

# **The constructed authentic self at work and other acts of fiction.**

**A narrative approach.**

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Submitted as part of the completion of Doctor of Philosophy

Submitted: 2021

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# Certificate of Original Authorship

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## Required wording for the certificate of original authorship

### CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, *Kate Burt* declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Business School at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution. *\*If applicable, the above statement must be replaced with the collaborative doctoral degree statement (see below).*

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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## Collaborative doctoral research degree statement

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## **Format of thesis:**

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Thesis by artefact, exhibition, portfolio or creative work. This thesis comprises of an exegesis and creative artefact in the form of a children's novel.

## **Statement of published work:**

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The creative artefact enclosed here titled THE DANGEROUS BUSINESS OF BEING TRILBY MOFFAT, is an original work by Kate Burt. It will be published by Hachette Australia in October 2022 under the author name Kate Temple.

The illustration included on page 97 is credited to Christopher Cooper.

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This work was created on Gadigal Country.

## **Pre-text: On writing fictions and exposing the beams.**

Hello and welcome to what some might (and have) called a risky thesis. This is an arts-based approach situated in the UTS Business School, in which I am investigating the paradox of constructed authenticity at work, through the narrative method of writing a children's book. For good measure, I've also thrown in a Ricoeurian lens of narrative identity to steady me along the way. But before I take you with me along the tightrope I have strung up between the pillars of organisational studies and the world of children's literature, I would like to introduce you to the narrator. Me. After all I will be the one holding the balancing stick. My name is Kate Burt, as you have read on the title page of this document. I hold a Bachelor of Arts, and Masters of Business Administration and at the time of writing I am a PhD candidate with an interest in the constructed authentic self at work. So, what's all this about children's books? In my other, and quite separate life, I go by another name, Kate Temple. As Kate Temple, I have written over 16 books for children, some picture books, some novels. My work has been translated into 22 different languages and my books have won awards both here in Australia and internationally. Until undertaking this PhD these two Kates had almost nothing to do with each other, except a shared calendar. I doubt they would even talk to each other at party, in fact they wouldn't even go to the same party. Yet here we are, a reluctant and yet obvious collaboration. The above, slightly odd introduction is not intended as an exercise in narcissism. It's important context of the reading of this research. As you move through this work you will meet this narrative voice, as embodied and subjective. I have made the decision to write in this way because it best serves the subject I am investigating: the constructed authentic self at work. It is an attempt to allow myself to be present in

the work and to experience what I can as I engage with this research and for you as the reader to experience me. This voice however, is not the only voice you will encounter. There is something of a distant, academic and more expected tone to some of the sections. It can be jarring. It is jarring. Instead of attempting to smooth the two voices (both my own) into one seamless ‘authentic’ narrator, I have elected to expose the beams – allow the new to meet the old. What I mean by this, is the architectural contrast between the voices within this work are both written with an intent to be authentic and rigorous, they are trying to create a good and true work, but they are at odds. There is a tension. This tension is real, it is one that I as the author experienced throughout the entire thesis, and it is one that I am also probing as I look to better understand the constructed self at work. It is further complicated by a third voice, that of the author. As this thesis comprises of both an exegesis and creative work, the complete novel is embedded within this document, chapter 5 to be exact. Here you will meet new voices, also produced at my hand. The tension between these voices reflects the many voices that we as individuals create for ourselves at work and beyond. How I navigate them and how you, as the reader, navigate the contradiction of a multi-faceted self is at the heart of how we experience a constructed authentic self.



## **Abstract**

This work interrogates the changing meaning of employee authenticity and argues that it has become an aesthetic and paradoxical construct with implications for the politics of work. Using a unique arts-based narrative method this work aims to better understand the human experience of a constructed self within organisations – in this way the contribution is both to the field and methodological. This original arts-based approach involved the creation of two children’s novels developed as thought experiments to investigate the subjective experience of a constructed self at work. The selection of this method brought together my field of study and drew on my separate experience as a professional children’s author. Using a Ricoeurian lens, Narrative Identity Theory is then used to examine the intersection of the constructed self and the implications on that self at work. This work finds that the current definitions of authenticity within organisational studies are narrow and lack the ability to account for a multiple of selves that are ultimately authentic in their own execution and yet contradictory. It also concludes that the future of authenticity is in the broadening of this definition to the contradictions of self and the continuity of a conflicted self which relies on dismantling and demystifying of authenticity as a tool for organisational homogeneity.

This research is timely and required given the unchecked rise in authenticity as a desirable and cultivated employee attribute. It sits within a landscape of overwhelmingly positive literature which endorses authenticity as a benefit and one that offers the employee a liberation from the binds of conventional

management practices. Despite this, an emerging critical view suggests authenticity may instead be a Trojan horse designed to exert control and influence over the employee in personal and insidious ways. Current gaps in the literature have been identified in this critical space as well as gaps in the methods used to research it. This work aims to address both those gaps and demonstrate new and innovative ways of expanding ideas around the self at work. It looks at what we can glean from the proliferation of authenticity and finds that a future for authenticity at work may exist if the notion of what it means to be authentic is readdressed and the impact of constructing authentic selves is dismantled in its current form.