

The good old days yet to come: Postalgic times for the new spirit of capitalism

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Abstract

The spirit of capitalism has been read off biographies, accounting methods, and popular managerial texts. Here we explore it by report on a 'compressed ethnography' of a festival-type event for practising and budding entrepreneurs, the Do Lectures. Our analysis provides insight into a developing spirit of capitalist enterprise not yet discursively settled into text or organizational practice. We suggest that the event and its surrounding virtual community constructions contain intimations of a different spirit founded on incorporation of a range of temporally conditioned beliefs related to the natural environment, work, and organization. This in turn, we argue, suggests that spirits of capitalism can be understood as temporally more complex than as a series of linear progressions. We conclude by noting the potential for conceptual development to better interpret and understand the pasts, presents, and futures of capitalism through this approach.

Keywords

capitalism, environment, ethnography, nostalgia, spirit

Introduction: Spirits of capitalism past and yet to come

The notion that capitalism contains, or that its conduct is affected by, a 'spirit' has been with us for more than a century now. Weber's (1930[1904]) thesis retains a place as one of the most controversial theories in social science; his account of the spirit of early capitalism as founded on a 'Protestant ethic' has become part of the everyday language we use to account for individual or collective orientations to work, for example, as well as a way of understanding attitudes to economic activity. The idea of spirit has recently returned to prominence in sociological analysis thanks to Boltanski and Chiapello's monumental book *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005a, first published in French in 1999; the arguments are summarised in Boltanski and Chiapello 2005b). They pay homage to Weber's approach to understanding economy from the title onwards, always assuming that capitalism must be inflected by a spirit (or *Geist*¹) to explain why people participate in an economic system that has no coherent logic of its own beyond endless accumulation. Boltanski and Chiapello therefore start from the position that the best explanation for our continuing, expanding, increasingly global engagement with a system that exploits and damages us is due to our absorption of habits and behaviours founded on an ethos developed 'outside' capitalism's economic positioning. Because of this, we are said to be enacting a series of changing moralities that give meaning to our economic engagement where it would otherwise be absent.

In this paper we suggest that Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) conceptual framing of both capitalism and spirit rest on a implicitly progressive linear narrative of development. We do this through a reading of their arguments in relation to an event and community we argue exemplifies both the productive potential and limitations of this analytical approach. We begin

¹ The German term *Geist* is variously translated into English as ghost, spectre, mind, drive, moral, spirit-mind, and spirit.

by discussing Boltanski and Chiapello's thesis through examination of more recent contestations of capitalism and its spirit. Boltanski and Chiapello focussed their analysis on a published corpus of managerialist writings from the 1990s, which articulated, in a well-formed and relatively stable discourse, ideas that had emerged in response to demands made by counter-cultural new social movements of the 1960s. This is their 'new spirit', the third, which they distinguish from what they identify as the first and second spirits, developed during the late 19th and mid-20 centuries. Boltanski and Chiapello's first spirit is characterised by the bourgeois entrepreneur and his/her bourgeois values, while the second is recognisable by the figure of the bureaucratic manager, embodying the values associated with large scale, rational organization and management by objectives. This second spirit was rejected by the students – the next generation of potential managers – in the 1960s, throwing the social and cultural reproduction of capitalism into crisis. The third spirit – the 'new spirit of capitalism' that they focus on in their book – sought to appeal to the criticisms of the students of May 1968 by reimagining capitalism in terms of excitement, stimulation, and unalienated creativity, albeit at the cost of 'security', which was associated with the boring and safe world of bureaucratic, grey flannel suited managers from the 1950s.

This succession of changing spirits is thus generated by a series of ideological crises during which the economic logic of engagement is challenged, and individual commitment to capitalism wanes in light of the dominant form of the capitalist critique. New justification must be found, from 'outside' the narrow confines of the economic system, in cultural norms of social justice, security, and excitement, that can be transformed into a widely accepted ideology in order to engage the next generation of managers, capitalists and workers. Whilst new sources of criticism do not completely replace the former ones, there is a sense of progression in these changing criticisms and spirits, characterised by a combination of rupture and continuity. In this sense, the model of temporality assumed by this idea of a series of 'spirits' is similar to the 'unilinear' model of time, in which the 'antecedents of the present are seen in what is the immediate past' (Burrell 1992, 169) and in which the 'new' is also seen as 'a 'higher' level of development' (*ibid.*). Like debates over changing organizational forms from Fordism to post-Fordism, which accompany the changing spirits of capitalism, there is a sense of progress being articulated here, even if that is ultimately understood in a radical sense, as a progress toward the final confrontation of basic contradictions that will necessitate some form of revolutionary synthesis (cf Chiapello, 2013).

Even as Boltanski and Chiapello were writing about the 'new spirit of capitalism' in the 1990s, a different set of demands being made by 'even newer social movements' had emerged (Crossley 2003), generating another round of anti-capitalist criticism centred on environmentalism, debt, poverty, global justice and consumerism (Chiapello, 2013). To analyse how the ever-changing spirit of capitalism could be seen as being reframed in response to these challenges, we turn to an event that is prominent in the construction of a new form of discursive entrepreneurship: the 'Do Lectures'². Loosely modelled on the globally successful 'Technology, Entertainment, Design' talks³, this event is held on a Welsh hillside either annually or biannually with a small group of around a hundred physically present, and subsequently broadcast via the internet to a global audience. As we develop our analysis, we suggest that there are indications here and elsewhere of the articulation of an 'even newer' spirit of capitalism, notionally the fourth, built around features we observed at the event which suggest a different moral justification for engagement with capitalism.

² <http://www.dolectures.com/>

³ <http://www.ted.com/>

However, our analysis is also a means of problematizing the linear narrative of a progressive series of spirits of capitalism. The content of the spirit being articulated at the Do Lectures suggests a more complex conception of temporality, more akin to Gibson Burrell's image of time as a spiral (Burrell 1992), or Frederick Jameson's suggestion that postmodernism had flattened the logic of historical narrative into a bricolage of past, present, future, fact and fiction (Jameson 1991, 96). This means that there has been a shift in temporality, pointing to a different interrelationship of past, present, and future. As a result, understanding developing spirits of capitalism as a linear progression may be more of an analytic convenience than an empirical observation. Drawing upon the closely related concepts of nostalgia and postalgia, we argue that the 'even newer spirit of capitalism' articulated at the Do Lectures suggests a different temporal logic to the idea of spirit. This version of the spirit suggests more of a combination of romantic nostalgia for a lost past in which life and work were integrated into a meaningful whole through a 'craft' identity, located in authentic relationships of *Gemeinschaft* or community, with a techn-utopian postalgic (Ybema 2004) discourse of emancipation to be achieved through technological development and mediated community.

In the first part of the paper we set out central arguments that have developed around Weber's notion of spirit, and map out the current challenges to the reigning 'new (third) spirit' from even newer social movements. In the second part of the paper we outline our methodology, especially our choice of the Do Lectures and its community as a site to study the articulation of a spirit of capitalism. We then provide a narrative account of our attendance at the Do Lectures in autumn 2011, attending to the materiality of the event as well as drawing out key discursive anchor points developed through the lectures themselves. These are then further analysed through the lenses of nostalgia and postalgia; following this we bring together our arguments in the discussion to consider its implications for understanding temporal dynamics of the spirits of capitalism.

From Spectre to Spirit: Materialities and cultures of capitalism

When Marx and Engels (2008[1848]) wrote that there was a 'spectre' (*Gespens*) haunting Europe, they were referring to the spirit of communism as a political shadow cast over capitalism that they predicted would produce its own gravediggers. Writing just over fifty years later, Weber chose the term *Geist* rather than *Gespens* to conceptualise the cultural and political conditions of capitalism's emergence. Whilst both terms can be translated into English as 'ghost', they have very different implications. Weber wanted to provoke development to the materialism of Marx's analysis (Gerth & Mills 2009[1946]), by suggesting that political and economic formations are equally shaped by independently developing cultural values. For Weber, such values could shed light on the specific social and economic formations of capitalist organization and also the concrete rationalities motivating engagement in an economic system that, at root, has no internal logic other than accumulation for its own sake. As a source of power or authority, socio-cultural formations can also exist independently of, for example, economic standing, with the result that we should seek affinity rather than causality (Gane 2012).

Weber contrasted 'natural' pre-modern market economic relations in which activities are oriented toward the satisfaction of material wants, with the open, endless drive toward accumulation-without-enjoyment of modernist capitalism. The maximisation of income and wealth for its own sake is described as a culturally specific, northern European and North American, Protestant achievement. The subordination of life to work through a secularised notion of 'calling' and the construction of a moral equivalence between wealth and godliness, is framed as a reversal of the 'natural' subordination of work to life. For this to happen, there has to be a cultural spirit that animates and motivates activity because an exclusively materialist

analysis, which presupposes the drive to endless economic accumulation as an end in itself, misses a crucial sociological dimension (Gerth & Mills 2009).

This same problematic of the relationship between material, cultural, and economic dynamics resonates as we try to understand capitalism today through combinations of classical sociological theory and contemporary conceptual articulations (Gane 2012). Boltanski and Chiapello (2005a, 4) start with a 'minimal definition' of capitalism as 'an imperative to unlimited accumulation of capital by formally peaceful means', and draw from Weber 'the idea that people need powerful moral reasons for rallying to capitalism' (2005a, 9). They suggest workers, managers, or capital holders alike need a moral justification and legitimating ideology for engaging with capitalism precisely because, as a bare economic system, it has no inherent value rationality of its own. As such, capitalism needs a spirit, which they also define minimally as 'the set of beliefs associated with the capitalist order that helps to justify this order and, by legitimating them, to sustain the forms of action and predispositions compatible with it' (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005a, 10). Boltanski and Chiapello then trace the development of spirit from its early Protestant variant and the first spirit embodied in the bourgeois entrepreneur, through a second 'industrial' incarnation epitomised by the 'organization man' of the 1950s, to the third 'new spirit' emerging from the 1960s counter culture that would come to dominate popular managerial literature of the 1990s.

Where Boltanski and Chiapello depart from a Weberian perspective most clearly is in their suggestion that the new spirit of capitalism developed in response to antagonistic discourses articulated from a position of dissatisfaction with the status quo. This, they argue, led to a crisis of legitimacy and thence a reformation of the guiding spirit and its 'regime of justification' (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005b, 163). They invoke events in 1968 in France when students and workers took to the streets in protest and the ideological foundations of capitalism were explicitly challenged. The moral discourses 'addressed to the cadres' (2005a, 14), the managerial classes that are reproduced through the French higher education system, sought to address the disengagement of this class from the logic of capitalist production/consumption. Whilst 'blue collar' workers can be pressured into work through poverty and the withdrawal of social security, a more active engagement than mere compliance is required of the managerial classes. Hence, they argue, the need for a post-1968 formation of a 'new spirit of capitalism' to re-engage students (the future managerial cadre) with the possibility of a meaningful working life in management. This generation was not attracted by the image of the stable, safe, grey-suited, career bureaucrat that dominated the imaginary of the business world, it is suggested. Influenced by the emerging 'artistic critique' of capitalism, excitement and authenticity were to be valued rather than security, and the overarching values that justified engagement on grounds of efficiency or market success were best ignored. Thus, this critique:

...first emerged in small artistic and intellectual circles, and stresses other characteristics of capitalism. In a capitalist world, it criticises oppression (market domination, factory discipline), the massification of society, standardisation, and pervasive commodification. It vindicates an ideal of liberation and/or of individual autonomy, singularity, and authenticity.

(Boltanski and Chiapello 2005b, 176)

It is presented as articulating a rejection of capitalist alienation and oppression, as well as highlighting the dysfunctions of mass consumer society. To re-engage these people, then, a new spirit of capitalism formed that would speak to demands for autonomy, singularity, and authenticity, articulating the value of capitalist management in these terms. Boltanski and Chiapello point to writers like Tom Peters decrying bureaucracy as a force that crushes

individualism and creativity and leads to dull (and uncompetitive) conformity, as typical of this shift.

Their argument conceptualises three main elements to the regime of justification articulated by any spirit of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005a, 16; 2005b, 164). First, what is exciting about engagement with capitalism, enabling it to generate enthusiasm and the promise of liberation? Second, what stability and security does it promise, for both current and future generations? Third, how is capitalism justified in relation to the common good? In answering these questions, a spirit can emphasise one aspect more than others – for example, until the 1960s the spirit's main emphasis lay on material security and well-being. In response to the artistic critique, the new spirit of capitalism signalled a shift of emphasis away from these concerns towards 'excitement' and 'liberation'.

Boltanski and Chiapello's analysis concentrates on how critiques of capitalism, as absorbed and articulated in its changing spirit, are transformed into ideological rhetoric to provide a moral foundation and justification for the maintenance of established forms of organization and economy. The artistic critique, informed by a moral theology that draws on New Age spiritualities rather than Protestantism, has served this purpose since its initial flowering in the 1960s. It is easy to find consumerist and managerialist commodifications of the spirit that underpinned the artistic critique: feng shui office space consultancies, spiritual management development programmes, aromatherapy candles to soothe away work-related stress, and yoga positions that enable creativity and innovation have all become part of Western working landscapes (Carrette and King 2005; Casey 2004). In a more secular form, the positive focus of this critique on creativity, innovation, excitement, fun, non-alienated, fully human activity, and the integration of 'work' and 'life' is reflected in any number of team building away days, corporate culture initiatives (Fleming 2005), or the architecture and design of iconic corporate headquarters like the Googleplex.

However, we think we can also see one of the contours of an 'even newer' spirit constructed in response to a second line of critique that emerged at the same time in the 1960s: environmentalism. Overshadowed for a time by the dominance, and recuperation, of the creativity-focussed artistic critique, environmentalism emerged as a powerful global imaginary for resistance in the 1990s, coupled with an explicitly anti-capitalist, anti-globalisation ideology framed in terms of 'global justice'. These 'even newer social movements' (Crossley 2003) shifted emphasis from notions of 'excitement' and 'singularity' to an alternative way of justifying capitalistic activity, suggesting that 'justice' could be articulated in demands for the eradication of third world debt, for example, granting indigenous land rights, or in corporate accountability for environmental degradation.

This shift in critique, and therefore spirit, is embodied in the on-going protest movement that started with the 'battle of Seattle' in the 1990s and developed in more recent years into 'Occupy Wall Street' (Maeckelbergh 2009; Graeber 2013). New consumption communities (Moraes et al. 2010) and organizations promoting ethical production/consumption (Land & Taylor 2010) both aspire to address exactly the problem Weber (1930[1904], 123) predicted as inevitable to the Protestant-inspired first spirit of capitalism – that unbounded accumulation and consumption would be challenged by lack of fossil fuel. This issue is, perhaps, the most pressing that contemporary producers and consumers now face, and therefore it is this that the 'even newer' spirit of capitalism claims to address, presenting rhetorical justifications for production and consumption that rationalise the impending reduction in natural resources that earlier spirits of capitalism (and their associated critiques) largely ignored. Given that this spirit is emergent, and the critique still contested, studying its formation in action requires a distinct methodology from

the text based analyses of Weber and Boltanski and Chiapello. The following section therefore explains our methodological approach: a 'compressed ethnography' of discourse in action undertaken at the Do Lectures, as a quasi-public forum in which new ideas of what capitalism is, or what forms it might take, are articulated, discussed, and performed.

A Methodology for Studying How to 'Do' the Spirit of Capitalism

Our analysis is based on fieldwork centred on a five day event held at a campsite in west Wales, the 'Do Lectures' ('Talks that inspire action' because 'Ideas change everything', according to the organizers - <http://dolectures.com/>). These annual events are a perfect manifestation of what Boltanski and Chiapello (2005b, 162) call the 'intellectual avant-garde' of the spirit of capitalism. The people involved claim to be early adopters and pioneering practitioners of the new, which they then lecture and write about, so that others can be inspired to follow. As such, we think their cultural influence is disproportionate to their economic wealth.

To study the Do Lectures we undertook an intensive, short period of ethnography (Crang and Cook 2007), participating in the lectures as attendees. This can also be described as 'compressed ethnography', an approach based on fully inhabiting a research site to collect data on both visible and less observable social relations (Jeffrey & Troman 2004). The key to this ethnographic methodology lies in the detail of data collected, and recognition that the snapshot presented in analytic narrative can be read as a representation of culture or community dynamics constructed over a longer period of time. In negotiating access, we were open from the outset about our research interest. We made fieldnotes from the moment we applied to be admitted to the event, through receiving confirmation that we had been accepted, traveling to the site, participating in the lectures, dinners, campfire conversations, cold nights in tents, shower queues in the mornings, and evening social activities. As the campsite event is only one part of the Do Lectures community, we surrounded it with virtual ethnography (Hine 2000) before and after the event, watching lectures from previous events, maintaining contact with members of the community by email, and keeping notes on the regular communications from the organizers. Our fieldnotes are split into description of key events or communiques supplemented with drawings, for example to capture the layout of physical spaces, and more analytical reflections on the event both in the moment and subsequently. Whilst this is clearly an artificial division of the objective and subjective (Crang and Cook 2007), it helped us to maintain a focus on describing who said what, when, where and why, as well as thinking about how we felt and why. It is also worth noting that as middle class professionals with concerns for the problems of contemporary capitalism and the natural environment, we fitted the profile of the core target audience for the lectures very well, so it is a reasonable assumption that our responses would resonate with those of other attendees.

During the event we observed the processes of articulation, recognition, contestation, investment, and disengagement that frame the formation of an ethos supporting engagement in capitalistic activity. Not all of this process is linguistic; material and performative aspects of the spirit are also essential to protest communities and companies that claim radical roots (Sutherland et al. forthcoming; Land 2009; Land and Taylor 2010). From first browsing the website of the Do Lectures it was apparent that this community drew on language and symbolism from radical movements, and that the culture of the lectures was a very visual one. In the booklet sent out to newly registered attendees, for example, there was relatively little text, and much of the content was given over to drawings and photographs. In seeking to capture this dimension of the 'even newer spirit', and to understand better the visual culture within which it was being articulated, we therefore incorporated elements from visual ethnography alongside our more conventional fieldnote analysis (Pink 2007). In practical terms, this meant using our own

cameras to capture elements of the event, but also to discuss photographs with the many others who were taking them, as a way to understand what they saw as significant and worthy of documenting. Given that there were also several professional photographers documenting the event, with still photographs and fixed video cameras set up to capture the lectures themselves, this provided a rich and detailed aspect of the data set.

The next section gives an overview of the event, providing an overall narrative and drawing out specific critical moments and themes. We developed the themes here as we wrote up our field notes, inserted photographs, and exchanged, compared and discussed interpretations. Early in this process we decided that the twin themes of nostalgia and postalgia, as prospective and retrospective temporalities, were interwoven in the constitution of the ideology that sought to capture the imaginary of the present. This is not a purely conservative, backward looking vision, or a purely progressive, future-orientated evolution, or revolutionary break with the past. Rather, what we found is a more spiral temporality, in which engagement with a particular version of the past holds the key to a better future, with its true potential only becoming possible through ICT and other new technologies, which promise traditional authenticity, belonging, the realisation of human potential, and social and environmental justice, without the constrictions imposed by tradition and the past.

Doing 'Do'

Our material empirical engagement with the Do Lectures started a month before the lectures, when some 'stuff' arrived in an A5 envelope with a real stamp (i.e. not a business frank), the address faintly printed. The 'Do lecture' logo and address - 'The Chicken Shed' - were properly printed on the bottom of the envelope, slightly to the left, so that the addressee print quality appeared rather 'quaint'. The overall effect was of a slightly amateurish, fanzine aesthetic from the 1980s. Inside, the letter from the 'Chief of Stuff' was very informal, opening with a 'Hi there', signed off with a 'Can't wait'. It was decorated by simple cartoons of a bicycle and a hot-air balloon, images of old technologies of travel, environmentally friendly and connected to nature and the elements: technologies that conjure up simplicity, humility, and enthusiastic amateurishness. This theme was carried over into the 'Attendee's Guide', which included 'Travel Information' pages featuring images of a boat, double-decker bus, bicycle, propeller biplane, and tractor - all rendered in an amateur, slightly childish style. The overall effect was strikingly similar to imagery used by activist organizations involved in campaigning on environmental and transport issues (Land 2009).

Against this lo-tech imagery, epitomized by the potato-stamp appearance of the main 'Do' logo on the front, the final page of the attendee guide contained the following:

Before you go...

Discover and connect with fellow attendees through the 2011 Do Lectures Lanyard. The Twitter powered conference directory. Visit the link below.
lanyard.com/2011/the-do-lectures

The link to Lanyard/Twitter fulfilled two main functions. First, it opens a space for participation, suggesting that attendees should become actively involved, and echoing the statement from the founder of the lectures that "We know it isn't just the speakers that make this event, but those who attend it too". Second, this participation was elicited, using the latest social networking technologies, so that attendees' first engagement with an event that promised a kind of 'time out' to return to nature in the bucolic idyll of the Welsh hills was via their

smartphones and laptops. This clashing of past and future, tradition and technology, was repeated throughout the event.

Arriving at the event (guided by a combination of hand painted 'This way' signs, a map, and a GPS app on a phone), we parked our very conventional hire car and walked onto the main site. The venue is next to a nature reserve just outside the town of Cardigan; it combines a small kitchen garden growing organic produce, with a campsite offering a range of high-end accommodation options up to geodesic domes with wood-burning stoves and proper beds. Our own sleeping place was in a large tent, shared by eight people and gender segregated. The tent was a traditional square canvas structure of the type associated with collectivist camping in the 1970s, its roof supported by a roughly hewn wooden post. It was a far cry from the lightweight, synthetic tents with carbon-fibre poles that are more common today. This was carried over into the reindeer skin used as a sleeping mat that we were each provided with. It was carefully placed on top of a high-tech, arctic quality, self-inflating sleeping mat made entirely of synthetic materials. Finally, to help keep us warm we were also loaned a four/five season sleeping bag from a high-end Finnish manufacturer.

The conjunction of high and low tech was carried over into the main venue's pair of large, conjoined, canvas tepees. At one end, next to the entrance, was a sound mixing and lighting control desk surrounded by hay bales. In the middle, rows of mis-matched folding chairs were laid out facing the main stage. To the sides were two high-quality video cameras, set up to capture the lectures. Behind the stage was a projector screen, and slightly to left of centre was a tree stump, beautifully cleaned, levelled, and shaped, two small microphones protruding from its top like antennae. The stump operated in exactly the same way as a more conventional steel/glass lectern (or simply masks one? We were not able to check as the stage was open only to organizers and lecturers), while simultaneously expressing very clearly that those materials are unacceptable in this context. If we must engage with the norms of contemporary technology, then we should do so in a way that upsets the conventions by pretending that they can be made of wood or more obviously natural materials.

This combination of natural materials, a homely domestic object, and contemporary technology exemplifies the key way that consumer goods were discursively articulated. The arrival car park contained several very well maintained classic vehicles – a vintage Land Rover and a Type 2 Volkswagen camper van, for example. These practical long-lasting vehicles suggest a desire to be living in the 1960s, perhaps for aesthetic reasons based on appreciation of innovative classic designs, but also suggesting a wish for an ostensibly simpler life that is now read as containing fewer demands on time, location, or selfhood. Clothing also reflected this philosophy. Most people attending, ourselves included, brought a bag filled with a clashing mixture of cotton, wool, natural dyes, lycra, Gore-tex, and neon. We noticed some very careful dressing, dependent on activity, temperature, and social context. Early morning yoga, canoeing, and running all saw a preponderance of man-made fibres; attending the Lectures brought more classic design clothing in natural fibres, the sartorial equivalent of the vintage Land Rover; while relaxing in the evening around the campfire or in the little stone-built pub saw us dressed in a mixture of the two, especially when the temperature dropped near to freezing and we put on everything we had brought.

This approach and its cultural associations extended throughout the camp and the lectures. Speakers referred repeatedly to moments in time or places in which life was apparently simpler, more rewarding existentially, more sensitive to the natural environment, and more ethical. The lecturers consistently promoted an image of a simpler, more authentic mode of existence, better integrating work and life into a unified whole. For example, a workshop on improvisational

theatre and creativity, run by a management consultant who also teaches at Saïd Business School, was held in a traditional workshop out in the forest, surrounded by handsaws, axes, and woodcarving equipment. In this environment we were encouraged to physically reconnect with ourselves and interact with each other in order to unlock our natural creativity. In another talk, we were told a story of how the speaker, disillusioned with his conventional career, had set off around the UK on a bicycle to meet and interview a range of traditional craftspeople, each with a distinctive local flavour to their crafts, expressed, for example, through strong dialect, reference to skills handed down from generation to generation, or the use of specifically local materials.

The location and the physical environment of the event itself were given great prominence. The site was presented as an example of preservation and re-use, with low impact construction that could be removed leaving no trace. Only in such a setting, it was implied, could people flourish as individuals and communities. We were continually reminded of the buildings, the natural context, and how they fitted together, each supporting the other. The vehicles, buildings, and clothes were supported by a more ephemeral material: the food and drink. A list of collaborating companies provides a strong sense of the food available (if you are a middle class British consumer with an interest in what you eat and an ethical orientation): Innocent, Yeo Valley, Rude Health, Cafe Direct, Tea Pigs, and Adnams. Each of these companies has a reputation for production of high quality, taste oriented, expensive, carefully packaged food and drink. The fresh food served at lunch and dinner extended this feeling. All of it was made from scratch on site by a small group of (mostly) women, so that we ate extremely well of fresh handmade bread, sweet and savoury tarts encased in excellent pastry, and casseroles or large pot meals made up of fresh vegetables, freshly ground spices, and locally sourced meat. The long communal tables allowed/forced people to sit with strangers, sharing food, drinks, and life stories.

The importance of food and fresh ingredients took a curious form in the many references to breadmaking. This seemed to be a masculine activity; it was certainly celebrated more by men during the event. Particular cachet attached to making sourdough bread using a natural yeast starter, following the first method developed to make leavened bread and emphasising the craft nature of the process. The domesticity implied in making bread in the home was echoed in references to children – again, this was a gendered dynamic in which men made many more prominent comments about their offspring. We interpreted these rhetorical markers as a means of claiming a masculine presence in domestic life, in contrast to the typically absent father figure in the high modern era of the 20th century ‘organization man’. Many of the male lecturers showed photographs of their children, or told stories of amusing thought-provoking things their (small) children had said/done. Referencing family and especially children in this way also provided a way of showing work/life balance, even if regrets had to be expressed about not seeing enough of family because of pressures of work. Discursively including family in this way also enabled lecturers to speak to a more innocent, happier, and more insightful personal past, constructing children as wise and childhood as a time of naïve creativity unfettered by organizations or societal norms.

Through nature, family, and traditional crafts, the ideology of the Do Lectures promises to heal the wounds of 20th century capitalist civilisation, reintegrating work and life, economy and community. The idea of community was particularly clear in the first lecture, which dealt directly with the isolation and solitude of contemporary Western life. Reflexively, it opened the Do camp with a discussion of another camp system, Foo Camps, organized via the internet and social media to bring together people with a common set of interests or concerns in a temporary community. A similar lecture focused on co-working spaces, where independent freelancers and the self-employed can rent desk space and computer with wifi by the hour, day, week or month, easing the isolation and solitude of home-working by sharing space with others in a similar

situation. In both lectures, new technology was held out as promising a return to a lost form of convivial community, even though these same technologies have, in many ways, contributed to the patterns of working that have broken down industrial workplace communities and led to widespread, isolated, insecure home working (Gregg 2011).

This conjunction of technology and tradition was also apparent in the ideal of 'craft' that promised to return meaning to work. The clearest example of this was in the lecture recounting a cycle tour of the UK that the speaker had undertaken to visit a range of craftspeople. The tour had been documented using photography and interviews, then uploaded as a slideshow to play over the edited narratives of the interviewees on a website. We were shown one of these short films featuring a walking stick maker from Lincolnshire. With a strong regional accent, clearly locating him in a concrete geographical and class location, he worked with very basic, traditional hand tools, in tune with the seasons when gathering wood, to make a range of traditional walking sticks, for traditional shepherds for example. Doubling this sense of craft, the speaker rhetorically laid claim to a 'craft' documenting his subjects with digital photography and interviews to create a website and modern book, more reminiscent of the high-tech, media focussed, creative economy than traditional manufacturing. In a similar way, this ethic of craft was presented in a lecture about 3D printing. At first appearance, the image of younger people playing with laptops and 3D printers could not be further from that of an older man hand carving sticks in his garden shed, but both images came together in a celebration of physically making things, of tinkering, and of an ideal of passionate commitment to a craft, sharing knowledge and skills in a community. With the 3D printers, for example, the real craft was the making of these machines and the programming, very clearly reflecting Sennett's (2009) analysis of open source software programming in craft terms.

This sense of bifurcated time, combining a romantic, retrospective form of nostalgia with a techno-utopian, prospective celebration of technological progress, also surfaced in relation to nature and the environment. Ecology was continually evoked as something sacred and almost, or about to be, lost. A key focus of several talks and workshops was reconnection with nature, by surfing, canoeing, doing yoga at dawn, or through simple food and camping. These activities were presented as a way to return to something 'primordial' (as the camp organizer put it) and basic in human nature, taking us back to our roots and to something that had been lost in the progress of modernity. In a very muted form, this could be seen as reflecting elements of the critique of civilisation prevalent in much more radical social movements organised around eco-activism and with an ideological orientation toward anarcho-primitivism (Zerzan 1996), such as Earth First! or in parts of the Climate Camp movement. In the Do Lectures, however, attempts to re-sacralise nature run hand in hand with commerce and technological progress. One of the main organizers of the event also runs an outdoor activities company, offering management development workshops based around outdoor pursuits to large corporates, promising to build team spirit through physical activity and a reconnection with nature. The promise here is not a destruction of civilisation or capitalism and a return to a pre-lapsarian unity, but rather the deployment of a natural experience, packaged and paid for, as a means to increase organizational effectiveness.

This theme, and the tension it embodies, came to the fore in an episode that took place on the first morning of the lectures. After arriving the previous afternoon, we had been told that each morning there would be 8am yoga classes held on the reception building veranda and at 5am a canoe trip down a nearby river. The first canoe trip had been talked about a lot over dinner and drinks the evening before, with eloquent accounts of how the mist rises from the surface of the water in the early morning sun, connecting the paddler to nature. Over the course of the following day, however, a range of ever more hilarious and elaborated accounts of a farcical

process of 'geeks trying to commune with nature' (as one of the attendees put it) came out, once accompanied by a rendition of 'Duelling Banjos' - the theme from the film *Deliverance* - played on an acoustic guitar. Apparently some of the canoes had capsized, soaking occupants to the skin; when they finally swam to shore, dragging the canoes with them, someone stepped into a nest of bees, so several people were stung by the irate insects. The crews eventually returned to camp closer to nature but also cold, wet, hungry, sore and thoroughly irritable.

Looking back to the future: Constructing the past, constraining the future

The complex interweaving of past and future to generate an ideal form of economic engagement in the present is a prominent feature of this event and its community. This ideal form was always capitalist and entrepreneurial, with most of the speakers discussing how they had set up profit-making businesses to address the problems they saw. Companies included a solar farm in Wales (selling into the British National Grid), a Californian venture capital fund investing in eco-enterprises (and generating healthy returns on investment), a natural sea salt manufacturer (who supply Walkers' crisps), a green supply chain consultant (working for Tesco), and a company providing cheaper loans than payday companies to the sub-prime poor of East London. In each case the business was presented as an ethical solution to the problems of social and environmental justice. There was never any suggestion that a profitable, capitalist business model might be incompatible with these goals. Indeed, it was generally seen as the best way to 'Do' something and make a difference. Engagement with capitalism was presented as a way to do good as well as make money. In this we might see the Do Lectures as encapsulating an 'even newer' spirit of capitalism, in which the three dimensions of Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005b, 164) model are combined. The first dimension - 'excitement' - relates to the autonomy and liberation promised by a spirit. In the Do Lectures, we would argue, this was primarily related through unleashing entrepreneurial creativity through the image of craft mastery, suggesting a continuity with the 'new spirit' that Boltanski and Chiapello see as emerging in response to the artistic critique of the 1960s. This combines with a retrospective valorisation of a more conservative 'craft' ethos, however. The second dimension of security was framed at the Do Lectures through a combination of ecology and family. Reflected through the mobilisation of children, animals, food and nature in the talks, these combined in persistent demands for environmental sustainability framed in terms of keeping the world safe for children. It was the third dimension that perhaps came most explicitly to the fore however: 'the notion of *fairness*, explaining how capitalism is coherent with a sense of justice, and how it contributes to the common good' (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005b, 164). In the 'even newer' spirit that we are suggesting is being articulated, however provisionally, at the Do Lectures, the dimension of fairness moved beyond the conventional 'trickle down' idea that 'a rising tide floats all boats', the staple legitimacy articulation of the social good of capitalism. It also moves beyond the focus on 'mobility' that characterised this dimension in the 'new spirit' and which enabled the development of 'employability' as an individual benefit. Although we would argue that 'community' was primarily represented within the lectures as a network resource, this was coupled with local rootedness as a means of establishing authenticity and ecological responsibility.

In this, the 'even newer' spirit seems to follow the conservative strand of ecological criticism identified recently by Eve Chiapello (2013), including locally grounded responsibility for workers and their moral education as furthering the social good. In this conservative critique:

... day-to-day business management, development of personal connections and affection towards employees is recommended, and the firm owner should have a duty to live on the same territory as his workers, so that he (conservatives generally have a strictly gender-

segregated view of the world) will retain a permanent concern for their living conditions and safety. (Chiapello, 2013, 70)

As David Hieatt, founder of both howies and the Do Lectures, wrote of his latest company, also situated in Cardigan, the home of his first two ventures:

That's why we have started The Hiut Denim Company. To bring manufacturing back home. To use all that skill on our doorstep. And to breathe new life into our town.⁴

In this, we would suggest that an emerging 'even newer spirit' of capitalism is working through tensions between conservative and artistic criticisms of capitalism, whilst sidestepping the social criticism that is essential to the most directly anti-capitalist elements of the social movements that inspire it. These tensions arise from the inability of the ungrounded entrepreneurial mobility of the 'new spirit' to address ecological responsibility but also reflect an unacknowledged dependence on the state and regional development funds. The result is something approximating a light-green, paternalistic entrepreneurialism that draws upon elements of the German *Mittelstand* model of medium-sized business and its underpinning *bürgerlich*/bourgeois values of *Anstand* (decency) and social responsibility. The 'even newer' spirit thus draws upon retrospective, nostalgic desires for a stable past, reflecting elements of conservatism, and combines them with a forward looking, utopian imaginary that centres upon the artistic criticism of capitalism.

The peculiar temporal regimes mobilised in this emerging discourse simultaneously referenced a romantic pre-modern past and a utopian technology-led future. Nostalgia is usually most simply defined as an attachment to the past, but in organization studies it was initially understood as an emotion or sentiment (Gabriel 1993) based on personal experience and memories of embodied events. These feelings are said to generate ontological security, particularly when threatened by economic or managerial changes. However, as Strangleman (1999, 2012) emphasises, nostalgia also has considerable managerial potential as a means of striving for control of the ideological construction of the present and future. Nostalgia is therefore less rooted in emotion, sentiment, and direct experience, and more fungible, a reference to a series of events as a resource that is mobilised and contested to support or challenge preferred ways of framing what can and will happen.

Contestations of the past in Strangleman's empirical context, the British railway system, also suggest a high degree of 'nostophobia'. Managers sought to 'free' that industry from (what they framed as) unhealthy links to the past by changing outward symbolic manifestations of culture and identity, and by encouraging older employees to retire thus severing the embodied histories of the organization. Managerial rebranding looked further into the past to re-construct a historically meaningful identity, breaking with recent history and embracing a more distant past. This is always an 'active recasting of the past', a 'process of selection and rejection of particular historical interpretations and the context in which these occur' (Strangleman 1999, 742). This dynamic is especially important to our analysis, as it allows for the construction of futures that can legitimately reference the past, so long as it is a past that has not been experienced by anyone involved in constructing the future.

These dynamics intersect with our analysis of the Do Lectures in the way the past is evoked to attempt to rebuild a sustainable moral order of capitalism. They emphasise how changes to the

⁴ <http://hiutdenim.co.uk/blogs/story/5156362-our-town-is-going-to-make-jeans-again>

socio-political conditions of economic activity affect both the moral order in place and how it is constructed. As production and service provision have become increasingly globalized, distanced in time and space as processes, nostalgia has become prominent as a means of remembering or reviving specific aspects of social life (Cutcher 2008). This can be seen in corporate banking's reconstruction of community (with the local bank at its centre, of course) as a means of suggesting belonging to a moral community (led by the bank and its employees, naturally). Notions of home, morality, simplicity, and social relations all feature in this carefully managed process, as attempts to counter the nothingness that characterises contemporary Western economies (Cutcher 2008).

A parallel form of nostalgia is also at work in the Do Lectures. The ideals of community lost and 'primordial' reconnection with nature both reflect a Judeo-Christian desire for the prelapsarian. In the image of the 'good old days' that the Do Lectures draw upon and reconstruct, work and life are integrated in a single, meaningful vocation or craft, through which self and world are united in meaningful making and action. This nostalgic framing appeared repeatedly, suggesting ideals of 'man' (the gendering is not accidental) reconnected to nature and at one with it. One very popular lecture concerned surfing and filmmaking. The image of the surfer riding on, but also with, the power of nature simultaneously positioned him as master of and at one with the waves. The ideal that was constructed in this lecture was one of a feral child, with a wild upbringing, who had not been tamed and civilised but stayed true to an authentic self and inner child, and thereby achieved critical success both in life and professionally as surfer and filmmaker.

A similar ideal of reunification with nature was found in the concern with growing things, baking bread - the most basic 'staff of life' and redolent with Christian associations as the body of Christ - and reconnection to something 'primordial' by camping and canoeing. This was promised before the event through disconnection from the imperative to constant communication and an 'off grid' escape; however internet access was available and central to the event. In the breaks people moved around to find phone signals; the smoking area, with comfortable seating and a nice view, doubled as a place where emails were checked and the day-to-day demands of waged labour were performed. Rather than understanding this connectivity and technological fixation as contradicting the romantic nostalgia for the 'good old days', however, they can be seen as twinned elements of a discourse that combines community with communication. A nostalgic lens provided a clear moral framework for evaluating the good order of social organization, overcoded with an acceptance of the dominant capitalist logic of progress so that the craft and community ideals could be realised now, or in the near future, for anyone, through new technologies of communication.

In this way nostalgia is woven into a sense of both present and future. The mobilisation of the past in this way by managerial, employee, and consumer groups has been labelled 'postalgia' (Ybema 2004). This neologism indicates the construction of a 'paradise yet to come' (2004, 826), usually presented as an emotional anxiety-reducing approach controlled by managers to legitimise change. As our description and analysis indicates, postalgia is also present in influential cultural communities promoting a new spirit of capitalism. The content, form, and materiality of the Do Lectures frame visions of the past and desires for the future. There is a strong fascination with the new, manifest in engagement with technologies such as social media, 3-D printing, and environmentalist innovations. However, the presence of the future is firmly rooted in continuity with the economic present and selective mobilisation of an idealised past.

This brings us to the final theme of our analysis, temporal positioning. Rather than understanding historical change as a simple unilinear sequence of events, as Boltanski and

Chiapello's (2005) discussion of spirits of capitalism implies. Although they do not explicitly theorise the temporality of the spirits of capitalism, the basic model of contestation/critique and response/recuperation, suggests a basically evolutionary development or progress of spirits, each emerging from the contradictions in the previous formation. We would locate the Do Lectures, and the 'even newer' spirit within this temporal frame, but suggest that in terms of the ideological content of the Do Lectures, articulates an idea of time more akin to a spiral (see Burrell 1992). Here time progresses, but also repeats and circles past itself, calling forth 'echoes' of the past not as an eternal return of the same, but as a repetition with difference. This is quite distinct from the idea of progress and rationalisation that characterised the second spirit, though not a complete break with the third spirit, which itself captured romantic, nostalgic elements in the valorisation of the 'artist' as a non-industrial, perhaps pre-industrial, figure around which a new image of the entrepreneur could be built. The past can thus be brought into the future, not by simply going backwards, but by moving forward. At the Do lectures, it was suggested that community and craft might be regained, work and life, economics and existence, might be reintegrated, through progress *and* return. Burrell suggests that understanding organizational change in terms of spiral time differs from both the linear time of the mainstream change management literature, grounded in industrial logics of production and progress, and from the eternal return of cyclical time, rooted in rural and agricultural forms of organization and production. In this conception, spiral time 'breaks free from linear and cyclical patterns with the assumption of the march of progress in the former and that of overarching repetitive stability in the latter' (Burrell, 1992, 162). To illustrate this point, Burrell draws on the example of the Levellers from the English Civil War, suggesting that their struggles were *echoed* some 200 years later in the 19th century and the development of the unions. Here the idea is that certain forms - including the ideological forms - of struggle are repeated, or perhaps better reproduced, in a different political, economic, and cultural context, so they are not simply a repetition of the same. We would argue that a similar dynamic can be seen in the Do Lectures, which seek to address the criticisms of the 'even newer' social movements with the formation of an 'even newer' spirit of capitalism: one that draws upon, and seeks legitimacy from, a combination of nostalgic retrospection and nostalgic prognostication. Whilst replicating the basic temporal idea of the spiral, rather than the line, the movement is not so much 'back to the future', as Burrell (1992) suggests, as onward, ever onward, to find the good old times yet to come (around again).

This postalgic spiral is most clearly seen in the use of technology to connect, communicate, and form new types of community. Traditional forms of ascriptive community were not problematised, and any retrospection was in a strictly romantic vein such that the dominant ideal of community was affiliative and voluntary. This free association of like-minded individuals, which realised the ideal of community only hinted at in actually existing, pre-industrial context (Tönnies 1963), was made ideologically possible through contemporary communication technologies. This can also be seen in the mobilisation of the craft ideal, in which work and life were reintegrated through a vocation understood in terms of a craft: a simultaneous crafting of self and of the material world (Kondo, 1990). This self-crafting was an essentially entrepreneurial activity, in which learning new skills and demonstrating commitment and passion ensured membership of a professional community in which these skills and performances were financially valued. In this sense, the pre-industrial craft aesthetic of the walking stick maker, carving sticks from green wood in a rickety garden shed with just a few knives, is positioned as inhabiting the same existential plane as a freelance 3D printer engineer working in a hack-lab.

There is one final conjunction that demonstrates this dynamic in relation to the environment. Whilst the postalgic spirit clearly recognises the damage that industrial capitalism has done to the natural environment, the solution proposed is more entrepreneurship and better technology. The promise is that well-intentioned, caring, and passionate individuals can make a difference by

doing something, and that new technologies like solar power, recycling, and organic food growing can delimit or even repair the damage done to the earth by more capitalist progress. This is much more than a backward-looking romantic construction of pre-modern economy and social life. Nor is it a simple tale of linear capitalist progress through technology. Rather, it exemplifies the progressive construction of a heavenly future which spirals back through an idealized past that we will find just around the next turn, or revolution, of the spiral.

Discussion and conclusion: Doing more capitalism in a new spirit

Nostalgia is often founded on responding to a sense of loss (Cutcher 2008) in an attempt to construct a happier, gentler future that revisits the good old days. The ideology that we observed being constructed and mobilised at the Do Lectures turned away from loss, towards two of its antonyms – gain and profit. Many of the lecturers proposed engaging with carefully selected aspects of the past to gain future advantage. Most obviously, this can be competitive advantage for the business owner or shareholder; it could also be seen in the personal gain of a happier domestic life or even a pastoral view from the office to replace concrete and urban transportation systems. However nostalgia was mostly invoked as a feeling to help construct a postalgic ideal of future gain in terms of financial profit. It ranged from implicit to rather more explicit; many lecturers, for example, referred in passing to their comfortable income as independent consultants or small business owners, while others spoke directly of their involvement in highly profitable venture capitalism. The continuous exhortation to ‘Do’ something felt like an encouragement to ‘Do’ capitalism.

This is a much less civic-minded engagement with the past than that observed by Cutcher (2008) but it also lacks the reflexive element Strangleman (2004) sees in British railway workers’ accounts of the past and present in their workplaces. There is little sense of trying to re-enchant work, organization, or consumption. It could be described as profit-oriented nostalgia, or profitable postalgia (cf. Ybema 2004). In this respect, it illustrates something very simple – an attempt to commodify an idealised past and an ideal future and to package this, commercially, as an ideological salve for those troubled by the various forms of the ecological criticism (Chiapello, 2013) and recent social movements (Crossley, 2003).

Based on the data presented here, and our long-standing interest in ostensibly radical businesses that purport to be following a different economic ethos (Land and Taylor 2010, 2011), our analysis suggests old/new tropes framing yet another iteration of the spirit of capitalism as retrospect and prospect. The retrospective thematics of community, belonging and craft, are coupled with prospective themes of eco-tech, environmental change, and economic improvement, as mechanisms for enabling social, economic, or metaphysical autonomy, combining to reframe ideological justification of capitalism’s effects and processes. These themes are intriguing because they suggest that spirits of capitalism circulate rather than develop in a simple progressive, unilinear way. They can be understood as combining elements of a nostalgically viewed, golden past age when human society and relations with nature were simpler and more authentic, with a postalgic faith in the promise that technological and economic progress will again bring us to this golden age.

This in turn raises the possibility of conceptual development of the notion of spirit, working from key characteristics of empirical data towards an explanatory interpretation of social life and economic cultures (Gane 2012). This might in turn lead towards reconsideration of how profit-making economic activity is pursued at this moment in time – in other words, analysis of how and why types of capitalism are discursively constructed, enacted, embodied, politicized, and resisted. This is an inherently temporal project, empirically and conceptually. The Do Lectures

claims to provide insight into current, past and future spirits of capitalism, in part to place enterprises and individuals ahead of competition. Understanding and interpreting the construction of that spirit must involve analysis of uses that time is being put to in the service of past, present and future; the cultural shape of that capitalist future is in turn also an interpretable shift from spirits we already understand. The temporary community of events such as the Do Lectures requires conceptual analysis just as much as market reforms and political economic change.

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