

Article

Towards an Existential Archeology of Capitalist Spirituality

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Abstract: Throughout his career, Michel Foucault sustained a trenchant critique of Jean-Paul Sartre, whom he accused of arguing that the subject “dispenses (all) significations”. In contrast to existentialism’s interests in subjective consciousness, Foucault pursues an archaeological method which he later develops into a genealogical approach to discourse that emphasizes the institutional practices and forms of knowledge/power that undergird historical epistemes. Taking contemporary networked Capitalism, the discourse of “workplace spirituality”, and the life history of one management reformer as its case studies, this paper turns to the cognitive linguistics of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in an effort to historicize experiences of neoliberal “spirituality”, as an archaeology of knowledge might, while also attempting to account for intentionality and biography, as existential approaches would. Turning to work in contemporary critical theory, which associates strident anti-humanism in social theory with the rise of neoliberal discourse, I argue that sustained attention to the ways in which personal and social history always entail one another and are mutually arising makes not only for better phenomenology but makes for better critical scholarship as well.

Keywords: workplace spirituality; critical theory; archaeology of knowledge; existentialism; philosophy of the subject; ethnography of capitalism; cognitive linguistics; neoliberalism; religious studies; management theory; religion and capitalism

1. Introduction

In a previously published article, I explore the discursive formation of neoliberalism at the level of dominant patterns of social metaphor. There, I argue that contemporary management theory provides a window into the cultural logic of post-Fordist Capitalism, wherein the sharply delineated bureaucracies and iron-clad factories (we can also add to this list union collectives and social safety nets) of the modern industrial imaginary are being torn asunder, replaced by the cybernetic, plasmic and circular metaphors of an explicitly emotive, probabilistic and increasingly immaterial global Capitalism [1]. I conclude that discussion with the suggestion that what we might call “existential deconstruction” can serve the purposes of the social criticism of “corporate spirituality”. However, there, the suggestion remains theoretical and is not supplemented by a concrete ethnographic application which describes some of the ways in which social and personal histories are always mutually arising and embedded within existing historical, institutional arrangements. The present discussion provides such an application and articulates an ethnographic methodology, what I call *existential archeology*, for tracking the conditioning power of “cultural” rules, on the one hand, and the subjective intentionality and biographical inflections according to which history is always personalized, on the other hand.

Today, networked Capitalist cosmology has substituted the breezy feedback loop for Max Weber’s iron-cage and the *mentalité* of the system takes its ideological cues from complexity theory rather

than Newtonian physics.¹ The movement towards a “real economy” characterized by service and ritualization but shepherded and disciplined by a strongly abstracting finance has implied accompanying shifts in the conceptual contours of both “religion” and “economy”. A cybernetic “spirituality” is today the going ideology of the post-secular bourgeoisie, having supplanted, at least in the North Atlantic postindustrial context, the celebration of “machine production”, which dominated the Fordist economy.² If Weber associated the ideal-type of a specifically Capitalist rationality with a formal disinterest in psychological life, traditional values and religion, *postindustrial* Capitalism, as evidenced by the rhetorical strategies and practices of marketing and management discourse, actively covets the disciplinary effects and trust-enhancing power of ritual, pre-conscious psychic attachment, the poetic imagination, and religious metaphor.³ As this paper will detail, behind the celebrations of the service economy, the sharing economy, and a branded world stands a more primary metaphorical grammar which emphasizes recursive connectivity, performativity and the dissolution of the once vaunted boundaries of official modern metaphysics. As I will describe, amidst these linguistic fissions whereby a postindustrial cosmology takes historical shape, key methodological questions of special interest to this volume on the theoretical status of the individual also present themselves.

First, if what is implied is a shift in what Michel Foucault refers to as *episteme*, how exactly is the shift in the cultural logic of a historical context accomplished at the level of practice, biography and experience? Following C.W. Mills [6], how might we seek to elucidate the dynamic interplay between biography and history? Second, what is to be made of the religious “ghosts” that rise up from the spaces of tension, contradiction, resistance and anxiety characteristic of the neoliberal age and its attendant forms of ephemerality and social precarity? How do these specters make themselves known in the interstices between the shifting conceptual platelets of historical displacement and what Jan Rehmann refers to as, “the contested space of social institutions and attitudes,” especially when it comes to the socialization of the individual by organizational apparatuses ([2], p. 38)? However, since, as Michael Jackson writes, following Theodor Adorno, the gap between word and world can never be elided, it ought to be noted that the spaces of intersubjective tension that comprise the “force fields” of lived discourse are never dependent for their reality on modes of active resistance (see [7]).

2. The Cybernetic Ideology of “Spiritual Management”

In their landmark work, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, the sociologists, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, suggest that contemporary management theory is marked, in the end, by its celebration of spontaneity and “rhizomorphic capacity” [8]. In contrast, the machine, mechanization, and objectivity

¹ Weber is often read as a historical sociologist who, within the context of his comparative studies of religion and society, describes the ways in which the modern West transitioned from a traditionalistic social order to one characterized by “legal-rational” rationality and a formal separation of spheres. However, in contradistinction to this normative reading of Weber, Jan Rehmann reads him as an “organic intellectual” of the modern, industrial bourgeoisie whose work anticipates and benefits the passive revolution of Fordist modernization [2]. Complexity theory, a theoretical science of complex adaptive systems, is primarily associated with the pioneering work of the Santa Fe Institute, which was founded in 1984. As I will discuss in this paper, some of the core principles of complexity theory anticipate the discourse of “new management” which would develop later. However, as would be anticipated by an archeological analysis, we can also note the emergence of complexity discourse within the purview of other social institutions (such as the architectural theory of Robert Venturi, see [3]).

² Jan Rehmann’s overview of theories of ideology is a very helpful reference [4]. Following Rehmann’s discussion, I understand ideology theory to both identify objective interests (e.g., objective measures of social security) and to explore the ways in which the turn to values and attitudes, “can go hand in hand with the loss of collective and individual agency.” There is an interest in the voluntary subjection to forms of domination but a facile and reifying account of “false consciousness” is resisted. As Rehmann suggests, “A theory of ideology begins at the moment when its social genesis, functional necessity and efficacy becomes the object of reflection” ([4], pp. 5–6).

³ Of course, Weber’s account of ideal-types, or average cases, needs to be supplemented by genealogies which demonstrate the ways in which historical moments and historical change are characterized by messy counter-examples and accompanied by cross-purposes. Often, surprising examples turn out to be as much the rule as the exception. Ideas of neat “linear progress” pertain to the ideological and metaphysical repertoire of Western modernity and are confounded by historical details. Within religious studies, a classic study which unsettles many of the assumed secular trajectories and directions of American religion and modern Capitalism is Liston Pope’s *Millands and Preachers—A Study of Gastonia* [5].

were compelling tropes of the imaginary of industrial American Capitalism; machine metaphors also underwrote the literary and journalistic production of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in addition to its management theory (see [9]). An industrial aesthetic attached to the work of the organizational philosopher, Fredrick Winslow Taylor, and, later, to the cosmology of Fordism. According to the management scholar Mauro Guillén, the scientific management philosophies that rose to prominence at the turn of the twentieth century tended to share in a fascination with “machinery, technology, factory aesthetic, [and] mass production” and conceived of the worker’s body as a “living machine” [10]. At the time, simple managerial hierarchies, specialization and routinization were also common.⁴

One effect of the epistemic movement away from the imaginary of modern industrial Capitalism in which industrial machine metaphors abounded to the imaginary of a cybernetic “postmodern” Capitalism in which digital and organic metaphors are increasingly dominant is the construction of explicitly capitalist concepts of “spirituality” and related ideas like “mysticism” (e.g., [12], p. 35). With a unifying interest in the inculcation of company narratives and workers’ self-legislation of shared, corporate values, the discourse of “spiritual management” can be understood to be “a holistic, monistic, markedly Western, and mainly Christian rooted discourse of universalism and globalism” [13]. As Boltanski and Chiapello explain, the networked organization is held together by processes of self-organization and self-monitoring. In its primary interests in accepting, predicting and managing *excess* (or that which overruns the linear horizons of instrumental control), posing reality as a series of closed loops, and deconstructing the perceived rigidities of the “unliberated” firm, “spiritual management” has recourse to an eclectic and definitively “postmodern” potpourri of ideological resources in its work.

According to Boltanski and Chiapello, not only are managers ascribed explicitly monastic qualities according to which they catalyze and inspire human potential but it also the case that, “the transmission of operational modes for organizing firms is, in the work of some authors, glorified by a lyrical, even heroic style, or defended by numerous heteroclitite references to noble and ancient sources such as Buddhism, the Bible, and Plato” (e.g., [8], p. 59). For example, the exceedingly influential management philosophies of Robert Greenleaf, Margaret Wheatley and Peter Senge [14–16] all trade in religious metaphor, making use of them to mark cybernetic phenomena. In the process, the body of labor is reconfigured in “new management” as a complex and dynamic node. The dissipation of the tangible heaviness of the body of labor mirrors the dissolution of state bureaucracy that is the *sine qua non* of neoliberal discourse. A basic premise of this paper is the idea that the deregulating currents of contemporary “workplace spirituality” are, in part, reproduced at the level of lived social metaphor. Through their mundane speech-acts, I will argue, individuals play a necessary role in the active re-formation and re-inscription of the *ontological shape* of capital.⁵ One central modality and register of neoliberalism has to do with the ways in which its cosmography is inculcated by workers (and consumers) and, in Daniel Dubuisson’s terms, gets “incarnated within our own existences” ([19], p. 212).

The discourse of “spirituality” within organizational management, of course, necessarily emerges within broader structural contexts and discursive histories. First, it is an extension of the human relations revolution in North Atlantic management (see [10,20]). It is also nested within the institutionalized logic of neoliberalism as a whole. Neoliberalism is, according to David Harvey,

⁴ Religious horizons were, already, from the start, imbricated in the cosmology of Fordist production. For a discussion of the ways in which “interwar religious visions trafficked in secular futures”, disrupting our analytical categories of the religious and the modern, (see [11]).

⁵ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger seems to suggest that acts of superficial classification, which would include speech acts, sediment and constitute our world and its overarching taxonomical structures (see [17]). In my monograph [18], an extension of what I propose here, my ethnographic accounts of everyday speech and ritual at the workaday worlds of two organizations involved in the “workplace spirituality” movement are indebted to this kind of account of what Heidegger calls a “hermeneutic circle”.

in the first instance a theory of political practice which posits that human well-being is best enhanced through the liberation of entrepreneurial energies supposedly occasioned by market liberalization and strong private property rights ([21], p. 2). It is, of course, in turn, necessary to understand neoliberalism according to its policy commitments and the structural adjustments enacted in its spirit (cuts in top-tax rates, reductions in social welfare programs, resistance to union power, the regional and global integration of economies, and the loosening of government controls of “cross-border investment”) ([22], p. 164). A Hayekian critique of collectivism and “planned economies” and an attendant celebration of the “*spontaneous social order*” is baked into the very core of neoliberal economics ([4], p. 278). Of particular importance to the present discussion, it is also the case, however, that ideological work beyond the rationality of economics is required to actually maintain the neoliberal consensus on the ground.

As Bethany Moreton has argued, a central paradox of neoliberal ideology is that it cannot actually be sold to “living hosts” according to the unvarnished autism of economic rationality [23]. Neoliberalism engages the existential desire for association and the spirit of service towards anti-collectivist ends, as a structural matter. Neoliberal forms of labor are sanctioned and sanctified by religious enthusiasm even if, as Moreton argues, religious ideas and practices can always, in turn, shape economic ideologies of work [23]. The spiritual care provided by industrial chaplains and “enlightened” managers speaks to what Winnifred Fallers Sullivan writes is the “ongoing indeterminacy about where to locate religious work in the late modern period” ([24], p. 53). In keeping with Moreton’s now classic analysis of the strongly Christian Evangelical “soul of neoliberalism”, Sullivan associates the proliferation and ubiquity of chaplains with the “leftover business” which the state and its proxies still have to do, ministering to constituents who need and demand “practices of presence” despite their ostensibly secular and laissez-faire institutional contexts ([24], p. 185).

The discursive space of early twenty-first century American “capitalist spirituality” is rife with the suggestion that the phenomenal world, including organizational life, is best (that is, most efficiently) understood according to the tone of pattern, the language of poetry, the mathematics of probability, and the form of spirit. Since she argues that, today, understanding requires a “poetic” grasp for transitive phenomena, Margaret Wheatley exhorts managers to incorporate, “any process...that encourages nonlinear thinking and intuition, and uses alternative forms of expression such as drama, art, stories, and pictures. The critical task is to evoke our senses, not just the grey matter” ([15], p. 143). “Workplace Spirituality” is one with the self-understanding of contemporary management theory writ large in its critique of the Newtonian focus on stable identities and separable parts and in its concomitant insistence upon the singular importance of recursive, self-regulating interrelationships. In fact, even in the most influential and popular organizational philosophy of the neoliberal age, “trust” in the final order of seeming chaos is often indexed in cybernetic, “spiritual” terms (e.g., [25]). Wheatley makes use of the metaphor of the “dark night of the soul” ([15], p. 170) and the insights of “Sufi teaching” ([15], p. 10), for example, while Peter Senge argues that in order to understand the “circle economy” and its “system wide interrelationships”, one must master a discipline of intuitive processing whose roots, “lie in both Eastern and Western spiritual traditions, and in secular traditions as well” ([16], p. 7). For his part, in his effort to reconnect organizational life to matters of cosmic concerns, Robert Greenleaf calls upon the power of “religion” to, at its root, “rebind” society and turns to Jesus, Confucius, the Buddhist eightfold path, Abraham Heschel, the Torah, Reinhold Niebuhr and Harvey Cox, among others, to inspire his servant leadership philosophy [14]. We might well consider these great luminaries in the management world to be “organic intellectuals” of the postmodern, postsecular bourgeoisie.⁶

⁶ Prompted by Rehmann’s Gramscian analysis of Weber as an unwitting apologist for Fordist production, I mean here that all of these popular and influential theorists of postmodern work look to connect the interests of working persons to the corporatist level and to the needs of postindustrial management.

In this marshalling of religious symbols to help teach and organize the art of immaterial intuition, contemporary “workplace spirituality” participates in what Scott Lash and John Urry refer to as the, “aesthetic reflexivity [that] is the very stuff of post-organized capitalist economies of signs and space” ([26], p. 59). The signs of the “spiritual” bind workers to one another, to the master narratives of their organizations, and to the material conditions of their labor. Wheatley suggests that, “the era of the rugged individual has been replaced by the era of the team player” ([15], p. 39). No longer strictly unencumbered, self-intending and invested in the heroic powers of pure reason, the bourgeois *intra*individuals of networked workplaces [27] ooze the “religious aroma” that marks the misty scent of what the critical theorist, Eduardo Mendieta, refers to as “the crystallization of ideology” ([28], p. 125). Aided by a ghostly furtiveness, the “capitalist spirituality” of organizational management participates in the evasive tactics of power under what Zygmunt Bauman calls conditions of “liquid modernity” [29]. Rather than an “iron-cage”, today we might speak of capitalist organization in terms of shape-shifting ameba which are able to manage and control excess not according to the categorical exclusions of clear lines of demarcation but, instead, according to the managed play of statistical *difference*. In this movement of statistical power, modernist boundaries between the secular and the sacred (boundaries that were ideological if also never fully realized on the ground) grind and continue to transform.

If modernization and industrialization transformed “the processes of becoming human and the human itself”, according to Michael Hardt, capitalist postmodernization has implied a thoroughgoing informanization of production which privileges the work of service and symbolic manipulation to such a degree that *immaterial labor* now claims the highest value in the marketplace as a “symbolic-analytic service” which produces an “immaterial good such as a service, knowledge, or communication” ([30], p. 94) Following Fredric Jameson’s claim that, today, “the word processor replaces the assembly line in the mind’s eye” ([31], p. 389), Hardt argues that “we increasingly think like computers, and the interactive model of communication technologies becomes more and more central to our laboring. Interactive and cybernetic machines become a new prosthesis integrated into our bodies and minds and a lens to redefine our bodies and minds themselves” ([30], pp. 94–95).

3. Existential Horizons at the Crossroads of Archaeology

In many ways, Michel Foucault is the obvious theorist with whom to think through moments of discursive transformation. According to Gary Gutting, in his archaeological work, “...a set of conceptions, along with the conception of knowledge they entail, constitutes what Foucault calls the *episteme* of a period” ([32], p. 140). If Foucault’s analyses in *Madness in the Age of Reason*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, *The Order of Things*, and the *Archaeology of Knowledge* formed his archaeological corpus, the publication of *Discipline and Punish* in 1975 is often considered to mark his turn to genealogy. As Gutting explains,

In order to analyze the development of bodies of knowledge out of systems of power, Foucault employs a new historical method that he calls genealogy. Genealogy does not replace archaeology, which is still needed to uncover the discursive rules that constitute bodies of knowledge. But genealogy goes beyond archaeology by explaining (through the connections with power) changes in the history of discourse that are merely described by archaeology ([32], pp. 6–7).

In his genealogical work, Foucault is very keen to trace the relationships between “discursive knowledge and the power structures” of society, making use of the now ubiquitous concept of power/knowledge to describe how discursive and institutional practices reinforce one another through processes of social discipline. While Foucault’s recognition of the fact that systems of thought are never autonomous and interests in the role of language in self-constitution are to be applauded, many contend that he never went far enough in his recovery of the subject.

Of course, Foucault’s work comes as a response to the, “unfortunate division between “society” and “culture” that had emerged out of social scientific theories and social histories that

proposed mechanistic, causal models wherein “cultural” phenomena were finally flattened out by a thoroughgoing economic functionalism. In response to the hegemony of Marxian economisms among the French left in the 1960s, Foucault was only one of several celebrated representatives of the “linguistic turn” who, in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, “turned to linguistic theories to help it carve out an autonomous realm for “culture,” now understood as a “self-enclosed, non-referential mechanism of social construction that precedes the world and renders it intelligible by constructing it according to its own rules of signification” ([33], p. 8). In the strongly structuralist articulations of Foucault’s archaeology, Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistics and Pierre Bourdieu’s early sociology, the unconscious operations of discourse are privileged over and against “conscious, purposive individual activity” ([33], p. 6).

According to Jan Rehmann, “structuralism might roughly be described as the endeavor of identifying general (and therefore ahistorical) signifying structures that undergird human speech utterances, social practices or ‘culture’ in general” ([4], p. 211). Radicalizing structuralism’s “linguistic turn”, poststructuralist theories, in turn, often associated the later work of Foucault, Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes, question, “the assumptions of fixed, ahistorical dichotomies, which are therefore to be deconstructed (Derrida)” ([4], p. 211). In Foucault’s genealogies and his work in ethics and governmentality, power is understood to always produce effects, including the creative possibilities for resistance. The reversibility and generativity of relations of power, introduces surplus and excess into the system.

For some, the question of whether Foucault, despite his turn from archaeology to genealogy and ethics, still reproduces a closed system in important ways remains. According to the American historian, Gabrielle Spiegel, a growing number of voices have joined the British economic historian, Gareth Steadman Jones, in wondering out loud whether theories and methods heavily indebted to Foucault (and especially to the readings of his many celebrated readers and interpreters) might be creating, in their single-minded focus on discourse, a “deterministic fix” in which cultural history’s linguistic approach is now (somewhat ironically) combined with “the undead residue of historical materialism” ([33], p. 10). For some of even Foucault’s otherwise friendly readers, the result is an understanding of discourse which buries and renders invisible the historical effects of subjective agency.⁷ Subjects are still variable subject *positions* and, at the end of the day, according to Foucault, “any given society is constituted through a multiplicity of dynamic, fluid, and ever-changing systems of meaning (discourses), which create regimes of practical rationality and actions as well as regimes of truth” ([33], p. 11). This “supplementariness” is still attributed to the dynamism of power and discourse rather than to the carnal existences of diverse and different human agents.

According to Spiegel, Foucault’s poststructuralist progeny have generally viewed the subject “not only as discursively constituted but also as controlled, ultimately, by the social as hegemonically, that is, discursively thought (knowledge/ power)” ([33], p. 12). In the words of the poststructuralist historian Joan Scott, being a subject means “being ‘subject to’ definite conditions of existence, conditions of endowment of agents and conditions of exercise” ([33], p. 12). At the extreme end, Judith Butler argues that subjection is always and already subjectivization: that is, the very possibility of subjectivity is founded on a primary submission to interpellations of power [35]. In light of this strong suspicion of the subjective perspective, the historian Gary David Shaw argues that the poststructuralist “self” is so “divested of autonomy and control that it can’t really operate as a cause, as an agent” ([33], p. 12). The sociologist Anthony Giddens writes, “Foucault’s ‘genealogical method’, in my opinion, continues

⁷ One of the most erudite and persuasive readers of Foucault in religious studies today is Mark Jordan. In *Convulsing Bodies—Religion and Resistance in Foucault*, he argues that one of Foucault’s central interests lies in somatic rather than voluntary refusals of pastoral power (see [34]). To the degree that recoveries of agency in theory are tempted to look past these non-voluntary expressions of power, they ought to be chastised by the kind of reading Jordan offers. On the other hand, within the context of a critique of postmodern Capitalism, given the ways in which forms of collective bargaining have proven to be the sharpest tool in labor’s resistance to domination, it seems patent that due emphasis on *voluntary* as well as involuntary resistance is warranted and necessary.

the confusion which structuralism helped to introduce into French thought, between history without a *transcendental subject* and history without *knowledgeable human subjects*" ([36], pp. 221–22). In other words, if the subject is always conditioned by history, this does not therefore imply that historical subjects are simply *determined* by discursive conditions.

According to the historian Judith Newton, even if it is true that subjects are socially and historically determined, this does not imply that the subject is "dead" or that human agency is, at base, illusory ([33], p. 12). Rehabilitations of the subject can focus precisely on the ways in which actors affect change and are also shaped by the social world in turn. In precisely this vein, neo-phenomenological practice theories, "tend[s] to focus on the adaptive, strategic, and tactical uses made of existing cultural schemes by agents who, in the very act of deploying the elements of culture, both reproduce and transform them" ([33], p. 12). According to Gabrielle Spiegel, these approaches highlight the ways in which "the individual agent's perception is mediated and constrained but not wholly controlled by the cultural scaffolding or conceptual schemes within which it takes place" ([33], p. 13). It is admitted that, as Jacques Revel argues, the choices of individuals are "inseparable from the representations of relationships, space, the resources which it places at their disposal, [and] the obstacles and constraints which [this] imposes on them" ([33], p. 13). However, practice theory refuses to settle at the extremes and understands "culture" and "experience," neither of which are self-evident, *sui generis* or a-historical categories, in terms of the irreducibility of practical activity. The relationship between the subject and history approached in this way, ethnography becomes situational sociology and shines a direct light on the social semantics whereby structuring structures are reproduced by socially competent actors.⁸ As a descriptive matter, methodologies able to trace the ways in which agency and history are mutually arising and always entail one another is warranted. In what follows,

⁸ The work of Jacques Derrida has exercised a profound impact on the study of religion given deconstruction's patent successes as a tactic and strategy for challenging and undoing the boundaries and parameters of identities and practices traditionally policed by religious institutions and authority. Of his celebrated notion of "différance", Derrida writes: "Différance is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other. This spacing is simultaneously active and passive (this *a* of différance indicates the indecision as concerns activity and passivity, that which cannot be governed by or distributed between the terms of this opposition) production of the intervals without which the "full" terms would not signify, would not function" ([37], p. 27). Logocentrists, Derrida insists, believe that "writing should erase itself before the plenitude of living speech ([37], p. 25). In other words, the "I" precedes my embodiment and adoption of it as a possible position for me (and one that is dependent on the spacing of différance such that I assume that my dog, Clover, can never embody that same position given the humanistic pretensions of Western metaphysics) but I conveniently disavow this reality as a speaker. The problem with Derrida's approach is that he almost inverts the switch such that living speech is forced to erase itself before the primacy of writing.

In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida proposes to further radicalize Freud's concept of the unconscious via the *trace*, which, "is the erasure of selfhood, of one's own presence, and is constituted by the threat or anguish of its irremediable disappearance, of the disappearance of the disappearance" ([38], p. 230). For existential anthropologies and practice theories like my own existential archeology, Derrida, like Freud, swings the pendulum too far in the direction of involuntary forces. The binary itself between speech and writing is itself a red herring, in the end. We cannot speak of one without the other since in the world of human meaning they mutually imply one another.

Derrida's poststructuralist challenge would also hold that metaphor is always and already performative. There is no discourse, for Derrida, that does not always and already *show* rather than *state* (see [39]). In a society in which global Capitalism depends as much as it does on marketers and corporate managers' exceedingly well-funded *science of metaphor*, the empirical and political onus remains on the view which holds that metaphor is always and already performative and, as such, not amenable to any intentional organization and utilitarian appropriation whatsoever. Of course, none of this implies that attempts to mark, freeze, and understand metaphor will not also always be haunted by that which slips through the grasp of science and unsettles its ambitions to control the fluidity of lived phenomena. We need not revert to an a-reflexive empiricism, naïve phenomenology or vulgar positivism. Nevertheless, my approach stands in contrast to Derrida's unrelenting critique of *logocentrism*, or his damning association of the idea that persons intentionally manipulate words to make meaning with the hierarchies of a Western metaphysics of presence. Neoliberalism is not conceptually underwritten by the metaphor of structure in the way Derrida suggests modern Capitalism was. It does not disavow the *fluid* movement of metaphor, as Derrida argues modernism does, but, rather, hopes to control and exploit the liquid power of language as a shifting, embryonic sac. Nor does neoliberalism overvalue the powers of the rugged individual, constructing persons, as it does, as iterations and instances of complexity driven discourses.

Ken Surin explains that for Derrida the subject, "arises from a "space" of responsibility that is antecedent to the subject's emergence and its identification with the self" ([40], p. 167). That is, the self can only always and already be identified to itself only via alterity and the traces of différance. According to Surin, the problem Derrida poses any critical theory of Capitalism is that within a Derridean account, "there is no way of (actually) inserting the subject into the domain of the political" ([40] p. 195). How to concretize Derridean ethics within extant institutional contexts is never self-evident

I will therefore provide some empirical textures to what I mean by “existential archeology”, or the ethnographic study of how institutionalized epistemic codes are brought into being in overdetermined ways by agents who are simultaneously mediated by irreducibly particular biographical histories. However, it is important to note that the oft-assumed line between description and politics is, from the start, overdrawn and dangerous. To the degree that methodologies fully bury existential horizons under the weight of archaeology and discourse, they are structurally complicit with the politics of the neoliberal order.

With Michael Jackson and other practitioners of forms of existential anthropology critical of the “sociological reductions” which place the scholar in the role of “hierophant or seer” and depict other persons “one-dimensionally”, as simple instantiations of “social processes” ([41], p. 4), I am partial to what Michael Herzfeld writes is the new “ethnographic attempt to reverse the usual ethnographic emphasis of pattern over experience, the collective and the cultural over the range of idiosyncrasy that the members of a society are prepared to tolerate”([42], p. 14). While an approach like Foucauldian archaeology gives important stress and importance to the codes which provide historical limits to what can be thought and experienced, it can, like the totalizations of historical materialism Jean-Paul Sartre took issue with, dissolve the individual into history, burying her within the deep structures of society (see [43], p. 8).⁹ I proceeded with my own investigations of the “new spirit of Capitalism”, empirically, as an ethnographic history of the present or existential archeology, precisely in an attempt to mitigate against the absorption of living human praxis by a system of concepts, structures and Ideas.

4. Biographical History at Seeing Things Whole

4.1. *Seeing Things Whole and Landry's Bicycles*

The ethnographic field sites for my fieldwork, conducted between 2007 and 2011, were two related organizations, Seeing Things Whole (STW) and Landry's Bicycles. The former is a business roundtable comprised of small to medium-sized businesses that have traditionally met in the Boston, Minneapolis-St. Paul Twin Cities, and Chicago metro areas to engage in ritualized group reflection on pressing organizational quandaries. Several of the group's officers have also written extensively on what they call a “theology of institutions,” establishing intellectual kinship with the work of Robert Greenleaf, who popularized servant leadership in the 1970s and 1980s. They trace their organizational history back to the Metropolitan Associates of Philadelphia (MAP), an action-research project from the 1960s sponsored by several Christian Protestant denominations, itself inspired by the World Council of Churches's (WCC) study of the “Missionary Structure of the Congregation.”

Founded in 1993, though indebted to a rich intertwining of much older organizational and personal histories, STW is, according to its mission statement, a “community of business leaders and scholars dedicated to exploring the intersection of spirituality, values and organizational life and performance.” The group is “drawn by a vision of a world in which the performance of organizations is measured no longer on the basis of a single bottom line, but rather on multiple bottom lines which together more fully reflect the health and impact of the organization on the world around it” [46]. According to the group's published organizational history, one stream for the idea of a “theology of institutions” developed out of initiatives and collaborative research undertaken at the World Council

and, unsurprisingly, Derridean deconstruction suffers from a certain sociological poverty when it comes to analyses of Capitalism ([4], p. 54).

⁹ While his influence over my own thinking is strong, I do not turn to, in any immediate way, Pierre Bourdieu's work to frame the present analysis. While Bourdieu looks to attend to this impasse in his later work (see [44]), I agree with Michael Jackson's assessment that even the concept of the “habitus” is mired in a reductive expectation of a “quasi-perfect” coincidence between the objective tendencies of “structuring structures”, on the one hand, and subjective expectations and the living out of freedom “at the margins” of history, on the other hand (see [45], p. xxi). Similarly, Foucauldian ethics (e.g., the concept of “care of the self”) fails to concretize the relationship of the self to the discourses of social institutions at the level of *lived* relations, which are, at least in part, biographically mediated by personal histories.

of Churches (WCC), the American Baptist Church (ABC), and six Protestant denominations in the 1950s and 1960s [47].

Under the leadership of Jitsuo Morikawa, there was an attempt to make good on the “powerful call to address the Reformation mandate to recover the ministry of the laity” that came out of the 1954 Evanston meeting of the WCC. In 1964, Morikawa invited Dick Broholm to join the staff of the “Division of Evangelism” of the ABC. At the time, the division had been considering “the possibility of establishing an American model of the German Evangelical Academy—a center for theological dialogue between theologians and leaders in government, business, media, etc.” [47]. Harvey Cox, who was then on Morikawa’s staff, urged the group to instead “consider the option of establishing an American mission within a major metropolitan city [which] rather than serving as a center for dialogue... would seek to engage in a mission to the city” [47]. According to Broholm and David Specht, the idea would be to develop an urban mission that would “serve as a signpost to the denomination about what it might mean for Christian laity to take seriously their ministry in the workplace” [47].

Metropolitan Associates of Philadelphia (MAP) grew out of the idea and, eventually, five denominations joined ABC in signing on to the project: the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church. MAP oversaw different but related ministries. It oversaw the work of eight “worker ministers,” “clergymen, who, like the worker-priests in Germany and France, found employment in a variety of secular occupations in the political, business, social service, and educational sectors of the city” [47]. In addition to these “worker ministers,” MAP also salaried six clergy to work as “urban agents” who served as “roving reporter(s)—seeking to be present whenever significant events were occurring” [47]. MAP also designated one hundred and twenty-five “lay associates” who were charged with thinking “reflectively about what might constitute “ministry” in their workplace” [47]. The stated mission of MAP was to “engage in experimental missionary action for the sake of a common witness to and participation in Christ’s work or renewal in the city” [47]. As an “action-research project for the church,” the aim was to “learn how decisions are made affecting the city’s life and suggest how Christians can help institutions realize their God-given role in the society” [47].

In the end, MAP was active between 1964 and 1974. However, its commitment to the idea that, in Jitsuo Morikawa’s words, “biblical faith finds change and revolution basic to the way God acts in the world and enables men and women to be free to enter into that challenge,” [47] lived on through important publications like *A Strategy of Hope* and Dick Broholm’s work at Andover-Newton Theological School. In 1974, Dick Broholm returned to Andover, his alma mater, to help the seminary pursue similar work. There, he worked closely with the president of the seminary, George Peck, and with the theologian Gabe Fackre, Broholm led a center that was eventually “institutionalized as the Center for the Ministry of the Laity” in the early 1980s. The Center’s efforts revolved around “an action research effort involving six local congregations” [47]. The pastor and five members of each congregation would meet with faculty once a month for five years, working to identify forces that enabled and blocked the work of the laity within their particular institutions. Broholm and Specht write that it was at this time that it became crystal clear that what was missing in the work of the center was a “theology of institutions” that would assist the team in thinking theologically about businesses [48]. Dick Broholm, who also collaborated closely in the 1980s with Robert Greenleaf, the father of servant leadership management theory, eventually rediscovered in Greenleaf’s work resources for developing the group’s theology, which was designed to provide the theoretical and ethical grounding for its interdisciplinary work. After the Center for the Ministry of the Laity closed its doors in 1982, Broholm was instrumental in the resurrection of the work under the auspices of STW.

At the time in which I completed my fieldwork with the group, the members of the Boston roundtable, which I attended, were Landry’s Bicycles, the Xenon Corporation, beingmeta, Zoar Outdoor, The Society for Organizational Learning, and a small consultancy group called Executive Soul. The members of the Twin Cities area roundtable included Quality Bicycle, Reell Precision Manufacturing, World Servants, Hilleren and Associates, and Integris. In 2014, roundtable meetings

at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago were also developed. Traditionally, the typical member of the roundtables has been a small to medium-sized company that is not publicly traded. Landry's Bicycles, an independent bicycle retail company with strong roots in the biking advocacy world and the member organization I came to know best given my ethnographic work there, brings in about \$10 million in revenue and at the time of my research operated four retail locations in the greater Boston area—a number which has recently grown to five. Logistically, the meetings have generally been held at the offices of the host organization, the group presenting an organizational quandary for purposes of shared reflection. Programmatically speaking, “the host organization presents a real-time, unresolved challenge it is facing, and participants serve as temporary trustees who work for half a day with the hosts on this dilemma.” As of 2015, STW's circle of gravity has shifted to Augsburg College and St. Thomas University in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, where a professor of leadership studies and Catholic social thought, respectively, have been exploring a “fee-for-service” consultancy model. The Boston wing of STW, for its part, has now turned its focus to “next generation leadership” work with young professionals.

Many of the members of STW relate the work they do to a larger need they observe in society to reintroduce “spirituality” and “religion” back into the workplace. For example, through the membership, scholarship, and activism of Margaret Benefiel, who had been Adjunct Professor of Spirituality and Congregational/Organizational Leadership at the Andover-Newton Theology School and is currently Executive Director of the aforementioned Executive Soul and of the Shalom Institute for Spiritual Formation, STW has maintained an institutional voice at the Management, Spirituality and Religion (AOM MSR) special interest unit within the American Academy of Management—a professional subgroup with over 600 members. Margaret, who also maintains an active membership with the American Academy of Religion (AAR), has chaired the group as recently as 2008. A journal associated with the group, *The Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion* (JMSR), currently issued by Routledge Press, has been publishing on “spirituality” and what it considers to be the rise of the “moral organization” since 2004 [49]. As I discovered through my interviews, key members of STW consider the work of the AOM MSR to be very much in line with the mission of their own organization. In any event, through the ideological influence of Robert Greenleaf's work and the later adoption of Peter Senge and Margaret Wheatley's associated management theory, on the one hand, and through the practical organizational connections to the AOM, on the other hand, STW clearly participates in, reproduces and is informed by the discourse of “new management” and its attendant form of “cybernetic”, capitalist spirituality. Of course, as Michael Jackson writes, every story told is *janus-faced*, continuously shifting between collective and idiosyncratic levels of meaning ([50] p. 139). Ethnographic histories can be narrated in this fashion, stitching together personal and social modalities of experience. In the present case, the wider and nested histories of cybernetic Capitalism, the “workplace spirituality movement” and STW are woven together by the irreducibly particular threads of ethnographic history.¹⁰

4.2. Tom Henry

Tom Henry is currently the general manager of Landry's Bicycles; at the time I was doing my ethnographic work, he co-owned Landry's along with his older brother Peter and late sister-in-law,

¹⁰ While there is no “unmediated” account of the “real”, Sartre nevertheless does recognize the important (if also necessarily insufficient) role non-dialectical, analytical knowledge plays in the progressive development of what he calls *comprehension*. Non-ethnographic, analytical knowledge (e.g., the institutional history of STW) can always, “be integrated into a more comprehensive dialectic” ([51], p. 275). What Sartre calls “dialectical reason” implies an empirical methodology which inserts the scholar “feet first” into the historical field and highlights the lived, intersubjective qualities of ethnographic relationships, framing scholarship, in the process, as a form of shared labor (see [52]). As Sartre notes, highly discursive projects tend to eschew the issue of the scholar's relationship to history. I do not mute my voice when I narrate ethnography precisely because my own actions, choices and feelings are to be included within the scope of empirical data to be reflected on and theoretically reconsidered at the back end of “fieldwork” (see [18]).

Jeanne. Believing that profit must be socialized, Tom and Peter have transitioned the company to an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) and, as of 2014, the ESOP owned 28 percent of the company. Tom is a well-known fixture in the local and national biking worlds, especially in activist circles. Much like “workplace spirituality,” biking activism began to grow in the 1990s, only to explode, comparatively, in recent years. According to Tom, when he and others decided to establish “the first industry-wide lobbying effort in Washington” in 1999, there were only twelve members of the biking community who “went to share our vision with Congress” about the need to increase bike lanes and to improve the social infrastructure for biking, more generally. A decade later, upwards of 700 activists converged on Washington, compelled by a passion for biking and the conviction that the world would be a far better place if we biked more and drove our cars less.

Tom’s résumé in the biking universe is as impressive as his accomplishments are very concrete. Tom served as the president of the Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition, MassBike, for three years. Among other advocacy successes, MassBike has successfully lobbied for the expansion of hours during which bikes can be brought onto Boston subway trains and for the creation of “safe bicycle routes for students” ([53], p. 45). Margaret Benefiel profiles Tom in one of her books, *The Soul of a Leader: Finding Your Path to Success and Fulfillment*. She writes:

Tom also invited partners to help strengthen the National Bike Summit, held annually in Washington, D.C. Founded in 2001, the National BikeSummit lobbies legislators regarding cycling issues. At the Bike Summit, sponsored by the League of American Bicyclists, industry representatives can attend presentations dealing with legislation affecting cycling. They can also take the opportunity to lobby legislators and to recognize government officials who have helped improve conditions for cycling in America. For example, in 2005, Sen. John Kerry, in accepting the National Bicycle Advocacy award, spoke about how honored he felt to receive it, having been a bicycle enthusiast since childhood ([53], p. 45).

It was under the rubric of these efforts that Tom reported to the STW membership gathered around one of the roundtable meetings that he and his fellow advocates had a successful meeting with the first Obama secretary of transportation, Ray LaHood, whom Tom reported was very open to the group’s talking points and overall vision regarding the environmental and health benefits of bicycling, especially as a mode of everyday transportation. During my interviews with Tom, it became clear that he hopes to affect history on both state and national levels through his biking advocacy and spiritual activism.

Tom was fifty-six at the time I began my fieldwork with STW and Landry’s. Tom was born in Gloucester, MA and moved to Exeter, NH when he was very young. His family was Congregationalist and attended a United Church of Christ (UCC) congregation. There was no crucifix, he recalled, only an “abstracted cross.” The white church only had clear glass. Along with Herbert Blau, Tom’s former theater troupe director, and Dick Broholm, Tom considers the minister, George Booth, to be one of the three most important mentors in his life. He recalled that Pastor Booth “preached sermons that revolved around the world, about justice, civil rights, and the Vietnam War.” Pastor Booth, Tom qualified, was a critic of the war but he was not an “uncritical protestor” either. For his part, Tom is not entirely uncritical of his religious upbringing in Pastor Booth’s church. Tom once explained that when he was a boy growing up, one of his best friends was Catholic and that he remembers thinking the stained glass windows and the incense of this boy’s world seemed “weird” and “cultish.” Now, he chalks this attitude up to his own parochial Protestant upbringing. Tom admits that his religious education was thick, though progressive and mainline. Taking stock of the good and the bad, he realizes that he was from his childhood “informed by that kind of mainstream Protestant tradition” that trained him in biblical exegesis at an early age and exposed him to liberation theology early in life.

While away at college at Oberlin, Tom worked in theater with the late Herbert Blau, a luminary in American experimental theater, an iconoclastic scholar of performance studies and interpreter of Jacques Derrida’s work for the theater. Tom also signed on to work with his professor’s theater group after college and very much enjoyed his life as an actor. When Blau disbanded the group, however,

Tom explained that he had felt lost and “didn’t know what to do.” He briefly went to work for his brother, Peter, who was already in the bicycle business even though he found the world of sales and profit-making strongly unappealing. At first, Tom said, “I couldn’t stand it!” “This is horrible!” Tom recalls that one day he was “just standing at a work bench and I was *showing wheels* and standing under these florescent lights and I was in so much grief about the end of the theater work. I think I was angry in those days.” It was at that moment, a moment which to him felt absurd, that Tom decided to go to seminary, just as his father had once predicted, and despite the fact that he lacked traditional theological commitments, preferring instead to think metaphysics by way of the “spirituality” of theater and poetry. Once there, his fellow students at Andover-Newton sometimes accused Tom of “not having faith” because he could not confidently speak about God. Tom recalls that in those days he simply felt the urge to “flip off” these detractors, many of whom he felt were “anti-intellectual.” While at Andover-Newton, Tom met and studied under Dick Broholm, who challenged his students to understand society itself, including its business and government institutions, as the “mystical body of God incarnate”. Under Dick’s sustained mentorship, Tom has spent the next quarter-century making good on the exhortation to work in the world with a servant heart. In the process, he has developed an appreciation for business and a passion for the biking industry. However, as I discovered through my relationship with him over time, leadership is an extension and prolongation of his scope as an actor. Time and again, Tom wove together connections between the work of STW and his experiences in the theater.

The actor’s craft, Tom will readily tell you, has everything to do with the dialectic between presence and absence. For example, he once described an actor’s presence as “that something that we can’t quite define where you begin to see yourself in the other person and to feel something larger than the person who is there.” He called this “some kind of knowing, some kind of awareness,” adding that this is “what you look for in great art and certainly in great theater.” *Presence* for Tom, though, is “directly relational; it’s in a direct relationship to their absence.” Tom recalled that one of his theater directors once went to see Marlon Brando in *The Iceman Cometh* and had described to Tom the ways in which Brando had literally become “an icicle” because he was “that frozen, that absent.” Continuing, Tom said that what he finds beautiful about acting, poetry, and the work of the imagination is “an absence *cycled* through presence, death and life, living, breathing and dying all coexisting.” “Theater,” he once said, “is in many ways a spiritual discipline because it’s a kind of confession, a kind of revelation, a kind of prayer.” Tom added, “theater acting at its best is fundamentally about revealing something. How do you come to know true love of God, self, and other? Most theater is about that. The failure of that. The tragedy of that. The success of that.” During our conversations, I noted the ways in which Tom contextualized acting as a play of form and formlessness accomplished by “self-emptying.” “One part of the actor,” he said, “has to do with the teleology, the goals and objectives of the scene, the larger arc of the movement.” Tom continued, asking, “What is the arc of this play? *The arc of history*. The movement towards justice and love. Every play has an arc. You have to also track that. But you also have to be present to the thing as it is.” While reality shifts for Tom, there is a core that persists and orients the dynamism of life. At several points in my ethnographic work with Tom, he referred to this center as Love. Linking different arcs of justice and history, Tom also talks about his commitment to socially enlightened business as a practice of Love.

“The ability to let yourself be possessed” is a necessary part of the spiritual discipline of theater, Tom once explained. However, “spirit” possession, Tom argues, is also a key aspect of life at work. The *demonic*, a word Tom uses a lot, is, for him, the power of unconscious possession. Companies and organizations can become trapped by what he calls “*cycles of power*” in which certain destructive behaviors are reinforced without conscious thought or moral awareness. Institutional “cultures” take on lives of their own, he explains. The competitive free market, Tom explains, says that “there is *no central control* but it says you can save, accumulate money whoever has the idea, find the need this wild, competitive, free-ranging kind of thing. Some people have a faith in that.” Tom does not. Our strengths

need to be brought back together and made “whole,” Tom says, if we are going to have any chance at all to withstand the demonic forces that allow corruption to become endemic of commercial culture.

Tom credits his work with STW in guiding him to take a principled stand against a destructive industry trend that he thinks was driving a “race to the bottom” and which he believes would have wreaked havoc upon independent bike retail.¹¹ Corporate and industry cultures themselves need to be reformed, Tom is one with STW in believing, so that what comes to possess us is virtuous rather than “demonic” in nature. Good habits must become what Tom calls “*momentum wheels*”; they also imply “possession” by our light demons or better angels. Tom explains that “*feedback loops*” and “*reinforcing cycles*,” terms that also pervade the management theory of Margaret Wheatley and Peter Senge, imply “being played by the music, the music playing us.” It is akin, he will say, to being “in a mantra state.” The proper goal for any company, he believes, is to create a “culture” that will inspire and give rise to virtuous rather than demonic action. For Tom Henry, I discovered during our many conversations, music, dramaturgy, poetry and dance provide the most apt and adequate metaphors for experience, even our experiences at work, because they imply the semi-circular and interminable movement of presence into absence and back again.

Within contemporary “cycles of power”, Tom Henry is fond of suggesting that bicycling has a special and positive role to play. If fear and unconscious possession by destructive systems fuels the demonic aspect of capitalist life, conscious reform that leads to unconscious possession by fair and balanced systems is what will save the world, Tom Henry explains, echoing management theory but speaking it by way of his own life story. For Tom, biking is a bodily, spiritual practice that one practices, driving towards a destination one might never see. Even if his Christian Reformed pessimism inflects his performance theory, Tom speaks about the need for “spiritual” reform with enthusiasm. He speaks of the “urgency of biking to save the world systems” and he does so because he notes an elegant symmetry between bicycle and human body, on the one hand, and spiritual cycles, on the other hand. The bicycle, he says, “is in perfect balance with the human body. It fits the body very nicely.” “To this day,” Tom adds, the bike is “the most efficient means of transportation on the earth.” Tom likes to quote the head of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, who argues that the bicycle can help us “turn the hydro-carbon economy into the carbohydrate economy.” In a productive, *self-regulating loop*, this would also increase fitness levels and improve overall health, Tom says. Biking can also, he argues, wean us from fossil fuels and the destructive geo-politics that feed our addiction to carbon-based energy. In this, or any Justice seeking we might do at work, Henry argues that it is important to practice the actor’s craft of self-emptying in order that we might finally allow ourselves to be played by virtuous rather than destructive “cycles of power.” We must allow the good scripts to guide us.

During one of our interviews, Tom made a point that I later understood differently than I did at the time. Tom explained that there was a new book out that discussed the fate of the biosphere after humans. “It’s an interesting experiment,” Tom suggested. “If I am the perceiver, what happens if I am not there perceiving it? What is there?” At the time, I was not at all sure what to make of Tom’s odd talk of “perceiving perceivers.” For my purposes in this present discussion, it makes sense to pause and consider a few things. Until I began to research the work of Margaret Wheatley and other creativity-inspired management theorists, I had little awareness of the deep and profound ways in which major principles from “new science” were being actively introduced into organizational science.

¹¹ When Specialized, one of the major American bicycle retailers, accounted plans to go “big box” and expand the market within the likes of Wal-Mart, its then CEO told industry leaders that more profit could be made all around. To the independent bike shops, like Landry’s, he said that “big box” bikes would mean a greater demand for bike repairs. With a wink and a nod, the CEO of Specialized smiled and laughed while the industry leaders gathered around him and did the same. For Tom, this moment has become the paradigmatic example of “demonic possession” at work. The people in the room did not even realize, he says, that they were suggesting that they wanted to provide worse products and put people at risk all for the sake of profit. Tom stood up and gave a damning speech that, he will proudly tell you, has become part of urban lore in the bike industry. He says he took his stand from a position of “whole self,” a concept which resonates with themes in the management literature of the STW universe. Tom’s view won the day and Specialized and the industry, he explained, went in a different direction that resisted a “big-box” model for bicycle retail.

When Tom made the comment about “perceiving perceivers” over lunch at Legal Seafood, I took it simply as an extension of his interest in the dynamism of poetry and performance theory. Now, in retrospect, I realize that, given the particular influence which the work of the leading organizational theorists Margaret Wheatley, Robert Greanleaf, and Peter Senge have had on the discursive world of STW, I also need to consider it to echo the quantum idea that the observer evokes reality, an idea popularly expressed by the principle of “Schroedinger’s cat.”

In her now classic manifesto, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Wheatley writes:

A live cat is placed in a box. The box has solid walls, so no one outside the box can see into it. This is a crucial factor, since the thought experiment explores the role of the observer in evoking reality. Inside the box, a device will trigger the release of either poison or food; the probability of either occurrence is 50/50. Time passes. The trigger goes off, unobserved. The cat meets its fate. Or does it? Just as an electron is both a wave and a particle until our observation causes it to collapse as either a particle or a wave, Schroedinger argues that the cat is both alive and dead until the moment we observe it. Inside the box, when no one is watching, the cat exists only as a probability wave ([15], p. 61).

For my part, I am sure that the life or death of the cat would matter to whatever kittens it might have or would matter to its loving caretakers in ways that are quite different from the supposed impact that the steely gaze of the quantum scientist, who has come to think of cats like wave particles, might have on its reality.

Here, though, what I want to highlight is the fact that Tom Henry’s question might simultaneously represent a cultural dominant, the popularization of quantum scientific principles, what Foucault might speak of in epistemic terms, and also speak to his personal background in theater and love for poetry. In other words, “power” operates in misty ways that achieve sociological solidity (as what Michael Jackson calls “patterns of intersubjective experience”) but which can also allow Herbert Blau and Jacques Derrida through him to wed Margaret Wheatley in or as the mystical Body of Christ. Symbolic conflation, psychic history, and the personalization of social metaphor work together to defy the neat categorizations and definitions in which we often put much stock. As it is enacted and lived, “power” is, in other words, liquid. It is, in life, *existential* rather than *analytical*.¹²

5. Towards an Existential Archeological Methodology

“New Management” is rife with talk of self-regulating feedback loops, circle economies and metaphors that mark the embodied, co-creative processes of communication and cultural production that are endemic to contemporary work. The fissions that have attended the deregulation of heavy industry in favor of immaterial labor are often marked in the management literature by religious and poetic metaphor. As a longstanding and visible member of STW and consistent participant at the roundtables, Tom Henry absorbed and was shaped by this discourse. However, it would be both empirically and politically myopic to conclude that Henry is merely a passive effect of discourse. In fact, as is the case for all persons, Henry’s social reality is always mediated by his existential history.¹³

¹² Management discourse, like any other limiting structures of history, is never simply conserved and reiterated but always brought to new places through the mediations of intersubjectivity. As Michael Jackson writes, “As Sartre argued, the conscious projects and intentions that carry us forward into the future are grounded in unconscious dispositions, accumulated habits, and invisible histories that, taken together, define our past. Accordingly, any essay in human understanding requires a progressive-regressive method that both discloses the preconditions that constrain what we may say and do, while recognising that no human action simply and blindly conserves the past; it goes beyond it” ([50], p. 293).

¹³ Political and ethical considerations are central to Sartre’s concept of *choice*. We are never simply passive vessels of limiting structures but are held to ethical account by our moral responsibility to choose. We are defined not by any essence but according to the ways in which we respond to the exigencies of messy existence. We can adopt a life-project which is characterized by chosen values which totalize the scope of our biographical history, as a whole. While Sartre understood well the need to change the structures that shape and constrain choice (and argues that the intellectual must commit to this

Social metaphor is particularized by the vagaries of biography and is always, in practice, intersubjective in nature. As Sartre argued, it is not simply the case that the world makes us. We, in turn, remake the world through our acts, living steps and spoken words. In their classic study, *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that metaphoricality acts through the body, giving rise to ways of knowing and experiencing the world:

The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities, and what we do is very much a matter of metaphor ([54], p. 3).

As I detail in *Shape-Shifting Capital—Spiritual Management, Critical Theory, and the Ethnographic Project*, the STW roundtables represent attempts to *reframe* what STW calls “organizational stories” by synergistically reading these in tandem with and through the lens of an assortment of texts and images culled and mined from diverse religious traditions, humanistic disciplines, the “new science” discourse, and literary traditions ([18], pp. 35–81).

What Lakoff and Johnson call *ontological metaphors* (a metaphor which views “events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc. as entities and substances”) are evident in the group’s desire to *reframe* organizational stories to begin with. For STW, to reframe organizational stories is precisely to redraw the boundaries of business around the metaphor of “concentric circles held together by tension and informed by one’s deepest values” [48]. Within the group’s “Theology of Institutions”, circles are metaphorical containers within which spirit (e.g. creativity) flows *dynamically*, that is, in creative tension, but ultimately in harmony and coherently because the circles are understood to exist under Christ’s good providence [48]. Flexible circles capture the recursivity of cybernetic movement without forsaking the management interest in order and control. The nature images sometimes displayed on a screen during the group’s ritual meetings weave the natural world into this circular pattern of divine creativity and purpose, connecting sacred and market time.

If we are often not consciously aware of the “conventional metaphors” that pattern experiential gestalts and shape lived realities, Lakoff and Johnson note that we do sometimes actively and quite self-consciously attempt to create “new meaning” by creating new relationships of similarity. New metaphors, they write, “make sense of our experience in the same way conventional metaphors do: they provide coherent structure, highlighting some things and hiding others” ([54], p. 139). In the end, STW’s “spiritual” reform principally consists of the creation of new meaning and new relationships of similarity. The ritual work of forging new meanings through the inscription of “new metaphor” was the dominant focus of the STW roundtable meetings I attended. The question of *how* new meanings are constructed was less patent.

Following up on Lakoff and Johnson’s pioneering work, Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner develop the argument that “creativity involves bringing together elements from different domains” ([55], p. 37). What they call “conceptual blending” speaks not simply to the intentional juxtaposition of conceptual matrices but, in the end, to its ubiquitous and pre-conscious operation in “everyday thought and language.” Human networks of meaning integrate cognitive blends that are at once cultural and personal. In short, to the degree that theological and management frames are formative for persons, these blends are already shaping experience more broadly, whether or not persons take it upon themselves to *do theology* or *talk management*, as it were. Theological reason, like internalized management discourse, exists, from the start, *as a blend*. Cybernetic metaphors are alive for Tom as existentially mediated *metaphorical complexes*. Discourse is never “internalized” in the same way; we do not deploy language outside of the vagaries of biographical and empirical contexts. With

goal), unlike Foucault, he did so according to an account of a biographically inflected freedom which does not collapse discursive and existential histories.

his talk of “cycles of power”, Tom personalizes the group’s theology and reads himself into it. In doing so, he reproduces management ideology and participates in social history and the epistemic turn to immaterial labor and global, cybernetic Capitalism. Importantly, Tom makes history, psychically, at varying and shifting degrees of metaphorical inchoateness and conscious intentionality.¹⁴

In his masterful review of theories of ideology, alienation and subjection, Jan Rehmann argues that one consequence of poststructuralist thought’s unique attention to the discursive power of language is that the project of de-naturalizing fixed identities always remains “at risk of morphing into an overall de-materialisation of social life” ([4], p. 218). The radicalization of the linguistic turn, whatever else its obvious ethical fruits are, can be understood to reproduce a postmodern variant of “what Marx has analysed as “fetishism”, namely the alienating rule of abstract value over use-value, of abstract average labour over concrete labour” ([4], p. 217). Indeed, while poststructuralism’s strident anti-humanism is often lauded as a radical critique of Enlightenment liberalism and for being a check on the latter’s inordinate celebration of reason and autonomy, in an important recent volume on the relationship of the thought of Michel Foucault to the rising neoliberal tides of his day, Daniel Zamora argues that, in many ways, Foucault’s later work in ethics and governmentality, especially, dovetail, as an ideological and historical matter, with anti-statist austerity programs, the deregulation of the welfare state, the abstracting financialization of social life, and the celebration of the ultimate sovereignty of the market [56]. In short, given his own libertarian anxieties regarding the institutional regulation and control of conduct, Foucault found common cause with neoliberalism’s “anthropological economism” and anti-bureaucratism.¹⁵ However, amidst Foucault’s critiques of the “rigidities” of the security state, he, “...neglects the function of finance, debt, and money. This is because he is unable to think about economic relations per se and the mediation of relations of power through money and value” [59]. In the process, in Foucault’s late work, Capitalism acquires ontological status as a saturating and pervasive “invisible reality” ([56], p. 75). Understood in the way Zamora does, Foucault falls prey to precisely the kind of unchecked symbolic connotations and political slippages which the critical theorist, Russell Berman, warns against:

Both the neoconservatives and the new social movements have, in addition to their critiques of the state, their respective cultural programs. These however are less interesting than the repetition of the antibureaucratic discourse of deregulation in the postmodernist cultural programs in terms like polyphony ([60], p. 134).

To assume, without contextualizing our ideas about subjectivity within the currents of neoliberal Capitalism, that any attempted recovery either of the subject or of biographical history is necessarily retrograde is to tread similar waters.¹⁶

¹⁴ Whenever we speak of word clouds or data clouds, we mirror the networked imaginary of contemporary Capitalism, while also, at the same time, reproducing these broader social formations at the level of lived experience. Recently, I have caught myself using the increasingly common idiom “having the band-width to” as in the question “do you have the bandwidth to take care of this right now?” I do not intend to cite a subject position when I use this Internet metaphor, but, despite myself, such a statement contextualizes my life within the digital age and in important other ways as well.

¹⁵ The work of Bruno Latour represents a watershed moment in Western social theory that privileges politics over and against existence. However, unlike Latour, whose “principle of generalized symmetry” assigns equal agency to persons as non-persons, including social structures and sedimented history, I am loath to go down Latour’s path of “Actor-Network Theory” on political grounds [57]. Systems very much express the agencies of individuals even if they also cannot be reduced to human agency. No doubt, some actors working for multinational corporations and in global finance work hard to support and maintain the “impersonal” structures of global neoliberalism because the paradigm enhances their financial and political power. The difference is that, as Sartre suggested, some individuals have more leverage than others and the processed materiality of history supports agency and human well-being in differentiated and unequal ways (see [43,51]). It is also not the case that the solidarity of the dispossessed can be ever be simply assumed at a distance, either. Choice always remains central to relationships of solidarity. Hence, both the constitutive instability of social solidarity and its very possibility are, in part, a consequence of a recalcitrant and at times politically inconvenient human freedom. For thorough discussions of the defining features of Sartre’s existential Marxism, see [52,58].

¹⁶ Nor can we assume that desire and *eros* are the great antidotes capable of undermining utility’s system. Jean-Joseph Goux provides a useful discussion of the ways in which Georges Bataille misrecognizes the ways in which affect and the inner

As anthropologists of Capitalism, such as Karen Ho [62], Melissa Fisher [63] and Caitlin Zaloom [64], describe, even the most highly abstracting finance Capitalism is still ultimately constructed through practice. For example, in her brilliant ethnography of Wall Street, Ho argues that since it is the case that “part of the discursive power of the financial market is precisely its representation as abstract,” ([62], p. 37) the deployment of ethnographic methods renders “concrete” the ways in which financial decisions and the experiences of financiers (in this case, investment bankers) are “thoroughly informed by cultural values and the social relations of race, gender, and class” ([62], p. 37). She demonstrates the ways in which “the *personal biographies* of investment bankers play into, and converge with, job status and workplace experiences to shape a commonsense understanding of the righteousness of Wall Street analyses and recommendations” ([62], p. 11). To the degree that the social construction of corporate “spirituality” ratchets up the power and scope of abstraction, ethnographic descriptions of its construction through practice can prove to be powerful, *critical* counterweights. Existential archeology highlights what Robert Orsi calls the memories, relationships, desires, fears, inheritances and attachments that attach to the redoubling of power and the iteration of social codes (see [65]).¹⁷

Of course, this kind of approach stands in contrast to “orthodox” poststructuralist methodologies which too often underplay the role of social semantics in the construction of ideology. According to David Graeber, performativity, or the reduction of all human action to politics and the idea that power creates its own truth, came into its own as a hegemonic theory between 1980 and 2008 [67]. Its prominence coincided with the increasing *financialization* of the economy and the “confidence games” that attend to the creation of market bubbles wherein value simply becomes what we think it is or what we can be convinced it is. Criterion of truth outside of the performative gestures of the market assemblage disappear and, in their place, there is a, “widespread assumption of no meaningful distinction between the nature of reality, the techniques of knowledge designed to analyze and interpret that reality, and the forms of institutional power within which knowledge is produced” [67]. In a neoliberal age, market logic *makes things so by saying so* and no alternative accounts of reality are admitted to cross-witness.

According to Jan Rehmann, Foucault constructs just this very kind of ideologically closed loop in his studies of governmentality. Foucault, he writes, insisted that neoliberalism’s leadership techniques and pastoral philosophies must be investigated in a positive way. Rehmann adds: Foucault’s “Governmentality studies”, “reproduce the view of management which looks at employees from the perspective of managerial leaders and dissimulates the domination and alienation in neoliberal capitalism behind the smokescreen of motivational incentives and appeals to teamwork” ([4], p. 314). Put another way, “since its interpretation is restricted to the programmatic interpellations of management literature without investigating their encounter with real subjects, the distinctions between techniques of self-conduct and domination becomes obsolete” ([4], p. 314). In other words, the subject is uncritically and too simply identified with the discourse that shapes it. *An existential archeology of contemporary postindustrial “workplace spirituality” will track the contours of the neo-hegemonic discourse, on the one hand, and will also exploit the spaces of contradiction wherein biographical history simultaneously reproduces and resists—both as a voluntary matter or not—identification with this discourse, on the other hand.* As a type of practice theory which self-reflexively aims to bridge existentialist and poststructuralist insights, it specializes in the investigation of the ways in which the discursive rules that constitute knowledge *across multiple social institutions* are reproduced at the level of intersubjective

life are not other than or separate from the systemic coherence of Capitalism but, rather, constitutive and generative of it (see [61]).

¹⁷ Focusing on social semantics or the space of intersubjectivity between self and discursive world does not in any way preclude supplemental, complementary or even antagonistic foci on something of what Jasbir Puar has in mind: “The assemblage, as a series of dispersed but mutually implicated and messy networks, draws together enunciation and dissolution, causality and effect, organic and non-organic forces” ([66], p. 211). My argument is not that we ought to privilege existentially mediated speech acts but, rather, that we cannot summarily dismiss them altogether from our analyses.

history. It attempts to make good on Mark Poster's suggestion that critical theory must, with Sartre, attend to the "dialectical interplay of men and things" and simultaneously follow Foucault in his considerations of the "systematized rules of formation" according to which the subject is linguistically constituted ([68], p. 275).¹⁸

In contrast to the Foucauldian collapse of the distinction between technologies of self and domination occasioned by the artificial removal of the "contradictions of socialization under the antagonistic conditions of neoliberal capitalism," ([4], p. 315) an existential archeology of contemporary "workplace spirituality" gives voice to these tensions and gains critical leverage in doing so. In *Shape-Shifting Capital*, I provide thick ethnographic accounts of the biographical mediations which attach to the reproduction of management discourse for *deconstructive* purposes. While Tom Henry is a vocal champion of STW's "Theology of Institutions", which itself bears a strong family resemblance to the broader ideology of "new management", his existential history resists a full and final identification with the discourse and, at times, points to sites of viscerally felt tension as a charismatic salesman who also believes that wealth must be socialized and as a former actor whose first love will always be the theater rather than the boardroom. In these ways, what Michael Jackson calls "existential deconstruction" (see [7], p. 3) meets the demands of "a critical ideology-theory (which) needs to grasp the contradictions between neoliberal discourses of self-activation and the submission to alienated relations of domination" ([4], p. 318).

Ethnographies of "spiritual management" must also always remain attentive to the differing milieus of their reception. As Rehmann argues, "the appeals to creativity and initiative might play a mobilising and constructive role in the formation of identities if they correlate to labour-conditions that actually require and bolster a certain (relative) autonomy and freedom; they tend to destroy agency and subjectivities if there are no, or very restricted possibilities to act" ([4], pp. 317–8). As I describe in the monograph, the lower-end workers I met at Landry's tended not to adopt the STW framework and sometimes actively resisted many of its most basic assumptions. They also often worked with competing accounts of the "spiritual" (see [18], pp. 119–55). At an even more radical political and epistemological distance, we might compare and contrast the "spirituality" of leadership ideology and the lived religion of populations not afforded the same "new management" niceties—religious life and religious conversion within the prison-system and police surveillance complex, for example (see [4], p. 317). In all cases, even in these days of assumed performativity and the lingering popularity of poststructuralist accounts of the subject in the study of religion, a methodology appropriate to the study of religion and Capitalism must take "seriously the agency of individuals and their attempts at self-socialisation and self-conduct. The emergence of capacities to act is not to be equated beforehand with subjection" ([4], p. 318). As Zygmunt Bauman argues, "conflict, is no longer between classes, but between each person and society. It isn't just a lack of security, but a lack of freedom" [71]. Critically exploiting the gap between the discursive say-so and the empirical do-so, an ethnographic existential archeology can draw important contrasts between "neoliberalism's attractive promises of individualization and its practical reductionism" ([4], p. 318).

6. Concluding Reflections

Capitalism has not drowned out the "heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor," as Marx predicted ([72], p. 206). It is in the business of generating its own distinct variety of "religious

¹⁸ For a discussion of the ways of the false oppositions, which tend to confuse understandings of the relationship of Sartrian and Derridean accounts of subjectivity see Steve Martinot, *Forms in the Abyss: A Philosophical Bridge Between Sartre and Derrida* [69]. Martinot writes, "Subjectivity does not manifest itself as writing in the Derridean sense, any more than writing manifests itself as subjectivity in the Sartrean sense. One can no more say that consciousness produces writing as its thought than that writing produces consciousness as its text. They are homological, which means these are not oppositions between Sartre and Derrida" ([69], p. 248). In a similar vein, I appreciate the ways in which Amy Hollywood's Derridean readings, attentive to the "perversion" inherent to Derrida's thought itself, resist a new, poststructuralist orthodoxy of the subject and make room for active, intentional work (see [70], p. 269).

fervor." Networked Capitalism is characterized by its misty ephemerality. Its R&D units, dark money, dark pools, dark data and shadow banking reveal its increasingly penumbral quality. Increasingly, "spirituality" is an explicit and public aspect of Capitalism's present archeological form. The battle over religious metaphor is, Derrida writes, all encompassing: "the war for the "appropriation of Jerusalem" is today the world war. It is happening everywhere, it is the world" ([73], p. 73). Both Max Weber and Karl Marx believed that "enchantment would disappear". And yet, according to Jean and John Comaroff, today, "more and more ordinary people see arcane forces intervening in the production of value, diverting its flow toward a new elect: those masters of the market who comprehend and control the production of wealth and contemporary conditions" ([74], p. 25).

According to the Comaroffs, "epochal shifts in the constitutive relationship of production to consumption, and hence of labor to capital" as well as the rampant explosion of digitally mediated forms of casino Capitalism have resulted in what they call the "ontological conditions-of-being under millennial Capitalism" ([74], p. 25). "Occult economies" can provide existential hope to persons when social conditions place them in danger. As the late ethnographer of Capitalist magic, Galina Lindquist, writes, magical practices, "thrive where power is brutal and overwhelming, where the rational channels of agency are insufficient or of limited value" ([75], p. 2). Unauthorized ghosts and forms of spectral assault can aid in the resistance of Capitalist discipline (see [76]). Magical techniques can also mark the utter primitivism of financial chicanery.¹⁹

The "spirituality" of contemporary management theory never has the final word. The members of STW are not alone in turning to "extrasocial" sources in an effort to manage the many crises of Capitalism. Many are conjuring forth specters, ghosts, and spirits from the borderlands, in search of hope and spectral assistance. In addition to "religion" as it has been sequestered to meet the totalitarian demands of Capitalist domination, religion has also become, "the privileged, if not primary form in which the impoverished masses...articulate their hopes as well a critique of the world ([28], p. 51), At all times, we are all always haunted by other, elusive "spirits" that populate the limits of what we can do and know.²⁰ In a society so thoroughly suffused with the alienating logic of capital, we participate in this religious history whether we like it or not. However, this is not the "timeless time of creation," as one of the STW roundtable meetings suggested. We are tethered to history. It is also our perpetual task in life to remake it. We ourselves help write the history of "spiritual Capitalism", not as pawns in a progressive unfolding of purpose, but through the everyday things we say and the little steps we take. We who labor in the study of religion must reckon with the new, ancient, and revenant spirits of Capitalism.²¹

¹⁹ Indeed, in 2008, the *New York Times* reported that following the economic collapse of that same year, psychics and tarot card readers saw a spike in business as day traders looked to occult techniques to help them predict and manage the increasingly chaotic financial markets (see [77]).

²⁰ In her masterful, *Politics Out of History*, Wendy Brown queries: "are ghosts and spirits what inevitably arise at the end or death of something—an era, desire, attachment, belief, figure, or narrative?" There, she suggests that the mourning of modernity's many certainties has given rise to the furtive specters which Derrida then conjures forth ([78], p. 114).

²¹ As Robert Orsi reminds, modern, Western criticisms and naturalistic reductions of the "real presence" of religious agencies necessarily participate in racial, colonial, gendered and class histories which have traditionally made much of modern, secular taxonomies according to which religious societies have been understood to exist at primitive stages of socio-cultural evolution and religious persons who insist on the reality of religious "presence" have been deemed some version of ignorant, psychotic or delusional. These histories necessarily breathe down the back of the critic of even highly commodified and bourgeois forms of "capitalist spirituality" (see [79], pp. 3–5). Capitalist spirituality places religious studies in a difficult but productive "double-bind". There are simply no intellectually defensible reasons for concluding that it is appropriate to glibly write-off "capitalist" forms of "spirituality" on account of the charge that they are somehow "unreal" or not the kind of "religion" that is worthy of our best efforts as religion scholars. The kinds of lived experiences of "presence" which accompany self-help techniques ought to matter to us and to our scholarly projects. At the very same time, to eschew criticisms of the inequalities and social suffering that underwrite bourgeois capitalist spirituality is to seek refuge in an apolitical, phenomenological refuge of the scholar's own making. Fortunately, a better understanding of how Capitalism is viscerally "religious" can only improve our social criticisms of contemporary conditions. Criticism and phenomenology are in no way opposed to one another.

According to Amy Hollywood, the question of the limits of the "real" antecedes modern discourse and is, for example, constitutive of Medieval periods in which she works. It is also the case, as Hollywood suggests, students of religion are

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perhaps *inescapably* and especially confronted with the problem of critical reason's constitutive limits (see [70], p. 135). Hollywood marshals the "apparently uncritical readings" of Medieval, women mystics traditionally marginalized for their purported bodily and affective excesses (readings which are bound to specific times and places but which can, whether "then" or "now", ignite new meanings). While I am generally partial to this kind of Benjaminian dialectic, it must be *contextualized* within the movements of a post-secular discourse which generates much of its power by grinding its axes against a fetishized, "dead" and "unhip" secularism. While I agree that we cannot assume that religion is inherently uncritical, today, this kind of understanding must be contextualized within a sociology of "spiritual Capitalism" in which economic reason does not outright reject and disavow religious and theological reason but, instead, hopes to strategically manage, predict and control "religious", "poetic", linguistic and psychic borderlands through forms of statistical power. Today, Capitalist reason seeks not to disavow but rather to don the trappings of "excess". This is precisely how fire walking corporate training exercises and shamanic rituals have become some of the favored technologies of today's surfing CEOs and poet CFOs (see [18], pp. 1–34). Can the sacred past "blaze up" today the way Benjamin would have us hope when, in the contemporary context, the ideology of Capitalism itself covets the disciplinary power of ancient, religious metaphor and looks to mine penumbral spaces and liminal states in search of profitable creativity?

As Hollywood's Derridean readings would seem to suggest and I argue, from a slightly different angle in my monograph, our situation is marked by *contestations* over already overdetermined forms of "religious" metaphor. A double-movement is needed—the "religious" (or attendant forms of the poetic, the affective, spirituality and mysticism) cannot be opposed to the rational; instead, competing accounts of the "religious" (and the "poetic") can be conjured forth, forced to coexist in generative tensions which might explode the possible horizons of meaning. In my own work, the ethnographic details resist the totalizations of management discourse and its ideological, capitalizing accounts of "spirituality". They also resist the totalizations of critical reason. Politics is informed by phenomenology and phenomenology is framed by sociology but the connective circles are never closed. Detailed archival work can also accomplish something akin to this kind of open critique always at odds with itself so long as, in my view, intersubjectivity is not collapsed into a generalizing account of discourse.

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