



Authenticity and the Cultural Politics of Work: New Forms of Informal Control

Peter Fleming

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The 'personal' was once something to be put to one side in the work place: a 'professional manner' entailed the suppression of private life and feelings. Now many large corporations can be found exhorting their employees to simply be themselves.

This book critically investigates the increasing popularity of personal authenticity in corporate ideology and practice. Rather than have workers adhere to depersonalising bureaucratic rules or homogenous cultural norms, many large corporations now invite employees to simply be themselves. Alternative lifestyles, consumption, ethics, identity, sexuality, fun, and even dissent are now celebrated since employees are presumed to be more motivated if they can just be themselves.

Does this freedom to express one's authenticity in the workplace finally herald the end of corporate control? To answer this question, the author places this concern with authenticity within a political framework and demonstrates how it might represent an even more insidious form of cultural domination. The book especially focuses on the way in which private and non-work selves are prospected and put to work in the firm. The ideas of Hardt and Negri and the Italian autonomist movement are used to show how common forms of association and co-operation outside of commodified work are the inspiration for personal authenticity. It is the vibrancy, energy and creativity of this non-commodified stratum of social life that managerialism now aims to exploit. Each chapter explores how this is achieved and highlights the worker resistance that is provoked as a result. The book concludes by demonstrating how the discourse of freedom underlying the managerial version of authenticity harbours potential for a radical transformation of the contemporary corporate form.

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