

**THE POLITICS OF THE BRITISH PUBLIC HOUSE, 1979 – PRESENT:
Architecture, Authenticity and Everyday Enchantment**

by
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I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it, except where explicitly stated otherwise, are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Signed: 

Date: 10/09/2019

For my parents,
John & Catherine

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Abstract

This PhD investigates the transformation of the British public house since 1979. Chapter 1 establishes the conceptual and methodological framework for the thesis, including its approach to the concept of the political. Chapter 2 traces the formation of the pub as a symbol of national identity through a history of pub writing; drawing on pamphlets, ethnographic studies, poetry and polemics. From these sources it attempts to derive the key characteristics which constitute the pub's peculiar phenomenology, and which set the terms for understanding the broader politics of its place within British culture. The chapter begins in the interwar period, exploring how a new fixation with the cultural markers of British identity – stimulated by the rise of recreational motoring, imperial decline, and the experience of a new phase of modernity – created a representation which shifted the pub from its 19th century depiction as an institution 'of crisis' to its familiar, contemporary depiction as an institution 'in crisis'. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 then explore how three case studies – the corporate chain, J D Wetherspoon, the craft beer company, BrewDog, and the emergent phenomenon of community owned pubs – interact with the pre-history outlined in Chapter 2, each producing different modes of social experience which imitate, undercut, or reinforce characteristics latent in pub space and pub custom.

Although it aims to provide an overview of all the case studies, the predominant concern of the PhD is the relationship between architecture and politics. It follows Raymond Williams's notion of 'the structure of feeling' in the light of everyday architectural objects as they emerge during two epochal shifts in British political, social and economic life: broadly understood as the Thatcherite paradigm (1979 - 2008), and the 'post-crash' era which followed the 2008 financial crisis (2008 - present). Consequently, it endeavours to understand the relationship between meta-political trends on the one hand, and the lived fabric of everyday life on the other. Through close architectural readings it considers the role of these case studies in producing particular kinds of reality; which reinforce, challenge, or qualify dominant political ideologies. Finally, in Chapter 6, it returns to the pub's symbolic role, asking whether an institution seemingly imbricated within a reactionary project of nostalgia, nationalism and revanchism, can be reclaimed through a phenomenological politics of enchantment.

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Chapter 1

Approaching the Politics of the Public House: Concepts & Methodologies

On March 29th 2017 the British government invoked Article 50 of the Treaty on the European Union, initiating the secession of the United Kingdom. A short distance from Parliament, Nigel Farage, former leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the referendum's unofficial architect, awaited the media in his usual fashion: ensconced outside a pub. 'We are past the point of no return, we are leaving the European Union' Farage told a reporter, 'we've won the war.'¹ With symbolism typical of Farage's stage management, his choice of pub – The Marquis of Granby – celebrated an 18th century commander famous for his victory against French forces during the Battle of Warburg.

During its time under Farage's leadership UKIP became famous for its association with the pub. The party had run a 'Save Our Pubs' campaign since 2009, and media interviews commonly featured Farage inside one. Here, at The Admiral Owen in Sandwich, 'standing up for small business against the corporates', there, at The Westminster Arms, complaining about the 80p per pint tax rate: 'all [the publican is] doing is collecting tax for the government!'.² Following the European election results in 2014, one journalist asked Farage how many pints of beer he had drunk during the course of the campaign: 'incalculable dear boy!' joshed Farage in response.³

UKIP's politics can appear congenitally suited to the pub setting. The pub's traditionalism and acclaimed 'Englishness' speaks to the cosmology of the party base. For despite the 'United Kingdom' in its name, and some temporary successes in Wales and Northern Ireland, UKIP has always been, at heart, a party of English nationalism. Farage explained UKIP's support was due to the way 'a lot of English people feel they've been condescended to', and that whereas political devolution brought cultural credibility to Welshness, Irishness and Scottishness, it was

¹ 'Nigel Farage celebrates Brexit day at the pub' *ODN*, 29 Mar 2017 ([youtube.com/watch?v=GnDv6Wn73E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnDv6Wn73E); accessed 05/18)

² 'In the pub with Nigel Farage' *The Economist*, 29 Apr, 2015 ([youtube.com/watch?v=hW8hNI1UkTg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hW8hNI1UkTg); accessed 05/18)

³ 'European election: UKIP's Nigel Farage celebrates at pub' *acrossvideos*, 26 May 2014 ([youtube.com/watch?v=t-lba0888YA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-lba0888YA); accessed 05/18)

‘somehow... not cool to be English.... Our politicians have always been ashamed of the concept of Englishness.’⁴



Fig. 1.1 United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) Former Leader, Nigel Farage (pictured) is famous for exploiting the symbolism of the pub. UKIP, more than any other political party, have made the crisis of the pub a feature of their campaigns. [Clockwise from top: Reuters / Olivia Harris – via Daily Telegraph, Dec 11 2019, Getty / Macdiarmid - via Daily Telegraph, Sept 16 2016, Paul Grover – via Daily Telegraph, Apr 25 2015, UKIP – via Brew Wales, ‘Save the Pub with UKIP’, Nov 19 2011, found at: beerbrewer.blogspot.com/2011/11/save-pub-with-ukip.html, accessed 04/04/2018)

⁴ *Economist*. “In the pub with Nigel Farage” 29 Apr, 2015

In this war of political symbolism, the pub has proved a potent signifier. Its essential Englishness is such a common refrain that it has come to appear immemorial. Thomas Burke, the interwar author of *The English Inn*, felt that ‘to write of the English inn is almost to write of England itself’, and accounts of the pub have tended to double as national founding myths. Burke argued that the pub ‘began where we began’, and that though ‘the birth of the English inn cannot be documented... we may say with certainty that when the first fifty miles of road was cut through England the first English inn was born.’⁵ Representations of the public house, from George Morland’s sentimental ‘The Roadside Inn’ (1790) to Sir David Wilkie’s irreverent ‘The Village Holiday’ (1809-11) tend to either depict arcadian scenes unsettled by time, or provide mischievously moral portraits of English life as an unruly carnivalesque; reinforcing the notion of the pub as a window onto the nation’s true, ungovernable heart.

Yet Burke’s choice of ‘inn’ rather than the more generic ‘pub’ already belies the ease of this association. For the pub has been many things and had many names: inn, alehouse, tavern, gin shop, hotel. Each of these discriminators has its own history, its own associations. They share commonalities but defy collective identification. As a guide for 18th century magistrates despairingly noted of just two of these categories, ‘every inn is not an alehouse, nor every alehouse an inn: but if an inn uses common selling of ale, it is then also an alehouse; and if an alehouse lodges and entertains travellers, it is also an inn.’⁶ Attempts to distinguish the *English* pub from its Irish, Scottish and Welsh counterparts have also proved difficult. Writers refer vaguely to the ‘different traditions’ of these other nations, but whilst differences do remain, pubs resembling their English counterparts might be found, to a varying extent, right across the British Isles.⁷ Even ‘the pub’ itself is a recent concoction, designed to capture the expansiveness

⁵ Thomas Burke, *The English Inn*, Longmans & Co; London (1930) p.1 It is notable that in this early phase of writing, it is the ‘inn’ rather than the more generic ‘pub’ which Burke chooses for his title. Burke switches to the latter in 1936 in his *Will Someone Lead Me To A Pub?* when dealing with London. Presumably he felt ‘Inn’ represented the motorist’s rural imaginary better - as the natural inheritors to the coaching tradition around which many ‘Inns’ were originally built to provide hospitality for itinerant trade. ‘Pub’ was, at any rate, a modern amalgamation of the many sub variants of the public house, and perhaps less amenable to Burke’s romantic affectations.

⁶ Peter Clarke, *The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200 - 1830*, Longman (1983) p.20

⁷ A characteristic attempt to fudge this issue can be found in Ben Davis, *The Traditional English Pub: A Way of Drinking*, Architectural Press (1981): ‘The pub is English. The Scots drink in bars, and the Welsh, bless them, will drink anywhere. The splendid Irish had the sense to hold on to the pubs which the English gave them... but their native manner of drinking is in grocers’ shops.’ The slight against the Welsh in fact masks the issue with Davis’s claim – for many ‘English’ pubs can be found across Wales, and unlike Scotland and Ireland, do not have alternate drinking institutions to stand in as a ‘true’ national drinking culture distinct from England’s. This is perhaps a reflection of Wales’s

of these variant institutions under one comprehensible moniker; a coinage made in 1669 but only in common use from the late 19th century onwards.⁸ The pub is as much invention as tradition.



Fig 1.2 Top Left: George Morland, 'Roadside Inn' (1790), Top Right: Richard Wilson, 'The Cock Tavern, Cheam, Surrey' (1745), Bottom Left: Sir David Wilkie, 'The Village Holiday' (1809-11), Bottom Right: Cecil Gordon Lawson, 'The Hop-Gardens of England' (1874) [All images: Tate Museum – tate.org.uk]

earlier integration into what would ultimately become 'Great Britain' – first through Roman, then English / Saxon expansion.

⁸ Paul Jennings, *The Local: A History of the English Pub*, The History Press; UK (2011) p.15

If the pub's romanticism had been established since the 18th century, it was in the 20th century that it became institutionalised. After a generation of attacks from temperance campaigners and social regulators the pub emerged as a figure of nostalgia and mythology for an interwar generation troubled by England's identity in a world ruptured by mass warfare, urban and architectural modernisation, state intervention and the denouement of empire. First caught up in a resurgent appetite for the English picturesque fuelled by the expansion of car ownership, and then the subject of academic scrutiny and popular eulogy throughout the Second World War, the pub found itself the subject of increasingly politicised writing concerned with the nature of capitalism from the 1970s onward. Despite these different contexts, a seam of continuity runs throughout: the pub's tortuous relationship to modernity, the encroachment of managerialism, commodification and stratification; the attempt to make something local, idiosyncratic, and recalcitrant conform to the systematisation of the market. In the texts which shadow it through the 20th century, the pub, revered for its apparent stability, presents as perpetually under threat. Its death is anticipated in the 1930s, announced in the 1940s, protracted through the 50s and 60s, confirmed in the 1970s, only for its funeral to be held up for disputation – and so it has continued in the decades since. As early as 1930 a writer for the *Daily Herald* commented that 'Our inns are not what they were', and worried that 'our age will bid farewell to the inn since it is out of place in a world of speed.'⁹ Where fears about Britain's decline proliferate, fears for the future of the pub are rarely far away.

The sense of crisis is ongoing. At present, alarming statistics are announced each month declaring the weekly rate of pub closures (29 per week, as of Autumn 2017).¹⁰ Yet the apparent longevity of the pub's crisis suggests it ought to be understood as more than a statistical phenomenon. Rather it is the consequence of its unique cultural standing: perched precariously upon the fault-line where modernity, capitalism, shifting social relations and national identity intersect. It a fault-line readily exploited by the conservative Right - hence UKIP's pub populism - but is for the most part neglected by the Left, wary of any association with symbols of revanchist nationalism. Yet the history of pub writing suggests a more complex picture can be reclaimed. Situated between many competing political narratives but belonging wholly to none of them, the pub is a much-contested institution. Yet this ambivalence is also a source of

⁹ *Daily Herald*, 3 June 1930

¹⁰ Campaign for Real Ale, 'New Pub Closure Statistics Revealed', Press Release, 2017 (camra.org.uk/home/-/asset_publisher/UzG2SEmQMtPf/content/new-pub-closure-statistics-revealed)

potential: hinting at a role of relative unity in an otherwise divided polity – a space to reimagine what identity is, and belonging entails.

The symbolic centrality of the pub to British / English identity only makes it more vital that it not be captured by any one faction in the political fissures opened by Brexit. As long-standing ‘spaces of exception’, drinking cultures offer a place to performatively stand to one side of the social relations which otherwise predominate.¹¹ If there can be considered such thing as an ‘authentic’ pub (a concept explored throughout this project) it is perhaps in the sense of an architectural technology which offers a *break* with the world outside its domain. The historic themes of pub culture – ‘good fellowship’, class mixture, reciprocity, openness to strangers are powerful civic values when a pub’s culture, architecture, and organisation allow for them. Such experiences, in paradoxically breaking with prevailing social norms, confirm a sense of belonging to a larger historical order. The *real pub* is so often where Britain / England is depicted as being at its truest, exactly because it can permit experiences otherwise denied within its cultural norms.

Likewise, it is the recalcitrant rootedness of the pub in a local geography which allows it to represent something of a larger national identity.¹² This ‘unofficial nationalism’ can be distinguished from a confected official nationalism which sell a pastiche, uniform image of identity. It is what the authors Sue Clifford and Angela King describe as ‘locality... defined from the inside’, whereby the national is in fact constituted through a dazzling constellation of particularity.¹³ At its quintessential the pub can thereby marry apparently contradictory geographical frames: both the horizontal network of the national and the vertical, place-bound temporality of the local.¹⁴ This quality is expressed in the very semantics of the phrases ‘the pub’ and ‘the local’ – used both to signify a specific local pub (as in: ‘shall we go to the pub / local?’ or more simply still: ‘pub?’) – and as a universal category: ‘the pub / the local’. This twin character suggests something too of the felt meaning bound up in visiting the pub: both concrete act and performative gesture; ritual elevated to the status of duty. Injunctions to ‘save your local’ – common to campaigns by CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) reflect something of

¹¹ Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*, Hodder & Stoughton (2005) p.89

¹² As David Matless points out, the search for England through its regional particularity has a long pedigree in its guides and diarists. This idea is explored further in chapter 2. David Matless, *Landscape & Englishness*, Reaktion (2016) p.100-101

¹³ Sue Clifford & Angela King, *England in Particular*, Hodder & Stoughton (2006) p.x

¹⁴ Yi-fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*, Columbia University Press (1990)

this twin sense of personal ownership ('your') and what might be called the 'universally local' register of unofficial national belonging. The affective semantics of 'pub' – a rounded, decisive monosyllable (a contraction of 'public house') – similarly speaks of certainty, intimacy, and everyday familiarity. For an institution whose history is intertwined with monopoly ownership, the pub nevertheless continues to be perceived as a kind of collective inheritance – an institution belonging to all those invested in upholding it.¹⁵

Reimagining the Pub since 1979: Aims and Methodologies

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the relationship between the pub and politics, with special focus on the period between 1979 and the present day. It looks to provide an account of the key transformations of the public house in this period and detail the implications of those transformations for broader political change with the hope of furthering an understanding of the relationship between architecture, identity, aesthetics and politics.

Politics is not here used in the straightforward sense of political governance – though this is addressed when relevant. Rather it is understood in three related ways. First, it is concerned with the way the pub is entangled in political discourses – of nationhood, of class and gender, of modernity, capitalism and authenticity – evolving from and reinforcing shifting socioeconomic contexts. Second, politics is understood through the representational positioning of pub enterprises in relation to those discourses; through aesthetic engineering, public relations, target audience, company policies and practices, and interventions in the 'field' of the pub industry. Third, it is concerned with politics in the sense of the management of possibility. Here, different regimes of pub ownership can be said to produce, through their architecture and spatial management, different modes of the possible with ramifications for the user's experience of everyday life – their daily encounters, imagination, belonging, and senses – with concordant meta socio-political consequences. Throughout the thesis these different interpretations of the political are brought into dialogue, sometimes reinforcing, sometimes contradicting, conclusions which might be drawn from attending only to one approach.

This approach has informed the thesis methodology. In order to establish the central political discourses of the pub, chapter 2 draws on archive collections, pamphlets, and supplementary sources such as historical newspaper articles and film, in order to provide an analytical survey of key representations of the pub from the early 20th century onwards. Beginning in the interwar

¹⁵ The reality can, of course, be more mixed. With sub-genres such as the 'locals pub' giving rise to notorious motifs such as the pub going silent upon the entrance of a stranger.

period, these (predominantly textual) sources provide a means of reconstructing a cultural history of pub representation in the 20th century, as well as establishing what could be termed the ‘semiotic anatomy’ of the pub. The aim in chapter 2 has therefore not been to provide an exhaustive examination of pub texts and their authors, but rather to draw out the key motifs which have informed the pub’s unique cultural standing within British culture.

The texts were chosen on the basis that they represent a specific genre of writing about the British pub. This genre is concerned less with the pub’s true history, or its technical details, than with the pub as a symbol of identity, community, meaning, and tradition. They are all marked by an attempt not to just think *about* the pub, but to think *through* it: using the pub as a prism through which to grapple with much larger fears and anxieties about modernity, sharing similar concerns with commodification, modernisation, and innovations they felt removed the pub from its authentic purpose. Many are polemical as a result, or as in the case of Mass Observation, disguise their personal stances behind the veneer of pseudo-objective sociological research. They are also reflexive documents: aware of each other and in dialogue – sometimes tacit, sometimes explicit – with each other across the course a century.

Though the selected texts are uneven in their range and influence (some, such as Thomas Burke’s *The English Inn*, reached relatively mainstream acclaim, while others, like George Williamson’s *Beware the Barmaid’s Smile* are of a more underground character) they share compelling similarities in their use of the pub as a prism through which to perceive wider social ills, even where the character of those ills were disputed. Between them they show something of both the consensus, and range, of pub discourse from across the political spectrum. The chapter is ordered in chronological fashion, as new texts tended to emerge as social, legislative and economic influences on the pub industry changed.

With the political framework of the pub established by chapter 2, chapters 3, 4 and 5 then turn to three different interventions within the ‘field’ of the pub market since 1979, exploring how they draw upon, contradict and support different elements of the pub’s semiotic anatomy. 1979 has been chosen as the start date for these explorations as it coincides with both the founding of J D Wetherspoon, now one of the largest chain pub operators in Britain, as well as the election of Margaret Thatcher – widely understood as symbolising a key shift in the ‘structure of feeling’ of British society.¹⁶ The relationship between the emergence of Wetherspoons and this political context is consequently explored in chapter 3. This commercialised ‘top-down’ reinvention of

¹⁶ This concept, originating with Raymond Williams, is discussed later in the chapter.

the pub saw the development of a hybrid form which blended its historic signifiers with the spatial forms and operational cultures of the new so-called ‘nightlife economy’ – often, it is argued, to the detriment of the pub culture it appropriated – and yet achieving its own form of ‘proverbial’ authenticity in the process.

Chapters 4 and 5 then turn to two institutions which have flourished since the financial crisis just as Wetherspoons prospered before it: the craft beer company, BrewDog, and the spread of community owned pubs. These have been chosen as representing two paths for the post-2008 era. Each nominally attend to a latent anti-corporate, or non-capitalist, ethos, and an interest in avowedly resisting the commodification of the pub market, though by way of highly divergent strategies. Chapter 4 covers the rise of BrewDog, tracing its rapid expansion from self-conscious brewing insurgents to global beer brand. This ‘sideways’ reinvention of the pub – top down in its business reality, yet apparently bottom-up in its financing models and channelling of the craft beer movement’s social ethos – jettisons many of the pub’s aesthetic and cultural traditions in favour of a ‘deconstructed’ architecture. Emerging out of the financial crisis, this style paradoxically embraces modernity by revelling in the wreckage of modernity’s promise, producing a blend of ‘standardised non-standardisation’ within pseudo-derelict bar spaces. Finally, chapter 5 considers the potential of truly ‘bottom up’ phenomena in the form of community owned pubs: crowdfunded exercises in collective ownership aimed at reversing the fortunes of endangered pubs in their local areas, with variant aesthetic results. Between these three cases – top-down, sideways, and bottom-up – the major meta-interventions (chain pub, craft brewery, community owned) in the pub market since 1979 are represented.¹⁷

To assess the ‘representational positioning’ and ‘management of possibility’ in these case studies a methodology combining archival research, discourse analysis, ethnographic observation and oral interviews was used. In the case of J D Wetherspoons and BrewDog, corporate grey materials, publications, newspaper records, and relevant secondary literature were analysed to establish their ideological positioning, and the reception of their brands and spaces amongst consumers. This was followed with thirty site visits across the UK, selected so as not to privilege one geographical region or urban context. Consequently, in the case of Wetherspoons, these involved a sample of Wetherspoon typologies – from major inner-city pubs, to suburban outlets and market towns – in order to understand their implications at different scales. Whilst, in the case of BrewDog, which is almost entirely city based, visits were

¹⁷ For a fuller thesis overview: see ‘Summary of Argument’ at the beginning of Chapter 6.

made to multiple sites within the same city (as in London, where BrewDog have sites in numerous locations – e.g. Soho, Shoreditch, Dalston, Clerkenwell, Angel, Camden, Brixton, Clapham) and to numerous cities across the UK (e.g. Bristol, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Brighton). Since pub spaces can radically alter in atmosphere depending on time of day, and day of week, specific sites were chosen as depth studies and visited repeatedly to capture a representative sample of their weekly cycle.

During each site visit a research visit with observations and reflections was kept. These included recordings of demographic breakdown, architectural features, staffing and branding, as well as more complex data on the phenomenological and affective characteristics of the space. This was achieved through observation of the ‘proxemic’ interactions between the pub layout and the pub user, sound recordings, auto-ethnographic reflection, notes on the hexis (comportment / posture of embodiment) encouraged by the environment, and the activities taking place inside.¹⁸ Sound recordings were taken at segments for around a minute to acquire more representative data. Recordings are an imperfect representation of how the body experiences sound and were therefore only used as supplementary evidence for written descriptions, which focused on ambient noise, legibility of voice, and bodily response. Proxemics were assessed through sketches of pub layout, and observation of how groups and individuals positioned themselves within it, as well as how they interacted (or neglected to interact) with each other. These provide the basis for analysis of key ethnographic moments, which have been used to illustrate the arguments made within the case study chapters.

As it documented a heterogenous process rather than a specific entity, community pub ownership required a different approach. Unlike the companies in chapters 3 and 4, in which a brand is propagating a specific corporate model, community pubs are responsive environments adapting themselves to myriad local needs and desires. Consequently, the chapter focused much more on the participants themselves. To achieve this, I visited five rural community pubs over a period of months, conducting interviews with over twenty participants about their experiences bringing a local pub into community ownership. These interviews were then supplemented with local documentation (e.g. from council records) as well as additional reportage and ethnographic observation. To prevent a narrow perspective informing the research, interviews were made, where possible, with multiple members of the community organizations, as well as pub regulars and stakeholders. Interviews were open-ended and

¹⁸ See: Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press (1977)

unstructured, though adopted similar lines of enquiry; focusing on the process of the buyout, impact, motivations, aesthetic decisions, conflicts, obstacles and policy implications, as well as lived experience.

The case studies were selected by several criteria. First, although they were all representative of the predominantly rural nature of community pub ownership, they offered distinct settlement typologies: small town (Northumberland Arms, Marple / The Fox & Goose, Hebden Bridge), village (Angler's Rest, Bamford / The Old Crown, Heskett Newmarket), and satellite settlement (The George and Dragon, Hudswell). They also adopted different models of community ownership. Two were 'tenanted', in which the community group owned the asset but hired a third party to operate the business. Three were managed houses, in which the community interest company both owned the asset and ran the business directly. Additionally, they represented different spans of maturity. One - The Old Crown - was the first community owned pub in the country and had operated for nearly twenty years. Another, the Northumberland Arms, had been established within the year of study. These divergences allowed for a comparison of the benefits of different models in their respective settings, at different stages of maturity. There were some limits to this approach: for logistical reasons, all the studies were clustered in the north of England - limiting potential regional influences, though initial research suggested these to be sufficiently minor. Likewise, there was some potential bias in that the pubs most willing to discuss their experiences with a researcher may have been those which were most successful. In the event however, nearly all the respondents were comfortable presenting a sufficiently complex picture of their experiences, with the positives and negatives that entailed.

As detailed above, although similar concerns run throughout the thesis, each chapter has at times required a different methodological approach. Chapter 2 is intended to establish a baseline summary of the history, themes and discourses which surrounded the pub in the 20th century, against which the other case studies could be understood. This required an approach which concerned itself far more with archival research and textual analysis; and allowed for a sense of the development and transformation of the institution brought by the case studies. Chapter 3 adopts a blended approach, mixing archival research and discourse analysis with contemporary ethnographic methods. This allows for a sense of the emergence of Wetherspoons from the context established by Chapter 2 and enables comparison of representational claims (as in corporate positioning, branding, public reception and popular debate), and non-representational experience. This also provides for a more rounded analysis

of a historic, singular company with over 950 sites in its estate, about which it might otherwise be hard to generalise.

Chapter 4 adopts a similar approach to chapter 3. As a company which makes discursive strategies central to its corporate identity, and consciously attempts to integrate them into aesthetic experience, an approach which blended both representational and non-representational methods was required. This also facilitated direct comparison with the case study in chapter 3, to which it – as a competitor and corporation – is most immediately analogous. Like the case study in chapter 3, BrewDog is a company with an extensive estate, which, though smaller than Wetherspoons, was large enough to benefit from a more rounded approach drawing on key examples from site visits than an intensive survey of a smaller number of sites. This allowed the chapter to discuss the influence, impact and meaning of the case study as a whole, rather than simply its influence in a handful of areas.

The approach of this thesis has not been to use case studies to resolve a ‘problem’ of theory. Rather it starts with the case studies themselves, and works outwards from where they lead, drawing on a range of theoretical ideas in support of the analysis. This is in part due to the nature of the inquiry - there are almost no full academic accounts of the case studies (or in the case of chapter 2, texts) in question (though several articles have approached elements of each). The basics of the record have, in this sense, not already been comprehensively established and I have consequently attempted to establish them here. This is also why I have attempted to explore case studies in the round, rather than sectioning off a primary area of interest (in this case architecture / aesthetics) from other questions (e.g. staffing). In fact, as I aim to show, many of these fields are entangled.

This project aims at objectivity without neutrality. It supports the pub as an institution, and broadly take the view that its contribution to British social experience has been a net positive. Insofar as various features of capitalism have beset the pub – managerialism, commodification, vertical integration, value extraction, and property speculation – the stance toward them is critical. As I hope to show, the pub of the imagination – a space of particularity, temporal depth, autonomy, and authenticity – is often at odds with its capture by such imperatives. Insofar as pub models have managed to break with at least some of these forces, as in the case of community owned pubs, the stance toward them is sympathetic. This is not to shy away from uncomfortable realities: that market offerings such as those provided by Wetherspoons have accommodated social progress where traditional pubs, and traditional pub culture, as well as

alternative democratic offerings like the Working Man's Club, did not. The ability to leverage economies of scale (and the wages of their staff), offering accessible social life in broadly elevated settings, has bought it a widespread popularity no even-handed account could ignore. Yet these come at costs – not just to the exploitative conditions of their workforce – but to the lived experience of the pub itself, and by extension to a society fraught with polarisation and suffering from crises of identity and belonging. Despite this, the belief here is that we can hope for social life to provide more than is currently given under the aegis of such an economic model.

Intellectual Moorings

Informing these research aims and methodology are roughly five intellectual traditions. First is a store of empirical work on the public house, produced by historians, geographers, popular authors and architectural writers. For the pub's historical development, Paul Jennings' survey *The Local: A history of the English Pub* and Peter Clarke's: *The English Alehouse: A Social History, 1200-1830* have both proved invaluable empirical studies.¹⁹ Likewise, the blog of the writing duo, Boak & Bailey, has proved a rich repository of archival material and opinion on all matters related to the history of pubs and drinking.²⁰ Although indebted to these studies, this thesis departs from them insofar as it concerns first the historical construction of the pub as a symbol, rather than the perhaps more nebulous reality documented by Clarke and Jennings, and second, in that it investigates the pub's dialogue with that history in the current conjuncture. The thesis in this sense builds on Jennings's three overarching 'pub themes' (loss, Englishness and community) and documents how they fare under contemporary conditions. Likewise, although its focus is skewed towards the question of alcoholic consumption, James Nicholls's *The Politics of Alcohol* provides a useful summary of the entangled relationship between alcoholic consumption, pub history, and state control.²¹ These themes have in turn been developed by geographers such as James Kneale in studies of the pub's relationship to governmentality, supervision and biofinance.²² This thesis builds on these approaches by

¹⁹ Paul Jennings, *The Local: A History of the English Pub*, The History Press (2011) / Peter Clarke, *The English Alehouse: A Social History, 1200 - 1830*, Longman (1983)

²⁰ Jessica Boak & Ray Bailey, *20th Century Pub*, The Homeward Press (2017) / Jessica Boak & Ray Bailey, *Brew Britannia: The Strange Rebirth of British Beer*, Aurum Press (2014) / boakandbailey.com

²¹ James Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England*, Manchester University Press (2009)

²² E.g. James Kneale, "'A Problem of Supervision': moral geographies of the nineteenth century British public house", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 25; (1999), p.333-48 / James Kneale, 'The Place of Drink: Temperance and the public, 1856-1914', *Social and Cultural Geography*, 2; (2001)

considering the entanglement between high, formal politics, and the informal, cultural politics of the pub as an institution, and the attitudes and responses of the consumers who occupy it.

The bottom-up focus has benefitted from another body of literature – drawn primarily from cultural geography, architecture and anthropology – which is concerned with the relationship between architectural form and subjectivity. Chatterton & Holland's study *Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces and Corporate Power* has been a particularly important influence in this regard; tracking the exchange between corporate intention and the lived reality of participant's experience of nightlife.²³ In its emphasis both on the political implications of commodified experience, and in the capacity of its consumers to adopt ambivalent stances towards them, their work achieves a nuanced synthesis of structure and agency which I have endeavoured to adopt here. This has been particularly important in the case of Chapter 3 where a careful negotiation was required between the obviously top-down character of the spaces in question (J D Wetherspoon's pubs) and their ability to nevertheless remain, in one sense, popular institutions like the traditional pub itself. Throughout all the chapters however, whether through interviews, observations, or by drawing from personal accounts, I have attempted to keep the question of subjectivity central to an assessment of the impacts, benefits, and limitations of the case studies.

To facilitate this approach, especially in the case of ethnographic observation, the work of pub anthropologists like Kate Fox and Daniel Vasey, and the sociologist Valerie Hey has been particularly useful.²⁴ Though sometimes too readily extrapolated as commentary on national character, Fox's attention to the micro-performances of the public house provides an additional lens through which to understand the political implications of its architecture. In turn, Vasey's observations of the relationship between traditional pub layouts and consequent interactions provided a benchmark against which to assess the reinterpretations of pub layout made by the case studies in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Vasey's analysis is in turn influenced by the field of proxemics, instituted by the anthropologist Edward Hall. Hall's dubious emphasis on biological

p.43-59 / James Kneale, 'Surveying Pubs, Cities and Unfit Lives: Governmentality, drink and space in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain', *Journal for the Study of British Cultures*, 19 (1); (2012), p.45-60

²³ Paul Chatterton & Robert Hollands, *Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces and Corporate Power*, Taylor & Francis (2003)

²⁴ Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*, Hodder & Stoughton (2005) / Valerie Hey, *Patriarchy & Pub Culture*, Tavistock (1986) / David Vasey, *The Pub and English Social Change*, AMS (1990)

essentialism and cultural determinism understandably limited the influence of his work on spatial distance.²⁵ Despite this, elements of his lexicon – including the concepts of social distance, sociofugal and sociopetal layout – have been revived in this project, since they provide a useful means of accounting for the way spatial configurations frame interaction. Likewise, his early observations on the role that senses such as sound and smell play in constructing richer, more memorable, environments – an idea since developed by architectural theorists such as Robin Evans and Juhani Pallasmaa – have informed some of the sensory analysis undertaken in this research.²⁶ In so doing I attempt to prise proxemics away from its bio-cultural origins, and re-integrate it into a more materialist, historical framework.

This relates to a third, phenomenological, tradition which has been used to inform the definition of architectural politics as the management of possibility. This considers the role of so-called non-representational experience; that is, experience which is for the most part unmediated by a symbolic, discursive, or ideological response within the field of the political. I have been influenced here by Ranciere's suggestive phrase, 'the distribution of the sensible', taken to mean the inequal apportioning of sensible experience disclosed to subjects, with ramifications for what is perceived as politically possible.²⁷ Ranciere's own elaboration of this idea is, however, often somewhat gnostic. My approach has consequently been developed by way of writers other than Ranciere, who nevertheless share the thrust of this insight. First amongst these is the anthropologist David Graeber's theory of imagination. To summarise Graeber's argument: 1) imagination is not a product of rarefied cognition but emerges through material encounters with the world, which are in turn structured by political ideology. 2) The governance of material reality is presented as neutral evidence of 'how things really are' but is in fact underpinned by artificial forms of bureaucratic governance, which are in turn underpinned by monopolies on violence. 3) Consequently 'reality' is an expression of power, and this power

²⁵ These varied from the diverting, if spurious, observation that 'The English... lacking rooms of their own since childhood, never developed the practice of using space as a refuge from others. They have in effect internalized a set of barriers, which they erect and which others are supposed to recognize' to more insidious, racist claims: 'Now even if it were possible to abolish all prejudice and discrimination and erase a disgraceful past, the lower-class Negro in American cities would still be confronted with a syndrome that is currently extremely stressful: the sink (popularly referred to as "the jungle"), the existence of great cultural differences between himself and the dominant white middle class of America, and a completely foreign biotope'. Edward Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, Anchor (1990) p. 156 / 131

²⁶ Robin Evans, 'Figures, Doors and Passages', in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*, Architectural Association (1997) / Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, Wiley & Sons (2005)

²⁷ Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, Bloomsbury (2006)

structures the imaginative limits of what is possible.²⁸ Architecture, as a curator of sensible experience, is deeply implicated in managing this politics of imagination. In attending to the manner in which architecture shapes reality through sensory experience - as in Juhani Pallasmaa's classic work, *The Eyes of the Skin* - and how the body actually processes and absorbs more than what is consciously observed (pre-reflective experience) - as in the work of explication theorists such as Claire Petitmengin - we can arrive at a deeper way of understanding the relationships between architecture, subjectivity and politics.²⁹

Fourth is the concept of authenticity. Authenticity is a complex and much contested term and, as a result, the thesis deploys it in a multifaceted way: considering authenticity as it is *deployed* as a conscious strategy - e.g. in branding, marketing and design; as an *economic relation* - with a certain stance toward the labour process, commodity production, and motivating values; as a *lived experience*, in the senses, practices and possibilities enabled by a given space; as a *social relation* encompassing the balance of formal and informal ownership held between pub owner / pub manager, pub staff and pub patron; and as an *aesthetic ideal* encapsulating the haecceity of an architectural form which exists within a genre but which - as part of that genre - is constituted by certain idiosyncrasies and regional expectations. These approaches are in turn derived from roughly three interrelated traditions of thought: 1) authenticity as an existential problem of human subjectivity 2) authenticity as a quality of experience and production under capitalism - one undercut by processes of alienation, commodification, reification 3) authenticity as an immanent property of the architectural object itself.

In the first tradition, three relevant themes emerge. One is authenticity as a something self-willed; a selfhood untainted by duress or social convention. This notion - originating with St Augustine and developed through Rousseau and Kierkegaard - views authenticity as an unmediated relationship between the self and the other: whether to nature (Rousseau), or to God (Augustine, Kierkegaard).³⁰ A second, connected theme, is authenticity as a condition of autonomy or self-ownership. This notion, found in the philosophy of Kant and Heidegger, is intricately bound up with questions of freedom, without which, genuine authenticity cannot

²⁸ David Graeber, 'Imagination' in *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, AK Press (2009)

²⁹ Claire Petitmengin, 'Towards the Source of Thoughts: The Gestural and Transmodal Dimension of Lived Experience' *Journal of Consciousness Studies*; 14: 3 (2007)

³⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau; C. Bertram (Ed.), Q. Hoare (trans.), *Of The Social Contract and Other Political Writings*, Penguin (2012) / St. Augustine; J.H.S. Burleigh (trans.), *De vera religione, (On True Religion)*, Indiana: Gateway (1953) / Søren Kierkegaard; A. Dru (trans.) *The Present Age*, Harper 1962 [1846] / See also: Jacob Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity from Kierkegaard to Camus*, Routledge (1995)

exist. Like the first strand, it implies authenticity as something which is conducted without recourse to duress, whilst taking a more positive view of the role of reason.³¹ Third, is the emphasis – made by Nietzsche and the existentialist tradition which followed – of authenticity as a process of self-becoming. In this account, authenticity is always at risk of sliding into inauthenticity.³² Contra to assumptions of authenticity as a kind of fixed essence, it emphasises that authenticity is an ongoing task requiring constant movement, self-examination, and development.

In the second tradition, the themes of the first are given a materialist basis, introducing authenticity as something imbricated within socioeconomic relations. Authentic labour, and the authenticity of its product, can thus be considered as those which are the product of autonomous workers, free to exercise their creative powers in an unmediated fashion, through their own desire, as part of an ongoing expression of their species-being and self-development. Capitalism's role in denying such a possibility, through alienated wage labour and the commodification of labour products, has been a well-established feature of the Marxist analysis of authenticity, expressed in the 1844 manuscripts by Marx himself, though preceded by him as a long-standing feature of socialist critiques of capitalism.³³ In Britain, such an argument can be found in the work of figures as various as John Ruskin and William Morris, whose work mythologised (perhaps questionably) the apparent integrity of artisanal labour in a pre-capitalist medieval world.³⁴

In the third tradition, we can discern the culmination of the first two traditions in its implications for architecture itself. Authentic architecture can either be understood as a combination of features which might include: being the product of free, creative labour; an architectural aesthetic which reveals and acknowledges that labour; a phenomenology which matches its representational claims to its non-representational qualities (as in Lefebvre's critique of fetishism in architectural production)³⁵; an architecture which does not deceive or conceal its structure or materials (as in Ruskin's notion of 'architectural truth'); an architecture which is

³¹ Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* Penguin (2009) [1784] / Martin Heidegger; J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (trans.), *Being and Time*, Harper & Row (1962) [1927]

³² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How to Become What You Are*, Oxford University Press (2009) [1888] / Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, Routledge (2003) [1943]

³³ Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, International Publishers (1984) [1844]

³⁴ William Morris, *Useful Work v. Useless Toil*, Penguin (2008) / John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice: Volume 2*, Dover (2009) / John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Dover (1989)

³⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Blackwell (1991) p.93

permitted to ‘self-become’ over time without reversion to a pre-formatted design; and which is therefore temporally syncretic – maintaining a connection to its past whilst still evolving in tandem with time.³⁶ Finally, that the trajectory of this transformation is the product of autonomy: its life-course and evolution produced in tandem with its principle users, rather than the agenda of external forces or agents.

Authenticity has also become a concept of renewed interest for academics concerned with the resurgence of *real/ale* and the emergence of *craft* beer. Thomas Thurnell-Read notes that real ale, as a result of its affective characteristics and the self-conscious symbolism of the industry, has become a significant factor in the construction of self-identity, creating ‘a way of feeling one’s identity and one’s place in the world’; an enactment of unofficial heritage.³⁷ A similar process was observed in his study of craft microbrewers; whose sense of authenticity was grounded in their creation of a ‘tangible material product’ which could be ‘appreciated tacitly through the taste and senses’.³⁸ Crucially, Thurnell-Read notes that authenticity is most convincingly understood as an entanglement of phenomenology with meaning rather than something discursive or representational – something his interviews made clear:

While brewers did, to some extent, offer stock narratives of their entry into the trade, where their accounts became most energetic was when talking about the brewery as a space with an almost magical coming together of affective attachments, embodied processes and tangible sensory stimuli. All brewers interviewed offered some sense of this being an important reward of the job and, for many, one that could easily be contrasted with its lack in previous occupations which were contrasted as being disembodied and unfulfilling.³⁹

Such claims have however, come in for critical appraisal by researchers such as Andrew Wallace, who notes that the valorisation of authentic, tactile production should not be divorced from its role in more troubling economic dynamics, especially in urban areas of intense capital accumulation. Wallace warns that:

³⁶ Marvin Trachtenberg, *Building in Time: From Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion*, Yale University Press (2010)

³⁷ Thomas Thurnell-Read, ‘Beer and Belonging: Real Ale Consumption, Place and Identity’, in T. Thurnell-Read (ed.), *Drinking Dilemmas: Space, Culture and Identity*, Routledge, (2015)

³⁸ Thomas Thurnell-Read, ‘Craft, Tangibility and Affect at Work in the Microbrewery, Emotion, *Space and Society* 13: 46–54 (2014)

³⁹ Ibid

an artisanal symbolic being deployed by developers and authorities as they try to tempt middle classes to gentrify somewhat unheralded London territory. Here a dialectical entanglement of the artisanal impulse with logics of urban renewal and capital accumulation is unfolding in districts like Deptford but in ways that wholly marginalises how an extant multi-ethnic working-class community survives ‘on the make’ in contemporary London.⁴⁰

These tensions, between authenticity as a discursive strategy, or an aesthetic referent of commercial branding and as it is lived run throughout this thesis. I consequently argue that these different models of authenticity need to be understood together – as neither ‘true’ or ‘false’ but as something which is all the time being negotiated, sometimes with more meaningful results than others. I have termed these different strands of authenticity as: proverbial, performative, generative and phenomenological. I suggest that even more ‘negative’ forms of authenticity might achieve something of their promise; perhaps, for instance, by the coincident uptake of their users – who see through something of their falsity and translate it into a new form of personalised authenticity in the process. Yet I also draw a distinction between these outcomes and forms of authenticity which are realised beyond the limits of commodification; coming closer to appeasing a richer sense of meaning which fulfils more existential criteria.

Fifth, two connected strands of literature which I bring together in chapter 6, pertaining to national identity & enchantment. Studies such as *Landscape & Englishness* by the geographer David Matless demonstrate, in a manner akin to the public house, the way thematic resonances of identity are embedded in the landscapes and institutions which come to acquire an apparent ‘national character’. The way Matless integrates these ‘processes of subjectification’ and the ‘geographical self’ into values and practices of the landscape provides a way into thinking about competing cultural attitudes surrounding the public house: who it is for, and what comportment they ought to present.⁴¹ More recently, writers and authors such as John Denham (former Labour minister and now involved in the Centre for English Identity and Politics), and the constitutional activist and author Anthony Barnett, have revived an engagement with Englishness from the political left; building on an intellectual tradition encompassing the New Left (especially Nairn and Anderson), and further developed through studies such as Colls &

⁴⁰ Andrew Wallace, ‘Brewing the Truth’: Craft Beer, Class and Place in Contemporary London’, *Sociology*, 53(5) 951–966 (2019)

⁴¹ David Matless, *Landscape & Englishness*, *Reaktion* (2016) p.31

Dodd's *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880 - 1920*.⁴² This thesis however takes the politically-oriented interests of Denham and Barnett, and considers how they might be applied to a different strand of writing on identity; concerned less with the abstractions and constitutional components of Englishness – and instead on identity built through everyday experience. The writer Paul Kingnorth's *Real England: The Battle Against the Bland*, offered something of an initial survey of this project – with studies on, amongst other things, the pub – assessing the constellation of institutions which comprise English identity and the threats they face from homogenising forces.⁴³ How these forces re-shape and diminish identity through altering daily experience is only loosely addressed however, and the counter-narrative which might resist them is for the most part absent. To address these weaknesses, I have drawn on work which conceptualises the experience of 'enchantment', seeing in it a potential for new narratives of identity rooted in sensory expansion and through it, a non-alienated encounter with the world. Jane Bennett's *The Enchantment of Modern Life* has offered a starting point for these ideas; as well as (though with a more individual, mythological emphasis) Sharon Blackie's work *The Enchanted Life*.⁴⁴ In turn, Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* – a short, literary account of the author's experiences in the Cairngorm mountains – provides a powerful illustration of the way in which phenomenological encounters (in her case, replete with alterity and deep time) can have radical effects on the experience of reality and belonging.⁴⁵ In turn, Claire Petitmengin's work provides a rich guide to the actual mechanics of experience, and evidence of the profound impact which even pre-conscious, fleeting encounters have on the almost geological formation of the self; all of which informs my analysis of architecture's influence in this thesis.⁴⁶ Indeed, current innovations in neuroscientific research suggest the extent to which consciousness is a contingent prediction of reality – shaped and sculpted by knowledge, experience, evolution and social priority.⁴⁷ In this sense we are only ever partial

⁴² John Denham: 'Centre for English Identity and Politics', University of Winchester (winchester.ac.uk/research/understanding-society-culture-and-the-arts/centre-for-english-identity-and-politics) / Anthony Barnett, *The Lure of Greatness: England's Brexit and America's Trump*, Unbound (2017) / Robert Colls & Philip Dodd (eds.) *Englishness: politics and culture 1880-1920*, Bloomsbury (2014)

⁴³ Paul Kingsnorth, *Real England: The Battle Against the Bland*, Granta (2009)

⁴⁴ Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: attachments, crossings and ethics*, Princeton University Press (2001) / Sharon Blackie, *The Enchanted Life: unlocking the magic of the everyday*, September (2018)

⁴⁵ Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, Canongate (2011)

⁴⁶ Claire Petitmengin, 'Towards the Source of Thoughts: The Gestural and Transmodal Dimension of Lived Experience' *Journal of Consciousness Studies*; 14: 3 (2007)

⁴⁷ E.g. Stanislas Dehaene, *Consciousness and the Brain: Deciphering How The Brain Codes Our Thoughts*, Penguin (2014)

witnesses to the Real; instead living with an 'edit' of reality which ignores, attenuates, or actively shuts out (usually because of certain negative external stimuli) elements of experience which under different conditions of knowledge, external ambiances, and social interests, could become significant, even constitutive, of a 'non-alienated' engagement with the world.

Finally, I have drawn from strands within the Marxist tradition, particularly in its materialist approach to aesthetic analysis and the notion of aesthetic ideologies. Underpinning the thesis is Raymond William's concept of the 'structure of feeling' – his term to capture 'a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange.'⁴⁸ William's explanatory metaphor is drawn from chemistry, with the structure of feeling attending to 'social experiences in solution' as opposed to the 'social semantic formations' which have already precipitated.⁴⁹ As he notes, such a feeling can generally be observed through an analysis of style-in-general as it moves through the novelties, revivals, synergisms in 'dress, building and other similar forms of social life.'⁵⁰ Architectural style, and its homologues in corresponding socioeconomic trends / political ideologies, can provide a prism of analysis for understanding shifts in the structure of feeling which are as yet to precipitate into a hardened social form. This encourages a level of provisionality and ambivalence in analysis; as well as a way of understanding the deeper, latent structures of aesthetic meaning. This thesis covers two such shifts in the structure of feeling; one of which has consequently hardened into its 'social semantic formation' as Thatcherism, and a current conjuncture, opened by the financial crisis, whose direction and implications remain open. These respectively inform chapters 3 and 4, on J D Wetherspoons (Thatcherism ->), and BrewDog (2008 ->). I have been especially influenced in this regard by three other writers, who have all in their own way built on the legacy of Raymond Williams: David Harvey, Stuart Hall and Mark Fisher. In Harvey's case, by *The Condition of Postmodernity*, which provides an exemplary study in exactly those correspondences between economic structure, political discourse, aesthetic (especially architectural aesthetic) production and subjectivity.⁵¹ In Hall's case, by his analysis of popular culture, politics and authenticity, as well as his foundational work on Thatcherism (ideas picked up currently in cultural studies by Jeremy

⁴⁸ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press (1978), p.131

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.134

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.131

⁵¹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change*, Wiley-Blackwell (1991)

Gilbert – whose analysis of commodification has been particularly helpful to this thesis).⁵² Finally, Mark Fisher, in his diagnostics of the current political-cultural moment, first, in *Capitalism Realism*, then *Ghosts of My Life*, has stimulated reflections on the substructure of aesthetic practices in the current conjuncture, especially in the case of BrewDog, as well as making powerful connections between culture and what could be termed the ‘psycho-political production’ which governs the sense of what is possible in everyday life.⁵³

⁵² Jeremy Gilbert, *Anticapitalism and Culture: Radical Theory and Popular Politics*, Berg (2008) / Stuart Hall, ‘The Great Moving Right Show’, *Marxism Today*, Jan 1979 / Stuart Hall, ‘Popular Culture and the State’, in Aradhana Sharma (ed.) *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, Wiley-Blackwell (2006)

⁵³ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?* Zero Books (2009) / Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, Zero Books (2014)

Chapter 2

Anatomy of the Pub in Crisis:

Representations of the Pub in the 20th Century

Chapter Abstract

This chapter provides a survey of key pub writings throughout the 20th century. It traces a shift in the pub's representational history, from an institution perceived as a source of social crisis, to one conceived as *in* crisis. It explores why the pub became a powerful cultural symbol within British life, and a prism through which broader anxieties about the nature and direction of modernity were articulated. The writers it discusses – Thomas Burke, Ivor Brown, A E Richardson, Maurice Gorham & Harding McGregor Dunnett, Mass Observation, Christopher Hutt, and George Williamson – offer an inevitably partial view on the pub as an institution (they are, notably, all male, white and broadly – though not exclusively – middle class in their outlook and professions). Yet between them an anatomy of the pub's symbolic structure can be established: its ambivalent relationship to nationalism, its arcadian anti-modernism, its communitarian autonomy, and its uneasiness with standardisation and commodification. This symbolic structure provides a baseline against which further attempts to transform the pub, discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, can be measured, and their implications understood.

Dismal Palace: Origins of a Fault-Line

The late 1890s represented a high point for the public house. By 1896 the city of London had a pub for every 345 residents. The consumption of beer per capita returned to the zenith of the 1870s, and with more people drinking, the number of pubs built – at unprecedented expense – reached record levels.⁵⁴ Yet outside of the pub trade the period was marked by existential and economic crisis. Beset by relative declines in production and actual declines in profitability, the confidence which marked Victorian ideas of progress gave way to malaise, pessimism and a

⁵⁴ Mark Girouard, *Victorian Pubs*, Yale University Press (1975) p.76

new 'semantic of historical time' which perceived the future in terms of futility; and where cycle and stasis replaced linearity and optimism as the dominant cultural motifs.⁵⁵

By 1899 the pub industry had become enmeshed in this narrative of decline. The Conservative Party's victory in 1896 was followed by the so-called 'brewer's war' in which commercial one-upmanship inflated the market to unsustainable levels. The ensuing collapse gave way to an Edwardian era in which the fortunes and reputation of the public house were at an all-time low, and where, following the 1902 Licensing Act and landslide victory of the Liberal party in 1906, social reformers were increasingly able to manipulate its design and regulation. The ebullient phantasmagoria which characterised the Victorian pub was consequently transformed into a symbol of decadence from another age.

Though many temperance campaigners had given up on outright prohibition of alcohol, pub regulation was conceived as the best way of 'designing out' its worst effects. Consequently, gaudy decor, cloistered layouts, 'interested management', curtained windows, and sparsely furnished rooms conducive to so-called 'perpendicular drinking' all attracted the ire of reformers.⁵⁶ By the mid-1890s the Trust House Movement drew on philanthropic donations to in order to buy up pubs and transform them along principles inspired by the 'Gothenburg experiment' in Sweden. Traditional, tenanted landlords were replaced by 'disinterested management' - salaried managers who received no financial bonus for the sale of alcoholic drinks - and the pub aesthetic was implanted with a 'tearooms and table clothes' style intended to subdue its atmosphere. Other innovations, such as long benches, were installed to encourage a 'canteen' mentality where an emphasis on food replaced drink amidst communal sociality.⁵⁷

Though the Trust House movement had a limited impact it nevertheless established a precedent for further experiments in pub regulation.⁵⁸ In 1916, the government conducted a 'test nationalisation' of pubs in Carlisle as part of an attempt to fix the productivity problem

⁵⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875 – 1914* (2007) p.36; Michael Sayeau, *Against the Event: The Everyday and the Evolution of Modernist Narrative*, Oxford University Press (2013), p.113

⁵⁶ Interested management: where the owner of a licensed premises profited from their customers consuming more alcohol. Perpendicular drinking: drinking at the bar (thought by temperance campaigners to increase speed and quantity of consumption)

⁵⁷ Jessica Boak & Ray Bailey, *20th Century Pub*, The Homeward Press (2017), p.41

⁵⁸ The Trust House movement struggled on a number of fronts. Scandals involving not-so-disinterested managers, a failure to encroach into the more prized urban real estate held by the major brewers, as well as their parsimonious ideology and design, all limited their spread.

bedeviling the war effort. The Carlisle experiment saw 40% of the region's pubs closed, and the rest remodeled on lines strongly reminiscent of the pre-war reforms: 'disinterested' managers became government employees on a fixed salary, the sale of food was encouraged and 'snug' bars re-purposed for its consumption. Pubs were re-designed to appeal to women and families. Table service was introduced. Beer was sold at a fixed rate and served solely from a government brewery where higher alcohol percentages were restricted.⁵⁹

Though nationalisation remained restricted to Carlisle, private enterprise continued many of its precepts into the inter-war period. The so-called 'improved' pubs of this time did away with 'snugs and saloons, garish lighting and engraved glass panels' and replaced them with spacious, open-plan seating areas, dining halls and even dance floors.⁶⁰ From the perspective of enthusiastic reformers like the architect Basil Oliver, such changes were welcome and progressive - embracing efficient, rationalised plans which either maintained a link to tradition by recourse to mock tudor and neo-Georgian facades, or reinterpreted the genre altogether within the aesthetic language of modernism.⁶¹ They also appealed to the predilections of temperance campaigners for a more controlled 'respectable' environment.

Despite much initial complaint about the Trust's favourable treatment by licensing justices, the brewing industry came to benefit from the opportunities it presented: respectable, open plan, mixed gender, family friendly pubs had an obvious commercial appeal. Likewise, if a number of small, irrational, licenses could be exchanged for larger, more profitable ones, then all the better.⁶² Where respectability had proved an economic barrier to the old public house, then the model of the reformers provided commercial as well as moral opportunity and their concerns were easily accommodated within the new leisure market. This infusion of moral order with capitalist imperatives scaled public house improvement in a way that the Trust Houses never managed. James Nicholls suggests for instance that in just eight years between 1922 and 1930, around 20,000 pubs were 'improved', with 79 'super-pubs' built at considerable expense.⁶³

⁵⁹ Roger Kershaw, 'The Carlisle Experiment: limiting alcohol in wartime', *National Archives*, 15 Jan 2015, blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/blog/pubs-vs-first-world-war

⁶⁰ James Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England*, Manchester University Press (2009) p.182

⁶¹ Basil Oliver, *The Renaissance of the English Public House*, Faber & Faber (1947)

⁶² Nicholls, *Politics of Alcohol*, p.181

⁶³ *Ibid*, p.182

Ideological conversion came easily to brewers already situated to invest and with conversion came denigration of the preceding era. As a 1929 publication by the Birmingham brewer, Mitchell and Butlers, noted:

Fifty years ago the generality of public houses, especially in the towns, stood on a rather low level. The bad type of house was deplorable, with its dingy taproom, ill-kept floor, sloppy counter and stale atmosphere. The parlours and saloons of the houses just above this class were, as a rule, either ill-kept or gaudy. The flaring lights and staring mirrors of the gin palace were as objectionable as the murk and gloom of the den... it was not an epoch... to which one can look back with pride.⁶⁴

In its place, Mitchell and Butlers proffered a new vision of stately respectability: buildings were expanded, cut-back from the street, populated with windows, even adorned with bowling greens. Above all, they were designed to appeal to a new type of customer, one borne from the contemporary, motoring age:

The patrons of the new house are not expected to slink furtively up to the entrances; many will drive up in their cars or on their motor-bicycles and have no more compunction about entering these portals than they would about entering a hotel in town. Why should they?⁶⁵

Yet this new consensus was not matched with equal enthusiasm from below. Whilst the more modest experiments in Carlisle had been met with sympathetic ambivalence, the larger scale improved pubs which followed struggled to achieve popularity.⁶⁶ A report conducted by the Royal Commission on Licensing between 1929 and 1931 found that there was ‘much evidence in support of the view that the average frequenter of licensed houses desires conditions that are

⁶⁴ Mitchell & Butlers, *Fifty Years of Brewing 1879-1929*, p.58 cited in Emily Cole, ‘The Urban and Suburban Public House in Inter-War England, 1918-1939’, *Historic England* (2015) p. 19

⁶⁵ Cited in Boak and Bailey, *20th Century Pub*, p. 48

⁶⁶ As a Trade Union fact finding report noted in 1919: ‘It’s true that in some of them there was a tendency to “high art” in the scheme of decoration and the pictures on the walls... and we found that many customers looked with little favour on the simple austerity which marked many of the public houses. Yet we were impressed by the evident attempts which have been made to convert the public houses into places which possess a certain dignity and beauty.’ cited in ‘Pub History: The People’s Pubs’ *Morning Advertiser*, 18 Jun 2009, morningadvertiser.co.uk/Legal/Property-law/Pub-history-The-people-s-pubs

to be found in the smaller houses.’⁶⁷ Other critics found them enervating and identikit. As Thomas Burke described, they were ‘very well conducted, very bright, very new, very hygienic, and very much like each other’, with the customers similarly affected: ‘Whatever fire and salt of character they had, they seemed to have left it outside and were as unemphatic as the place itself’.⁶⁸ Practices such as ‘perpendicular drinking’ (drinking at the bar) which the improved house was supposed to eradicate, were found by the Commission to be an ‘ingrained national custom’, making ‘complete and immediate abolition of the bar’ an ‘[im]practicable proposition’.⁶⁹ The ‘dismal sham-Tudor places’ decried by Orwell in the 1930s had failed to match the popularity of the baroque gin palaces of the 1830s nor could they outdo its customs.⁷⁰

The transformation of the public house did not solve the temperance problem – it simply moved it around. As a 1927 select committee report noted,

where a public house is improved and enlarged there is a tendency for the old clientele which used to frequent it to remove to another unimproved house while another and better class of customer... comes to take their place.⁷¹

With predictable circularity, making the pub respectable attracted those most concerned with respectability. For those who had never embraced the worthy discourse of the moralists the solution was not ‘self-improvement’ but migration. Even if the improved pub had managed to find willing converts amongst the working class, the prohibitive pricing - a flipside of the brewer’s substantial investments in bespoke architecture - meant economic barriers were as detrimental to conversion as aesthetic ones.

Pub improvement thus exposed a fault-line in the cultural politics of the pub which would mark it for the rest of the century. On one side was arranged the state, the mega-brewer, modernity, respectability, and the newly mobile consumer subject, embodied in the motor-vehicle: young,

⁶⁷ Report of the Royal Commission on Licensing (England and Wales) 1929 – 1931, cited in Basil Oliver, *The Renaissance of the English Public House*, p.25

⁶⁸ Thomas Burke, *The Birmingham Mail*, August 2 1943

⁶⁹ Report of the Royal Commission on Licensing (England and Wales) 1929 – 1931, cited in Basil Oliver, *The Renaissance of the English Public House*, p.25

⁷⁰ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Penguin (1962) p.64 - first published in 1937.

⁷¹ *Report of the Committee on the Disinterested Management of Public Houses*, cited in Nicholls, p.182

local to nowhere, gliding fluidly between new ventures with loyalty to none in particular. On the other, the recalcitrant pub-goer, with their awkward penchant for traditional places and behaviours: old, rooted, immobile, skeptical of the modern.

Fig 2.1 -



Exteriors of Improved Houses in the inter-war period. Top: The Berkeley Arms Hotel, Cranford, London – a fusion of roadhouse and pub (*Copyright: Architectural Press Archive / Riba Library Photographs Collection*) Middle: The Boar's Head, Perry Barr, Birmingham (pictured in 1937) Bottom: The Black Horse, Northfield, Birmingham (*Copyright: Historic England, James O. Davies, DP166415*) [Images via Emily Cole, 'The Urban And Suburban Public House In Inter-War England, 1918-1939' *Historic England* (2015)]



Fig 2.2 – Interiors of Improved Houses in the Inter-War Period. Top: Green Man, Southend village, Catford, London (1927) Bottom: Rose and Crown, Upperby, Carlisle [*images via Cole, 'The Urban And Suburban Public House In Inter-War England'*]

Smart Young People With Their Gin-and-Its: A.E Richardson's *The Old Inns of England* (1935), Ivor Brown's *The Inn* (1935)

The interwar period saw the popularisation of the motor-car in Britain. By 1934 two-and-a-half million cars were exploring Britain's newly built network of arterial roads, with asphalt creeping along even the minor byways of hitherto quiet, rural villages.⁷² Just as the railway had brought with it a new leisure economy in the 19th century, transforming England's seaside peripheries, so the motor-car transformed England's rural interior in the 20th. And, like the railway, the motor car introduced a new temporal subjectivity.⁷³ Yet whereas rail had allowed the passenger to experience and conceive of, a new space-time on a linear axis, in the motor car the passenger did not travel faster but in a new fashion: the car enabled the possibility of always being somewhere else. Journeys became bespoke. And its spontaneous, improvised subjectivity the could remain beyond the actual experience of driving itself.

In one sense the arrival of the motor car and its new subjectivity represented a turn-in the fortunes of the network of English inns which crisscrossed the country. The decline of the coach trade following the advent of the railway had not only supplanted the inn's historic purpose as a site for the rejuvenation of travellers, but also as an important logistical node where 'carts could load and unload, warehouses where goods could be stored and rooms where carrier and customer could meet, sometimes designated as the 'Carriers Parlour'.⁷⁴ Though the motor-car never quite restored these functions, it created a new one from the burgeoning tourist trade.⁷⁵ H.V Morton's bestselling *In Search of England* - an account of the writer's motor journeys across England - capitalised on the trend but also shaped it: conjuring 'a portrait of warm beer, country lanes and village greens.'⁷⁶

⁷² Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History Of Britain*, HarperPress (2010)

⁷³ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century*, University of California Press (2014)

⁷⁴ Paul Jennings, *The Local*, p.43

⁷⁵ 'The invention of the railways and the growth of their great systems left the roadway Inns to desultory neglect. Now, the giant growth of motors and of motorists has brought our old roads, and the Inns adorning them, into a renewed existence' in A.E Richardson, *The Old Inns of England*, Batsford (1952), p. v - First published 1934

⁷⁶ Max Hastings, 'A Very English Hypocrite', *The Telegraph*, 9 May 2004; referring to: H.V Morton, *In Search of England*, Methuen (1935)

The success of Morton's book established the formula for a new genre of English picturesque, but in paradoxical fashion. It thrived on a notional idea of what English rural life was like, whilst bringing its authors and adherents into a blunt confrontation with its reality. As one newspaper noted in 1930 "With the rediscovery of our roads...the English inn is coming under scrutiny, and not passing the test too well."⁷⁷ The sedentary image of England popularised by Morton et al. was threatened by the market it was fueling: motor tourism meant busyness and disruption, and the authenticity it proselytized became commodified. The contradiction is well captured by the architect A.E Richardson in his 1934 work, *The Old Inns of England*, which both directed itself toward the motorist and yet associated motorism with a whole raft of kitsch fakery. England, he notes, 'is a country of countless miles of lanes and by-roads, almost all nowadays of excellent or fair to passable surface, and the great delight of the discriminating tourist is to wander at will through their sinuous stretches from village green to secluded hamlet [...] unshackled by any cut-and-dried itinerary yet following a roughly worked out course.'⁷⁸ Yet in the opening of his book, Richardson was keen to warn off all but the most discriminating readers:

if you would rather have a quick one leaning against a bar, with your feet on a sawdust floor, than sitting on a hard fake-Tudor chair, at a shiny fake-Plantagenet table, with a disinfected fake-marble floor beneath you and a spiky palm above your head... then this book is intended for you. If, on the other hand, you use the roads as a means of transit from one town to another: if you really think that sham medieval beams on the outside of a large and obviously new public-house are preferable to no decoration at all, beyond the good proportions of windows, and honest stone or bricks: if 'de luxe' attracts you more than 'family and commercial': if you think that true comfort and civilisation are somehow connected with the words 'up to date': then you have no business to have read this book beyond the opening paragraphs. For we are not dealing with palatial hotels, but with inns large and small.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Western Morning News & Mercury*, July 28 1930

⁷⁸ Richardson, *Old Inns of England*, p. 99

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 1

Richardson contrasts two types of inn-goer: one languorous, 'wandering at will', on no fixed schedule, with a connoisseur's eye for the robust and real, the other accelerating from town to town, lured by false gestures and modern promises.⁸⁰

These concerns were shared by other the inn's other interwar chroniclers. Thomas Burke, who authored three tracts on inns and pubs between 1927 and 1936, blamed motorists for everything from damaging the pride of inn-keepers to lax kitchen standards:

I think the imperfections of the modern inn are mainly due to motorists. Motorists, as a class, live in a state of hurry. They are always anxious to go on. They do not travel; they buzz from place to place; and they put up with treatment and food they are too hasty to examine, and that the slower and more critical commercial traveller would not suffer for a moment.⁸¹

Motoring performs a protean function in such accounts; a kind of contaminable metaphor slipping into all aspects of the contemporary condition. Burke complained of inn kitchens which '[are] run like Ford car's --- replenished day by day from standardised stores'⁸².

Richardson refers to typologies of inn based on whether they were 'Baby Austin's' or 'Rolls Royce'.⁸³ Motoring had come to stand for more than itself; symbolising the threat of modernity at large as it equalised experiences ('To many travellers, though, an inn is an inn --- a stopping-place for bed or refreshment, and nothing more')⁸⁴, rendered history indifferent ('It is infuriating to meet in the coffee room of some noble old hostelry a company of motorists who know nothing of the house's history, and who might just as well be stopping at the Regent Palace or the Metropole --- where they rightly belong')⁸⁵, and sacrificed place to time ('The roads designed by this spirit are not roads to places; but through places.')

⁸⁰ Ibid: 'sham medieval beams on the outside of a large and obviously new public-house'

⁸¹ Thomas Burke, *The Book of the Inn*, Constable & Co; London (1927) p. xii / xiii

⁸² Ibid, p. xiii

⁸³ Richardson, *Old Inns of England*, p. vii

⁸⁴ Burke, *Book of the Inn*, p. x-xi

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ G.K Chesterton, [Introduction] Council for the Preservation of Rural England, *The Penn County of Buckinghamshire*, London (1933) p.7-8

The apotheosis of that threat was best demonstrated by the road-house - an American innovation adopted to English use from the mid-1920s.⁸⁷ Though initially given a Tudorbethan or rustic camouflage intended to render it indistinguishable from more traditional inns, some designs, like The Showboat, built in 1933, were more adventurous, intended to resemble the bridge of an ocean liner.⁸⁸ Hugging arterial roads, they promised dancing, swimming, golf and tennis, as well as freer, more anonymous encounters with the opposite sex. Michael John Law has demonstrated how much of the criticism of road-houses tended to inflect the anxieties about changing class and gender norms in the interwar period, especially as motoring itself began to encompass much broader swathes of the population following mass production of the motorcar.⁸⁹ In this sense it may be that criticism of motoring and the new road-house style inns cannot be separated from wider, reactionary complaint about social transgression. Yet this was not, at least on the surface, the complaint of the inn traditionalists. Ivor Brown, then drama critic at *The Observer* and later its editor, though archly scathing of the road-house, did not see it as déclassé - quite the opposite:

The Road House is now a new term for a very old thing, but it signifies a new kind of tavern, being the simple description of a sophisticated place. In a Road House one does not expect to find tosspot tinkers with their ale, but smart young people with their Gin-and-Its.⁹⁰

It was rather the superficiality of the new environments and their clientele that attracted Brown's sarcasm:

Since smart young people affect the games of the populace, there will be opportunities for throwing the democratic dart and shoving, with manicured hands, the democratic halfpenny. There will be a bathing-pool to cool the bodies of those who have taken no more exercise than is demanded by changing gears and pressing pedals. Information will probably be given that, for health's sake, the waters of the pool have been

⁸⁷ Michael John Law, 'Turning night into day: transgression and Americanization at the English inter-war roadhouse', *Journal of Historical Geography*; 35: 3 (2009)

⁸⁸ *Ibid* p.482

⁸⁹ *Ibid*

⁹⁰ Ivor Brown, 'The Inn,' in *The Legacy of England*, Batsford; London (1935), p. 190

chemically treated; something similar may have happened to the alcoholic refreshments.⁹¹

A haptic listlessness hangs over the portrait. Purpose is subsumed to leisure and consumption cowed by artificial treatment. The ‘democracy’ on offer is presentational and banal. The road-house may imitate the inn, but they are conceived as antinomial in their temporality and integrity:

[The Road House] is not a relief for country wayfarers but a recreation for town-workers. You do not plod on to find a Road House at the end of the day’s journey, but seek it out for what fun it may contain. The Road House, then, belongs to the age of quick and easy movement, whereas the inn was the product of slow and arduous travel. At the Road House, the visitor, having journeyed lightly by the power of mechanical horses, immediately starts to be active, to take exercise on the dancing floor, in the water, on the miniature golf course, or at lawn tennis. At the traditional English inn the traveller tumbled from the top of a coach in a half-frozen state or rolled exhausted off his horse in order to be restored with hot brandy and water and hot cuts from the joint. He sat by the fire and drank punch until it was time to be in bed. The pleasures were sedentary and narcotic.... the journey was an ordeal and the inn a mitigation.⁹²

If Brown seems less concerned with class anxiety than other road-house critics, his emphasis on the *Englishness* of the traditional inn is more revealing. Motoring represented modernity, but like the road-house itself, it was modernity on imported terms. As Law suggests, the road-house was inseparably associated with Americanization, and the concern it provoked was a powerful indication that ‘economic and cultural leadership had transferred across the Atlantic.’⁹³ Brown famously denounced the Anglo-American modernist poet, T.S Eliot, ‘pretentiously bungling with the English language... bestriding the Atlantic with his cultural messages’⁹⁴ and though his criticisms also extended to ‘native’ writers like D.H Lawrence, the pointed reference to the Atlantic does not seem incidental. The pub’s decline was therefore also a cipher for the loss of British dominance following the First World War; and the fight between the inn and the road-

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 190-191

⁹² Ibid, p. 191

⁹³ Michael John Law (2009), p. 492

⁹⁴ Ivor Brown, *I Commit to the Flames*, Hamish Hamilton (1934) p.10

house a form of allegorical shadow-boxing between Englishness and Americanization. A new conception of Englishness was being constructed through writing about the pub, which found itself transmogrified into the beleaguered standard bearer of the true England.

‘A Spasm of Nostalgia in the Breasts of Englishmen’: Thomas Burke’s *The English Inn* (1927)

The American example cut in both directions. The inn’s defenders attacked the road-house for its imported Americanization, but reformers (‘zealous meddlers’, in Burke’s words) ‘dare[d] to compare our English inns and taverns with the saloons of Chicago!’⁹⁵ The affront Burke took at the comparison speaks to the way the pub was moving from a concerning feature of British life to a constituent symbol of it. Burke’s first text about pubs (or rather, ‘inns’), written in 1927 formed part of a contribution to an English heritage series which attempted to map the constellation of Englishness. Other entries included topics on ‘The English Public School’, ‘Cricket’, ‘Shakespeare’, as well as English wildlife, humour, and the ‘English Constitution’.⁹⁶ This was obviously a very partial picture, broadly contained to the culture and concerns of the privileged classes. And that may be why Burke chose to focus on inns – a subject not only of the most interest to the new motoring audience, but historically one of the most refined of the pub’s various typologies.

There may be other reasons why the inn was felt to be particularly suited to national reverence. A Roman import, they could lay claim to the oldest historic ancestry. Their networked geography - servicing the major logistics routes, urban and rural stopovers, and old droving routes - meant that the inn in a sense stitched England together. This spatial, horizontal binding was matched at the temporal, vertical: as Burke put it, ‘[Inns] hold [the village’s] unbroken story. In them the past fed by the present remains in constant bloom. and their two-, or three-, or four-hundred years of story are but one story that is longer to-day than it was yesterday.’⁹⁷ In this sense, the inn served as a kind of architectural equivalent to the novel in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*: it made Englishness (and more awkwardly, ‘Britishness’) an imaginable conceit.⁹⁸ But a conceit which necessitated at least the pretense of organic,

⁹⁵ Thomas Burke, *English Inn*, p. viii

⁹⁶ The English Heritage Series in Burke, *English Inn*, Front Matter.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p.4

⁹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso (2006), p.25

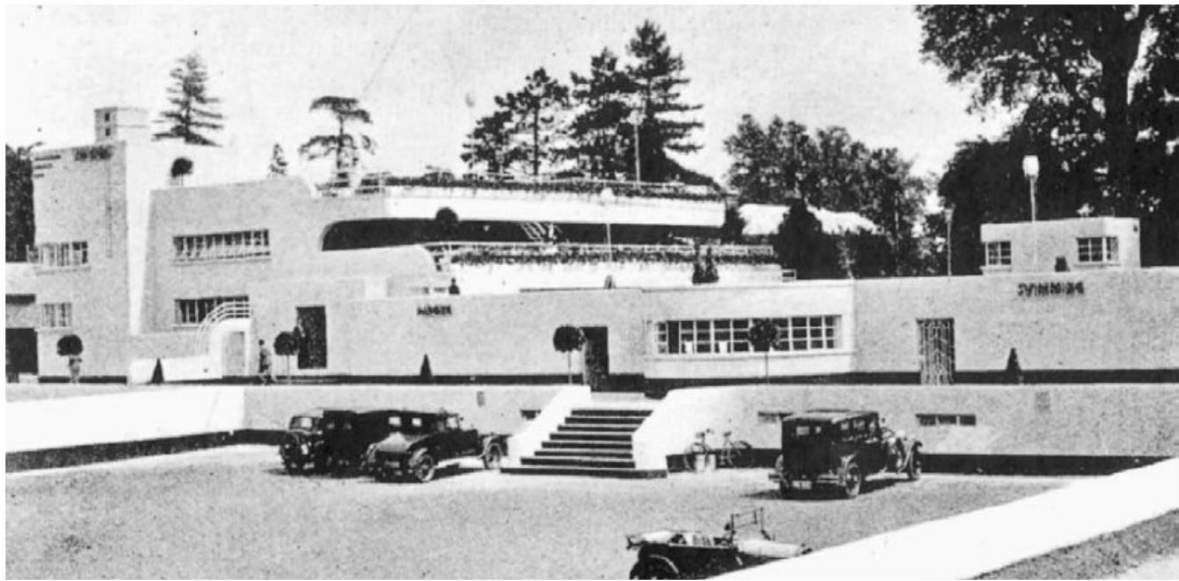


Fig 2.3 – Road-houses in the Inter-War Period. Top: The Showboat Road-house, Bray, Maidenhead (From Ivor Brown: *The Heart of England*, London (1935) Bottom: The Thatched Barn and Barn Club Road-house, Barnet [*Collection of Elstree and Boreham Wood Museum* – via Michael John Law, ‘Turning night into day: transgression and Americanization at the English inter-war roadhouse’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 35: 3 (2009)]



Fig 2.4 – Portraits of AE Richardson & Ivor Brown. Left: Photograph of Albert Richardson (*Christie's Images Ltd. 2013*) Right: Portrait of Ivor Brown, by Rodrigo Moynihan (1955), [*Copyright: Rodrigo Moynihan estate via Guardian News & Media Archive*]

incremental development. As Tom Nairn has argued, it is this latter feature defined the apparent exceptionalism of Britain's national development, and whether that exceptionalism is accepted or not, such a model of identity struggles to resonate with a concept of the British nation state as 'fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimetre of a legally demarcated territory'.⁹⁹

Burke's work did much to put a mythic meat on these material bones. In his account the inn, like the church and the cottage and the village green, 'appears not to have been made, but to have grown out of the soil like flowers.'¹⁰⁰ This illusion necessitated some very specific architectural detailing: first, following 'the [prevailing] style of their birthday', second 'the material of their locality' whether stone, brick, wood or thatch.¹⁰¹ The inn's integrity as a national icon was in this sense contingent on its interrelation with its immediate environment; dependent on details which 'wove' the inn into the 'gradual development of our land'.¹⁰² Burke could clearly not mean all inns, let alone all pubs, in this assessment. Rather his symbolic inn resides in the geography of the traditional English village with all its requisite accoutrements: church, green, pub, and cottage. Yet there was enough reality in his depiction to resonate. In the preface to Burke's book, the writer A.P Herbert praised Burke for having avoided the clichés of a subject which 'brought more nonsense into print than any other subject' and for allowing the reader to 'study fact and not romance.'¹⁰³ This was a generous overstatement – Burke's work is often extremely romantic and sentimental. But it does suggest that his portrait did not strike the contemporary reader as entirely beyond recognition. Simply 'demystifying' Burke's portrayal of the inn would therefore seem to miss something essential about its symbolic power and fail to explain its resonance as a source of identity.

Burke's account of the interwar inn perhaps also explains the difficulty faced by the postwar brewers who attempted to drape the pub in the Union Jack and supplant local ales with national or foreign products. Burke's depiction demonstrates how the pub's symbolic legitimacy only worked in so far as it corresponded to the incremental national development it shadowed: England could mean nothing at the meta-level unless it could be affirmed at the local and, as the pub is colloquially known, The Local. The abstract design philosophies of the

⁹⁹ Ibid p.19

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Burke, *English Inn*, p. 17

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Thomas Burke, p.1

¹⁰³ A.P Herbert in Burke, *English Inn*, Preface

post-war brewers and the interwar improvers - gimmick themes which appeared to arrive from nowhere, and which brought with them the destruction of ‘useless’ features which attest to the pub’s historic evolution - mirrored an abstract nationalism divorced from the actual conduits of national sentiment.¹⁰⁴ Recourse to a national identity, when predicated upon the dissolution of regional particularity, rang hollow.

In fact, Burke’s portrayal of the inn can be conceived as a rebellion of one vision of Englishness (telluric) against another (nationalist). Early in *The English Inn*, Burke thanks the editors of the heritage ‘for reviving those almost lost words “England” and “English”... [which] have been lumped into the words “Britain” and “British” and buried there.’¹⁰⁵ Britain was associated with the elite projects of the state, ‘cold gritty words, belonging to empires and politics and trade’; a deception generated by ‘the coarse timbre of the advertising-agent’¹⁰⁶:

Say “British poetry,” “British cricket” and “the British inn,” and, if you have any spiritual ear at all, you will get the feeling that you get on putting your right foot into a left shoe, or looking at Chesterfield’s spire. The words make illicit intercourse. It is like an association of statistics and nightingales, workhouses and magic casements.¹⁰⁷

Astonishingly for an author writing not ten years since the conclusion of the First World War, Burke could not envision a man ‘willingly laying down his life for... British ideas’, which would be like ‘dying for a trade-mark or a coal-scuttle’, only ‘English ideas, or Irish ideas, or Scotch ideas or Welsh ideas.’¹⁰⁸ If the content of those ideas remained entirely vague, the heritage series was an attempt to give them some institutional and cultural clout distinct from the Union into which Englishness, as the Union’s dominant party, had subsumed itself. It may be that the experience of the war, with its centralisation of state power and emphasis on collective, *British* endeavour, produced its own fatigue in the decade which followed. Burke’s account of the pub is nationalist, but it is a separatist nationalism running in antagonism to the unification of the nation state. It is also one which uncouples components of Englishness which are more usually lumped together.

¹⁰⁴ This tendency is discussed further in the following section.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Burke, *English Inn*, p. 22

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*

These themes would persist through the history of pub writing. Christopher Hutt, whose 1973 polemic, *The Death of the English Pub* (discussed further in a later section of this chapter), described how the brewer's modernisation schemes also entailed imprinting abstract referents of national identity onto the more ephemeral organicism of the pub:

The character of a pub can reside partially in features that are archaic, useless, or simply in the way. These are ripped out and replaced by the modern comforts the brewers are so anxious to provide, and charge for. Luxurious soft furnishings replace the wooden seats, wall-to-wall carpeting covers those worn-out old tiles, the ornate mirror and dart-board make way for a set of tasteful hunting prints.¹⁰⁹

The replacement of idiosyncratic decoration with the 'official nationalism' of the aristocratic hunting print has its rhyme in the replacement of the local brewer in favour of the national brand.

In his history of the pub's representation in English literature, Peter Earnshaw has demonstrated how embedded the division between the official nationalism of the state and the unofficial nationalism of the pub has been. Earnshaw argues that Hal's rejection of Falstaff in Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part II* is allegorical: Falstaff and his drinking companions at the Boar's Head represent the immature but carefree temporality of Merrie England, spurned by Hal to forge the sober post-reformation nation state. Hal 'simultaneously suppresses Englishness whilst broadening out England to encompass other lands'¹¹⁰, and in abandoning the tavern, makes time function productively, readying the nation for the incipient spread of capitalism.¹¹¹ The national time of the state is thereby counterpoised to the recreational time of the inn. Invocations of Englishness map onto this distinction, fixating on immemorial depictions of the landscape and its architectural features; the 'myth functioning as a memory' which Raymond Williams felt marked the pastoral tradition in English Literature.¹¹² Consequently, the pub's eulogisers, who, like Burke, are most concerned with Englishness, have tended to focus on the pre-modern, rural iterations of the pub rather than its more contemporary, urban expressions: 'To the inn time is static. In one breath it has seen all

¹⁰⁹ Christopher Hutt, *The Death of the English Pub*, Hutchinson & Co (1973), p. 116

¹¹⁰ Stephen Earnshaw, *The Pub in Literature: England's Altered State*, Manchester University Press (2000) p. 53

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 49

¹¹² Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, Oxford University Press (1973) p.43

English History.¹¹³ Even when Burke came to address the urban pub in his third book on the subject, *Will Someone Lead Me To A Pub* (1936) the pub is essentially made to conform to a-temporal expectations, something ‘grown with us from our beginnings... as constant in the London scene as the Lord Mayor or the street-market’.¹¹⁴ The pub must precede modernity, precede capitalism, precede the Union. It is a symbol of folk Englishness, not the Englishness of an imperial state.

For Williams, such recourse to arcadia was not ideologically neutral. Rather it was the mechanism by which one class ‘immortalised its possession’ of the landscape, ‘while banishing the industrial hell which financed its indolence.’¹¹⁵ An analogous claim might be that evocations of the alehouse - with its traditions of good fellowship, timelessness, and comradery - was a way of papering over social division and writing the painful experience of modernity out of its depiction; perpetuating myth whilst reality disintegrated. Burke is, after all, writing in the context of the interwar depression. Burke may be one of the original propagators of the motif that the inn (though later writers would extend it to the pub more generally) is a space of class mixture, where ‘the man of ten-thousand a year dines at the next table to the holidaying clerk of two-hundred a year, both of them within ear-shot of the tap-room labourers of twenty-five shillings a week.’¹¹⁶ Only the ear-shot though, for formal class distinctions between the separate spheres of the pub were still a prevalent feature of its design. Nevertheless ‘in the bar the nobleman ceases to be a nobleman and the peasant ceases to be a peasant. Both become men. Only in the inn can this happen.’¹¹⁷

This seems paradoxical with the belief in the pub’s Englishness: how could an aberration from the social order simultaneously represent it? Yet it was precisely this contradiction which

¹¹³ Burke, *English Inn*, p.31

¹¹⁴ Thomas Burke, *Will Someone Lead Me to A Pub?*, Routledge (1936) p.2

¹¹⁵ Roger Scruton, *England: An Elegy*, Chatto & Windus (2000) p.39 / There are numerous examples of the English landscape being infused with ideological meaning, and Thomas Burke has as partial as many authors in this period. He approvingly cites the (American) author Washington Irving: ‘The great charm, however, of English scenery is the moral feeling that seems to pervade it. It is associated in the mind with ideas of order, of quiet, of sober, well-established principles. Everything seems to be the growth of ages. The old church of remote architecture, with its scrupulous preservation, the parsonage and the neighbouring village with its venerable cottages and its public green sheltered by trees - all these common features of English landscape evince a calm and settled security that speaks deeply and touchingly for the moral character of the nation.’ Thomas Burke, *The Beauty of England*, George and Harrap (1933) p.14

¹¹⁶ Thomas Burke, *The English Inn*, vii

¹¹⁷ Ibid

infused the pub with its symbolic potency - a diversion from the social order, it could mitigate its most troubling qualities. Secondly, it corresponded heavily with the pub's symbolism as a national institution. As Anderson has observed, the recourse to nationalism 'offer[s] to resolve the tension between a hierarchical educational and social order and the concept of a horizontal community' and so the 'togetherness' experienced in the inn is a compensatory gesture for the rifts which exist outside of it (as Burke emphasises, it is *only in the inn* that this can happen).¹¹⁸ Again, the figuring of Englishness as an essentially pre-modern identity was a way of invoking the customary society of the pre-capitalist period, in which the hierarchies of society were nevertheless thought to have balanced 'the claims and rights of lesser members of the community, and the duties and responsibilities of the leader members'.¹¹⁹ There is no doubt though that this was an essentially conservative vision; part of a broader critique against the 'bright and hard young spirits of to-day who are anxious to abolish [national] tradition'. For Burke this was tantamount to 'abolishing [the] personal memory', without which 'the human creature could make no material, mental, or spiritual progress, nor, without tradition, could a nation'.¹²⁰ These slippages of category fashioned a link between the rustic inn and national identity; and progress against the 'traditional' trappings of the class system as inseparably, erroneously, bound to the destruction of the pub.

This critique does not seem to entirely capture Burke's motivations however. Against Raymond Williams, the conservative philosophy Roger Scruton has argued that fixation with such arcadian discourses was in fact a way of re-enchanting a landscape demystified by the utilitarian values of industrialism. It was not concerned with 'grieving over a Merrie England that had never existed' but a means to 'discover another order, a hidden order, which had been overlayed by history ... [concealing] the deep-down explanation of our being here... [a way of] internalising the topography of England... and deliver[ing] it up as a home'.¹²¹ And it is telling that much as Burke dwells on the inn as a national symbol he also confers upon it a kind of unique phenomenological reality which is not reducible to purely representational notions of Englishness. The inn is a kind of portal between epochs. To step over the threshold was to 'touch hands with the wraiths of the past and the substantial mementoes of their days'.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.16

¹¹⁹ Stephen Earnshaw, *The Pub In Literature*, p.12

¹²⁰ Thomas Burke, *The English Inn*, p.9

¹²¹ Roger Scruton, *England: An Elegy*, p.41

¹²² Thomas Burke, *The Book of the Inn*, p.ix

Yet insofar as this rural, organicist ideal was a form of mythic re-enchantment, it nevertheless relied upon a distorted geography of Englishness (one which might even contain areas of Wales and Scotland) and which certainly excluded those not-so-idyllic rural regions, towns, and cities in which the majority of society were coming to live from the 19th century. It also posed that the city was not a source of enchantment in its own right. This marked it from the British left's own anti-modern traditions, which, as in William Morris's *News From Nowhere* was about rustivating the city rather than ignoring it: the orchard is, literally, brought to Trafalgar Square.¹²³ It is perhaps unsurprising then that when the next generation of *urban* pub writers emerged, panegyrics to Englishness ceased. In its place, mythology gave way to the sociological researcher and the social critic, for whom the life, design and transformation of the pub were more significant than its symbolic representation.

Hub of Our Wheel of Life: Mass Observation's *The Pub and the People* (1943)

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the pub's relationship to crisis was well established by the end of the 19th century. The economic excesses of the brewers merged with the alleged excess of the pub-goer to form a deviant image of the public house. By the end of the 1930s however, a new generation of writing shifted the pub's representation from one *of* crisis to one *in* crisis. Bookending the war, the journalist Maurice Gorham wrote two odes to the public house, first in 1939 with *The Local* with a revised edition, *Back to the Local*, emerging a decade later. A year later, Gorham, along with Shackleton-legacist and then *Architectural Review* writer, Harding McGregor Dunnett, published a design manual called *Inside the Pub* through the *Review's* press.¹²⁴ In the same period George Orwell wrote his famous article, 'The Moon Under Water' (1946) about a perfect pub which, tellingly, did not exist, and Mass Observation's pre-war research, *The Pub and the People* (1943), was finally released.¹²⁵ Though the war added an inevitable nostalgia and urgency to accounts of the public house (the impact of bomb destruction and fear that postwar reconstruction would repeat the worst of the pre-war reforms marks all the postwar texts), Mass Observation, and Gorham's pre-war text, both illustrate that a bottom-up concern for the public house was already becoming prevalent in the years preceding it.

¹²³ William Morris, *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*, Penguin (1993)

¹²⁴ Dunnett / Gorham, *Inside the Pub*, Architectural Press (1950)

¹²⁵ George Orwell, 'The Moon Under Water', *Evening Standard*, February 1946



Fig 2.5 – Portrait of Thomas Burke. [*Howard Coster, 1931: National Portrait Gallery, npr.org.uk*]

Fig 2.6 (overleaf) – For Burke the authentic pub expressed its distinct regionality through its materials, wore the style of its birthday, and responded to local conditions. Top left: Rugglestone Inn, Dartmoor (converted to an Inn from a cottage in the early 19th century) Top right: The Cooper's Tavern, Burton-on-Trent (bearing characteristic Staffordshire brick) Centre Left: Three Horseshoes, Warham (Early 18th century. Norfolk 'flint & brick' exterior) Centre right: The Fleece Inn Worcestershire (16th Century. [*Copyright: Jamie Burrell Photography, via visitbritain.com*]) Bottom left: The Old Ship Inn, Seahouses, Northumberland (An explosion of nautical memorabilia responds to the fishing town context. [*Copyright: Ray Cooper, via Digital Photographer*]) Bottom right: The Royal Standard of England, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire (One of many historic pubs which competes for the title of 'oldest in England' [*via adventuresinpubs.co.uk*])



Carried out by pseudo-neutral researchers for the earnest purposes of social science, *The Pub and the People* makes for an awkward example of ‘bottom-up’ anxiety. Yet the idiosyncrasy, and sympathetic prejudice of its author(s) overwhelm their initial pretensions to objective analysis. Mass Observation’s central argument is an early incidence of what would become an unwavering depiction from the postwar period onwards: that the pub’s centrality to town life is diminishing, besieged on the one hand by new, comparatively unregulated forms of individualised leisure - pools, cinemas, dance halls, televisions - and on the other by ‘a whole trend of economics’ which leads the Brewers to ‘eradicate the small and perhaps inefficient old-style unit and develop a massive efficiency which may even involve deliberately upsetting the existing social pattern.’¹²⁶ This analysis - seemingly so similar to later iterations - also departs from them however, rejecting contingent factors and singular culprits (e.g. the smoking ban, or government taxation) in favour of an emphasis on secular decline. From their perspective, the travails of the pub are not peculiar to the pub at all, rather ‘all the older institutions are declining. It is a main feature of the contemporary scene.’¹²⁷

[the] church, politics, sports clubs [the pub] depend[s] on the participation of people in groups which are in active physical and verbal proximity to one another, and who get to know one another in the course of sharing the same experiences of interests.¹²⁸

By contrast, the institutions of the new leisure industry,

are not concerned with making a social group, except in so far as it is essential to make all those doing the thing feel that it is the done thing ... [they] do not create a social group of people sharing consciously the same experience, the emphasis is on each individual experiencing it, not on any common feeling or interest or talk.¹²⁹

The pub thereby loses its influence, ‘in the face of institutions which are providing, comparatively unrestrictedly, to individuals whatever the individuals’ are supposed to want, or will pay for readily.’¹³⁰ The emphasis placed on the erosion of traditional institutions of social regulation under modernity, resultant trends towards individualisation, and its anomic

¹²⁶ Mass Observation, *The Pub and People: A Worktown Study*, Victor Gollancz (1943) p. 77

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p.76

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p.78

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p.78

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 79

consequences (analogies are made with the closure of the mills in 'Worktown', aka Bolton, which 'smashed what remained of the mill-home-district relationship') clearly borrows heavily from classical sociology. It also constitutes a remarkable shift in the moral standing of the pub: as no longer something which must be regulated for society, but itself a necessary institution of social regulation.

On first appearance, this shift seems as conservative as the view it has unseated: the pub was hitherto 'bad' because it permitted individuals a dangerous excess of liberty, now it is 'good' because in fact it serves to regulate the destructive consequences of individualisation:

The pub stresses the fact that you are living among your fellow men, that the issues of life, whether faced or escaped, are not solitary but communal. The Church and the political party say the same thing, in a different way. The films and pools do not.¹³¹

In an analogy which would have been deeply unwelcome to temperance campaigners, Mass Observation noted further parities between the pub and the church,

the bar severing the landlord from the ordinary folk... the often ornate windows, the beer-engine handles... sticking up like tapered candles, the shortly-to-be-described rituals of toasting, rounds, glass-swigging... the dividing line between minister and ministered-to.¹³²

The folk belief that a secret passageway ran from the Worktown's parish church to the vault of the Man and the Scythe - a common trope in English folklore - only served to emphasise the 'umbilical cord' that connected the two institutions, and between them bound the community.¹³³ As Lutyens argued only a few years before (though here in approval of Basil Oliver's faith in the modern, reformed pub):

¹³¹ Ibid, p.218

¹³² Ibid, p.93

¹³³ Ibid, p.93

The Public House represented what should be the hub of our wheel of Life, essential to our material need and second only to the Church that stands and represents our material necessity. The Church is to the spirit as the Inn is to the flesh...¹³⁴

These parallels were clearly part of conscious critique of religiously-informed temperance campaigners, and form part of the broader revaluation of the pub's social contribution. Yet there is another dimension to Mass Observation's argument which complicates the comparison, suggesting a more radical dimension to the pub's function. The pub, it is argued,

is the only kind of public building used by large numbers of ordinary people where their thoughts and actions are not being in some way arranged for them; in the other kinds of public buildings they are the audiences, watchers of political, religious, dramatic, cinematic, instructional or athletic spectacles. But within the four walls of the pub, once a man has brought or been bought his glass of beer, he has entered an environment in which he is participator rather than spectator.¹³⁵

As a negative claim this could be picked apart (is the athletic spectator only that? Did all 'ordinary people' - here a by-word for the working class - really experience political spectacle only as an audience?) but its positive assertion - that the pub was a unique architectural environment being collaboratively and autonomously produced by people who in much of their lives and leisure otherwise lacked autonomy and the power which came with it, is borne out by Mass Observation's findings. For Mass Observation it is as though, in the new entertainment, man is an ever more 'free' individual whose freedom is paradoxically rerouted through a passive form of spectatorship; yet in the pub, enmeshed in social bonds and complex evolution of rules and customs 'he has entered an environment in which he is a participator'. In a twist on classic liberalism, autonomy which is social provides more liberty than an individuality which is anomic, fractured, externally imposed.

What did Mass Observation mean by participation? What did this autonomy constitute? Firstly, it was a space in which one was equal amongst one's peers. This is apparent in the figure of the landlord/landlady, whose apparent authority belies the complex codes and customs

¹³⁴ Edwin Lutyens in Basil Oliver, *The Renaissance*, [Preface] p. 3

¹³⁵ Mass Observation, *The Pub and the People*, p.17

which underwrite it. Unlike the parson, there are ‘no class distinctions between the landlord and his customers’,

mostly he is with the poorest section of them, and they meet on terms of outward equality, usually addressing each other by Christian names. But most parsons are “better” class than their congregations, are never addressed by Christian names - and very seldom by their surnames.¹³⁶

Instead of a class distinction, the landlord’s authority is derived from his ability to be both a final word on certain topics (one reports to Mass Observation his need to be ‘an authority on all sporting matters’) and an even-handed arbiter, to be ‘many-sided’, to ‘agree with all and sundry’ and leave the room when contradictions might occur.¹³⁷ Like a referee, this authority was not imposed from above, but a kind of formally accepted convention which extended from the participants themselves; the rough parity of class crucial to underpinning its consent. Gendered equivalents operated for the landlady - whose ability to both offer emotional counsel and face down trouble were considered pre-requisites of the role. Barmaids, often young women, and lacking the formal gravitas of proprietorship, traded instead in a currency of attention and detached affection, and were required to manage it in a similar fashion. As one Landlord argued, a good barmaid ought to be ‘uniform to all her customers’ in order to prevent intrigue and jealousy; an ideal which apparently fell short of reality: ‘many customers link up with barmaids, I think it is very detrimental to the publican.’¹³⁸

This social egalitarianism at first seems contradicted by the prevailing class layout of the pub - with its distinct grade of rooms and differential pricing - yet it might be better understood as enforcing it. Gorham noted how there were:

many Public Bars where any patron who is too obviously not dressed as a labourer is regarded with distrust. His presence is resented by the patrons as well as by the management, on the natural grounds that he is a person who can afford to use the

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 66

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 55

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.54

Saloon Bar and therefore his reason for going elsewhere must presumably be either curiosity or parsimony. Both are motives justly despised in the Public Bar.¹³⁹

Yet according to Mass Observation the reverse was not true. A working man could, when occasion demand, cross the threshold and enter the higher class territories of the bar - though he adjusted his clothing and demeanour accordingly:

It is also evident that the structure of the pub is not a class-structure, in the ordinary sense of the phrase. Any man can go into the vault. But if he is with his wife or mother or girl and wishes to sit with them, he can't go into the vault. He has to take a step up, a sit down, and pay more for the same stuff. He is not in a different class for doing that... The same thing exactly happens on Sunday, and centres around the church-going habit. On Sunday the visible weekday criteria of class-distinctions break down and disappear. On Sunday anyone looks like an Alderman.¹⁴⁰

To read the hierarchy of the pub space purely in terms of the lavishness of its furnishing is therefore to mis-read it. In the hierarchy of autonomy, it is the austere space of the vault which is the most liberated and the most exclusive. As one patron put it, 'You can do almost anything you bloody well like in the vault, short of shitting on the place.'¹⁴¹ A 1939 review of Gorham's *The Local* confirmed that:

Users of the public bar never dream of entering the other and have no envy of those who do. Users of the higher class apartment often dream of going into the public bar and are envious of those who, from their station in life, may do so. This thought transference does not arise from the fact that prices are lower in the public bar, but because somehow or other public bars have a more genuine atmosphere.¹⁴²

The policing of the pub space starts in the vault and extends upwards, but not the other way around.

¹³⁹ Maurice Gorham, *Back to the Local*, Percival Marshall (1949), p. 38

¹⁴⁰ Mass Observation, *The Pub and the People*, p. 107

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 105

¹⁴² *Liverpool Daily Post*, Dec 19 1939

These accounts expose the multiple levels of exclusion and performance at work in the pub's spatiality. To take a 'step up, a sit down, and pay more for the same stuff' by entering the saloon or parlour is akin to a church Sunday - an 'event' to which a wife can be brought and the performative rituals of respectability - dressing up, sitting down, being waited on - are mirrored in the ignored adverts for non-alcoholic drinks, soft furnishings and prevalence of aspidistras which marked out the saloon.¹⁴³ To borrow from Goffman, the vault is paradoxical kind of public (yet exclusive) 'back region', 'where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course'.¹⁴⁴

The hierarchy of spatial authority was reinforced through the gender norms which prevailed in them. As the Mass Observation investigator rather crudely notes, 'the vault is the place where men are men. In the lounge they are women's men, with collar studs. For that, as usual, they must pay another penny'.¹⁴⁵ Respectability corresponds not to higher status but to feminisation and performance: men acting for their wives. The 'truth' of the pub is found in the vaults where men are as they are. Crucial to this theatre was therefore that 'you cannot see the bar from the Lounge'¹⁴⁶ and the sightlines between the one space and the other, the 'frontstage' and 'backstage', were broken up with walls and partitions. Goffman's insight perhaps also provides the answer to another paradox. Mass Observation note how the public house was not in fact 'an escape from home life into better surroundings', rather it was 'often more dim and crowded than home'. Nor, in the vault at least, did one enter to relax physically. Despite the prevalence of the labourers visiting on workday evenings having spent all day on their feet, the vault was nevertheless for so-called 'perpendicular drinking' - standing at the bar and chatting freely. Instead of physical relaxation, Mass Observation suggest it was instead a space where the male worker comes to 'relax mentally' - free to 'spit on the floor or burn the bar with a cigarette' without rebuke.¹⁴⁷ Just as Goffman suggests, the backstage is a region where performance can be momentarily interrupted, providing 'brief periods of relaxation'.¹⁴⁸ It is by foregoing the accoutrements of comfy domesticity that the vaults, with its sawdust asperity, can maintain the aesthetic signifiers of its provisional 'backstageness', counter-intuitively producing through

¹⁴³ Mass Observation, *The Pub and the People*, p. 106

¹⁴⁴ Erving Goffman, 'Front and Back Regions of Everyday Life' in Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader*, Routledge (2002) p.53

¹⁴⁵ Mass Observation, *The Pub and the People* p. 107

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p.106

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p.105

¹⁴⁸ Goffman, 'Front and Back...', p.54

physical privation the only environment in which it was possible to drop fronts and mentally relax. If the 'event' of the saloon was the dressed stage with all its furnishings, it was in stripping space back to an empty stage that the vaults could offer a less scripted experience - more contingent, provisional and unpredictable - and thus earn the ire of the improver who saw in that autonomy a dangerous licentiousness. As one observer noted, with knowing juxtaposition, the taproom of his local beerhouse was decorated with 'a framed and glazed notice saying NO GAMBLING ALLOWED. This is above the table where the card players sit.'¹⁴⁹ The Worktown landlord who presumed that his customers opted for his pub 'with its stone floors and bare forms' over the two across the road 'better furnished, with all kinds of upholstery and covered floors' simply because he was superior company may have underrated the significant appeal of exactly such a design.¹⁵⁰

If the pub could be distinguished from the other 'old institutions' by the autonomy it conferred on the men who entered it, Mass Observation noted a further distinguishing feature: its relationship to capitalism. For if the pub's social worth was represented in its 'umbilical cord', attaching it to the old institution of the church, it had a second cord attaching it to the new institutions of the economy, an attachment which would prove increasingly pertinent to its fate.

Like Poppies Under the Scythe: Maurice Gorham's *Local* (1939), *Back to the Local* (1949), Gorham & McG Dunnett's *Inside the Pub* (1950)

For the pub's defenders, the devastation of the blitz during the Second World War resurrected the spectre of pre-war improvement. Maurice Gorham's *Back to the Local*, published in 1949 added a chapter to the original pre-war book (*The Local*, 1939) under the heading 'Obituary', warning that 'Progress, reconstruction, town-planning, war, all have one thing in common: the pubs go down before them like poppies under the scythe.'¹⁵¹ Bomb damage would likely necessitate bespoke pub designs, but the architects who might provide them were tainted by complicity with the fads of the 20s and 30s - either the 'pseudisms' of 'Tudorbethan novelty' or the now 'tawdry and dated' examples of modernist pub design which, for Gorham, had failed to root themselves in the traditions of public house design.¹⁵² In a follow up collaboration with

¹⁴⁹ Mass Observation, *The Pub and the People*, p. 95

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p.54

¹⁵¹ Gorham, *Back to the Local*, p. 90

¹⁵² Gorham / Dunnett, *Inside the Pub*, p. 121



Fig 2.7 – Mass Observation in action (Bolton). *Photographs from Mass Observation Survey* [Copyright: Bolton Council, taken from: boltonworktown.co.uk/themes/pub]. With examples of the Tap Room / Vaults (Bottom left), Parlour / Saloon (Bottom right), Snug (Top Left). Centre left: the distinction between the Vaults and the Parlour is clearly visible.

Gorham called *Inside the Pub*, Harding McGregor Dunnett argued (provocatively for an editor of the *Architectural Review*) that the problem lay with the nature of modern architects themselves - no longer appropriately subservient to a popular style, the 20th century architect 'enters the foreground' and became tasked with 'apply[ing] his inventive powers'.¹⁵³

Justifying his position, Dunnett argued that the 20th century architect had failed to understand '[t]he art of the pub is one of the few living arts which is still popular in a spontaneous, unself-conscious way.'¹⁵⁴ Consequently, even sensitive and intelligent design would falter if it was too *consciously* designed. What made the pub so hard to create was that it defied easy formulas and standardised models - it required the right 'atmosphere', which was a feeling rather than a blueprint - difficult to anticipate yet fundamental to the whole endeavour. In his preface to *Inside the Pub*, Gorham defines the pub atmosphere as

one which provides warmth, cheerfulness and a sense of seclusion and one in which the charm of the familiar is somehow combined with a sense of something intriguing just round the corner. A pub should make people feel at home and yet have the capacity to lift them a little out of themselves.¹⁵⁵

This presented a serious obstacle to designers (usually for breweries) looking to make, as Mass Observation put it, a 'quick response to new conditions'. For new conditions not only seem antithetical to the pub's nature but risked destroying the indefinable 'atmosphere' altogether. Equally, ham-fisted attempts at anachronism risked the same outcome from the opposite direction, resulting in a 'collection of theatrical shams' which 'bore no relation whatever either to architectural honesty or the true functional tradition of the pub' - 'sterilized medieval frills... draped round twentieth-century mass-production and amenities.'¹⁵⁶ The desire to produce an essentially standardised and easily replicable pub architecture would flounder in the face of an institution defined by a certain haphazard organicism and irrationality. This led Dunnett to the conclusion that '[t]he best thing an artist can do to the pub is to leave it alone':

no amount of design, no amusing textiles and ingenious furnishings, can get as good a result as you find in many a rather dark bar that gleams softly with the reflection from

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 114

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 13

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 11

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 121

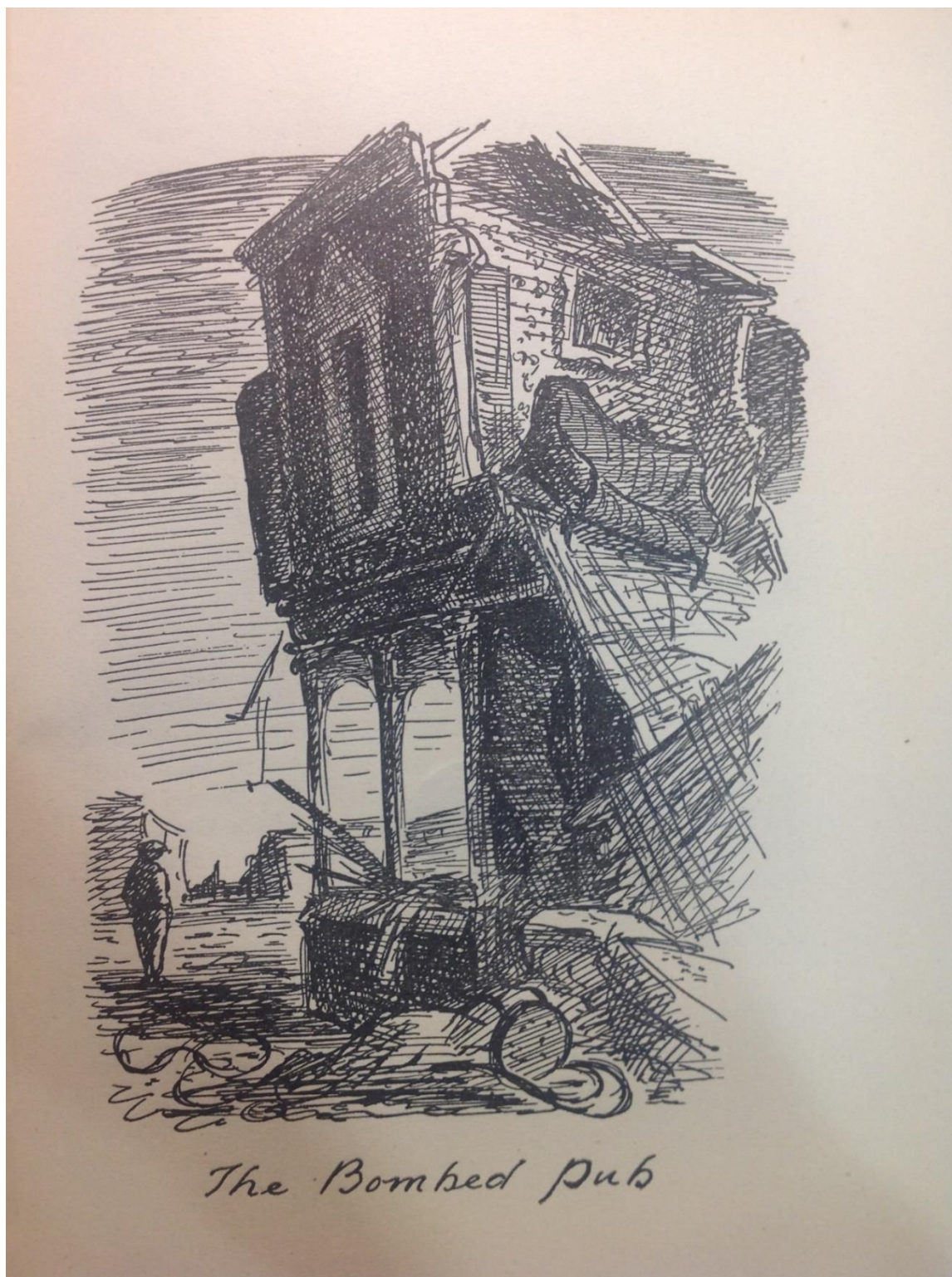


Fig 2.8 – Illustration of A Pub Destroyed in During World War Two. [Image by Edward Ardizzone, in Maurice Gorham's *Back to the Local* (1949)]

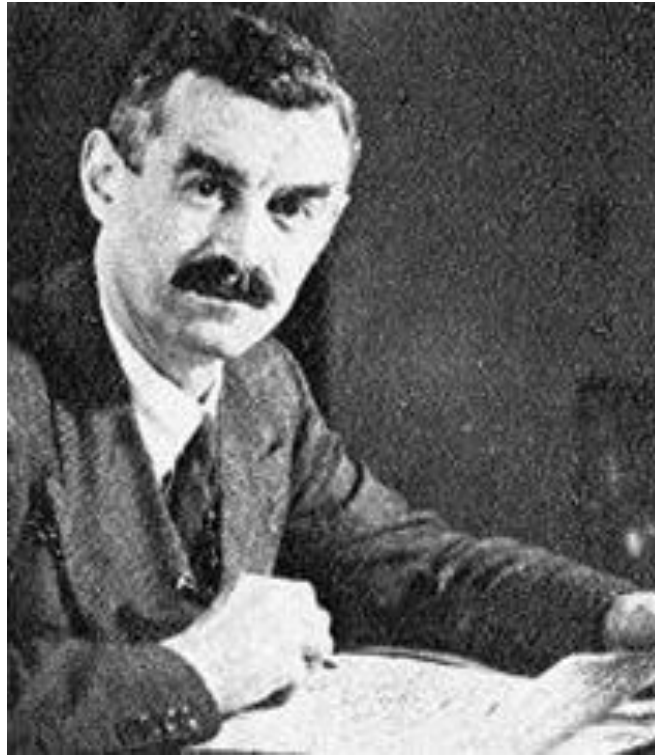


Fig 2.9 – Portrait of Maurice Gorham [BBC History – via Jessica Boak and Ray Bailey, ‘Two Englishmen an Irishman and a Bavarian go to a Dinner Party’ *Boak & Bailey Beer Blog*, Dec 2 2016. Found at: boakandbailey.com/2016/12/two-englishmen-an-irishman-and-a-bavarian-go-to-a-dinner-party, accessed 04/2019]

well-scrubbed pewter and well-polished glass. The tortuous interiors of the old houses have a charm that you can hardly recreate, and nothing that I have seen in the exhibitions is likely to give me so much pleasure as the gilt-etched mirrors, crowned by eagles, as the Spread Eagle in Grosvenor Road, the glass shutters, with their oak-leaf pattern, at the Royal Oak near Eaton Square, the fantastic ceiling of the Black Horse in Rathbone Place; and it would take a lot of modern design to create an interior so imposing as the faded Palladian of Mooney’s in the Strand.¹⁵⁷

The encroachment on old traditions was not only aesthetic, though even tangential alterations held aesthetic implications. Gorham noted the beginning of a tendency for landlords to be replaced by a ‘nominee of the brewery or even a salaried manager’. This diminution in the landlord’s power - and with it those complex social dynamics of autonomy - was felt by Dunnett

¹⁵⁷ Gorham, *Back to the Local*, p. 14 - Gorham makes exception for the design of small things like tankards, especially in helping them resist spills. (He recommends they not be too wide in proportion to its height, and not too wide at the top...)

to be one of the reasons ‘for the dwindling of individual character in pubs.’¹⁵⁸ A manager - as a company lackey - would struggle to command the same respect accorded the landlord/lady, and as an external imposition their legitimacy would come less from the tacit consent of their custom, and more from the brewer they represented. In turn, a company employee could not necessarily make the pub space their own - nor their clientele with it; a model is implied, and imposed, to which the pub must be restored and from which it should not deviate. The salaried manager was thus thrice alienated: in their control over their own labour, in their relationship to those they served, and in their influence over the space they govern. This was not a purely negative arrangement - Mass Observation noted how the life-consuming demands of the tenanted landlord/lady often led to an early demise - but it represented a fundamental change in the culture and experience of the pub, and an erosion of its social relations.

Alienation was creeping into the pub in other ways - Gorham makes one of the first references to piped music, and its replacement of the itinerant pub-musician (not, at the time, a much-loved institution, but considered preferential to the disembodied variety):

The wireless set usually plays away discordantly in the background until the landlord remembers it and impatiently turns it off, but the real horror is the juke-box. Even where the management has been so reckless as to install one, public opinion usually prevents its being used, but there is always the danger of the odd assertive individual.¹⁵⁹

The landlord (here of the brewer-appointed variety) suffers the wireless set, ‘the management’ install the jukebox; consensus opposes both. The ‘new entertainment’, with all its passive consumption, has found its way into the very place Mass Observation felt it was still resisted. Piped music’s inorganic atmosphere, its predictable guarantees, caused such ire because it was seemingly so antithetical to the pub’s authenticity. For if the pub’s ‘atmosphere’ is a fundamentally collaborative endeavour, produced in dialogue between architecture, drinker, landlord and each other; piped music shared none of these credentials.¹⁶⁰ It bought atmosphere on the cheap, occupying an acoustic territory it had not earned and to which no one, except perhaps the ‘odd assertive individual’, belonged. As the Marxist philosopher, Theodor Adorno, wrote a year earlier, in 1939:

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 111

¹⁵⁹ Gorham, *Back to the Local*, p. 85

¹⁶⁰ Ben Anderson, ‘Affective Atmospheres’, *Emotion, Space and Society*; 2 (2009), p 77–81

[I]t can be asked for whom music for entertainment still entertains. It seems to complement the reduction of people to silence, the dying out of speech as expression. the inability to communicate at all. It inhabits the pockets of silence that develop between people molded by anxiety, work and undemanding docility. Everywhere it takes over, unnoticed, the deadly sad role that fell to in the time and the specific situation of the silent films. It is perceived purely as background. If nobody can any longer speak, then certainly nobody can any longer listen.¹⁶¹

Adorno is often criticised for the elitist, anti-popular character of such positions. Yet if Gorham is to be believed - such sentiments were far more generalised at the inception of music's ubiquity than Adorno's critics are aware. Piped music seems to evict silence from the topography of conversation; the troughs which constitute the complex valleys of speech and experience are levelled into an insistent presentness. This new spatiality of sound is matched by an alien temporality - music imposes its own rhythm, overawing the slowness which shapes the pub atmosphere: the slowness of drinking pints of bitter (known as 'session bitters'), the slowness in the activities, like darts, which make sense within it - but also slowness in its sense of time as diurnal rather than synchronic. Pub time is generally open-ended, rarely squeezed precisely between activities but extending until closing in a manner unlike other spaces of consumption. Often a pub's architecture will cater to this sense of separation - using internal mirrors to refract light into an ambient glow resplendent of neither day nor night, with frosted windows or net curtains to shut the outside world away. As Dunnett himself put it, pubs 'are the portals to a world of fantasy.'¹⁶² Piped music shattered the fantasia.

Adorno's question remains: who was to be entertained except to appease the notion of entertainment itself? The brewer believed they were adapting to the current of the times - moving forward to stay afloat - but in parroting the new entertainment they misunderstood the nature of the institution they were transforming. The fallout could be definitive:

¹⁶¹ Theodor Adorno, 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening' in *The Culture Industry*, Routledge (1991) - Adorno is often criticised for the elitist character of his critique of popular culture; yet Gorham's work suggests that similar arguments were in fact being marshalled in its defense. The distinction is in fact one of a popular collective culture and 'popular' commodified experience.

¹⁶² Gorham / Dunnett, *Inside the Pub*, p. v

Already more than one pub has been closed to me by a juke-box, and there is another where the monster crouches ready to be called into hideous life; the regulars have the sense to leave it alone, but any day a Frankenstein may walk in. The threat makes one almost long to hear again the plaintive piping of the tin whistle from just outside the door.¹⁶³

Frankenstein's Monster: artificially constructed, without peers, ultimately destructive, the terrifying figure of modernity; Frankenstein: the anomic individual par excellence. As Dunnett perceptively notes, even the smallest of details in the pub was designed to ward against him. The glass and mirrors, the decorative display of bottles 'create an atmosphere of seclusion without destroying the sense of space; by reflecting every movement they allow a solitary drinker to feel he is one of a crowd and the crowd in its turn appears to have more space at its disposal than it really has.'¹⁶⁴ Communality is not here mistaken for the group: seclusion and solitude have their place within it; but the trick of the pub's design is its ability to make solitude, in a sense, social, part of the crowd. This expansiveness has a further, chronological dimension, leading to the principle 'don't repaint - revarnish', 'and so perpetuate the work of history and nicotine.'¹⁶⁵ Even the new pub must in some way be in the process of getting old. It must be open to history, even where it is not yet historic, and record in palimpsest the impressions of those who use it. Only in this way could the pub really be made one's own, participated in, collectively created. Its semiotics are of process, not product.

The failure to understand this principle floundered attempts from the 1930s onwards to introduce modern design materials - chromium bars, tiled floors - and explains the stubborn persistence of wood as one of the pub's defining features. The new bars lacked for the small details - like Dunnett's all-important bottles. But it was also a mistake repeated in the historicist fantasies of theme pubs. All were prone to freeze time, perpetually restoring the environment to an imaginary ideal which shut out the influence of those who used it.

Dunnett's principle also helps explain the lingering resentment felt towards the introduction of the smoking ban to pubs in 2007 (a factor often attributed to its contemporary crisis). Smoke

¹⁶³ Gorham, *Return to the Local*, p. 85 - As Gorham's final remark suggests, this principle did not apply to all music as such. Live music, especially collective singing, had long been a feature of pub life.

¹⁶⁴ Gorham / Dunnett, *Inside the Pub*, p. 131

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 133



Fig 2.10 – Sketches of Pub Life. [Image by Edward Ardizzone, in Maurice Gorham's *Back to the Local* (1949)]

trails assisted the deception at work in the surfeit of glass and mirrors. Nicotine is a smell which lingers, and accumulates - its traces remain once the smoker has gone. The operation of pipe smoke and varnish upon the walls created, for Dunnett, 'that pleasant and characteristic dark marmalade colour which is the best of all pub colours.'¹⁶⁶ Health hazard and stale-smelling, smoking was nevertheless perceived as experientially suited to the pub environment.

Further changes were being made to the layout of the pub itself, abandoning the ecology of differentiated rooms (Vault / Taproom / Public Bar, Parlour / Saloon / Lounge) - in favour of open-plan arrangements which made supervision easier and levelled out class distinctions. To an extent this may have been a recognition of their increasing redundancy - as one of Mass Observation's Bolton landlords commented of this 'southern' trend for open plan, 'you never got both rooms filled - you either got a vault crowd or a parlour crowd'.¹⁶⁷ It was nevertheless received with dismay by Gorham, who felt it 'sacrifice[d] the old and cosy multiplicity of bars

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 133

¹⁶⁷ Mass Observation, *The Pub and the People*, p. 100

for one large one where the sense of intimacy is lost, all to placate the magistrate's passion for supervision': a 'betrayal of the pub tradition.'¹⁶⁸

The scene was set for conflict. Pub-goers perceived themselves to be the honorary custodians of their spaces; yet under the monopolising tendency of the tied pub, actual ownership, more often than not, rested in the hands of the brewer who, as the 20th century progressed, would become an ever more monolithic, ever more distant entity. As John Clarke has argued,

The pub has held a central position in the local articulation of working class culture as a sort of 'colonized' institution which, though not formally owned by the class, has been internally moulded by the class's custom. Here certain customary rights and expectations could be enforced through what Foster in another context has called 'exclusive dealing', and users of the pub stood in a relationship to publicans which might be described as 'membership.'. In working class culture, then, the pub has historically been a 'local' - a term signifying its patronage by an established local clientele who shaped the internal dynamics, relationships and patterns of drinking.¹⁶⁹

Despite never truly being owned 'in common' monopolisation was nevertheless *experienced* as a kind of primitive accumulation: the *moral claim* of the patrons found that claim supplanted by the legal ownership of the brewers; and behind them - the state and judiciary. Gorham notes that the 'Brewer, bench, publican... all these people for their different reasons, would rather have one modern pub than three old-fashioned ones. We on the other hand would, as a general rule, trade one modern pub for one old-fashioned one, let alone three.'¹⁷⁰ The consequence was sometimes anger, usually melancholy. Gorham writes at mournful length about the transformation of his particular local in London's Berkeley Square:

Then came another change. The shack vanished and the pub reappeared in a new place, as part of the ground floor of the massive new block. Inside it was large and airy and unadorned, outside there was no brewers' sign. It was an unconventional but not a bad pub. But the changes went on. Outside came Neon lights and a signboard showing

¹⁶⁸ Gorham / Dunnett, *Inside the Pub*, p. 12

¹⁶⁹ John Clarke, 'Capital and culture: the post-war working class revisited' in Clarke, Critcher, Johnson (eds.) *Working class culture: studies in history and theory*, Routledge (2007)

¹⁷⁰ Maurice Gorham, *Back to the Local*, p. 9

the two chairmen carrying their sedan chair, but a sedan chair constructed on so novel a principle that not Hercules and Samson could have carried it without spilling its occupant out. The inside too began to sprout; giant beams that rang hollow to the knuckle, medieval doors, Tudor roses on the walls. A little pamphlet appeared, complete with long 'es that looked much more like italic f's, giving the history of the house from the time of Charles II but not going into the little matter of the rebuilding and change of address under George VI. Time heals all things, and after ten years I can look upon the Two Chairmen as quite a nice comfortable Truman house in a convenient spot. But I should not choose to go to it if I could still find the old house standing a little further up the mews.¹⁷¹

Gorham was experiencing what Glenn Albrecht has since defined as solastalgia: the psychic and existential distress triggered by environmental change; the homesickness you feel when you're still at home.¹⁷²

Total Aesthetic Breakdown: Christopher Hutt's *The Death of the English Pub*, (1973)

The 1950s and 1960s have traditionally been considered a moment of significant transformation in British social life, with particular emphasis on the allegedly novel 'embourgeoisement' and 'privatisation' of the working class. As Ian Proctor has summarised, this narrative is usually part of a three-phase analysis which, following E.P Thompson, begins with the 'heroic years' of the early 19th century, developing between 1850 and 1880 into the era of 'essentially collective institutions and values of the traditional working class', before finally succumbing by the 1950s to sectionalism and economism; bringing a halt to the forward march of labour.¹⁷³ Various factors - such as the impact of the Second World War, accommodation to postwar social democracy, and, as we have seen, the impact of new forms of passive leisure - are attributed with eroding the culture of collectivism. Whilst - as Proctor warns - this narrative risks overstating rupture, and simplifying change in a manner which is ahistorical and even polemical in its generalisations - some of the macro trends of the postwar period,

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p. 12-13

¹⁷² Glenn Albrecht, 'Solastalgia: the distress caused by environmental change' *Australas Psychiatry*, 15: 1 (2007), p. 95-8

¹⁷³ Ian Proctor, The Privatisation of Working-Class Life: A Dissenting View, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 41: 2 (1990)

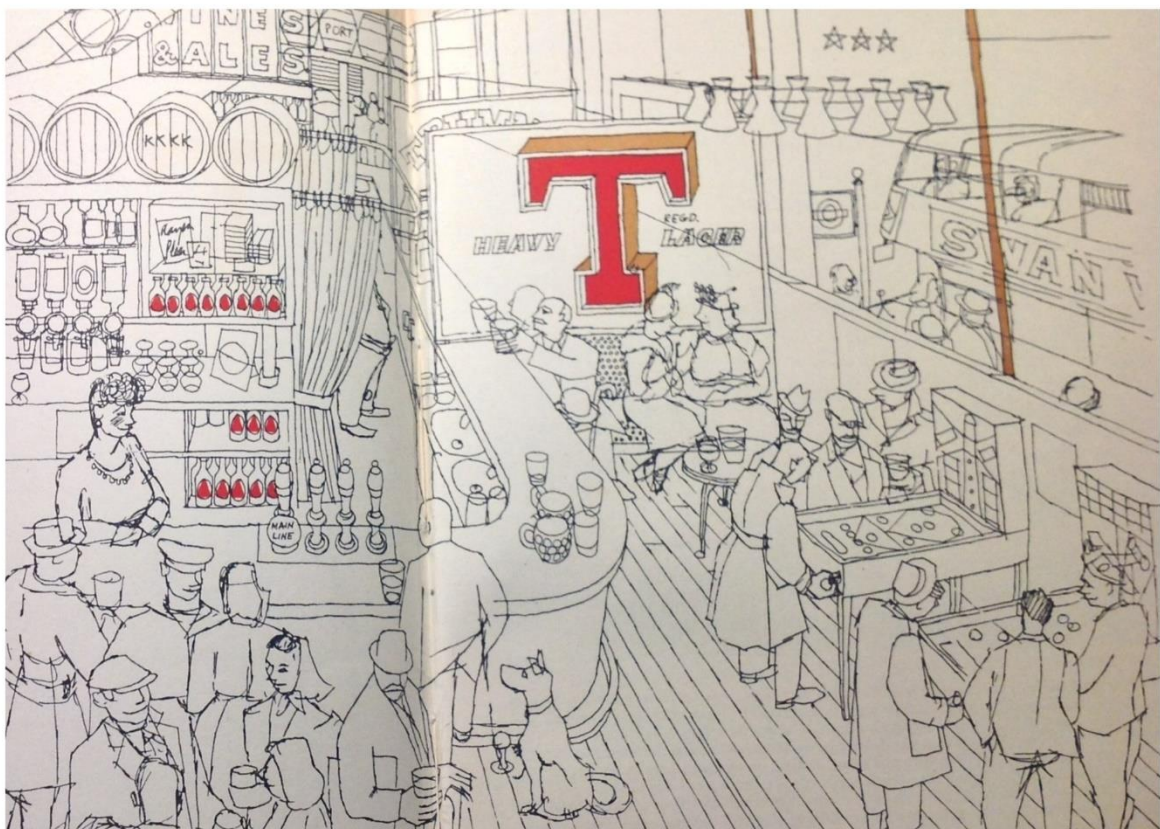
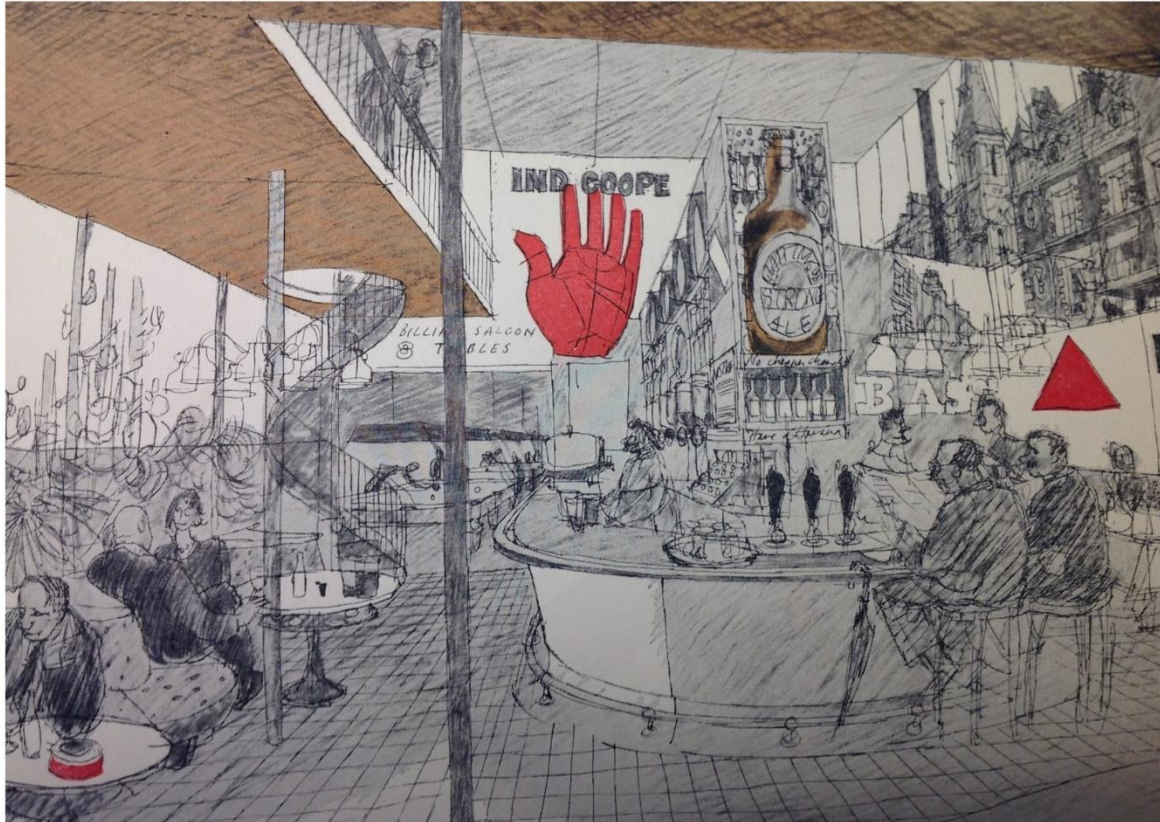


Fig 2.11 – Sketches Detailing a Modernist Pub. [Drawings taken from Dunnett / Gorham, *Inside the Pub*, Architectural Press (1950)]

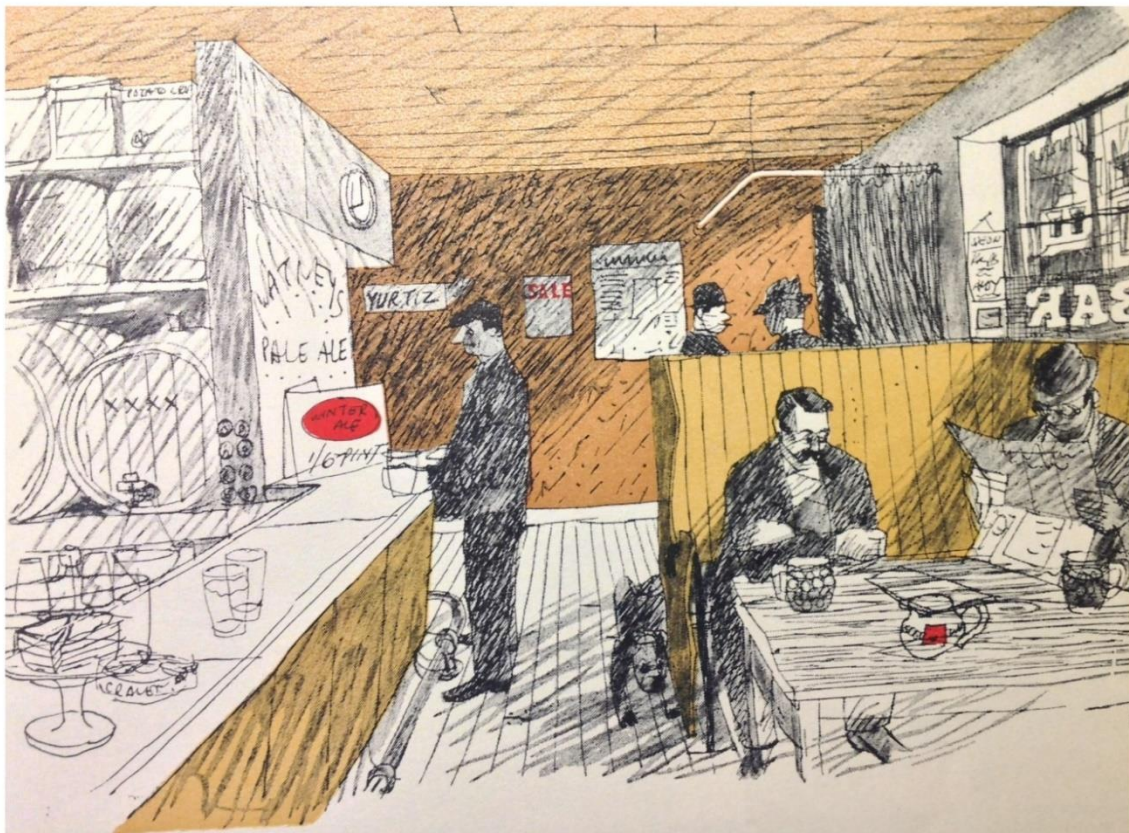
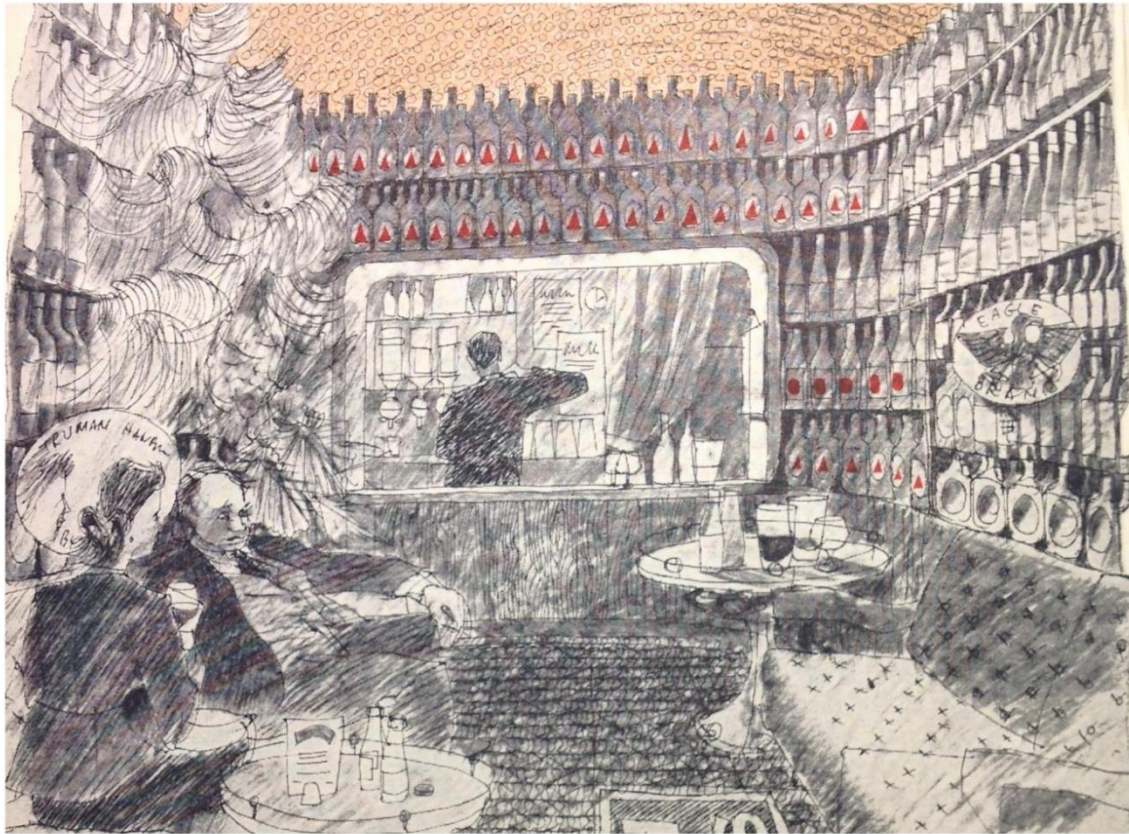


Fig 2.12 –Sketches Detailing A Modernist Pub. [Drawings taken from Dunnett / Gorham, *Inside the Pub*, Architectural Press (1950)]



Fig 2.13 –Attempts to bring modernity into the Pub, and the Pub into modernity. Left: Woman pulls beer from an automated beer dispenser [Copyright: Getty Images] Right: Images of the ‘Tavern Car’ on an evening train from Waterloo station, with brick painted exterior and half-timbered interior, dating from the immediate post-war period. [Tim Dunn, Twitter. Mar 27 2020 Found at: twitter.com/MrTimDunn/status/1243496976055926785, accessed 04/04/2020]

though already apparent in pre-war developments, are borne out in the microhistory of the public house.

In his 1979 survey of the relationship between capitalism and working class culture, John Clarke pointed out how the transformation of pub in the postwar era was conducted

in accordance with an image of a changing clientele identified by the breweries. The new consumer differs from the old in terms of age (s/he is young), class (s/he is classless) and taste (campari not beer). The effect of this attempt to address the new consumer is to fundamentally change the social and economic conditions under which drinking takes place, that is, to change the determinants of a particular historically developed form of reproduction [...] that of the “consumer” rather than the “member”.

Anticipating phenomena which would intensify through the 1980s onwards with the emergence of pseudo-aspirational chain pubs and wine bars, Clarke noted how the advertising of the brewers began to ‘echo political ideologies about the disappearance of traditional class differences and the rise of an affluent, middle class Britain’. Clarke argues that ‘these marketing ideologies and practices attempt to ‘complete the circle’ by producing precisely that affluent middle-class consumer they claim to have already recognized.’¹⁷⁴ In a similar vein, Richard Hoggart, the founder of the Centre For Contemporary Cultural Studies (to which Clarke belonged) tracked the manner in which the social world of the working class he had known in his youth was unravelled in the postwar era by the influence of an enervating (often Americanised) mass culture.¹⁷⁵ The pub is an oblique presence in *The Uses of Literacy*, but the themes and characters it inspired in the 1930s and 40s echo throughout Hoggart’s work. The solitary Frankenstein of Gorham’s pre-war pub survey reappears, now as the fully fledged figure of the 50s ‘juke-box boy’ - haunting the ‘glaring showiness’ of the milk-bar, slouching in the American fashion, occupying his time between nickelodeons and pumping spare change into the Monster.¹⁷⁶ For Hoggart this hollow subjectivity, mimicking the fads of American mass culture, is paralleled in the milk-bar’s ‘total aesthetic breakdown’, offering up a ‘peculiarly thin and pallid form of dissipation, a sort of spiritual dry-rot.’¹⁷⁷ Arguments rehearsed in Mass

¹⁷⁴ John Clarke, ‘Capital and Culture’, p.246

¹⁷⁵ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Penguin (2009) p. 13

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 220-1

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 221

Observation's critique of the new leisure are given full voice in Hoggart's warning that the 'concept of almost unlimited inner freedom' was replacing older notions of collectivism and tolerance, fed 'through increasingly shallow channels... always freedom from, never freedom for; freedom as a good in itself, not merely as the ground for the effort to live by other standards.'¹⁷⁸

For the pub, the leitmotifs of standardisation and commodification, already nascent, would arrive in their most complete form under the moniker of The Big Six: an umbrella term encompassing the major brewers who, between 1959 and 1972, came to produce 82% of domestically consumed beer and own 56% of Britain's pubs. Though something of a misnomer (mergers, rebrands and market movements altered the exact firms which constituted The Six, and excluded other major brewers like Guinness - who did not own pubs and would not produce lager), the dominance of brands like Courage, Whitbread, Watneys, Scottish & Newcastle, Bass Charrington, and Allied rapidly transformed the market, consolidating smaller breweries into vast units capable of mass production and closing those which did not fit the model. The monopoly had far reaching consequences for the experiential geography of Britain. Local breweries, responsive to local tastes and idiosyncratic preferences were bought out, shut down, and replaced with national (often more expensive) products. In turn the new beer was usually 'kegged' rather than cask-conditioned; a 'dead' product which was filtered, pasteurised and lacked 'live' yeast; stored in metal containers and served under gas pressure. To the brewer, keg beer had the advantage of guaranteeing consistency and extending shelf life. Unlike cask beer, it did not rely primarily on the cellarmanship and diligence of the local landlord/lady, required less skill to pour, and was more reliable to produce at economies of scale.

The brewers justified their actions by pointing to the often poor quality of cask-conditioned beer, and to an alleged enthusiasm for their national products over local variants. Yet a consequence was regional resentment that business managers in brewery boardrooms (e.g. London) were imposing their ideas on places they did not necessarily care for or understand, and whose motivations were inevitably shareholder oriented. As the Labour MP of Bristol South, Michael Cocks, argued in parliament in 1971, 'A series of takeovers occurred and in the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 154

end seemed to be dominated not so much by Bristol's interests as by London's interests.¹⁷⁹

Courage, the brewery in question, controlled 47/50 of the local public houses and began to replace Bristol's cheap 'cooking bitter' with their own, more expensive Full Brew, accompanied by an advertising campaign declaring it the 'regular's bitter' whilst the actual regular's drink was replaced. Similar stories were repeated across Britain. The issue was particularly sensitive because of the affective qualities of ale itself - usually produced through a curious fusion of national and local ingredients, with particular areas marked for the quality of their water or hop (famous brewing towns like Burton-on-Trent are renowned for the high sulphate, magnesium and calcium content of its water - lending its beer a dry, sulphurous aroma).

The monopoly brewers attempted to mitigate the conflict through different strategies; either emphasising pseudo-regional roots, or conversely appealing to a national 'British beer'. They also began to market new products, such as lager, by way its cosmopolitan credentials.¹⁸⁰ That this proved an unsatisfactory long-term solution is, following a revival of real ale and local brewing, now obvious. For contemporary writers however, it marked a nadir from which the pub was unlikely to recover. In 1973, Christopher Hutt's *The Death of the English Pub* was published, prophesying that 'if the major brewers are allowed to move with as much freedom and as little accountability in the next ten years as they have for the last ten, then the death of the English pub, which has already happened in many parts of the country, could well be accomplished everywhere.'¹⁸¹ Hutt's text, published at nearly the same time as the foundation of CAMRA (The Campaign for Real Ale) became the go-to activist text for the burgeoning movement. Hutt would later become CAMRA's chairman.

In Hutt's book, the fronts on which the pub are assaulted are manifold even as the cause - the monopoly of The Big Six - is singular: firstly, through the replacement of local, traditional cask ale with the keg beer of the major brewers, second through a general weakening of that beer, thirdly by the replacement of the landlord/lady with salaried managers, fourth through the treatment of the pub as property investment, and finally through the imposition of renovations which either hollowed the space through identikit rationalisation, or renovated into a kind of theme park. The latter incidence saw pubs like Southend's Sutton Arms transform into a bar

¹⁷⁹ Michael Cocks MP, 'Licensing (Abolition Of State Management) Bill' *Hansard*; Volume 815, Apr 20th 1971

¹⁸⁰ Jessica Boak & Ray Bailey, 'Panic on the Streets of Woking: Rise of the Lager Lout', *boakandbailey.com*, Aug 18 2017

¹⁸¹ Christopher Hutt, *The Death of the English Pub*, p. 14

called The Cave Dwellers, sporting imitation stalactites and stalagmites, Hounslow's George IV become The Honeycomb, a bee themed venue where the cash machine could be found inside an imitation hive, and inventions like The Carousel at Letchworth, with fairground décor and a centrepiece carousel, revolving steadily at 'a leisurely 2rpm'.¹⁸² To emphasise the perversity, Hutt quotes Roy Wilson-Smith, a pub designer for Watney Mann, who described his objective, in a surreal twist on the sublime, as giving 'the people who use my houses a rare and primitive relationship with the raw forces of nature. People love to be awed when they enter a pub by a superior natural force - a strange sort of higher masochism'.¹⁸³

As we have seen though, many of the criticisms raised by Hutt's work were not, in fact, unique to the era of Big Six - even if market consolidation exacerbated them. Self-conscious theming had been a feature of the pub since the 19th century, even if it opted for historical pastiche over carousels and honeycombs. When Hutt argues that 'the character of a pub can reside partially in features that are archaic, useless, or simply in the way' he echoes the sentiments of the interwar writer Thomas Burke, just as his following comment that 'these are ripped out and replaced by the modern comforts the brewers are so anxious to provide, and charge for. Luxurious soft furnishings replace the wooden seats, wall-to-wall carpeting covers those worn-out old tiles, the ornate mirror and dart-board make way for a set of tasteful hunting prints' might have been lifted from the postwar comments of Maurice Gorham.¹⁸⁴

The shifting scalar geography of the pub - from local to generic, 'national' institution - did however become more pronounced in this period. The brewer's product du jour, lager, seemed in turn to symbolise foreign encroachment on a British institution.¹⁸⁵ Modernity became expressed not in the earnest guise of interwar improvement, but seemed to mimic in its taste and character abstraction itself. As a report from a taster panel for *Which* noted in April 1972: 'Our tasters thought none smelled very strongly in the glass - none was either unpleasant or very pleasant. As far as taste went, the

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 126

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 122

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 116

¹⁸⁵ Some lager had historically been made in Britain, but it failed to persist as it did in Central Europe. Key lager brewers involved in The Big Six, like Carling and Carlsberg, were foreign companies.



Fig 2.14 – The Angel Inn, Highgate – historicist theming was less of a novelty than many post-war pub commenters appreciated. Top: The Angel Inn, Highgate in 1874 Bottom: The Angel Inn following a historicist remake in 1882 [Copyright: Historic England – via Alexandria Sivak, ‘Using Open Source Software to Protect English Heritage’, *The Iris*, Jan 5 2017. Found at: blogs.getty.edu/iris/using-open-source-software-to-protect-english-heritage, accessed 30/01/2017]

overwhelming impression of our tasters was that none of the key beers have a very characteristic taste.¹⁸⁶ A second issue might be considered under the broad heading of ‘commodification’. Initially, this might appear as a misnomer - the pub, after all, has always been in the business of *selling a commodity*, namely, beer, and even though a much larger pool of local and smaller brewers operated in the market before the Big Six, large breweries with

¹⁸⁶ Christopher Hutt, *The Death of the English Pub*, p. 19

recognisably capitalist relations were nothing novel. Yet Hutt's remarks, as he tries to capture what is being threatened by the processes of the 1960s and 1970s, are instructive:

When you order a pint of beer and hand over your money, you are paying for a complicated package deal. As well as the beer in your glass, the deal includes the barmaid's smile, or the landlord's bonhomie, the opportunity to... have a game of darts, the chance either to find a corner to chat with friends or stand at the bar and meet a stranger to the pub. In other words to enjoy the intangible but crucial feeling which is called atmosphere.¹⁸⁷

In Hutt's account, the pub is not, in fact, really a site of commodity exchange. Though this certainly takes place - 'a pint of beer and hand over your money', it is a surface purpose, even an excuse, for a plethora of other experiences which are much harder to quantify and cannot in themselves be treated as pure commodities. This 'extra' is what defines the pub's character, and is again attributed to the classic notion of 'atmosphere' - the thing which is collectively produced between space and all parties within it. The pub's atmosphere might be framed by its architectural devices, consciously or unconsciously, but it is socially produced.

Commodification therefore takes place not where commodities are exchanged, but rather, when these social relations are themselves reduced to buyer-seller transactions. As Jeremy Gilbert suggests, the result of commodification 'is a kind of flattening out of social and cultural experience whereby we are able to choose from a vast range of possible lifestyle- elements and experiences (different drinks, different designs), but the nature of our relationships to all of those things will be identical.'¹⁸⁸

If the landlord had hitherto been replaced with the manager as part of the temperance push towards 'disinterested' service, escalation of the practice under the Big Six had more to do with commodification:

The manager can be told what items to stock, while the tenant is freer to order the products his customers demand, and serve them in the way they like. The tenant furnishes his own pub, while the managed house is kitted out in fabrics and designs

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 13

¹⁸⁸ Jeremy Gilbert, *Anticapitalism and Culture: Radical Theory and Popular Politics*, Berg (2008), p. 116

bought in bulk and repeated in pubs in dozens of towns. More and more small breweries are taken over each year. Local beers are discontinued and replaced with tasteless national brands. There are so many ways in which the trend to standardisation in our pubs expresses itself ... Standardisation means, of course, the elimination of choice and is the enemy of the distinctive but infinitely variable atmosphere that is the hallmark of the really good pub. As the major brewers have increased in size, they have become less accountable to the public it is their job to serve.¹⁸⁹

Choice, and control over choice, was therefore limited at the level of the commodity; but it was also being limited at the level of experience - the 'infinitely variable atmosphere' was standardised too, as was the relationship between patron and landlord, recast as one between consumer and manager. In the process, the landlord/lady's autonomy was lost, and their trade was deprofessionalised: with the introduction of keg beer, 'the landlord's skill in keeping his beer engines in good repair, in keeping his pipes clean, became redundant overnight.'¹⁹⁰

The extent to which the pub building itself was made to conform to the new order could be extreme. Brewers like Watney Mann and Bass Charrington started colour-branding their pubs, painting 'broad strips of pillar-box red over the doors and windows', and in acts of literal symbolism, replaced the traditional hanging sign with white lettering spelling the name of the brewer. According to Hutt,

In one Truman pub, the red and orange stripes on a green background that combine in their new insignia reach from first-floor to gutter level on the side of a three-storey building forming a permanent lurid rainbow ... each pub that belongs to the major brewers will become just as much a branch of head office in appearance as a Tesco supermarket or the local Barclays bank.¹⁹¹

The palette of the pub could be changed in other ways, as designers experimented in variations on the classic ochre, such as this 1960s Wilson's Brewery pub:

¹⁸⁹ Christopher Hutt, *The Death of the English Pub*, p. 14

¹⁹⁰ Arthur Millard, cited in Christopher Hutt, *The Death of the English Pub*, p. 26

¹⁹¹ Ibid, p. 122



Fig 2.15 – The 1960s saw dramatic Experiments with pub colour schemes. [*1960s Wilson's Brewery Calendar* – via Jessica Boak & Ray Bailey, 'What Colour Should a Pub Be?' *Boak and Bailey Beer Blog*, Oct 5 2016, found at: boakandbailey.com/2016/10/what-colour-should-a-pub-be, accessed 05/10/2016]

The pub building not only took on the appearance of a commodity, but was itself becoming one as Brewers realised that the property value of pub venues had been consistently undervalued. Thus whereas the brewers of the Victorian era had competed against each other to produce ever more elaborate architectural spectacles with which to attract custom, the brewers of the mid-20th century competed to close, redevelop, and asset strip the vulnerable buildings in their possession - a feature of the pub's crisis which has re-emerged in the 21st.¹⁹²

Threatened with estate agents, painted with bright brand colours, denuded of its traditional signs, its partition walls, its tenant governor, covered with kitsch memorabilia, operated on by corporate designers; divested of its beer pumps and the ale casks attached to them, transformed into honeycombs, galleons, and spaceships, rationalised by modernity; pumped with piped music and alienated managers: the experiments of the 1960s seemed to build on the legacy of pub improvement and expand it not in the service of moral reform but financial gain. In so doing it laid the foundation for what would follow throughout the rest of the century. For

¹⁹² Greg Mulholland, 'Pub Company Business Models', *Hansard*; Column 570, Oct 14 2013

though The Big Six would not survive the reform of the coming Beer Orders, the PubCos which replaced them would prove as guilty in their approach to public house design.

The New Vulgarly: George Williamson's *Beware the Barmaid's Smile*, (1987)

George Williamson hid all his significant writing behind aliases. In 1976 he published, as 'James Finlayson', a small pamphlet called *Urban Devastation* protesting the alienated urban forms which accompanied post-war urban planning. Eleven years later he published a second, *Beware the Barmaid's Smile: The New Vulgarly in Our Pub Culture*, under the moniker of Chris Thompson, taking aim at the pub culture developing throughout the 1980s.¹⁹³

Williamson was born outside Glasgow in the town of Hamilton, but had moved to London in the early 1960s to become an apprentice architect. Initially, he was drawn into political activity through the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, but quickly became disillusioned with the environment operating in CND at the time, in which the bureaucratic politics of Labour party resolutions and sectarian arguments amongst Trotskyist sects over the merits of the Soviet 'worker's bomb' predominated.¹⁹⁴ By contrast, the anarchist wing of the anti-nuclear movement, with its emphasis on direct action, appealed to Williamson, and he left CND for the 'Committee of 100' - a new organisation headed by the anti-nuclear philosopher Bertrand Russell and committed to more physically disruptive forms of political action.¹⁹⁵ After two years Williamson moved back to Glasgow where he found his political home in the small libertarian socialist organisation, Solidarity.

By the time of *Beware the Barmaid's Smile*, Solidarity had collapsed, and the political context for groups like it had been radically altered by the ascent of Thatcherism. The keen sense felt by radical left activists in the 1970s - that they were the inheritors of a future beyond an apparently ailing and moribund capitalism - was replaced by what Stuart Hall called 'The Great Moving Right Show', sweeping away the left's horizon of possibility, and heralding an era

¹⁹³ James Finlayson, 'Urban Devastation', *Solidarity* (1976) - currently available at: libcom.org/library/urban-devastation-planning-incarceration/ / Chris Thompson, *Beware the Barmaid's Smile! The New Vulgarly in Our Pub Culture*, Pleasure Tendency (1987), republished by Pelagian (1990)

¹⁹⁴ Recollections of George Williamson, 'From Committee of 100 to Glasgow Solidarity' letter responding to John Quail - currently available at: [scribd.com/document/143926898/From-Committee-of-100-to-Glasgow-Solidarity](https://www.scribd.com/document/143926898/From-Committee-of-100-to-Glasgow-Solidarity)

¹⁹⁵ Ibid

in which modernity appeared captured by the political right.¹⁹⁶ This shifting context, a difference of eleven years, seems to have had a decisive effect on Williamson's politics. For whereas *Urban Devastation* is expansive in its ambition to produce a kind of unified theory of the city through history, *Barmaid's Smile* is a narrower, more nostalgic document, concerned only with the fate of the pub itself. Though both mourned the wrecking ball, whether it was aimed at the 'comprehensible' logic of the Victorian street, or the traditional pub with its 'centuries-old role of the landlord and landlady' and 'natural... social mix', by the time of *Barmaid's Smile*, Williamson was unable to look beyond it.¹⁹⁷

In many respects *Barmaid's Smile* is a conscious repetition of the themes which underpinned Hutt's more famous *The Death of the English Pub* fourteen years before: the brewers are 'continuing to abdicate their responsibilities as custodians and protectors of this heritage, by their renewed assaults on the fabric and social life of the pub.'¹⁹⁸ The theme pub, and variations like the café bar are denounced in a familiar fashion: attacking the 'veneer of cleanliness and modernity, masquerading as "contemporary style", and the theatrical back-drops which are 'removed like props, when the current theme show is over', 'as transient as the butterfly culture which alights on them.'¹⁹⁹

The novelty of Williamson's intervention can instead be found in the way it updated the themes of Hutt's book by drawing attention to the influence of marketing strategies over the behaviour of large breweries. He noted how a technique known variously as customer placing / segmented marketing / niche marketing began to be adopted by brewers who looked to target products at specific consumer demographics, rather than continue to accommodate spaces which catered to 'healthy spontaneous diversity and differentiation'.²⁰⁰ The pub would thus become a fragmented rather than cohesive institution – aesthetically contrived to appeal to specific ages, classes and genders; producing a homogeneity of clientele in environments engineered specifically to them. Coupled to this strategy was a furthering of commodification: the guaranteeing of 'packaged' experiences where the staff are 'programmed by training

¹⁹⁶ Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', *Marxism Today*, Jan 1979 / e.g. Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies*, Faber (2009) p. 233

¹⁹⁷ James Finlayson, 'Urban Devastation' / *Barmaid's Smile*, p. 11

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 1

¹⁹⁹ Chris Thompson, *Barmaid's Smile* p. 4

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 10

manuals'²⁰¹. The eponymous 'barmaid's smile' was one such example: 'dreamed up by "appearance technicians"' producing 'dishonest relationships between customers and staff – a one-sided manipulation by the brewery sponsored actor/puppets.'²⁰² The net outcome was what Williamson called 'psychic privatisation': the consumer perceives their identity only through 'consumption as a fetish...whose only reason for being born is to buy'. The freedom to choose an off-the-rack identity based on set consumer archetypes; but an archetype which in turn alienates and delineates your subjectivity from others.²⁰³ Spatial segmentation followed market segmentation, creating a feedback loop where social identity simply reconfirmed its own suppositions at the door.

Secondly, and connected to these marketing strategies, was the awareness of a new threat to cask ale. Whereas Hutt's work was concerned primarily with the replacement of cask by keg, Williamson focused instead on the emergence of lager as a consequence of globalised commodity exports penetrating the domestic market. According to Williamson, the presence of lager brought with it a 'lager culture' marketed as a product of youthful conformity, 'uniformly banal in taste and texture, and brewed as a lowest common denominator bulk product'.²⁰⁴ The dominance of the streamlined lager product, aimed primarily at the youth market, in turn threatened the 'intergenerational pub mixing with its healthy and necessary influence of adults over youths', and the co-habiting of 'different social, cultural and interest groups' within the pub.²⁰⁵ The well-worn trend of 'modernising' with open-plan layouts reinforced the effect – discouraging the presence of separate social groups, e.g traditional regulars attracted to distinct territories within the pub, instead enforcing a uniform experience targeted at a singular demographic.²⁰⁶

Williamson's intervention also represented a more explicit politicisation of the pub pamphlet. If Hutt's book had become a kind of CAMRA gospel, Williamson's text took aim at CAMRA itself – noting how its narrow focus on 'real ale (rather than real life)' simply allowed brewers to

²⁰¹ Ibid, p. 12

²⁰² Ibid, p. 12

²⁰³ Ibid, p. 11

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 7

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 5

²⁰⁶ Tony Thornton, *Brewers, Brands and the Pub in Their Hands*, Troubador (2014) p. 26 - As we have seen, this 'traditional' layout, was in fact far more complicated; with prevailing class divisions and a sometimes spurious claim to collectivity.

appropriate real ale for their own ends – ‘yuppify[ing] certain London pubs under the banner of “traditional cask ales”’:

Unpalatable and unfashionable as it seems today, the Campaign [CAMRA] will have to separate itself from the general flight from politics. No Longer a ‘consumer’s watchdog’ in the market place it will have to start challenging the very nature of the market itself.²⁰⁷

Yet there are troubling ambiguities in how the politics of *Barmaid’s Smile* are framed. Williamson’s hostility to the producers of the ‘new vulgarity’ often bleeds into his analysis of its consumers. *Barmaid’s Smile* most mainstream success was to introduce the phrase ‘lager lout’ into popular currency, and a contemptuous attitude towards the denizens of the new nightlife economy punctuates the text: ‘Lager is candle to the moth for these people. It lubricates the louts as they lurch to the football ground for a punch-up. It bleaches the floor when it is thrown up on the continental holiday disco night.’²⁰⁸

The late 1980s and 1990s would see Williamson’s ‘lager lout’ theme popularised in the British media. As Plant and Plant observe this entailed ‘intoxicated young men whose aggressive behaviour, both at home and abroad, became a symbol of unsavoury behaviour and national shame.’²⁰⁹ Through this revival 18th and 19th century motifs – in which the ‘drink problem’ was held inseparably to the moral shame of the lower orders – Williamson’s pamphlet resurrected the Victorian spectre of the pub-as-crisis, and married it to the discourse of the pub-in-crisis. Where Williamson’s earlier *Urban Devastation* contextualised its analysis through recourse to a Marxist materialism, *Barmaid’s Smile* saw this abandoned in place of an awkwardly individualised discourse without critical distance from its deployment in the conservative press.

As Measham and Brain note however, the figure of ‘the lager lout’, or rather the new nightlife consumer, is inseparable from the changing material basis of the 1980s economy and the transition to ‘post-industrial’ society, eroding:

²⁰⁷ Chris Thompson, *Barmaid’s Smile*, p. 21

²⁰⁸ Ibid p. 8

²⁰⁹ Plant & Plant, *Binge Britain: Alcohol and the National Response*, Oxford University Press (2006), p. 23

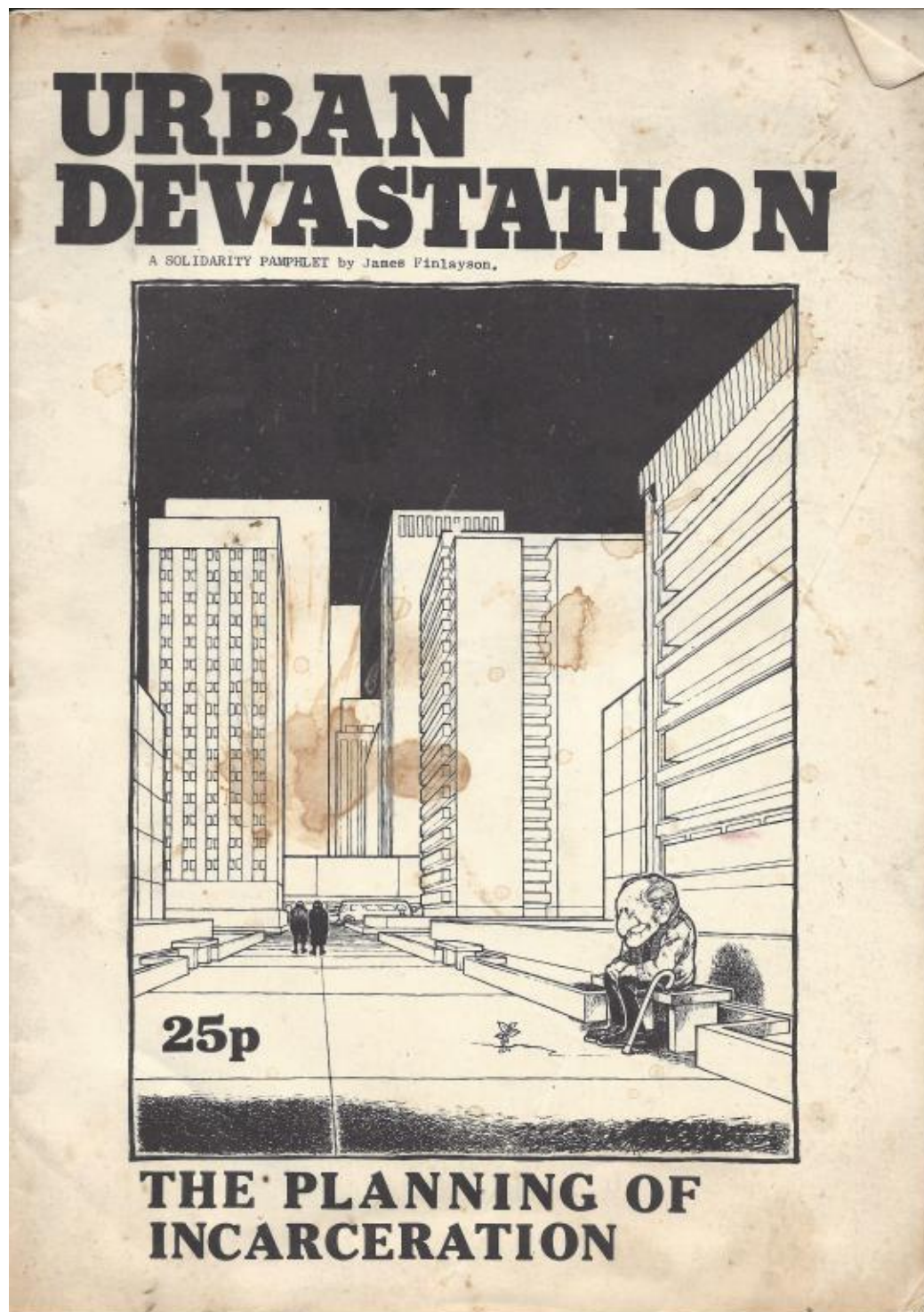


Fig 2.16 – Pamphlet Cover of Urban Devastation, by George Williamson [George Williamson, ‘Urban Devastation’, Solidarity (1976) via libcom.org/library/urban-devastation-planning-incarceration, accessed 02/02/2018]

traditional structuring sources of identity that the industrial system of modernity provided, rooted in occupational stability, class-based communities, patriarchal nuclear family structures and an interventionist welfare state. In such circumstances society becomes increasingly fragmented and individualized. Collective sources of identity fade and are replaced by identities formed in the market, particularly the sphere of consumption.²¹⁰

Williamson's text further establishes a relationship between the particular spatiality of the consumer pub and the embodiment of the 'lager lout' figure:

How ironic that when these hooligans are being caged and corralled on the football terraces, the boot-boys of the brewery board rooms are creating large open spaces in their young persons' "venues", which are ready made stages for aggressive, arrogant and violent behaviour. They lack both social policing because there are no mature adult influences, and physical policing, since there are no individual rooms to split up large groups.²¹¹

In an inversion of the logic of the early 20th century temperance reformer, the rationalised open-plan, with its greater capacity for supervision from the watchtower of the bar, is presented by Williamson as a driver of odious behaviour. Thurnell-Read has noted how depictions of masculinity and drink in this period revolved around the antinomy of two forms of embodiment - that of the lager lout 'typified by an explosive lack of bodily control manifest in physical aggression' and the ale drinker who 'exhibit[s] a slow decline and is subjected to parody and social disapproval for perceived indifference to performing culturally dominant ideas of masculine embodiment.'²¹² Their respective spatiality mirrors Williamson's critique - the rational plan, with clean thoroughfares to the wide, extended bar, a maximising of available floor space, bright lighting, and the playing of music - accelerates turnover and discourages sedentary behaviour through an ambience of collective and constant energy. It is in this sense a space directed to the fluid circulation of consumption; usually part of an urban planning trend towards 'districting' the nightlife economy and the advent the concept of the drinking 'crawl'

²¹⁰ Measham and Brain, "Binge' drinking, British alcohol policy and the new culture of intoxication', *Crime, Media, Culture*; Vol 1: 3 (2005), p. 275

²¹¹ Chris Thompson, *Barmaid's Smile*, p. 8

²¹² Thomas Thurnell-Read, "Yobs' and 'Snobs': Embodying Drink and the Problematic Male Drinking Body', *Sociological Research Online*, Vol. 18: 2, (2013) 1–10

from one venue to the next. Thurnell-Read notes how this distinct spatiality came to be represented:

The lager lout is generally seen on the public street, literally spilling out of one drinking den into the next one and, all the while, representing the potential for disorder and the transgression of propriety. The ale drinker is alternatively generally located in the semi-public space of the pub.²¹³

At stake in Williamson's critique is the desire to re-establish the pub space as one of normative masculinity, with its emphasis on '[t]he idealised male drinking body... that freely consumes alcohol, in doing so, demonstrates restraint and control in relation to the potential detrimental effects of drunkenness on bodily composure.'²¹⁴ What distinguishes the 'lager lout' from his antecedents is exactly their disavowal of restraint; yet this cannot be separated from the conditions which made such restraint a desirable quality: without it, the critique is reduced to moralism and contempt. That this opportunity is lost is only made all the more apparent by its recognition elsewhere in the text; '[t]he ongoing disappearance of those who were historically the large consumers of cask ale, drunk copiously as a reward for hard manual work; the industrial male workers in the shipyards, steelworks, docks and mines.'²¹⁵

This leads to the second ambivalence in the politics of *Barmaid's Smile*. Despite the caveats which are raised in the text, that 'the male chauvinist and racist elements [be] removed from pub culture', and that 'advertising has exploited this chauvinism to reinforce the rejection [of ale by women]', the argumentative logic of the text at times undercuts these gestures.²¹⁶ First Williamson establishes that 'women are now a major influence on what drinks are on offer in the pub', seen as a lucrative target market to be appealed to through a 'spurious US and continental "cafe bar scene" with drinks thought to be acceptable to women'.²¹⁷ He then notes how this drove 'a major rethink of the breweries' strategy and [that] the long term casualties will be the male associated cask beers and the male dominated traditional pub, both with their older and past generation overtones.'²¹⁸ The consequence is that the new drinking spaces

²¹³ Ibid

²¹⁴ Ibid

²¹⁵ Chris Thompson, *Barmaid's Smile*, p. 5

²¹⁶ Ibid, p. 13

²¹⁷ Ibid, p. 6

²¹⁸ Ibid, p. 6

‘specifically aimed at and styled in a way *it is assumed* that women want them’ are now ‘one of the main weapons in the deliberate assault on cask ale and pub culture.’²¹⁹ Williamson’s appeal is primarily that the failure of pub culture to adopt ‘extend toleration’ to women and other races not be used to discredit the pub as a whole, allowing the new capitalists of the night time economy to present themselves as a ‘modernising influence’ which ‘slic[es] through the divisions of the past with the divisions of the present’.²²⁰ Yet Williamson’s argument is predicated on its own dubious assumption that women either did not know what they wanted or were simply manipulated in believing what they wanted through advertising. As Jeremy Gilbert has argued, this is a feature of left-wing critiques of the emergence of neoliberalism which refuse to account for the way the ‘traditional working class culture’ of the left was broken from within as much from without through a failure to evolve restrictive attitudes and assumptions - especially towards women.²²¹

Williamson’s background was implicated in exactly this political failure. As he would reflect in an interview before his death in 2007, Solidarity were ‘pretty male sexist in... political organisation and way of life’ and the only female members of the Glasgow faction were housewives of male members.²²² In 1979 Williamson and five other male members of Solidarity wrote a scathing response to an attempt to edit the organisation’s founding document *As We See It* in accordance with the aims of the Women’s Movement, which had flourished in the 1970s. Based on the response, this included an innocuous call for ‘consciousness raising groups’ and a recognition of the politics of ‘sex role conditioning’, but was sufficient to open up a fault-line of tension. In a letter unsympathetically titled ‘Solidarity and the Swamp: Up to Our Eyes and Sinking’, the six denounced consciousness raising as a response to ‘the sense of exclusion suffered by radical intellectuals who find themselves deprived of any social anchorage and so attempt to construct an artificial identity by using the group as a crutch’.²²³ In refutation of the feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’, Williamson et al. retorted that there was a ‘crucial distinction between what is personal and what is social and public’ and that ‘consciousness... is both a component and a product of social (and not personal) relations

²¹⁹ Ibid, p. 6

²²⁰ Ibid, p. 21

²²¹ Jeremy Gilbert, ‘Why Did Working Class Culture Disintegrate in the 1980s?’ *openDemocracy*, Apr 18 2016

²²² George Williamson, ‘From Committee of 100 to Glasgow Solidarity’

²²³ ‘Solidarity and the Swamp: Up To Our Eyes and Sinking (Class and Consciousness)’ currently available at: forworkerspower.wordpress.com/tag/george-williamson/

which can be understood in class terms.²²⁴ A dogmatic position which contributed to the group's collapse.

The fate of Solidarity was a microcosm of a broader failure within the political left to accommodate the energies of the women's movement and with it a vision for a progressive modernity. If there was a belated awareness in *Barmaid's Smile* that the traditional pub would be caught in the backlash of that failure – as itself a retrograde institution of small-minded masculinity – it simply opened up a new front in its contempt for the youthful lager drinker and the CAMRA member.²²⁵ Equally, without any optimistic blueprint for what the contemporary pub might achieve – beyond a simple formula of the old pub minus the bigotry – the political force of *Barmaid's Smile* would be blunted. In the meantime, the market moved again. The type of institution Williamson was writing about – café bars like Muswells, Henrys and Drummonds – shortly disappeared, and the syllables which had been hewn off traditional pub names in an attempt to make them appear fresh ('Kings', 'Palms', 'Flints', 'Brooks') were restored.²²⁶ As the Beer Orders of the 1990s broke the pub tie between brewery and outlet, a new generation of Pub Companies bought up pub sites and ran them like retail outfits. In the vacuum left by the demise of the 1980s neo-pub, companies like JD Wetherspoon started to expand; carefully positioning themselves between both the old real ale drinker market and the contemporary lager drinker; a balance reflected in an aesthetic which merged elements of the neo-pub with a pastiche of the traditional. Its rise will be documented in the following chapter.

Conclusion

It should be clear from these accounts (by Burke, Brown, and Mass Observation, Gorham, Dunnett, Hutt and Williamson) that the genre of pub criticism which persisted through the 20th century was about far more than the pub itself. The moral tenor of the 19th century, with its top-down depiction of the *pub-as-crisis*, gave way to the more valedictory representation of the *pub-in-crisis*. Yet both portraits shared the assumption that the state of the pub reflected the state of society. Fixing it was a form of national absolution.

²²⁴ Ibid

²²⁵ Also see: Valerie Vey, *Patriarchy & Pub Culture*, Tavistock (1986)

²²⁶ Tony Thornton, *Brewers and Brands*, p. 25

The documentary history of these pamphlets demonstrates that this was not merely an affected romanticism. For every earnest evocation of Hilaire Belloc's refrain that 'when you have lost your Inns drown your empty selves, for you will have lost the last of England'²²⁷ there has been an account drawn from intimate affection without recourse to nationalist pieties. The picture which emerges is instead of a fundamentally ambivalent institution, on the one hand informed and legitimised by tradition, characterised - even defined - as a space of autonomy; on the other, tied and co-opted into capitalist imperatives which demand a response to 'new conditions' and profitable extraction. These imperatives have cut both ways; sometimes favouring (or at least accommodating) the interests of patrons over moral elites, at other times eroding autonomy and instrumentalizing space in the economic interests of those who monopolise it. This dynamic accounts for pub's novel air of crisis: always, like the other old institutions, in the process of dying, yet perpetually being reborn by the desire to harvest its residual cultural capital. This contradiction animates the history of the pub pamphlet, allowing it to reiterate claims of the pub's imminent extinction, and yet, paradoxically, to do so every decade. The pub is in this sense an architectural fulcrum in which the residual and the emergent are forced together and required to make sense of one another; and as such serves as an almost irresistible prism through which broader anxieties - about modernity, capitalism and the direction of society - are articulated.

These anxieties arrived in a number of specific forms. Top-down designs supplanted the haphazard, incremental pub space, either rationalising it or subjecting it to marketable kitsch fantasies: the pub became as product rather than process. In a linked fashion, the pub patron became the pub customer with a correspondent attrition of entitlement to the space itself. Open plan formats democratised access but undercut social relations, particularly the paradoxical authority of the vault / taproom. Meanwhile, pub landlords were swapped for pub managers. economisation dictated which pubs remained opened, which closed, and the manner in which new ones were built. National or imported products encroached upon local preferences. The net result was a pub as an institution denuded of its specificity, living on as a parodic semblance of its own symbolic meaning.

²²⁷ Hilaire Belloc, *This and That and the Other*, Methuen (1912) - Belloc's line can be found prefacing many accounts of the public house, especially those which tend towards the more nationalistic and mythologised spectrum of pub writing.

Yet in many respects there is reason to doubt the totality of this crisis narrative. Pub numbers may never have recovered from their high point in the late 19th century, but enough ‘true pubs’ survived that each generation could find them, if only to use as a measure against which they judged the rest. The number and variety of breweries, ales, and local products has, in the past decade, come full circle. Market-led reforms may have disrupted the old spatial order, but also brought an element of accessibility - especially for women - who were hitherto confined to the parlour or lounge. Even the contemporary ‘mega-pub’ has its ironic echoes with the pub of interwar improvement, and even as the earlier gin palace. Circularity seems more of a governing pattern than secular decline. It is the manner, language, and motivation for change, rather than the changes themselves which mark the major shift.

Of the ‘true pub’ itself, some constituent features persist. First, is the sense of being to one side of modernity: the ‘true pub’ has an ambiguous age, aided by vernacular materials and weathered appearance; irrational in development, rooted in its place. As Burke put it,

The spine and essence of the English public-house have rested in its variety and whimsical difference. Every house has something special to itself in its character and atmosphere. In different localities they are built of local material [...] You can take your refreshment among the architectural and furnishing styles of seven or eight different ages.²²⁸

This passage is also testament to a second feature: temporality. The ‘true pub’ forms a link between the present and past. An atmosphere conducive to slowness is the expectation. At the conclusion to Gorham’s book he recounts idling by the river, noting the soothing sluggish water and the way the slow tempo of the river traffic ‘conduces to the leisurely enjoyment of drink’, only to be spoilt by the modern motor-boat ‘when they go scooting and puffing up and down.’ ‘[A]t least there are no motor-cars’ he reasons, before sitting at the balcony of a down-river pub at slack tide to watch the rowing-boats; and ponder whether he is enjoying the same tranquility ‘our fathers must have enjoyed when they sat in the shade outside a roadside pub in the country, and the slow transit of an occasional cart became an event to watch with fascination and celebrate at its conclusion with another drink.’²²⁹ The pub’s aesthetic - sombre colours, soft

²²⁸ *Birmingham Mail*, Aug 2 1943

²²⁹ Gorham, *Return to the Local*, p. 66

materials, warm lighting, informal seating - cater to a bodily hexis of slowness; so too the slow-drinking qualities of bitter 'session' ale.

Third is a sense of mystery, heightened either by recourse to refractive glass, idiosyncratic bric-a-brac, and acoustic divisions in which atmosphere is collectively experienced but not necessarily seen. All of which is reinforced through a representational history of folk myth and legend; catering to Gorham's requirement that a good pub ought to feel like 'something intriguing [is] just round the corner'.

Finally, is something which might unsatisfactorily be termed Englishness. This is the perhaps the single commonest refrain which surrounds the pub and also the most tenuous. Yet if we place to one side exact national boundaries and instead understand the pub as a place where drinkers might enter into a networked relationship with the 'imagined community' of the nation it can hold more credence. 'The pub' is a national universal realised and experienced through the local and particular: something bound up in exactly 'the pub's' multiple meanings - as a specific local, a noun-acting-as-verb, and a generic catch-all signifier. Its geography is a distributed network which at once anchors nearly every settlement, and stitches together the variegated links between them. Likewise, it is conceived as a place where social distinctions ought, in theory, be put to aside; and where a patron meets his compatriots in a gesture of good fellowship. Sociopetal layouts and customary obligations reinforce such expectations, even as quirks like classed and gendered layouts undermine them.

This chapter has explored how the symbolic structure of the pub was developed through the 20th century by a tradition of writing which has defined it through its relationship to crisis. In turn it has sought to show how the pub is enmeshed in discourses more extensive than anything which might be imagined from a modest architecture of everyday life. In transforming the pub, an intervention is being implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, made in this field, with ramifications both for the pub's political representation, and the politics of the daily experiences it confers. It is to these contemporary transformations that the thesis now turns.

Chapter 3

Proverbial Authenticity:

J D Wetherspoon & the Politics of a Simulacrum

Chapter Abstract

This chapter explores the case of J D Wetherspoon, a ‘top down’ reinvention of the public house which has expanded across Britain and Ireland since the late 1970s. It investigates how the chain emerged in the context of the same socioeconomic trends which underpinned the Thatcherite era in British politics and considers the ambivalences which resulted from these origins. By resonating with a shift towards ‘aspirational consumption’ and ‘ordinariness’ – as well as accommodating a backlash against the homogenised products of the monopolised brewing industry – Wetherspoons has become a paradoxically ‘popular’ institution of social life: a corporate chain capable of marshalling grassroots support from across the political spectrum. Yet it is argued such popularity operates within a limited frame: in the words of Stuart Hall, ‘*about and bought by but not produced by, or committed to the cause of the popular classes.*’²³⁰ This ambivalence runs through the brand’s architecture; in its pastiche of the traditional pub environment, its layout, acoustics, and temporality, and its attenuation of the pub’s customary norms. Likewise, analysis of its impact in the local urban fabric, suggest the manner in which Wetherspoons undercuts the traditional pubs it imitates, altering the geography of social life in the process. Its popularity should therefore be qualified by a sense of its experiential limits, and its broader impact on an ecology of social life in which the constituent features of the British pub (discussed in chapter 2) can prosper.

Overview

J D Wetherspoon is a chain of pubs based in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. It is famous for its vast venues, cheap prices, extensive choice of drinks and accessibility to families and non-typical pub goers. As of 2019 the company runs an estate with

²³⁰ Stuart Hall, ‘Popular Culture and the State’, in Aradhana Sharma (ed.) *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, Wiley-Blackwell (2006), p. 370-371

over 900 outlets, with a branch in most urban conurbations.²³¹ It is the largest single-brand pub retailer in Britain, and in its quiet, ordinary way, perhaps no other institution has such an extensive claim to changing the fabric of everyday life in Britain since its inception in 1979. Wetherspoons is a household name, with a symbolic significance reaching well beyond other brands of its kind. When the satirical news website *The Daily Mash* runs its regular spoof articles about the pub chain, the joke is recognisable even to those who have never set foot inside. Their headlines irreverently illustrate the paradoxes which surround J D Wetherspoons' popular image: 'Wetherspoons impossible to Boycott', 'Wetherspoons to open in A&E', 'Wetherspoons to open human zoo', 'Rich Kids of Wetherspoons', 'Middle Class Woman Trying To Condemn Wetherspoons Without Using the Word "Common"', 'Grey-haired, dead-eyed morning Wetherspoons drinker only 28'.²³² It is an exploration of these paradoxes which drive the chapter which follows.

Until the early 1990s Wetherspoons remained clustered in and around Greater London. At that time, the pubs of the capital had been particularly susceptible to control from major brewers, whose effective monopoly put a stranglehold on the industry. The result had been that the variety and quality of beer available in their many tied pubs was poor. Such was the extent of this arrangement that even with only seven or eight pubs to its name in the early years, Wetherspoons could still claim to represent one of the largest freeholds in the city. In CEO Tim Martin's account of the company's rise, it was this fact which gave Wetherspoons a unique commercial angle, by 'providing real ale from regional brewers, family brewers around the country in a London pub chain'.²³³ Paradoxically for an emerging leviathan, it was in attending to a shift in the sensibility of consumers - away from modernised mass production brewing and towards a product (real ale) expressive of the local and particular - that the company, in part, built its success. Its first site - known as 'Marler's Bar', in London's Muswell Hill (a respectable and, in the late 1970s, modestly bohemian suburb of North London) specialised in offering 'exotic' beers 'that you really did not see elsewhere... in London generally'.²³⁴ This principle underpinned the formula of each new outlet.

²³¹ J D Wetherspoons, 'Our History', accessed Feb 3 2019, at: jdwerspoons.com/about-us/our-history

²³² Various. *The Daily Mash* (thedailymash.co.uk), 12 Oct 2017, 31 Mar 2017, 01 Sep 2010

²³³ 'Interview with Tim Martin' *propel.info*, 24 Nov 2014 (youtube.com/watch?v=i8d9NcS3VGc; accessed 04/17)

²³⁴ Keith Flett, 'The first Wetherspoons (Marlers bar): a research note' (kmflett.wordpress.com/2016/04/25/the-first-wetherspoons-marlers-bar-a-research-note) & Boak & Bailey, *20th Century Pub*, p.180

INTRODUCING.

J.J. MOON'S

FREE HOUSE & COCKTAIL BAR

LANDSEER ROAD, HOLLOWAY, LONDON N.19

(ESTABLISHED JUNE 1982)

TRADITIONAL ALES

FROM ADNAMS, ARKELLS, BELHAVEN,
GODSONS, GREENE KING, SHEPHERD NEAME,
TIMOTHY TAYLOR, TISBURY, WADSWORTHS
& MANY OTHERS.

PLUS

A WIDE RANGE OF EXOTIC COCKTAILS,
ENGLISH COUNTRY WINES & TRADITIONAL
CIDERS ON HAND PUMP.

ALSO AVAILABLE AT "MARTINS FREE HOUSE"
89 COLNEY HATCH LANE, N.10 AND "DICK'S
BAR", 61 TOTTENHAM LANE, N.8.

Fig 3.1 – An early advert for one of the first J D Wetherspoon pubs (here known as JJ Moon's). The emphasis on traditional ales – now common – was a novel selling point in the early 1980s. [from *The London Drinker*, November 1982 - via Jessica Boak & Ray Bailey, 'Which Was the First Wetherspoon Pub in the Good Beer Guide?' *Boak and Bailey Beer Blog*, May 3 2017, found at: boakandbailey.com/2017/05/quick-qa-first-wetherspoon-pub-good-beer-guide, accessed 03/03/2017]

It was not until the 1990s that the company moved from regional success to national brand. Several factors lay behind the transition. The more pubs Wetherspoons acquired, the greater its capacity to leverage economies of scale became, bulk-buying beer at wholesale prices beyond the range of smaller purveyors. As they were priced out, so Wetherspoons could in turn corner their share of the market. Unsurprisingly, Tim Martin cites Sam Walton of Walmart as a key influence, and as of 1993 its spokesman unguardedly described the company as ‘the McDonald’s of pubs’, though recent hesitance about comparison with supermarket giant Tesco suggest they have become less comfortable identifying with symbols of globalisation.²³⁵ By 1992 J D Wetherspoon held an estate of 50 pubs, and for the first time floated on the stock market as a PLC. Within two years the estate had doubled to 100 pubs. Within five it opened its 200th. In 1998 the company opened 100 pubs in a single year.²³⁶ In 2017 the company is just shy of its long-held 1000 pub target, finding market equilibrium at around 950 outlets.

Economies of scale necessitate architectures of scale, yet as demonstrated in chapter 2, these sit uneasily with traditional conceptions of what constitutes a public house. Wetherspoons is famous for buying ‘absolute aircraft hangars’ to host its businesses; generally harvesting the shells of buildings whose primary function has become obsolete but whose design remains of significance. Art deco theatres and cinemas, stately former banks, grand post offices and town halls, relinquished churches and former music halls are common examples in its portfolio.²³⁷ In 1995 the company opened *The Moon Under Water* in Manchester - a 10,000 square foot giant which went on to claim a *Guinness Book of Records* title as the largest pub in the world; a feat bested in 2017 with the construction of the even larger Royal Victoria Pavilion in Ramsgate - double the size at 20,000 square foot.²³⁸ Its predecessors are, in this sense, the Gin Palace of the 1830s and the supersize ‘improved pubs’ of the 1920s and 30s. And Wetherspoons seems to have successfully absorbed both their principles and contradictory reputations: as baroque palaces of the dissolute masses and as family friendly locales where the consumption of food is weighted equally with drink.

²³⁵ Wetherspoons spokesperson, cited in Boak and Bailey, *20th Century Pub*, p.183

²³⁶ J D Wetherspoons, ‘Our History’, accessed Feb 3 2019, at: jdwwetherspoon.com/about-us/our-history

²³⁷ Robert Lewis, *Swansea Terminal*, Serpent’s Tail (2007) p.24

²³⁸ Sean Farrell, ‘Shark in minnow pond’: Ramsgate locals split on new Wetherspoon pub’ *The Guardian*, 28 Aug 2017

These inconsistencies span its opprobrium and popular acclaim. The company is variously accused of being: a soulless imitation of the traditional pub; a redoubt of alcoholics and lairy ‘pub-circuit’ drinkers; a parasite preying upon cash-strapped municipal councils; a purveyor of zero-hour, unskilled and alienated labour conditions; a vessel for the homogenisation and standardisation of the high street; and a propagandist for right-wing - especially anti-European Union - policies (a charge which has intensified after its CEO, Tim Martin, agitated in favour of Britain’s vote to leave the European Union in 2016). Yet the chain remains popular, even loved. When *The Times* restaurant critic, Marina Loughlin, penned a critique of the chain in a visit to its new Ramsgate mega-branch, she was attacked from all sides of the political spectrum and in opinion pieces which spanned the range of British newspapers.²³⁹ Somehow, J D Wetherspoon managed not only to bisect otherwise rigid lines of political and social demarcation, but found itself - a corporate chain with extensive annual turnover - defended from both below and above. How then did Wetherspoons come to accrue such broad social support?

Building Structures of Feeling

Founded in 1979, the year of Margaret Thatcher’s election in Britain, the company seems to reflect both the ideals and the realities of the Thatcherite turn. Thatcherism has been described as an example of what Andy Beckett calls a ‘revolution in the head’; a moment where a government represented more than itself - seemingly expressing a shift in the structure of feeling of British society.²⁴⁰ This interpretation - developed most recently in popular accounts of the period such as Beckett’s *Promised You A Miracle* - sees affinity between the period’s disparate elements; such that a housing policy like the Right to Buy finds its rhyme in the ‘peacock individualism’ of 80s fashion culture, and the shiny surfaces of Canary Wharf’s new financial district are reflected the sheeny surfaces of the decade’s pop videos.²⁴¹ In its classic narrative, most famously iterated by the theorists of *Marxism Today* during the 1980s, this feeling was the product of key social and economic shifts during the postwar period. These included a cycle of prosperity in the 1950s instituting the politically conservative ‘affluent worker’, challenges to heteronormative and class-based identity in the 1960s and 70s - both in

²³⁹ Marina O’ Loughlin, ‘A spoonful of reality landed me in the soup’ *The Sunday Times*, 5 Nov 2017

²⁴⁰ Andy Beckett, *Promised You a Miracle: Why 1980-82 Made Modern Britain*, Allen Lane (2015) p. xxiii / ‘structure of feeling’ taken from Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Chatto & Windus (1961)

²⁴¹ Ibid

LGBT and women's rights - followed by economic crisis and de-industrialisation throughout the 1970s. Contemporary theorists like Stuart Hall argued that these forces, coupled with a reactionary emphasis on 'law and order', and the failure of the traditional left of labour



Fig 3.2 – Wetherspoons is famous for its architectures of scale. Top: The Royal Pavilion, Ramsgate. [Tripadvisor.co.uk – Royal Victoria Pavilion], Bottom: The Opera House, Tunbridge Wells [jdwetherspoon.com: The Opera House]

politics to respond to them, broke the foundational bases of working class culture. As a result, a political space opened for the values of Thatcherite conservatism to achieve popular assent. This entailed a shift away from a postwar ethos of collectivism towards the ‘aspirational consumer’ who was thought to have abandoned rigid social identities in favour of individual expression accessed through the market. By the late 1980s these values shot through the political discourse of Thatcherite conservatism, even as the material consequences of de-industrialisation and economic inequality prompted by its policies meant only certain segments of Britain could meaningfully participate in them [fig 3.3]. Thatcher is cited by Tim Martin as a political hero, and in some respects Wetherspools was built from and for the circumstances in which her politics took root. With a design semiotics caught between hotel foyer, wine bar, and traditional public house, in occupying stately architectural forms yet selling food and drink at bargain prices, the contradictions posed by Thatcherite values and Thatcherite economics could be reconciled in a new model of social space.

Whilst recent historiography has added many caveats to this story, its import for J D Wetherspools is worth considering.²⁴² For the affinities between Thatcherism and Wetherspools were more than their shared attempt to adjust to new consumer types. In its early years the chain sought to represent itself as a nimble underdog sallying the industrial monopoly of the major brewers.²⁴³ The latter - arranged into a large monopoly known informally as ‘The Big Six’ - resembled the world of inflexible Fordist production and closed markets which Thatcherism posited itself as breaking. Like Thatcher, Wetherspools positioned itself in antithesis to the cartel, manipulating the oversupply of beer production to cut deals which could be passed on to the consumer as cheap prices. As Tony Thornton has argued, this enabled Tim Martin ‘to be seen as a man of the people, selling beer cheaply and taking on the big bullying brewers in the process.’²⁴⁴ The tan of this populism has continued to Wetherspools even as its antagonist - the brewery cartel - has been dismantled, and its pub estate grew beyond anything its underdog image could sustain.

²⁴² Many of the social changes attributed to Thatcher’s tenure in government in fact, preceded it; likewise, her politics were only one expression of a global ‘neoliberal’ shift across much of the capitalist world encompassing nations as diverse as the United States and China. Even at her height – lack of electoral share, lack of individualism as she perceived it – remained a recalcitrant feature of British politics.

²⁴³ Letters featuring Tim Martin criticising the monopoly of the major brewers can be found as early as 1991. E.g. Tim Martin, ‘Pub-owners’ reply’, *The Times*, 3 Sep 1991

²⁴⁴ Tony Thornton, *Brewers, Brands and the Pub in Their Hands*, Troubador (2014), p. 138

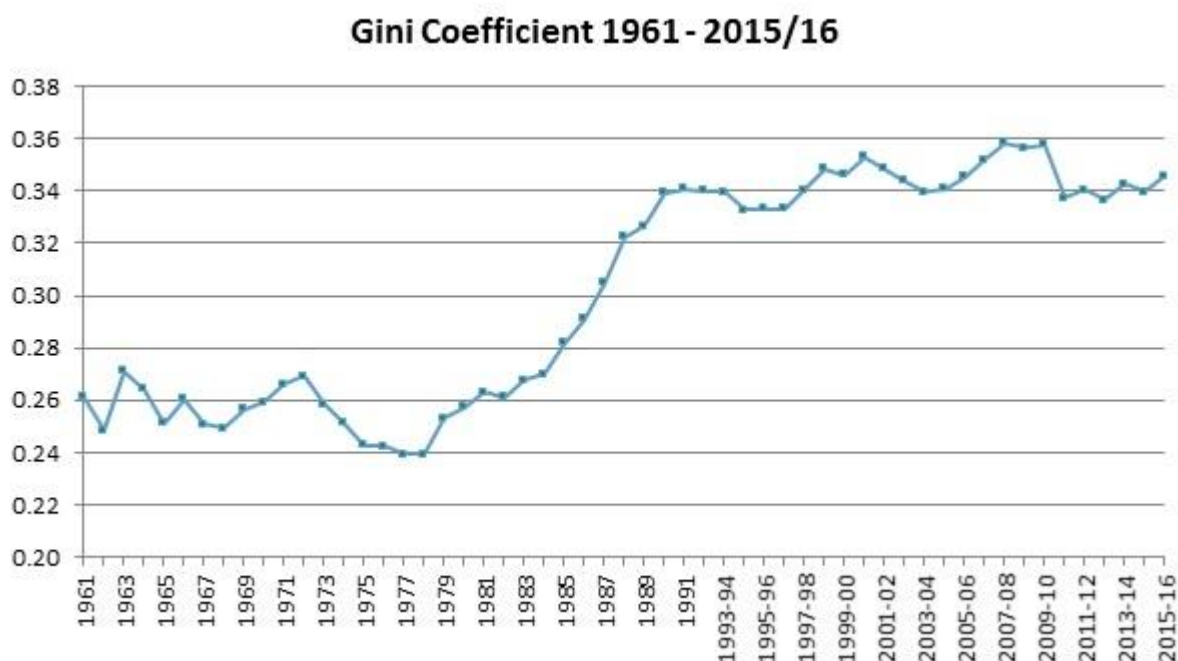


Fig 3.3 – Gini Coefficient for the United Kingdom, 1961 – 2015/2016. Higher rating depicts average increase in inequality across the population. [The Equality Trust, ‘Scales and Trends’ found at: equalitytrust.org.uk, accessed 02/02/2018]

As Stuart Hall argued in ‘The Great Moving Right Show’, written the year Wetherspoons was founded, this ideology was constituted through ‘the contradiction between “the people”, popular needs, feelings and aspirations - on the one hand - and the imposed structures of an interventionist capitalist state’:

Thus in any polarization along this fissure, Labour is undividedly "with" the state and the power bloc—and Mrs. Thatcher is, undividedly, out there "with the people". It can now be seen that the anti-statist elements in the discourses of the radical Right are key supports for the new populism.²⁴⁵

Consequently, Wetherspoons learnt to quickly adapt away from design choices which associated it with postwar monopoly capitalism. Though its early pubs were given faux names based on George Orwell’s famous essay *The Moon Under Water* (“The Moon Bell”, “The Paper Moon”, “The Half Moon”, “The Moonraker”) and identikit blue fascia with a visible

²⁴⁵ Stuart Hall, ‘The Great Moving Right Show’, *Marxism Today*, January 1979

brand name, such unpopular displays of homogeneity were dropped in favour of more traditional variants, usually based on local associations.²⁴⁶ More recently, thanks to the endeavours of a Wetherspoons enthusiast, the company has become famous for its bespoke carpets which respond to local features. This produced some decidedly un-Thatcherite outcomes: in the Yorkshire town of Maltby, formerly a mining community, the carpets of The Queens Hotel are interspersed with pit headstocks, geological strata and stitching representing the molecular structure of coal (the original pub had opened shortly after a mine explosion killed 27 colliery workers in 1923).²⁴⁷



Fig 3.4 – Carpet at The Queen’s Hotel, Maltby [via Kit Caless, *Spoon’s Carpets: An Appreciation*, Vintage (2016)]

Perhaps because of these local adjustments Wetherspoons has succeeded where the brewers largely failed in their attempt to create a nationally embraced product.²⁴⁸ The company’s decision to remain based primarily within Britain (with the exception of a later expansion into the Republic of Ireland) likely also confers it legitimacy as a national institution. Tim Martin’s hostility towards the European Union draws on the emotive force of a British imaginary in which the Pub is an evocative, even central, institution, positing the EU as an attempt by a

²⁴⁶ Boak & Bailey, *20th Century Pub*, p.188

²⁴⁷ Kit Caless, *Spoon’s Carpets: An Appreciation*, Square Peg (2016), p. 172

²⁴⁸ A notable exception might be found in the brewer, Guinness, excluded by CAMRA et al. from ‘Big Six’ status due to its lack of pub estate and the quality of its product.

cosmopolitan elite to evade the ‘great, unwashed British public, with its interfering courts, aggressive and intruding press and cantankerous population’.²⁴⁹ In a 2002 interview about his role campaigning against the Euro, Martin stated that he ‘articulated the fears of the English and others who feel instinctively that there’s something wrong with this’.²⁵⁰ Anti-Europe beer mats have been disseminated throughout his pubs at strategic moments in European negotiations, and in 2012 the ‘Veto Ale’ by Batemans in 2012 was rolled out exclusively across Wetherspoons branches to celebrate David Cameron blocking a new Lisbon Treaty.²⁵¹ Alongside Thatcher, Winston Churchill - former British premier and symbol of Britain standing alone against Nazi-occupied Europe - is another Tim Martin favourite ‘for his wartime leadership’.²⁵²

The personalised, underdog character of the company is also a feature of its house publication, *Wetherspoons News*, which is distributed across its pubs. Inside, Tim Martin has a dedicated column for his reflections on the political issues of the day. At first the column seems out of place within what is essentially a vehicle for company public marketing, sat amongst the humdrum pieces (‘Wetherspoon judged to be top employer for a 13th consecutive year’). Yet the column is itself a form of public relations. The consistent thread of ‘Tim’s Viewpoint’ is an anti-elitist populism: in ‘Political Masters Need to Serve Us’ Martin decries the ‘narrow and privileged background’ of political leaders, which leads them to ‘think they know better than the man, or woman, in the pub’, the ‘patronising’ manner of professional political operations and the danger of democracy’s erosion by power passing to supranational institutions like the European Union.²⁵³ In 2019 Martin began touring his pubs to promote the benefits of a ‘no-deal’ exit from the European Union as an initial withdrawal agreement faltered in parliament, deploying a soap-box style of political agitation in which the pubs were explicitly used as fora. Though no doubt sincere in its advocacy of Brexit (Martin is a rare fixture amongst major CEOs for his advocacy of British exit from the EU), the populist image is a cultivated one, and a well-worn feature of media interviews. Common tropes include Martin’s hostility to ‘the metropolitan elite’, his bad haircut, bland dress sense, hatred of dinner parties, and his 11 year

²⁴⁹ Tim Martin, ‘Tim’s Viewpoint’ *Wetherspoon News*, 26 Feb 2016 (available online at: jd.wetherspoon.com/news/2016/02/tims-viewpoint-eu – accessed 03/17)

²⁵⁰ ‘The Real Pub Landlord’, *The Guardian*, 3 Mar 2002

²⁵¹ Andrew Trotman, ‘JD Wetherspoon supports Prime Minister David Cameron with Veto Ale’, *The Telegraph*, 3 Jan 2012

²⁵² ‘The Real Pub Landlord’, *The Guardian*, 3 Mar 2002

²⁵³ Tim Martin, ‘Tim’s Viewpoint’, *Wetherspoon News*, June 2015

old Volvo Estate; which are proxied onto the essential wholesomeness of the company: ‘a quality pub empire that sells cheap ale and reasonable food, treats its staff fairly and delights long-term shareholders.’²⁵⁴ In an episode of the BBC’s ‘Desert Island Discs’, Martin chose to describe himself as a publican not a businessman.²⁵⁵

These positions are hard to square with other pronouncements and practices. Martin has lobbied government to prevent local authorities being given the power to license premises in the worry that councils will be swayed by their electorates.²⁵⁶ He has been a vocal opponent first of the minimum wage, and recently of the introduction of a ‘living wage’, arguing they would lead to pub closures in poorer communities and higher pint prices.²⁵⁷ He is also a consistent advocate of zero hours contracts, which the company deploys (though since 2016 has provided permanent options). Though Wetherspools offers competitive pay rates within the hospitality sector, these are notoriously precarious. On employer rating websites, opinions of the company from its workforce prove consistently hostile, belying the company’s image as a benevolent employer. Understaffing, low pay, high stress, erratic hours, poor management oversight and haphazard training, little recourse against sexism from colleagues and customers - all are common gripes levelled at the company.²⁵⁸ Though emphasis is placed on the company’s ‘Tell Tim’ scheme, which rewards workers for proposing ideas to HQ from the frontline, worker comments suggest such ideas are rarely considered and the reward in question amounts to £5 (one per week max). Meanwhile, in 2015 the company made £77.8 million pre-tax profit.²⁵⁹

Wetherspools operates an aggressively fragmented internal labour market. Pub Managers are well paid, with salaries of around £40k or over. Below them, the vast majority of workers are stratified into many numerous roles with superficially distinct responsibilities, broadly similar labour conditions, and essentially negligible pay differences. This well-worn strategy has been imported from semi-skilled industrial workplaces with the specific intention of reducing

²⁵⁴ ‘The Real Pub Landlord’, *The Guardian*, 3 Mar 2002

²⁵⁵ Desert Island Discs, ‘Tim Martin’, *Radio 4*, 8 Dec 2017

²⁵⁶ ‘The Real Pub Landlord’, *The Guardian*, 3 Mar 2002

²⁵⁷ ‘J D Wetherspoon Profile: how Wetherspools utilises zero hour contracts’, WS & DB (wsandb.co.uk/wsb/profile/2319667/profile-how-jd-wetherspoon-utilises-zero-hour-contracts – accessed 03/17)

²⁵⁸ Employer Reviews: J D Wetherspoon, *Indeed* (indeed.co.uk/cmp/Wetherspools/reviews?fcountry=GB&start=80, accessed 03/17) indicative comments include: ‘Stop squeezing the life out loyal staff before they move on and be replaced by another horde of unhappy people’

²⁵⁹ ‘Cut price deals, higher costs hit pub group Wetherspoon's profits’, *Reuters*, 11 Sep 2015

collective identification amongst the workforce. The more fragmented the roles, the more superficially hierarchical the workforce, the less likely a collective class mentality is to form, unionise and contest their conditions. Wetherspoons has stretched this strategy to breaking

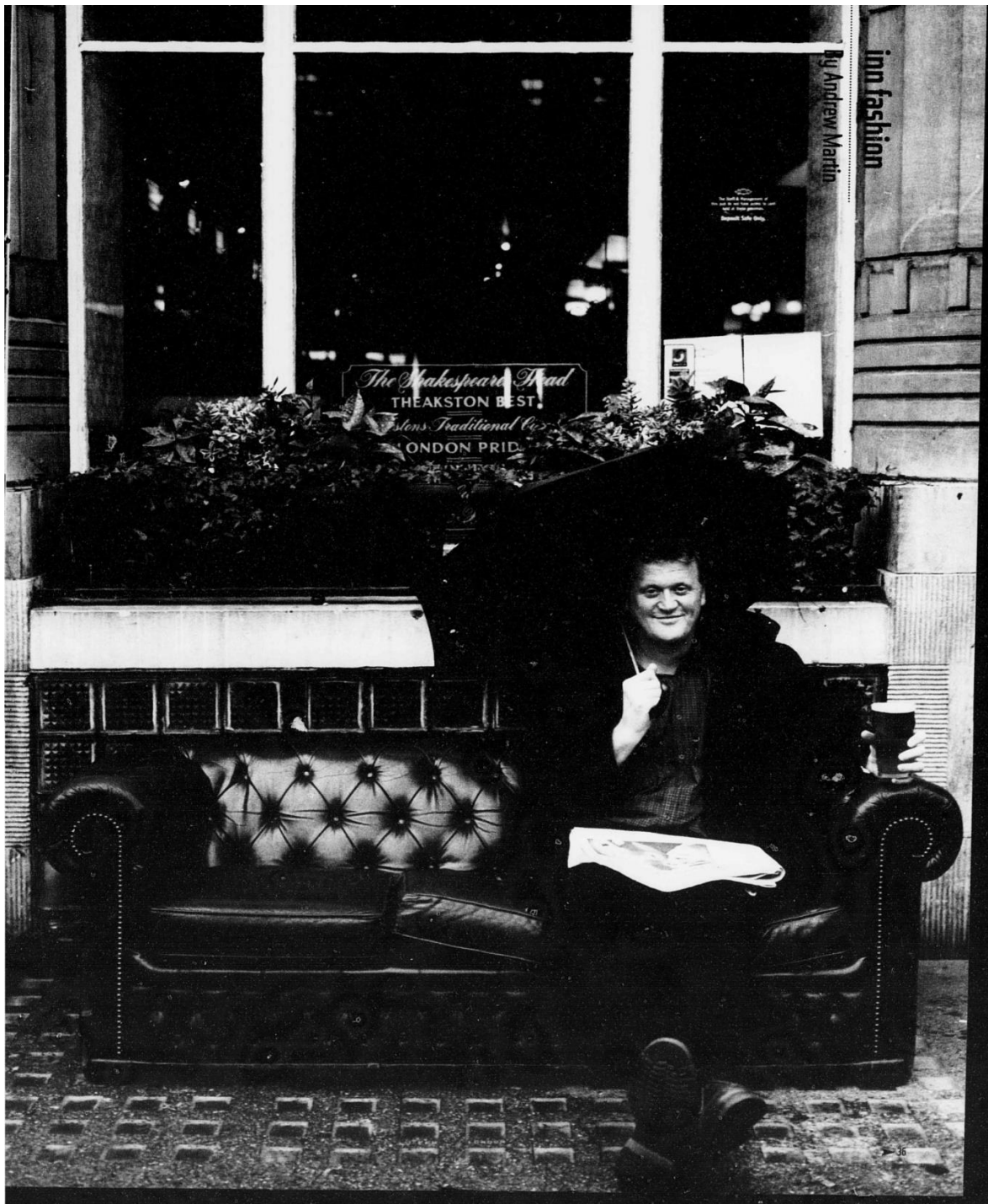


Fig 3.5 – Tim Martin, Founder of J D Wetherspoon [*Financial Times*, Jan 13th 2001]

point, with workers at two branches in Brighton mounting an unprecedented strike in 2018 against ‘poverty wages.’²⁶⁰ As Callum Cant, one of the strike’s organisers, noted: the ‘gaps’ between staff grades had become so compressed as to become essentially meaningless, with workers actively avoiding promotion and strikers of all rank below Pub Manager participating in the strike.²⁶¹

Such strategies are a direct result of Wetherspoon’s novel business model. The attempt to liberalise the pub trade through the 1989 Beer Orders, which forced the “Big Six” breweries to divest of around 14,000 tied houses, simply exchanged one type of monopoly for another, since the timescale of the divestment limited potential buyers to those able to raise large amounts of capital quickly. This inevitably skewed the market towards large PubCos, often backed by various financial conglomerates, whilst shutting out smaller scale competition. As a relatively large scale free-house operator with a decade of experience in the trade, Wetherspoon’s was well placed to capitalise on the opportunity, and with the support of venture capital, began its rapid expansion. Other circumstances – such as a contraction in high street banking following a series of mergers and consolidations in the financial sector during the mid-1990s opening up viable new high street venues – and a laxer regulatory environment for large franchises in search of inner-city licenses, further benefitted the Wetherspoons model.²⁶² Yet whereas value extraction before the Beer Orders was essentially at the level of the commodity (value was increased by making production more cost effective, by reducing product quality, scaling production and leveraging monopoly practices as well as fixing tied publicans into contracts which guaranteed an artificially high stock cost for products), after the Beer Orders a new model was required. Some PubCos effectively used the pub trade as an interim profit generator for what was in reality a large property portfolio – some of the current contractions in the pub sector are the result. Wetherspoons by contrast expanded its business to leverage economies of scale at distribution and undercut local competitors. But since this left it with limited control over value extraction from the property value itself, or over commodity production and sale, it was left with staffing as a final area from which to realize value.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Katie Southworth, ‘Wetherspoons dishes out poverty wages. That’s why I’m striking’ *The Guardian*, 4 Oct 2018

²⁶¹ ‘McStrike and Unions in the Precarious Economy’ (Podcast), *Novara Media*, Oct 2018

²⁶² *Liverpool Echo*, 18 Jan 1996

²⁶³ ‘McStrike and Unions’ *Novara Media*, Oct 2018

Dealignment / Realignment

The cultural theorist Jeremy Gilbert has argued that the crisis of the postwar settlement did not have a predetermined outcome. On the one hand, there was the ‘possibility that a configuration of forces including the newly radicalised groups [of the 1970s] (women, youth, students, black people, LGBT+ people) and a well organised labour movement would succeed in demanding a settlement which permanently weakened the power of capital to maximise profits and suppress wages, probably through the further socialisation of large parts of the economy.’ On the other ‘the great opportunity for capital was that it might be able to shed the constraints of the post-war settlement’ and create its own configuration ‘which included at least some of the elements which were in danger of being radicalised in the new political context, and which bound them to the new project of capital.’²⁶⁴

An illustrative example of why the latter succeeded where the former failed can be found in the fate of Working Men’s Clubs. The decline of Working Men’s Clubs maps almost exactly onto the rise of Wetherspoons and its trade equivalents. In some cases this is quite literal: clubs such as the Garforth Liberal Club in Yorkshire spent 128 years as a WMC before being bought out by Wetherspoon’s and renamed The Briggate.²⁶⁵ From a height of around 4,000 in 1972, WMCs had declined to 2,000 by 2012, its membership decreasing in number and increasing in age. A model of democratically controlled social life, WMCs were collectively owned by their members and run on a non-profit basis which kept the cost of drinking low.

At first it seems surprising that such institutions failed to accommodate the turn towards anti-statism within a collective endeavour, yet their attachment to class fixity as well as traditional cultural norms prevented such a flexible response from materialising. Though the gender politics of Working Men’s Clubs were improving, the fact that as late as 1955 attempts to drop ‘Men’ from their title were successfully contested spoke to a wilful short-sightedness in regard to social change.²⁶⁶ Likewise, though slowly evolving, the public house remained an institution

²⁶⁴ Jeremy Gilbert, *Anticapitalism and Culture: Radical Theory and Popular Politics*, Berg (2008) p.36

²⁶⁵ Jack Peat, ‘How Wetherspoons Rejuvenated the Satellite Towns of Britain’, *The London Economic*, 6 July 2017

²⁶⁶ Richard Hall, ‘Being a Man, Being a Member: Masculinity and Community in Britain’s Working Men’s Clubs, 1945-1960’, *Cultural and Social History*, October 2016



Fig 3.6 – A selection of Wetherspoons exteriors and interiors. Wetherspoons draws on the signifiers of aspirational consumption and democratises them. [Selection taken from: jdwwetherspoon.com]

dominated by masculine norms.²⁶⁷ Meanwhile, alongside competitors like All Bar One, Wetherspools adopted a design strategy throughout the 1980s which explicitly targeted female consumers - introducing large, transparent plate glass windows, improving the standards of toilets, and accommodating children (in some sites with their own play areas). The open floor plan and erasure of segregated spaces such as the 'women's lounge' reinforced the idea that the chain was jettisoning the gender baggage of traditional pubs. Though they appealed to normative sensibilities, small touches like the placement of high chairs in front of makeup mirrors adjacent to the women's toilets further contributed to the sense of a space which thought about, and welcomed, women amongst its clientele. As Mags - a minor celebrity of the chain, famous for attempting to visit every single one - put it 'I love the fact as a woman on her own I can go into Wetherspools and no-one looks at me as if to say "what is a woman doing in a pub on her own?"'²⁶⁸ If these design strategies saw Wetherspools turn its back on the signifiers of the public house, or appropriated them only as pastiche, this was hardly a negative for those who found little succour in such history in the first place. Insofar as Wetherspools rode the wave of class dealignment, the wave was catalysed as much from below as above.²⁶⁹

The transition from autonomous to consumer democracy parallels Stuart Hall's description of the popular press and its subsumption into commercial models which '*reflected* popular interests, tastes... sufficient... to win popular identification and consent' but did 'not become an authentic "voice" of the popular interest': '*about* and *bought by* but not *produced by*, or *committed to the cause of*, the popular classes.'²⁷⁰ If the question of the popular press for the ruling elite was, as Hall puts it, 'how to contain the popular classes within the orbit and authority of the dominant culture, while allowing them the formal right to express opinions', then similar ramifications hold for the politics of social life. It is instructive to compare, as Phil Hadfield has in *Bar Wars*, the justifications behind the suppression of rave culture - in the 1990s an explosive, grassroots competitor to commodified nightlife - alongside the arguments in favour of extending licensing hours primarily to the benefit of exactly the large scale corporate operations like J D Wetherspoon which could accommodate them. As Hadfield

²⁶⁷ Valerie Hey, *Patriarchy and Pub Culture*, Routledge (1986)

²⁶⁸ Angus Harrison, '992 and Counting: Meet the Woman Trying to Visit Every Wetherspools in the UK' *Vice*, 21 Mar 2016

²⁶⁹ Jeremy Gilbert, 'Why Did Working Class Culture Disintegrate in the 1980s?' *openDemocracy*, Apr 18 (2016)

²⁷⁰ Stuart Hall, 'Popular Culture and the State', in Aradhana Sharma (ed.) *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, Wiley-Blackwell (2006), p. 370-371

notes, both brought about the ‘mass invasion of public and private space by large crowds of intoxicated young people, created noise and nuisance... and [potentially] caused distress to innocent residential communities’. Yet whereas one was an autonomous project collectively owned by its participants, the other ‘could be channeled into the pockets of corporate investors and used to drive the economic renaissance of post-industrial cities’. Rave received the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, whilst the other (eventually) received parliamentary assent. The attempt by dance culture to ‘leave the orbit’ of the dominant culture was thereby ‘subjected to a lingering death... safely corralled within licensed premises... sanitized, commercialized, and infused with an alien alcohol-oriented aesthetic.’²⁷¹ Hall could have easily been writing about social life as much as the popular press when he noted that ‘the heart of this relationship was the constitution of the popular classes as an economically essential but culturally and ideologically dependent and subordinate element.’²⁷²

Simulacra

The tension between the need to reflect and win popular consent on the one hand, and subordinate popular culture on the other, is reflected in Wetherspoon’s aesthetic. In some respects, Wetherspoons is not a chain of ‘pubs’ at all. Instead it operates as a simulacrum of the pub genre, absorbing its design palette and regurgitating it as a series of jumbled referents. These express the idea of pubness through their muted colour scheme, use of dark natural furnishings, patterned carpets, wooden chairs, pump handles and (generally) old-fashioned lighting. Its choice of buildings also tend to be recuperative: ‘saving’ historic spaces, often of civic importance to its locality and wearing their husk like a protective shell whilst the brand is rolled out across it. Pastiche is in this respect a way of ‘wearing the pub’ without being a part of it: *about the pub* and *bought by* the pub’s customers, without belonging to either. In fact, Wetherspoons’ biggest market innovation was exactly to make a clean break with the crumbling infrastructure and restrictive scale of traditional pubs - something Tim Martin proudly states no one thought was possible in the 1980s due to licensing restrictions.²⁷³

²⁷¹ Philip Hadfield, *Bar Wars: Contesting the Night in Contemporary British Cities*, Oxford University Press (2007), p.59

²⁷² Stuart Hall, ‘Popular Culture and the State’, p. 371

²⁷³ Desert Island Discs, ‘Tim Martin’, *Radio 4*, 8 Dec 2017

This relation to history jettisons the architectural legacy of the pub proper, converting its organic past into a system of equivalences. On this (relatively) blank slate, a virtual history is instead contrived. Softwood panels, settle seating, wooden chairs and tables, and decorative details relating to local history do the work of locating Wetherspoons within a broadly Victorian pub aesthetic: an attempt to naturalise the novelty of the venues with the clothing of a familiar genre.²⁷⁴ Even the more contemporary designs deploy these principles. At the Mossy Well (Muswell Hill) for instance, which opened in 2015, portraits of tenuously ‘local’ figures like Mary Shelley were used as decoration, whilst historic quotations relating to the area were inscribed on the walls. As Rountree and Ackroyd argue ‘roots in the locality recall the era of the pub as romanticized by Orwell and others; a time when the pub’s status as main, if not sole, community entertainment venue and absence of national or multinational conglomerates in the industry meant connection to locality was inherent.’²⁷⁵ Local histories tend to be presented in a way which reinforces this sense of hyper-reflexivity: framed and spotlighted as though in a museum exhibit.

This nostalgic appeal to vernacular and historic legacies sits uneasily with the aforementioned scale of the venues - a necessity for their low cost/high volume economics. It also accounts for other design principles, such as the use of zoning and screen partitions to distort perceptions of size and recover a semblance of the intimacy which ought to denote an ‘authentic’ pub atmosphere: the result is a kind of ‘Alice in Wonderland’ syndrome, in which aesthetic details are misaligned with the carapace which hosts them.

Such aesthetic contortions can either be regarded as a trick (which pays superficial homage to a tradition in order to mask its erasure) or as a compromise with the pub’s customary power. When Tim Martin’s states of the company’s “just a Pub” philosophy that ‘we never judge Wetherspoon to be a brand. In fact we make every effort possible to ensure that we are not seen as a brand, whether through individual pub names, individual design, or a range of

²⁷⁴ For more on this self-conscious aesthetic positioning, see: Rountree & Ackroyd, ‘More than just a shop that Sells Beer? J D Wetherspoon and the Pub Authenticity-Value Aesthetic’ in Mark Hailwood / Deborah Toner (eds.) *Biographies of Drink: A Case Study Approach to our Historical Relationship with Alcohol*, Cambridge Scholars (2015), p.114

²⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 120

different beers at our pubs'²⁷⁶ it is hard to know whether to see in those manoeuvres a partial victory for a resilient culture, or its ultimate loss.

Yet, as chapter 2 revealed, this 'balance of forces' – between customary obligation and commodification – is complicated by further questions about the very authenticity of the pub's popular culture, and the extent to which it was already a reflexive semblance of a mythological ideal: a 'theme' whose 'theme' is the presentation of an already absent culture back to itself. As chapter 2 also demonstrated, the history of the pub from the late 19th century is as much one of pastiche, financial meddling, and ill-fated negotiations with modernity as it is a story of authenticity. A self-consciousness about the pub's cultural role, and its authenticity is in this sense as old as the 'modern' pub itself. The question then is less one of counterposing Wetherspools against a singular generic 'true pub' of the past, but against a particular conception of what the pub is, and ought to be, in order to express that authenticity.

Wetherspools is not oblivious to this contest, and its aversion to being conceived as a 'brand' can be understood through this prism. As a company spokesman revealed, the aim is that 'each pub is different in its own way. They each have their own identity, and to [create] that we use different architects each time.'²⁷⁷ This cultivated difference occurs within quite specific parameters however, 'assimilating new trends within an enduringly popular tradition'.²⁷⁸ As Jean Baudrillard argued in his treatise on simulacra, the agenda is not one of imitation, reduplication, or parody, but of 'substituting signs of the real for the real itself... leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and the simulated generation of difference.'²⁷⁹ The historical material which is generically exhibited along the walls of Wetherspoon pubs in this sense a substitution for a lived history their brand identity cannot assimilate. Even later attempts to integrate 'community boards' into the pub seemed to exhibit this quality. Throughout the ethnographic visits undertaken to Wetherspools venues no pub-goers were observed ever reading these signs or notices, and in a sense that is not their purpose: they exist to represent locality rather than to be of it. The consequence is that, despite feints to the contrary, the contrived locality it documents struggles to resonate within the actual architectural experience.

²⁷⁶ Tim Martin, quoted in 'Wetherspoon tops YouGov list of favourite fast food and pub chains', *Food Service Equipment Journal*, 22 Jan 2016

²⁷⁷ 'Client 1: J D Wetherspoon', *Architect's Journal*, 5 Nov 2008

²⁷⁸ Rountree & Ackroyd, 'More than just a shop that Sells Beer?' p.122

²⁷⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, Semiotexte (1983) p.4

The Vortex & The Halo

It is perhaps fitting then Wetherspoons might be said to be at its most convincingly local not in its design but in its economic strategies. A *Financial Times* investigation in 2017 uncovered evidence of what it called ‘obsessive menu engineering and predatory cynicism’ based not on



Fig 3.7 – History as a frozen assemblage of referents. [Pictures taken by author: clockwise from top: Sir Richard John Blackler, Liverpool; The Limes, Liverpool; The Mossy Well, London]

local competitors in the pub trade, but competitors in every particular of its menu.²⁸⁰ By Benchmarking from a stable commodity (a bottle of Moretti beer), the investigation revealed the granular engineering behind the chain's variable pricing: curries 'tend to be priced more aggressively around Birmingham, where more than a quarter of the population identifies as Asian or Asian British'.²⁸¹ Outliers such as The Edwin Waugh - depicted on the right hand side of the graph below - which rate averagely on burger price but cheapest on curry, suggest just how minutely this is calculated: with high local competition from Indian restaurants and no competition from burger providers. A kind of fetishistic inversion is at work in which locality has become abstract symbolic currency, and economics the distilled expression of localism. That expression is possessive rather than additive: it leverages superior capital, generated across the stock, which dampens and redistributes any local risk, and applies it against the local markets themselves. This assists in making Wetherspools 'the only game in town': in the words of one Hackney publican - after a Wetherspools opened nearby - 'You can't compete with them on price so you need to look for other things - for us that means much longer hours, for less money, just to stay open'.²⁸² As the author of the *Financial Times* article points out, such practices have long been regulated in the grocery market sector to prevent supermarkets from using localised pricing specifically to break far weaker local competition; yet so far this is not the case for the pub trade.

In fact, at certain scales, 'being the only game in town' is one of Wetherspools primary assets.²⁸³ In the last decade, Wetherspools has increased its expansion in small to moderately sized towns (approximately a population spread of 8000 - 20,000 residents), lured by easily outweighed markets and lower site costs. There is not a consensus about the results of this geographical shift. Critics ascribe a vortex-like effect whereby the arrival of a Wetherspools re-orientates the rhythm and circulation of social life - from a diffusion of small to medium sized locales spread along a high street and backstreets - to a dominant central location around

²⁸⁰ Bryce Elder, 'Here's what we learned from ordering 213 curries at Wetherspools', *Financial Times (Alphaville)*, 17 Nov 2017

²⁸¹ Ibid

²⁸² Christopher Thompson, 'Wetherspools focus shifts to small towns', *Financial Times*, 28 Nov 2011

²⁸³ Sean Farrell, 'Shark in minnow pond': Ramsgate locals split on new Wetherspoon pub' *The Guardian*, 28 Aug 2017

which everything else turns.²⁸⁴ Social life is in this way concentrated rather than distributed, to the benefit of Wetherspoons itself.

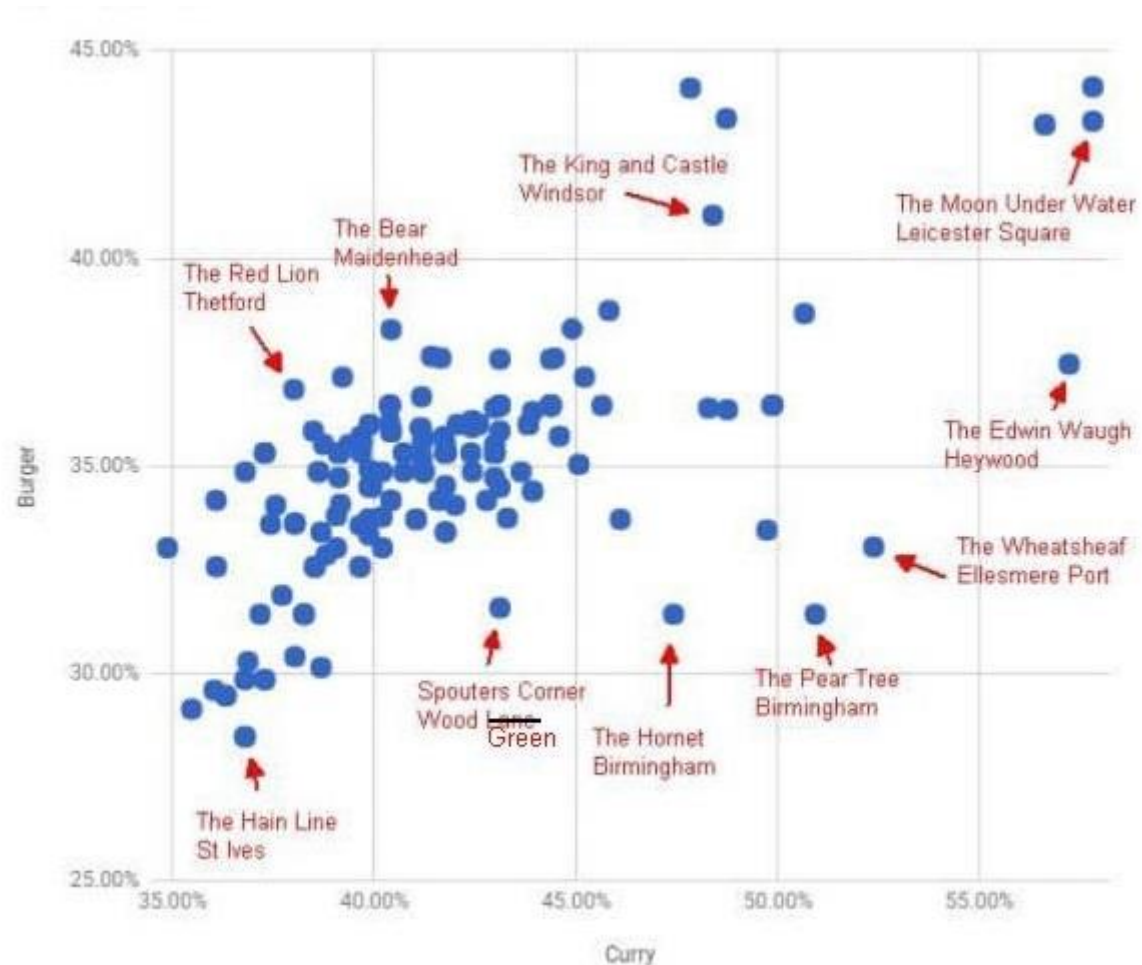


Fig 3.8 – Variable price distribution of like-for-like commodities across JD Wetherspoon branches.
(via Bryce Elder, *Financial Times: Alphaville*, Nov 17 2017)

By contrast, supporters attribute a ‘halo’ effect through which the draw of a bigger venue like Wetherspoons re-energises local trade to the mutual benefit of competing traders.²⁸⁵ Provided custom is not static but circulatory, the argument follows, both Wetherspoons and its competitors will benefit since net circulation is increased. A second effect is to allegedly boost the caché of those pubs with a more traditional atmosphere, so that those with the most unique offerings are boosted by dint of their distinction to the alternatives. A study of growth, loss, and stability in licensed premises situated in a ½ mile radius from new Wetherspoons reveals a

²⁸⁴ Ibid

²⁸⁵ Sarah Bridge, ‘We’re not a pub Tesco: Wetherspoon boss hits back at critics of his chain’s growing dominance’ *This Is Money*, 4 Dec 2011

mixture of both effects.²⁸⁶ After an initial period of decline immediately following the opening, some premises noticed a rebound effect, with growth and loss rates roughly balancing after a period of around 3 years (42% growth, 42.6% loss respectively). Yet the data is heavily skewed by geography and typology. Cities saw the overwhelming share of growth rates at 66.7%, whilst towns experienced results close to the total average (44.7% growth / 43.9% loss). Suburbs were the overwhelming losers, with 40.9% loss against 29.5% growth. Yet the figures mask a more damning picture for impacts on the pub itself. Drink led sites received only 25.6% growth against a huge 52.8% loss, whilst food-led establishments experienced the inverse 52.7% growth against 22.5% loss). The smaller scale the settlement, the more vulnerable to the vortex; the larger – the greater the possibility of the halo; the more wet-led the more vulnerable, the more food-led, the greater benefit.

There are also methodological problems with such studies. In UK cities for instance, new Wetherspools are often ‘quartered’ alongside a medley of other leisure and nightlife chains as part of regeneration strategies: halo effects could simply be representing this broader dynamic rather than the impact of Wetherspools itself. Likewise, the ½ mile measure is an unreliable scale to judge proximate impact in a city where potential custom is much more mobile and dispersed. Trade may have simply been moved from one part of the city to another: the vortex is still operating, but at a macro scale, rendering it invisible at the micro. The statistics are also compounded by a broader national picture in which wet-led premises are declining regardless of proximity to Wetherspools, and the food sector experiencing considerable growth.

Some direct correlations can however be borne out in specific case studies. The introduction of the Ramsgate super-pub, The Royal Victoria Pavilion, in 2017 provides a classic illustration of the vortex vs halo debate. Welcoming its arrival the district council leader, Chris Wells, pointed out that only a company with the financial capacity of Wetherspools could have restored such a venue, and that the investment ‘demonstrates faith in Ramsgate, it creates jobs and it will bring visitors to the town.’²⁸⁷ Local publicans took a different view: describing the new competitor as a ‘a shark in a minnow pond’, arguing that for all the extra pull a Wetherspools might provide, its deleterious effect on the independent quirkiness of the town meant other

²⁸⁶ ‘Market Growth Monitor: Quarterly Report’, CGA, June 2018

²⁸⁷ Sean Farrell, ‘Shark in minnow pond’: Ramsgate locals split on new Wetherspoon pub’ *The Guardian*, 28 Aug 2017

attractions were lost.²⁸⁸ Nine months after The Royal Victoria Pavilion's arrival the impact on local businesses in comparable trades (pubs and cafes) was predominantly negative. Some were unaffected – especially food outlets offering something distinctive, or backstreet community-oriented pubs with minimal passing trade, a traditional ethos, and a strong base of loyal custom. The majority, in both food and drink premises, saw a loss in custom. A local coffee vendor described The Pavilion as 'a beam of light taking people there' drawing away his passing trade.²⁸⁹ Most found they could not compete on food price, location, or the cost of teas (Wetherspools offer free re-fills).²⁹⁰

At another case study, in the town of Monmouth - a small, relatively prosperous market town of around 11,000 residents on the border between Wales and England - the arrival of Wetherspools (The Kings Head) in the year 2000 saw both impacts. The town was serviced by 9 pubs and a social club by the mid-2000s, with 7 surviving until the present.²⁹¹ The draw of Wetherspools was sufficient to pull in regional trade on key nights - Fridays and Saturdays - providing a 'centre' for a night-life which had hitherto been dispersed, or insufficiently attractive. As much as any specific feature of its market offering (below cost drink, wider selection, food), customers attested to visiting the pub because it had become a hub - large enough and cheap enough to be the common denominator: the most reliable place to meet people and feel attuned to where things were happening.²⁹² In this sense it was not Wetherspools as such that the customers were drawn to, but the higher possibility of multiple social encounters - of seeing everyone and being at the centre of events.²⁹³

Initially, competing pubs - especially those away from the main high street (The Queens Head and the Nags Head) looked for other ways to provide for a niche market that Wetherspools couldn't accommodate. The Queens - a timbered, Tudor pub with low ceilings and a fireplace - became a live music venue, taking advantage of Wetherspools 'no music' policy. The Old Nags Head - a traditional, 19th century corner pub with medieval origins - whether intentionally or not, became a redoubt of underage drinkers, who exploited the pub's informality (compared

²⁸⁸ Ibid

²⁸⁹ Adele Couchman, 'The Royal Victoria Pavilion super Wetherspools in Ramsgate 'has made the seafront the worst it has ever been' *KentLive*, 8 Feb 2018 / Adele Couchman, 'Ramsgate will thrive' traders say new 'Super Wetherspools' is not 'killing off the seafront' 16 Apr 2018

²⁹⁰ Ibid

²⁹¹ Office for National Statistics (Dataset): 'Public houses and bars by local authority' 2001-2018

²⁹² Personal experience of the author, 2001 – 2007 & Research Conversation, 02/17

²⁹³ Ibid

to Wetherspoons use of bouncers and age-conscious bar staff) to get served drinks (though a clamp down later brought this to an end). The Gate House, situated at the bottom of the high street, utilised its riverside location and rebranded as a more upmarket gastropub to attract an older, wealthier crowd. The immediate losers were the most vulnerable to Wetherspoons: two wet-led, lower-income venues, the Gloucester Arms, and The Griffin, which have since closed.

Superficially, both these cases indicate the sort of shifts one might expect from a market dynamic: some competitors adjust their offering to survive, those that cannot adjust - or will not - fold. But markets are not neutral forces and accepting their impact as natural in practice means accepting the capacity of scale players to accrue advantages such as cost, size and centrality which strongarm consumers into choices which they, in a level playing field, would not necessarily opt for. Both the vortex and the halo accept the centrality of Wetherspoons to every outcome: its arrival distorts the rhythm and economics of the field into which it enters, and its competitors are left to adjust as best they can. Wetherspoons is accommodated rather than accommodating.

The Politics of Ordinariness

So far, this chapter has discussed some of the correspondences between the rise of Wetherspoons and the structure of feeling which underpinned Thatcherism. It has touched on why, and how, forms of social life representative of the postwar era, became supplanted by a corporate chain which has consequently transformed social life across Britain. It has also made some critical comments as to the nature of experience produced by Wetherspoons' architecture: including its static relationship to history, contrived localism, and the non-transformability of its design. It has also explored the impact that Wetherspoons has had on the contexts in which it arrives. Yet these positions now bear some closer appraisal.

The recent work of social historians like Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Jon Lawrence and Mike Savage has sought to qualify the classic 'dealignment' story of vanishing class consciousness and rising individualism which has marked most traditional analyses of postwar Britain. Instead they have emphasised the way in which class did not so much disappear, but came to be talked about differently. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite's analysis of Mass Observation surveys taken throughout the 1980s shows how the moniker 'working class' - though sometimes used in an articulation of roots, tended to be replaced with an emphasis on 'ordinariness'. Though 'the

decline of deference made people more ‘individualistic’ in some ways... this did not equate to a selfish, greedy, materialistic, anti-collectivist orientation’: ‘People were more keen to assert their right to choose as individuals, but also keen to emphasise authenticity and ordinariness as opposed to privilege and snobbery.’²⁹⁴ As Savage and Lawrence have themselves argued: asserting one’s ordinariness is more than it seems - a ‘means of refusing both a stigmatized, pathologized identity [...] at the same time as it refuses a privileged position’.²⁹⁵ If Wetherspoons appealed to the non-deferential ‘aspirational consumer’, it did so on terms counterpoised to snobbery: that Wetherspoons is a contemptuous shorthand for society’s ‘down-and-outs’ at all is testament to its inability to ever make good on the associations of the hotels and opera houses it takes over. As one writer sardonically commented of the Hamilton Hall, a Wetherspoons in the City of London’s financial district, ‘Like most Spoons, it’s an impressive looking space - an old hotel ballroom in this case - which leaves you unsure as to whether you’re upscaling your pints or dribbling all over a once respectable building.’²⁹⁶ Some interviewees even explained their patronage of the chain for exactly that lack: a place for ‘losers’ to belong; a social space relieved from the pressure of performing cool, performing success.²⁹⁷ Few were duped by the notion of Wetherspoons as a ‘real pub’: the imitative touches - real ale, no music, cheap prices, were enough to suffice.

It is this tension between the semiotic claims of the space and the clientele it caters for which produces a special kind of ordinariness: one that be both for ‘losers’ and yet undercut the stigma that entails. As one young writer noted of her ambivalence towards the company:

When I was depressed and at my poorest, having just moved to London, I would sit there [Wetherspoons] all day nursing filter coffee refills and applying for jobs. I could have done this in my bedroom, but there is value and dignity in having a reason to get dressed and say hello to another person. When we’re in the pub, we’re visible. We’re legitimised. We’re real. Someone has seen us that day, and known that we exist.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁴ Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, ‘Discourses of ‘class’ in Britain in ‘New Times’’, *Journal of Contemporary British History*; Vol 31: 2 (2017)

²⁹⁵ Mike Savage and Jon Lawrence, cited in Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England, 1968-2000*, Oxford University Press (2018) p.5

²⁹⁶ Angus Harrison, ‘Meeting London’s Morning Drinkers’, *VICE*, 18 Aug 2017

²⁹⁷ Research Conversation, Anon. 02/07

²⁹⁸ Megan Nolan, ‘The Hypocrisy of the Brexit-Funding Mr Wetherspoons’ *VICE*, 15 Mar 2017

This ambivalence can also be found in the manner with which former buildings are adapted. The North Western in Liverpool, a grade II listed building designed by Alfred Waterhouse, formerly served as the railway hotel for the nearby station before being converted into a Wetherspoons in 2013. There are three public zones: a high-ceilinged entrance area; a mezzanine; and a long dining hall at the far wing of the building. The first two spaces are modernist in tone, with chrome and glass detailing accompanied by an unorthodox grey/silver/black colour scheme. By contrast, in the dining hall, the original stonework of the hotel has been left exposed and unadulterated (likely as a stipulation of its heritage listing) and the décor traditionally maintained. The effect of these contrasting spaces is of an architecture caught between embracing and destabilising itself. In the entrance hall, columns are dressed in silver and grey paint to suggest pastiche, and hanging lanterns are set beside exposed steel bulb chandeliers as though oscillating between the industrial heritage of the local station (implied by the images of former steam trains) and the baroque intentions of its original design. In the far dining hall, the integrity of the exposed stonework, left crumbled, marked, and rough with age, has a gravity and authenticity at odds with the Wetherspoons additions: faux-chandeliers made of transparent plastic with over-harsh light bulbs that colour the room with a cold light.²⁹⁹ The grandeur of the space is unsettled by these irreverent gestures; a kind of architectural performance of the chain's contradictions.

Not all Wetherspoons are made equal however. For every impressive iteration like the Hamilton Hall and The North Western a more functional, utilitarian offering exists. Yet even these, in their very alienation, can produce surprising modes of subjectivity. Robert Lewis's novel *Swansea Terminal* documents itinerant life in the city, with Wetherspoons as one of its key locations:

The Wetherspoons in Swansea was called the Potter's Wheel. Fuck knows why. They have to call them something, I suppose, and Wetherspoon number nine hundred and six probably doesn't appeal to marketing. As you might imagine, it's an absolute aircraft hanger of a place, but that has its pluses. There's plenty of room for people like me, and you will see plenty of people like me in there, sat at our tables of one. They need some people in there just to give the place a sense of scale, like little human figures in a

²⁹⁹ Research Visit, Entry: 3 March 2017

landscape painting. If you avoid the main thoroughfares (street-bar-toilets-kitchen-fruit machines) then people aren't going to notice anything about you other than you're there. Later, when it gets busy, when you've had a few, that can be a different story, but for now it was a safe bet. Getting thrown out of here would be like getting thrown out of a bus station: it was possible, but you'd probably need to put a lot of work into it and the police would probably have to be involved. The nineteen year-old manager that was supposed to be in charge probably felt no more proprietorial about this place than the four fifty an hour Somali contract cleaners on Garden Street did towards their pavements.³⁰⁰



Fig 3.9 – The North Western, Liverpool [jdwetherspoon.com: The North Western]

³⁰⁰ Robert Lewis, *Swansea Terminal*, p.25

Corporate indifference, the alienation of staff from the territory they manage, inhuman scale, and architectural genericity here produce a curious form of humdrum ordinariness, analogous to the bus station. Though not exactly a positive portrait, it is a testimony to the way the very lack of proprietorship can produce strange forms of belonging.

Stratification & Zoning

Such accounts sit at odds with prevailing trends in the night-life economy, which have tended towards market stratification rather than inclusivity. Chatterton & Hollands for instance note how much the urban 1990s saw the fragmentation of urban social life into ‘entertainment ghettos such as gay villages, ethnic entertainment zones, women-only nights’ whilst providing no space for ‘unemployed low-income and welfare-dependent groups’. Market stratification existed, they argued, to ‘reaffirm existing structures in the labour market [...] hid[ing] the “dirty” back regions of entertainment production by constructing the illusion of a wealthy urban oasis.’³⁰¹ Yet a feature of Wetherspools is that it brings the stigmatised back regions on-stage, providing flexible, affordable space which break with the entertainment ghetto. It facilitates a form of *consumer autonomy*, both in its accessibility and in the minimal demands it makes on the identities of those who inhabit it. This comes at the cost of *social autonomy* - the capacity of groups to extend their sense of ownership over the space, and proprietorship - the capacity of its managers to do the same. It is a standardised, and individualised autonomy which provides belonging as a passive rather active undertaking.

Instead of using market stratification to filter access to its venues, Wetherspools instead uses zoning to operate it within them. In the Rockingham Arms for instance (a Wetherspools situated in London’s Elephant & Castle) ethnographic observation revealed how the different micro-territories of the pub tended to be populated by distinct demographic groupings: students and young white-collar workers gravitating to the raised dais at the rear of the pub, sheltered from the ambivalent space of the central pit, and furthest from the elder, working class regulars who dominated the bar-space and seats alongside the glass window frontage. Though such arrangements shift through the course of the day (and are unique to each architectural configuration and the availability of space in a given moment), some general

³⁰¹ Paul Chatterton & Robert Hollands, *Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces and Corporate Power*, Taylor & Francis (2003) p.28

patterns were observable. Retirement age men usually gathered in groups in the dominant positions towards the centre of the pub, nearest the bar and central thoroughfares, allowing them to referee passage to the serving counter. Students tended to opt for geographically distinct areas from the central zones - raised platforms, window areas, booth tables, except where critical mass or local demography made them the dominant party. Women, especially those with children, gravitate towards the edges of the pub which are most clear of the main thoroughfares. There was little interactivity between these groups. Yet the spatial division might be considered ideologically neutral, allowing for difference within shared parameters; reducing communality but increasing collective accommodation. Unlike market stratification in other sectors of the night-life economy, Wetherspoons could not be accused of shunting off demographics perceived as less advantageous to its finances or its brand.³⁰² Consequently, activities on display in its pubs are as diverse as: young mother meetups, solitary paper reading, solitary film viewing, student parties, all day drinking (solitary elderly, group elderly, group early-retired), hen and stag parties, morning drinking for off-shift night-workers, noon-time drinking for absentee office workers, afternoon drinking for off-shift day-workers, work meetings, dates and family meals.³⁰³

The diversity of this cast is well captured in an article by the journalist Angus Harrison in this excerpt on morning drinkers in a London Wetherspoons:

The next batch of morning drinkers is made up mostly of people stopping by for pints during their working day. From as early as 10AM, men drift up to the bar and set glasses next to their laptops like cups of coffee – standing up to take calls and organise meetings between swigs. Two men in their late twenties stride in, ID lanyards swinging across their chests, bouncing with excitement. They order two Jack Daniels and cokes and head straight outside to smoke. I catch them on my way out and ask if they're going

³⁰² Though there are some important caveats to this. In 2015 a group associated with the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain were awarded £24,000 in damages after they had been turned away from The Coronet – a Wetherspoons branch in Holloway (London) – on grounds of their ethnicity. Anonymous interviews with other Wetherspoons workers revealed that this was not an isolated incident, with similar exclusion of Travellers occurring at other branches, sometimes leading to the branch closing rather than serve the group in question. The perception was that this was an informal rather than explicit policy, but one known by branch managers and backed by the Wetherspoons office.

³⁰³ Research Visit, Various.

back to work afterwards. "Yeah," they laugh, after checking I'm not going to write their names down, "this just takes the edge off."

The working drinkers are a surprisingly common fixture. In a majority of central London pubs there is a steady turnaround of men in suits, with bluetooth headsets and briefcases. The team at the Flying Horse in east London, which starts serving at 10:30AM, tell me their most reliably regular customers are a bunch of city boys who arrive at 11AM every morning for pints of Guinness. "They all get a break around then, I think," I'm told. "They have a drink, stick around for a bit of chat and then head back to work."³⁰⁴

This heterodox population ensures that, in comparison to the other case studies explored in chapters 4 and 5, Wetherspools produces a far greater range of *activity* within its venues; though with each activity is accorded a diminished *intensity*. It is as though a core of action had been stretched across the space, encompassing more variety but containing less density. The following excerpt is taken from research visit notes during a late-stage visit to a Wetherspools, reflecting on the differences between observations made in the chain and the trendier craft-beer bar, BrewDog (the focus of chapter 4):

In Wetherspools I come to define people by their activities - and it is the activities and the spaces they adopt which are notable. Here in BrewDog the activities are uniform - there is very little variation, or at least far less than in Wetherspools, but more intensity with the mono-activity underway (e.g. in the conviviality of conversation). It is much easier to define people in BrewDog by what they look like, what they sound like, what conversations they have, and their sense of having already 'collectively bought in' to an identity by walking through the door. BrewDog customers are often making an active choice of association to drink here: they self-define, or self-actualise. There cannot be a 'Wetherspooner' in the same sense - they still have an identity, but it is imposed from the outside from a position of condescension. In BrewDog, there is a pre-prepared cookie identity which can be accessed just by one's presence in the space - 'I don't need to change it because it has already been made for me.' By contrast, JDW (Wetherspools) seems more like 'I don't need to change it because it's not for me, not

³⁰⁴ Angus Harrison, 'Meeting London's Morning Drinkers', *VICE*, 18 Aug 2017

*really for anyone'. More than that, it is as if the disavowal of branded identity is part of what constitutes a Wetherspoon subjectivity: unlike in BrewDog, nothing is expected beyond what I already am - my presence makes no claims just by being here.*³⁰⁵

There is then a certain civic legitimacy to Wetherspoons, catering to widely divergent sections of the population for a diverse range of purposes: everything to sedentary behaviour that a public leisure centre is to activity. If this successfully distinguishes it from other chains, it also contributes to a certain laxity of association, with Wetherspoons oscillating between the mundane and exceptional, the ostentatious and deprived, the civic and the capitalist, the real and unreal. Despite the homogeneity of its brand formula, the architectural variations between branches mean a customer need not drink in the finest example of a Wetherspoons to feel covered by a transferable legitimacy held by the brand as a whole. The down-at-heel Toll Gate in Turnpike Lane can in this sense 'borrow' associational credit from the sumptuousness at The Knights Templar in Chancery Lane. In turn, the ordinary rather than exclusive character of the company rescues even its most baroque iterations from the risk that they aspire to something more snobby and pretentious than they are. Likewise, if simulacrum is the intent, the ersatz character of its decor render the reproduction too obviously counterfeit to be fully read as deceitful. Just as in The North Western the grandeur of the host building elevates what its brand formula might otherwise attenuate; whilst that formula's very mediocrity forgives it the offense of a more exact, kitsch imitation. Where Wetherspoons departs from its brand ideal, such brokenness countermands elements of its alienation; where it delivers its ideal, this countermands the broader experience of its brokenness.

Were it not for the affordability and accessibility of its venues, this might be to no avail. But by keeping prices low consumers are left to feel they are, economically, getting something at good value on the cheap: experiencing something - a meal, an expensive craft beer, a building - they might not otherwise be equipped to afford. All of which prevents the feeling of being 'duped' that a truer pub simulacrum might create. Baudrillard writes that 'to dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has, [t]o simulate is to feign to what one hasn't'³⁰⁶ and yet Wetherspoons occupies an interstitial position between having and not having. It has the *real* building, it has the *real* ale, the *real* value, the *real* people. In failing reality, it only become more 'real' as a result - legible, un-deceitful for being half-hearted: real without being 'the real deal'. It manages

³⁰⁵ Research Visit, Entry: 23 March 2017.

³⁰⁶ Baudrillard, *Simulations* (1983) p.5

to be ordinary even where it is extraordinary. There is in other words another category of authenticity at play; one which survives the ‘gap’ between the fakery of commodification and the perception of its knowing consumers; a kind of ‘proverbial authenticity’ in which a common wisdom – of good value, of accepted compromise, of mundane legitimacy – has taken root.

Proxemics

The spatial characteristics of the pub can be as many and varied as pubs themselves. Likewise, as Chapter 2 demonstrated, even the basic division of rooms has been subject to considerable historical transformation. Despite this, some studies have suggested some underlying principles tend to predominate. In his analysis of traditional English pubs, published in 1990, the anthropologist Daniel Vasey observed how characteristics of pub spatiality, such as the ‘regular’s citadel’ relied on a sociopetal model of seating:

A number of tables, wall benches and chairs are ... arranged around a central space, permitting easy conversation with anyone in the room as well as creating a single social focus [...] incoming patrons tend to fill the wall seats first, turning their chairs to permit interaction with anyone in the room. Although two or three separate interacting groups are the rule during all but slack hours, groups are repeatedly brought together by exchanges of members and by extensions of conversations.³⁰⁷

In Vasey’s estimation this led to the occurrence of ‘frequent interaction at distances over twenty feet, with no apparent strain’.³⁰⁸ Another anthropologist, Kate Fox, has in turn noted how ‘the bar counter of the pub is one of the very few places in England where it is socially acceptable to strike up a conversation with a complete stranger.’³⁰⁹ The lasting popularity of the bar (as opposed to waiter service, tried at very points in the pub’s history) is therefore explained as a product of its social function: forcing patrons to get drinks encourages an element of social interaction and unexpected encounter. It might be added that it also inverts the typical power relationship between patron and server, since the patron is not waited upon, but waits. This feature – which Fox terms ‘cultural remission’ – works concentrically outwards from the bar,

³⁰⁷ David Vasey, *The Pub and English Social Change*, AMS (1990) p.52/53

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.52

³⁰⁹ Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*, Hodder & Stoughton (2005) p.89

‘limited to the bar counter, and in some cases, to a lesser degree, to tables situated very near the counter – those furthest from the bar being universally understood to be the most ‘private’.³¹⁰ Games areas – around the pool table or darts board – are also granted exceptional status. Other features, such as ‘invisible queuing’ (in which the apparently erratic distribution of people along the bar masks a strict and hidden order) also provide testament to the pub’s particular spatial order. How these features have been translated, or failed to translate, into Wetherspools is the subject of this section.

Like the traditional pub, every Wetherspools has its supply of regulars – groups of people, usually men, who assemble from early in the morning in a predictable enough pattern to be familiar to other regulars: e.g. ‘is Tommy in today?’ ‘he’ll be about for dinner - any moment now’.³¹¹ As discussed earlier in the chapter, these men also occupy predictable spaces within the pub. However, unlike in the case of the ‘regular’s citadel’ identified by Vasey, proximity to the bar is only a secondary criterion: what tended to matter was supervisory control of the thoroughfares – a capacity to referee the pub space. This is partly due to the fact that bar lounging is much harder in a Wetherspools. The high stools which normally accompany the bar space are usually not present, in order to favour mass access and faster turnaround. But it is also to do with scale: the sheer size of a Wetherspools alters the act of crossing the thoroughfare – an important moment of drama in many pubs – making it both less significant, and more easily lost on the regulars who are most invested in adjudicating it. Fox’s concentric rings of power still function, but from a different point of reference.

Invisible queuing likewise experiences modification. Though still present, its stringency waxes and wanes in lines with the busyness of the bar and the time of week. Friday and Saturday nights, where Wetherspools is most likely to either form the central nightlife of a small town, or form part of a ‘going out’ circuit in a city, saw a blurring of behaviours between the pub (strict fealty to invisible queuing) and the club / bar (assertive individualism). Again, the simple reality of scale (both in terms of bar length and number of patrons) means that whatever assortment of people happen to be arranged before the bar struggle to cohere as a unit organised enough to self-regulate. During busy hours they are also less likely to know each other, and less likely to encounter each other in future, leading to low penalties for

³¹⁰ Ibid, p.90

³¹¹ Research Visit, Entry: 7 Mar 2017

transgression. In turn, the anonymization of the bar staff, transformed into company lackeys by branded uniforms, quick staff turnaround, often young age, and low status, lessens their natural

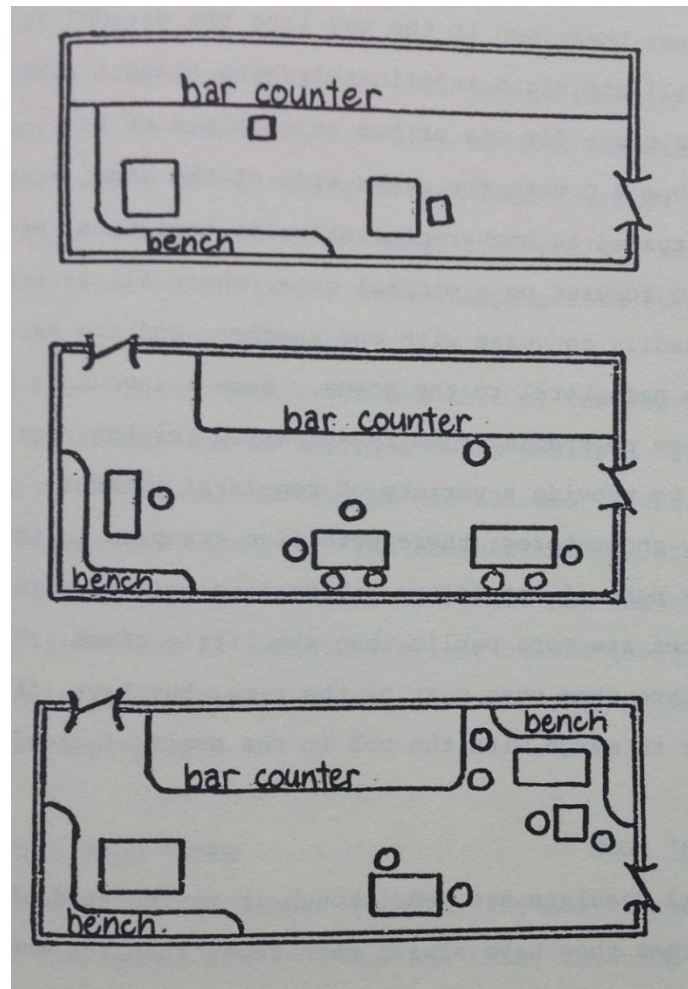


Fig 3.10 – Three examples of traditional sociopetal pub layouts. (via Vasey, *The Pub and English Social Change*, 1990)

authority as arbitrators of the invisible queue. All of these factors add up to a kind of inured indifference towards customary practices at peak times. This may also be due to what Robert Shaw refers to as ‘affective manipulation’ in the pubs, where changes to lighting and available seating move the atmosphere away from the slower, more sedentary temporality of the pub towards the faster pace of the night-life economy.³¹² The fact that, in some venues, Wetherspoons was forced to abandon its reliance on these informal customary practices altogether, and make the invisible queue formally visible through so-called ‘post-office style

³¹² Robert Shaw, *The Nocturnal City*, Taylor & Francis (2018), p.74

queuing' (in which portable barriers regiment the route to the bar) confirms the breakdown of the system.³¹³ In 2018, the company went as far as to issue a statement on the 'correct' method of queuing in its venues to counter the confusion they generated.³¹⁴ Wetherspoons now operate an 'app-delivery' system which skips out the bar altogether, allowing patrons to order food and drinks directly to their table.³¹⁵ Being waited on – once a feature of moral improvement – has returned as a method of convenient delivery.



Fig 3.11 – 'Invisible queuing' gives way to formal queuing at 'The King of Wessex' Wetherspoons [via Tandleman, 'Join the Queue' Tandleman's Beer Blog, July 28 2017, found at: pubcurmudgeon.blogspot.com/2017/07/join-queue.html, accessed 02/02/18]

The sociopetal layout described by Vasey has been a further casualty of translation, with some strange behavioural results. Here, for example, is a description from field notes documenting a group of regulars in a Wetherspoons in suburban Manchester, embarking on a mid-morning drinking session:

Four men in a group drinking ['Central Men'], just past retirement age - the most common demographic for regulars. Fifth man on table next to them, alone but known to the group ['Solitary Man']. Elsewhere in the pub a table of labourers are having tea

³¹³ The Pub Curmudgeon, 'Join the queue' *Tandleman Beer Blog*, 28 July 2017

³¹⁴ Alex Richards & James Brinsford, 'Wetherspoons has revealed the correct way to queue to be served', *SomersetLive*, 7 July 2018

³¹⁵ J D Wetherspoon, 'The Wetherspoon App' (jdwetherspoon.com/pubs/order-and-pay-app, accessed 03/17)

and breakfast. Approximately five other couples are present, of mixed ages and genders. The four men have taken a table in the centre of the room and made it their 'regular's citadel'.

Solitary Man has refreshed his pint. He occasionally fields questions from the Central Men when one or two of their party head off somewhere. Lots of light swearing is rolled casually into the conversation. Low timbred voices. Occasional silence.

Solitary Man sat with his back to the window, curved towards the Central Men. His phone is plugged in, and he is idly scrolling, seemingly without much purpose. He makes the occasional turn to listen to a more involved story emanating from the Central Men. His body language is half committed, trapped in-situ between being social involvement and maintaining his solitude.

Long period of silence follows. One of the Central Men browses a menu which has been brought round (this one advertises burgers), another two twist off, turning their bodies and looking in opposite directions to each other. Eventually one of them goes off to the bar to refresh his pint. One man looks in towards the table, the other looks away. Solitary Man receives a phone-call, seemingly from the phone company. Phone calls tend to break up the rhythm and silence - an extraneous voice which cuts through and forms a new basis for conversation. Papers (in this case a copy of The Sun and local press) are used in similar, more old-fashioned way. When conversation drifts to silence, the paper and phone come out again.

Two new Central Men arrive, and one departs. The Solitary Man takes this as a cue to leave his table and join them. Now six men are stuck at the table in an intense island formation. Solitary Man, despite joining, continues prior activities - diverting back to browsing phone or calling people. A new man arrives, also known to the group, and takes up the table formerly occupied by the Solitary Man, though one seat closer. The uncomfortable proximity of the men to each other, trapped around a single table with only an adjacent one for outflow, is clearly ill-suited to the kind of day-in-day-out rituals of the regulars, in which long pockets of silence and a sort of half-commitment to the group is required to even out the days.

Several strategies emerge to cater for this problem. One of the Central Men takes the dominant position looking straight in, the other two pull their chairs away from the table at diagonals, as though they're slightly further away, and only partly present at a table which by design fully commits them to directed, internally facing conversation. Lots of distant staring techniques, and odd gestures are used to break up the long silences: the oscillation of serious topics, little stories, half-jokes with 'jollity-prompts', silence, staple topics ('you see the Chelsea game last night?')³¹⁶

Several points emerge from this example. A 'regular's citadel' is present but struggling to adapt to a spatial layout ill-suited to its existence. In the traditional pub layouts observed by Vasey, patrons could take their position in the room at a relative, but still social, distance. In such a configuration it was possible to be entirely silent but still involved (what I would term 'silent sociality'); and alternate between investment in group discussion and being set apart from it. As Vasey points out, the primary unit of the pub is not the table but the room, 'favouring interaction within the whole room or within some major segment of it'.³¹⁷ Yet the absence of rooms, and the broadly sociofugal layout of Wetherspools tables, prevents such a possibility occurring. As a result it is difficult to be on the fringes of the central group of regulars - who do much to dictate the life and activity of the pub in slow periods - and still involve oneself or interact. Across the majority of Wetherspools, tables are organised in a grid system, each an island partitioned from its immediate neighbours. One cannot be social without socialising. This limits proprietorship - preventing cliques from dominating the pub - but at the cost of attenuating the authority the regular's citadel, which can provide the pub its anchor.

These problems perhaps explain the controversial introduction of television screens across the chain. These display Sky News on mute repeat, providing a justification for solitude, but which further alienates the viewer from the presence of those around them, displacing it onto the television. A striking characteristic of many of the Wetherspools visited is exactly such solitary behaviour, particularly amongst the elderly. At The Toll Gate in a suburban district of North London for example, the daytime back-rooms were populated with individual elderly men arranged one by one across isolated neighbouring tables, with no real means of turning their tables in towards each other, or joining the central hubbub nearer the bar. The absence of bar stools impacts the elderly most heavily since conversation with bar staff is the most easy to

³¹⁶ Research Visit, Entry: 7 March 2017

³¹⁷ Vasey, *The Pub and English Social Change* (1990) p.51

broach but too strenuous a location to perch without support. The partitioning of areas - though an attempt to mitigate this effect by falsifying the intimacy of sociopetal layouts, does little to countermand the problem. In the Manchester example given above, the situation was less extreme - two tables at least were able to accommodate each other - but the consequent packing of men around one table demonstrated how limited this setup was for sustaining daily interaction or involving additional members. It represents a failed translation of the regular's citadel; transferring the pub's primary unit from the room to the table.³¹⁸

Generalisations about such proxemic effects may seem difficult to sustain - certainly, some Wetherspools have configurations which work reasonably well to produce a social ambience of sorts; and the 'traditional pub' documented by Vasey is only an average composite of the examples he encountered on his stay in particular parts of England, e.g. Bolton. When visiting The Spouters Corner - a modern, high-ceilinged, Wetherspools in Wood Green with vast windows encircling the front entrance - on an April mid-week afternoon, a more convivial atmosphere seemed to predominate than in the nearby Toll Gate:

The space is airy and open, with central highchairs running along one side to form a thoroughfare. Settle seating make up the other side, which extends downward into an area of open tables at the back. The open plan makes the whole pub appreciable at nearly a single glance, and you can work out who is here with a quick left/right scan as you walk to the bar. The power spot where the regulars gather is not the high stools but the booth closest to the entrance - it has the most visibility to the door, and combines the embeddedness of the booth with the open, lightness of the 'balcony' space (accessed via steps & where the students would normally be - and where the youngest couple in the pub & families are). The thoroughfare to the bar is well populated with regulars, who cross-interact between the highchairs and the booths: elderly men and recently retired alike. It is far more convivial than in its other iterations. This appears to be paradoxically due to the lack of partitions and the dramatic volume of the space - filled with light from the vast front windows, as well as the creation of a central thoroughfare with unusual proximity to the booths and highchairs. Though it may also be to do with the efforts of the individuals involved - in this case an energetic elderly man who does a good job at rallying the others together, and this pub's 'Central Men'

³¹⁸ It is nevertheless notable, and testament to their resilience, that such behaviours continue even when the environment is no longer conducive to it occurring.

*who frequently summon newcomers over. These features raise the atmosphere, and the design choices, though straightforward, make it easy to appreciate who is where in the pub, and so gravitate towards them, as well as cross-communicate between the central spaces.*³¹⁹



Fig 3.12 – A classic, grid-style, ‘sociofugal’ table layout in Wetherspoons [jdwetherspoon.com]

The Spouters Corner example suggests the provisional nature of any such proxemic determinism, and the difficulty of generalising across the chain as a whole. In some ways this particular branch could be seen as a true expression of Edward Hall’s desire that, rather than legislating either sociofugal or sociopetal space, there should simply be a ‘congruence between design and function so that there is a variety of spaces, and people can be involved or not as occasion and mood demand.’³²⁰ Across the sweep of research visits however, this was the exception rather than the rule: evidence that the agency of pub-goers is capable of transforming any environment with enough impetus – but that such an impetus is rarely reinforced by design.

³¹⁹ Research Visit, Entry: 3 April 2017

³²⁰ Edward Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, Anchor (1990) p.103

Sounds and Senses

Proxemics are not the only feature of the traditional pub which have struggled in their passage to non-traditional formats. Comparing sound recordings taken across a sample of different Wetherspoons reveals a distinct soundscape at odds with the acoustics of traditional pub settings; one which limits the capacity of patrons to interact beyond their immediate surroundings, and their ability to triangulate, differentiate, and discriminate the sounds of the pub space. Acoustics are, of course, subjective: no one quite hears the same way. Recordings too are fraught with technological influence, recording *a version* of sonic reality, but one distinct from the human ear and partial to the recording equipment at hand. Time of day, and the considerable variability in volume, materials, and location all inevitably affect how sound operates within an architectural environment. Nevertheless, some general conclusions can be drawn by matching a first-hand, written description of the spatial acoustics against a recording taken for the purposes of evidence and further reflection. By accompanying written records with sound recordings, the embodied experience of sound can also be considered. Likewise, observations and recordings taken across a number of distinct examples within a given typology give a sense, if only a tentative sense, of the qualities of a typical soundscape within them.

An indicative comparison might be made for instance between the acoustics of two traditional, London pubs (The Harp [see ‘The Harp’] and The Southampton Arms [see PhD - Southampton Arms]) and a typical Wetherspoons venue (The Sheffield Water Works - set in the former 19th century headquarters of the Sheffield Water Works Company [see ‘PhD - Sheffield Water Works’]). In the Wetherspoons example, the legibility of the sound is poorer. Voices clash and overlap, seeming to disperse and then cluster in the middle-distance without much distinction between the near and far. Individual conversations are hard to apprehend, and there is a stretched out, attenuated quality which makes the sound feel dissociated from the bodies producing it. Occasionally sharp noises pierce the soundscape - the clatter of cutlery and glasses - and certain categories of human noise as well.³²¹ As a journalist described in a visit to the Hamilton Hall Wetherspoons:

I notice a group of students killing time before a train, in particular one whose
whinnying laugh keeps shooting into the air without warning. Whenever it does, the

³²¹ Sound file: ‘PhD - Sheffield Water Works’ 10 Nov 2017

pub visibly tenses up. The morning drinkers freeze, as though he'd just cracked them on the head with the back of a spoon.³²²

By contrast the recordings taken at The Harp and the Southampton contain a more rounded sonic texture. The ambient noise is closer and richer. It is also much more legible - nearby conversation is easily apprehended, especially in the latter, even with Jazz music playing in the background.³²³ In The Harp, the density of the sound gives it an embodied quality: notes from the research visit describe how the acoustics press and saturate the body, absorbing the atmosphere into it.³²⁴ Here, sound's capacity to 'sketch' space, giving it a sonic as well as physical body, is much more apparent. In comparison, the amorphous pitch of The Water Works, and other observed examples like The Knights Templar, is picked up by the head and remains there: discarnate and indecipherable.³²⁵

The net effect of this acoustic environment, as recorded at numerous Wetherspoons sites, is stress - something noted in several accounts within the research diary: 'ambient sound stressful - contrast experienced physically as we switch to smaller, intimate pub. I feel the comparable silence almost wash through my body, and become aware of the tension I was carrying in my head' (Knights Templar), 'mildly stressed by wall of very indeterminate noise, exacerbated by being alone in the sound and not contributing to it... Can't hear conversations - just snatches from those directly behind and next to me but not sustained.' (North Western), 'usual disaggregated sound but with occasional penetrating noise of shouting men, who're dominating the large space despite being quite far away - approx 30 metres... only the most objectionable sounds are carried and afforded' (Richard John Blackler). Interestingly, The Spouter's Corner stood out again as an exception - with the inevitable distancing of sound in the vastness of the space, but with more legibility than other examples. The acoustic effect of Wetherspoons seems to be produced by a number of factors: the tendency of the buildings towards large, open-plan spaces with high ceilings; and at times the proliferation of harder materials - chrome bars for instance - which refract rather than absorb noise, the acoustics 'reverberating in a way that cuts through the body.'³²⁶

³²² Angus Harrison, 'Meeting London's Morning Drinkers', *VICE*, 18 Aug 2017

³²³ Sound file: 'PhD - Southampton Arms' 24 Oct 2017

³²⁴ Research Visit, Entry: 29 Feb 2017

³²⁵ *Ibid*

³²⁶ Research Visit, Entry: 8 Mar 2017 - Use of atypical materials, and atypical structures, could, of course, countermand these effects.

It would be incorrect to describe this shift solely in terms of lost intimacy: it is still possible to be intimate in the Wetherspoons soundscape. Rather, it is the manner of intimacy which has changed. Conversations which might be impossible in a more sonically legible environment are, in a sense, sheltered by nondifferentiable noise.³²⁷ Despite its open floor plan, the architectural privacy of the Victorian snug has been reproduced in Wetherspoons, and generalised as a kind of aural architecture instead. Much like in the case of its layout, this constitutes a kind of privatisation of the atmospheric experience against those in which all users are, in some way, implicated. This seems an important component of what pubs are and what their ‘authenticity’ is felt to contain: sonically exceptional spaces sought after for their soundscapes and constitute a crucial component of their ‘atmosphere’. Just as the imposition of piped music has been historically resisted as antithetical [see chapter 2] to the pub environment, so putting earphones in whilst in a pub would be considered strange in a way that using earphones in a café or bar environment never would. A phenomenon which is not unique to Wetherspoons however is the increasingly schizophonic character of all social space as phone use becomes ubiquitous and disembodied voices enter the soundscape.

The olfactory sense has almost universally been removed from the pub landscape. In traditional pubs and Wetherspoons alike, the smoking ban and more exacting cleaning regimes have for the most part stripped pubs of their distinct smells; the potency of which is clear from older sources. Here, for instance, is an excerpt by from Len Deighton’s 1967 *London Dossier*:

Before opening time there is a virgin aroma of freshness, an inimitable pub-perfume mixture of hops and malt, spirits and polish with perhaps a faint touch of violet-scented air-freshener. This is my boyhood nostalgia. Spilt ale, dried and sugar-sticky.³²⁸

On the whole, the pubs visited tended to hold fairly neutral smells, broken only by the occasional bout of staleness, vinegar, hops, and food.³²⁹ The top down nature of their design and the need to conform to uniform company standards result in the traces, marks, and arrangements of patrons being erased at the end of each day’s custom. No personal tankards

³²⁷ Research Visit, Entry: 22 Mar 2017

³²⁸ Adrian Bailey in Len Deighton, *London Dossier*, Penguin (1967) via Boak and Bailey ‘Pub Perfume’ 21 July 2017

³²⁹ Research Visit, Entry: The North Western, 5 Mar 2017

are placed behind the bar; tattered furniture is (at least expected to be) replaced; there are no portraits of now passed regulars or the in-jokes of current ones; you cannot organise a night of singing or a competition of darts. The ‘publicness’ of the public house is thereby reduced to a flat service centred around exchange. Space is rented for as long as the drink lasts but cannot be collectively produced in the sense of being altered and changed in confluence with its patrons. Wetherspoons venues are thereby invested with the fluidity of an abstraction, reproducing against its own intention the ‘touchlessness’ characteristic of deracinated modernity.³³⁰

Wetherspoons consequently manufacture a narrower range of experiential possibility. Spontaneity has been written out from the outset and a guaranteed package can be expected from every occasion: they contain less ‘risk’, but therefore less surprise. As a Wetherspoons press officer suggested, the design of the pubs should be such that ‘a 70 year old grandfather and his 18 year old granddaughter should be able to go there together and both feel comfortable’, an aim which though laudable, entails a protected, predictable environment.³³¹ As Rountree and Ackroyd note, the emergence of the concept of entrepreneurial governance in the 1990s saw venues responsible for the management of the spaces they operated in exchange for less restrictive regulation, and there is a sense in which state intervention has in this way been privatised and outsourced by means other than ostensible policy. For free-market ideologues there was an obvious discomfort in utilising the state to govern individual’s drinking choices or behaviour, and such arrangements perhaps reflect the result of the contradictions expressed between the moral conservatism and economic liberalism propounded by more or less all UK government since Wetherspoon’s existence.³³² Such biopolitical characteristics are even evident in design features like the walls of antique books which adorned many Wetherspoons pubs, encouraging a ‘subdued library-like atmosphere’ aimed at teaching patrons how to behave.³³³ But it is perhaps the less conscious choices - of layout, sound, smell and temporality - which produce the most etiolating effects.

³³⁰ Robert MacFarlane, *The Old Ways*, Penguin (2012)

³³¹ Wetherspoons press officer, cited in Mark Hailwood / Deborah Toner, *Biographies of Drink* (2015) p. 128

³³² James Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England*, Manchester University Press (2009) – ‘Beer orders: the changing landscape in the 1990s’

³³³ ‘Last Orders for the Local? Working Class Space v the Market Place’, *Past Tense* (2001)

Conclusion

Wetherspoon's rise has been facilitated by a regulatory environment which enables the leveraging of scalar power against small local competitors; reinforced by a relative exploitation of its workforce. It benefits from an economic environment in which councils are rarely in a place to oppose its presence, and where obsolete fixed capital has few alternative investors. Its appeals - of affordable and accessible social life, of minimal demands, and consumer-led democracy - can neither be dismissed nor entirely embraced as a product of broader social inequality and class division. Its attachment to broader economic trends; of individualism and consumptive aspiration on the one hand, 'ordinariness' and democratic consumption on the other, are equally ambivalent. Overall however it is the element of control; both formal and experiential, which inhibits a celebratory account of the chain's place in British social life. The consequences - of privatised experience, and its corollaries in loneliness and predictability - are a negative dialectic to the supernumerary possibility that social life ought to make possible. As Robin Evans warned in an essay written the year before the first Wetherspoons came into existence,

The cumulative effect of architecture during the last two centuries has been like that of a general lobotomy performed on society at large, obliterating vast areas of social experience. It is employed more and more as a preventive measure; an agency for peace, security and segregation which, by its very nature, limits the horizon of experience - reducing noise-transmission, differentiating movement patterns, suppressing smells, stemming vandalism, cutting down the accumulation of dirt, impeding the spread of disease, veiling embarrassment, closeting indecency and abolishing the unnecessary; incidentally reducing daily life to a private shadow-play. But on the other side of this definition, there is surely another kind of architecture that would seek to give fully play to the things that have been so carefully masked by its anti-type; an architecture arising out of the deep fascination that draws people towards others; an architecture that recognizes passion, carnality and sociality.³³⁴

Whatever their failings as sites of inclusivity, the traditional institutions of working class social life could make some claim to expressing something of that organic, carnal, popular culture.

³³⁴ Robin Evans, 'Figures, Doors and Passages', in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*, Architectural Association (1997)

The claim is not uncomplicated in light of the historic domination of the brewing industry, the manipulation of social reformers, and the simple fact that pubs are, at the most rudimentary level, sites for the exchange of a commodity. Nevertheless a distinction can be drawn between, say, the sense of shared ownership found in the traditional local, or the post-war world of democratically controlled and co-operatively owned working men's clubs, and the corporate forms which supplanted them.³³⁵ To see this as a kind of cultural 'primitive accumulation' of social life - the appropriation of a hitherto collective commons - might exaggerate the emancipatory character of what went before, but it is an exaggeration which captures something of a macro shift that the vexed complexity of the pub's micro-history might otherwise negate. This is matched by a second kind of economic accumulation - in which buildings designed as theatres, cinemas, and town halls are bought by Wetherspools, converted to commercial premises, and consequently priced at an inflated rate beyond conceivable reversion to original use. Wetherspools may 'save' the grand buildings it acquires, but it only does so in a context in which the public sphere is eroded, through political and economic choice or inaction, and where its salvation is purely aesthetic rather than functional.³³⁶ Its presence in local geographies has a centralising and concentrating effect, capable, perhaps, of providing a magnet for increased custom, but rarely with the 'halo' effect which is often ascribed.

Finally, its relationship to history - abstract, tokenistic, and exhibitive - parodies the lived history of the pub in its more traditional guise. The customary relations which accompany it fail to translate into a new environment ill-suited to their purpose. As one regular bitterly commented,

No one speaks to each other in here. No one ever speaks to each other in Wetherspools. We all come in for the cheap beer, and we sit alone - we sit down, and we don't try to create any untoward feelings between each other because it is a social space. So we don't talk about Brexit in here, we don't talk politics, we don't even talk to each other.³³⁷

³³⁵ Richard Hall, 'Being a Man, Being a Member: Masculinity and Community in Britain's Working Men's Clubs, 1945-1960' *Cultural and Social History* (2016)

³³⁶ *The Stage*, Dec 4 1997

³³⁷ 'Brexit breakdown: southern discomfort' (Video) *The Guardian*, 24 Jan 2019

The consequence is a kind of ‘rootless nationalism’ mirroring the ‘official nationalism’ discussed in chapter 2: an Englishness of motifs and images rather than embodied feeling. The affinity between Wetherspoons and the far right, though not welcomed by the chain, is therefore perhaps unsurprising.³³⁸ Wetherspoons quite literally takes over the architecture of a more complex civic and social life and replaces it with something predictable, repetitive, easily accommodated. Félix Guattari argued that architectural spaces are ‘machines of meaning, of sensation, abstract machines... that carry incorporeal universes that are not universals but can standardize individual and collective subjectivity’. Wetherspoons is in this sense a machine for fragmentation: from the collective to the self, from the present to the past. It centralises social life, only to dissipate it; appropriating the signifiers of a national institution, only to hollow out the content which give them meaning.

³³⁸ The company was led to banning the English Defence League from its pubs in 2010 after they unwittingly became the preferred gathering point around far-right organisation’s rallies (the police in Stoke on Trent had requested the company host their pre-rally gathering, to which they initially assented). A video posted in 2013 suggests the limits of these bans however, as the fittingly named St George’s Wetherspoon in Bristol, turned into a battleground between an EDL outfit and the riot police. It would be absurd to claim Wetherspoons represented, or willingly accommodated, the activity of English fascism. Yet there is an uncomfortable sense in which the rootless nationalism of the EDL holds a protean affinity with the rootless nationalism of the chain’s aesthetics and that the deep structural trends which underpin the existence of one counterform in the rise of the other.

Chapter 4

Performative Authenticity: BrewDog & The Politics of Alienation

This chapter explores the case of BrewDog, the most significant operator within the UK ‘craft beer’ movement. BrewDog is an example a ‘sideways’ institution – (top down in its corporate model, yet partially funded and popularised through the cultivation of a crowdfunding fan-base). BrewDog, like the craft beer movement as a whole, posits artisan experimentation against the homogenising outputs of ‘Big Beer’. This ethos sees craft beer as a bastion of authenticity, democracy, and collaboration in contrast to what it sees as corporate norms of hypocrisy, hierarchy, and monopolisation. Such values are performed through BrewDog Bars ‘deconstructed’ architectural style which ‘crashes the walls’ between production and consumption, seemingly removing the alienated character of architectural aesthetics through the use of non-standardised DIY décor. BrewDog can be viewed as an attempt to accommodate many of the thematic strands which resonated in Chapter 2’s anatomy of the public house (towards particularity, authenticity and collectivity), whilst simultaneously urbanising, modernising and internationalising its geography, economic structure, and aesthetic imagery. Yet this attempt is also fraught with paradoxes. Its modernity is founded on a yearning for the tactile and the unpredictable, whilst still being reliant on techniques of industrial mass production, freezing its environments in a self-conscious theme of erratic spontaneity. Meanwhile its aesthetics are, especially within Britain, ‘hauntological’: refusing a stance towards the future and instead making their home in the ruins of the industrial world and its attendant subcultures. Likewise, it’s radical claim to represent a break with a pre-crash era of corporate business, seems increasingly questionable in light of its own global expansion, use of venture capital, and monopolisation of craft beer offerings – making pacts with corporate distributors, such as J D Wetherspoon (discussed in chapter 2) and containing meaningful democratic control of its operations.

Overview

BrewDog was founded in 2007 out of an industrial unit rented from Aberdeenshire council. Nine years later, the company had grown to 580 employees, built a dedicated eco-brewery in

Aberdeenshire, established over 30 bars, and reached an annual trading profit of £5.5 million. By 2017 it had expanded its operations to include a 42-acre brewery in Columbus, Ohio, and announced plans for a third site in Australia. Part of an international wave of craft beer companies which began in the United States in the 1980s, BrewDog is the singular most successful craft beer brand in the UK, notorious for its polemic marketing strategies and ‘punk’ aesthetics. Its bars are present in most major British cities in Britain, with multiple sites in the largest, stretching as far afield as Tokyo and São Paulo.

Like many UK-based craft brewers, BrewDog was a beneficiary of the 2002 Small Breweries Relief Scheme, which offered duty reductions of up to 50% for breweries producing less than 60,000 hectolitres a year. The financial crisis of 2007-8, though hard on small businesses, also created new opportunities for companies which successfully read the zeitgeist; popularising an anti-corporate ethos and suggesting the unstable foundations on which the prevailing model of capitalism rested. More than any other brewer, and perhaps any other UK company, BrewDog has aligned themselves wholesale to these tectonic shifts - superficially, in their marketing and rhetoric - and more substantially in their financing models and business practices. Such is their extent that some left-wing commentators have even argued that BrewDog even represents the nascent murmurings of ‘post-capitalist’ enterprise.³³⁹ Others have been more sceptical, arguing that BrewDog harvests the energy of the zeitgeist for its own ends, commodifying the activity of radical traditions whilst making little concordant contribution to them.³⁴⁰ This chapter will explore the ramifications of BrewDog for the politics of the public house - representing both the most radical departure from its traditional aesthetics and geography - whilst ostensibly resurrecting many of the creeds outlined in chapter 2.

Niche is the New Mainstream

In 2016, BrewDog’s CEO, James Watt, published *Business for Punks* - a manual-come-mission-statement - expounding the business practices and ideology of the company. In it, Watt argues for a decisive break in the desires of consumers following the financial crisis - a

³³⁹ Paul Mason, “Brewdog’s Open Source Revolution is at the Vanguard of Postcapitalism”, *Guardian*, 29/02/16

³⁴⁰ Ray Filar, ‘Trans™: how the trans movement got sold out’ *openDemocracy*, 25 Nov 2016 / Jonathan Moses ‘Byron, BrewDog and the Recuperation of Radical Aesthetics’ *openDemocracy* 10 May 2013

new premium is placed on alternative offerings, authenticity, belonging and the dissolution of information control – and the necessity for start-up companies to relate to it:

Niche is the new mainstream. To have any chance of success you have to start under the radar, on the fringes out in the cold. What was impossible ten years ago is now a paradise of opportunity as boundaries, borders and distance have dissolved into insignificance... Information can now flow freely and quickly all around the world, giving you instant access to your very own dedicated tribe.³⁴¹

BrewDog's marketing campaigns have attempted to capitalise on these trends, with a positioning that, even as the company leaves behind its 'fringe' roots, nevertheless presents itself as an insurrectionary force whose aim is not the success of its business but the victory of its ideals. One of Watt's key lessons in *Business for Punks* is that you do not 'build a business but build a crusade' with the corollary effect that broader consumer values become accessed and identified through your brand.³⁴² In BrewDog's case that crusade has been two-fold: on the one hand 'elevating the status of craft beer... to make people as passionate about great craft beer as we are' and on the other, waging war on 'the corporate beer whores crazy for power and world domination' with their 'mass-marketed lagers... fizzy, tasteless liquid cardboard propped up by snazzy straplines.'³⁴³ At the start of BrewDog's life, this core message was reinforced in almost every media appearance made by Watt, and formed the basis of all their marketing stunts. To announce the start of their crowdsourced alt-financing programme 'Equity for Punks', Watt and Dickie drove a Soviet tank to a face-off with the Bank of England, and later tossed stuffed 'fat cats' from a helicopter over the City of London.³⁴⁴ Likewise, when alcoholic drinks giant Diageo blocked BrewDog's award for Pub Operator of the Year in 2012, the company revelled in the free PR, denouncing Diageo as a 'band of dishonest hammerheads and dumb ass corporate freaks. No soul and no morals, with the integrity of a rabid dog and the style of a wart hog.'³⁴⁵ They were scared, suggested Watt, of 'the craft beer revolutionaries'.³⁴⁶

³⁴¹ James Watt, *Business for Punks: Break all the rules – the BrewDog way*, Portfolio Penguin (2015) p.30

³⁴² Ibid p.20

³⁴³ 'BrewDog Manifesto' (short print release) 2013

³⁴⁴ 'Equity for Punks 4: Death to the Fat Cats' *BrewDog*, 12 May 2015 ([youtube.com/watch?v=fkMbDEtHB0A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkMbDEtHB0A); accessed 07/17)

³⁴⁵ BrewDog, 'Diageo Screw BrewDog', *brewdog.com*, 9 May 2012

³⁴⁶ Jon Henley, 'The aggressive, outrageous, infuriating (and ingenious) rise of Brewdog', *The Guardian*, 24 Mar 2016



Fig 4.1 – BrewDog founders James Watt & Martin Dickie drive a tank through the City of London [Michelle Russell, 'Twitter Works!', Snow Marketing, Jun 28 20013, found at: snowmarketing.co.uk/twitter-works, accessed 01/01/2016]

This insurgent energy is characteristic of the craft beer movement as a whole, even where its rhetoric has proved quieter and more community focused. Many of the more established craft brewers dialogue with a larger grassroots network of brewing enthusiasts, running classes, competitions and providing space for brewing club meets. BrewDog in turn runs 'advanced beer school', offering classes and publishing videos with brewing tips on its website.³⁴⁷ In 2016 it broke with the traditional corporate approaches to the protection of intellectual property and released 'DIY Dog' - a recipe manual for every beer the company had ever made for homebrewers to try and imitate themselves:

Copy them, tear them to pieces, bastardise them, adapt them and most of all enjoy them. They are well-travelled but with plenty of miles still left on the clock. Just remember to share your brews and your results... Oh, and if you are from one of the

³⁴⁷ 'BrewDog Beer Schools Will Return Next Month' *Beer Today*, 13 Dec 2018

global beer mega corporations and you are reading this, your computer will spontaneously combust...³⁴⁸

Every year £200,000 of BrewDog's profits are, the company claims, sent to start-up breweries, with mentoring and equipment to follow.³⁴⁹ A foundational belief of the craft beer movement has been that a rising tide lifts all boats, rejecting inter-brewery competition in favour of a united front against the major companies.³⁵⁰ As Watt puts it, 'winning businesses promote their category. Losers promote themselves.'³⁵¹ Many craft-beer companies, including BrewDog, visit each other's breweries to share advice and collaborate on beers to be sold collectively. 'Craft beer in general is very unique' notes one brewer based in Harrisburg, 'it's a brotherhood, it's us against the big guys, so everybody is in it together.'³⁵² In the context of this collective ethos, leaving the fold by "going corporate" can be treated as something akin to apostasy. When San Diego brewer, Ballast Point, sold itself to Constellation Brands in November 2015 for \$1 Billion, BrewDog doctored bottles of their collaboration beer, adding new labels with Ballast Point's name scrubbed over in black marker and bleeping out any mention of the company in promotional videos.³⁵³ When Camden Town Brewery sold to AB InBev a month later, BrewDog posted a video tearing down their name from the guest beer list: 'Mega corporations care about costs, market share, dividends, valuations. They don't care about beer'.³⁵⁴

BrewDog has tapped this collectivist energy in other ways. In 2013 it ran its first #MashTag campaign on social media, crowdsourcing a recipe to be made in the company's new Ellon brewery. '#MashTag was beer by the people, for the people' claimed Watt, 'We basically put our fans in control of the brewery and the brewery process', nominally handing over the means of production to the consumer.³⁵⁵ More explicitly political interventions have also been made. After the passage of homophobic legislation in the run up to the Russian Winter Olympics, BrewDog sent a crate of 'Hello, My Name is Vladimir' to Moscow, depicting a Warhol-

³⁴⁸ BrewDog, *DIY DOG: The BrewDog Back Catalogue*, brewdog.com (2016)

³⁴⁹ Jon Henley, *The Guardian*, 24 Mar 2016

³⁵⁰ 'Brewed in the Burg' *GK Visual*, 23 Aug 2015 (youtube.com/watch?v=Bh2jn4rh80; accessed 07/17)

³⁵¹ James Watt, *Business for Punks: Break all the rules – the BrewDog way*, Portfolio Penguin (2015) p.30

³⁵² 'Brewed in the Burg' *YouTube*, 23 Aug 2015

³⁵³ 'Shipwreck' *BrewDog*, 31 Mar 2016 (youtube.com/watch?v=-GnDv6Wn73E; accessed 07/17)

³⁵⁴ Jon Henley, *The Guardian*, 24 Mar 2016

³⁵⁵ James Watt, *Business for Punks* (2015) p.119 – in reality however this amounted to little more than a popular vote from a multiple choice series of pre-selected beer types, hop choices, and styles.

adjusted portrait of Putin on the bottle and mocking the premier with the warning the beer was ‘not for gays’.³⁵⁶ Later (on the suggestion of a PR firm) they produced No Label, ‘the world’s first non-binary, transgender beer’ made from hops which had changed sex, donating the proceeds to LGBT charity Queerest of the Queer, leading to acclaim as well as accusations of capitalist recuperation.³⁵⁷



Fig 4.2 – BrewDog’s ironic ‘Hello My Name is Vladimir’ Beer, released in response to homophobic ‘Gay Propaganda’ law [BrewDog, ‘Hell My Name is Vladamir’ brewdog.com, Feb 4 2014, found at: ‘blog.brewdog.com/blog/hello-my-name-is-vladimir, accessed 02/02/2016]

Yet a defining feature of BrewDog’s marketing is that it is often difficult to distinguish between authenticity on the one hand, and PR strategies on the other, since, for Watt, authenticity *is* the new marketing:

Your culture isn’t a given and it has to be earned. You can’t make it, invent it, or spin it. It is actions, not words... It is the by-product of consistent behaviour and it has to be real, grow organically from the inside out and it has to develop over time. Artificial

³⁵⁶ Ibid, p.124

³⁵⁷ Ray Filar, *openDemocracy*, 25 Nov 2016

cultures are transparent. They lack substance and are thinly veiled; they are overly engineered smoke screens made of pure fluff. Faux statements, faux policies and faux promises all wrapped up in cringeworthy overly manufactured acronyms. You can't invent or impose a real company culture... Your culture needs to be rooted in brand truth. It needs to be authentic, honest and real.³⁵⁸

A consequent feature of Watt's missives is that they make no separation between truth and presentation, marketing and action. His book talks frankly about the calculated nature of their stunts (notoriously, one clash with the Portman group over BrewDog's 'offensive' advertising was triggered by Watt himself lodging the only complaint against his company), but the idiolect is more akin to a campaigning organisation revealing its activist strategies than a PR operation masterminding brand exposure: 'The only way to build a brand is to live that brand. You have to live the values and the mission, then let the customer decide.'³⁵⁹ Instead of a straightforward case of recuperation, BrewDog conceives of itself more as a curious fusion of company and cause; not only refusing to distinguish between brand and integrity, but perceiving integrity as the only possible way to commercially survive. The underside of this strategy however is that BrewDog has become an almost cult-like phenomenon, drawing from the collective ethos of the craft beer movement and channelling it through a single brand. As the Cumbrian brewer, Jon Kyme, argues '[hype] is their main product. It's only in the hype that there is an absolute, quantum gap between BrewDog and the rest [of the craft brewers]. Their entire existence, basically, is marketing.'³⁶⁰

Company AGMs are more like music festivals, with rock bands, BrewDog tattoos, and company badges. One of Watt's aims is to 'turn customers into fans' who invest in the company, via Equity for Punks, in shares, and agitate for it on social media. Watt argues that,

Twenty-first century consumers increasingly want to align themselves with companies and organizations whose missions and beliefs are compatible with, and enhance, their own belief systems. Your customers will need to be actively complicit to help you

³⁵⁸ James Watt, *Business for Punks* (2015) p.157/158

³⁵⁹ Jon Henley, *The Guardian*, 24 Mar 2016

³⁶⁰ Ibid

succeed and you need to give them a compelling reason to do so. You can make people care and make them evangelize by having a strong mission.’³⁶¹

Unlike an actual campaigning organisation like CAMRA, with its local committees, formal democratic structures and non-profit status, control of BrewDog is far more limited; distributed via its shareholders who nominally influence key decisions through the website, with the extent of their influence or formal accountability unclear. With CAMRA in something of a crisis of mission, as many of its energising aims appear both fulfilled and supplanted by the craft beer movement, the space it abandons is therefore being assumed by more dynamic yet more compromised institutions.³⁶² CAMRA’s long-standing refusal to embrace craft beer – reaffirmed by its members in 2018 – has in this sense been a self-inflicted wound, successfully capitalised upon by BrewDog.³⁶³

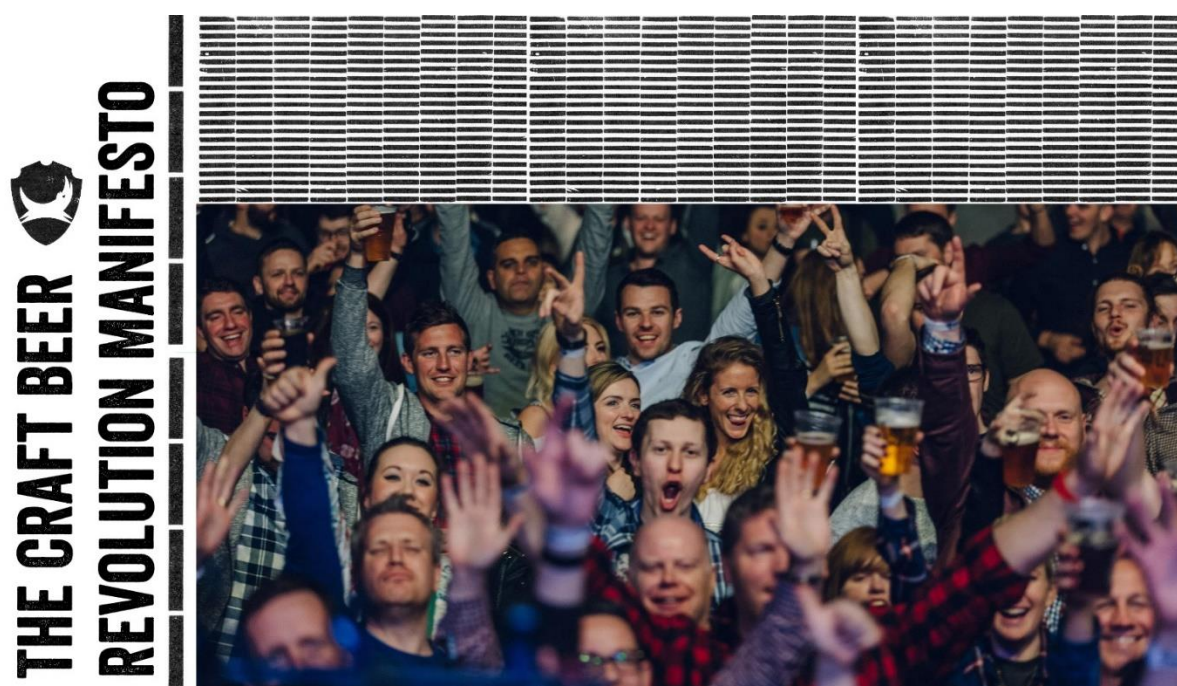


Fig 4.3 – BrewDog’s ‘Equity Punks’ at an Annual General Meeting, depicted on the BrewDog ‘Manifesto’ BrewDog Manifesto (2017), found at: thegeniusworks.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/BrewDog-Culture-Deck-2017-1.pdf, accessed 04/05/2018]

³⁶¹ James Watt, *Business for Punks* (2015) p.20

³⁶² Hugh Thomas, ‘Craft beer: is it closing time for the Campaign for Real Ale?’ *The Guardian*, 19 Apr 2016

³⁶³ Pete Brown, ‘What should CAMRA do now to save cask ale – and itself?’ 23 Apr 2018

Authenticity & Apostasy

Yet BrewDog's cultivated authenticity, marketing or otherwise, mean the goods of authenticity need to ostensibly be present. Its oft-proclaimed refusal to be bought out, and its belief that 'purely money-focused businesses will go the same way as the dinosaurs', act as barriers to the company degenerating into a straightforward corporate giant.³⁶⁴ Whereas J D Wetherspoon's Tim Martin campaigned against the implementation of a living wage for instance, BrewDog was one of its first signatories in 2014.³⁶⁵ It funds and rewards Cicerone training qualifications for its staff. Its new brewery was built to be 100% carbon neutral. It, at least rhetorically, encourages autonomy as part of its company culture of 'not-asking-for-permission', and claims to operate on the principle of staff first, company second.³⁶⁶ When demand superseded capacity in 2011, it was the big national distributors like Wetherspoon who BrewDog chose to short.³⁶⁷ The refusal to compromise on the price point of its products has thus far prevented the kind of margin-making business survival strategies which lead to staff 'efficiencies' in wage cuts and lay-offs – though it escalates costs for consumers: BrewDog bars sell their beer for substantially higher rates than industry equivalents. In this sense it operates an almost inverse business model to that of JD Wetherspoon.

BrewDog's greatest innovation however has been in jettisoning the traditional models of financing which compromise the independence of fledgling companies. 'Equity for Punks' has brought funding from 42,000 crowdsourced investors in four waves, totalling over £26m. Though some of the stakes are substantial - in part belying the claims of a crowdsourced army of small scale "fan" investors' - the majority fit the characterisation. Shares are sold at a minimum £95 rate and come with perks like lifetime bar discounts. Though the inflated price, limited vehicles for share sale, and lack of dividends have brought scepticism from traditional investors this has done little to prevent their success: 'Equity for Punks IV' raised £19m at closing in 2016. BrewDog's pitch to prospective shareholders focuses far more on accessing a sense of collective ownership than on the financial benefits of investment:

³⁶⁴ James Watt, *Business for Punks* (2015) p.19 – see later in the chapter for the limits of this refusal

³⁶⁵ BrewDog, 'Brewdog is now a living wage employer' *brewdog.com*, 1 Oct 2014

³⁶⁶ James Watt, *Business for Punks* (2015), See chapter: 'Building a team for aspiring pirate captains'

³⁶⁷ BrewDog 'An update on stock, our new brewery and our partnership with meantime', *brewdog.com*, May 2011

We revel in the fact that people as passionate about craft beer as we are now own a slice of business. No greedy hustlers, no fat cats... no investment bankers, no venture capitalists, no overbearing parent. Just loads of people who passionately love great beer [...] We don't think of our fellow Equity Punks as investors. They are the heart and soul of our business and our *raison d'être*. They are the BrewDog community... liquid legionnaires, marching between the banners of better business and better beer whilst living the dream with us.³⁶⁸

Consequently, it may not matter whether BrewDog is “for real” or not, since the necessity for its brand's survival is that “being real” countermands all other concerns. If the distinguishing feature of the company is not its core product - since it is not dissimilar to others in the craft beer market - it is the messaging which will determine the strategic limits of how the company operates. It also leaves BrewDog open to leverage by the progressive forces it has by necessity aligned itself with. One cannot imagine BrewDog continuing, for instance, the historic link between the brewing industry and the British Conservative Party. Though this, especially domestically in the UK, has its limits: BrewDog USA has been much more forthcoming in its anti-Trump stance than BrewDog UK has on key political issues like Brexit, despite standing to lose out considerably in an EU exit.³⁶⁹

Whereas critical theorists like Slavoj Žižek have taken aim at ‘postmodern ethical consumerism’³⁷⁰ - functioning as a kind of misdirected political subjectivity which nullifies meaningful political action, or as a disingenuous salve to reality - the same criticisms do not quite seem to capture the turn represented by BrewDog, whose audience are attracted not by its corporate responsibility but by its company ethos:

The walls came crashing down long ago, although only the smartest of companies are alive to this new reality. Internal culture has to sync with external perception. The days of disconnect are over. Audiences are sophisticated, savvy and quick to smell marketing bullshit. Brand truths must ring true, inside and out, for them to be authentic and relevant.³⁷¹

³⁶⁸ James Watt, *Business for Punks* (2015) p.75

³⁶⁹ Edward Robinson, Thomas Buckley, ‘UK Craft Brewer BrewDog is Dreading Brexit’ *Bloomberg*, 24 Jan 2019

³⁷⁰ Slavoj Žižek, ‘The Delusion of Green Capitalism’ *Fora TV*, 20 Apr 2011

³⁷¹ James Watt, *Business for Punks* (2015) p.106

If this is agenda is a novel one, its actual implementation is more suspect. Reports from anonymous employer ratings – though often skewed towards the already aggrieved – paint a collective picture of chaotic and dictatorial management, unrealistic working hours, low pay progression, and document how strapline offerings like the living wage are undercut by manipulation of staff hours during quiet periods.³⁷² Further complaints itemise the manner in which staff are expected to *live* BrewDog, working long frenetic hours and performing the image of the brand in their bodies and attitude.³⁷³ There is admission of a ‘culture of fear’ and cult of personality formed around the figure of James Watt: ‘a dictator, most people fear James Watt’, ‘bit culty’, ‘When there is a dictator in charge there isn't much hope’, ‘BrewDog is a cult. You do not just work for BrewDog, you are BrewDog. Lots of covering over the cracks, positive reinforcement, manipulation and distrust’.³⁷⁴ Wastage, repairs and breakages are deducted from the vaunted Unicorn fund (in which 10% of profits are distributed to charity, 10% to staff); cutting into any bonus wage surplus.³⁷⁵ In at least one former bar worker’s account lost profits from till miscalculation or petty theft were deducted directly from staff wage packets: ‘if the till is down more than £4 - which is frankly absolutely disgusting, particularly on nights when your bar has taken in excess of £10k.’³⁷⁶ Though difficult to prove, many of the competing, positive review entries on the website have the curated tone, punctilious spelling, marketing tics, and ‘cons-as-pros’ responses which tend to be the hallmarks of astro-turfing:

‘Pros

BrewDog is an incredible company to work for. We are consistently pushing boundaries, leading the market with flair and innovation. We stand for 2 things, Beer and People and this genuinely feeds into every aspect of our operation. BrewDog is not a job for me, its a way of life! A visionary at the helm and some super awesome leaders throughout the business pushing their team, all underpinned by fantastic beer.....

Cons

³⁷² Employer Reviews: BrewDog, *glassdoor.co.uk* (accessed 06/16); for more on this phenomenon: Peter Fleming, *Authenticity and the Cultural Politics of Work : New Forms of Informal Control*, Oxford University Press (2009)

³⁷³ Ibid

³⁷⁴ Ibid

³⁷⁵ Ibid

³⁷⁶ Ibid

If you don't 100% buy into what BrewDog stands for, you don't like speed of change, innovation and daily challenges this is probably not the place for you - but who wouldn't want to work in such a stimulating environment?³⁷⁷

As one bona-fide review commented: 'The HR team are always happy and brainwashed and probably spend most of their days writing fake reviews to cover up all the negative ones.'³⁷⁸

BrewDog has also mis-fired with its polemic marketing campaigns. In 2017 its legal team attempted to censure an independent Birmingham pub for its use of a phrase - 'Lone Wolf' - trademarked for BrewDog's incipient spirits line; producing a serious backlash and climb down. Later that year it announced that TSG Consumer Partners, a venture capitalist firm was investing a \$264 million minority stake in BrewDog, stimulating further rancour that a 'Punk' brewery which had made so much of the apostasy of other craft brewers was falling foul of the standards it had itself aggressively policed. BrewDog described TSG as 'one of the world's leading growth funds with successful investments in global brands like Pop Chips and Vitamin Water', neglecting their minority holding in Pabst - a large, corporate, industrial lager brewer. As of 2019, many of BrewDog's earlier references to 'corporate beer' were removed from its website and marketing.

Studies of US craft breweries have documented the processes which tend to follow such compromises: brand offerings encounter 'product level category stigma' and 'inauthenticity discounts' in which they become 'subject to lower evaluations and higher penalties from the stigmatizing audience, regardless of its true underlying quality' and negative evaluations of the product's symbolic value.³⁷⁹ Further, the higher quality the offering and the more intense its protestations of integrity, the greater the stigma received. What craft beer fashions in its image it risks by deviation.

It might therefore be expected for BrewDog to suffer commercially from accusations of selling out, and whilst it certainly has damaged the company's reputation with its own staff as well as

³⁷⁷ Ibid

³⁷⁸ Ibid

³⁷⁹ Justin Frake, 'Selling Out: The Inauthenticity Discount in the Craft Beer Industry' *Management Science*, 63 (11) pps. 3930–3943 (2017)

within the UK beer community, this has not yet seemed to dent enthusiasm for its crowd-sourcing or its profit margins. Partly this is due to the reliance of the brand on its export market, which insulates it from the attention it receives domestically in the United Kingdom, where at any rate, the ‘beer community’ is smaller than in the US and the wider consumer base less attuned to relatively technical distinctions of ownership (the ‘minority stake’ of TSG sufficient to protect BrewDog from the full charge of hypocrisy). Where news stories have been more significant – as in BrewDog’s handling of the Lone Wolf fiasco – rapid backtracking and apologies mitigated the damage.

A further defensive strategy is BrewDog’s manufacturing of a subculture built around the company, drawn from an aesthetic pot-pourri of Punk, Hipster, Nerd and Start-Up. Branded ‘merch’ is sold in its bars and online: keyrings with company logos, clothes, badges, pins of its bottle caps, BrewDog art and BrewDog tote bags, even pyjamas and underwear. Crowdsourced investors are not investors but ‘our equity punks’. Its beer delivery subscription is described as its ‘fanzine’. Its company AGMs are not Annual General Meetings but a festival of ‘Annual General Mayhem’ replete with rock bands. Watt describes cultivating this fanbase in terms of its nurturing its ‘very own tribe’: dedicated brand enthusiasts who provide grassroots hype and invest their identity as well as their funds into the product.³⁸⁰ The tribe is a kind of solution to the inauthenticity discount, with Equity for Punks turning the shareholder into the cheerleader. This financially anchors new definitions of success when they come into conflict with the rhetorical values on which the original tribal affiliation was made. As the business has expanded, and many of the flagship products of craft beer (i.e American IPA) are imitated by competitors – BrewDog has shifted metaphors in an attempt to distinguish itself from other global ‘mass producer’ breweries. First, the garage rock band who made it on their own, against the manufactured imitators put together by the record company, then a pioneering mass movement bringing the Real Beer message to the world.³⁸¹ Origins, rather than practice, give it license to be big.

³⁸⁰ James Watt, *Business for Punks* (2015)

³⁸¹ Richard Taylor (with James Watt & Martin Dickie), *Craft Beer for the People*, Hachette UK (2017) p.14-15

Crashing the Walls

BrewDog's attempt to "crash the walls", removing the distance between internal reality and external imaginary has a powerful corollary with BrewDog's aesthetic. Whereas British public houses have typically sought to mimic cosy, domestic interiors (albeit one at variance with actual domestic reality) BrewDog takes a strikingly different tack in its outlets. Bars operate on a modernist axis, with clean lines and demarcated zones functionally disaggregating the space. They are lit with industrial lighting and serviced by exposed concrete bars. Branches like that in Liverpool, designed by Michaelis Boyd Associates, deploy spent beer kegs as a divider between the toilets, and consciously 'echo a time of industry', integrating 'authentic shipping containers' into the space.³⁸² Actual industrial sites are also resurrected as BrewDog bars: in São Paulo a former car repair workshop was converted 'complete with the original yellow painted parking spaces' and the 1950s tyre compressor retained in position.³⁸³ Its architects - local Aberdeen firm CM Design describe the style as 'Cold War chic meets abandoned factory'.³⁸⁴ In their Edinburgh and Aberdeen branches CM commissioned special 100mm thick, rough finished concrete for the bar top to sit on a platform of reclaimed bricks. The floors alternate between polished concrete and Durbar non-slip industrial steel sheeting; 'used widely in factories and as manhole covers'.³⁸⁵ BrewDog branches are not so much public house as public warehouse.

This deconstructed style symbolically 'remove[s] the distance' between the internal and the external, production and consumption, collapsing them together. To drink in a Brewdog bar is in this sense supposed to represent an umbilical extension of BrewDog's brewery. The functional chrome beer taps imitate those attached to the giant on-site storage barrels, and many of its outlets stack the usually concealed kegs about the bar, or mis-match company sloganeering with images of the Ellon brewery along its walls as a stand-in for the real thing.

A redesign of its bottle labels in 2014 saw the company move even more assertively towards 'a more crafted look and feel, using printing techniques and materials that reflect the artisan way

³⁸² Restaurant and Bar Design, BrewDog (Liverpool): Michaelis Boyd Associates, *restaurantandbardesign.com*, Archive 2013 - 2016

³⁸³ Urban Realm, BrewDog (Sao Paulo by CM Design), *urbanrealm.com*, 2014

³⁸⁴ Samuel Sweetman, 'BrewDog's Craft Beer Bars: Maverick Scottish brewery takes on some Cold War chic, *we-heart.com*, 9 May 2011

³⁸⁵ Ibid

in which we make our beers.³⁸⁶ The accompanying video detailed the production process in action, with real wood-cut and metal letters: ‘No computers. No photoshop... everything you see on these labels will be real. Real texture. Real Ink. Real layers of colour. Hand-cut prints with character you can feel.’³⁸⁷ Authenticity is the principal signifier; the aesthetic starting from production and growing outwards with as few adulterations as possible. Just as the beer is exclusive of preservatives, so the labels are exclusive of algorithms; the architecture, exclusive of cladding: ‘master[s] of reality with exposed metal girders’.³⁸⁸

The effectiveness of the design stems from its apparent amelioration of two features of capitalism: alienation and commodity fetishism. Marx argued that the commodity becomes abstracted under capitalism, divorced from the conditions of its own production, and thereby separated from its relation to those who produced it.³⁸⁹ The aesthetic consequence has been a veneration and expectation of perfection. The commodity must arrive seamlessly, bearing none of the marks and traces of its makers. As Adrian Forty suggests, this has had direct implications for architecture, and aesthetics more generally:

Commodity aesthetics are to a large extent dependent upon making something that is necessarily imperfect appear perfect. [...] Now this kind of expectation of the perfect object that we have of consumer goods transfers very easily into architecture, and this has happened to a considerable extent in the last fifty years. Our experience of the standards of finish, and of smooth operation that we have become familiar with from often quite inexpensive pieces of electrical and mechanical equipment, have become the norm for what we expect of buildings.³⁹⁰

This aesthetic has a particular spatial and temporal character: a backstage and backhistory of production, a front stage of present consumption. As Lefebvre argues in *The Production of Space* this had led to the tendency for buildings to ‘cover their tracks’ through ‘polishing,

³⁸⁶ Ishbel Mcleod, ‘Brewdog unveils redesign but says that it is only “25% complete”’, *thedrum.com*, 21 July 2014

³⁸⁷ ‘Time for a change’ *brewdog.com*, 3 July 2014

³⁸⁸ BrewDog: Birmingham, *brewdog.com* (Accessed 25/05/16)

³⁸⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol.1, Penguin (1976) p.163-165

³⁹⁰ Adrian Forty, ‘Future Imperfect’ in *Forty Ways to think about Architecture*, John Wiley & Sons (2014) p.21

staining, facing and plastering', to such an extent that 'productive labour is sometimes forgotten altogether', producing a 'manifest expulsion of time' from the experience of architecture.³⁹¹

'Corporate' appearance is generally meant to correspond to these aesthetic signifiers. The corporate aesthetic can be conceived as one which attempts to hide mundane realities, inefficiencies, and other inevitable traits of the work it performs as they are experienced from the inside. Corporate aesthetics present a veneer of professional order and seamlessness in the hope that this external picture will serve as a mythical projection of its internal workings. The utopianism of that projection is what lends corporate aesthetics their apparent hypocrisy, for the underlying reality must be kept out of view, and the gap between the external and internal always maintained. By apparently 'exposing' an imperfect internal image, BrewDog can project such imperfection as a salutary indicator of its non-corporate brand identity – expressing a DIY informality which belies the ever-increasingly size and scale of its operations.

It is precisely in the spaces which work against this 'masking' that European and North American anti-capitalist movements have been attracted since the late 19th century³⁹² - becoming a particularly prominent trend in the late 1960s and 1970s with the heyday of the squatting movement and its synonymy with the Punk subculture that BrewDog strongly identifies itself with, 'redecorating ... the only way we knew - with a sledgehammer in one hand and a can of spray-paint in the other.'³⁹³ As the anthropologist David Graeber observed of the activist spaces of the alter-globalisation movement,

One thing that emerges... is the constant preference for places of construction- or, sometimes, destruction - where the ordinary surfaces of life are either being patched together or torn down [...] The idea seems to be, to couch the matter in appropriately Situationist terms, to poke behind the spectacle and hover instead as much as possible around the grimmest, most unlovely places where the spectacle itself is produced; there to create one's own spectacles, perhaps, but collectively, transparently, in a participatory fashion without the split between backstage and onstage, between workshop and shop floor, that is the original form of all alienation.³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Blackwell (1991), p.113

³⁹² See: Jonathan Moses, *The Texture of Politics: London's Anarchist Clubs, 1884 – 1914*, RIBA President's Awards for Research (2016)

³⁹³ BrewDog: Aberdeen, *brewdog.com*, (Accessed 25/05/16)

³⁹⁴ David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, AK Press (2009), p.278-279



Fig 4.4 – BrewDog’s ‘hand crafted’ graphic design re-brand in 2014 [Ishbel Mcleod, ‘Brewdog unveils redesign but says that it is only “25% complete”’, *thedrum.com*, 21 July 2014]

The design of BrewDog's bars is an attempt to channel this aesthetic politics, an architectural philosophy described by the company as 'deconstruction'. To drink in the bar is to enter a space where onstage and backstage are no longer separate, and alienation has, at least performatively, been overcome. 'Give them [customers] not just a peek behind the curtain but the keys to the house' suggests Watt, and you also shorten the distance between you and your customers: 'the Holy Grail of brand building.'³⁹⁵

There is a parallel symbiosis between the design and the product. The success of craft beer has in part been due to the ease and speed with which experimentation can take place. Brewing has a turnover time of around two weeks - much faster than equivalent alcoholic products - and responds well to the introduction of idiosyncratic ingredients. This rough and ready adaptability lends an appropriateness to an environment with tactile, adaptable materiality: 'Wherever possible, items have multiple functions - and allow a customer or bar staff to adapt them as they see fit'.³⁹⁶ There is a sense that the consumer is invited to be a minor artisan in their own right, and "complete" the space to their needs. 'Deconstruction' can in turn be understood as a kind of dis-assemblage of the constitutive components of labour; a way of teasing out process and laying it legibly on the screen. Entering the Shoreditch branch one encounters an artfully 'discarded' toolbox on the floor below a large image of the brewery (much like an establishment shot in a film) as though the space is still provisional, still under construction. By appearing unfinished it can be restored to a kind of ur-craft state of tactility, latent with as yet unrealised possibility. Yet in freezing the process it prevents such possibility from being manifest; making an object of process rather than the object truly being process itself. The inability of its users to truly change the space, simply reintroduces commodification by means other than aesthetic consequence.

Adaptation

BrewDog's aesthetic also holds some commercial advantages. By 'stripping the design process back to basics' the design becomes easily portable to global, urban environments. What speaks of industrial legacy in Nottingham, the bar 'arising from an abandoned, one hundred year-old factory building with exposed brickwork, dark wood floors and ornate industrialism that is

³⁹⁵ James Watt, *Business for Punks* (2015) p.169

³⁹⁶ BrewDog (Liverpool): Michaelis Boyd Associates, *restaurantandbardesign.com*

utterly befitting the city's history' can morph, in Tokyo, into something more culturally recognisable with arcade-game lettering and softer furnishings juxtaposing the harsher brand coding. This has been a conscious decision by the company, with Watt arguing in his book that 'strategy and positioning should be designed to be global. Don't tie yourself to a location or geography. In our second year of trading we sold more beer in Tokyo than we did in our home city of Aberdeen.'³⁹⁷ Yet as the distance from production becomes more pronounced so attention is paid to both the 'global audience at your fingertips' via social media, and the use of local guest beers within the outlets; designed to ameliorate the increase in scale.³⁹⁸

The most aesthetically successful adaptations have been in countries where national styles have pre-empted or exceeded BrewDog's own purported aberrance. CM Design won the Scottish design award for their work on the São Paulo branch of BrewDog, and the exterior, original or not, is lifted straight from the architectural playbook of João Artigas and the Paulista movement: a savagely raw take on *béton brut* which is both more dramatic and unapologetic than anything BrewDog has been brave enough, or able enough, to construct elsewhere. Unwittingly or not, this is the closest BrewDog have strayed to associating with actual radically politics; the domestic connotations of Paulista inseparable from the Marxism of its architects. Yet the apparent synergy of the FAU Group's style to BrewDog's own exposes by comparison the limitations of the latter's drive to authenticity. This phase of Brazilian modernism was a direct response to the economic circumstances of the country in the 1950s, with large pools of unskilled labour lacking the expertise and technology required for the production of a more polished product the Paulista style instead harnessed the aesthetic potential of raw, primitive concrete, rejecting the models established by European modernism and the foreign expertise/technology required to produce it.³⁹⁹ It did not simply represent 'the idea' of industry, but was an actual political and technological solution to the limits of Brazilian development; investing it with a rigorous integrity. The polished concrete of BrewDog's other outlets risks appearing somewhat tame and arbitrary by comparison; more readily assimilated into a fashionable taste which venerates stark modernist aesthetics only once they have been defanged, evacuated of their political threat.⁴⁰⁰ Put simply, the São Paulo branch risks doing

³⁹⁷ James Watt, *Business for Punks* (2015) p.116

³⁹⁸ Ibid; this can be understood as a form of 'glocalization' which at once marries both universalizing and particularizing tendencies.

³⁹⁹ Adrian Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History*, Reaktion Books (2012) p.127-128

⁴⁰⁰ Owen Hatherley, *Militant Modernism*, Zero Books (2009)



Fig 4.5 – BrewDog’s ‘deconstructed’ aesthetic is a hallmark of its brand design [selection from brewdog.com]

BrewDog too well for BrewDog. Without a comparable seam of tradition to echo in BrewDog's other international outlets (or the wherewithal to find and imitate them), the designs lack the same confidence. Consequently, most of its international bars tend to receive far less assertive descriptions on the company's website.⁴⁰¹ The BrewDog aesthetic may therefore be functionally adaptable to local traditions, but the success of those adaptations is uneven and contingent.

The British context is equally ambivalent in this regard. The global financial crisis in 2007-8 produced a discernible shift in cultural motifs, of which the trend toward dilapidation/deconstruction has been one notable component.⁴⁰²



Fig 4.6 – BrewDog São Paulo [Beer Art, 'O Polo cervejeiro da capital paulista', June 22 2014 , found at: revistabeerart.com/news/2014/6/22/o-polo-cervejeiro-da-capital-paulista, accessed 02/02/2016]

⁴⁰¹ A characteristic description, from BrewDog Budapest (brewdog.com/bars/global/brewdog-budapest): 'We love Hungary, and Hungary loves great beer. Located in the centre of the city within 3 minutes walk of Gozsdu Courtyard, our 76th site lies.' For more on the internationalism of dereliction see reference to the 'Anthropologie Aesthetic' in Rosalie Knecht, 'Let's Talk About the Fantasy of the Writer's Lifestyle' *Literary Hub*, Jan 21 2018. For more on local contexts, especially in post-Soviet countries: Lugosi, Bell, Lugosi, 'Hospitality, Culture and Regeneration: Urban Decay, Entrepreneurship and the 'Ruin' Bars of Budapest, *Urban Studies*, 47:14 (2010)

⁴⁰² Owen Hatherley, *The Ministry of Nostalgia*, Verso (2016)

The “look” of the austerity era which followed seems to operate on a curious counterpoint: just as budget outlets like J D Wetherspoon appropriate ever more ostensibly “high class” buildings; premium outlets like BrewDog contrive the appearance of half-finished ones. It is as though design has taken on a compensatory nostalgia for a moment other than itself; dislocating semiotic categories in contradictory arrangements to recover equilibrium when there is no longer certainty where the equilibrium is.⁴⁰³ There is in other words a kind of present absence in these contemporary fashions; what Mark Fisher (via Derrida) has described as hauntology: ‘a failed mourning’ where the spectre of the past ‘will not allow us to settle into / for the mediocre satisfactions one can glean in a world governed by capitalist realism’.⁴⁰⁴ Produced in the context of the financial crisis, and with it, the end of the End of History, the turn to deconstruction can be understood as one of Gramsci’s ‘morbid symptoms’; the product of a world in which ‘the old is dying and the new cannot be born’.⁴⁰⁵ This aesthetic crisis is marked by a kind of return of the repressed, resurrecting the hulks of the near but abandoned future. In the graveyard of financialization the spectre of the industrial past, the turmoil of the 1970s and its accompanying subcultures arise again; ghostly paradoxes around whose axis the aesthetics of crisis spin.

The uneasiness of these trends is well captured in its most crass iterations, like the Job Centre in Deptford, an upmarket purveyor of food and drink whose ‘quirky design features [are] inspired by its function as a place that once served the unemployed’⁴⁰⁶ or The Washhouse in Manchester – situated in a former laundrette – where the ‘most popular cocktail is called Let Them Eat Cake.’⁴⁰⁷ On the one hand such sites trade on a kind of poverty chic: ‘hanging out in a pretend laundrette signals you don’t need to use one; joking about job centres is a way to signal wealth’.⁴⁰⁸ But their force also derives from their ghostly transgression: the nagging ruins of fixed capital serving as awkward reminders of a world which was supposed to have been exorcised by a financial order symbolised in ethereal projections of steel and glass.⁴⁰⁹ If, as

⁴⁰³ Ibid

⁴⁰⁴ Mark Fisher, ‘Hauntology’ in *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, Zero Books (2014)

⁴⁰⁵ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence & Wishart (2005)

⁴⁰⁶ Hannah Ellis-Petersen & Helena Horton, ‘Job Centre bar faces backlash from locals in south London’ *The Guardian*, 9 Jul 2014

⁴⁰⁷ Dale Lately, ‘Pawn shop bars and poverty chic: how working-class life was colonised’, *The Guardian*, 2 May 2017

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid

⁴⁰⁹ Fredric Jameson, ‘The Brick and the Balloon: Architecture, Idealism and Land Speculation’, *New Left Review*, 228 (1988)

Fredric Jameson suggests, such ethereality is the mirror image of an economic model rooted in financial speculation; the tangibility of the industrial ruin might be seen as an alias for an economic model which appeals to the desire to resurrect tangible production from the relics of the past. Marx once wrote that the grandiloquence of the gin palace was the dialectic of industrial capitalism in action – ‘their luxury reveals the true relation of industrial luxury and wealth to man’ – palaces to sell crude alcohol to the poor.⁴¹⁰ BrewDog is the inverse phenomenon: a speculation on the need for reality rather than illusion, and with it, faux-dilapidated wrecks to sell sophisticated alcohol to the privileged.

Standardised Non-Standardisation

As in the São Paulo example however the force of this aesthetic is countermanded by its arbitrariness. In London’s Soho BrewDog for instance, the customer is met with paint-spattered faux-pipes functioning as columns; skateboard iconography (a Nightmare-Before-Christmas inspired seahorse unicorn); a coat of rough plaster, executed such that the ‘swashing’ effect of the trowel merges with the sea waves of the grafitto; caged ship lights (Watt was formerly a fishing boat captain); low-slung ‘dungeon’ imitations – cages and neon lighting – to reference Soho’s connotations with the sex trade. Apparently eclectic and improvised gestures, such as the reclaimed wood tables (preserved as-is, with erratic nail marks) are fringed with metal boundary casements – a subtle but tell-tale sign of their brand uniformity, just as the exposed industrial lightbulbs are unvarying across their other branches. This standardised non-standardisation harnesses the DIY appearance of punk improvisation, whilst being planned and executed by BrewDog’s interior designers. Behind the bar, a floor plan of the space, detailing its exact arrangements, is in place. Whatever ‘hauntological threat’ it might pose, the packaging is sufficiently tidy, the semiotics sufficiently non-specific to appeal to a clientele of professionals and stag-party beer tourists.

Standardised non-standardisation is also the paradox of BrewDog’s style of ‘craft’ beer. By ‘kegging’ their beer they try to preserve the integrity of their commodity, removing the reliance on effective cellarmanship in order to ‘guarantee’ that what leaves the brewery stays in the form it left. True uniformity is, however, expensive and difficult to achieve. As BrewDog’s head

⁴¹⁰ Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, International Publishers (1984) p.153

brewer noted, industrial brewers like Budweiser ‘spend millions and millions of pounds every year on making sure that if you drink a bud in the UK it’ll taste exactly the same as a Budweiser in Japan’.⁴¹¹ The malt and hops in BrewDog’s beer vary from season to season depending on the environment they grow in, ‘so the soil conditions, the weather, anything that can influence them will influence their flavour and how they are received in the beer, so we will have slight batch to batch variance.’⁴¹² In contrast to Budweiser this is considered a welcome feature, ‘quite a cool aspect... a little bit interesting, a little bit different... there’s a little bit of excitement y’know: what’s the next batch of hardcore going to be like?’⁴¹³ Variance is welcome as long as it is controlled from the brewery end, at which point it is sealed and standardised.

This ambivalence between variation and control tests the definition of ‘craft’ altogether. BrewDog uses state of the art modern industrial brewing equipment, and is reliant on pressurized keg systems to deliver its products through a global distribution network. Its beer styles may be innovative and experimental, but this is not the same as crafted. And insofar as the artisan morality of ‘craft’ evoked by BrewDog has its origins in a 19th century tradition stretching from Ruskin to Morris, it was one exactly counterposed to industrial modernity and standardisation as such.

Further attempts to define craft beer have notoriously failed. It neither denotes fealty to a particular set of ingredients, nor, like ‘real ale’ to its method of dispatch. Many ‘craft brewers’ like BrewDog are, though not as large as giants like AB InBev, now sizeable international players, negating scale as a criterion. The increasing prevalence of so-called ‘crafty’ beer – beer produced or bought out by major brewing conglomerates which nevertheless imitates many of the recognisable traits of craft beer (e.g. novel ingredients, or heavy use new world and west coast hops) further muddies the water.⁴¹⁴

It is better to consider craft beer as a hybrid product of two distinct craft traditions. From the legacy of artisanal socialism it borrows the moral authority of anti-industrial, humanistic

⁴¹¹ Stewart Bowman (BrewDog head brewer), in ‘BrewDog: The Craft Beer Revolution’ *Ellie Sinclair*, 3 Aug 2015 ([youtube.com/watch?v=2W1pxGEtSkU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2W1pxGEtSkU); accessed 07/17)

⁴¹² *Ibid*

⁴¹³ *Ibid*

⁴¹⁴ Tony Naylor, ‘Can craft beer really be defined? We’re about to find out’, *The Guardian*, 27 Aug 2015



Fig 4.7 – One of BrewDog’s many contrived ‘improvised’ DIY gestures: an abandoned toolbox and rusted old chair [photograph by author, Shoreditch BrewDog]

production – and this underpins much of craft beer’s ‘epideictic’ (its rhetorical style) – whilst its actual production is a form of ‘non-standard serialisation’, allowing for the mass production of ‘handmade’ (or in this case, differential, yet still serial) products.⁴¹⁵ BrewDog’s ‘DIY Dog’ catalogue of beer recipes lists over 260 entries, from its mass produced headline beers to niche specialty collaborations appealing to connoisseurs and brand enthusiasts. Combining them addresses two marketing strategies simultaneously: the symbolic value consumers associate with products ‘supporting them to build the type of world they seek’,⁴¹⁶ and the hyper-differentiation which appeals to a segmented consumer base valuing the peculiar, the particular, and the ‘resonant’.⁴¹⁷ These two objectives: one ethical-moral, and rooted in authenticity, the other more

⁴¹⁵ See: Mario Carpo, *The Alphabet and the Algorithm*, MIT Press (2011)

⁴¹⁶ Lauren McMenemy, ‘Brand Storytelling That Stands Out in the Crowded Food and Beverage Market’, *skyword.com*, 24 Oct 2017

⁴¹⁷ Clemons, Gao, Hitt, ‘When Online Reviews Meet Hyperdifferentiation: A Study of the Craft Beer Industry’ *Journal of Management Information Systems*; Vol 23: 2, 8 Dec 2014

concerned with marketing opportunities and addressing fragmented consumer need, co-exist simultaneously underneath the ambiguous label of ‘craft’.

Building Tribes

Such hedging strategies are also central to BrewDog’s tribe building. Gestures such as the (soon aborted) plans to build a ‘bar on the edge’ situated on the border between the US and Mexico, though ostensibly a riposte to Trump’s infamous plan to build a wall between the two nations, served the dual function of garnering press attention around the time of its US brewery launch, as well as acting as a call-out to potential tribe members aligned with BrewDog’s anti-Trump stance. Far from a risk, such gestures serve to solidify a demographic base BrewDog has already identified as its key market audience. YouGov’s BrewDog profile describes its average consumer as an urban, well-off left-wing man in their mid-late 20s and 30s with a tail bias towards middle-aged professionals. Where current trends in craft beer more generally suggest a shift towards diversity in income, education, gender and ethnicity this does little to threaten a pitch towards its core base of urban, liberal progressives, nor its primary export market – Scandinavia.⁴¹⁸ Though some investors asked for their money back following the stunt, BrewDog’s US CEO Tanisha Robinson stated she ‘would be more upset if we were appealing to people that want to build a wall in Mexico than that we’re pissing people off that think that’s a great idea.’⁴¹⁹ In BrewDog fashion, this could both be a sincere conviction as well as aligned to current marketing wisdom, which suggests that provoking strong feelings in consumers, positive or negative, is more effective than appealing to an average centre: ‘customers who hate you product will not buy it, but customers who merely like your product will not buy it either.... It is more important to have some customers who love you than a huge number of customers who merely like you.’⁴²⁰

There is a consequently a certain hyper-reflexivity around its brand and customers relation to it. BrewDog, like much of the craft beer scene is often characterised as an outgrowth of ‘hipster’ subculture – something the company both self-parodies and embraces. A sign imprinted with faux-amateurism outside BrewDog Shoreditch – historically a ‘hipster’ enclave in London’s

⁴¹⁸ Bart Watson, ‘The Demographics of Craft Beer Lovers’ *Brewer’s Association* (2014)

⁴¹⁹ Chris Gaiten, ‘The Queen of Chaos: BrewDog USA’s new CEO Tanisha Robinson’, *Columbus Monthly*, 24 Oct 2017

⁴²⁰ Clemons, Gao, Hitt, ‘When Online Reviews Meet Hyperdifferentiation’ (2014)

East End – for instance states sardonically, ‘WARNING! ALL HIPSTERS MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY A RESPONSIBLE ADULT’. In 2017 BrewDog started printing T-shirts for its bar staff decorated with lines from negative online reviews, like ‘Just a s*** hipster Wetherspoons.’⁴²¹ These gestures are a kind of feint; wearing the tan of an association (e.g. Hipsterism) without risking commitment to the thing itself. The geography of BrewDog bars is one of second-wave gentrification: in the case of London: Shoreditch, Soho, Camden rather than ‘current’ destinations like Peckham. A similarly second hand geography operates elsewhere in the UK: Finnieston in Glasgow’s West End; Ropewalks in Liverpool’s ‘officially trendy’ district, and the clientele they accommodate follow accordingly.

Though demographic sampling inevitably varied across the destinations visited, young besuited professionals, office workers, and tourists, won out over the presence of trendsetting hipsters: it is rather the presentation of hipsterism as it appears to the wave behind it. This movement between disavowal and self-conscious identification is a means by which to overcome the fact of an absence: the gap between brand presentation, geography, and reality. Rather than brand mirroring demographic this is closer to an offer of self-enhancement or self-transformation. James Watt has argued that the old model of demographic marketing is misplaced, since ‘everyone wants to be something they’re not – young people want to be older; old people want to be younger. So you are essentially marketing towards the stereotypical aspirations of a stereotype.’⁴²² Instead of giving to consumers a reflection of themselves, it therefore promises a projection of their own self-concept onto something more wishfully presentational. BrewDog must perform ‘cool’ without in fact being for the cool; its presentation of cool must therefore be a comprehensible one.

Comprehensible Cool

Comprehensible cool necessitates a certain legibility for architecture that can accommodate instantaneous projections. Bars use a cinema board to advertise their beer, events, and notices providing the sense of something dynamic, ad-hoc and present. Just as the aesthetic of the Victorian pub corresponded to the world of theatre with its mirror tricks, baroque grandiloquence and maintenance of the backstage/onstage divisions; so BrewDog aligns itself to

⁴²¹ Emily Heward, ‘Just a s*** hipster Wetherspoons’ - the Manchester bar that’s put its bad reviews on staff T-shirts’, *Manchester Evening News*, 16 Sep 2017

⁴²² James Watt, cited in: Lauren McMenemy, ‘Brand Storytelling That Stands Out in the Crowded Food and Beverage Market’ (2017)



FAVOURITE DISHES



HOBBIES & ACTIVITIES

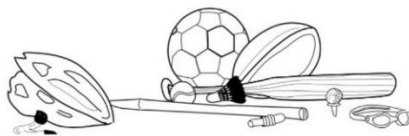


- TREKKING AND HIKING
- FISHING
- PHOTOGRAPHY

FAVOURITE SPORTS



- MOTORSPORTS
- GOLF



DEMOGRAPHICS

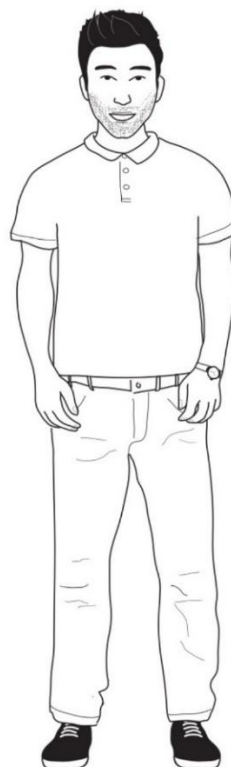
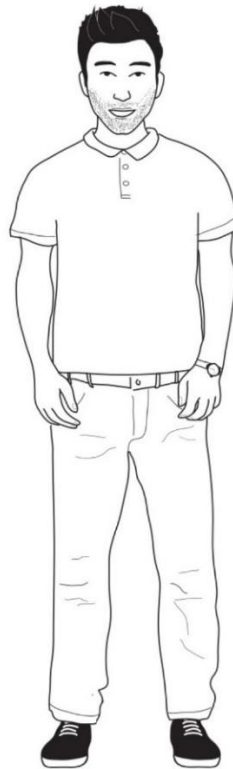
- GENDER: MALE
- AGE: 25-39
- SOCIAL GRADE: C2DE



TOP REGIONS



- NORTHERN SCOTLAND
- CENTRAL SCOTLAND
- MIDLANDS



+ GENERAL INTERESTS

- INTERNATIONAL NEWS
- BUSINESS AND FINANCE
- CARS & MOTORING

+ NICHE INTERESTS

- SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
- NEWSPAPER CARTOONS
- MARTIAL ARTS
- POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS
- CAREERS & RECRUITMENT

+ MOST LIKELY PET

- BIRD



POLITICS

LEFT

RIGHT



+ PROFESSIONS

- ENGINEERING
- MANUFACTURING
- MILITARY AND DEFENCE

+ MONTHLY SPARE £

- £1000 OR MORE



Fig 4.8 – BrewDog’s YouGov Brand Profile provides a snapshot of BrewDog’s demographics
[YouGov: Brand profile for BrewDog, yougov.com (accessed 01/01/2017)]



Fig 4.9 – BrewDog USA has been quick to align itself with the backlash against Donald Trump’s right wing presidency. Top: BrewDog founders pose with a polar bear and Trump wigs in protest at the President’s stance on climate change. Bottom: BrewDog’s proposed bar on the border between the USA and Mexico, in place of the notorious proposal to ‘build a wall’ between the USA and Mexico. [Lauren Edads, ‘New BrewDog bar to straddle US Mexico border’, *The Drinks Business*, Aug 4 2017]



Fig 4.10 – Ironic reflexive performance is integral to BrewDog’s brand strategy [BrewDog Cardiff, Instagram. Accessed 06/12/18]

the world of the screen in its simulacrum of the backstage world. Belief is not suspended, but reconstructed.

It also requires that customers themselves become part of the advertising. Furniture is chosen and arranged such that lounging is designed out: high tables, fixed half-tables, stools, high-backed booth chairs, all of which draw on a material palette of unadorned wood and metal. Cushioning is avoided. Unlike the branches of J D Wetherspoon discussed in chapter 2, which tend to use dividers to isolate their booths for private use, BrewDog’s booths are generally more exposed from the flanks. The sharp angles and hard industrial surfaces all contribute to an aesthetic code antithetical to slouching or slowness: bodies are pushed upwards, literally attempting to lift drinkers out of themselves. There are no screens for distraction, with extraneous offerings kept to lively group activities like board games. Rather than a place to idle it is a place to be seen, to perform, and to mix confidently in groups. This design philosophy, coupled with a typical preference for small-medium sized rooms has the effect of maintaining sightlines across all or most sections of the room to each other. Equally, the clean plate-glass frontages relate the interior and exterior in terms of spectacle, with drinkers on display to the street rather than concealed from it as in many classic pub designs. This means there is nowhere to ‘hide’ from the room; but without the correspondent cross-directional arrangements the tables are generally still, like Wetherspools, maintained in sociofugal setups designed for discrete groups befitting an individualised place to perform one’s collectivity. Customers are

therefore used as design props in their own right, their bodies shaped and sculpted to suit a particular brand image in which the successful images of congregation: conviviality, assertion, intensity, friendship groups – are all on display through the transparent plate glass.

A similar pattern can be noticed in the acoustic design. BrewDog's hard surfaces tend produce a refractive quality: distinct sounds pierce the sonosphere, and conversation carries with a ring and clarity it lacks in softer environments.⁴²³ The scale, geometry and openness of the room – such as that in BrewDog Bristol, Shoreditch or Camden – provide a legibility to the acoustics that softer, more voluminous or fragmented environments lack. Vocals are clear and their sources easily ascertained. This feature contributes to the notion of performance. Conversation is ascertainable to the rest of the room but due to the seat design, rarely interacted with; private utterance is public, publicness private.

Music, though influenced by staff choice, is drawn from a palette of indie to punk rock. Where the latter 'punk' is chosen it tends towards the mainstream offerings of the 2000s, a more manufactured, generic and palatable sound than its 1970s predecessors – a kind of punk-lite. When staff choose material more obviously drawn from their own interests – in one Soho visit, a dark, grungy metal band – it's apparent match to the raw industrialism of the space makes its ill-fittingness all the more notable (much as in the Paulista-inflected architecture): niche and unyielding, it is unbecoming to the chain setting, whatever its protestations of independence, and ill-suited to its audience. Moments such as these open the brand's 'hypocritical gap', just as the millennial punk rock closes it: smoothing over the cracks with the gestural sound of punk and rebellion, without the accordant dysphonia.

Legible architecture, in which clear aesthetic signals are able to be apprehended at a glance, is also important to virtual presentation. BrewDog's bars conform to what might be termed 'Instagram architecture', created with social media photography in mind. Instagrammable design tends to draw on certain 'fairly gaudy' features such as 'tile mosaics, neon lights, tables or art with graphic words on them, murals, custom tile designs and wallpaper', nearly all of which are present in BrewDog's interior design.⁴²⁴ Likewise, sleek lines, metallic materials or artfully

⁴²³ See recording sample - 'PhD Shoreditch Afternoon 2'

⁴²⁴ Hannah Collins (designer) cited in Olivia Petter, 'How Instagram has ruined restaurants' *Independent*, 1 Dec 2017



Fig 4.11 – Comprehensible Cool: BrewDog’s customers are part of the display [Restaurant and Bar Design, ‘BrewDog Liverpool – Michaelis Boyd’, Dec 12 2014, found at: restaurantandbardesign.com/2014/12/12/brewdog-liverpool-michaelis-boyd, accessed 02/02/2016]

dilapidated brickwork, exposed lightbulbs, graffiti, reflective surfaces and generous window lighting make for the ‘perfect’ Instagram image: crisp beer in the foreground, glassware slogan visible; a backdrop of neon light, orange halos, and eccentric iconography. The company has just under half a million tagged posts on Instagram (#brewdog) and over 200,000 followers on its official account.⁴²⁵ The majority of the content generated is unsolicited and user generated. For comparison, a competitor like J D Wetherspoon – a considerably bigger chain than BrewDog – holds just over 6,000 followers with its top tag match, #jdwetherspoon, receiving around 4000 hits. Every BrewDog bar, brewery, and most of its staff members have company branded accounts on numerous social media platforms. These dispersed marketing efforts aim to disrupt the sense of an impersonal brand run from a headquarters, humanising and

⁴²⁵ see: [instagram.com/brewdogofficial](https://www.instagram.com/brewdogofficial/) / Carah & Shaul, ‘Brands and Instagram: point, tap, swipe, glance’, *Mobile Media and Communication*; 4: 1; 69-84 (2016)

personalising the experience of local bars through the casual tone and impromptu efforts of its workers.

Further, analogue, touches contribute to this decentralised marketing. BrewDog bars have an irreverent take on the staff directory, with polaroid pictures or chalk drawings of each worker stuck on the wall beside the bar. Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor page links are drawn in marker pen in boxes framed by the white tiles; sometimes accompanied by mock staff portraits. Seemingly ad-hoc, these actions are in fact scripted – and extend beyond visual motifs to staff behaviour.

James Watt vaunts their counter-intuitive practice of keeping a metric of staff giveaways, whereby BrewDog ‘measure and bonus our staff on... how much beer they give away – so the more tasters that the bar staff give to customers the better.’⁴²⁶ Fieldwork experiences suggest this extends to other items as well: discretionary teas (‘I’m not going to charge you for a cup of tea mate, don’t worry about it!’⁴²⁷) and frequent yet apparently non-obligated table service (‘can I fix you another one?’⁴²⁸) suggests a behaviour code which is made to appear self-produced and unaffected but which is in fact choreographed. Staff autonomy is, contradictorily, a feature of the marketing operation and a performance.

This is not necessarily a mere cynical feature. Expectation brings power and authority to service staff which might be absent in other comparable roles. If bar workers are obliged to personalise their service then such personalisation confers upon them a certain kind of dignity: the discretionary power to gift customers, be a conduit for an act of kindness, and thereby humanise their labour by partially removing it from the injunction of the bottom line (even if this is nevertheless subsumed into other broader commercial strategies). If this altruism is somewhat scripted, it nevertheless provides license to prompt equivalent altruism from customers. The BrewDog menu for instance lists under Sides: ‘Pint of punk for the kitchen (£5.65) - Cooking in our kitchen is thirsty work! Give our amazing kitchen team a high 5’.⁴²⁹ Likewise, the polaroids of staff – affected or otherwise – are a notional gesture of inclusion and

⁴²⁶ James Watt, speaking in Rock on Beer Blog, ‘Interview with James and Martin of Brewdog’ *YouTube*, 3 Jul 2015

⁴²⁷ Research Visit, Entry: 19 Apr 2017

⁴²⁸ Research Visit, Entry: 23 Mar 2017

⁴²⁹ Research Visit, Entry: BrewDog Camden, 5 Apr 2017

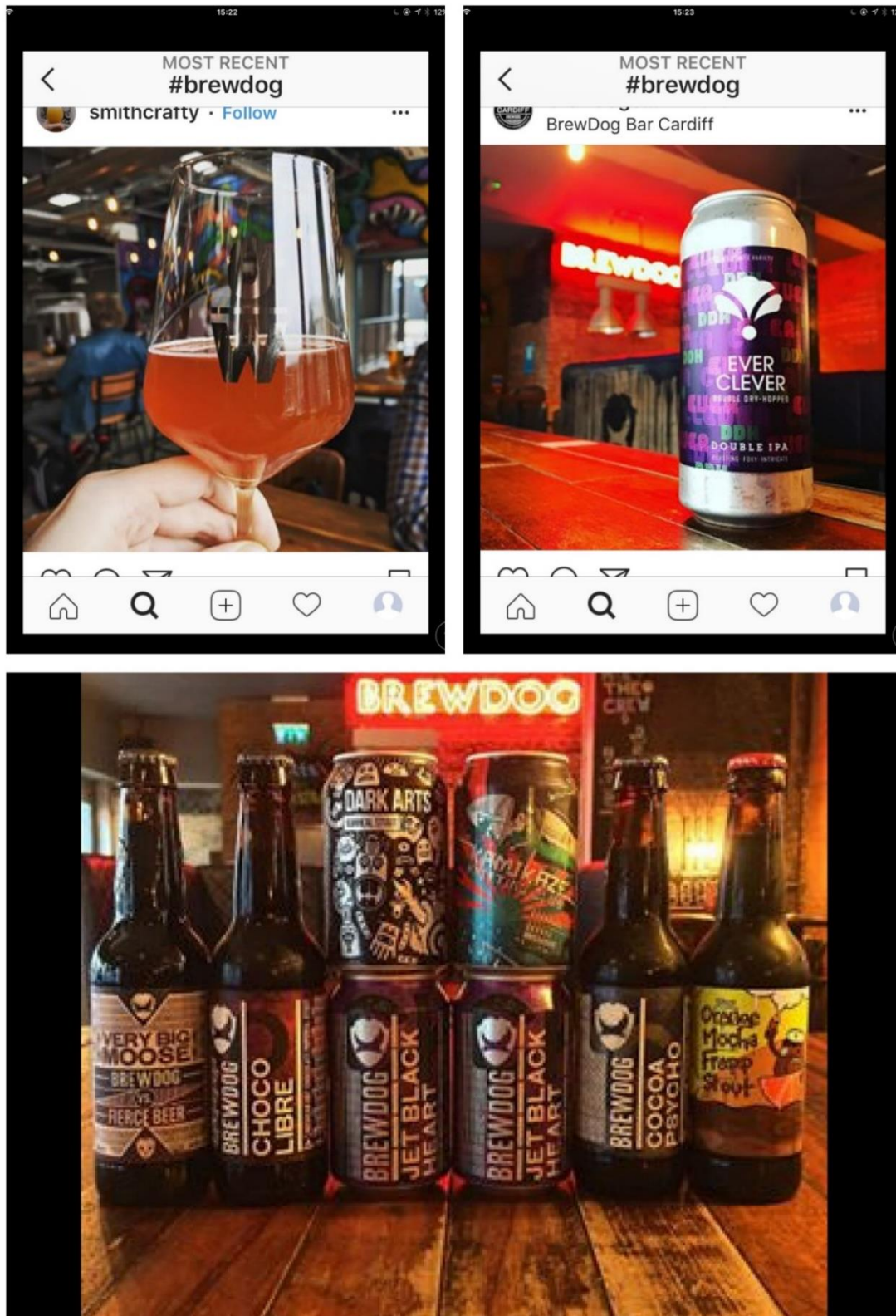


Fig 4.12 – BrewDog’s ‘instagrammable design’ [BrewDog / multiple users. Instagram: search entries for ‘Brewdog’, accessed: 12/12/2018]



Fig 4.13 – BrewDog’s scripted ‘ad-hoc’ staff boards [author photograph: BrewDog Soho]

interest in the individuality of the staff members themselves: from anonymous shift workers, they are considered part of a team, a ‘crew’ of staff. The tension is similarly expressed in the uniform– BrewDog branded at its core, but subsequently personalised. Literally ‘uniform’, yet customised – another non-standard standardisation.

There is an extensive debate about the precise nature of such gestures, and the status of the kinds of emotional labour which sustain them.⁴³⁰ We can recognise for instance, elements of Hochschild’s classic critique that they constitute a subsumption of the private self into a commodified public performance, in which staff are enjoined to ‘be themselves’ at the behest of commercial imperatives.⁴³¹ Yet equally present is Bolton’s alternative typology of emotion management; in which *pecuniary* and *prescriptive* forms of emotional labour co-exist with *philanthropic* behaviours which are not merely reducible to self-commodification.⁴³² Yet

⁴³⁰ E.g. Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: the commercialization of human feeling*, California University Press (1983), Sharon Bolton, *Emotional Management in the Workplace*, Palgrave Macmillan (2004), Paul Brook, ‘In critical defence of ‘emotional labour’: refuting Bolton’s critique of Hochschild’s concept’ *Work, Employment and Society*; 23: 3 (2009)

⁴³¹ Hochschild *The Managed Heart* (1983)

⁴³² Bolton, *Emotional Management in the Workplace* (2004)

BrewDog is perhaps relatively unique in its attempt to *prescribe philanthropy*. If Paul Brook has noted how even philanthropic components of emotional labour are not ‘outside’ of commodification (since they still operate within the contested nexus of a worker’s labour power), this is even more emphatically the case with BrewDog. Yet it also points to an important qualification of the emotional labour argument: that elements of short-term mutual benefit can exist within commodification itself. BrewDog might gain brand performance from their staff, and staff might separately gain something other, be it a sense of belonging, altruism, or enjoyment from their performances, mandated or otherwise. If the result is commodification all the same, the rewards for company and staff member are nevertheless distinct. Though the injunction to be *authentically on-brand* might represent an intensification of what Hochschild terms emotional dissonance (in which the ‘true self’ and the ‘performed self’ become confused, producing a kind of self-alienation), this might be tempered by the relatively low stakes of the labour itself (bar work), where the level of personal identification is generally low. It might be said in fact that the very fact of bar work’s low status represents a much greater threat to the mental well-being of the worker than the required emotional dissonance, with bar work suffering from transient prospects, de-skilling of the workforce, low autonomy and minor stakes.

If craft beer has a performative cultural caché that BrewDog self-consciously promote in its staffing, then this can accrue social capital for its staff as well as its customers. Certain company practices genuinely bolster this fact, and make it more than presentational: all BrewDog staff are trained with a Cicerone qualification (which certifies mastery of beer), with financial incentives for developing the training further. Consequently, 62% of all certified Cicerones in the UK work at BrewDog (in 2014 James Watt became the first European to achieve Master Cicerone status). Whilst clearly beneficial to a brand whose hallmark is its obsessional focus on its beer, it also imparts the skill and confidence to proffer recommendations and lead customers to the right choice. This fundamentally alters the dynamic between server and served; guiding, discriminating, offering advice, opinions and samples - imparting knowledge and experience rather than delivering rote interaction formulae. The expanding search for new beer forms and revival of niche types which fuels craft’s edifying self-image and culture requires translation and guidance for customers whose sense-expectation is for the most part limited.⁴³³

⁴³³ Research Visit, Entry: Various, e.g. BrewDog Camden, BrewDog Liverpool - many customers, unfamiliar with craft beer or overwhelmed with its characteristically eclectic offerings, were witnessed being guided through the beer menu in this fashion.

But this necessity, and its growing remit, elevate the significance of the staff's connoisseurship, just as it raises the cultural standing of beer to something as sophisticated as other traditionally haute-produce like whisky and wine. BrewDog's current investment – in a sour-beer facility called 'Overworks' – is the most recent example of this kind of frontier-stretching; investing in a style whose intensity makes for a notoriously high entry point.

Numerous site visits confirmed the emphasis on connoisseurship. With customers often nonplussed by the array of unfamiliar products, staff would assess the kinds of drinks they like, offer a range of options with detailed descriptions of each, provide tasters, explain their own personal favourites, and give back-histories of the breweries or novel typologies of drink.⁴³⁴ This was both a rote performance of the core company missive to exalt beer, but also a demonstration of knowledge, skill, and bespoke guidance on behalf of the staff member. The arcane experimentation of craft brewing in a sense provides a self-made niche, in which staff will, for the most part, always be ahead of their customers in terms of their knowledge of the product: a reskilling of a routinely deskilled profession.

Reflexivity, Belonging & Control

Whilst the cultivation of its 'tribe' might suit a particular corporate agenda which squares off diminishing authenticity returns with a cultish fan-base of investors, this would miss a second, more complex emotional investment made by craft beer consumers in their brands. For one craft-beer memoirist, craft beer had a generational force because it served as a haven in the context of financial crisis and declining future prospects: 'For those who couldn't find much stability in the rest of the world, craft beer was a haven.'⁴³⁵ The pot-pourri was in this sense an advantage: inflected with the frisson of cool subculture, substantiated with a moral and ethical creed, whilst grounded in more anorak fixations with beer style and industry lore. Craft beer 'was cool, but not too cool. It had the allure of a cottage industry, and just enough hipster cred to make one feel unique. The proverbial, now almost comical beards and plaid were neon lighthouses for those seeking harbor.' Their account conveys something embodied and relational about the experience of the bar itself, that 'when you drank your local IPA with your friends, you had some control.'⁴³⁶

⁴³⁴ Ibid

⁴³⁵ Oliver Gray, 'A Crisis of Faith Not Finances' *literatureandlibation.com*, 10 Apr 2017

⁴³⁶ Ibid

Such ‘control’ can be conceived as a kind of affective community; a sense of affinity, ownership and harmony with one’s surroundings and one’s sense of self. Thus whilst self-enhancement theories tend to emphasise the narrow calculations subjects make as they invest in symbolic goods to enhance their self-concept, something more complex seems to be at play in such investments in craft beer and its territories; something more embodied. I experienced this subjectivity myself during the research, ‘feeling freer, joking more with the bar staff... brief exchanges come more easily... as though intervening in another conversation wouldn’t be “out of place” (even though it doesn’t happen, and isn’t witnessed happening)’.⁴³⁷ I describe a more ‘floating / lifted’ subjectivity than that produced in traditional pubs: a combination of light, but also of material. The weightier, sharper glassware, chrome taps, hard surfaces and absence of clutter or embeddedness; even of smell with its aerial, aromatic tinge of hops rather than the ‘sunk-in’ embeddedness of stale beer.⁴³⁸ There is a tempo to such spaces and their fast circulation, even in the conversation and manner of drinking. To say this is exclusively a performance is to miss the sense that it is a part of oneself already; a latent possibility sculpted into form by design which, by election to conscious performance, manifests as control.

The interplay between subjectivity and design conjoins with the feedback of knowledge, representation and experience. The past tense of the memoirist speaks for instance to a temporal dimension: the knowledge of craft beer being in a historical zenith, and a topic of focus and excitement, produces the contentment of being current - in the right place doing the right thing. Such satisfaction is given validity by the product and by knowledge of the product, which is sensorially deeper because of its ingredients and manufacture, but also because its *imaginative bandwidth* is much more extensive than mass-produced lager: layered with perceptions of hops and their origins, artisanal brewery processes and their configurations, histories of styles and forms. BrewDog’s single-minded insistence on the commodity itself invests it with a value and reverential discernment which the higher price point almost mystically unlocks. Finally, there is the sense of political belonging: to an ethical creed and artisanal anti-corporate ethos which seems manifest in a popular movement; an affective community joined through feeling. At this level of investment, consumers are buying ‘more than a beer’, or even enhancement, but access and belonging, centrality and sensory depth, self-elevation and with it - control. This possibility is inevitably classed and gendered, or contingent

⁴³⁷ Research Visit, Entry: 10 Mar 2017

⁴³⁸ Ibid

on prior knowledge and cognitive investment, but nevertheless encountered by participants as genuine, rather than duplicitous, experience.

Conclusion

Though in many respects an attempt to depart from the traditional model of public house – existing within the same ‘field’ as the pub, but in reality operating more as a global, modern ‘bar’ brand – BrewDog has been inhibited by the same tensions which we saw underpinning the crisis of the pub in chapter 2. Like the pub, its claims to offer something essentially beyond the terrain of commodification, aesthetically, experientially, and organisationally, is unsettled by the reality of its position within a capitalist market. This has proved true of both its aesthetics and economics, which make gestural motions towards popular, grassroots ownership whilst in reality relying increasingly on big capital and standardised environments which thematically perform non-standardisation. To compensate for these limits, BrewDog deploys marketing strategies which combine hyper-differentiation with prefigurative identification – cultivating a ‘tribe’ of supporters which it offers the chance to build the world they want to see through the brand via a series of targeted interventions in cultural politics, kept at a safe distance from actual economic or political power. For its customers it emphasises self-enhancement; the chance to buy into the ephemeral qualities of subcultural ‘cool’, making them legible to the outsider, and facilitating their performance through a design setup which creates a display of assertive conviviality. BrewDog Bars can be best understood geographically as a second-wave gentrifier; commodifying the remnants of cultural associations which have since, in reality, departed; and offering the subversive, experimental image of the craft beer community in mainstream outlets from J D Wetherspoons to the supermarket chain, Tesco. Such branding is not, however, straightforwardly hypocritical. But rather manifests itself ambivalently through relative staff skill and autonomy, gestures of philanthropy and collaboration, and the hegemonizing of progressive values. It points to instincts – of authenticity, social responsibility, experiential generosity – which it can only partially satisfy, but which through existing, popularises.

Chapter 5

Generative Authenticity:

Community Owned Pubs & The Politics of Belonging

Abstract

This chapter explores the phenomenon of community owned pubs – a ‘bottom up’ solution to the crisis of the pub first attempted in 2001 but which, since 2011, has become increasingly widespread. It draws on extensive oral interviews with participants over five separate community pubs, alongside secondary research, to provide a detailed examination of the benefits, difficulties, and possibilities of community ownership, as well as proposing potential policy solutions to further enable its proliferation. The opening section narrates the story of the Northumberland Arms community buyout in Marple, providing a sense of the process involved in community ownership. The positive impact of such buyouts – in terms of community wealth building, social networks, place-anchoring, and dynamic architectural control – are then illustrated through a discussion of all five case studies. Two further sections investigate the conflicts which can arise during the process of community ownership; over procedure, aesthetics, policy and staffing. The politics of community ownership are then explored, both in terms of the political philosophies which underpin it, and the practical policy changes which might be enacted to benefit it. Finally, the ramifications of community ownership for the meta-themes of the pub, as detailed in Chapter 2, are detailed through a consideration of the phenomenological differences prompted by its removal from the market.

Overview

Since 2001, over sixty community groups across England and Wales have succeeded in buying their local pub.⁴³⁹ Once an esoteric idea, community pub ownership has become widespread, boosted by the 2011 Localism Act which allowed communities to list their public house as an Asset of Community Value. Borne out of a context in which pubs – especially rural and wet (drink focused) pubs – are undergoing a well-publicised crisis, community pubs are proving

⁴³⁹ Community Business Map, Plunkett Foundation (plunkett.co.uk/community-business-map)

remarkably resilient; boasting a 100% survival rate, with the oldest currently operating for 17 years.⁴⁴⁰ Like the phenomenon of the ‘micropub’ – small, ale-focused environments which place conversation at a premium, of which over 350 have been established since 2005 – community pubs adopt an essentially non-capitalist approach to pub ownership; disinterested in growth beyond what is sustainable for its ongoing existence and unmotivated by traditional market mechanisms.

More than an economic success, community owned pubs are credited with transformative effects: reducing loneliness, increasing inclusivity, thickening social ties, and restoring confidence in the power of local self-governance. Their profits are returned in dividend to community shareholders (whose investments are capped) with any excess reinvested in the business itself and community need. In turn, they offer publicans the chance to operate a free house independent of PubCo or brewery ‘ties’ without requiring a large mortgage or substantial capital investment, increasing the viability of the business and their creative independence.⁴⁴¹ Despite these advantages, community ownership can also raise difficulties: producing internal fractiousness, relying on unpaid labour, and struggling to break with paternalistic worker-owner relations sometimes described as ‘hobby capitalism.’⁴⁴² This chapter explores the impact and prospects of community owned pubs, as well as the challenges they face from without and within. In turn, it details the kinds of political and institutional changes which might make more amenable conditions for their proliferation. Finally, it considers how community ownership can be situated within the cultural history of the pub, and the kinds of phenomenological experience it confers, continues, or negates.

Case Studies

This research is drawn from five case studies, spread across the rural uplands of England: The Northumberland Arms (Marple, Stockport region), The Angler’s Rest (Bamford, Derbyshire), The Fox and Goose (Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire), The Old Crown (Hesket Newmarket, North Cumbria), and The George and Dragon (Hudswell, North Yorkshire). Between them

⁴⁴⁰ This statistic does not include failed community bids however. Nor a situation where the community has itself become the pub tenant rather than owning the asset directly.

⁴⁴¹ A tied pub is where a pub is operated by a tenant but owned by a brewery or pub company (PubCo). The tenant is allowed to operate the pub with certain restrictions: they must pay a rent to the company or brewery, and buy a fixed set of beers, usually at an inflated price from the PubCo or brewery itself.

⁴⁴² Mark Simmonds: Interview, Fox and Goose, 14th August 2018

they span small towns, rural villages, and satellite settlements. They include the first, and longest running, community pub in England (The Old Crown), and the recently established (The Northumberland Arms). All of the pubs were purchased through community share offers but were otherwise distinct.



Fig 5.1 – Map of Community Owned Pubs across Britain (Plunkett Foundation ‘Map of Community Pubs’, plunkett.co.uk, 2018, accessed 06/03/2019)

Two of the cases followed ‘tenanted’ models, whereby the community organisation owns the pub building ‘asset’ itself, but leaves the operation of the business to a hired tenant who pays a negotiated annual rent); three operated as managed houses, with directors taking a much more active role in the running of the business: overseeing staff hires, stock, policy, cash flow and other particulars, usually assisted by an employed manager. In three instances the pubs were

the sole remaining licensed premises in their village, in two they represented the interests of a niche community of drinkers with strong affinities to a particular endangered pub.

Interviews were made over a four week period, predominantly with directors of the relevant community organisations, though occasionally included pub regulars, shareholders, and members of staff. Not all pubs were evenly interviewed - with some community groups, like The Angler's Rest and The Old Crown, tending to have one key contact - whereas at others like The Northumberland, interviews were arranged with nearly all the directors. Likewise, in a very sociable pub such as The Fox and Goose, interviews often began with one director but rapidly expanded to incorporate nearby interested parties. Overall this chapter therefore represents a partial, insider, view of the experience of community owned pubs, allowing for a much clearer picture of the technical detail, difficulties, and dynamics encountered by community ownership schemes, but occasionally at the cost of a broader picture. Interviews were unstructured but followed common lines of enquiry: the process of the buyout, its impact, the motivations of those involved, the value - or not - of Assets of Community Value, community dynamics, staffing, architectural and aesthetic decisions, long-term sustainability and phenomenological experience. In addition, ethnographic observations and recordings of architectural details and layout were taken to aid the analysis.

Whilst other recent research, such as the New Economics Foundation report 'Co-operatives Unleashed: Doubling the Size of the UK's Co-Operative Sector' has taken a more expansive view of the community ownership sector as a whole, the aim of this chapter is to focus on the qualitative experience of community pub ownership, and the personal, aesthetic, and geographical issues it raises.⁴⁴³

Note on Approach:

The focus of this chapter is as much about the process of community ownership as it is about the outcome of the spaces it produces. As such it is a chapter which is predominantly about people and their actions, and draws the majority of its material from interviews with them. Consequently, I have approached this chapter differently to the others, endeavouring to take the notion of academic co-production seriously. To this end I have not aimed to situate myself 'above' my respondents - it is after all, their knowledge and experiences, not mine, which are of

⁴⁴³ Report: 'Co-operatives Unleashed: Doubling the Size of the UK's Co-Operative Sector' *New Economics Foundation* (2018)

primary value. As reflexive agents in their own stories, they have each brought their own analyses of the benefits, difficulties, and dilemmas of community ownership. As far as possible I have attempted to represent these views rather than pass judgement upon them or see it as my place to authoritatively override them. It would seem both inappropriate and unhelpful in this instance to turn the fine grain of people's lives and actions into grist for the mill of academic production, or to serve as a launching pad for lofty theoretical abstractions when the aim is to accumulate practical advice for the benefit of future parties. The latter seems particularly inappropriate when the academic has not themselves been immersed in the processes under question, and, as in this case, only has a provisional, partial view of the situations which arised from them. If this allocates a more modest role for the researcher than that of the all-knowing intellect, it is still I think, a vital one for community-engaged research. In this context, I see the academic role as that of the facilitator, the synthesiser, the contextualiser and the adjudicator. Here, the researcher acquires a larger view not by dint of superior claims to knowledge and expertise, but by linking up the broadly disparate knowledge of hitherto unconnected cases (though it should be noted that networking between community pubs is not uncommon, and several respondents mentioned having received advice from others in the course of their own community buyout).

The Story of The Northumberland Arms: A Narrative of Community Ownership

The regular drinkers of The Northumberland Arms first knew something was wrong in the Autumn of 2016. The previous landlord and landlady were due to retire after a long tenure at the pub (a tied house owned by the regional brewer, Robinsons) and yet the brewery was not advertising for new tenants. Anyone who contacted the company expressing interest was offered other pubs in the area, but not The Northumberland.⁴⁴⁴ The regulars were worried: Robinson's were known to be curtailing their stock - reducing their pub numbers from 360 to around 200, keeping the top earners and selling the rest - and the fear was that The Northumberland (known locally as the Thumb) was next.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁴ Peter Summersgill: Interview, Northumberland Arms, 8th August 2018

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid



Fig 5.2 – The Northumberland Arms, Marple [The Marple Website, ‘The Northumberland Arms, found at: marple.website/community/pubs-in-marple/638-northumberland-arms.html, accessed 03/03/2019]

The Northumberland is not the only pub in Marple Bridge - a small village attached to a larger series of conurbations situated between the city of Stockport to the west, and the Peak District to the east. The Windsor Arms is a short walk away, just at the top of the hill. Another, the Norfolk Arms, can be reached in less than fifteen minutes. But it was the atmosphere of The Northumberland which made it special, offering something no other pub in the area could quite reproduce. As one of its regulars put it:

this pub fits a niche. And from that point of view it is unique in this area. The one up there [The Windsor Arms] is a completely different animal... if you go in there the average age will be 30... it's a bit more raucous. I won't take my wife in there because some of the language is appalling... They play music every Friday, they have live bands on - and that's the way their regulars like it - but it isn't what we were looking for here.⁴⁴⁶

By contrast, the Thumb was the kind of pub where you ‘could have predicted who was going to walk through the door at what time and what they were doing to drink’⁴⁴⁷ - a regularity which

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁴⁷ ibid

conferred a sense of familiarity, ‘more friendly [than other pubs]... like coming home’.⁴⁴⁸ The pub itself had existed since 1824, and despite a lack of investment from the brewery, it had lasted; persevering through the 2008 recession, and ticking along steadily: ‘it may not have done particularly, spectacularly well, but it survived.’⁴⁴⁹ One regular in her seventies had been coming to the pub since she was five years old, when her grandparents drank there.⁴⁵⁰ It was a place that endured.



Fig 5.3 - Historic image of the Northumberland Arms. The pub had been open since 1824. [The Marple Website, ‘Community Pub set to reopen Saturday 16th December 2017’, found at: dontmissmarple.co.uk/community-projects/thumb-community-pub.html, accessed 03/03/2019]

Later, an area manager from Robinson’s visited the retiring tenants and confirmed their suspicion: the pub was to be closed - but could they keep the news quiet? ‘We thought for about five minutes and thought... well why would we keep it quiet? So we didn’t did we! We told everyone and it was immediately like “whoosh!”’⁴⁵¹ The news began an active campaign. Robinson’s were petitioned to keep the pub open, and the petition formed the basis of an application for Asset of Community Value status to be granted to the pub by the local council. This legislation - a product of the 2011 Localism Act - creates a six month moratorium on sales

⁴⁴⁸ Janice Robertson: Interview, Northumberland Arms, 9th August 2018

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid

⁴⁵⁰ Margaret Houghton: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁴⁵¹ Ibid

of designated community assets; giving community groups or parish councils time to arrange a bid for their acquisition, or campaign for their preservation.⁴⁵²

At first, the bid for ACV status met with opposition. The Council's Property Services Provider recommended refusal on the basis of the proximity of other public houses, and it was thought that Robinsons - a powerful regional player - might be lobbying against a listing from the other side.⁴⁵³ In the end though, with the help of a sympathetic councillor, the recommendation was overruled, and the community group's arguments won out - that the Thumb was not 'just another' public house, but offered something unique, that it held together the 'small village' around Compstall Road which had been steadily eroded by a loss of local amenities, and provided a space which was both accessible to its elderly patrons (being on a flat road, rather than up a hill), and its female customers (who noted it for its safety).⁴⁵⁴

Yet Assets of Community Value do not allow a community group a preferential right to bid. In fact an asset holder has a number of ways to circumvent the legislation. They can wait out the moratorium of six months and sell to anyone they choose whether the community group has put in a bid or not. Or they can avoid the moratorium altogether by selling a pub on as a 'going concern' - initially guaranteeing its preservation as licensed premises, but with no time restraint attached to a declaration of unviability, and with it, an application for change of use. Finally, an asset holder can simply choose to sell to no one; waiting for momentum of community resistance to dwindle, or for the legislation governing change of use to change. Following the ACV listing the community group therefore had to campaign on two fronts: to build the capacity to buy out the pub itself, and to prevent Robinsons from selling the pub to anyone else. That Robinsons were known to impose covenants on their pub sales - preventing them from ever operating as public houses again - meant the latter outcome was an existential threat to the pub's future.⁴⁵⁵

The community group started a ground campaign. They persuaded the pub's next door neighbour to run a banner along the top of the adjoining wall, advertising the campaign and

⁴⁵² 2011 Localism Act, Chapter 3 [95] (Assets of Community Value), UK Government

⁴⁵³ Report of the Deputy Chief Executive to Marple Area Committee, Application for Northumberland Arms ACV. See appendix.

⁴⁵⁴ 'Statement in support of an application to nominate the Northumberland Arms for listing as a Community Asset'

⁴⁵⁵ Malcolm Allan: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

warning off potential developers.⁴⁵⁶ Meanwhile a team leafletted as many local events and neighbours as they could to drum up support. One of the campaign directors, Rick Clarke, worked for a large pub company as a building development manager, and brought his industry knowledge to bear on the negotiations with Robinsons. In Rick they had someone who could speak the language of the brewery and make an informed argument about the £250,000 asking price, reducing it to a more realistic £217,000 to buy freehold, with no strings.⁴⁵⁷ Robinsons agreed that if the Community group - now formalised as a Community Benefit Society - could raise the requisite funds plus VAT, they would sell.

The group had one final trick to hold Robinsons to the deal:

we did one or two...they're not *naughty* things but we sort of... we found out he [William Robinson] was a non-executive director of a thing called The Pub is the Hub [a charity which supports community buyouts and offers advice on pub diversification]... so we dropped Prince Charles [the honorary president of the charity] a message and copied in William Robinson to let him know how very very helpful he was being in allowing us to make a bid for one of his pubs... We were pretty convinced that William Robinson would like to be Sir William before not very long and he's a member of an organisation that is there to support village pubs. So it's a bit of a contradiction... It worked in our favour in the end because he did take a fairly relaxed view to us buying it out. It's the only pub that Robinsons have ever allowed to be bought out of their estate without applying conditions to it. There are no ties, nothing. We do have a Robinsons beer on there but it was a Robinsons pub and Unicorn [the Robinson's beer] is always very popular...⁴⁵⁸

Optimistic about the pub's future, the group issued its first community share offer. It did not go well:

When we actually launched on the first day there were like six applications and they were all board members. And then it was flat. It was blowing tumbleweed. People didn't understand that if they put money in they weren't actually putting it in - they were just

⁴⁵⁶ Rick Clarke: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁴⁵⁷ Peter Summersgill: Interview, Northumberland Arms, 8th August 2018

⁴⁵⁸ Rick Clarke: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

pledging to put it in - so there was a bit of reluctance to go. People thinking they wouldn't get their money back even though they would have.⁴⁵⁹

The group had aimed to close their share offer in mid September but the lack of initial momentum forced them to extend a further two weeks. Several factors then brought about a change of fortunes. One donor, intending to buy a share at the minimum price of £250, accidentally pledged £25,000 - suddenly boosting confidence in the campaign and producing a 'stock market effect' on other investments.⁴⁶⁰ Other contributions were less adventitious. A social investment organisation called Big Society Capital approved of the community business plan and offered to invest £100,000 - four times the maximum share price limit. Initially this caused a technical problem: a key principle of the community share offer was that any individual or organisation could only own a single share, ranging in price from £250 to £25,000 in order to maintain equal democratic access for all investors, regardless of their wealth. Additional shares could, however, belong to nominees, and this fact allowed the community organisation to sell four shares to the major investor without violating its constitution. In turn the Co-Operative bank bought £25,000 worth of shares: 'That really encouraged the ordinary punters so that we ended up with 230 people buying shares in the pub' with average investments at around £750.⁴⁶¹ As well as injecting large sums of capital, the involvement of these larger organisations alerted average investors - who had so far been reluctant to commit - to the benefits of the share deal. This provisionally offered (at the discretion of the directors and with a several year lock on withdrawals) a 3% dividend, and up to 30% of tax relief on the invested amount (up to a certain limit).⁴⁶² With the new investors on board, the buyout was tantalisingly close to becoming a reality.

The group made a final push, producing a new round of leaflets, advertising their campaign on BBC Manchester Radio and in the local paper, as well as using social media and traditional word of mouth.⁴⁶³ During the last 72 hours of the share offer they opened a mechanism to allow current investors the chance to 'top up' their commitment to help the group over the finish

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid

⁴⁶¹ Peter Summersgill: Interview, Northumberland Arms, 8th August 2018

⁴⁶² 'Tax Relief on Community Shares' communityshares.org.uk (communityshares.org.uk/tax-relief-community-shares)

⁴⁶³ Lauren Taylor: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

line.⁴⁶⁴ By Friday evening, one day before the close of the share offer, the group was £30,000 short of their target, without which the crowdfunding organisation would not ‘match’ their amount and support them with a crucial, additional 50% of funding. The group waited nervously, but by around 9pm on the Saturday night, three hours before the share offer was due to close, they finally hit target.⁴⁶⁵

The building, uninhabited for 11 months and already in a dilapidated state, had not lasted well. Everything was covered in mould, the furniture had been stripped away. What remained was tired and in need of refitting and upholstering. ‘An army of us came in here with professional help... we scraped off all the old stuff and they put the new stuff on. Carpet fitters. People like that. Very good joiners and so on. They were all contacts from people we knew in the industry [both Peter and Rick worked in the architectural profession and had reliable local tradesmen who would work for them fast track].’⁴⁶⁶ Between the professional contacts and the volunteers the pub managed to open in time for Christmas. The opening attracted media attention from the BBC - ‘we were the Christmas good news story’ - the packed bar was blessed by the local priest ‘and it has been a steady trickle ever since’.⁴⁶⁷



Fig 5.4 The ‘Thumb’ as a Community Owned Pub (Katherine Bainbridge, ‘These people heard their much-loved local was going to close - so they bought it’ *Manchester Evening News*, Nov 23 2017)

⁴⁶⁴ Rick Clarke: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁴⁶⁵ Peter Summersgill: Interview, Northumberland Arms, 8th August 2018

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid

Impact

At first stories like The Northumberland's might simply seem consolatory, rear-guard actions which stymie loss rather than create change. There is clearly a conservational impulse underpinning the project - preserving rather than transforming what was already there: 'it's not any different to me now than how it was, you always felt at home here.'⁴⁶⁸ What then does community ownership really change?

Yet this account shows how conservation is itself a form of change. Under private ownership The Northumberland had been steadily run down; the brewery who owned it appeared more motivated by portfolio management rather than the quiet import of the pub in a locality and, despite the efforts of the tenants, had not invested in the building's upkeep.⁴⁶⁹ This meant that despite the pub's historic pedigree, and the unusually well preserved nature of its multi-room layout, the pub was changing through neglect. By altering the logic which governed the trajectory of The Northumberland - prioritising community need over economic productivity, direct rather than distant investment in its design and appearance - community ownership allowed it to realise its immanent properties. As Peter expressed when asked to compare the pub under community ownership to its previous iteration:

It's fantastic now. The pub feels exactly the same in many ways as it always did but that's because in your mind's eye you thought it was nicer than it actually was! [...] now it's beautifully furnished and it's all freshly painted and there are nice floors and so on. It was a bit... your feet are sticking to [the floor] before, y'know! The upholstery was a bit tired... The walls still had old nicotine stains on it from a time when people used to smoke in here. We took a decision not to take the walls down. People like big open plan pubs these days, or so they say. But you'd be surprised in here how you can create four different atmospheres in the pub. This [lounge seating area] can be families or couples and they're all sat around chatting. You can have a bunch of lively lads in the pool room playing pool. There can be a football match on in the bar - or, what's been a big attraction this year, the Tour de France - there's always a regular small group who want to watch the Grand Prix.... Really good atmosphere....⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁸ Janice Robertson: Interview, Northumberland Arms, 9th August 2018

⁴⁶⁹ Margaret Houghton: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁴⁷⁰ Peter Summersgill: Interview, Northumberland Arms, 8th August 2018

Peter's comment alludes to a second difference of trajectory taken by community takeover: pubs owned by breweries and pub companies rarely stay the same. Instead, as chapter 2 demonstrated, the history of the pub is littered with examples of radical aesthetic overhauls as companies either adjust the space for the maximum possible profitability, or attempt to align it with contemporary fashions.⁴⁷¹ To rehearse an argument made earlier – this is an integral feature of the pub's contradictory position in culture: situated between a market which demands change and innovation on the one hand, whilst needing to provide a sense of stability, permanence, temporal connectivity, on the other.⁴⁷² The community group's conservationist approach was a way of resisting alterations to the character of the pub which are governed by a logic alien to those who frequent and use it. The power to stay the same, to realise the pub's aesthetic ambition to step to one side of modernity, is therefore not a minor one. As Rick pointed out:

because we retained the layout you can get as many different atmospheres going on as there are rooms at any one time. Whereas you can get pubs like the Windsor up the road which was knocked through into one great room in the 70s... they're really difficult pubs to build any atmosphere in. You go in there and there's ten people and it feels like it's empty and you come in here and there's five people and it's buzzing. Its architecture really helps. So we were really keen not to change that.⁴⁷³

This approach to architecture partly derives from The Northumberland's position as one-amongst-many. Rather than community pubs like The George and Dragon, or The Angler's Rest (both discussed later in this chapter) which are the sole pub of the village and therefore gravitate towards a more neutral, accessible aesthetic - or corporate pubs which differentiate the market to target one demographic - The Thumb preserved its historic layout in order to achieve a kind of differentiation under one roof; allowing a variety of atmospheres, activities and patrons to co-exist in the same space.

Because of its architecture and atmosphere, and because of who used it, The Northumberland was informally a community pub before it was formally owned as one. This revealed itself in

⁴⁷¹ See: Chapter 2 / also, Chatterton & Hollands, *Urban Nightscapes*, Taylor & Francis (2004)

⁴⁷² See: Chapter 2

⁴⁷³ Rick Clarke: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

the many small anecdotes about the role the pub had played in its users lives. From Janice, who found in the pub a ‘lifeblood’ following her divorce, ‘because I knew Margaret [the landlady] - I knew if she was working on a Saturday night I could come down and sit at the bar and have a drink and take the dog down. It’s a way of going out without having to organise everyone around me’⁴⁷⁴ or a local who bought his house on the back of a handshake deal with the owner in the pub.⁴⁷⁵ The Northumberland did not need to change to become a community pub, but by becoming a community pub it made it plausible that negative change not be imposed upon it. Conservation was thus a transformation of trajectory; a way of preserving the pub’s essence and building upon it.

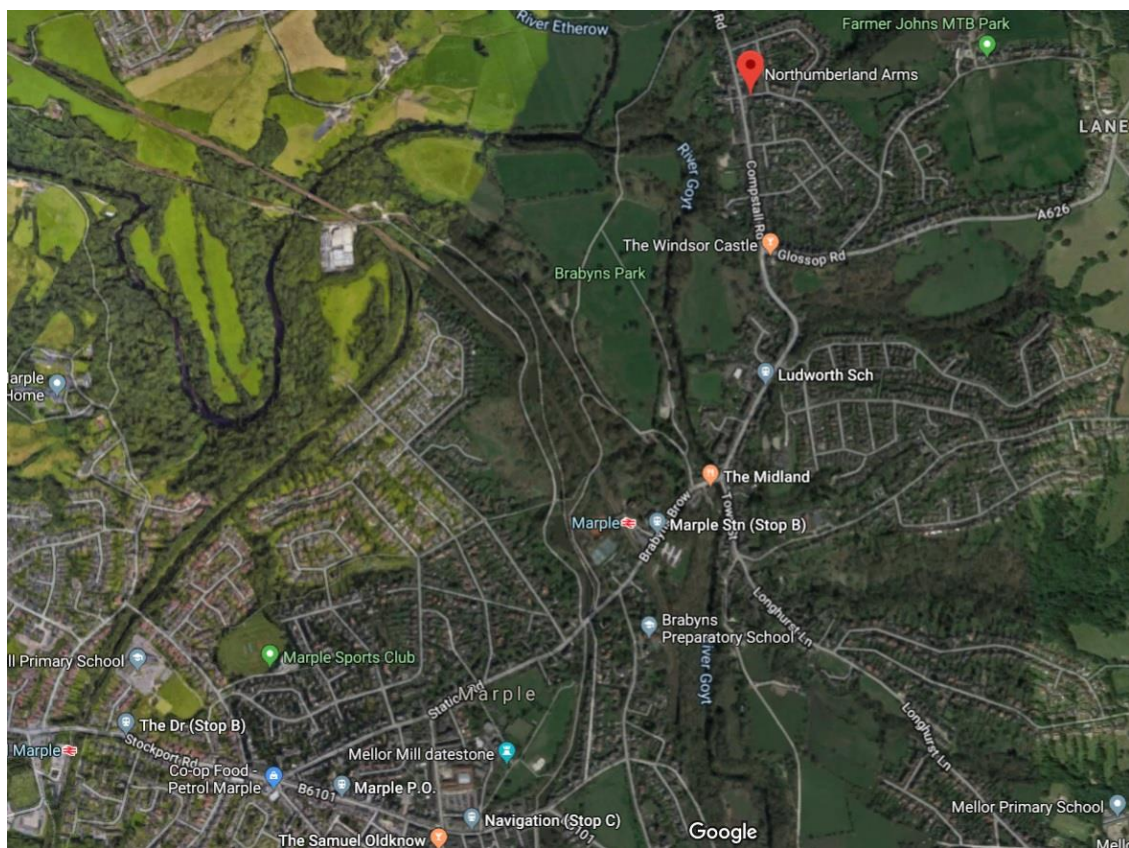


Fig 5.5 - Urban layout of Marple, one of a series of conurbations near Stockport. The Northumberland Arms can be seen towards the top. [Screen Capture from: Google Maps – ‘Marple’]

As Margaret the former landlady noted, the lack of a brewery tie meant the regulars could be involved in suggesting and choosing beers.⁴⁷⁶ The gender balance - already improving under her and her partner’s oversight - had, the directors thought, improved further following the buyout,

⁴⁷⁴ Janice Robertson: Interview, Northumberland Arms, 9th August 2018

⁴⁷⁵ Rick Clarke: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁴⁷⁶ Margaret Houghton: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

and more young people were frequenting the pub.⁴⁷⁷ Small changes, like getting rid of the dartboard (a symbol of the old, male-orientated pub), and brightening the paint colour, contributed to these demographic shifts. Likewise, the notion of being ‘a pub for the community’ has been taken up by local society groups - from cycling clubs to walking groups - giving it a more diverse range of uses than drinking: ‘people come in and they’re not drinkers but they’ve heard about the clubs that we have and they come in on a Sunday afternoon and have a coffee.’⁴⁷⁸ Plans are afoot to extend the pub’s value as a community asset in other ways, potentially converting the empty tenant’s flat into a function room (something lacking in the village as a whole):

[we] need more space for more people to gather. Take out one or two non-structural walls. Could make a fairly big hall that could hold about 60 people quite easily. At the moment if we do anything like that we use the church hall across there.⁴⁷⁹

The broader knock-on effects of having such community spaces can be significant. At The Angler’s Rest in Bamford - a small village in the middle of the Peak District - a survey of members found that 80% had met new people as a result of the community buyout, with 40% meeting more than ten. Two thirds felt more part of the community just because of the existence of a venue: ‘it definitely improved social cohesion and reduced social isolation.’⁴⁸⁰ Sally Soady, one of the directors of the Bamford Community Society, gave the example of a yoga class which ran at an institute close to the pub:

It has been going for ages. And now those people come over and have a coffee after yoga. So whereas before... [they’d just briefly say hello] they’ve actually got to know people and become friends with people and now they’re going out doing things together. Although they’d kind of recognise people from the village... they’d not got further than saying “how are you?” But they’ve actually been able to make proper friendships by coming in here.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁷ Lauren Taylor / Margaret Houghton: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁴⁷⁸ Lauren Taylor: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁴⁷⁹ Peter Summersgill: Interview, Northumberland Arms, 8th August 2018

⁴⁸⁰ Sally Soady: Interview, Angler’s Rest, August 12th 2018

⁴⁸¹ Ibid

Dynamics in the village - which has a large elderly population and a lot of single households - changed in other ways. After repeated closures of pubs and other amenities across Bamford, the community had been left with no daytime social space. Whereas now the cafe pulls in people who might never normally frequent a pub: 'You almost never come in here and not see someone from the village... lots of things happen here that never happened anywhere. I came in one day and there was a group at the top playing scrabble in Italian.' Other new activities included Bridge groups, 'knit and natter' clubs, 'all sorts of things.'⁴⁸² Unlike The Northumberland Arms, such behaviour was a remarkable transformation of the pub, which historically 'just wasn't a welcome place' - Sally herself hadn't come in for ten years and felt that it had become run down by underinvestment and a high turnover of landlords, as well as dominated by a narrow clique of predominantly male drinkers: now 'there's a lot more people coming in here than used to.'⁴⁸³



5.6 The village of Bamford, where The Angler's Rest is located. [Screen Capture from Google Maps – 'Bamford']

⁴⁸² Ibid / see also research on the benefit of pubs in combatting social isolation: Robin Dunbar, 'Friends on Tap: The Role of Pubs at the Heart of the Community' *Campaign for Real Ale* (2016)

⁴⁸³ Ibid – such divisions will be discussed further in the following section on 'Conflict'.

A less tangible impact has come from the process of the community buyout itself: as Sally described, it gave the community ‘a sense of not having to wait for other people. If there’s things that need doing we ought to be able to do it ourselves... [it] empowered us.’⁴⁸⁴ During a difficult parish council meeting about parking and traffic in the village (an infamously antagonistic topic in the area) for instance, a participant pointed out that ‘if the village could buy the pub then surely it could sort out traffic and parking’, and by saving the pub, other services - like a post office (based in the pub itself, and the original reason for purchasing the building) could also be continued as a result of community initiative.⁴⁸⁵

Likewise, the local economic benefits have been substantial. As Sally argued ‘this little pub is putting about £200,000 into this valley which has a population of about 5000 people... [in] wages, buying local products [the majority of the real ales available at the pub are from local breweries], using local plumbers, and all the rest of it.’⁴⁸⁶ In place of the parish council, which ‘hasn’t got much money and can’t do much’ the Community Benefit Society is therefore a sufficiently substantial, democratic organisation, capable of directing internal economic flows within a region, such that money gets “recycled” rather than extracted.⁴⁸⁷ Any additional profit made by the pub in future can also go further: employing gardeners, or funding the school - whatever most reflects current community need.⁴⁸⁸ In the meantime, the draw of the pub and cafe itself attracts walkers and other tourists to a part of the Peak district which might otherwise be overlooked, with a concordant effect on the local economy, and additional opportunities for viable business within the village. Borne in response to a sense of village decline, the process of community ownership has thereby restored confidence, prospects and civic culture in Bamford, providing it with a renewed sense of futurity.

Both The Old Crown and The George and Dragon - which, like The Angler’s Rest, are single pub villages - noted similar effects. Julian Ross - one of the pioneers of The Old Crown (the first community owned pub in England) - pointed out that, for all the romantic clichés of the ‘pub as the heart of the village’, it holds an immediate, practical reality:

⁴⁸⁴ Sally Soady: Interview, Angler’s Rest, August 12th 2018

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid

⁴⁸⁷ Community ownership in this way synergises with other alternative economic models aimed at recycling local resources to maintain wealth locally. E.g. ‘the Preston Model’: see ‘The Preston Model’ *CLES* (cles.org.uk/the-preston-model)

⁴⁸⁸ Sally Soady: Interview, Angler’s Rest, August 12th 2018

in a community of this size [approx 450 people] this [the pub] isn't a tiny thing. It's a huge thing...It's the lifeblood if you live in a village...if [the pub] goes it's just a collection of houses. Where do you eat? Where do you come to laugh and cry and celebrate weddings and funerals?⁴⁸⁹

In a similar vein, Paul Cullen (a director of The George and Dragon in the village of Hudswell in the Yorkshire Dales) noted how a pub was essential to place-making:

If you go driving through the Dales on a night when it's dark, and you come to a village, you don't know the village but you're looking for the light. You're looking for the light. And if you find it, it's normally the village pub: you go in there, you have a nice chat and so on, you ask the landlord or he'll ask you "what sized shoes do you take?" and all this sort of thing. But when you go through a village and there's no pub you just pass through it. It's dead. At night they [the residents] don't meet - they just close the doors. They're like commuters then. It loses the village focus. It's great now [since the community re-opened the pub]: you can come half ten at night and the light is on. "Have you pulled the last pints yet? Ah good" and then you pop in.⁴⁹⁰

Hudswell's linear arrangement - a collection of houses stretched along an old drovers' road outside the medieval town of Richmond - made the danger of the village 'losing focus' more pronounced. Without the pub to provide a social space at its centre the village would struggle to 'bind' its sides together, and, indeed, just become 'a collection of houses'. One couple noted that before the community buyout 'we socialised differently... with people you knew from elsewhere' rather than from the village itself.⁴⁹¹ The presence of the pub has instead made, it was felt, a place that was not only 'more prosperous' but more welcoming to 'people moving in, like us, who don't come from here... they use this place to build a social life... There are relationships I see all the time [because of the pub].'⁴⁹² Having a community pub at its centre has in this sense redrawn the mental cartography of Hudswell, mapping a more holistic psycho-geography onto a physically linear settlement.

⁴⁸⁹ Julian Ross: Interview, Old Crown, August 18th 2018

⁴⁹⁰ Paul Cullen: Interview, George & Dragon, August 24th 2018

⁴⁹¹ Interview 1, George & Dragon, August 22nd 2018

⁴⁹² Interview 1, George & Dragon, August 22nd 2018



Fig 5.7 Hudswell, near Richmond, North Yorkshire. Hudswell's linear arrangement can clearly be seen. [Screen Capture from Google Maps – 'Hudswell']

Conflict

The George and Dragon was taken over by the community in 2010 after its former iteration had closed two years earlier.⁴⁹³ Many of the directors and their partners noted how the pub in its former iteration had been a predominantly male enclave that could be unpleasant to enter as a woman and unfriendly even as an 'outsider' man. Paul Cullen, one of the directors of The George and Dragon and a local councillor for a nearby ward, had lived in Hudswell for a long time but still found himself branded an outsider: 'if I came in on my own and sit in in that corner with a drink, nobody would talk to you. Nobody would acknowledge you at all' - a mentality Paul described as "Who's he? Where's he from? What's he doing in our pub? It's *our* pub."⁴⁹⁴ The architecture of the pub did little to ameliorate the problem, especially for women. 'You'd go up to the hatch, you'd order a drink, you'd come out bum first, and when you turn around you just see all the fellas looking at you'.⁴⁹⁵ Likewise, a large porch wall committed patrons to the pub before being able to see who was inside it, which added to the intimidating feeling.⁴⁹⁶ In its new guise as a community pub, these issues were the first to be targeted.

⁴⁹³ 'The George and Dragon' (georgeanddragonhudswell.co.uk/community-pub)

⁴⁹⁴ Paul Cullen: Interview, George & Dragon, August 24th 2018

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid

⁴⁹⁶ Martin Booth: Interview, George and Dragon, August 22nd 2018

Some of the original locals consequently viewed the community buyout with suspicion, perceiving it as collection of outsiders turning a village asset into something which reflected their own interests and agenda. A conflict thus emerged over the direction of the community group and the composition of its directors - many considered ‘outsiders’ to the original village.⁴⁹⁷ This division came to be played out through the architectural changes to the pub. The community group opened the space, installing a bar in place of the beer hatch, and removing the porch wall which had made entering the pub intimidating for new customers. A simpler, more modern decor was also introduced. Rather than maintaining the pub as a collection of small rooms with a traditional rustic interior, the space was opened, unified, and brightened. This had the advantage of making the pub more welcoming to the community’s many different demographics - from families to women and young people. But for some of its old patrons this came at the cost of the pub’s identity; with the old pub’s aesthetic asperity reflecting the tough, Dales farming life around which the village was once based.⁴⁹⁸

For Cullen, though, such sentiment is nostalgic for an era where pubs could afford to be male preserves, and fail to make a case for why a community owned space should not be responsive to inclusive needs:

When we chose to buy it - it was to buy it as a community pub - not a drinking hole. So it had to be family friendly, dog friendly, community events going on, book clubs, dominoes if you can and that sort of thing... No aggression. Just a nice place.⁴⁹⁹

Other members of the community group are proud of the changes.

There are more things you could say about this place which make it more welcoming for families and women, really. If you look at the size of this table [we’re sat on a large, long, wooden table, capable of sitting up to around ten people] there used to be all little tables. [By contrast] This is very inclusive. When you sit down you can chat to people [around you.] You can sit and eat. You can meet someone. It’s very communal.⁵⁰⁰

Having failed as a private house catering to a niche audience and subsequently succeeded under community ownership, the changes appear justified. In the years since the pub’s re-opening, the community group has established a collection of bee hives and allotments at the

⁴⁹⁷ Interview 1, George & Dragon, August 22nd 2018 / Paul Cullen: Interview, George & Dragon, August 24th 2018

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹⁹ Paul Cullen: Interview, George & Dragon, August 24th 2018

⁵⁰⁰ Partner of a Director: Interview 1, George & Dragon, August 22nd 2018

bottom of the pub garden, opened a village shop inside the pub ('a godsend in winter'⁵⁰¹) and have plans to make the pub entirely accessible to disabled patrons. The pub is now well attended in the week as well as weekends. Its current tenant - Stuart Miller - attracted national attention in 2016 after winning awarded CAMRA's National Pub of the Year - the biggest accolade a British pub can achieve. This was made easier because of the community model; allowed Stuart, as a young, innovative landlord, to run a free house without requiring the large amounts of capital to buy a pub outright, or becoming indebted to an infeasible loan as previous tenants of the pub had done.



Fig 5.8 – The George and Dragon after it was awarded CAMRA Pub of the Year in 2016 [Ashley Barnard, 'Community pub saved less than 10 years ago wins top pub award', *The Northern Echo*, Sept 15 2016]

Despite the minor external criticisms, relations stayed mostly strong amongst the community group's directors, which Cullen and others put down to the lack of egos: 'we all get on very well. Nobody is allowed to be bossy boots or whatever. Whatever we do we decide as a board. Nobody takes decisions on their own.'⁵⁰² Interpersonal relations, and community relations at large, can be one of the hardest hurdles for community ownership schemes. After a successful

⁵⁰¹ Paul Cullen: Interview, George & Dragon, August 24th 2018

⁵⁰² Ibid

Christmas opening, The Northumberland Arms community group found that divisions arose quickly once the campaign shifted gear - from a united front with a clear objective (keeping the pub open and achieving the buyout) to managing a business with a group of directors and around 230 shareholders; all with competing visions, competencies and allegiances.⁵⁰³ The result was a fallout amongst the directors, with two leaving, and different factions emerging around the splits.⁵⁰⁴ As in other cases, online media exacerbated the problem, creating a perpetual ebb of background criticism which was difficult to substantially resolve.⁵⁰⁵ At the surface level, these disagreements were manifold and particular: some felt the former landlord and landlady, who served on the new committee, (perhaps understandably) maintained too close an attachment to the premises they had spent many years of their lives invested in, making it difficult to achieve a clean break. Other disagreements revolved around differing interpretations of the group's constitution over issues like directors being paid for working the bar during periods where more permanent staffing had not yet been hired, or over areas where two directors shared similar professional competencies but disagreed about the other's approach. Likewise, whilst many of the group felt the project might never have materialised without the drive and enthusiasm of one of the directors, this created imbalances where influence was not evenly distributed across all the group members.

Such disagreements were initially more destructive than they might have been in a commercial environment. As Malcolm Allan, one of the group's directors noted,

There's a massive difference between a normal commercial operation... and this. We were all pals, we all knew each other from the pub, we're drinking mates and that fracture gets intensely personal.⁵⁰⁶

They can also be long running, even once animosities have been overcome, with some former supporters, friends, and even directors, no longer using the pub itself.⁵⁰⁷ Whilst the process of community buyout can therefore be a crucial component of its positive impact, it can also inadvertently create hard borders around the community as it forms, with a feeling of outsiders and insiders that persists long after any ructions occur.

⁵⁰³ Malcolm Allan: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁵⁰⁴ Rick Clarke: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁵⁰⁵ Interview 2: Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018 / Sally Soady: Interview, Angler's Rest, August 12th 2018

⁵⁰⁶ Malcolm Allan: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁵⁰⁷ Peter Summersgill: Interview, Northumberland Arms, 8th August 2018

The ubiquity of the problem, and the predictability of its stages, suggest that the issue is predominantly structural rather than a case of problem individuals or poor decisions (though both can inevitably exacerbate the issue).⁵⁰⁸ As Rick jokingly paraphrased the advice he received from the organisation Co-operative and Mutual Solutions:

You go into it imagining that a community is a wonderful green field where the lion lies down with the lamb and when you get to the other side of it you realise it's just a load of muppets who want to bury axes in each others heads and that's the reality of what a community is!⁵⁰⁹

A key problem is therefore that community groups fail to anticipate the structural issues that will arise, escalating the situation when they do. A romantic, rather than practicable view of community life inhibits its future effectiveness. As Janice Robertson - the Company Secretary of The Northumberland Arms - put it, 'I have this optimistic, idealistic view of the world and think everything is going to be great so when things like that happen it comes as a bit of a surprise to me'.⁵¹⁰ Building an awareness of group psychology into the advice and prior training of community benefit organisations could therefore be an important part of their viability. Likewise, 'having the right people from the start' can anticipate future problems; preventing tensions which arise from overlapping remits or individual overinvestment.⁵¹¹ Where possible - other parties, like professional external accountants, or advisers distanced from the community group itself - can also separate out difficult tasks from becoming personal issues.⁵¹² Staffing approach is also a likely factor. Case studies like The Old Crown and The George and Dragon, which experienced relatively low levels of internal fractiousness, may have benefited from adopting the more hands-off tenanted model, in which an individual was hired to be the figurehead of the pub and make the business decisions within the parameters agreed by the community group. Such figures can sit to one side from interpersonal conflicts and take over some of the difficult leg work which can hinder committee management of the business.

⁵⁰⁸ There are clear parallels here with classic accounts of group development e.g. Bruce Tuckman, 'Developmental sequence in small groups'. *Psychological Bulletin*. 63 (6): 384–399 (1965) / As well as the experience of socially committed activist groups, as documented in David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, AK Press (2009)

⁵⁰⁹ Rick Clarke: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁵¹⁰ Janice Robertson: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁵¹¹ Malcolm Allan: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁵¹² Ibid

Criticism from members of the community opposed to the buyout, such as occurred at The George and Dragon, also seems to be a relatively common occurrence. At The Angler's Rest, a small and vociferous group in the community resisted the buyout, attacking the project on social media and rallying around the former tenant who claimed their own aspiration to buy the pub. The tenant consequently banned everyone involved in the community bid from the pub in the interim.⁵¹³ Sally recalled that they 'had about 36 months of constant criticism... it was really horrible. Quite offensive. Personal.'⁵¹⁴ Ironically,

the people who were most vocally against it didn't buy shares but they're lots of our regular drinkers, so they come and use it. I think because not many [in the village] had been using the pub it had kind of becoming their private drinking club and they didn't want to see that changed... but it wasn't viable as it was so it had to change.⁵¹⁵

To combat the attacks, the steering group decided to only put out positive messages and ignore criticism where it was small-minded. Rather than engaging in a constant battle with social media they designated response rights to the best wordsmiths and kept the rest of the group out of the fray.

Having foreknowledge of the criticism that will likely emerge from within and without can reduce its impact when it occurs. But there are other ways it can be ameliorated through community engagement. When a cafe was being considered at The Angler's Rest 'there was a sort of "oh!" moment, when somebody was thinking greasy spoon, and another person was thinking vintage china' so the group resolved to combine the buyout celebration with a meeting giving members a chance to use mood boards to respond to the initial ideas of the steering committee.⁵¹⁶ One board member was tasked with thinking about design 'but as people came in she'd ask: "what do you think about this curtain material" etc. So it was kind of consulted with a small number of people [initially and then] consulted with a lot at this evening.'⁵¹⁷

⁵¹³ Sally Soady: Interview, Angler's Rest, August 12th 2018

⁵¹⁴ Ibid

⁵¹⁵ Ibid

⁵¹⁶ Ibid

⁵¹⁷ Ibid

Minor but controversial issues were tested with members via email survey. ‘So one of the early questions was: should we be dog friendly.... that came back 70% yes. So we could then say to the people who were like “you shouldn’t have dogs” - “most people do want us to be dog friendly so that’s what we’re going to do.”’⁵¹⁸ Larger problems are addressed at the AGM. Sally pointed out that these were consultative mechanisms a commercial pub would struggle to reproduce, lacking a network of shareholders to draw on. Likewise ‘you might not get the same level of positive feedback... you get a lot more interaction’ as a result of being a community operation, partly because of the sense of ownership that being a shareholder, or a village local, confers.⁵¹⁹

Getting the right expertise, steered by community involvement is another approach. At The Northumberland the group brought in a professional interior designer, and ‘when we saw what she had in mind it was absolutely perfect for us. So there wasn’t a lot of disagreement and I have been absolutely chuffed with the result. It has been exactly as I hoped it would be.’⁵²⁰ Retaining the original layout whilst making sensitive additions - such as the coloured Spanish floor tiles in the entrance porch - (‘they all thought it was the real thing not that we’d done it’) made the transition easier. Not all critics could be appeased however. ‘We put together the schemes for the pub and then presented them to everyone and everyone was like, “ah, yeah fantastic”! and then once we’d done it they’d be like “well, why’s it that colour?” - “well, because it’s the colour you picked!”’⁵²¹ Small changes could prove surprising flashpoints. The removal of a number of pictures in the heavily laden walls of the pub provoked such outcry at a public meeting such that it became referred to as Picturegate.⁵²² Such intensity likely results from ambivalent sense of ownership which predominates in local pubs, as discussed in Chapter 1. The Northumberland might have been owned by the Robinsons brewery, managed on their behalf by a tenanted landlord and landlady, but the official control of both these authorities is in a sense provisional, borrowed from the patrons who perceive themselves as its caretakers. Since it was this sentiment which in part drove the community purchase, the smallest of alterations - in this case, the dilution of the number of wall pictures, take on a potent symbolic force. Yet in officialising the underlying sense of community control, other benefits can be realised:

⁵¹⁸ Ibid

⁵¹⁹ Ibid

⁵²⁰ Rick Clarke: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁵²¹ Peter Summersgill: Interview, Northumberland Arms, 8th August 2018

⁵²² Interview 2: Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

within a village the skills you've got are amazing. When we bought it people would say "well I can do plastering" and came along and did the plastering [...] 'people think "well what can *I* do?"'⁵²³

Formalising collective ownership can, in other words, unleash collective skill and voluntary energy, channeling it in such a way that it produces the 'more than' the sum of its parts. Yet if this imbues confidence in community power, and reduces the chance of an alienated outcome - with every participant sensing their 'part' within the whole - it establishes a tension for the pub at the next stage of its life: how will it be run, and who will hold the power? `

Staff

Community groups are generally faced with two options for the running of their pubs. They can hire a tenant, who effectively runs the pub as their own business within parameters agreed by the community group, or opt to hire a manager who acts as an employee of the community organisation, leaving the community group with ultimate oversight of the business. A third, rarer option is for community groups to become the tenant themselves - whilst a third party owns the actual pub asset.

All options have different benefits and drawbacks. 'Managed' models allow shareholders to receive 30% tax relief on their investment (up to a nominal capital sum) - known as EIS (Enterprise Investment Scheme) - as well as maintaining the community group's control over the daily operations of the pub, ensuring it remains closely wedded to their vision.⁵²⁴ Its costs are time and liability. A management structure means committee members must set the policies on every aspect of the business - from employment practices to health and safety - as well as managing its accounts. For voluntary organisations, relying on unremunerated labour - such a commitment can be daunting. Likewise, should the business fail, the responsibility falls back onto the directors (and by extension, shareholders) themselves. By contrast, tenanted operations allow the community groups to function in a 'hands-off' manner. They form an initial agreement with a tenant, deciding particulars such as annual rent and ethos, and leave the

⁵²³ Sally Soady: Interview, Angler's Rest, August 12th 2018

⁵²⁴ 'Tax Relief on Community Shares' communityshares.org.uk (communityshares.org.uk/tax-relief-community-shares)

business to be run in their stead. Tenanted setups were consequently thought by respondents to require about a third of the time of directors compared to the managed equivalent. The cost is the inability of shareholders to qualify for EIS (since the tenant, rather than the shareholder, is taking the business risk), and less control over the operation of the pub itself.

Other factors influenced what path the community group chose. At The Fox and Goose, who adopted a manager-led model, they were worried about broader industry practices filtering into a community pub without easy mechanisms for community oversight:

You're vulnerable to corrupt goings on if you have a tenancy. [With managers] The directors have a much more close eye on things and you pick up on a problem quickly. With a tenancy... there [can be] dishonesty. Because amongst the tenancy community there's a general loathing of owners because owners have screwed them down so much, the PubCos over the years make these horrible contracts where they [the tenants] are almost forced into behaving corruptly to try and make a living. I.e. not declaring money, getting stuff from different suppliers.⁵²⁵

Another danger is how community orientated a tenancy might end up being. Sally Soady agreed that having a tenancy would have given the directors of The Angler's an easier time, 'but we've had pubs with tenancies coming to see us who say there's not a lot of community events [since there's not always commercial incentive to do so]'.⁵²⁶ Likewise, should the relationship between tenant and community group break down, or the tenant depart from the community group's vision, the possibility of intervening in the situation becomes harder: 'if there's complaint from shareholders about the behaviour from the tenant we wouldn't be able to do much. It would cost to break the contract.'⁵²⁷

Consequently, The George and Dragon, who adopted the tenant model, aimed to only hire people who bought into the community group's vision: 'we don't want a jukebox. We don't want a TV. We want a place that will allow Dales games - quoits - dominoes.'⁵²⁸ Likewise, it took advantage of the fact that the pub's natural constituency was the local village, and with it the shareholders themselves, whose opinions would inevitably influence the running of the

⁵²⁵ The Fox and Goose: Interview with Directors (3), 14 August 2018

⁵²⁶ Sally Soady: Interview, Angler's Rest, August 12th 2018

⁵²⁷ The Fox and Goose: Interview with Directors (3), 14 August 2018

⁵²⁸ Paul Cullen: Interview, George & Dragon, August 24th 2018

business. This led to compromises on issues like children's meals (Stuart, the tenant, was initially opposed) and at least one fixed, local ale (Stuart, a beer aficionado, was keen to have a fully rotating cellar). Other innovations by the landlord were considered more controversial. Stuart installed a cinema-style board to advertise the beer stock - *de rigueur* for craft-beer oriented establishments in major cities - but perplexing to many of the local residents of rural Yorkshire. As some of the locals remarked: 'That's Londony isn't it! A lot people didn't like that... he did come from London, he's a Yorkshireman but he did come...' / 'He said he was going to run a traditional pub [and so] there were several laughs about that...' ⁵²⁹ Such stringent requirements made hiring a more difficult process. It may be surprising, given its subsequent success, that The George and Dragon found it difficult to recruit a tenant both times it has tried. ⁵³⁰ Both times the pub hired a tenant it ended up selecting people who were not from the pub industry, but brought ideas and enthusiasms in line with the vision of the directors. This was put down to the nature of traditional publicans who 'would worry about committing to 200 members', based on a presumption of heavy interference from the local community. ⁵³¹

Despite this, there are obvious advantages to the tenant wishing to run a community pub. Constraints were lighter than with a traditional PubCo tie, 'we have an arrangement where he pays us rent, yes we do have a bond to secure our interests, but other than that we're pretty hands off.' ⁵³² Rental prices were also competitive with industry standards since, ultimately, 'HCP's [Hudswell Community Pub Ltd] desire is to see a sustainable public house' rather than extract additional profit. ⁵³³ And the initial alignment between owner and tenant - based in vision rather than commercial relationship - reduced the likelihood of compromise on key tenets of the pub's identity in the future.

Some of the difficulties faced by tenanted models are not unique to them. The Northumberland Arms - which adopted the management approach - also faced difficulties finding the right relationship with its prospective managers, exactly because the lines of authority were much less clear. Similar problems were experienced at The Angler's Rest. To begin with, none of the board knew how to run a pub but were effectively responsible for key elements of its operations. Policies for dealing with disputes and complaints, assigning roles and responsibilities, health and safety practices and accounts management all needed to be dealt

⁵²⁹ Ibid

⁵³⁰ The George & Dragon: Interview with directors (1) 22 August 2018

⁵³¹ Ibid

⁵³² Ibid

⁵³³ Paul Cullen: Interview, George & Dragon, August 24th 2018



Fig 5.9 - The Fox and Goose, in Hebden Bridge [Tripadvisor.co.uk – Entry for: Fox and Goose, Hebden Bridge]



Fig 5.10 - The controversial 'cinema board' at the George and Dragon [Guy Carpenter, 'The George and Dragon Inn in Hudswell being awarded Pub of the Year', *Richmondshire Today*, March 3 2017]

with by directors even if a manager was then tasked with their implementation. The manager's remit consequently became a vexed question: 'We're like a chain of pubs but we've only got one pub.'⁵³⁴ Paul Cullen pointed out that this situation ended up meaning that 'once you've got a manager then you've got to manage the manager'.⁵³⁵ Management models also suffer for lack of a 'recognisable figure behind the bar', disrupting the traditional figure of the landlord/lady, commanding from the front of house.

A problem with both models is that they tend to limit the radical potential of community ownership. A 'them' and 'us' is still maintained between the owners of the community asset and the staff who operate it. Likewise, though in practice many community groups may see the well-being of their tenant or staff as beneficial to their business - this is not structurally guaranteed. As Mark Simmonds, a co-operative business adviser involved with The Fox and Goose in Hebden Bridge argued:

It's an artificial model built on traditional shareholder capitalism where you separate the management from the shareholder representation. Effectively that's what the directors here are doing: managing the interests of the shareholders.⁵³⁶

Many of the community groups offered working conditions and benefits superseding their equivalents in the hospitality sector. At The Fox and Goose they pointed out that the lack of mortgage or rent to pay meant overheads were low, freeing up income to pay the Real Living Wage (£8.25) to its casual staff as well as operating a pension scheme fixed at 5% contribution.⁵³⁷ But this choice was credited to 'having principles' rather than any compunction emerging from the structure of the business itself. A three day strike at the Ivy House, London's first co-operatively owned pub, over the sacking of four workers and the use of zero-hours contracts revealed the limitations of co-operative structures to guarantee an alternative to existing employment practices in the sector.⁵³⁸ Likewise, the relationship with the landlord at The George and Dragon, though sympathetic, was still understood as 'just like an ordinary landlord somewhere else', with rent rising in line with turnover, albeit at lower levels than in PubCo/Brewery owned establishments.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁴ Sally Soady: Interview, Angler's Rest, August 12th 2018

⁵³⁵ Paul Cullen: Interview, George & Dragon, August 24th 2018

⁵³⁶ Mark Simmonds: Interview, Fox and Goose, 16 August 2018

⁵³⁷ The Fox and Goose: Interview with Directors (1), 13 August 2018

⁵³⁸ Ivy House Union (@ivyhouseunion): twitter.com/ivyhouseunion

⁵³⁹ Paul Cullen: Interview, George & Dragon, August 24th 2018

To combat this divide between staff and shareholders, and transcend some of the limitations of the ‘hobby capitalism’ model in which community groups find themselves, Mark Simmonds proposed an alternative solution: worker co-operatives. This might function either through dual ownership - in which the asset is controlled by the community, and the business by a worker co-operative - or through a mechanism whereby the community share offer can raise the capital to buy the asset as loan stock, only for control to be transferred to a worker’s co-operative who buy out the community over time.⁵⁴⁰ That way ‘the people who are generating the value are the people in control’.⁵⁴¹ This method has some additional advantages. The unpaid work of the directors would be replaced with the paid work of the worker’s co-operative, putting ‘management and decision making at the point that makes sense.’⁵⁴² This could solve the problem of sustainability: few of those interested in campaigning to save the pub, or buy shares in it, are much interested in coming to meetings about it or standing as directors - posing a problem for the pub’s long-term oversight. It may also remove some of the more destructive impulses of community relations. As Mark argued, ‘if it’s [a question of] livelihood you’re forced to knuckle down and sort out the problem, whereas hobby [ownership] you can drift in, sow chaos, and then go back and have a bitch on social media!’⁵⁴³

It would not be without risks however. As with the management model it would be a departure from some of the customs and traditions of the pub itself, lacking in the figurehead of the ‘landlord’ to bind the space under their vision and be the symbolic representative of the house. It would also require a shift in industry culture. Many bar workers are young and transient, rarely seeing the role as a career prospect unless there are chances of hierarchical promotion. A worker co-op would be a much more long-term investment on the part of the individual worker, requiring a different temporality and mentality towards the labour.⁵⁴⁴

Politics

Does community ownership have a politics? Many directors - though not all - described themselves as holding socialist or social democratic beliefs, and yet community ownership has received support from many conservative sources: at The George and Dragon the local MP and former leader of the Conservative Party, William Hague, is a shareholder. Prince Charles

⁵⁴⁰ Mark Simmonds: Interview, Fox and Goose, 16 August 2018

⁵⁴¹ Ibid

⁵⁴² Ibid

⁵⁴³ Ibid

⁵⁴⁴ Examples of this practice include: Unicorn Grocery (Manchester), The Cowley Club (Brighton), 1 in 12 Club (Bradford), Black Star Co-op (Austin, Texas)

has twice visited The Old Crown, presenting it with a plaque on both occasions, and received the benediction of its local Conservative MP, Rory Stewart. The Localism Act of 2011 - addressed in the next section - significantly boosted community ownership schemes, and was implemented by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition. The then Prime Minister - David Cameron - framed community ownership as part of what he called 'The Big Society' - a voluntarist project of community self-help which could replace state support. The co-operative movement has itself historically belonged to the more cautious, reformist traditions within the Labour Party. Community ownership consequently sits at the intersection of very divergent political strands. Conservatives can understand it within a tradition of rural communitarianism; socialists as an anti-capitalist project rooted in collective endeavour; liberals and anarchists as a gesture of autonomy from top-down statism, an example of the freedom and creativity of individuals unleashed to fulfil their potential.

This feature may be a component of its success, as well as a factor in its troubles: there is political agreement around the necessity of saving the pub, but how it goes forward is a more propositional political question. In a small way it reflects a politics of how the world ought to be, and at that point the intersection of divergent strands unravels. This was not a conscious element in the case studies - and nor was it something that much influenced the directors internally - though it may account for some divergences with opponents in the broader area. All the case studies were explicit about leaving formal politics by the wayside, and saw community ownership primarily as a practical problem to be resolved in a non-ideological fashion. As the sign read outside The George and Dragon during the buyout campaign: 'Big society or local socialism? It doesn't really matter!'⁵⁴⁵ (though most respondents opted for local socialism). It is rather a form of what Malcolm Allan, at The Northumberland, called 'unconscious politics' - political in its implications and impulses, rather than in the formal labels or ideology of adherents.⁵⁴⁶

This can prove ambivalent when mapped onto formal political lines. Allan pointed out that on the one hand 'we're not here to make money' but on the other that 'I'm constantly reminded that we've got shareholders and we might have to pay them a dividend':

It's a bit of a capitalist sort of approach but in the end it's community owned - so if I'm an ordinary working person and I've put my 250 quid in and I've said: it's secure and

⁵⁴⁵ The George & Dragon: Interview with directors (1) 22 August 2018

⁵⁴⁶ Malcolm Allan: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018



Fig 5.11 The village green of Heskett Newmarket, with The Old Crown visible on the middle right.

[Eco Club, 'Interview with Julian Ross', ecoclub.com, Oct 16 2013

ecoclub.com/articles/interviews/908-131016-julian-ross]

I'll give you some money back then there's an obligation there... so I think I would say the shareholders ultimately decide... and if we don't have customers and the pub doesn't survive then ultimately the pub doesn't serve the community: is that commercial? capitalistic? I'm not sure - I don't know what it is...⁵⁴⁷

Community ownership might best be understood as non-capitalist rather than anti-capitalist. It still operates within a shareholder model, and may hire a tenant who perceives it as a business, but its aims are broadly non-expansionist: 'we're not ambitious, we're not empire builders, we just want our pub.'⁵⁴⁸ It also ends a model of extractive capitalism which has predominated in the pub sector. It may be that once a pub becomes successfully community owned it will never return to the market again: as Julian Ross noted, 'we're a sole object company. The sole object is to open and run The Old Crown as a public house. The only way that object is going to change is if 3/4s of the members voted for it to stop being a pub. And since they all bought into

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid

⁵⁴⁸ The Fox and & Goose: Interview with Directors (3), 14 August 2018



Fig 5.12 – Prince Charles, a keen advocate of Community Owned Pubs, pulls a pint at The George and Dragon [John Giles - WPA Pool / Getty Images. Getty, ‘The Prince Of Wales Visits Yorkshire’, found at: gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/prince-charles-prince-of-wales-reacts-during-a-visit-to-news-photo/487559454]

it [to keep it open as a pub] it has effectively been removed from the market until the next meteorite strikes.⁵⁴⁹

Following the financial crisis and the austerity policies which followed in Britain, there is nevertheless a sense of a new paradigm; one which looks neither to the state, nor to the market to resolve its problems. Julian felt that,

it’s no good relying on those up there... or down in London, or even the country council. If you want something you’ve got to do it yourself. And that’s very empowering I think. And it’s contagious. And I don’t think it’s dangerous. I don’t think it’s about anarchy or anything like that.⁵⁵⁰

Such an argument has its limits - apposite, perhaps, in a tight-knit village in Cumbria, and less in more shattered communities or complex urban centres where the state is the only reliable body for rudderless or mobile populations. It is nevertheless testament to a desire for self-confidence

⁵⁴⁹ Julian Ross: Interview, Old Crown, August 18th 2018

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid

and autonomy in the parts of Britain - here, small rural villages and towns - which have been experienced neglect and decline, and where, especially since the 2008 financial crisis, the state has further and further withdrawn.

Assets of Community Value

Where government has perhaps had the biggest influence on community ownership is through a policy enabling communities to designate their pubs ‘assets of community value’. Introduced by the 2011 Localism Act, ACVs place a six-month moratorium on a pub before it can be sold on commercially. An ACV listing provides time for community groups to mount campaigns to protect their pubs, and helps induce the notion that such resources are beholden to a collective proprietorship which goes beyond their status as privately owned assets. Though community owned pubs preceded the implementation of ACVs, the introduction of the policy has clearly served as a catalyst in their proliferation. It has also achieved some preventive protection, since many developers are unwilling to wait the necessary six months before they can act commercially, and know they may suffer the PR consequences of fighting a community campaign.

Of the several weaknesses in the legislation, the most pressing is that community groups have no preferential right to buy after the moratorium expires, and owners can exploit loopholes to sell their asset as a ‘going concern’ with few restrictions on what happens subsequently.

Likewise, the seller can refuse to advertise its property as a pub properly, use the artificial lack of interest as a basis to declare the business unviable, and then apply for change of use. Many of the community groups consequently felt that the legislation should be stronger. This might be achieved in the following ways:

- a) extending the moratorium deadline

Applying for ACV listing, incorporating a community group, getting its organisational rules sorted, being ratified by the FCA (Financial Conduct Authority), opening a bank account, writing a business plan and getting into a position to issue a share offer takes a considerable amount of time and effort on the part of the campaigners. Many of these steps are only possible in sequence, drawing out the process further. Ratification by the FCA might take three weeks to happen for instance, but is a necessary precursor before a bank account can be set up

- which can take around six weeks. Many community groups were consequently reliant on their campaign pressure, the largesse of the owner, or the lack of other bidders in order to make it beyond the moratorium deadline. Too much time however might also be a danger, stringing out a process which requires an element of momentum and immediacy to galvanise action.⁵⁵¹ A moratorium extension to between nine and twelve months is therefore likely to have the best result.

b) preferential right to buy

If an Asset of Community Value bequeaths the principle of collective proprietorship to the community, this should be recognised in practice through a preferential right to buy. At present, some PubCos or breweries are actively incentivised to refuse sale to community groups aiming to keep a pub open, since it may only increase local competition. Likewise, speculative bids from corporate bodies / developers - aiming for a change of use or a dramatic change in the spirit of the pub for commercial purposes - will likely outweigh the financial resources a community group can bring to bear. Finally, owners may simply not want to deal with the vagaries of a community bid when other, more apparently straightforward, offers are available. Once a community organisation has therefore shown by the conclusion of the moratorium that it is in a position to buy at a rate determined by independent valuation - predicated upon its ongoing use as a public house - its bid could supercede competing commercial offers.

c) linked compulsory purchase

As a failsafe, the ACV could be linked to compulsory purchase powers. Currently, compulsory purchase orders are expensive for councils to implement, require a complex legal procedure, and must be agreed by the Secretary of State. They can also leave councils open to expensive compensation claims. Yet at present they are the only defense against malicious property banking by asset holders who both refuse to operate a pub and refuse to sell it, leading to its closure in perpetuity until more favourable conditions can be sought by the owner. Where such properties are listed as ACVs, the barrier to compulsory purchase by the local council should be lower, and the risk to the council less. This, as the Plunkett Foundation have argued

⁵⁵¹ Malcolm Allan: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

in a 2014 report, could be achieved through providing compensation funds for local councils to offset claims.⁵⁵²

Developers, pub companies, and the lawyers who advocate on their behalf have become more sophisticated in their response to ACV listings, requiring community groups and parish councils to receive clear advice early on in the process. One such law firm claimed that in 2015 it succeeded in blocking 68% of the 44 ACV applications it contested.⁵⁵³ Only unincorporated bodies and parish councils are empowered with the ability to apply for an ACV, and the circumstances of the application can leave both open to legal challenge. If, for instance, the members of an unincorporated body have not formally adopted a legally acceptable constitution, or cannot provide evidence that they are bound by it, their legitimacy can be questioned, unravelling the basis of the ACV application. Likewise, parish councils are expected to respond at the request of community members, rather than drive the process themselves: evidence to the contrary can threaten the legitimacy of an ACV.⁵⁵⁴ Other evidence justifying claims of a pub's social use must also be clear, detailed and exact about the *specific* value of the pub in question: vague, generic evidence can leave applications open to challenge, whilst a lack of specificity, especially where alternative premises exist in the locality, can increase the chance of rejection or legal contest.⁵⁵⁵ Where strong communities exist around a pub, they are required to be assiduous researchers of their own value: conducting interviews with their users, and gathering archival material which make the inherent value of the pub clear. This in turn requires a broad conception of what constitutes value on a range of measures: historical, architectural, demographic, geographical, atmospheric, potential and functional. It may be that amorphous components of value - like the mental geography created by a pub such as The George and Dragon or The Northumberland Arms, offering a 'village centre' in otherwise linear settlements - can only be made evident through recorded accounts of the local residents themselves. The Angler's Rest has steadily cultivated its own archive - strewn across its walls as decoration - and with the aid of an architectural historian, produced its own booklet. Patrons have sent in anecdotes and stories. It has drawn on old newspaper features recording events like the sheep dog trials hosted by the pub to raise funds for red cross parcels during the Second World War. As Sally suggested 'the pub has been part of the community since it has

⁵⁵² Plunkett Foundation, 'Co-operative Pubs, A Better Form of Business' *Plunkett* (2014)

⁵⁵³ Mark Brown, 'The continued rise of pubs as assets of community value' *hospitalitylaw.co.uk*, 12 Feb 2016

⁵⁵⁴ Mark Brown, 'Decisive action needed on nominations for ACVs' *hospitalitylaw.co.uk*, 15 Jul 2015

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid*

been built and this [the research] is trying to reflect that.⁵⁵⁶ The more community groups are able to undertake such work, the stronger their claims for protection become.



Fig 5.13 The Angler's Rest in Bamford, diversified with Post Office and Café [Euan's Guide: Entry for The Angler's Rest, found at: euansguide.com/venues/the-anglers-rest-hope-valley-7092/location, accessed 03/03/2019]

As well as strengthening the power of ACVs, changes to other areas of the community ownership infrastructure would assist their proliferation. A significant problem faced by all the case studies was the failure of the banking sector to understand the status of a community benefit society. Only one bank - predictably, the Co-Operative Bank - was willing to take on such an account, but even then the complexity could be daunting: 'You're a specialist product. You've got loads of directors and loads of signatures.'⁵⁵⁷ At The Fox and Goose any changes or additions to the bank account involved a lengthy process: 'everyone gets written to, have to have a meeting and minutes saying this person is now a director. They go in with two forms of ID etc. [The] nearest bank is in Rochdale - everyone has to go to the branch in person.'⁵⁵⁸ A revival of local credit unions, or a public bank enabled an account architecture appropriate to community and co-operatively owned businesses could lessen such difficulties.

Other technical changes could also make a difference to the spread of innovations like worker-led co-operatives to the sector. Mark Simmonds pointed out that at present, the social investment tax relief available to community benefit societies is not available to co-operatives.

⁵⁵⁶ Sally Soady: Interview, Angler's Rest, August 12th 2018

⁵⁵⁷ Rick Clarke: Interview, Northumberland Arms, August 9th 2018

⁵⁵⁸ The Fox and & Goose: Interview with Directors (3), 14 August 2018

This is due to the ‘asset lock’ stipulation, which prevents any personal benefit being deriving from a potential asset sale. Asset locks are available to community benefit societies but not to co-operative societies.⁵⁵⁹ Allowing such an option would allow worker co-operatives to purchase pubs with the same access to the tax relief currently enjoyed by community benefit societies. This is crucial for worker co-operatives, since they are more reliant on loans than shares, and tax relief particularly incentivises the lending of money. This would allow communities to fund worker-operatives through loans instead of shares without being required to become members and have meetings in order to access tax relief.⁵⁶⁰ Such a model may deal with one of the potential long-term threats to community ownership schemes, which rely on maintaining the involvement of voluntary directors into perpetuity, long after the initial excitement of the community buyout has passed.

Phenomenology

Through community ownership there is an alignment between the reality of the pub and the symbolic representations which surround it. As we encountered in chapter 1, the pub is symbolically imbricated in a kind of organic reciprocity: growing, as Burke suggested, out of the soil like flowers, woven from the material of its locality into the gradual development of the land. Where the facts of its architectural production contradict this symbolic claim, the pub’s aesthetic integrity is nevertheless contingent on making some gesture towards it: whether through antiquated ‘useless’ features, or a palette of materials and colour schemes which bespeak a provisional attitude towards modernity. The fact that this has so often become a contrived feature of pub architecture - as in Brewer’s Tudor or other Ye Olde reimaginings - nevertheless attests to its resilience as a salient symbolic feature. The pub of the imagination stands outside time, whilst being sufficiently responsive to contemporary conditions to avoid pastiche or antiquation. Meanwhile, the pub of reality has often not been there: destroyed by temperance reforms, wartime destruction, postwar reconstruction, industry monopolisation, and the property market; as well as secular trends towards the privatisation of social life and competing forms of entertainment. Community ownership alters this contradiction between the pub imaginary and the pub reality in a number of ways.

⁵⁵⁹ ‘Asset Lock Provisions’ *communityshares.org.uk*
(communityshares.org.uk/resources/handbook/asset-lock-provisions)

⁵⁶⁰ Mark Simmonds: Interview, Fox and Goose, 16 August 2018

Temporality

The status of a community owned pub is distinct from its equivalents in the open market. It does not exist to primarily generate profit - though this may be a welcome byproduct. Nor does it exist as a property asset: its role is not to be exchanged when its commercial value is superseded by its property value. It is, in other words, returned to its central use value, and those uses are expanded to include a broader range than simply the provision of alcohol and space. Though it exists within the market, it does entirely not belong to it. Underpinned by shareholders, and having nothing extracted beyond what can be sustainably provided as surplus, it is also more resilient to the market's vagaries. The consequence is a temporal alignment: the 'real' pub can join its symbolic counterpart in seemingly existing aside from time. As Paul Cullen experienced at The George and Dragon, it was this motivation which drove community investors, rather than any benefit from returns: 'I want to keep the pub. I want to come in and touch it and say "I bought some of this" and it's going to be there in one hundred years' time.'⁵⁶¹ When shareholders die, their shares are passed on as part of the estate to someone else in the family, which in time will create small family dynasties of distributed pub owners; tangibly rooting connection to place, whilst steady turnover of shares prevents such ownership from becoming entirely static. Community pub shares have proved popular investments for retirement payouts in the knowledge that the investment will be passed on to children and generate a small rate of return over a long time. Some of the pubs drew on this fact: offering badges, or formal certificates to shareholders to give a tangible sense of ownership.⁵⁶² In a 'whirligig world... where everything changes' the desire to have a 'fixed place' with a dependable *durée* proved a major motivation driving those who invested.⁵⁶³

Where commodification of the pub transforms this desire for fixity into a representational symbol - a heritage show 'performed' by the architecture but not lived through it - The Old Crown by contrast expresses fixity in an organic way; accumulating from imprint, trace, impression. The phenomenology this lends appears adjacently in the interviews, through embodied metaphors and suggestive verbs of action. Julian for instance described how he felt in the pub that:

⁵⁶¹ Paul Cullen: Interview, George & Dragon, August 24th, 2018

⁵⁶² Ibid

⁵⁶³ Ibid

‘everybody who has been through a place leaves an imprint... and when you come in here for the first time you’re stepping into something... and you kind of *join in*.’⁵⁶⁴

‘When you come in here *it’s like putting on a comfy old slipper*. So it’s a bit shabby and a bit bent and a bit dusty but *it actually feels very comfortable*.’⁵⁶⁵

After another pub Julian had known burnt down and been identically rebuilt, he noted how it had ceased to be the same, because ‘those imprints had been burnt away’.⁵⁶⁶ Without them, the capacity to ‘be in touch with those who have gone before you’, was lost.⁵⁶⁷

Two components of phenomenology are suggested by these reflections. First, the pub is serving as a kind of portal into historical time - a way of accessing the past that is participatory and immanent rather than spectatorial and direct. There is a recognition of the self as being entangled in the presence of those who have passed before it, and will live beyond it; contrasted against the ‘discrete’ self, which experiences history perhaps as an object of fascination, but also, in turn, estrangement.⁵⁶⁸

Second, there is a particular orientation towards social performance. Julian’s choice of imagery suggests that despite being a public space, The Old Crown can nevertheless enable an intimate, domestic form of self-presentation, equivalent to the wearing of an ‘old slipper’. The signifiers, and texture of the space - ‘shabby...bent...dusty’ - are stripped of their affectations, much as the echoes of the past oblige a certain integrity of self expression, the subject obliged to ‘truth’ by connection to the dead. Like many pubs, The Old Crown is a site of quiet memorial: a special ale made the pub’s microbrewery commemorates the 90th birthday of a since deceased regular, Doris, and remembrance pictures of local Cumbrian mountaineers (and frequenters of The Old Crown) are interwoven with those of the current pub users. The geography of domesticity is expanded; the notion of belonging extended; its temporality lengthened. Within such a space, one can be public without self-publicity.

⁵⁶⁴ Julian Ross: Interview, Old Crown, August 18th, 2018

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid

⁵⁶⁸ This might be contrasted against the use of history found in J D Wetherspoon, in Chapter 3.



Fig 5.14 – Interior of the Old Crown – mountaineering equipment and portraits of pub locals on the local mountains, Skiddaw & Blencathra, can be seen on the rear wall. [Eco Club, ‘Interview with Julian Ross’, ecoclub.com, Oct 16 2013 ecoclub.com/articles/interviews/908-131016-julian-ross]

Enchantment

If these features are not unique to community pubs (and not all community pubs achieve them) the attempt to preserve such qualities is a key motivation driving them. In a broader social context of homogenisation, and a broader political context of ‘disenchantment’, community pubs have become a means of channelling localised resistance. As Julian explained of the rationale behind his original campaign to save The Old Crown:

I think it’s to do with anti-McDonaldisation. Everywhere you go, whichever town you go to, they’re kind of all the same: you’ve got the shopping street, same shops on it, boarded up shops: Boots, Smiths, Wetherspoons somewhere... there’s a Tescos and something and there’s this kind of corporate steamrolling that flattens everything and everybody and people feel there is nothing really they can do about it. And I think in a tiny little way you can do something. You can say: you’re not having this!⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁹ Julian Ross: Interview, Old Crown, August 18th 2018

This was both defensive and propositional. The Old Crown was saved, but also carefully altered to adjust for the objects which, it was felt, had allowed some of the ‘flattening’ through the door:

there was a horrible 1970s fireplace and it took us two years to decide to do this [change it to an old stone fireplace]. And the reason for that was because we said everybody had to have a say. And there were some people who said “you can’t get rid of that! It was like it when we bought it” and other people saying it’s horrible.⁵⁷⁰

This democratic, grassroots approach to heritage allowed a much tighter responsiveness between user and aesthetic - allowing it to avoid an approach which simply ossified the pub from the arbitrary date of buyout: ‘It’s not preserved in aspic, *but it is preserved*. And I think there’s something magical about that... there’s something in the walls.’⁵⁷¹

It also speaks to a desire to decisively maintain the pub’s role as a refuge from modernity. There is no television, and the jukebox - that initial ‘Frankenstein’s monster of Americanisation, first noted in the 1930s pub - was ‘relegated to the other room and not really used, only kept because it was there when we bought it.’⁵⁷² Likewise, at The Fox and Goose the motivation to save ‘quite an idiosyncratic pub... a particular style that’s becoming a rarity’ meant adhering to the principles of: ‘real ale, local beer, no music, no fruit machines, nothing electronic - that sort of thing.’⁵⁷³

it lets people get back to what they really want. For this long period especially in the centre of small towns where pubs have become more and more targeting the ‘oof’ [youth] because they spend money quickly. At least that was the theory 20 years ago: it was loud machines it was loud music it was vertical drinking it was lager... open plan...⁵⁷⁴

The orientation of this politics seems to involve a link between a project of re-enchantment of space on the one hand, and an attempt to reverse what might be described, to borrow Mark Fisher’s phrase, as ‘consciousness depletion’ on the other.⁵⁷⁵ If experience can be understood on a spectrum of density and complexity, with dense, complex experience both pulling the

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid

⁵⁷¹ Ibid

⁵⁷² Ibid

⁵⁷³ Drew: The Fox and Goose, 14 August 2018

⁵⁷⁴ The Fox and & Goose: Interview with Directors (3), 14 August 2018

⁵⁷⁵ Mark Fisher, ‘Acid Communism’ [unfinished introduction] in *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher*, Repeater (2018)

subject ‘into the moment’ (through an expanded entanglement of the senses - including not only touch, sound, sight etc but also memory, temporality, self-orientation) and consequently leaving a deeper experiential imprint after the passing of the moment (nurturing what might be called the subject’s reservoir of sensibility from which all subsequent cognitive actions - such as thought, recall, inner voice, self-narrative are drawn) then enchantment might be understood as the maximisation of this density and complexity, and disenchantment as its minimisation.⁵⁷⁶ In this consciousness spectrum: the traces, acoustics, textures, and interactive possibilities of The Old Crown place on the side of density; the jukebox, the television, generic beer offerings, ‘electronics’, sociofugal seating plans on the side of depletion. Framed within this broader political matrix, the intensity of conviction and opposition which surrounds seemingly minor aesthetic details, makes more sense; testament to a kind of ‘generative authenticity’ in which the space is a palimpsest produced in dialogue between its history and the influences of its many owners, and users.

There is also a relationship to macro-political trends. Julian situated the co-operative buyout in the context of the ‘disenchantment’ which he felt was omnipresent in the early 2000s in Britain, ‘continuing on from the Thatcher years’ but crystallised under the election of the opposition Labour government of Tony Blair in 1997. Blair’s government had seemed to confirm the idea that ‘there was no alternative’ to a market driven model of society in which consumer-oriented individualism and with it, corporate control of social life; leading to what the critical theorist Mark Fisher described as a sense of ‘capitalist realism’.⁵⁷⁷ As Julian suggested:

That whole Thatcher thing - “there is no thing as society”... There was that “me”, that individualism. It was a trend certainly through the 80s and 90s it was a recognised phenomenon. And with that comes a sort of fragmentation. [But] We’re social beings aren’t we? We need to belong. We need to form collectives... And where else better than a pub? Especially a pub like this.⁵⁷⁸

Economics

⁵⁷⁶ E.g. Claire Petitmengin, ‘Towards the Source of Thoughts: The Gestural and Transmodal Dimension of Lived Experience’ *Journal of Consciousness Studies*; 14:3 (2007), pp. 54–82 / Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, Wiley & Sons (2005) / Jeremy Gilbert, ‘Psychedelic Socialism’ *openDemocracy*, 22 Sep 2017

⁵⁷⁷ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, Zero Books (2009)

⁵⁷⁸ Julian Ross: Interview, Old Crown, August 18th 2018

Finally, community ownership influences what might be understood as the ‘economic phenomenology’. If we see economic exchange as not simply a rational, de-humanised activity, but a way of mediating our relationship to a place, then changes to economic structure have a correspondent impact on the way we experience exchange-based environments.

As Drew, the cellar manager at The Fox and Goose, described:

We live in a consumer world and we’re all consumers and we’re all somebody else’s customer. With co-operative pubs you’re your own customer. It’s a different attitude... A lot of people feel like [when] you spend money in a co-operative pub you’re putting money in your own pocket... it’s nice knowing that the money you put in is going into the community rather than into shareholders pockets of someone who’s thousands of miles away sitting in the caribbean islands... it’s nice to know that this is ours and that people can’t take it away from us.⁵⁷⁹

For every demographic using the pub - staff, to shareholder, to local customer - the equation of exchange has been shifted. Giving over money is not an economic loss exchanged for a provisional gain, but paradoxically, a form of collective enrichment - a sort of virtuous economic circle. In other words, the most fundamental state of alienation (of oneself from one’s capital at the benefit to someone, or something distant and unknown) is broken. Where shareholders *are themselves* distant and mostly unknown, their buy-in is nevertheless a remote form of community participation, rather than economic extraction. As Julian put it,

I used to think that community was a geographically defined thing [but] we’ve got shareholders literally from the north coast of Scotland to the south coast of England and in Spain and in Germany. And they’re all part of our community.⁵⁸⁰

By removing alienation at the point of social interaction (distance from oneself and another inside a space or area), alienation at the point of environment (the capacity to mutually co-constitute the environment around you) and alienation at the point of exchange - community ownership provides a means of addressing, at a local, human level, some of the fundamental crises produced by the macro-trends of capitalism and modernity.

⁵⁷⁹ Drew: The Fox and Goose, 14 August 2018

⁵⁸⁰ Julian Ross: Interview, Old Crown, August 18th 2018

Conclusion

Community ownership schemes represent a sustainable alternative model for the protection and diversification of public houses across Britain. At their best they can offer a means for the survival of otherwise financially precarious enterprises, bolstering local community wealth and social ties; bringing resilience and revitalisation to settlements at risk of decline. If, as Chapter 1 demonstrated, the crisis of the pub as much experiential as economic, community ownership also offers a means by which a kind of dynamic authenticity can be established through the co-creation of space and clientele; democratising aesthetics and preventing the chance of unpopular, top-down makeovers. In areas which lack resources for social fora, and whose spatial layouts militate against place, community pubs can serve as powerful anchor institutions, binding the social flow of a place together.

Yet the process of community ownership is made difficult by the technical obstacles they face, such as the lack of an economic infrastructure suitable for community-run businesses and the weakness of legislation, such as Assets of Community Value, designed to encourage them. Reliant on voluntary and amateur organisation, it is also a process which risks fracturing the very communities which undertake the task, unable to negotiate the stresses and disagreements which such an enterprise entail. Other flaws prevent community ownership from fully realising its possibilities, such as the maintenance of divides between owners and employers, keeping decisions isolated from where wealth itself is produced, and which might otherwise establish a link between those most invested in economic decisions and those most affected by them.

Nevertheless, community ownership, unlike any other model of social space in Britain, has the capacity to bring together diverse political strands under a common project, and provide a meaningful system of accountability for its regular denizens – ensuring that emotional decisions about aesthetics, layout, and offering – are responsive to the needs and desires of its users. By removing the pub from the market, it resolves the fundamental contradiction which has driven the crisis of the pub throughout its modern history and restores temporal certainty to an institution whose romantic power is its capacity to provide stability and continuity under conditions of uncertainty and change.

Chapter 6

Phenomenological Authenticity: The Politics of Enchantment

Summation of Argument

This final chapter will explore further some of the themes and issues raised across the previous chapters and consider how they might be located within a broader project of ‘re-enchantment’ aimed at addressing, especially in England, a crisis of belonging. First, I will summarise what has been covered so far.

This thesis has explored how an architectural institution – the British public house – became transformed into a national symbol enmeshed in concerns around identity, modernity, social alienation and capitalist appropriation. It has also considered how, since 1979, three innovations – the pub chain (J D Wetherspoons), the craft brewer (BrewDog), community ownership – have interacted with those concerns, producing different modes of social experience which attempt to imitate, undercut, or reinforce characteristics latent in the pub space and pub custom. It demonstrates how the contemporary crisis of the pub has been foreshadowed repeatedly throughout the 20th century, with fear for its demise overtaking fears of its proliferation during the interwar period and maintained in a state of high alert since. It does not intend to reject the legitimacy of current concerns for the public house: its numerical decline is marked, and real. It is rather an attempt to explain that the roots of that crisis are deeper than a statistical assessment can show, and are reflections of other, broader crises, for which the pub is both cipher and living illustration. Likewise, as the relative success of each of the case studies demonstrate, the pub sector has not just been undergoing a crisis, but a recomposition. As the thesis has argued, such shifts in what the pub is, and what forms of experience it can offer, are responsive to broader social and political trends, as well as implicated in their reproduction.

Chapter 2

In Chapter 1, the pub was traced from its zenith in the late 19th century through attempts to manipulate its design and regulation via the Trust House movement, nationalisation, and the

‘improved’ super pub. These top-down experiments, responding to the pressure of temperance campaigners and government reformers, perceived the pub *as crisis*, and consequently something to be reshaped towards more salutary aims. As the century wore on however, this representation gave way to a different appraisal, lauding the pub – especially its rural iteration, the inn – as an expression of an organic Englishness at odds with the official nationalism of the British state: a bottom-up architecture of local particularity, anchoring its denizens in place and time. This portrait – drawn in the interwar period by pub writers such as A.E Richardson, Ivor Brown and Thomas Burke – was wielded against the spectre of encroaching Americanisation in the form of the roadhouse, and served as a bulwark against the predictable, sterile offerings of modern standardisation. The motorist is a contradictory symbol of this period: both the market for texts which lyricised the rural inn, and the (dis)embodiment of forces threatening its charm. Such responses reveal how fluid the political meaning of the pub could be – both entangled in anxieties about British imperial decline, but also concerned with the loss of a phenomenological reality irreducible to the neatly contained experience of commodified mass production. The pub could form part of a broader arcadian desire to belong, in a quiet, everyday fashion, to time immemorial.

During the Second World War, and the post-war period which followed, the pub was subject to more professional inquiry, both as a concern of academic sociologists under Mass Observation, and as a feature of social reportage and architectural journalism, as in the work of Maurice Gorham and Harding Dunnett. In Mass Observation, the pub’s crisis presented as part of the secular decline of all the ‘old institutions’, as spaces of participation gave way to the appeals of modern spectatorship. The nature of that participation was seemingly expressed in the austerity of the taproom – revealing the paradoxical way in which the most lowly of the pub’s room divisions was the foundation of its authority. For Gorham and Dunnett, brewer gimmicks, faux-modernisation schemes and post-war planning combined with the Luftwaffe in besieging the pub. Other threats, such as piped music and salaried managers, also encroached upon the pub to the chagrin of its regulars. The battle against such incursions, reflecting the pub’s status as a ‘colonized’ institution (dominated by market forces but informally owned by its users), set the scene for future accounts, such as Christopher Hutt’s canonical *The Death of the English Pub*, which took the monopoly of The Big Six brewers to task for their cynical attempts at pub theming and proliferating national kegged beer products over local real ales. Standardisation, and commodification – in which ‘the relationship to diverse offerings is identical’ – already a feature of earlier accounts, now became central to the pub’s crisis,

reinforced by the spread of chain pubs, the popularisation of lager, and the prevalence of market differentiation strategies.

Chapter 3

The most famous of these chains – J D Wetherspoon – founded in 1979 was the subject of chapter 3. Here, economies of scale are married to architectures of scale to produce an environment redolent of the 19th century gin palace: situated within the pub tradition but departing from it in its use of atypical building forms. These, often baroque, structures are made accessible through leveraging of drink and food pricing, allowing pub-goers of modest means to participate within them, shortening the gap between the expectations of the vaunted ‘aspirational consumer’ of the Thatcher era and the reality of material inequality which accompanied it. The consequence has been perplexingly strong popular attachment to a corporate chain, capable of rousing near-universal support when criticised in the national press. This feature is attributed to what I term ‘proverbial authenticity’: where former spaces of class exceptionalism are subtly declassed and made approachable rather than exclusive, creating ordinary environments in often extraordinary contexts, or which trade associational credit from the chain’s most exceptional examples even in its most humdrum iterations. This ease of belonging in turn chimed well with a historical moment in which, as the work of Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite has suggested, the languages of class were being supplanted by a ‘politics of ordinariness’, where those who hitherto identified as working class perceived themselves as ‘ordinary’ people instead. Wetherspoons, it is argued, manages to occupy an interstitial position between having and not having, being ‘real’ without being, in the pub context, ‘the real deal’; a pastiche of the true pub, and its true history, which succeeds exactly through the obviousness of its failure.

Wetherspoons does not permit the autonomy of the pub encountered in Chapter 1, producing an environment which is not colonized so much as dominated by market imperatives. This comes at a cost to its staff and the broader sense of mutually determined ownership between drinker and environment which allowed its participants to in part make the pub their own. Its use of scale, and its ability to aggressively undercut local competition in turn hold ramifications both for the survival of the very institution Wetherspoons imitates, and in small town settings makes it singularly capable of re-orientating the spatial flows of the night-time economy around itself. In place of autonomy, a consumer-oriented democracy operates, more open perhaps to groups excluded by the machismo and proprietorship of the old pub, but on narrower social terms. In this sense, Wetherspoons can be understood through Stuart Hall’s formation as an

institution ‘*about and bought by but not produced by, or committed to* the cause of the popular classes.’ This issue has become particularly pertinent in the current conjuncture, in which Wetherspoons outlets are used as a distribution network for CEO Tim Martin’s personal politics; disseminating a populist, anti-EU agenda advocating the merits of a ‘no-deal’ Brexit outcome for negotiations between Britain and the European Union.

In its phenomenology, Wetherspoons is a failed translation of the public house. Its proxemic structure: broadly sociofugal, demarcated into zones and thoroughfares, are poor at accommodating phenomena like the ‘regular’s citadel’ which have grown up in tandem with tradition pub formats. Its acoustics too disrupt a fuller spatial embodiment, tending towards an attenuated, disassociated soundscape which makes it hard to locate oneself within a collective atmosphere. Atmosphere is in this sense no longer co-produced but amorphous, seemingly belonging to no-one. The small dramas of pub life: its entrances, invisible queues, and cross-interactions, are further diminished. Accepting the dominance of Wetherspoons in the pub sector is not simply a case therefore of one type of pub replacing another as market demand dictates. It is the replacement of one form of experience for another, embracing consumer democracy but risking a depletion of consciousness in the process. This may be sufficient as part of a broader ecology of social life, but insofar as its dominance threatens that ecology, support for it should not go unqualified.

Chapter 4

Following the adage of its CEO, James Watt, that ‘niche is the new mainstream’ the Scottish craft brewer, BrewDog, has attempted to create a new model of bottom-up business (referred to here as a ‘sideways’ approach). This approach capitalises upon anti-corporate sentiment following the financial crisis and draws upon the collectivist ethos of the broader craft beer community for legitimacy – as Watt puts it, ‘winning businesses promote their category. Losers promote themselves.’ BrewDog’s ‘tribe building’ has seen it attempt to create a fanbase around its brand, promoting progressive political causes through PR stunts and championing an alternative financing model known as ‘equity for punks’. In contrast to the open, consumer-oriented accessibility afforded by J D Wetherspoon, BrewDog has followed a more partisan strategy which twins hyper-differentiation (aggressively cultivating an enthusiastic base of ‘fans’ at the expense of a broader appeal) with prefigurative identification (in which consumers are enjoined to ‘build the world they want to see’ through the brand-as-campaign platform). This also applies to many of the consumers themselves, who are sold a projected image of self-enhancement: to become what they are not through the brand. BrewDog consequently has a

form of hyper-reflexivity which surrounds it, ‘a movement between disavowal and self-conscious identification’ of its own stereotypes (as a ‘hipster’ enclave, for instance). Architectural touches - such as signs warning ‘All Hipsters Must be Accompanied by a Responsible Adult’ sell to BrewDog’s actual demographic of responsible adults the ironic tan of a second-hand subcultural association.

This follows the urban geography of BrewDog - usually established in long-gentrified urban zones where the ‘edginess’ traded by the brand has in reality departed. BrewDog’s ‘deconstructed’ architecture of distressed materials, pseudo-industrial relics and mis-matched furnishings - though very different to J D Wetherspoon - operates in a similar fashion to it: producing a simulacrum of the very world its presence signals has vanished. Likewise, its furnishings and decor - clean plate glass windows, open sight-lines, high tables, fixed half-tables stools, and high-backed booth chairs combined with a predilection for hard surfaces and unaccommodating materials (metal, concrete, distressed plastering, faux-derelict industrial pipework) to design out lounging, slowness, and passive posture - moulding a ‘hexis’ of performance, assertiveness, self-presentation. Other design features - neon lights, graphic words, murals, tile graffiti, and brewery props - follow the formula of instagrammable design, ensuring the offerings of self-enhancement and self-presentation can bleed out beyond the physical space and be reproduced in the digital realm as well. Such architecture, a form of ‘standardised non-standardisation’, is readily adaptable to a ‘glocalisation’ of the brand formula. It is an aesthetic which, though derivative, attempts to literally ‘crash the walls’ between brewery and bar, production and consumption, appealing to a structure of feeling which increasingly resists alienation, and is drawn towards the tactile, real, material: the crafted.

The ‘deconstructed’ style is in this sense paradoxical. It represents a kind of ‘de-fetishisation’ of the commodity aesthetic, with all its attendant qualities of perfectionism, reproducibility, and ‘tracelessness’ (divorcing it from the signs of the the social relations which produce it). By appearing unfinished, this aesthetic appears to restore the environment to a kind of ur-craft state of tactility, latent with as yet unrealised possibility. In this sense, BrewDog’s aesthetics might appear to be an apposite translation (into what might be better understood as a bar than a pub, despite occasional claims otherwise by BrewDog) of the calls made in Chapter 1 that the pub be a place of process rather than product. Yet in *objectifying process* it recommodifies itself, hindering the formation of a kind of haptic democratic potential within the architecture. Its obsessional fixation on a *product* (craft beer) likewise overdetermines the flexibility of its bars as a social space: it is a space which exists, first and foremost, for the commodity it serves.

Yet this elevation of the ‘crafted’ product provides space for a re-skilling of BrewDog’s staff, whose expertise is required to guide the perplexed consumer through an ever-changing range of beers with sometimes challenging elements. This is matched with a ‘discretionary philanthropy’, enabling staff to ‘treat’ consumers when they decide - maintaining, on the one side, the brand’s identity as a relaxed, less orthodox corporate institution - whilst also conferring on staff a certain power. BrewDog’s staff in this sense confuse some of the traditional academic categories of emotional labour. They are both consistently required to be “on brand”, yet their doing so requires elements of personalisation and informality which belie their total subsumption into a corporate product. As in nearly all features of the company, the old distinctions between marketing, authenticity, and corporate identity, are collapsed together. Yet the underlying reality of commodification still sets limits which cannot deliver on the brand’s aesthetic promises; and for all its claims to represent ‘a modern day rebellion for the craft beer proletariat in our struggle to overthrow [sic] the faceless bourgeoisie oppression of corporate, soulless beer’ its global expansion and part-buyout by exactly such forces means its novelty should not be overstated.

Chapter 5

In contrast to the ‘top-down’ approach Wetherspoons, and the ‘sideways’ approach of BrewDog, Chapter 4 considered the ‘bottom-up’ approach of community owned pubs. Community ownership schemes tended not to reproduce particular pub typologies, but rather respond to local circumstances. They might, as in the case of The Northumberland Arms and the Fox & Goose, be conducted by groups of regulars for whom a specific pub needed to be saved from the threat of closure. Or, such as The Angler’s Rest, The Old Crown and The George and Dragon, they might be the sole pub in the village (often after repeated local closures), and taken over by the community as a whole to be repurposed for that function.

In these case studies, community ownership was seen to alter many of the market-led dynamics which beset the pub in Chapter 1. Pubs which might be forced to change, either through planned underinvestment (usually as a precursor to their sale as real estate) or adaptation to brewery/pubco manipulation (open plan schemes, hyper-modernisation, theming etc) now had the capacity to alter themselves according to a community need. This might be through adjusting layouts, as in the George and Dragon, to remove intimidating features which made the pub hostile to non-regulars; maintaining multi-room atmospheres to cater to different community audiences within one space, as in The Northumberland Arms, or as simple as negotiating parking rights or setting dog policy, as at The Angler’s Rest. With the asset owned

directly by the community and responsive to it, local need rather than profit margins were the primary operating logic.

The beneficial impacts of community pubs were found to be diverse, and sometimes surprising. New activities, encounters, and civic confidence were generated. Community pubs helped guarantee the pub as a 'place-making' device, anchoring what was otherwise a 'collection of houses'. They also bolstered the local economy, stimulating virtuous feedback loops in which local money invested in the pub generated local expenditure from the pub; any profits were in turn fed back into other initiatives of community benefit. Given the geographical context of many community owned pubs - often in rural communities and small towns, prone to suffering from economic drain - the capacity of community pubs to recycle local economic inputs is even more significant.

In contrast to its romantic, harmonious image however, community ownership could be as much about division as local unity. Older senses of proprietorship, held by former pub locals, could come into conflict with a more expansive community proprietorship. The complexity and intensity of the process lent itself to divisions of labour where small groups of people, even individuals, were required to drive the project in their vision, making it hard to keep the broader community onside and abreast of plans. This, combined with more cynical social media campaigns, could have a coarsening effect on inter-community relations. Personal fractures tended to be much more intense than commercial ones. Even small changes to the pub could result in emotional responses, in turn requiring consultation from shareholders. Yet at its best this apparent inefficiency could produce powerful collective involvement and rely on the voluntary goodwill of locals to gift expertise, time, and skills to the project. Likewise, the community pub's capacity to appeal to all shades of political opinion mean that when handled well, the community pub can be a unifying, affirmative project in areas of split opinion.

Community ownership schemes can be limited in other ways however. They are open to critiques of 'hobby capitalism' in which the division between value production and ownership remains, albeit on a broadly benevolent basis with non-capitalist ends. Alternative models, in which community assets might be subsequently transferred to worker co-operatives, or policy devices enabling worker co-operatives to more easily raise capital and receive the same tax relief as community share offers, might therefore be more appropriate where they are possible. A number of other policy changes, such as strengthening the power of Assets of Community Value, streamlining compulsory purchase powers, and giving communities a preferential right to buy could further assist the expansion of community ownership.

Re-Enchantment as a Project of Belonging

This thesis has explored how the pub is situated on a fault line where anxieties around modernity, capitalism, shifting social relations and national identity intersect. To re-cap, this means the pub is caught in a contradiction. It is symbolically a place which sits aside from modernity - a place of stability and familiarity when little else can be taken for granted. Yet, obliged to survive within a commercial market, and cater for diverse and changing social relations, it is deeply imbricated in the modern world. As Chapter 2 demonstrated however, the innovations of modernity have, at best, received ambivalent welcome by the pub's chroniclers and perhaps, as Chapters 3, 4 and 5 indicate, this is for good reason. Commodification, with all its attendant malignity - theming, standardisation, pastiche, chronocide - has usually been the result. Yet a narrative which counterpoises the pub against modernity can be equally unsatisfactory. In Chapter 1 it was noted how the pub had been symbolically captured by reactionary political projects for which it serves as a bulwark of insular national identity. The nostalgia for a pre-modern pub (usually masculine and monocultural) where place is unchanging and identity fixed, has obviously regressive connotations.

As Chapter 5 illustrated, the pub's dilemmas can be practically combated in a progressive, inclusive fashion. Likewise, many of the pub's symbolic features are open to affirmative re-narration. By marrying these practical solutions to a new symbolic narrative, the pub can move on from the pub-as-crisis phase which has long beset it. This final section explores how the outline of such a narrative might be achieved.

Enchantment vs Nostalgia

The concept of enchantment (and with it, disenchantment) has been used in different, but interrelated ways. Weber defined it in terms of a loss of enchantment, which he perceived as fundamental to the experience of modernity. This 'enchantment' is understood by Michael Saler as 'overarching meanings, animistic connections, magical expectations, and spiritual explanations, as a result of ongoing "modern" processes of rationalization, secularization and bureaucratisation'.⁵⁸¹ One way of framing the beleaguered sense of crisis which surrounds the pub is the threat of an 'enchanted' institution becoming threatened by just such modern processes of disenchantment.

⁵⁸¹ Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation' (1919) interpreted by Michael Saler 'Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review' *The American Historical Review*; 11: 3 (2006)

Many of the attitudes about the pub expressed in chapter 2 resonate with this depiction. The pub is portrayed by Burke, Gorham and others as a place of everyday enchantment undercut by disenchanting forces. Their representations - of an architectural space in which ‘something intriguing is just around the corner’⁵⁸², where ‘wonder is everywhere about us’⁵⁸³, where ‘the whole cast of English history’ is echoed and repeated in the motions of the body, and the pub-goer is able to ‘touch hands with the wraiths of the past and the substantial mementoes of their days’⁵⁸⁴ - are mythological, but mythologies grounded in a kind of sensible reality. It is an aesthetic posture which might, to borrow Scruton’s phrase, be characterised by the desire ‘to show the real in light of the ideal, and so transfigure it’.⁵⁸⁵

What might normally be misconceived as a romantic and nostalgic is in other words an appeal to something more propositional. The philosopher Dylan Trigg has suggested that ‘in compensating for disenchantment, nostalgia discloses its mournful character’, ‘what lacks in the incomplete present is compensated by the absent past’, and yet in many of the examples explored in this research it is in fact the qualities of present experience itself which such narratives defend: experience born not from nostalgia for the past, but continuity with it.⁵⁸⁶ They are not straightforwardly mournful: rather they attend to the real possibility of expansive, experiential depth, in place of sensory depletion. By contrast, nostalgia can be understood as a kind of failed agency which perceives both the present, past and future as an alienated realm over which the subject has no influence or relation. Such nostalgia’s link to disenchantment - attributable to powerful, meta-structural forces which are seemingly beyond the direct field of agency and contestation (rationalization, secularization, bureaucratisation) - is clear. As Jon Goss writes in the context of the shopping mall:

we must realize that the nostalgia we experience for authenticity, commerce, and carnival lies precisely in the loss of our ability to collectively create meaning by occupying and using social spaces for ourselves. While developers may design the retail

⁵⁸² Dunnett / Gorham, *Inside the Pub*, Architectural Press (1950) p. 11

⁵⁸³ A.P Herbert (preface) in Thomas Burke, *The English Inn*, Longmans & Co; London (1930), p. v

⁵⁸⁴ Thomas Burke, *The Book of the Inn*, Constable & Co; London (1927), p. ix

⁵⁸⁵ Roger Scruton, ‘Why Beauty Matters’ *BBC Two* (2009)

⁵⁸⁶ Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason*, Peter Lang (2006), p.58

built environment in order to satisfy this nostalgia, our real desire... is for community and social space free from instrumental calculus of design.⁵⁸⁷

An affirmative project of re-enchantment therefore ought to be rooted in a restoration of the subject's agency over its lifeworld. We do not mourn what we feel empowered to change.

Agency alone is no guarantee of affirmative outcomes however. Where enchanted aesthetic qualities are married to democratic ownership, such as in the example of The Old Crown in Chapter 5, they can overcome disenchantment and alienation, producing an authentic environment defined not by its museumification of the past, but through dialogue with it. Yet, equally, as encountered at The Northumberland Arms, and the Angler's Rest, it can also risk provoking division, resistance and other forms of negative agency; as different visions of ownership and belonging compete. A clearer sense of the politics of disenchantment, and of the kind of agency which might be called upon for a project of re-enchantment, is therefore required.

The Politics of Enchantment

A project of (re)enchantment has already found adherents amongst both conservative and progressive writers. For Scruton, a Burkean conservative, it entails the return of something akin to what called Burke called, in defense of the aristocracy, the 'decent drapery of life' - the 'pleasing illusions which made power gentle, and obedience liberal'.⁵⁸⁸ As Scruton puts it,

Class, for them [the English], was not an economic but a spiritual fact... and through their tenacious titles of nobility they rendered social differences by and large acceptance, even to the losers. Titles, forms and the mystique of noble birth are costumes, through which the upper classes can display their difference and safeguard their privileges without flaunting their power. The English aristocrat was not a courtier kowtowing to his sovereign in the city, but the heart and soul of the landscape where he resided, bearing a title that ennobled the country as much as it ennobled himself.⁵⁸⁹

In turn, the investment of 'ordinary things and everyday customs' with the 'nimbus of authority, a quasi-divine and in any case mysterious given-ness... a world of rituals, uniforms, precedents

⁵⁸⁷ Jon Goss, 'The "Magic of the Mall": An Analysis of Form, Function, and Meaning in the Contemporary Retail Built Environment' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*; 83: 1 (1993)

⁵⁸⁸ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Yale University Press (2004), p. 66

⁵⁸⁹ Roger Scruton, *England: An Elegy*, Chatto & Windus (2000), p. 12

and offices' proved that, contra-Weber, 'the distinction between traditional and legal authority was inapplicable to a country in which law was a living tradition'.⁵⁹⁰ Arraigned for its destruction of this England is, for Scruton, a panoply of historic and modern ills, macro trends and micro insults, which together constitute a national disenchantment: the industrial revolution, urbanisation, post-war planning, European Union membership, immigration⁵⁹¹, Marxism (and with it, the 'break' with an unspoken pact of national unity even amidst dissenting forces), the politicisation of local government, the introduction of postcodes ('whose impenetrable symbolism effectively wiped away the sense of place'), motorways, agri-business, modernist architecture, light pollution and the loss of national biodiversity.⁵⁹² There is little propositional in Scruton's constellation of loss. Rather, such accounting is interwoven with a secondary desire for the 'spiritual fact' of a class society.

Yet there are moments where Scruton's conception of disenchantment hints at wider political range. The loss of recognisable, national creatures - hedgehog, newt, skylark - the roads which segment the countryside into discrete islands, the rationalisation of the landscape such that the imprint of its history is levelled into insistent presentness: all speak of a loss of connection, continuity, and sensory wonder. Indeed, such critiques are not unique to Scruton's conservatism, with writers from across the political spectrum, such as George Monbiot, Sharon Blackie, and Paul Kingsnorth providing similar damnations of English modernity.⁵⁹³ As Scruton concludes in a pained, elegiac outcry:

the landscape that was inscribed upon those contours has been scrubbed away. The old England for which our parents fought has been reduced to isolated pockets between the

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 12

⁵⁹¹ Scruton here presages the notorious slogan of the 2016 Brexit referendum campaign of 'Take Back Control'. He argues that hostility to migration was not a question of racism but imposition: 'The disquiet over immigration was the result, it seems to me, not of racism, but of the disruption of an old experience of home, and a loss of enchantment which made home a place of safety consolation. Until this fatal disenchantment, immigrants were regarded by the English as newcomers to the home, entitled to hospitality while they found their feet. [...] Recent hostility to immigration is surely to be explained in the same way. Disenchantment of the homeland is experienced as a loss of control. England, the English believe, is no longer 'ours'. In such circumstances hospitality (which implies ownership) becomes impossible. It is not *we* but *they* who are inviting these newcomers to stay. Resentment follows as a matter of course.' Scruton, *England: An Elegy*, p. 7-8

⁵⁹² Ibid

⁵⁹³ See: George Monbiot, *Feral: Rewilding the Land, Sea and Human Life*, Penguin (2014) / Paul Kingsnorth, *Real England: The Battle Against the Bland*, Granta (2009). Another recent book addressing the theme of enchantment includes Sharon Blackie, *The Enchanted Life: unlocking the magic of the everyday*, September (2018) – though Blackie focuses more on the specifically on the phenomenology of individual experience and especially its relationship to myth and ritual.

motorways. The family farm, which maintained the small-scale and diversified production that was largely responsible for the shape and appearance of England, is now on the verge of extinction. The towns have lost their centres, which are boarded up and vandalised; and the cities have been all but obliterated by vast steel structures which at night stand empty amid the wastes of illuminated concrete. The night sky is no longer visible, but everywhere blanketed with a sickly orange glow, and England is becoming a no-man's-land, an 'elsewhere', managed by executives who visit the outposts only fleetingly, staying in multinational hotels on the edges of floodlit wastelands. And nature has responded, as is her habit, to culture. The species that helped to consecrate the English countryside - the firefly, the nightingale, the barn owl, the eagle, the roadside reptiles and hedgehogs, the newts of the ponds and skylarks of the meadows, even the 'darkling thrush' - are now rapidly disappearing.⁵⁹⁴

Scruton could well have added – as Kingsnorth has in his more grounded survey of disenchantment, *Real England* – the pub to his itemisation of loss. Yet accompanying the funeral address is little analysis of causation; rather proxy agents – like the European Union – stand in as its vague protagonists. The role of capitalist economic relations in the restructuring of these traditional institutions of English life, clearly apparent in this thesis, is left essentially unexamined. As Stefan Collini remarks of these deficiencies:

when [...] Scruton deplores the loss of those institutions which sustained local communities, such as 'the village shop', or when he cries out that 'England is becoming a no man's land, an "elsewhere", managed by executives who visit the outposts only fleetingly, staying in multinational hotels on the edges of the floodlit wastelands,' he seems to be hovering on the brink of recognising that this may have something to do with 'the world of takeovers ... and multinational capital' [earlier dismissed as the errant opinion of Scruton's left-wing father].⁵⁹⁵

Despite these failings, if the effects rather than causes of contemporary disenchantment are shared political ground there is reason to believe that a project of re-enchantment might offer a point of collective agreement for future national politics. In 2019, research by the centre-right thinktank, Onward, found a uniform shift across nearly all age groups in Britain to what it termed 'the politics of belonging' – even as the terms of what belonging might constitute

⁵⁹⁴ Scruton, *England: An Elegy*, p. 252

⁵⁹⁵ Stefan Collini, 'Hegel in Green Wellies', *London Review of Books*, 8 March 2001

differed.⁵⁹⁶ It is the role of politics, and political narrative, to help shape such desires into an affirmative vision of identity.

Everyday Enchantment

One attempt to lay the philosophical groundwork for such a project has been made by the philosopher Jane Bennett. In *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, Bennett argues that enchanted experience can be a force which mobilises the body to *enact* ethics through ‘an assemblage of affective propulsions’.⁵⁹⁷ The experience of enchantment as a ‘state of wonder’ characterised through the ‘temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement’ results in a generous attachment to the world which cascades into generosity towards each other: making us capable of ‘donating some of one’s scarce mortal resources to the service of others’.⁵⁹⁸ The enchantment Bennett describes has a number of characteristics: moments where the senses operate in high gear – with new colours, details, sounds, smells rendered discernible; the world ‘comes alive as a collection of singularities’; one is surprised to be ‘meeting with something that you did not expect and are not fully prepared to engage’; an uncanny feeling is encountered, ‘of being disrupted or torn out of one’s default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition’ (what neuroscientists might term disruption of the Default Mode Network).⁵⁹⁹ The overall effect is of ‘fullness, plenitude, or liveliness, a sense of having had one’s nerves or circulation or concentration powers tuned up or recharged’.⁶⁰⁰ Clearly, a project of re-enchantment would seek to enhance the opportunities for such an experience to take place, with the hope that virtuous ethical implications might follow as a result.

Yet there are potential contradictions between re-enchantment as a kind of expansive political project, which is implicitly what Bennett describes, and her definition of the enchanted experience itself. For if enchantment necessitates the unexpected, the encounter which we are unprepared; if it is contingent on breaking the default modes we adopt as part of our daily

⁵⁹⁶ ‘The Politics of Belonging: how British politics is undergoing a sea change away from freedom and towards security’ *Onward*, 8 Aug 2019 – though the report suffers from terminological vagueness, asking respondents from attitudes on everything from ‘tradition’ to community segregation and family values, without interrogating what was meant by them.

⁵⁹⁷ Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: attachments, crossings and ethics*, Princeton University Press (2001), p. 3

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 4

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 5 / The concept of the ‘Default Mode Network’ is explored in Buckner; Andrews-Hanna; Schacter, ‘The Brain’s Default Network: Anatomy, Function, and Relevance to Disease’, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*; 1 (2008)

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 5

reality to survive – how can it be translated into a project that will outlive its momentary occasion? Likewise, exceptional moments of enchantment may temporarily reconstitute subjectivity within a more ethical frame, yet the very fact of their exceptionalism makes them a nebulous foundation for identity as such. The danger is that fleeting moments of enchantment only reinforce a more general awareness of their absence; as capable of degenerating into the *what once was* as the *what could be*.

This problem is common to literature dealing with what is variously termed ‘peak experiences’, ‘altered states’, ‘oceanic feeling’, and ‘enchantment’. In his study of clubbing, Ben Malbon defined altered states as those which were explicitly *not* ‘experienced on an everyday basis’, but rather were characterised by their being ‘transitory, unexpected, valued and [of] extraordinary quality’.⁶⁰¹ The requirement of ‘being beyond the everyday’ has also been central to how Marghanita Laski understood ‘oceanic’ experiences: ‘as being one in which all sense of self and time and the everyday world seem to vanish’.⁶⁰² For Laski, the presence of the crowd only diminished the ‘full sense of loss of self and reflection’ necessarily for the oceanic experience to take effect.⁶⁰³

In other words, to talk about the pub as enchanted is to talk about something distinct from the exceptional and the transcendental experiences theorised by Bennett, Malbon and Laski. What seems to be required is instead a capacity for a more mundane forms of enchantment which enchant exactly because they make good on expectation, and which allows for default, ritualistic actions to serve the creation of the enchantment itself – connecting repetitive somatic motions into the collectivity of history and time. Such an enchantment, instead of resembling a so-called ‘peak experience’ (rare and oceanic moments which generate an advanced form of reality) would create a dialogue between surprise and repetition, ritual and exception.⁶⁰⁴ It is this latter, mundane form of enchantment which might best describe the contribution made by the pub – something which can provide familiarity and regularity, whilst still containing the potential for wonder and surprise; lifting the individual out of themselves, and connecting them to something deeper, more enduring. Connection which arises not from birthright but personal

⁶⁰¹ Ben Malbon, *Clubbing: Dancing, ecstasy & vitality*, Routledge (1999) p.106-7

⁶⁰² Marghanita Laski, cited in *Ibid*, p.107

⁶⁰³ *Ibid*

⁶⁰⁴ The concept of ‘peak experiences’ is explored in A.H Maslow, *Religions, values, and peak experiences*, Penguin (1964)

investment. Here the crowd, the presence of the other, is not an ‘anti-trigger’ for such feeling, as Laski would have it, but a necessarily precondition for its materialisation.

Components of Authenticity

This thesis has explored the capacity of the pub’s variant forms to make good on such a promise of everyday enchantment. It has argued that its ability to do so is contingent on certain architectural, economic and social features. These have included: an adjacent stance toward modernity; sociopetal layouts which allow for both passive and active social engagement; materials which dialogue with the locality; décor which accommodates the traces, memorabilia, and enthusiasms of its users; legible, embodied soundscapes, which ‘sketch’ their environment (contrasted against tinny, disaggregated soundscapes perhaps dominated by externally imposed noises – television screens, piped music); ‘live’ alcohol, usually inflected by regional brewing and preferences; recognizable, autonomous staff; furniture catering to passive, non-performative affective posture; social mixture (instead of social differentiation / tribe building); temporal slowness; invisible queueing. This constellation of features is generally taken as the bedrock of a pub’s authenticity, against which the encroachments of commodification, and ensuing disenchantment, are assessed. This first order of authenticity has been termed *generative authenticity*: the capability of a space to evolve in concert with its surroundings and its inhabitants - something which is never quite static or imposed from elsewhere, but evolving from the pub floor upward. Chapter 5 examined how community ownership might provide a sustainable economic means by which to institutionalise the potential of generative authenticity.

Complicating this picture however are the competing claims to authenticity made by the case studies covered across this thesis. In Chapter 3, Wetherspoons appeared to lack authenticity since it was neither truly grounded in its locality nor especially responsive to it. To repeat Stuart’s Hall’s formulation: it is ‘*about* and *bought by* but not *produced by*, or *committed to the cause of*’ its customers. Its attempts to ameliorate this problem through various representational strategies - local beer stock, local history, decor resonant of its building’s historical purpose - are consequently deemed to be insincere: attempts to mask a ‘hypocritical gap’ between the reality of the chain and the claims it makes for itself.

Yet, as has been shown, such an account would be incomplete if it stopped at this analysis. For in an era where the authenticity of consumption has become a central feature of aesthetic

discourse [see Chapter 4] the chain's ongoing popularity would make little sense.⁶⁰⁵ To dismiss it as a mere side-effect of cheap prices would seem to misunderstand both the nature of Wetherspoons' genuine appeal, and the way in which 'cheapness' is itself much more than a material notion reducible to its material effects. Wetherspoons, in this interpretation, becomes 'authentic' by dint of the affordances made for it by its customers and its acceptance as a national institution with its own specific cultural resonance. This is a second order of authenticity, which I have described as *proverbial authenticity*: a kind of unthreatening, everyday familiarity which achieves collective acceptance. Authenticity not drawn from any delusions about reality (be that the chain's corporate underpinnings, debatable quality, or its ideology) but from a recognition of need and personal identification. Wetherspoons is in this sense inclusive enough, useful enough, good value enough, and has done enough to pay homage to the pub culture it draws legitimacy from, to achieve a provisional popular consent.

Likewise, in Chapter 4 the craft beer company BrewDog avowedly placed authenticity at the very centre of its commercial offering, paradoxically commodifying non-commodification itself through aesthetic and discursive strategies which try and collapse the boundaries between production and consumption. By emphasising the integrity of its product, placing its affective experimentation at centre stage and celebrating its allegedly artisanal nature, BrewDog sought to distinguish themselves from the standardised offerings of its competitors. Likewise, the crowdsourced share buy-in imitated the semblance of democratic control inherent to community ownership models. Insofar as this responds to 'what consumers really want' – or at least, what they desire to want – according to Pine & Gilmore's definitions of commercial authenticity, it has proved successful. Yet it should be clear from the accounts which detail the reality of working under BrewDog, and consuming within it, the thin nature of this model of authenticity; predicated as it is more on performance and the imperatives of standardised, reliable experience than on true ownership and dialogic evolution. Consequently, its capacity for those deeper forms of everyday enchantment seems relatively limited. Even in the narrow terms of authenticity as a kind of alignment between internal essence and external world – much of BrewDog's offer is in fact based in a *projection of an enhanced self* to prospective customers, rather than alignment with the self as it is. I have termed this *performative authenticity*.

⁶⁰⁵ E.g. see: Pine & Gilmore, *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want*, Harvard Business Review Press (2007)

The concept of everyday enchantment is in turn reliant on a third order of authenticity, one concerned less with the discursive, representational or semiotic features of architecture, and instead with what is lived in the body through the senses. To an extent, these features are inseparable – embodied experience can never be fully divorced from our second-hand associations and expectations – yet as we have seen in Chapter 2, the authentic pub is not just that which *looks* right but which *feels* right. This *phenomenological authenticity* therefore perceives the pub as a kind of architectural technology capable of transforming our relations between each other, allowing certain kinds of conversations and interactions which could not exist in another form of space (layout, acoustics, customary obligation); a place where conditions – e.g. the use of certain furniture, the absence of music, the type of drink offered – encourage a specific form of embodiment / hexis (slow, hunkered, intimate, repetitive); and where cultural identity can be performed without requiring a performance of the self.

Beyond the Pub: Re-Enchantment and Belonging

I want to conclude where I began with the problem of identity. In the introduction it was noted how the story of the pub had been interwoven into narratives about a disparaged and overlooked Englishness. The 2016 Brexit vote lent further credence to this argument, and elements of the left have responded accordingly, urging the Labour Party to renew its emphasis on Englishness contra Britishness, and place themes of identity and belonging at the heart of its political offering. Each element has placed different emphases on this call. So-called ‘Blue Labour’ proffer a return to ‘faith, family and flag’, suggesting an alliance between communitarianism and traditionalism to revive the more conservative strains of social democracy.⁶⁰⁶ John Denham, a former Labour Government minister, has, through the auspices of the Centre for English Identity and Politics, promoted a vision of progressive patriotism, arguing for increased recognition of English cultural traditions (e.g. St George’s day) alongside political settlements delivered through an ‘English Manifesto’.⁶⁰⁷ Likewise, writers and activists like Anthony Barnett see in Brexit, in part, the outcome of a failure to provide an English constitutional settlement.⁶⁰⁸ This, for Barnett, is an act of national modesty rather than an appeasement of nationalist triumphalism. Solutions such as an English parliament he argues,

⁶⁰⁶ See: bluelabour.org/faqs (accessed 06/19)

⁶⁰⁷ e.g. John Denham (Panel Contribution) ‘Red White and Blue Labour at The World Transformed’ *The World Transformed*, 23 Sept 2018 (available: youtube.com/watch?v=jdGE3RH4o7o, accessed 06/19) / John Denham, ‘A nation divided? The identities, politics and governance of England’ *openDemocracy*, 16 Aug 2018

⁶⁰⁸ Anthony Barnett, ‘It’s England’s Brexit’, *openDemocracy*, 4 Jun 2016

will allow a transition of English identity from its imperial guise as England-as-Britain-as-Empire, in which ‘English nationalism... doesn't feel a need to define its existence’: a hangover legacy of its central role first in the formation of the Union, and through the Union, British imperialism.⁶⁰⁹

Yet such solutions seem only to address half the issue. Belonging here is essentially a kind of abstraction; invoking England and the English as disembodied actors – an accumulation of statistically measurable attitudes towards immigration, parliamentary representation, and self-identification. This ‘official nationalism’ as it was described in Chapter 2 deals in belonging as reified categories of identity rather than something that is made and remade through tangible, sensible experience. I am thinking here of something akin to what Martin A. Lee, in his discussion of progressive bioregionalism, has described as identity ‘rooted in place’ yet ‘neither static nor exclusionist’:

Bioregional identity is existential rather than essentialist. It perceives difference not as a threat to eliminate, but as something to negotiate as part of an evolving, over-arching project that entails remaking ourselves, our identity, through reinhabitory practice. We aren't simply born with an identity because of our blood type; we have to cultivate our identity by consciously relating to the place we live, our bioregion'.⁶¹⁰

Identity here is provisional and processual; shaped through action and experience; an inner geology layered through encounter.

This is close to how Marx understood species-being: acting upon the world in order to transform it, and in transforming it, the world acting back, constituting our essence.⁶¹¹ Alienation for Marx can be understood as the collapse of this relationship – with the consequence that the world is estranged from being; a relapse to the fixed, abstract categories of identity could well be the result.⁶¹² Modernity (with its secular trends constituted through everything such as indoor lifestyles, motorized transport, digital media, commodification and standardisation, industrial agriculture, detachment from nature, individualisation and secularisation, institutionalised medicine and pharmacology, and disembodied cultural norms) – has produced an ambivalent

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid

⁶¹⁰ Martin A Lee, ‘Bioregionalism Versus Fascism: A Conversation About Place, Ethnicity, Globalization, and the Waning of the Nation-State’ in Berg; Lee, *Raise the Stakes. The Planet Drum Review* 28; (1998)

⁶¹¹ Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, International Publishers (1984) p.113-4

⁶¹² Ibid p.114

dialectic of sophistication and disenchantment.⁶¹³ In Britain, a counter-ecology of re-enchantment might look to redress the imbalance, replacing the defunct telos of the imperial nation state with a redemptive story of phenomenological restoration; reviving the raw materials of particularity upon which those practices of reinhabitation can operate.⁶¹⁴ To sketch the outlines of such a project, politically, socially, culturally, it could consist (and in various forms and fragments, already consists) of:

- 1) A revivification of institutions of belonging: e.g. pubs, (former) religious venues, civil society groups (facilitated through logistical support – such as space in defunct high street infrastructure and a local skill-matching census), anti-loneliness drives pairing cross-generational knowledge, interests, and voluntary capacity.
- 2) A revivification of landscape rights and ecological protection: e.g. rewilding schemes, community land purchase instruments, public-goods led agricultural reform, expansion of the right to roam, strengthening of legal rights for nature.
- 3) A resistance to sensory depletion: e.g. anti-car measures / resistance to motorway expansion, to light and noise pollution, to non-tactile building; political and cultural resistance to smartphone usage / associated social industries, rebalancing between acoustic and digital technologies, education in perception and perception-facilitating language.
- 4) A creation of new, materialist rituals (aka ‘deep historical materialism’): practices which reorient the self within multiple the temporal registers of the land: from the alterity of geology to the archaeological layers of settlement (e.g. from early inhabitation through to monumental Britain, settled Britain, urban Britain, industrial Britain; as well as encompassing early and contemporary migratory flows)
- 5) Pre-18 education & familiarisation: e.g. through the inclusion of natural history on the curriculum, formalisation of outdoor skills, free transport and subsidised accommodation over a set period to explore Britain, the opportunity to study place-bound regional languages.
- 6) Rejuvenation, expansion and enhanced protections for unique features of national/regional cultures.

⁶¹³ E.g. Charles Eisenstein, ‘Indigeneity and Belonging’ 18 Sept 2015 (schumachercollege.org.uk/blog/indigeneity-and-belonging-by-charles-eisenstein; accessed 06/19)

⁶¹⁴ George Monbiot has also recently proposed the need for a new national story, rooted in a redemption narrative against community fragmentation and alienation. See: George Monbiot, *Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an Age of Crisis*, Verso (2018)

Out of this constellation a new narrative of national identity – a story of redemption and affirmative belonging could begin to be fashioned, and take root in the actual embodied experience of people’s lives. In this sense, the project of reinvigorating institutions like the pub can be married to a broader political project which might establish the culture, policy framework and socialised finance for the resurrection of everything from the use of churches to the canal network; ecology to footpath network; rewilded landscapes to the renewal of the high street as a site of civic fora; small-scale farming to seas and skies re-abundant with life; the right to the city and the right to the country. Against a sense of national ennui and identity loss, such a narrative can revive particularity and create dense structures of ownership which begin to abate the drift towards highly conservative forms of anti-globalism; borne from entrenched social inequality, a lack of ‘access to history’ through the meaningful agency of people to prevent the hollowing out of the fabric of their daily lives.⁶¹⁵ It need not be exclusive. Indeed, the more identity operates on multiple scales and accents of belonging; the richer, deeper, more enchanted it can become. Insofar as we exist where we are – whatever manifold sites, nations, and landscapes that encompasses – particularity offers a means by which to make those multiple, overlapping components of identity richer, more complex. In place of recourse to abstract symbols – whether they be St George, the Monarchy, or the invention of traditions unmoored from a tangible connection to the world⁶¹⁶ – a phenomenological approach to re-enchantment can ground identity in a material relationship to place which offers more than discursive, representational gestures of belonging. In Britain, the pub, as both a symbol and a space, a signifier of identity and a forum for its expression, offers a powerful place to start.

⁶¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Penguin (2017) – Arendt argued that fascism can be understood as a temporary alliance of elite and mob’, and that the mob, denied ‘access to history’ by the bourgeois world, was permitted it through fascism, ‘even at the price of destruction’.

⁶¹⁶ Such solutions have been proffered by the “soft nationalist” wings of the Labour Party, expressed most clearly by Blue Labour’s ‘Family, Faith, and Flag and more recently by John Denham (England and Labour Project), see: ‘Red, White, and Blue Labour’ *The World Transformed*, September, 2018 ([youtube.com/watch?v=jdGE3RH4o7o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdGE3RH4o7o); accessed 06/19)

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