic (Jackson & Guthey, 2005). Paradoxically, the social constructivist critique is caught in the very logical scheme it opposes.

In order to overcome the idea of authenticity, I have developed, following Deleuze, the concept of the simulacrum, defined as a system of internalized differences, within organization studies. The simulacrum is neither an original nor a copy; neither true nor false; neither authentic nor inauthentic. Therefore, the simulacrum enables us to think beyond the categories authentic/inauthentic. By radically re-conceptualizing the simulacrum from a *false copy* (Plato) into a system of *internalized difference* (Deleuze), we radically manage to alter the problem from a problem of resemblance into a problem of difference. The simulacrum does not derive sense from resembling an external model, because it is self-referential: it exists in and for itself, producing an effect. Thinking beyond authenticity was exemplified by CEO-portraits. The problem of the CEO-portrait is not to resemble the leader, but becoming the leader itself. The CEO-portrait was analyzed as an autonomous phenomenon operating in its own internal aesthetic organization. Yet, I have argued that thinking beyond authenticity has several implications for normativity and ethics that leads us towards a new field of problematization.
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