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# Corporate Social Responsibility To-Come: A Derridean Interruption of Transparency

Robert Foschia

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CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO-COME: A DERRIDEAN  
INTERRUPTION OF TRANSPARENCY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Robert M. Foschia

December 2018

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2018

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INTERRUPTION OF TRANSPARENCY

By

Robert M. Foschia

Approved August 24, 2018

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Dr. Erik Garrett  
Professor of Communication  
(Committee Chair)

---

Dr. Ronald C. Arnett  
Chair, Department of Communication and  
Rhetorical Studies  
Professor of Communication  
(Committee Member)

---

Dr. James C. Swindal  
Dean, McAnulty College  
Chair, Department of Philosophy

---

Dr. Janie Harden Fritz  
Professor of Communication  
(Committee Member)

## ABSTRACT

### CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO-COME: A DERRIDEAN INTERRUPTION OF TRANSPARENCY

By

Robert M. Foschia

December 2018

Dissertation supervised by Professor Erik Garrett

This study investigated the relation between rhetorics of transparency and organizational action. Digging into CSR literature from a philosophy of communication perspective, this project seeks to determine if corporate social responsibility delivers on the promises it makes of a better world.

Drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida, the research first lays out his often overlooked contribution to the philosophy of communication, and then moves towards possible applications in deconstructing the perceived benefits of CSR, particularly in its transparent nature. By looking at organizational life from the Triple Bottom Line, this dissertation peels back the underlying rhetoric of planet, people, profit to discover an ethical project with gaps, fissures, and inconsistencies, in need of a future-oriented version that lives up to this challenge CSR sets out for itself in such precarious times.

Key implications: Derrida's philosophy of communication as cannibalistic, or contagious; transparency as a form of non-communication; the limits of CSR communication

## DEDICATION

To my grandfather, Robert D. Foschia, the smartest man I ever met.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank the members of my committee for the guidance, confidence, and help they gave me during this process. I would like to especially thank Dr. Erik Garrett for the work and support given towards helping me finish, including editing line by line in coffee shops around Pittsburgh the week before my defense, as well as a thousand other small kindnesses I witnessed and helped me feel supported and mentored.

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## Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility has been a contested term from the start, with multiple theoretical lenses and issues percolating within diverse departmental and theoretical applications for implementation and philosophy, leading to little consensus or unified field of study—business schools looking to use it in one manner, communication practitioners in another, and activists and consumers in still other myriad ways. Within such a confused and Babel-like arena, many different and diffuse critiques have been leveled against the idea(s) of corporate social responsibility, that is over and dead (Fleming, 2012), that it is not the role of business to confront social problems (Friedman, 1970), or that it promises a responsible corporation or organization that can deliver shared value, better standards, and save the world.

Although corporate social responsibility is a relatively new ideal or “theory” to look at it, it has existed in several different historical epochs and with it brought a variety of challenges; we cannot associate the early debates of Milton Friedman and a business’s sole responsibility to shareholder wealth with current issues and events that interrupt and demand our attention now. Major advances in technology combined with more information for consumers and employees on top of a deepening and potentially catastrophic ecological disaster leads us to different questions of responsibility and “what to do now?” (Arnett, Fritz, Bell, 2008), although similar the debate surrounding this apparatus has several coordinates or connective tissue that binds its *corpus* together in interesting ways.

In a postmodern moment of virtue contention, it is incredibly difficult to have common conversations about what is just, ethical and in pursuit of the Good as other

historical moments could; this is not necessarily a negative addendum to our time, but one that presupposes we seek out and learn difference and the multiplicity of goods that surround communicators at any given time (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Postmodernity also unravels many of our previously held coordinates and beliefs, asking us to question why we invest faith in current institutions and practices, not nihilistically, but in an effort to better or change them, to reinvest belief with a deeper critical appreciation.

Postmodernism leaves us with no meta-narrative, no overarching guide to our times, but as Slavoj Žižek comments, many of us living in the affluent West subscribe to a theology of “humanitarianism-ecological concern,” even if we do not publicly state it (Žižek, 1997). It is hard to speculate of an organization openly advocating for pollution in local communities, lauding the toxic environment of its workplace, or the contribution of 100% all profits to a social cause. Yet these things do happen! As Arnett comments, high unmet expectations lead to cynicism (Arnett, Arneson, 1999), something that after the 2008 financial meltdown as well as the seemingly constant dance of corporate scandal after corporate scandal that is trotted out.

### **Statement of Problem**

Corporate social responsibility outlines the construction and then communication of standards of conduct for organizations in their larger indebtedness to the larger human community. Mediating these discussions of where that responsibility begins and ends, CSR intervenes into the normative practices of business strategy, public relations, integrated marketing communication, sustainability, and other disparate fields to ask what *ought* to be done given the multiplicity of responsibilities and demands—to bottom lines,

to consumers, stakeholders, and employees, and to the larger arenas in which these enterprises operate, communities, nations, and the Earth.

Social responsibility according to Carroll (2008) begins in the rise of the corporation, citing figures (*doers* in his parlance) who helped implement CSR strategies into developing corporations—looming figures from the turn of the century such as Andrew Carnegie, John Rockefeller, Mellon, and Henry Frick. At the time, these *doers* were taking the insights developed from De Tocqueville, Marx, Locke, and Spencer. Carroll traces how corporations ‘turbulent’ rise meant reevaluations from theory on how to avoid worker strikes, environmental pollution, and the emerging class that demanded better behavior from corporations in their communities. The progressive movement and New Deal in America redefined worker rights, environment standards, benefits and condition improvements. The social movements of the 60s saw business being drawn away from the purely economic realm (not that it ever *purely* ever existed there) into social disputes and conversation external to business operations. The 1980’s saw the further move from merely managing programs meant to curry favor with differing publics, to thinking of all those affected by a business or stakeholders (Freeman, 2010). Carroll details how the emergence of the extra-business case starts to frame and morph how actions of a business are presented as moral, ethical, and just.

Theorists have decried corporate social responsibility as a tool to mislead and distract publics as well, nullifying some of the rosier aspects of CSR. As Coombs and Holladay detail, saying “...CSR is known to be a liability as well. If poorly executed, CSR efforts can be harmful to a corporation. Some of those problems include negative effects from greenwashing (e.g. Lim et al., 2013) or CSR efforts not matching the

organization's mission" (Coombs & Holladay, 2015, p. 149). Other thinkers such as Banerjee (2008) have tried to reckon with some of CSR's more reckless and unethical behaviors, especially on a global stage, where different conceptions of the good lead to the destruction of local communities too soon brought into the global economy, the destruction and exploitation of natural resources from poor communities to rich ones, and the violent mistreatment of workers in sweatshops and terrible work conditions. Corporations continue to use CSR to better their image despite potential unethical practices that separate their mission from their duties.

This view appears to render CSR impotent, outdated, and favors engaging new strategies in order to better an image and placate consumers. However, CSR has also done a great deal of good in the world, leaving audiences with a tension between the effectiveness of wealthy and powerful organizations participating in making their social worlds better in light of scandals and risk provoking behavior, something De George (2008) and Jones (2007) cover in terming CSR discourse 'undecidable'. Undecidable in the aspect that CSR cannot be called either 'good' nor 'bad', but rather dependent upon context and the specific practice.

### **Significance of Problem**

CSR discourse then becomes an important fulcrum for evaluating how organizations talk to others in a public fashion. What organizations deem important is both a formulation of engagement with the public(s) as well as strategic decision in the marketing of products. "So the question is not really whether or not CSR strategy is proactive or reactive, but what type of crisis or anticipated crisis triggers the corporate decision to develop CSR programs and how various types of power, knowledge, and

expertise influence the strategic process” (L’Etang et al, 2011, p. 178). L’Etang and her fellow authors point to the issue at the heart of CSR, of the yearning for more ethically minded organizational action in light of Enron the 2008 Financial Crash, the BP DeepWater Horizon oil spill, as well as leaked offshore financial disclosures in the Panama and Paradise papers. Akin to Carroll’s mention of the great robber barons of the Gilded Age instituting reform, the question of ethics in the public sphere. We become burdened then with two unfavorable stances, the knave is a neoconservative advocate of the free market who cruelly rejects all forms of social solidarity as counterproductive sentimentalism,” or the “fool,” who “is a deconstructionist critic who, by means of his ludic procedures to subvert the existing order, actually serves as its supplement” (Žižek, 1997, p. 46). As accurate as this may appear of the contemporary situation, what is needed is a change from these two binary poles for a new order of thinking and contemplation, as Arnett describes in thinking through our contemporary historical moment:

“Arendt’s rhetoric is exemplar of Michael Hyde’s stress upon the importance of “rhetorical interruptions,” which function as pragmatic intrusions in routine existence that generate the conditions for moments of revelatory temporal truth, *alethia*. Arendt points to a view of communication ethics in dark times that is dependent upon rhetorical interruptions that can illuminate possibilities and decrease the darkness of modernity” (Arnett, 2012, pgs. 250-51).

CSR is in need of such an interruption, that focuses not on the poles of ‘the business case’ or the co-opting of activist causes, but of a revelatory moment to see if our current organizational structures are capable of solving the many challenges we face. The

response called forth by an analysis of CSR discourse demands not a final interpretation in this moment of its positivity or negativity, but rather its possibility.

## **Methodology**

Outlined above I have stated that CSR participates in the construction and communication of standards of responsibility for communication practitioners to operate within and function within, and that one of the problems of this contemporary practice is the encounter with paradox and misleading statements. Corporate Social Responsibility struggles when it is limited inside its own bubble of practice and theory while contemplating these systemic and philosophical issues. Conversations around what the responsibility of business is, or what responsibility is, *as its own concept*, naturally veers into the realm of philosophy and ethics.

In untangling the oppositions that structure modernity, and consequently, CSR, Arnett calls for a “...communicative act of deconstruction is the rhetorical reaction of postmodernity. The rhetoric of deconstruction continues with the existential fact that postmodernity is not hegemonic; if it were, then postmodernity would take on universal characteristics of modernity. Thus, within postmodernity, modernity continues to live and prosper, maintaining a call for efforts at deconstruction” (Arnett, 2012, p. 258). A deeper philosophical of deconstruction does the work of continuing this project.

A philosophical approach opens CSR to a larger dialogue. As Cook and Holba detail in their edited volume *Philosophies of Communication: Implications for Everyday Experience*, most views of communication take a “strict stance based on qualitative or quantitative processes” which often neglect hermeneutics which presents an opportunity

“...to frame or reconstruct communication studies” (Cook & Holba, 2008, p. xviii.).

Cook and Holba’s text links philosophy of communication to communication ethics not as similar fields, but as two poles of a unified search for truth: ethics involving “...choices, duty, obligation, right and wrong, and how one makes a decision and then articulates it to another,” (xix) while philosophy of communication pursues similar question under rubrics of “question of method, effectiveness, realities, multiplicities, trying to understand the why, how, and what for questions” through lenses of epistemology, history, and ethics (Cook & Holba, 2008, p. xvi). The dialectic moves from common debates of ‘is it useful’ or ‘is it not useful’ to the particular, thinking how it affects a particular organization in a specific place during a temporal moment in history.

In placing philosophy of communication not as a simple addendum to communication studies, but as larger questions of method and assumptions in regard to communication, fix communication not as a “grammar but as dialectic, with a rationality that is inherent in the very nature of the communicative act” (Cook & Holba, 2008, p. xvii). Cook and Holba proffer diverse thinkers such as Jurgen Habermas, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Stanley Deetz to think through communicative issues in our historical moment, echoing Chang and Butchart (2012) in their call that, since the Greeks, to philosophize is to communicate about and in philosophy. Calvin Schrag adds to the conversation by emphasizing the communicative practices and decision-making that makes up the Self, contours and defines it through the “hard struggle of making choices” (Schrag, 1999, p. 63). In an era of fragmented selves and ideas, philosophy of communication provides a deep meditation on overcoming the challenges *through* communication.



While engaging CSR, this project also seeks to understand and give a sympathetic reading of Derrida's *corpus*, specifically his later work that revolved around his 1990's seminars on 'Questions of Responsibility'. This moves further away from his early texts, published around 1967, and more his encounter with ethics, hospitality, the secret, law, archive technologies, and responsibility to the Other(s). An implicit dimension of this view is that Derrida has been misinterpreted, which, in reviewing commentaries and writings surrounding Derrida, appeared to be one of his biggest fears. As Tumolo et al. (2014) develop, Derrida's writings on mourning seek to continue to engage with fellow philosophers ideas rather than fix, affirm, and reify their last image at the moment of their death—rather, he seeks to keep alive their ideas through questioning, "... (un)faithfully yet responsibly" (Tumolo et al, 2014, p. 113). It is also implicit that the same has not been done *for* Derrida, in reception and memory.

The practice of a Derridean method concerns the very close reading replication of corporate social responsibility texts, searching then for the shifting ground and *aporia*, or paradox on which they are built. CSR's core tension of being for corporatism or for activism or any continuum resembling as such demands such investigation, as it exists as what Derrida would deem as "undecidable." Being two things at once, there exists the inability to make a clear declaration one way or another, breeding paralysis, indecision, and cynicism. At first glance, this undecidable nature of CSR seems to violate Arnett, Fritz, and Bell's (2008) contention that public discourse ethics requires that we do not block ideas contrary to our own from entering the public sphere, and that we are able to make temporal decisions and grappling with contending ideas. Often Derrida's work is seen as pointing toward the undecidable, critiquing the text that produces it, and then a

flight away from any decision making. This is a not entirely untrue reading, as Derrida does refer to the undecidable, the unnamable as “*monstrosities*—is that they cannot be named” (Chang, 1993, p. 143-44). Yet his philosophy revolves around the need for the undecidable, and the passage through it.

Chang refers us to the ability to sit in these moments of undecidability, of growing accustomed to not having all the answers, being open to indeterminacy, and learning from it. Critchley, on the other hand, views the undecidable as a moment in time, a temporal deferral of justice and decision making, the

“...central *aporia* of deconstruction—an *aporia* that must not be avoided if any responsible political activity is to be undertaken—concerns the nature of this passage from undecidability to the decision, from the ethical ‘experience’ of justice to political action, to what we might call the moment of judgment. ...Derrida insists that judgments *have to be made* and decisions *have to be taken*<sup>1</sup>, provided it is understood that to be responsible they must pass through an experience of the undecidable” (Critchley, 2003, p. 35).

Critchley’s description here is to frame the undecidable not as a postmodern aesthetic, a ruse to outmaneuver fellow philosophers through clever stammering but as an ethic that seeks to make, as Schrag comments, ‘hard decisions’ but also recognizes the impossibility of those decisions. If decision making, if deciding to be responsible were as easy as simply being responsible, of uttering ‘I will be responsible’, there would most likely be no need for such fret, indecision, and campaigning. There is, as Derrida does in his *Gift of Death*, a reference here to Kierkegaard and the framing of such action as ‘the

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<sup>1</sup> The italics here are mine, and not Critchley’s—I want to emphasize his view that Derridean interpretation involves decision making, if only through this prolonged trial of the undecidable. Both Chang and Critchley refer back to *The Gift of Death*, paying close attention to Derrida’s flirtation with Kierkegaard and proffering his own interpretation of the Abraham nearly sacrificing Isaac. How to follow both commands? To follow God but also protect our only son? This is perhaps Derrida’s most visceral example of the undecidable.

madness of the decision'. Movement through *aporias* is possible, but constitutes a fever dream, a long night for which we must wrestle through, sleepless, a wrestling with Gabriel out in the desert.

This method's obsession with the undecidable is in order to preserve and proliferate that which it 'deconstructs'—justice, law, hospitality, responsibility—all draw attention from Derrida not because he seeks to destroy or decimate them, but in order to find the limits of these concepts, to understand them in the now. Deconstruction obliges us to write—to encounter these concepts as lived within our specific contexts and modes of existence, and to *communicate* then about them after the trial of the undecidable.

Derrida works within the philosophical tradition due to a basic respect and reverence (if not irreverence) for it. Thinking through the problematic of corporate social of responsibility and Derridean philosophy is one that answers Kimball's challenge of 'oh god—in business schools' as one in where business theory, business ethics is at an important juncture in our historical moment, one in need of close and thoughtful reading and response.

## **Overview Chapter 1 Plan of Research**

To understand a Derridean approach to corporate social responsibility, there first needs to be an explication of Jacques Derrida and his philosophy. While some approach the work of Derrida (and deconstruction in general) as relativistic, "deceptive," or even "absurd, vapid and pernicious" (Tumolo et al, 2014, 116). Even the small amount of scholarship done connecting Derrida to business communication and corporate social responsibility in general, have characterized his philosophy as haphazard and idle pastime.

In teasing a brief overview of Derrida's life and works, I set the stage for his relevance to this project and the relation of the oft maligned term deconstruction to communication studies. I also try to guide the reader towards more of his later works that engage responsibility and ethics than the earlier contributions to philosophy that he supplies.

## **Chapter 2 Derrida and Communication Studies: Carnophallogocentrism**

In order to render a Derridean reading, first, as Briankle Chang observes, a faithful and exact copy must be made before any 'cuts' or deconstruction can occur. Chang is adamant about the nature of an exact replica, fostered by intense and slow, careful reading. By reviewing prominent corporate social responsibility texts, the current state and arguments of the CSR debate can be made relevant as well as enacting a Derridian iteration; no copy can exact, and the structural selections will be made apparent to better serve the reader and argument.

Secondly, the 'messiness' of CSR literature will be explored, deeming CSR a wholly interdisciplinary endeavor. Philanthropy, corporate governance, sustainability, value chain, corporate citizenship, are just a few of the plurality of discourses *within* CSR discourse. My reasoning will view this as a positive for CSR literature, allowing it to tackle a variety of concepts in an open ended way from a variety of perspectives, allowing for the cross pollination of methodologies and attempting to escape any rigid determinism. Here I posit Derrida's metaphor of cannibalism, asking how, if we must eat, can we eat ethically? If organizations must profit to survive, how can they do so without harming people or the planet?

### **Chapter 3 Corporate Social Responsibility as a body of literature**

Milton Friedman is often credited with starting the bifurcation of corporate social responsibility, as responsibility termed in degrees of making profits to ‘doing good’. Since its inception, CSR and the conversation surrounding it has devolved into binaries of ‘corporate legitimization tool’ to extra burden placed upon a business. What if the nature of this concept has already been decided? What if this bifurcation is the sense of CSR, a dual, border-straddling activity between stakeholders and organizations. Drawing on the work of DeGeorge, Jones, Carroll, and Rasche, the connection between Derridean philosophy and corporate social responsibility emerges through the passage of the undecidable—the ‘madness of the decision’—for how to turn this ‘purely textual’ philosophy into practice. Drawing on conversations between Rorty, Chantal Mouffe, Critchley, and current CSR practitioners, the limits of ‘rules for responsibility’ signaling responsibility as a singular act under which hard and fast rules negate the face of the Other, and under which pragmatic action must be undertaken as a radical evaluation in each and every instance. CSR is best understood not as a set of codes or concepts, but an open ended and discursively ever evolving project in which a ‘responsible’ corporation is always to-come, always delayed, and always in need of work to be done in achieving this goal.

The triple bottom line advocated by John Elkington of people, planet, and profits can here be interrogated in relation to responsibility. There is no universal situation where each of these functions corresponds one to one and allows for the digestion of these CSR concepts into the organization, employees, or wider stakeholder communities in which they are practiced. While the goal of this project is to provide a disruption to

CSR in order for it to pass through what Rasche (2010) calls the ‘ordeal of the undecidable’, to stake out better limits and practices, the idea of wholly unified and therefore supposedly ‘naturally’ occurring and originating triple bottom line must be interrogated as well.

#### **Chapter Four Interrupting Transparency**

The notion of a fully transparent corporation in which each problem manifests itself and can be seen, catalogued, and *managed* casts the ideal of metaphysics upon CSR literature—it negates the dissemination of signs (and politics) that are always already present in an organization and that must be confronted daily in order for success. Using Derrida’s semiological writings, this chapter will focus on the impossibility of full transparency on the organizational level, in fact advocating for a measure of secrecy in order to allow employees to function ethically and pragmatically

Derrida does not outwardly critique transparency, but in his writing on the university I pose his theory next to that of Clare Birchall, a Derridean thinker who sees the shrinking of secrecy in the public sphere as a net negative for good governance and interpersonal relations.

#### **Chapter Five Social Investing and Accounting**

The main way firms communicate social responsibility is via websites, and the social audit. External statements help a company publicly test itself and account for action taken. This chapter will deal with the transparency paradox, specifically in accounting practices that overturn and derail the impetus of regulations and laws in plain sight and help corrode the public sphere. In Brooke Harrington’s *Capital Without Borders*, she highlights how wealth managers develop practices that fit within legal and

*ethical* guidelines by watchdog groups and third parties, yet still contribute to problematic issues. Through an interconnected global system wealth is able to hid, only reaching public consciousness through leaks and complicated financial dealings.

Using the work of Derrida, and particularly an interpretation of Derrida by Charles Barbour on the secret, in tandem with Sissela Bok on secrecy and Arendt on the public/private divide, this chapter attempts to tackle why transparent, rule-forsaking behaviors continue to occur in profit-seeking are tolerated, but not changed. By looking at the specific practice of accounting (as a organizational- communicative activity) we can begin to deal with this paradox of transparency and build what Chantal Mouffe calls a ‘democratic ethos’, one where “by urging us to think in terms of practices, it compels us to confront the real issues that have to be tackled in order to enhance democratic citizenship” (Mouffe, 2003, 6). Harrington’s work finds that while these managers may skirt laws, ethics, and terms of good practice, there is a hope to bettering the public arena amongst them, and perhaps it is not theory but a praxis view that can deepen this resolve. Accountability is a calculus which can be circumvented, but responsibility is a deeper call to conscience that can demand what regulation cannot. A Derridean responsibility cannot be reduced to an accounting measure that neatly fits into a report, but is more wider and engrossing notion of what an organization is seeking to accomplish.

### **Interrupting; Blockchain**

By looking at new technologies such blockchain, which poses itself as an unhackable software that makes all exchange transparent. I refer to David Golumbia’s investigation into the libertarian ethos at the bottom of such technology. Rather than

make things more visible, blockchain tech, specifically the Bitcoin craze that emerged from it, as based in a rhetoric of secrecy.

## **Chapter Six Organizational Democracy and Holacracy**

Another factor in Elkington's triple bottom line is 'people', itself a term that is already subject to slippage due to the nature of organizational boundaries; are committed stakeholders that promote change in organizations inside the org, outside, or in a liminal space? What is the role and place for employees that are often at the helm of these voluntary CSR activities and help drive them? Application of CSR to employees by attempting a transparent organization leads to impulses such as Carrol's (1991) CSR pyramid, in which a privileging of ethical, philanthropic, economic, and legal demands is ordered and structured.

Examining the management plan of holacracy put in place by Zappos, I interrogate the idea of an organization with a flat hierarchy, one in which the org chart appears as transparent but operates in secret along lines of friendship and nepotism. Workers constitute the organization and should demand a responsible democratic structure they can participate in.

### **Interrupting; Ford and Stakeholders**

Exploring the critique of Edward Freeman's stakeholder theory (1984) via Henry Ford's failed project in the Amazon rainforest. This interruption focuses on the company town as it has been exported to our digital and work spaces, ensuring we are all now stakeholders of every organization as risk has been diluted across the planet.



## **Chapter Seven *Mondialization* and Sustainable Practice (Planet)**

A final chapter dealing with Elkington's triple bottom line would focus on planet, often referred to as sustainability, which is both inside and external to the purview of CSR and this project. A more focused approach would be an examination of Derrida's idea of Hospitality, where hospitality is not an ethic but *the* ethic, a responsibility that is culture itself. Implementing CSR and sustainability into a company culture as strategy fails when the culture of the organization is not organically invested into these ideas. A bolt-on approach leads to greenwashing instead of an investment into ideas which stakeholders are passionate about. Using the work of Timothy Morton and Jean-Luc Nancy, I connect the discourse of sustainability and globalization to each other and offer what this connection might present.

Such an abstract concept can be better viewed through the prism of free trade coffee, particularly, the multitude of different certifications that come from buying coffee. Oftentimes consumers see products labeled as fair trade or organic, and consider them transparently so, when in reality often these certifications come not from third parties who can be publicly scrutinized, but rather the company themselves. Fair Trade has also fallen into paradoxical situations where the initial goals of instilling 'alterity' as Christopher M. Bacon claims, into the value chain, have been co-opted and need reassessment. Oftentimes, companies dealing with organic or free trade coffee advertise themselves as eco-friendly or environmentally conscious, while at the same time divesting from the area where the coffee comes from. Investing in the areas that produce the coffee help yield better coffee bean product, while at the same time helping build infrastructure and economic prospects in these traditionally underdeveloped areas.

## **Interrupting Habermas**

This short section will review a brief history of CSR while also connecting it the spread of coffeehouses that helped Habermas define the modern public sphere; the explosion of information and civil discourse also coincides with the arrival of coffee to Europe from the New World. This historical addendum will address how historical situations limit the reach and effectiveness of CSR depending on the moment, and this tradeable commodity of coffee can also be traced through history and has interesting connections and connotations to the overall argument and project.

## **Chapter 8 CSR to Come: The Future Responsible Company**

Submitting corporate social responsibility to a Derridean analysis allows for theorists and practitioners to see the possible pragmatic avenues that are opened up by the negation of closure and the movement through the paralysis of the undecidable towards more standardized and implementable practices. However, at the same time, A Derridean approach opens up the *impossibility* of CSR working amongst stakeholder groups.

A Derridean response to such a problematic would revolve around his text *The Specters of Marx*, in which he outlines his theory of hauntology and the specter. The image of the specter is both corporeal and not, and represents a useful metaphor for communicating risk and crisis. Similarly to the specter, this fear of the past returning and haunting the future can cripple action, as every movement is agonized over and debated. CSR will always be haunted by greenwashing and bolt on approaches, but nevertheless needs to be engaged and communicated with

## Chapter One:

### Derrida: Life and Theory

“Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about”

G.K. Chesterton, in “The Ethics of Elfland,” *Orthodoxy* (1908), p. 85

This project seeks to connect Derridean philosophy to the discourse of Corporate Social Responsibility, particularly in how it manifests under the guise of transparent communication. Derrida’s connection to CSR is an oblique one, in that he, more than any philosopher, contests the basic underlying aspects of this diagram that appear self-evident. In questioning giving, responsibility, ethics, the world around us, and transparent communication itself, Derrida emerges as an unfortunate impasse, a sphinx (or, at times, a bridge troll) demanding we answer riddles in exchange for safe passage. As this chapter intends to bring to light, this mood is done not in spite but in the quest that CSR often neglects or forgets—responsibility. For Derrida, it is only questioning our deepest held beliefs that we can make ethical or responsible decisions. By examining his life and thought, we can channel a mode of Derridean thought to bring CSR back to its core promise, that of responsibility.

Derrida was born in French Algeria in 1930 to Jewish parents. His connections to France, then, have always been strained due to this connection and his reception upon moving to France at an early age during the Occupation. Derrida was expelled from school due to the Vichy regime, and this status as outsider and foreigner never seemed to dissipate or leave him or his work. Even in later writings, the question of the foreigner, of Algeria continues to resurface and define this philosopher we often idealize as *the*

postmodern French philosopher, along with contemporaries such as Lyotard, Baudrillard, Foucault, Deleuze, and the May '68 generation. Derrida is often presented as being a trickster come from abroad to sell us his language games and puns in America, where he was promoted by the Yale school as a predominant philosopher, yet this reception was so much stronger in the U.S. than his native France. Perhaps former student David Farrell Krell's title of a recent book, *The Purest of Bastards*, best defines Derrida's standing outside of his own mythology.

While there has been considerable offense taken to his work here, neither was it wholly accepted on the continent. The gap in attention, especially after translations began to increase Derrida's profile in America, led to articles such as Michele Lamont's "How to Become a Dominant French Philosopher- The Case of Jacques Derrida" exhibits the view of Derrida as a cunning player that used a militaristic approach to conquer the American cultural market (Lamont, 1987). Other interventions, such as spats with Gadamer or Habermas, have led to Derrida being received into two camps—those partial to his theory and work, and those who perceive him a charlatan, cynic, and fool. Derrida's lacksadaisical attitude, combined with his penchant for quick responses and eagerness to join in debates, made him enemies but also represented his method—to respond, even when he did not want to, to uphold a fair and ethical reading of the subject, and to intervene as a matter of solidarity with interlocutors.

This can be seen early in Derrida's career when he exploded the Baltimore conference that was to install structuralism as the de facto theory of its day. Derrida instead gives a paper at the end of the conference entitled 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences' which disrupts and challenges structuralism, opting for readings where

meaning emerges only from the interlay or juxtaposition of two differing terms—for example, white as good in contrast to black, day as preferred counter to night, etc. As his biographer Benoit Peeters proclaims, this early essay sought to “move beyond structuralism and presence the nostalgia for origins to looks at how signs could be traded for one another, an ethics that “affirms play and attempts to pass beyond man and humanism” (cited in 2013:167). This binary nature of language, where meaning moves, slips, and has ‘play’ to it, deriving from a reading of Saussure, would set his career ablaze and chart a method and interest in language for years to come.

Derrida proposes a philosophy of language that never realizes itself as complete, total, or pure. It is always through traces, remains of other texts and influences that a text is bound up and (re)presented to us. There is an ethical duty for Derrida in tracking the trace back to its destination, or possible destinations, to uncover what remnants of the original elements are still contained within this new usage. Derrida thus acts a historical detective in uncovering various unthought usages of words to show how our narrow focuses usually loses or obfuscates the vibrancy of certain words, whether by accident or purposefully. By thinking through alternatives, the possible definitions and usages that are pushed to the margins, we engage with solid traditions while also forging new ways of thinking. As Derrida moves throughout his career, this focus moves from the tracing words, the graphemic focus on written marks, to *philosophemes*, large concepts such as history, capitalism, the university, and philosophy itself.

This preference or privileging, a phallogocentrism as Derrida claims, starts with Western metaphysics idealizing the speaking subject, his or her presence, and the delivery of truth. As Derrida showed in his paper at the Baltimore conference, and in his

dissertation on Husserl, presence is always deferred—stopped, distanced, and in process to what we perceive moment to moment. There is no actual ‘living present’ for Derrida in part due to language’s dependency on the written word. We are not magically born with alphabets, but learn them and interiorize this gap, this deferral between the written word and our understanding of it. This logic extends to all of language and writing, and therefore to experience as well, lending it a certain graphemic or *gramme*-like quality, which can be traced back through its variations. These are the themes introduced and explored in Derrida’s magnum opus, *Of grammatology*, published in 1967 along with two other collections, *Speech and phenomena* and *Writing and difference*. Slowly moving back through the inheritances of Western philosophy, Derrida seeks to understand how these claims, these privileges come to be, and how they unravel themselves—deconstructing their parts—through these oppositional binds.

The above paragraph contains but a small snippet of the wealth of complex and invigorative ideas Derrida proposes in the reading of texts and the problems of language. However, what is most pulled from *Of Grammatology*, amidst its critique of Western metaphysics and Rousseau, are two things: the application of his term *differance*, a structuring *non*term that starts the work of deconstruction in texts and the oft quoted line “*il n’y a pas hors-texte*,” roughly translated to ‘there is nothing outside of text’ or the more common ‘there is nothing outside the text’. Multiple interpreters, including Walter Ong, Richard Rorty, sought to take this neologism literally, framing Derrida as a nihilist who viewed all the world as a book, that there really exists *nothing* outside of a textual realm. As Francesco Vitale recently pointed out, the biological life processes have similarities to deconstruction in the notion of survival, particularly how “...the *gramme*

would allow us to point out that *différance* is a genetical-structural condition of the life of the living and its evolution” (Vitale, 2018, p. 22). Or, more simply: words live on because of how they are used, and how they are used change with history, location, context. English is mish-mash of a variety of languages, which trumpets itself as wholly unified and complete, although each word carries with it the history of these other usages. Words then, adapt, change, evolve like a living system, and follow this logic of writing and its deferral.

Vitale takes up the task of arguing this point in 2018, fifty-one years after the publication of *Of Grammatology*. The more common interpretation of Derrida is that words escape meaning, there is no ground or material to stand upon, and anything goes. This appears as a severe conflation of ‘play’, where structures loosen and allow openness and invention, and nihilism or anarchy, where structure is abandoned. Although we use writing to lock meaning down, it necessarily escapes boundaries, and this fixity only persists for a moment. Derrida’s mentioning of this, that nothing exists in a vacuum or outside of the specific context of the moment has cornered him into this nihilist, postmodern position. As Clayton Crockett summarizes in recent scholarship on Derrida and writing:

“the passion of Derrida’s thinking and writing, his prayers and tears which Caputo attends, marks deconstruction as a more-than-linguistic phenomenon, which does not mean that it is simply non-linguistic. Caputo attacks the stupid, reactionist readings of Derrida that proceed by taking literally the translation of Derrida’s offhand remark that “there is nothing outside the text” (*il n’y a pas de hors texte*), “as if there is nothing other than words and texts” (Crockett, 2018, p. 98).

It is a willful misreading to confine Derrida to the textual realm, especially as his work moved further and further from language philosophy into other concepts, and as he distanced himself from the term deconstruction, designing other concepts that upheld the ideal of *differance* by another name. This project proposes several Derrida's, with his later work representing more of a turn towards responsibility and socio-political concepts that carry on the ethical concerns that exist throughout his corpus.

Caputo in various places, especially in *Prayers and tears of Jacques Derrida* praises the philosopher of his attack on totalizing claims, the *Geschlecht* and instead seeks to replace it with “community without identity, of a non-identical community that cannot say I or we, for, after all, the very idea of community is to fortify ourselves in common against the Other” (Caputo, 1997). Deconstruction opens multiple discourses as being strange or paradoxical to themselves. Besides *Geschlecht*, the name Derrida gives to totalizing impulses (besides philosophy, or metaphysics) is *arche*-writing, which emerges in another '67 collection, *Speech and Phenomena*. As Vitale concedes, *arche*-writing “continues to maintain and to acknowledge the necessity of the system of prohibitions (knowledge, science, philosophy, work, history, etc.),” while also being deconstructed at the same time (Vitale, 2018, p. 5). Derrida, as his career progressed, continued to argue against the closure of concepts and thinking, the shutting down of ideas while at the same time working within these inheritances. Caputo sums up deconstruction as a “philosophy of institutions,” set upon “...making institutions livable—open-ended, porous, and on the *qui vive*-and structured around programs that do not try to program everything” (Caputo, 1997, p. 50). It is the recognition of the *arche* while also holding the door slightly, for an open ended future to arrive.



It is his work throughout the nineteen-seventies, including the founding of the Tel Quel and Greph philosophy groups that Derrida attempted to open philosophy to others, writing on the role of the university in an increasingly neoliberal and budget conscious French system, as well as writing for a larger audience. In *Eyes of the University*, Derrida sees deconstruction acting as a *Mochlos*, or wooden support beam the Greeks used jar a door open, or hold it in place. This insertion, as opening the door for a new philosophy to come, again realizes Derrida's commitment to the opening of philosophy and thinking to the future, rather than a static present. However it is also in the nineteen-seventies that Derrida also publishes what critics called his first real book<sup>2</sup>, rather than a collection of articles, in *Glas*<sup>3</sup>. As Peeters acknowledges, the book came with multiple problems, based on its columns of unassociated text, being "without beginning or end, divided up in many different ways, playing havoc with typographic conventions, the book also lacked any scholarly apparatus: there were no footnotes, and there was no bibliography whatsoever" (Peeters, 2013, p. 259). In their extremely useful Glassary, John P. Leavey and Gregory Ulmer situate this tome as a Menippean satire that "may be seen as Derrida's attempt to produce in a philosophical text something like the multi-voiced discourse achieved in literature by Dostoevsky" (Ulmer & Leavey, 1986, p. 109). This of course angered many in the academy as well as almost bankrupting the printing press, Galilee, for the odd printing style they had to adhere to. As his star began to grow,

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<sup>2</sup> Derrida publishes a number of important works that will be focused on going forward, from his indebtedness to Nietzsche and the latter's focus on women in *Spurs* (1978), which also featured *The truth in painting* in the same year. Earlier in the decade he publishes *Positions*, a series of interviews that attempt to demarcate what deconstruction was as it became popularized, and in that year also published *Dissemination* and *Margins of philosophy* (1972).

<sup>3</sup> Derrida referred to the project *not* as a book, but a "reading effect" (Ulmer & Leavery, 1986, p. 113)

so did a reputation for being pedantic, a nuisance, and foreign to philosophy, with his focus upon literature, art, and psychoanalysis.

The nineteen-eighties began with Derrida making his mark upon American<sup>4</sup> philosophy departments, as more and more of his works became translated, including *The post card*, a focused intervention into the works of Freud and communication. However, the decade can best be coalesced into the arguments, debates, and attacks that Derrida participated in. In subsequent years, Derrida was embroiled in debates about his allegiance to Heidegger, Paul De Man, and analytic philosophy's rebuttal to deconstruction in the form of Searle's defense of the illocutionary act. Searle was quoted in the *New York Review of Books* as attributed a quotation of Foucault's to Derrida's work, that it represented incoherency and was pedantic. This moves Derrida to aggressively defend himself in a response to Searle about the ethics of discussion, claiming he never had read his actual work. These controversies ignite for Derrida focus on response that follows him into the nineteen-nineties, but not before more invective is passed around.

Derrida has the unfortunate luck of writing *Of spirit: Heidegger and the question* around the same time allegations of Heidegger's involvement with the Nationalist Socialist Party were emerging; as detailed in Benoit Peeters biography, "In what was probably an inevitable misunderstanding, *Of Spirit* was read as a response to Farias, thought it was not at all meant to be one" (Peeters, 2013, p. 381). Within the year, another similar accusation was directed at Paul de Man posthumously, prompting a more

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<sup>4</sup> Not merely American departments, but even international events—as Derrida visited Prague in 1981, Peeters recalls how he was jailed overnight by an overzealous police chief wishing to latch onto the famous philosopher (Peeters, 2013, p. 332)

direct defense from Derrida. The comparisons between the two incidents were coupled together, and "...the polemic soon extended to deconstruction as a whole" (Peeters, 2013, p. 393). It was not then de Man on trial, but Derrida's own philosophical project. A French studies professor in New England labeled the endeavor of deconstruction simply as "...an amnesty project for politics of collaboration during World War II" (Peeters, 2013, p. 393). Those who had qualms philosophically or politically with deconstruction, the door was now open to launch attacks upon it, from what Peeters describes as "...positivist philosophers, conservative humanists, and leftist Marxists" (Peeters, 2013, p. 395). Deconstruction's supposed nihilism and radicalism had led to it "whitewashing Nazism" in the eyes of its critics (Peeters, 2013, p. 397). Derrida's own reaction, in Peeters estimation was an overreaction: two articles, one specifically defending his remarks ("On Paul de Man's War") and another, ("Biodegradables: Seven Diary Fragments") addressing criticism toward him specifically and criticism in general.

The open-ended nature of Derrida's work, which is exemplified in his later writings on *hauntology* and the future also contain the risk of those same methods being rerouted and used against him. Deconstruction leaves itself open to more deconstruction, which, on one hand, allows a continued engagement with tradition and a hospitality toward future readers to interpret that tradition. Because it at the same time claims no universal monopoly on what it deconstructs, no end point, it also can appear as relativistic and useless. This is tract that Jurgen Habermas creates for deconstruction, as his *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* critiques deconstruction as evasive and empty, while Derrida himself "does not belong to those philosophers who like to argue" he

establishes a deeper connection between Derrida (without reading him directly<sup>5</sup>) and Heidegger's *destruktion*, from which Derrida takes the term deconstruction (Peeters, 2013, p. 399). Such charges of methodological naivete and associations with the very same party which exiled him in his youth leaves a mark upon his work which lingers today.

The concept of the trace that Derrida proposes, however, is opposed to this singular conception of a philosopher as one concept, or one interpretation. Derrida himself continually traces the tradition while returning to the same figures over and over again, remixing them while exploring forgotten works, or juxtaposing them with current socio-political concepts. Figures as diverse and wide-ranging as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Hegel, Levinas, Freud, Plato, Mallarme, and Kierkegaard continually emerge and influence his work. It is a sustained exploration with the philosophical tradition and its insistence on obtaining reason that Derrida carefully reads, or traces through his work. The trace, then, is not only a feature of method but a responsibility to read and re-read, to continually discover the missed or quarantined aspects of a text that unravel upon deep introspection.

Derrida releases a response in *Limited Inc.* to such attacks was a siege against Habermasian communicative action itself, arguing that “it is *always* in the name of ethics—a supposedly democratic ethics of discussion—it is always in the name of transparent communication<sup>6</sup> and ‘consensus’ that the most brutal disregard of the

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<sup>5</sup> Habermas makes use or alludes to Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction* for his interpretation, warning students at the time of Derrida's thought being “nihilistic, obscurantist, and politically dubious” (Peeters, 2013, p. 399)

<sup>6</sup> My connection of Derrida with transparency and CSR discourse is elaborated more in chapter three, using his work *The Other Heading* where he again discusses transparency outside the debate with Habermas. It is interesting to note the only other direct attack Derrida appears to have upon transparency

elementary rules of discussion is produced” (Derrida, qtd. In Peeters, 2013, p. 400). It is not improbable that these events swayed Derrida in some way, but as the nineties appeared he proceeded to designed lectures around the ‘Question of Responsibility’, very much moving from the textual field and philosophical inheritances to questions of the animal, auto-immunity, the specter, economy, and death.

The decade began with Derrida visiting Moscow in 1990 and unabashedly speaking of Marx and Marxism as the USSR began to fall. This lecture in turn was birthed into the world as *Specters of Marx*, in which Derrida poetically connects Marx’s philosophical and social thinking with his allusions to Shakespeare. Taking the opening line of the manifesto—there is a specter haunting Europe”—Derrida turns it on its head, citing how there is a specter of Marx, in fact, several specters, or several versions that still haunt the world despite the fall of communism. We do not, Derrida argues, live in a perfect utopia of liberal democracy as Francis Fukuyama proclaimed. Derrida uses the ghost in Hamlet to drive home the idea that ‘the time is out of joint’ where a search for the ghost as belonging purely to past disrupts temporal locations; instead, Derrida argues for *hauntology*, a French pun on ontology, where the ghost, the specter, the thing haunting is neither past nor present. Hauntology becomes a new way for describing *differance*, encapsulating the timeliness of the ‘always already’ within the Hamlet story, or as Mark Fisher argues, this pun or *puncept* points us towards the “no longer or not yet” that considers both the past as well as the lost futures of the present (Fisher, 2013, p. 18).

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comes before the split between the German philosopher and himself, in his defense of not taking sides in the May ’68 riots: “what really bothered me was not so much the apparent spontaneity, which I do not believe in, but the spontaneist political eloquence, the call for transparency, for communication without relay or delay, the liberation from every sort of apparatus, party or union” (qtd. in Peeters, 2013, p. 197). IN this instance, it appears more of a critique of the communication appearing a in a void, without context or specificity rather than notching a win against Habermas.

For Fisher, hauntology develops the sense of time<sup>7</sup> that informs much of Derrida's work stretching back to *Of Grammatology*, but also one that looks forward to the rest of his work, inviting ideas of auto-immunity, messianism, and spectrality, and justices<sup>8</sup>

While the nineties were regarded as the end of history or the *Pax Americana*, this is where Derrida is considered to make two turns; one toward the political in his flirtations with Marxism<sup>9</sup>, precisely at the time Marxism was seen to be dwindling and forgotten, and ethical, as his work on Kierkegaard in *The Gift of Death* represents, moving fully into these questions of responsibility that ignited so many of his lectures at the time. These political and ethical works harmonize with one another in questions such as hospitality, which Derrida formulates through the decade in works such as *The other heading*, which questions Europe's identity and identity in general. It is also a destabilizing period where Derrida loses quite a few close friends, including Gilles Deleuze and Sarah Kofman to suicide, as well as the passing of Emmanuel Levinas on Christmas of 'ninety-five. While the ghost of the intentional fallacy persists here, in the French-Algerian's turn toward survival and autoimmunity as concepts, Derrida also fashions ideas relating to the secret in his engagement with Augustine (1991), mourning

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<sup>7</sup> Joanna Hodge in several places develops and pinpoints Derrida's philosophy of time and deferral, especially in *Derrida On Time* (which itself acts a pun or "*puncture*") as well as being within an orbit of scholarship that is an extended reflection on Levinas and phenomenology, as she claims, whereby what is in contestation is the inheritance of phenomenology itself. This contestation has bearing both on the future of phenomenology and on the thinking of futurity in phenomenology" (Hodge, 2013, p. 386). Again Derrida is opening philosophy to new ideas rather than 'ending' it.

<sup>8</sup> For Derrida we must demand justice in the moment, but it is always a justice to come. Justice is realized in the event, which must come from behind, surprising us, as to expect it is to submit it to pre-programmed functions. Justice is tied up with Derrida's ideas of messianism, which are more eloquently captured by Caputo (1997).

<sup>9</sup> As Peeters elaborates, Derrida never joined or was particularly liked by the French Communist Party, which affected his standing in the academy. Derrida waits until this point to clarify that "Deconstruction never had meaning or interest, at least in my eyes, than as a radicalization, that is to say, also *within the tradition* of a certain Marxism, in a *certain spirit of Marxism*" (Derrida, 1993).

(1997), and again ethics in *The gift of death* (1999). This movement traces a culmination of work on Levinas where Derrida begins to reckon with the Other in a political and ethical sense.

Derrida's last works before his passing from cancer in 2004 highlight his conviction to expand the field of Otherness further than the meeting of another human face, to include faceless unnamed refugees, animals, and the future. His mediations in *The Animal that therefore I Am* and *The Beast and the Sovereign* point to a preoccupation between the self he helped 'deconstruct' and others in the world, saying in the second seminar "I know a sentence that is still more terrifying, more terribly ambiguous than "I am alone," and it is, isolated from any other determining context, the sentence that would say to the other: "I am alone with you." Meditate on the abyss of such a sentence: I am alone with you, with you I am alone, alone in all the world." (Derrida, 2010, p. 23). His late life say attacks in *Rogues* on America's War on Terror and a surprising convergence with Habermas on the subject (2004). There is also Derrida's final reckoning with philosophy, of 'learning to die' as J. Hillis Miller describes how "all ten of Derrida's last seminars, as I have said, are governed by the running away from death that is a running toward death" (Miller 2009, p. 71). Yet there was never a self-memorializing aspect to these late seminars, always an investigation into philosophy, truth, time, writing, and other concepts that the man felt important.

Which is why, for a thinker of mourning, some of the interpretations following his death were so spiteful in fulfilling old grudges or ideological attacks. Derrida was treated with what Michael Tumolo calls "un-civil mourning" by numerous publications upon his death, due to political investments in the 'culture wars' of the nineteen-eighties (Tumolo,

et al, 2014, p. 108). Whether for his friend Emmanuel Levinas in *Adieu*, or to Louis Althusser, or favored student Sarah Kofman, Tumolo suggests Derrida paid close attention through “...acts of repetition, explanation, and criticism. However, he argues that the mourner has the responsibility of carefully attending to the thought of and reasoning dialectically *with* the dead (2014, p. 112). Tumolo selects two obituaries of Derrida in particular that offer zero or scant “quotation, citation, or specific paraphrase to introduce readers to the extended scholarly debate around these claims. (2014, p. 116). Instead, as:

“Roger Kimball asserts in the *WSJ* that Derrida’s complicated writing style is actually a strategy of deception, leading adherents to wrongly consider deconstruction as a theoretical innovation. He writes, “deconstruction comes with a lifetime guarantee to render discussion of any subject completely unintelligible. It does this by linguistic subterfuge” (D6). *The Economist* offers the most blatant example of a willful refusal to engage the philosopher’s work in advancing the claim that Derrida’s writing style purposefully obscures the work’s lack of substance. It leverages its attack on Derrida’s writing by citing a public letter opposing Cambridge University awarding Derrida an honorary doctorate in 1992, dismissing the faculty’s majority support of the award and averring the critics’ portrayal of Derrida’s work as “absurd, vapid and pernicious” (Tumolo, et al, 2014, p. 116).

All of which reinforces unfortunately common assertions that in that attacking ground, Derrida seeks to throw us into a destructive anarchy without purpose, for his own personal amusement. In pointing towards a shifting ground, His critics fear that his philosophical perspective would allow for any abuse to be justified and responsibility to be evacuated from the realm of human affairs. Derrida’s own work on mourning comes to the opposite conclusion, namely that the notion of responsibility demands



accountability to all others when we think, act, and judge in the world” (2014, p. 118).

Mourning, then, constitutes more than a special mode in one’s life, but should influence it in all segments.

Regardless of ethical import, the style Derrida often writes in is “taxing” (2014, p. 121). Although this highlights and performs the issues with language Derrida has focused in on, it provides the casual reader with a deficit in attempting to understand him. It often seems that Derrida himself seeks to be misunderstood rather than establish a connection with readers. The idea that writing, once delivered to an audience, is no longer something the author can own is easier to theorize than to perform, and the manner in which Derrida performs these readings becomes a labor unto itself. While Derrida obviously developed ideological opposed enemies, he also left open the future reception of his work, leaving no real project to continue in the vein of a Marxist or Frankfurt school critic; there is no Derridean bible unto which to seek the Word of the master. Simon Critchley, an avid Derridean scholar, argues that the problem then is that Derrida’s method “cannot be reduced to a methodology (or competing methodologies) in the human or natural sciences or a technical procedure assimilated by academics and capable of being taught in educational institutions” (Critchley, 2014, p. 22). Often those who follow Derrida attempt to write exactly in that dispiriting style, oftentimes without the unique ability to translate pun and emphasis across language(s).

Taking a page from *Specters of Marx*, I would like to suggest that there are many Derrida’s<sup>10</sup>, multiple interpretative modes that can be culled into being through a deeper

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10 The reading that I eventually settle upon, or find most interesting, is the Derrida of *The gift of death* and his overtures to Kierkegaard and Levinas; there are versions that align with *Glas* and the debt he pays

analysis of his method. This is not to simply pass over the critiques of Derrida, of which there are many<sup>11</sup>, but to focus on the building of a specific Derrida for this project, which can then be critiqued and interpreted further. In laying out in the next section the rough analysis of the ‘method’ I will be using for this project, I would like to follow in Critchley’s footsteps by hoping to “assemble a more ‘constructivist’ account of deconstruction, by asking *how* deconstruction takes place” (2014, p. 22). In this, I would like to move away from deconstruction itself and emulate the ways of thinking that Derrida sets out, focusing on a Derrideanism that eventually must break with a circumscribed line of thinking and become irresponsible in order to faithfully adhere to such ideas. Critchley stresses that competency in reading is a key second factor, that a reader must understand the *minimal consensus*” which represents the “Deconstructive duty of scholarship” (2014, p. 24). A Derridean reading must first faithfully (if parasitically) reconstruct the text first.

The third move is based upon this faithful reconstruction, where the reader shows how this traditional reading misses or obscures something—such as Derrida’s reading of Plato and the *pharmakon*<sup>12</sup> or Rousseau’s supplement. What Derrida seeks to accomplish, the end goal (even though Derrida’s real goal is to keep such conversations open ended) is to think the un-thought of a tradition, of what cannot be thought, to push the rational *logos* to its limit; for Critchley, this is, “neither sophistical rhetoric nor negative theology. It is rather to point towards that which philosophy is unable to say”

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to Lacan (Ulmer & Leavey, 1986), or his feminist bent as exemplified in the work of his former student, Helen Cixous, or his Hegelian interpreters, such as Catherine Malabou.

<sup>11</sup> Rapaport (2013) breaks Derrida’s work into a ‘late’ period, referencing the twenty books he published from 1990 to his death, and the tangible shift in themes, including a contested ‘theological turn’ as seen in Caputo as well as entanglements with Benjamin and other thinkers.

<sup>12</sup> In “Plato’s Pharmacy” Derrida demonstrates how the notion of the *pharmakon* is both a cure and a poison, and cannot be reduced to either singular meaning but must occupy both.

(2014, p. 29). This *unsaying* represents the limit of what a text can say, opening it future interpretations.

### **‘Exorbitant method’**

The method of deconstruction, then, is to trace the inheritances, the double binds that lay in a text and expose them for a reader. As much as Derrida’s paper at the structuralism conference in Baltimore seemed to doom structuralism, deconstruction always adheres to a certain kind of structure, what his biographer Peeters cites in a letter to a Japanese friend as a “...focus on the structure or traditional architecture of Western metaphysics” (Peeters, 2013, p. 160). Deconstruction does not unravel texts, leaving them naked and abused, but, stakes out the limits of a text, and within “this limit, this finitude, empowers and makes one write; in a way it obliges deconstruction to write, to trace its path by linking its “act,” always an act of memory, to the promised future of a text to be signed” (Derrida, 1989a, p. 215). What we can draw from Derrida’s injunction is that deconstruction stakes out new territory—it develops, *oblige*s us to write something new that will then engender another interpretation, another iteration. Deconstruction gives us a responsibility for a writing-to-come, a writing that sketches out the paradoxes and responsibilities of a certain idea.

Given this, Derrida sees philosophy as “unthinkable outside the textual medium,” and always tied to writing and the deferential trace that it produces (Chang, 1996, p. 202). Simon Critchley, in his excellent *The ethics of deconstruction*, sees Derrida’s (non-mimicable) method as consisting in four steps—the first being the textual nature of deconstruction, which implies reading. For Critchley this always a parasitic<sup>13</sup> reading,

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<sup>13</sup> Chang refers to deconstruction acting a similar way, but also adds that it is strategic, nomadic, partisan, and seductive as well (Chang, 1996, p. 137).

which consists in searching for the ellipses, holes, and blindspots that a text presents. One must then know the dominant interpretation and work within it. The third move is based upon this faithful reconstruction, where the reader shows how this traditional reading misses or obscures something—such as Derrida’s reading of Plato and the *pharmakon*<sup>14</sup> or Rousseau’s supplement. What Derrida seeks to accomplish, the end goal (even though Derrida’s real goal is to keep such conversations open ended) is to think the un-thought of a tradition, of what cannot be thought, to push the rational *logos* to its limit; for Critchley, this is, “neither sophisticated rhetoric nor negative theology. It is rather to point towards that which philosophy is unable to say” (Critchley, 2014, p. 29). This *unsaying* represents the limit of what a text can say, opening it future interpretations.

In the realm of communication studies, Briankle Chang’s *Deconstructing Communication* is the exemplar in Derridean scholarship, and points out various intricacies in his theory. Chang sees Derrida reading texts, but also inhabiting them, functioning not unlike a judo master who exploits the strength of the opponent, a deconstructionist turns the aporetic forces in philosophical texts against themselves, thus flooring their authors by deception, chicanery, and if necessary, dirty tricks” (Chang, 1996, p. 137). It is this parasitic reading where Chang acknowledges how deconstruction can appear nihilistic, even though he deems it affirmative: It begins by recognizing , in the diplomatic sense, the otherness of the text, and it ends by affirming the necessity of communication for strategic intervention that avoids, in an equally diplomatic manner, the danger of reaffirming the old structure of the names it disrupts” (Chang, 1996, p. 147).

. It is a nihilism that repeats Joyce’s double yes to the supposed object it seeks to attack.

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<sup>14</sup> In “Plato’s Pharmacy” Derrida demonstrates how the notion of the *pharmakon* is both a cure and a poison, and cannot be reduced to either singular meaning but must occupy both.

Which is not to say that Derrida's method is without strategy or goal. Derrida does not simply pull a book, author, or idea from random and pay very close attention to it—a Derridean method works within a strict philosophical register, and pays attention to the ideas and philosophemes that come before it. As he claims in *Eyes of the university*;

“you have heard too much talk of strategies. “Strategy” is a word that I have perhaps abused in the past, especially as it was always to specify *in the end*, in an apparently self-contradictory manner and at a risk of cutting the ground from under my own feet—something I almost never fail to do—strategy without any goal. The strategy without any goal—for this is what I hold to and what in turn holds me—the aleatory strategy of someone who admits that he does not know where he is going. This, then, is not at all an undertaking of war or a discourse of belligerence. I would like it also to be like a headlong flight straight toward the end, a joyous self-contradiction, a disarmed desire, that is to say, something very old and very cunning, but also has just been born and that delights in being without defense” (Derrida, 2004, p. 128).

Derrida does not attempt smuggle in some grand project or end up in the same place twice; each intervention or interruption provides a new ground from where he may be deconstructed himself anew again. This invites the Other to dialogue and debate in the oldest philosophical tradition.

Such a method stems from a engagement with tradition and “with initial circumspect ‘hesitation’ in front of his objects, thus betraying a profound respect for the text and a willingness on the part of the deconstructionist to examine the text in all its particularities before conducting textual surgery” (Chang, 1996, p. xii). As much as Critchley and Chang will reaffirm the indebtedness, the parasitic nature Derrida's method employs, we must also submit to deconstruction's critics (and its protectors) that it *does* something. Chang sees this as a ‘castration’ of the replicated text, which:

“Unlike mimesis, castration does not leave the text alone; it lacerates or deforms it. Castration refers to deconstruction’s violent act of transgressive reading; it embodies deconstruction’s unique strategy of counterreading, a way of dealing with the parent text that goes deliberately against what might be called our “logocentric habit.” Castration destroys the identity of the text-body by slicing the text apart and reassembling it in unexpected ways, creating a surprise or crisis where it is least expected by the writer and reader alike... the deconstructive counterreading seeks to show why and in what respect there always exists a discrepancy or asymmetry between a text’s explicit “statement” and its implicit “gesture” (Chang, 1996, p. xiii).

Deconstruction is for Chang a double science, one that first “*overturns* and then *reinscripts*” (Chang, 1996, p. 142). Deconstruction does not give simple audits that reassure, nor does it engage in scorched Earth campaigns. It is not a simple tossing off of hierarchy, since that inversion still leaves it in play, but a constant, continuous overturning to be performed with each reading. Writing presents a couplet of such an overturning, a monstrous couple Derrida refers to as ‘undecidable’.

For Derrida, anything that is ethical has to pass through the paradox, the *aporia* of the undecidable, which, unlike dialectic and the *Aufhebung*, both urge choice as well as prevent the choice from being made to the other. *Aporias*, then, are philosophical impasses that the reader must somehow circumvent while considering both possibilities simultaneously. They are labyrinths of reason from which we easily can toss up our arms in defeat, seeing no thread to guide us through. The classic *aporia* Derrida proposes in ‘Plato’s pharmacy’ is the issue of writing and speech, and the *pharmakon*. Plato sees writing as inferior to speech, being second, non-present, and sapping the immediacy of speech. It is a dangerous technology, one which destroys our ability of memory. He also describes writing as *pharmakon*, which under this rubric can be interpreted as ‘poison’.

In other respects, Derrida traces this term to also mean ‘cure’. He implores us to think both at the same time, as Plato distresses over writing *in writing*, being the first philosopher to encapsulate their work in writing. Thinking writing then as coming possible before speech, or a mode of communication that privileges this supplement to speech, creates new readings and interpretations to Plato; it keeps Platonic thought alive in the mind of the reader, forcing them to carefully re-read him.

Derrida’s style of reading forbids us from total understanding, forcing us into uncomfortable positions of ‘both and’ or ‘but, if’. Such terms resemble “syncategoremata”—lexemes such as *and, or if, some, only, but, in between*, which cannot be used by themselves but only in conjunction with other terms—these undecidables order the play of meaning” (Chang, 1996, p.145). The bringing of the marginal character of words, the decision on meaning produces a productivity in the text. Such a notion of undecidability drastically removes hermeneutics from the board, as hermeneutics attempts to ground itself, meaning disseminates; or, better yet, as writing and the signs it provides are ‘dead’ used by the living, they contaminate, infect, and spread continuously. We decide upon meanings, but there is always the futural opening of something else to-come. Writing then becomes for Derrida prior to speech and more important, the possibility of communication but also its impossibility; it becomes undecidable.

This is not to claim that we cannot trace meaning of writing, rather that we are obliged to do so. Chang cites Derrida’s reading of the Declaration of Independence, which functions as a necessary *aporia* and demonstrates the problem of deferral for

writing. The signatories of the Declaration signed as representatives of the United States, a nation that is only incepted into being upon their signature. It is the signature that births America. So, how could they possibly sign for a country that had not been created yet? Was it created before? Simultaneously? Derrida persists that we should view the Declaration, and this problem as undecidable, oscillating between these two poles. Later, in Chapter six on Organizational Communication, I will lay out a more detailed synopsis of the undecidable and its relation Kierkegaard in *The gift of death*. It is little wonder why so many have problems in fulfilling these truly impossible goals, as Critchley alludes the ‘deconstructor’ to a tight rope walker, one who is at constant peril to fall back within the thing he attempts to traverse.

However, it is again the obligation put upon us by deconstruction to write, to create new interpretations, to welcome new foreigners to the table of interpretation that motivates such a dangerous task. As Critchley staunchly advocates: “my governing claim is that these insights, interruptions, or alterities are moments of *ethical transcendence*, in which a necessity other than ontology announces itself within the reading, an event in which the ethical Saying of a text overrides its ontological Said” (Critchley, 2014:30). Critchley sees a break in late Derridean thinking that moves from Heidegger more towards Proust, less concerned with the “ineffability of the word and more with the proliferation of beauty and the rearrangement of his memories” (Critchley 2003, p. 30). Starting with works such as *Glas* and *The post card* function not as “evidence of a retreat towards the private, they are performative problematizations of the public/private distinction” (2003, p. 79). For Critchley, the actual work, what deconstruction does, is a continual questioning that incrementally pushes discourse



towards more positive and ethical outcomes. However, deconstruction often lacks a political program in order to physically accomplish anything. The problem then is that Derrida's method "cannot be reduced to a methodology (or competing methodologies) in the human or natural sciences or a technical procedure assimilable by academics and capable of being taught in educational institutions" (Critchley, 2014, p. 22). The tools we can take, and use, are close readings that understand fully the traditional development and reception of a theory, but which welcome stranger and unthought ideas, placing them in tension with the original interpretation. This is done not as a provocateur, but to prevent what Derrida calls the worst, the installation of an *arche* which mediates and frames all decision, almost automatically.

Today's tagline of 'doing well by doing good' is literally diagnosed as a win-win, framed in a logic of inexorable success. Such choices, such as Fair Trade coffee, or open office plans, or the financial justification that such programs work *and* make money seem transparent, non-disputable claims. However, a close reading reveals the syncategoremata staring us in the face, the *and* tucked away in the invaginated pocket between our wallet and our ethics, to focus on them simultaneously rather than in discrete, separate containers. This project disputes transparent communications *as* that, as communication, and seeks to sue Derrida to closely read through CSR discourse. How to inculcate a non-method as method? I turn here to Critchley, whose constructivist approach sees this later Derrida, the Derrida spurned on by 'Questions of Responsibility' and his thinking

"...dominated by the overwhelmingly *public* issue of *responsibility*, whether ethical, political, sexual, textual, legal, or institutional. In order to contest these issues, I would suggest—contentiously—that Derrida's style has become neither theoretical nor performative, but *quasi-*

*phenomenological*. By this I mean that much of Derrida's recent work—his analyses of mourning, of the promise of the secret, of eating and sacrifice, of friendship and confession, of the gift and testimony—is concerned with the careful description and analysis of particular phenomena, in order to elucidate their deeply *aporetic* or undecidable structures. My contention here is that Derrida's work is moving towards a practice of deconstruction as a series of quasi-phenomenological micrologies that are concerned with the particular *qua* particular, that is to say, with the grain and enigmatic detail of everyday life" (Critchley, 2003, p. 32).

This project intends to use these *micrologies*, Derrida's quasi-phenomenology and his dispersion of *differance* into concepts such as the secret, eating, sacrifice, the undecidable, and hospitality to explore CSR as a transparent, automatic process which erases communication.

The next chapter investigates more specifically Derrida's contributions to communication, particularly the relation between his communicative theory and responsibility, as well as positioning him as a scholar of communication ethics in his indebtedness to Emmanuel Levinas. Finally I introduce one of the micrologies Critchley lists above, eating, as a key to thinking through some of Derrida's thought, though in no way am I positing it as a meta-language or hieroglyphic deciphering of his *oeuvre*, something that would summon the worst, the *arche* or master narrative.

## Chapter Two:

### Communication and Derrida: Carnophallogocentrism

“The slogan of Hell: Eat or be eaten. The slogan of Heaven: Eat and be eaten.”  
--W.H. Auden

Part of the problem in discussing *any* theorist or philosopher in regards to communication is the use of the very tools of description also becomes the object of analysis—transposing Derrida into this schema, whose repertoire often involves (or is framed as being involved with) nihilism, the dissolution of meaning, interruption, and *miscommunication*, exponentially raises potential pitfalls that may occur. Deconstruction is assumed to be puny word games without any ground or end, which this chapter hopes to present as caricature. The beauty in using Derrida is that the pitfalls are *his* object of interest, what he pays careful attention to and attempts to highlight, not to destroy or remove any chance at communication, but to show the limits of communication and to move away from it as a master trope, a totalized and impotent system. This is often presented in a highly circular and frustrating way, however, as when Derrida declared victory over his meeting with Gadamer, insisting that the two philosophers inability to find common ground only fortified his position that communication can only exist with chance for miscommunication (Derrida, 2005). Such a result of philosophical debate results not in winning or dominant theory, but in more ambiguous fashion: draws, postponements, split decisions.

Perhaps such offbeat outcomes are what Derrida aims for in his work, as Charles Barbour in *Derrida's secret* proclaims he performs “a knights move,” circumventing

traditional structures, leaping here and there, persisting as an annoyance, a pest; this is what leads Walter Ong, in entering the speech versus writing debate to define Derrida as a ‘gadfly’ and to critique his slow movement (Ong, 2013). The methodology Derrida employs is old, yet it still raises consistent critics, not only from the style of his writing as has been mentioned, but also what Chang very early on in his *Deconstructing Communication* declares the “problem of asking questions about communication *using* communication (Chang, 1996, p. ix). Chang’s work is a masterful suspension bridge that links philosophy, particularly phenomenology in the vein of Husserl and Heidegger to communication studies and what he characterizes an overwhelmingly positivistic attitude that has helped keep Derrida, a thinker of writing separate from speech, and therefore communication. Is this not a case worthy of Derrideans, to finally break such a binary distinction?

Which is why the disavowal of Derridean concepts from communication studies, except for a few critical approaches (Biesecker, 1989 ) is a missed opportunity to generate new ideas and concepts, for exploring another side of communication theory. Deconstruction will never be as fundamental or important as Habermasian theory or media ecology, but this does not mean it is not important. Rather, the lack of a plethora of Derrideans or a grand unified theory of Derrida provides room for thinking and fertile ground for research. Part of this comes from the frantic, nomadic movement he has shown in his work, which, as John Caputo (a Derridean himself), recalls, is purposeful move: each time Derrida writes to a subject, he treats it as if he has never written anything before, that there is no fundamental project or political goal, merely engagements with objects of concern (Caputo, 1997, p. 46). Major theorists of Derrida in

communication studies include the fantastic work of Francois Cooren (who will be investigated more thoroughly in chapter six on organizational transparency), who derives his theories of organizational communication and ventriloquism from a meeting with Derrida; Barb Biesecker, who uses a critical rhetoric approach to investigate *difference* as a rhetorical invention as well as the ideal of the university under neoliberal structures (1989; qtd. in Derrida, 2004); Drucilla Cornell, a law professor who introduces deconstruction to law and hermeneutics in a search for justice (1992); and Briankle Chang, who uses Derrida's idea of the postal system to ground a theory of communication based on Derridean concepts (1996). The open-ended system of deconstruction allows conversations to start, but does not dictate where they go or end.

There is nothing that precludes Derrida from being absorbed into communication theory, although many of his concepts<sup>15</sup> have been relegated to other fields than communication, particularly literary studies. Chang's definition of communication includes a statement of *noncommunication*, a circle that Derridean theory privileges perhaps over the effective meeting or understanding, declaring that "to be excommunicated is to be purged from the community, to be barred from partaking in the Holy Sacrament" (Chang 1996, p. x-xi). Chang takes communication to be a:

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15 An interesting "game" (if you can call it that) in the research of this project was combing through bibliographies of Derridean scholarship on communication to see what texts are actually cited from Derrida. Those assessing him as a 'deconstructionist', a rogue postmodernist ripping at the fabric of civil society (as Allan Bloom has) often cite his seminal works from '67 and *appear* negative, though an empirical quantitative study would be highly useful in this instance. Those that cite from across his *oeuvre* appeared more positively, but again this is a highly suspect bias to have and requires more investigation outside the scope of this project, lending a confirmation bias to Caputo's scolding of Amy Gutman for not citing Derrida and the thinker himself's oft criticized retort that his detractors do not read him.

“...common sharing of material or symbolic wealth, on social intercourse, mutual exchange, or the imparting of feelings and thoughts to one another. In each instance, the correspondence between a sender and a receiver of messages stands unwaveringly at the center of the concept. And the built-in goal, the telos, of communicative events is always—at least for those who are involved—to arrive at a better understanding or greater feeling of certainty and security toward one another, in short, the achievement of *commonwealth* that reflects the triumph of sociality over individuality, of collective identity over individual difference” (Chang, 1996, p, xi).

Chang complicates this notion by referring to Derrida’s work *The post card*, where Derrida articulates a theory of communication based on the postal system, where messages can only be sent if there is an underlying system guaranteeing the success of such messages; or, as Chang breaks down, “...there is always a message before the message, a prior sending before the sending itself, which, despite the absence of the addressee, proposes itself as capable of being understood” (Chang, 1996, p. xii). For Chang, this sets up a temporal dislocation wherein communication open itself through this “disjointing proposal,” to the possibility of *noncommunication* being the basis for communication, creating an *aporia* or paradox at the very center of communication (Chang, 1996, p. xii). The possibility of communication is permitted by the chance that communication does not occur—making it a risk at some level each and every time.

Chang then is opposed to most theories of communication in his obliteration of the typical sender-receiver/Shannon-Weaver model of transmission. In moving away from the highly romanticized version of a teleological process, a foreclosing dialectic, eventually leading them to their unquestioned valorization of identity over difference, of the selfsame over alterity, of dialogue over polylogue, and most important, of understanding and the determination of meaning over *misunderstanding* and

undecidability,” he moves us toward a more inverted, nomadic, and *destinal* form of communication (Chang, 1996, p. xii). This inevitably sets Chang on a course not dissimilar from Derrida’s in attempting to undo the work of a variety of scholars, which he cautions is not the thrust of his project: Chang does not attempt to “denounce the vague charm of commonality, of dialogism, of the “fusion of horizons,” of the “ideal speech situation,” and the like; nor is it to descry errors in specific research programs in communication studies, whether empirical, interpretative, or otherwise” but rather question the *aporia* of “transcendental economy” that such thinkers take for granted (Chang, 1996, p. xvii). Like Caputo’s contention that Derrida is not the ‘sworn enemy’ of Enlightenment thinking because of his critique, neither is Chang attempting to befuddle communication studies—rather like Derrida following the best ideals of the Enlightenment, in seeking a new Enlightenment that dares to think, Chang opens the space of communication studies to new ideas and directions.

Chang questions our current communication theory system, where one theory only substitutes itself for another, in a process of relating, extending, translating and digesting other theories; Chang asks, How much do we learn from reading communication theories if what they offer amounts to nothing more than a mere communication between one set of concepts and their surrogates?” where misunderstood or easily fettered away concepts only reinforce metaphysical properties, which are then combined and repackaged in new forms—metaphysics becoming a metaphorics (Chang, 1996, p. 55). For Chang, this becomes a

“...prison house for communication theorists, a conceptual panopticon that interns ventriloquist theorists and performs ventriloquist show upon a highly guarded stage. Similarly put, it allows for the generation of communication theories as explanatory accounts for an existential enigma, but it does so only by tacitly prescribing the question in advance, a question whose answers only perpetuate the working of the problematic and leave the preunderstanding of its key concepts unchallenged” (Chang, 1996, p. 66).

What this means for Chang is that typical communication theory involves a pre-rendering of concepts, not only in the guise of the sender-receiver which destroys the context of the communicative exchange, but also in the presupposition of a lifeworld or background that grounds these exchanges. Communication theory then poses ground or lifeworld as givens, without acknowledgment of these givens in order to appear more scientific. Chang then is attempting to move away not from social science and quantitative study and only favor close reading for communication, but to dismantle notions of positivism that abound in such studies that do not consider the floating status of signifiers such as sender, receiver, and message.

Often posed in counter to these positivistic subfields is phenomenology, which for Chang offers no new doors to step through, actually helping to undergird the “very foundation of modern theories of communication, a pre-theoretical platform shared by both the positivist-empiricist and the interpretative-critical approaches in media and communication studies” (Chang, 1996, p. xvi). Phenomenology is the unacknowledged guarantor of this ground that allows subjectivity in the form of a sender to motivate such theory. “It is this necessity to “ground intersubjectivity fundamentally” that pushes phenomenology beyond its descriptive assignment and transforms it into a social



ontology,” which represents the invention of dogmatism and completion of a system that Derridean thought seeks to escape (Chang, 1996, p. 82). This pushes Chang to conclude that communication theory, in concert with phenomenology, enacts a “desire to reach a *ground*, phenomenology begins as an archaeology of consciousness but ends as a universal science of the *sovereignty of the subject*” (Chang, 1996, p. 29). Chang’s attack on phenomenology functions as a misguided attack on Enlightenment philosophy, as phenomenology *begins* with Husserl’s attack upon positivistic science and modernity installing the subject as absolute sovereign. Chang’s conflation of phenomenology, where Derrida begins his work and writing, and the Enlightenment, which he always been somewhat hostile to, conjures the groundless approach Derrida is often critiqued for.

Derridean philosophy is phenomenological philosophy, operating at the (supposed) end of phenomenology and working back through important texts and ideas. One of the ways we could constitute ground for Derrida then is through tradition, or inheritance. In Derridean terms, this would be represented through the trace, or writing. Chang refines Derrida’s thinking by claiming that “the ‘single system,’ in this case communication theory, performs a “...search for ground represses its own frustration by instituting a hierarchy of philosophemes is centered on the notion of presence” again returning to Derrida’s crusade against metaphysics in erasing difference (Chang, 1996, p. 134). For communication, this binary is posed as togetherness, community, etc. and a whole host of terms referencing intersubjectivity, the neglect and abandonment of solitude. Grounding communication theory implies a stopping point, a definitive and nonmoving *topos*, a “would be authority” from which articulations of the human as

isolated are denounced in order to privilege another set of terms that gain prominence (Chang, 1996, p. 153). Here, communication *must* happen, is *always* occurring, and removes questions of non-communication or miscommunication from sight. This makes communication theory similar to philosophy, in its attempts to pinpoint solid ground to speak from and find determination and closure.

For Chang, one of the few unabashedly Derridean communication scholars, this only makes clear the logic of the supplement of isolation for communication theory/philosophy. For communicative ideas to flourish, they are juxtaposed next to isolation, which is then driven from theory as a master trope. Again, and due to the amount of negative interpretations of Derrida, this elicits unnecessary repetition, this does not preclude that Chang thinks communication cannot happen, or that normative theories are wrong and misdiagnose whole swaths of social experience. Rather, Chang (following Derrida) wants us to think through such concepts, see the binary system at their heart, and see how the process of grounding is never fully complete, although in many times can present an accurate snapshot of phenomenon. Chang borrows a geological metaphor to refer to ground as a “float sheet” atop molten lava, and, as a float sheet, it shifts without warning, like a mirage appearing and disappearing in reaction to the endless dislocation of ground searching” (Chang, 1996, p. 153). Yes, there is objective reality we can point to, but like a child chasing fireflies with a net, we are all too often a moment behind the thing, and if we do catch up to it, the imprisonment in glass bottles often kills it more than revealing it.

This is the catastrophic mistake Chang assigns to Heidegger in his chasing of Being down to its origin, and “where the hermeuntico-phenomenological excavation

reaches rock bottom” (Chang, 1996, pgs. 165-6). Whereas Heidegger searches for an originary call echoing out from Being, Derrida refuses to locate any such point. All points, whether they be language or even myth, as in the garden of Eden, are contaminated, and therefore there exists no purity, only contaminated systems influenced by one another, fed through feedback loops that produce distortion upon distortion. Chang, following Derrida’s logic, disputes the ability for phenomenology to analyze the thing itself due to this widespread contamination, and the need for context. Following Natali (1986) in his critique of communication theory supporting existing structures of capitalist accumulation and control, Chang writes that this binary logic of the supplement favors:

“a certain *hermeneutic ideology*, an implicit value judgment anchored in the primacy of understanding that, by exercising its prescriptive authority, valorizes certain objects or relations (such as the conscious intention, consensus) to the suppression of others (such as the unconscious, desire, conflict, uncertainty, dispute, ambiguity)... Communication theory willy-nilly promotes social cooperation at the expense of social difference and conflicting interests” (Chang, 1996, p. 175)

Chang’s contention is that a Derridean theory of communication *does* introduce ambiguity, dispute, uncertainty, but at the cost of “...undermin(ing) the possibility of any phenomenologically based theory of communication by tangling up the orderly relation presumed to exist between sending, receiving, and the context in which they take place” (Chang, 1996, p. 172). Derrida’s theory of the dissemination of a text is not the common nihilistic anything-goes free-for-all, but rather that meaning itself acts as a limitation or spacing from all other meaning(s), that “Meaning, we are advised, is not retrieved from apparent unmeaning, but, rather, consists in the repression of unmeaning” (1996, p. 205).

Here Chang is drawing on the citation of Saussurean productive difference between words, where blue means blue because it is not red nor black nor purple. Systems disseminate, contaminate, and then are processed again and again.

It is this focus on *écriture*, or Derrida's ideal of writing that ultimately grounds the unground-able realm of communication for Chang. Because I can write a text and deliver it to someone, they may in turn read it and have a host of bizarre and unforeseen reactions to it. This ability to *mis*-read, to lose control over the text and deliver it to another strives to preserve a sense of otherness between partners in a dialogue. Because I can deliver a text that is no longer mine, and that you the reader can take that text and produce a myriad number of readings and interpretations from it, preserves your authority as an Other and not the same as me; to read a statement and be forced towards a dogmatic and ultimate meaning is not communication but domination. For Chang, following Derrida, it is writing and the system of writing for producing and maintaining signs across multiple systems that can be repeated or iterated<sup>16</sup>. Speech institutes "a phonic similarity or acoustic resemblance" which is to be copied, while writing introduces this notion of mutagen or contagion, of misreading that allows difference and identity to flourish (1996, pgs. 195-6). Derrida, then, or a Derridean theory of communication does not destroy meaning, or understanding, but rather seeks to avoid totalizing systems of meaning and recognize the opening to difference and the future that writing paradoxically opens.

For Chang, this is exemplified most in Derrida's oeuvre in *The Post Card*. Derrida's probing in that work represents the individual, private person using a public

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<sup>16</sup> Derrida, in several places across his career remarked on the etymological root of *Iter* in Sanskrit, which meant both "writing" as well as "Other"

system to communicate, and adhering to all the tropes and conventions of that form while also destroying them and creating something new. Dismantling the sender-receiver notion of communication does not lead to a Babel like chaos, but rather opens us to an ideal

“As the picture on the cover of *The Post Card* illustrates, there is always someone speaking behind one’s back; there is always more than one voice speaking at the same time, so that one can no longer be sure what the message is or who is speaking to whom. Signs grow, rhizomelike, ultrafast, like cancer threatening the life of the body in which it grows. Such a cancerous proliferation of signs, traces, traces, delayed associations, and supplementary meanings would eventually destroy any sign’s claim to any fixed meaning, because a sign can never be meaning-*full*. This nonfulfillment is, of course, the outcome of an unchecked and uncheckable dissemination, a nonfulfillment created by excess and surplus” (1996, p. 208)

The ‘ground’ that deconstruction touches, if only for a moment, is one that returns again and again to the notion of otherness, of responsibility for the Other. Chang masterfully illustrates the pitfalls and traps in obliterating the other through communication, of asserting communication as natural and destined, and having a particular form that draws lines and borders around what is good and just. Chang’s theory of Derridean communication still interrogates communication theory and critiques ideas such as the ideal speech situation, the public sphere, and lifeworlds, What makes Derrida such an engrossing and interesting read is not only his focus on the communicative, which as engaging as it is could fall victim to some of his detractors laments, but also this coupling with responsibility. Responsibility is implied in Chang’s work, but drawing out this notion positions Derrida not only as productive addition to communication theory, but also to communication ethics. As Caputo notes, “if Derrida is a renegade, a word he

would not utterly renounce, he is a highly responsible one,” one constantly concerned with the ethical and justice (Caputo, 1997, p. 50). This ethical bent is best represented through his work on responsibility, which ties to this communicative theory, which, as Amit Pinchevski notes, the call to responsibility is the bedrock of ethics and fundamental to our relation to the Other (2014). Derrida, while critiquing phenomenology and ethics, still participates within these systems and writes to them.

Posing Derrida or Derridean thinking as ethical is not a new phenomenon, but one that is often lost in the debate over his methodology and style. As Critchley starts his work on Derrida and Levinas, he offers that deconstruction “...*should* be understood as an ethical demand,” and entails a deep commitment on behalf of the Other (Critchley, 2014:1). While Chang follows Derrida through the inheritances of phenomenology, notably Husserl, Gadamer, and Heidegger, Critchley works through Levinas, arguing that Derrida is

“...highly sensitive to the ethical modalities of response and responsibility in reading. Yet the way in which the question of ethics will be raised within deconstructive reading will be through a *rapprochement* with the work of Emmanuel Levinas. I believe that one of the major reasons why Derrida’s work has not been read as ethical demand by his major commentators is because of an avoidance or ignorance of the novel conception ethics at work in Levinas’s thinking” (Critchley, 2014, p. 2).

The Derrida that Critchley paints is one that follows most of Levinas’s teachings but comes at them from a very different angle and background. Derrida has a profound respect for his friend Emmanuel Levinas, not only from the work of mourning he compiled upon his death in *Adieu*, but also to his popularization of many of Levinas’s works, and pulling out a memorial for Beaufret due to slander of Levinas and standing

with Heidegger (Arnett, 2017, p. 65). Derrida certainly clashes with Levinas, but also holds a very dear friendship with him, as John Caputo notes in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, where Levinas calls Derrida, to which Derrida is described as beaming with affection afterwards and insisting that he has no objections with any of his thought (Caputo, 1997, p. 127). Levinas referred to his pupil as both a “half-drunk barber” (Critchley, 2014, p. 155) as well as an ‘abstract painter’<sup>17</sup> (Arnett, 2017, p. 65). Although Derrida borrows a great deal from Levinasian philosophy, he departs sharply in some critical ways, including a foreclosure of stable ground, to which Levinas remarked “that the constant act of deconstruction misses the power and insight of the Saying and the Said, living somewhere in between in an unknown abyss.

Such activity opens to “pathless places,” something Derrida would construe as an openness to the future (Arnett, 2017, p. 99). Rather than condemning Derrida to an abyss, falling between the fissures of language, it is perhaps better to portray him as Richard Klein does in marking the totality of Western philosophy as either of the city or of the country-side, Derrida is oddly stuck in the “suburbs,” which suggests unwillingness to commit to a particular tradition” (qtd. In Arnett, 2017, pgs. 98-99). Derrida draws a great deal from Levinas and took the task of that inheritance seriously, while also challenging it, iterating it into a new form which William Desmond remarks is akin to Levinasian generosity with a Nietzschean suspicion” (qtd. in Dickinson, 2015, p. 10).

Rather than being a black sheep upon the tradition and proper name of Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida’s break with him also represents the essential kernel of his place as a

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<sup>17</sup> In ‘Violence and Metaphysics’, Derrida challenges some of Levinas’s notions while supporting his claims for the Other, noting that writing can also be a place for such an encounter.

philosopher of communication ethics and responsibility. As he relates in *The Gift of Death*, “there is no responsibility without a dissident and inventive rupture with respect to tradition, authority, orthodoxy, rule or doctrine” (Derrida, 1999). It is the paradoxical move of being irresponsible to be responsible, or being unfaithful to be faithful to Levinas that Derrida performs, in order to not subsume him and allow his personal singularity to shine through—otherwise, and going back to Chang’s analysis of the speech/writing divide—Derrida is copying or contaminating Levinas, speaking for him instead of speaking against, with, and of him. As J. Hillis Miller recounts, part of Derrida’s style and distrust of his own status as postmodernist and ‘deconstructionist’ is a refusal from “any family or community because it is only in isolation from such belonging that a responsible, responsive ethical relation to another person can take place” (Miller, 2009, p. 130). It is this inheritance, and the responsibility to do justice to it that animates Derrida and causes him to deconstruct, or, in more accurate terms, point out to auto-deconstruction already at work in texts.

To leave Levinas unchallenged is, under this rubric, not an ethical reading, but a way to forget Levinas. By interacting with his thought and searching out the *aporias* and paradoxes, Derrida repeats him in a new light, creating new discussions and debates. Thus Derrida keeps his memory alive in this fashion. The ability to dissent is not only a democratic Good, but also part of the nature of an ethical engagement for Derrida, stemming from Critchley’s conception of Levinasian ethics *as critique* (Critchley, 2014, p. 2). Pinchevski, who operates as a Derridean-Levinasian (an odd temporal misalignment) conceives of the replication of criticism or thought as a form of programmability, which does *not* entail a responsible attitude. It in turn reproduces



Babel, the universal language which “God destines translation as law, duty, and debt” to which we must pick up and interpret for ourselves (Pinchevski, 2005, p. 128). One interpretation, one totality of Levinas represents the very thing Levinas argued against, so to be responsible to him, one must often break with tradition, create a differing/deferred iteration that still adheres to the tradition and inheritances set out—Derrida does not deconstruct his hairstyle<sup>18</sup>, or new diet fads sweeping the nation—he works from within a philosophical tradition yet moving through and against it.

It is from this Levinasian responsibility that Derrida draws (and yet changes) his theories. Arnett (2017) posits that “human responsibility is ultimately personal in action—guided by education, interpretation, and responsibility in the particularity of action. The hearing and doing of ethics is a difficult freedom,” a definition that already points towards the aporetic notion of responsibility (Arnett, 2017, p. 35). Arnett sees responsibility as a communicative gesture that comes before the Levinasian primordial call, designating responsibility as a matter of communication as well as ethics. Derrida, again like Levinas<sup>19</sup> before him, ends up in a similar territory, but by drastically different means of transport. For Morag Patrick, in his analysis this is the site of ethics for Derrida, that “deconstructive questioning transforms, it transforms through translating, and through reading for example. But such transformations must obey certain protocols, it cannot be carried out arbitrarily” (Patrick, 1997, p. 18). It is this avoidance of master

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<sup>18</sup> This is also not to say that such a deconstruction would be an unethical reading or interpretation of Derrida—his point about the dissemination of texts is that the close reading and style he leaves behind are not his, and therefore open to different uses, from Slavoj Žižek dedicating entire works to pop culture or Clare Birchall looking at conspiracy theories. There also exists the opportunity that his work will be used for what he calls ‘the worst’, used as a violence against the Other.

<sup>19</sup> While for Levinas the human face instigates a primordial echo which beckons us to responsibility, Derrida, especially in his late writing sees a speck of humanism upon such a call, and attempts to widen the field to include the animal and non-human as well.

terms and metanarrative discourse that allows Derrida to include otherness and base communication, which, again, directly impacts his theory of responsibility, on an ethical footing.

Patrick starts his work by answering the question of what does deconstruction *actually* do by pointing out the ineffectiveness and lack of political position taking by Derrida. ‘Undecidability’, that nefarious term seems to remove pragmatic action and entrapped Derrida in a text-bound world, again returning to the initial grammatology mis-translation. Working from his essay ‘Passions, an Oblique Offering’ Morag situates Derrida as arriving at an impasse where:

“a question of the possibility of subjecting responsiveness itself to the order of decision or critique. His subsequent acknowledgment of the impossibility of responding to this question introduces the double bind that threatens to halt the prescribed order of a process... But even as we are caught in its grasp Derrida maintains that we are not arrested in silence. We continue to speak, trying to communicate the perplexity of the situation; we continue to respond but in a language that has ceased to recognize the limits of the response” (Patrick, 1997, p. 59-60).

Derrida’s essay turns on the term ‘responsiveness’ which he cannot translate out of its Anglicized idiom into his native French; the duty of translation ends. In “Passions,” Derrida contends that “thinkers of “....responsibility cannot fail to wonder at some point what it meant by ‘respond,’ and *responsiveness*, a precious word for which I can find no strict equivalent in my language” providing a linkage between *being* responsible and *communicating* responsibility (Derrida, 1992a, p. 15). Can we *not* respond? Is this *not* responsible? It is Derrida’s reaction that if we are addressed, we naturally should respond due to some *sense* of obligation, which destroys the moment for ethical communicative action: “Clearly not; it would be too easy and, precisely, natural,

programmed by nature: it is hardly moral to be moral (responsible, etc.) because one has the sense of the moral, of the highness of the law, etc.” (Derrida, 1992, p. 16). Rather we must look at the double bind that Patrick points to at the root of responsibility.

Having responsibility, or being called on to respond institutes something akin to an invitation—yet, an invitation is already aporetic if we opt to decline—why invite someone you don’t want to come?—therefore, a non-response already seems to transgress some unspoken law of communication residing under the guise of a brash and rude attitude. Part of this signals Derrida’s own structuring, apart from Chang’s interpretation, of the problematic nature of communication, where “the respondent presumes, with as much frivolity as arrogance, that he can respond to the other and before the other because first of all he is able to answer for himself and for all he has been able to do, say, or write,” resting upon the certainty of the individual as a speaking subject and a manner of response that comes from the “I” (Derrida, *passions* 20). However, as Chang related, this “I” is not completely sovereign to itself in its use of various languages and semiotic codes. For Derrida, the originary “I” falls under what Timothy Morton describes as the Heideggerian U-boat, plumbing the depths in search of Being and finding nationhood and identity instead (Morton, 2013); rather, we should look for a derivative “I” that comes from the Other.

It is these underlying codes, technologies, and systems that provide context that Derrida seeks to explore in regards to both responsibility and communication—for what *techne*, code, or system defines our actions and gives context more than language? Another important entry into Derrida’s writings on responsibility is his transcribed talk about the future of Europe in *The Other h\Heading*; in it he challenges the notion of a

colonizing English, a Babel-like language defining the world via the term ‘globalization’. In order to even critique globalization, one must first speak in the language, that being English<sup>20</sup>, which defines the conversation. The same can be said for ‘responsiveness’ in terms of responsibility—responsiveness is an American-ized term, one that presupposes the natural occurrence or debt to responding, even when one does not want to. When Derrida nitpicks or complains about the intricacies of language, it is a showcase of a larger argument about the very language terms are spoken in, or *translated* from—it is a short jump from assuming a subject with a duty to respond to then define the subject itself as one who responds—leading us back to Chang’s decree against a phenomenological speech situation.

For communication ethics, these assumptions represent a dance with the worst, as Arnett, Fritz, and Bell point to in saying “danger lurks wherever a person or group assumes that a particular local view of common sense is universally correct, dismissing too quickly the reality of difference and the bias inherent in one’s view of common sense” (Arnett, Fritz, Bell 2008, p. 64). Arnett in his scholarship on Levinas insists that instead communication ethics is tasked with “a charge of responsibility that is void of ethical formula and any sense of self-righteous assurance,” forcing us to make decisions without assurance of right action (Arnett, 2017, p. 17). The notion of assurance, in all its economic and financial contexts is something Derrida extends from Levinas, seeing it as foreclosing the future. The future is to be kept open for the stranger we do not expect and cannot predict, and any responsibility that excludes this, the impossible thing for what

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<sup>20</sup> This topic will be given considerable more space in chapter seven, where I link Derrida’s trope of language to sustainability discourse and his preference for the term ‘mondialization’ over globalization, as it retains the French term with all its signifying capacities.

Patrick calls "...the order of the possible, it simply follows a direction and elaborates a program. It makes of action the applied consequence, the simple application of a knowledge or know-how. It makes of ethics and politics a technology. No longer of the order of practical reason or decision, it begins to be irresponsible" (Derrida, 1992b, p. 45). Rule following leads us back to Arendt's critique of thoughtlessness in the aftermath of the National Socialist regime, and the place duty was ascribed within it. For Patrick "Acting responsibly, then, first requires rethinking these codes as they structure our interpretations, addressing them once again as questions," interventions into what we perceive as common sense with different interlocutors in no predefined or orchestrated way (Patrick, 1997, p. 127). It is this questioning that starts towards a responsible decision.

But a question for whom, and over what? The form of responsibility that Derrida attends to is Levinasian in its opening to the Other, but also Nietzschean in its refusal of herd accountability; Francois Raffoul in his *Origins of responsibility* sees accountability as necessarily different from this form of responsibility Derrida strives towards, this impossibility of responsibility. For Raffoul, accountability condemns responsibility, as in French responsibility translates to *les responsables* means 'the responsible ones', those in charge, the decision makers, turning this call into "as an act of appropriation, as taking over a domain, or establishing control of one's actions, a model one finds in Aristotle. It thus belongs to a semantics of power and appropriation, as it is about owning one's actions and owning oneself, about establishing an area of mastery and control" (Raffoul, 2010, p. 11). For Derrida, this also broadens the field for responsibility. Making the scope or range "that leads to an exceeding of the very anthropocentric enclosure of the

concept of responsibility, thus disturbing the demarcation between what would be a human and a non-human sphere?” (Raffoul, 2010, p. 14). We are always called, and must answer this call that comes from a groundless place—yet our answer is always late, deferred, and put off. We are also called by more than just humans, as the historical moment and context dictate the specificity of that call. This nonhuman inclusion allows something like the event of the Other to enter into the field and ask us to respond. For Raffoul, responsibility does not cohere with accountability<sup>21</sup> and are two distinct fields.

How then are we to be responsible for Derrida? Is responsibility literally impossible, or is there some program to install that would lead us to achieve this goal? For Levinas, it is the imposition of accepting the pledge of being my brother’s keeper and a meeting with the Face of the Other—what Nietzschean scheme then does Derrida break with such a demand? (Arnett, 2017) We cannot simply have responsiveness and leave such terms unmarked and unquestioned—this would be following the route of the possible, of insisting on a calculable future. Instead, any decision must endure the ‘madness of the decision’ or, “that is to say, with the impossible. A decision must decide without rules to follow, to apply, to conform to, and this is why it is each time (the singularity of each time) a decision as event, an event Derrida calls “impossible” because taking place outside of any possibilizing program” (Raffoul, 2010, p. 37). Any decision, “moral or political” must pass through the trial of the undecidable (Derrida, 1977, p.

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21 Raffoul continues, responsibility “Whatever the origins of such an obsessional need for accountability—its relation to pain, hurt, *ressentiment*, and sadism (in short, its pathological nature) we can already state that undertaking such a genealogy of responsibility other possible significations to emerge, which are not dependent on the logic of power, subjection, accountability, and punishment” (Raffoul, 2010, p. 23). The discrepancy between accountability and responsibility will be covered in more detail in chapter five on social accounting.

116). There are problems associated with such a maneuver, but what Derrida essentially asks of us is not to simply respond, but the question the presuppositions under which we respond: or, as Patrick excavates from *The Politics of Friendship*—“answering for, answering to, and answering before” (Patrick, 1997, p. 111). It is a question of which of these we choose, a question of the right or authority to judge, and the question of the possibility of the question’ (Patrick, 1997, p. 120). Questioning allows us to respond in a way that is a nonresponse, but also response-able. It continues a conversation rather than rendering it finished, inert mute: it iterates it, with all the associations of difference that brings.

If we are questioning, here we must question what Derrida is actually asking of us, not from a philosophical level, but from the level of a person who communicates on a daily basis with other humans. If we are to respond to what is around us, and question why we respond in such ways, and complete something impossible, it seems like a tall order. For Derrida, nothing is easy. Even the concept of responsibility runs into problems, as Raffoul notes that “*responsibility deconstructs itself*. This is also why, no doubt, one is never responsible *enough*: Responsibility actually engenders irresponsibility from within itself” (Raffoul 2010, p. 21). It is important to note that these terms perform an auto-deconstruction which Derrida then comes along and points out—the trap of the originary “I” is sidestepped by the ‘always, already’ dismantling from within language itself. A double bind occurs through the concept’s “essential excessiveness,” in how it “...resists all calls to account, it overflows the concept of duty which can be discharged, and announces itself as contradictory” (Patrick, 1997, p. 105). *Aporia* cannot be reduced to wordplay, as there exists actual thorny issues, such as global warming, poverty, and

debt to which no good actions seem viable. To be responsible for Derrida amounts not only to performing moral actions, in taking on burdens far past what we can actually hold but also but also what one must take for another, in the name of the other or oneself as substitute for the other” (Patrick, 1997, p. 104). Responsibility remains excessive, and disseminates much like meaning does; where Levinas sees the face of the Other as our ethical call, Derrida sees that face, and another, and another, and a paradox emerge in how to be ethical to all—including animals, plants, and the environment.

This excessive overflow of responsibility is constrained only by the shape of the Other, who provides at least a rough outline to the ‘abyss’ of meaning that is characterized by this call. This is Patrick’s mapping in following the trajectory of responsibility, to the hole that is filled with what Arnett calls a “derivative ‘I’ rather than an originary one (Arnett, 2003). Into this void, Patrick recalls that:

“Similarly, if we follow the line of ‘excessive responsibility’ in Derrida’s text, is not the repercussion that beyond and behind the place we ascribe to the subject, to the autonomous moral agent with its rights and duties, there lies a limitless responsibility? An intractable responsibility that constantly recounts its supplementary structure in that it is sometimes, and perhaps always, not what one assumes for oneself, in one’s own name and before the other, but also what one must take for another, in the name of the other or oneself as substitute for the other” (Patrick, 1997, p. 104).

The Other provides at least some footing to start a conversation, but responsibility, again like Derrida’s semiotic, exceeds—in what Chang refers such a dissemination as akin to play-doh, separating but then joining again, continuously malleable—but also functions as a subtle pun where one is reminded of Plato, and thus Derrida’s *pharmakon*, and the



duality of a poison/remedy. In *Rogues* (2005), Derrida refers to grounding and responsibility in terms of navigation, where grounding entails a captain takes responsibility for touching bottom and steers toward safe harbor. In this case, Derrida in this abyss of excessive responsibility steers towards Levinas's communicative call of ethics.

These two strands of Derridean thought—the somewhat unexplored territory of his communicative vision and his emphasis on responsibility can be seen conjoined in terms he focused on towards the end of his life and in his last seminars, specifically those stemming from *The Beast and the Sovereign* and interpretative lenses brought into clearer focus by David Farrell Krell in a focus on cannibalism. Since this is Derrida, he complicates the term from our typical vantage point, but uses it in a novel way that encompasses binaries of communication and isolation, responsibility, and the void of the subject alluded to by Patrick from which responsibility originates. By instituting terms such as ‘carnophallogocentrism’, Derrida is not just obfuscating his philosophy, but attempting to be “responsive to the irreducibility of this emancipatory promise” by producing “events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization” (Patrick 1997, pgs. 134-5). This commissions new interventions around the totalizing systemic drive of philosophy.

### **Cannibalism as Communication Ethic**

Derrida's contribution to surprisingly large amount of scholarship on cannibalism (Avramescu, 2009; Kearney, 2005; hooks, 2009) comes from an interview session with Jean-Luc Nancy, in which he discusses (in comparable terms with hooks) the assimilation or ‘eating’ of culture and identity. Whereas for hooks this remains a cultural

battleground, Derrida transposes it into biological terms, retracing our steps back to basic principle that a subject must eat—we have no choice but to consume in order to remain corporeally sufficient. The question, the ethical question then, is how to eat well—“eating well” becomes the undecidable moment of decision making in which we become burdened with an excessive responsibility to the Other. We *eat* Others<sup>22</sup>, and we must in order to remain alive, so how can we possibly accomplish this while maintaining some commit to responsibility, to ethics?

Derrida sees in this discourse the various problems of appropriation: we *must* eat something that is other, and when we do, physically or symbolically, that other is to be “assimilated, interiorized, understood ideally” (Derrida, 1974, p. 115). This is at the same time opposed with Derrida’s call to responsibility, that in consuming, by devouring, we must maintain some aspect of respect and acknowledgment, more so than a prescribed duty “this obligation to protect the other’s otherness is not merely a theoretical imperative,” it becomes tied up with the body itself through the rhetoric of cannibalism (Derrida, 1974, p. 111). This becomes a major *aporia* for Derrida, as he skirts in the interview around the question of advocating for some form of vegetarianism, he starts to shift Nancy’s frame by refocusing on the symbolic in the form of the sacrifice: “the subject does not want just to master and possess nature actively. In our cultures, he accepts sacrifice and eats flesh” (Derrida, 1974, p. 114). Eating flesh, eating itself, is ritualized and part of not our genetic-biological makeup, but also our symbolic. Eating,

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22 This conundrum represents another break with Levinas; in acknowledging we must eat, and we must eat *flesh*, in most cases, how does this reorient us to the Face of the Other? Cannibalism provides, in many world religions, a strict prohibition against eating humans, but sanctions it for the nonhuman, the animal. Derrida seeks to break this humanistic line and extend this responsibility outwards to this realm

for Derrida, is unavoidable. The sacrifice of meat, of flesh represents not only a biological process but also a symbolic condition bordering on the religious.

Unavoidable but of extreme importance—eating is Derrida’s move from Levinas to Nietzsche, as Sara Guyer confirms in her citation of *Ecce Homo*, where Nietzsche conceives of eating and diet as a larger question than religion. Eating is the mechanism in which we can observe this break between a relationship with the Other, and ethics-- “for Nietzsche, then, eating can never be a task of obligation to another (this evades the Good) but is rather always a dedicatory ingestion of things that are good to eat” (Guyer, 1997, p. 63). Guyer’s genealogy then follows Derrida’s search back through ethics, the notion of the good man as typical of good *property* owner, which supposes property and household, or *oikos*, and from there to women as property of the house, their role (Guyer places this in the kitchen), and then—eating. Eating is an interiorization which erases the singularity of the Other as they become ingested, consumed, and identical to the consumer. Whereas for Nietzsche, especially Derrida’s elaboration of his style in *Spurs* becomes a philosopher of smell, Derrida fashions himself one of eating, or more specifically digestion. As Guyer notes, Derrida did not have time to prepare a text for Nancy’s search, and gives an interview, or *entrevoir*, which roughly translated for Guyer becomes a search between the space of things, and “raises the question of mouth-work at heart of this ethic” (1997, p. 65). As the interview progresses Derrida laments how we “eat-speak-interiorize” being able to consume through communication as actual physical ingesting (Derrida, 1974, p. 114). This rhetoric of cannibalism extends to Derrida’s ideal of mourning, where we do not simply regurgitate that which we have absorbed, but *digest* it, change, challenge it, and change the form.

This eating also involves an economy not just of eating stemming from the *oikos* but of the body. The privileging of speech stemming as natural, akin to breathing, is located as the mouth, and ending in the lungs. Yet Derrida expands such a metaphor to the entire body, forcing us to deal with the entire digestive process that also originates in the mouth and ends not in the lungs with breath, the gift of life, but excrement, the leftover residue of life. Such thought overturns the hierarchical body, as Derrida claims in “Economimesis” as displacing “the mouth in any case no longer merely occupies one place among others. It can no longer be situated in a typology of the body but seeks to organize all the sites and to localize all the organs” (Derrida, 1981, p. 16). A focus on the swallowing/swallowing mouth allows even negative pleasures to be re-appropriated back into an economic system of assimilation and interiorization, while also neglecting to think (or even imagine possible) the inability to swallow consume things—here, something like vomit is exorcised outside of the boundaries of the possible, as the speaking/swallowing organ is “absolutely foreclosed” as it would amount to a undoing of the hierarchy and its power of identification.

Derrida’s critique here moves back to the Cartesian subject who becomes a self-aware speaking being through *speaking*, which for Derrida situates the subject as paradoxical, late for its appointment to awareness. As Chang more simply describes this circular motion, “before the addresser can function as an addresser, it must have already been *addressed*,” we must already have learned and been absorbed into the codes and mannerisms of speaking (Chang, 1996, p. 181). Speech then does not burst forth from our heads fully formed, but is learned through interaction-- “In other words, before we become aware of ourselves as independent beings, namely, prior to self-reflection, we

have already had the basic experience that there are others who are not I, that all humans live in one and the same world, with the result that living means essentially ‘co-living,’ *living together*” (Chang, 1996, p. 80). Under such a structure, it is solitude and privacy that constitute the mode of existence for an ego-centric being. As Critchley notes, seeing Derrida adhering to either extreme sociality or as Rorty critiques him as a ‘private ironist’ is an exercise in “psychological bi-cameralism” (Critchley, 2003, p. 25) which misses the point that Chang alludes to, that “we have already had the basic experience that there are others who are not I, that all humans live in one and the same world, with the result that living means essentially ‘co-living,’ *living together*” (Chang, 1996, p. 80). Yet it is the contextual manner of this self-creation that yields troubling notions of communication, responsibility, and this ethic of cannibalism put forward.

This is best exemplified in Derrida’s fascination with Robinson Crusoe in *The beast and the sovereign*; Crusoe, upon being stranded on a deserted island, finds footprints which he considers not his, and immediately begins dreading the potentiality that there are others, cannibalistic others who might eat him. For Derrida, this formulates a transit station between a great deal of his thought, in Crusoe’s reading of the sign of footprints immediately followed by charges of cannibalistic attitude and possession by others. Crusoe laments being left alone on the island, but also fears the presence of Others and the ability to be eaten, an excessive fear and gesture that originates from the mouth and digestive system which clearly preoccupies Derrida at this point. As Krell highlights, Crusoe does not want to be devoured, whether materially or communicatively (in not knowing these Others he also does not know their language, codes, etc.) by wants to devour, triggering “an auto-immune response, greatest fear and greatest desire” (Krell,

2013, p. 156). Such a response again trigger's Crusoe's naming of Friday and communicative domination of the island, to cannibalize instead of being eaten.

There is a wealth of postcolonial criticism that can be read into the Crusoe story, but if taken in the way Krell demonstrates, again situates us in the rhetoric of cannibalism. Why fear being eaten, other than submitting to tales of barbarian islanders? Why not fear capture, torture, or death in general? Our own history is littered with testaments that cannibalism is of a special categorization only available to barbarians, humans of immense evil nature, while failing to recognize what Mikel Burley exhumes, that "Humans have historically eaten other humans for a variety of reasons, including in the so called West for ostensibly medicinal purposes" (Burley, 2016, p. 17). In an unpublished dissertation, Joshua Trey Barnett draws on such a rhetoric to highlight how "consumptive practices therefore index the stratification of social life; as such, it becomes possible to read the world based on who eats what and how," rendering cannibalism less biological oddity and more philosophical metaphor (Barnett, 2017, p. 203). Barnett's work also reinforces the idea that although Derrida 'chews up', so to speak, tradition, he is unable to fully digest or divest of the concept of the subject, and returns to the tradition to help re-anchor his thought.

This tradition of assimilation barbarous cannibalism can be seen stretching back to at least Descartes, and perhaps further. Under such a Cartesian (and drawing upon Rousseau and the separated, unspoiled nature) paradigm, "the theoretical challenge of communication is translated as the challenge of privacy—a challenge resulting from the encounter of multiple communicative subjects, each characterized as a disparate realm of private meanings and experiences" (Chang, 1996, p. 44). For Derrida, there is no island

from which society encroaches upon the human, as the human is already late, as Charles Barbour sketches we are born into a historical “set of expectations, conventions, presuppositions, background assumptions, prior arrangements and so on,” upon which secrecy or the ability to keep a secret defines the human (Barbour, 2017, p. 96).

Animals, cannibals even—react. Crusoe worries that they will see his footprints and immediately crave his flesh, while only humans, such as Crusoe can *respond*, which again carries with it this obligation toward responsibility, communicative responsiveness, and ethics. It is the eating of signs, whether they be footprints, names, or sovereignty that is of interest to Derrida. Barnett’s reading imagines a humanity that sides with inhumanity, that acknowledges its barbarism, that in “rigorously breaking from the lull of human exceptionalism, that is, opens us up to interesting conceptualizations of the human and about its enmeshment in broader ecological assemblages,” allowing the human to avoid cannibalizing Others communicatively, as Crusoe does to Friday (Barnett, 2017, p. 207).

It is this last notion that draws Derrida out from the physical body into the symbolic and intersubjective world. Krell’s description is one in which Derrida seemingly moves through the senses as a liminal point between eating with the body and the eating of symbols. “Senses devour,” Krell attributes, eating morsels of knowledge. In Krell’s relating of the seminar Derrida quickly moves onto Novalis and the Renaissance banquet, one in which is a banquet not just for the belly but also for the mind, a *bibliophagy*, or the consumption of books: “all the encyclopedic works, from Plato to Hegel and Mallarme, are encompassed here. All are at the table, either as digested or predigested works. Yet the center, in all that chaos, cannot be found, and

Plato is wretched. No participant in this *convivium* masters the feast” (Krell, 2006, p. 145). For Derrida, there are always leftovers, “*les restes*” to snack on later; this is not true for Novalis, and probable as to why Derrida sets him up as a foil in discussing eating well and eating not so well. For Novalis, as Krell relates to us, wants to eat everything at the banquet. Novalis status as romantic poet draws him into a cycle of biting off more than one can chew, of heroic engorgement, albeit one that “involves a system of residues, remains, remainders, and remnants, even as it waits upon a final, total sublation *sans restes*” (Krell, 2006, p. 159). Consuming all communicative gestures because part of the logic of cannibalism.

This however, becomes precisely the problem—the desire to eat everything, *sans restes*. The connection between speaking and eating, consuming food or symbol also here becomes more apparent: “all of this, no matter how cryptic it may seem, and no matter how Teutonic it may sound, is spoken in a Roman tongue, the *lingua romana*. Novalis’s dream is to translate all lore, from fairy tale to the findings of chemistry and physics, into a common code—precisely, the *lingua romana*—presumably without remainder” (Krell, 2006, pgs. 159-160). The banquet table of all knowledge, the full archive of life, is to be digested, eaten, consumed, *without remainder*. This leaves no room for the trace, or for difference, to enter the world. It is an imperial homogenization shrouded by the carnival atmosphere of the banquet. Which is why, as Krell deftly explains, “Derrida wants to quit Novalis’s table... In effect, the cycle of Novalis’s system, once it is formalized, is not so enticing; the cycle elevates the base and degrades the elevated by turns. The cycle is ultimately one of substitution” (Krell, 2006, p. 160). For difference or newness to enter into such a system, it does so like it has before, by



eating. We become like Novalis's universe, the *Das All*, of which we are composed of and are recycled through.

Derrida's reply, to Novalis specifically but also to hooks, is "the folly of substitution, of the *belief* in infinite calculability, is what underlies the experience of *sacrifice*. Sacrifice encompasses—or at least touches upon—all the modes of eating... What sacrifice invariably and implacably destroys is the irreplaceable as such" (2006, p. 162). If the entire universe can be eaten, or culture specific to time and place, it all decontextualizes the uniqueness or phenomality of the person, culture, situation, etc. Substitution, for Derrida, fails based on this calculability that refuses to take into account the remainders, the leftovers, *les restes*. To eat is to leave crumbs, remainders, traces which can be followed and genealogies to be constructed.

This leaves us with an unanswered question, one that harkens back to Derrida's reading of Defoe—why cannibalism? Why use this metaphor merely for an ethics of reading and representation, why use such an excessive trope? Krell attempts to answer this question by suggesting "it is *conviviality*, or the eating with and amongst others that forms the symbolic social world of digestion for Derrida. Wherever *eating* is to be found, so too is to be communication, as "embrace, and to embrace is to taste, enjoy, consume, consummate" (2006, p. 152). Derrida's rhetoric of cannibalism leaves room for ethical eating, ethical interpretation by considering both the material act as well as the symbolic transfer, or as Krell more poetically defines, "between the mouth that eats and the mouth that speaks" (2006, p. 164). The ethics of cannibalism are designed to promote the perils of communicative life that Derrida had come to know, growing up as a Jew in French Algeria then the witnessing of the Nazi regime in France ban those of

Jewish decent from the classroom. His ethic represents the hostility that can emerge not just from actual violence, but from a textual, communicative violence consumes the Other., a Nietzschean suspicion added to his Levinasian foundation.

Emerging thought on Derrida characterizes him as ethical, cannibalistic, but also, surprisingly indebted to Kierkegaard as well as Nietzsche and Levinas. Whereas for communication, Derrida's rhetoric of cannibalism perhaps enjoins him to thinking through the act of speech as simultaneous to an act of devouring, the philosopher himself would most likely align with Kierkegaard. The connection appears disingenuous until we consider Caputo's trace, his attempt to:

“underline a line that runs from Kierkegaard to Levinas to Derrida, which opens up another line on deconstruction. All this talk of decision as a “leap” in an “instant of madness,” as an aporia which passes through an “ordeal” of undecidability, which turns on the exception that the single individual makes of itself from universality, which requires the suspension of the universal, and which cannot wait for the System to be completed—what does that remind us of more than *Fear and Trembling*?” (Caputo, 1997, p. 139)

Derrida all the more nudges Levinas closer to Kierkegaard in *The gift of death*, but other similarities abound. Žižek's connection of the indivisible remainder in Kierkegaard, what he discloses as *hainamoration*, the split between love and the object of love, which Žižek takes as “...sometimes, hatred is the only proof I really love you” (Žižek, 1997, p. 132). Whereas Levinas refuses to sacrifice sacrifice, Derrida translate it into the idiom of eating and digestion, where there is an ecosystem of assimilation and return even after sacrifice. This impossible ethics sees that there is always a form of violence, but in choosing or limiting that violence, we choose who we are as people and our ethics.

Derrida's merging of communication and responsibility would be based upon his thinking of hospitality, which Raffoul entrusts with determining Derridean ethics "...as an ethics of alterity, of the welcome of the other. We recall that hospitality is not a mere region of ethics but indeed is "ethicity itself, the whole and principle of ethics" (Raffoul 2010, p. 301). As Arnett defines, hospitality also functions as a communicative act witnessed in the opening of oneself to the visage, to the face, of the Other. The face welcomes and bids responsibility for the Other," an Other that is often contextualized as 'come from abroad (Arnett, 2017, p. 225). It is the question of the question<sup>23</sup> which obliges us to rethink borders, not only in how we interact with Others on a interpersonal level, but also the possibility of a rigorous delimitation of thresholds or frontiers: between the familial and non-familial, between the foreign and non-foreign, the citizen and non-citizen, but first of all between the private and the public, private and public law, etc." (Derrida, 2000, p. 49). In thinking hospitality, which for Derrida is thinking through ethics (as they become synonymous), we must think through communication, borders, and responsibility.

Hospitality always questions the foreigner, and this questioning, in the form of the home language, entails questions of translation and communication ethics. This chapter poses Derrida as a thinker of communication, as the foreigner who questions communication and demands hospitality without consumption. Derrida's demand, then, is to be offered a seat at Novalis's table, to engage in communicative exchange while also

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<sup>23</sup> Derrida in *Of Hospitality* claims the original question as stemming from the "situation of the third person and of justice, which Levinas analyzes as the "birth of the question" (Derrida, 2001, p. 5). The questioning, then, of the Third, of the interlocutor in so many of Plato's dialogues that challenges the philosopher, becomes a second questioning that is defined by language and custom of the homeland. This questioner, however, this foreigner, is always already enshrined as the sophist.

making known the impossibility of completeness, of ever being satisfied by the feast. Too many, this represents a break with civility and decorum, but for Derrida, this seems to prove the carnophallogocentrism of eating, of the desire to consume and make same, of communicating in one language without remainder, without need for translation; it is the self's construction of Babel. The variety of these terms echo and intermingle, making it impossible to construct a unified theory of Derrida. He becomes an amalgamation of Nietzsche, Levinas, and Kierkegaard, but makes of his method the question of how to consume these authors without digesting them completely, yet without vomiting them back up completely. In order to avoid swallowing those inheritances we are obliged to cite, to repeat, but also to invigorate with difference, Derrida asks we break with tradition to save it, to not employ a method but a series of ethical presuppositions that recognize the inherent paradoxes in methods that sit on top of language. So although Derrida gives us rhetorical tropes of cannibalism, hospitality, *differance*, he gives us no concrete path to follow, rather a simple invitation to the feast, to eating. How to eat well then, is a responsibility we must take up ourselves.

## **Chapter Three:**

### **CSR as a body of literature**

“I believe totally in a capitalist system, I only wish someone would try it”  
--Frank Lloyd Wright

John Elkington starts his treatise on Corporate Social Responsibility and the adherence to *three* bottom lines with a quotation of a poem, asking, “is it progress for cannibals to eat with forks?” and from where he draws the title of his work (Elkington, 1997) CSR represents many of the issues of our time, from sustainable practices that keep to keep the environment from collapsing, to advocating for business’s role in social programs and issues, to employment initiatives and governance. However, it is also a concept that most demonstrates the deconstructionist credo that the text is ‘always, already’ in the process of deconstruction, ripping itself apart from the inside. CSR has always been in a debate about what it is, who it serves, and before what should it be judged upon. The fundamental tension in corporate social responsibility has been whether it fully serves the public, or that it has a business case to be made and should be integrated into normal business operations.

For Derrida, no ethical decision can simply claim to be ethical, regardless of what it accomplishes. Statements such as ‘we are socially responsible’ work as marketing materials, but do not stand up to the pressure of Derridean thinking and responsibility. To achieve (if possible...) such a responsibility, a decision or decision maker must pass through ‘the madness of the decision’ Derrida’s Kierkegaardian test stemming from the undecidable nature of terms in a binary language system. I would like to hold CSR *as* undecidable, suspended between the clear fact that it does accomplish good in the world,

and the critiques of it being a smokescreen or cover for multinational corporations as they pollute, underpay, and exploit workers and the environment (Banerjee, 2008, Fleming, 2012). CSR discourse stands to gain something by taking this balancing act as the productive tension of the literature; debates around CSR have existed in one form or another for at least fifty years, if not longer, and business has not at this point in time been able to swallow, digest, and assimilate *all* of the activist and social considerations. Whether or not business can cannibalize itself upon the social lifeworld will be an issue I will return to later in this chapter, after summarizing the debates swirling around CSR thinking and practice.

Corporate social responsibility is a fluctuating concept with multiple meanings that emerges in this form in the second half of the twentieth century focusing on people, planet, and profit rather than focusing solely on shareholder returns. Though there are antecedents<sup>24</sup> we can point to throughout history that could be of use in understanding this phenomena, CSR still remains a heavily contested concept with multiple interpretations (see Carroll, 1999; Dahlsrud, 2008; Kolk, 2010; Mintzberg, 1983; Whetten, Rands, & Godfrey, 2002; Zenisek, 1979). The harnessing of private enterprise allowed business to become a centripetal force in world events, and the power for consumers to make choices gave leverage to consumers in what they expected from an organization. What specifically this expectation is, or was, changes rapidly and is drawn

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<sup>24</sup> Andrew Carnegie's gifting of much of his fortune at the end of his life represents a Gilded Age exemplar for such conversations around CSR, both for the innumerable charitable and arts driven trusts that keep open museums, universities, libraries, and ballets, and also for a fundamental schism in reception over such donations, that Carnegie attempted to 'bribe his way into heaven' (Standiford, 2006). Carnegie positioned himself as using money and the worship of it as a means to an end, citing his donations as bringing "sweetness and light" while using the "Caliban" or "beast" of wealth. This positioning of inside and outside, foreigner and local, demands deconstruction in such an account--A similar undecidable schism rests within contemporary CSR (Visser, 2011, p. 61).

to the particular of the historical moment. Ans Kolk, an international business scholar who focuses on supply chains, sees CSR pertaining to multiple issues such as “sustainability, the triple bottom line, sustainable development, corporate citizenship or human rights,” all of which originate from different standpoints and traditions (Kolk, 2016, p. 24). Corporate social responsibility, in its intended use, focuses on broader impacts than stock prices and returns, although this definitional idea is contested itself. Oftentimes CSR acts as an umbrella term or catch all in describing the broader agenda of a specific project.

This leads one of the pioneering visionaries of the early CSR movement, Archie Carroll, to testify to his inability to definitively name and delineate what CSR amounts. The very nomenclature of CSR is ambiguous, and twenty years after first exploring its uses, Carroll reflects in 1999 that:

“it means something, but not always the same thing, to everybody. To some it conveys the idea of legal responsibility or liability; to others, it means socially responsible behavior in an ethical sense; to still others, the meaning transmitted is that of ‘responsible for’ in a causal mode; many simply equate it with a charitable contribution; some take it to mean socially conscious; many of those who embrace it most fervently see it as a mere synonym for ‘legitimacy’, in the context of ‘belonging’ or being proper or valid; a few see it as a sort of fiduciary duty imposing higher standards of behavior on the businessmen than on citizens at large” (Carroll, 1999, p. 280).

It is this ambiguous nature of CSR that disaffects it as well as give sit discursive power. Oftentimes CSR programs as self-voluntary, done to improve the reputational assets of a corporation or done in goodwill on a mutually beneficial partnership. Being directed at international firms, there is no overarching source of power to hand down rules, and firms being private enterprise are free to decide what aspects to adopt and which to pass,

although attempts in the nineteen-seventies and then again in the late nineties sought to mitigate power imbalances created by such large firms with international agreements or through the United Nations.

The nineteen-seventies is an interesting *media res* point to begin an investigation of CSR, due to the both the rise of international firms during the height of the cold war, as well as the numerous disasters and calls for regulation that resulted, which as Kolk notes, begins with “Seveso dioxin leak and the Amoco Cadiz oil spill, followed almost one decade later by the explosion in the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal, the Rhine pollution by Sandoz and the Exxon Valdez oil spill” (Kolk, 1999). This moment throws into relief the question corporate social responsibility, but to view it as a reaction to these events is somewhat askew, as the question of ‘social responsibility’ to the business community emerges in the work of Howard Bowen as early as 1953 (Visser, 2011, p. 104). The question of voluntariness in behalf of the corporation or institutionalized reforms and regulations from the state becomes a flashpoint issue.

This issue reaches a heightened schism in the decades preceding such disasters, yet is informed and dictated by them as well. The sixties are viewed nostalgically as an era of activism, and on the CSR front this historical assertion holds true. Rachel Carson’s investigation *Silent Spring* brought the chemical DDT into the (American) public consciousness, birthing the modern environmental movement. Ralph Nader’s concern over consumer protections enables him to lobby the automotive industry to install seatbelts in 1965, linking industry efforts to the larger social whole which they effect (Visser, 2011, p. 110). Even critics of CSR, such as Richard De George, expresses awe for the emancipatory character of the period, citing how:



“Environmentalists became vocal critics of industry. Animus against the US war in Vietnam gave rise to attacks on the military–industrial complex, in which industry and the military were viewed as a whole. The Civil Rights Act gave legal status to complaints about sexism and racial and other forms of discrimination in the workplace. Consumers added to the barrage of charges against corporations, and workers began to assert claims to workers’ rights that society had previously not acknowledged. Corporations were under siege on many fronts. (De George, 2008, p. 75).

The environmental and social aspects of CSR can here be seen disseminating out of academic circles and into the popular consciousness, as the public rallied behind such efforts to protect themselves from the rampant growth and accumulation practices of corporations in the postwar phase; organizations such as Greenpeace are created in 1970, challenging the idea of free enterprise as occupying a sphere of its own from the rest of the world.

As Campbell Jones pronounces, despite such activism, there is a central figure that “...towers over CSR and, whether in defense or disapprobation, CSR is today only thinkable as a response to this exemplary example;” that person being Milton Friedman (Jones, 2007, p. 512). Corporate social responsibility can be seen as a response to Friedman neoliberal economics, attempting to privilege these broader societal concerns alongside management. Friedman famously declared, both in his own work *Capitalism and freedom* as well as a highly cited *New York Times* article that business has one responsibility--to create wealth for its shareholders—with other outside responsibilities placed upon it negations of the freedom of private enterprise. Supporters of this libertarian, free-market view such as De George see many CSR activities as an unnecessary burden, an unequal exchange where upon providing services on a limited liability basis is a “special privilege, and it makes sense for society to grant this only if it

gets something in return” (De George, 2008, p. 76). One cannot expect every business to solve every problem because of stepping into the public realm to provide a good or service. De George extends Friedman’s original argument to modern parlance, asking should pharmaceuticals be held responsible for transferring retro-virals to every sick person in Africa, a popular belief “because it involves no cost to oneself,” but an unfair one to business (De George, 2008, p. 77). Such a gospel of highly delimited personal responsibility is often framed as purely Friedman, but there are important differences within his argument.<sup>25</sup>

Friedman defines in the seventies a view of business as separate from the larger social whole, legally bound within established codes to produce investment returns to shareholders first before engaging in any extracurricular activities. The entirety of his famous quote, points towards a bounded and demarcated space for business to operate in, arguing: “t]here is one and only one social responsibility of business— to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud” (Friedman, 1970). Such activities represent ‘window-dressing’, although he does give space for the idea that greenwashing, or marketing tactics aimed to give business a green, ethical sheen could be useful, if they do not detract from producing shareholder wealth.

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<sup>25</sup> Campbell Jones, to whom De George is responding, gives Friedman a wide and close read, alluding to the gap between the normative view of Friedman and the “...little interest in Friedman’s theory of the consumption function, the quantity theory of money, his methodology of positive economics, his *Monetary history of the United States* or his policy initiatives such as the school vouchers proposals “ (Jones, 2007, p. 513). De George reads CSR, however, as needing grounding in ethical theories of Aristotle, Kant, Mill, and that postmodern directives aim at obscurantism to hide Marxist tendencies (De George, 2008).

Friedman wins the Nobel Prize in 1976, a point of contention for Marxist David Harvey who rails in his *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* against the ‘Monday club’ of University of Chicago which pushes conceptions of neoliberalism into the mainstream (Harvey, 2007). Brutal economic upheavals in the 70’s in countries like Chile and Argentina give way to Reagan and Thatcher-ite economic policies in the eighties, under a doctrine of “Privatization and deregulation combined with competition, it is claimed, eliminate bureaucratic red tape, increase efficiency and productivity, improve quality, and reduce costs, both directly to the consumer through cheaper commodities and services and indirectly through reduction of the tax burden” (Harvey, 2007, p. 65). Harvey sees neoliberal theory being purely of the market, and distrustful of democracy to allow citizens to make the correct decisions, and moves in favor of “undemocratic and unaccountable institutions (such as the Federal Reserve or the IMF) to make key decisions” (Harvey, 2007, p. 69). These policies for Harvey transmit wealth to upper classes and place failed responsibility back onto the individual for not coalescing to the market.

This institutes a rhetoric centered around “freedom, liberty, choice, and rights, to hide the grim realities of the restoration or reconstitution of naked class power, locally as well as transnationally, but most particularly in the main financial centers of global capitalism” (Harvey, 2007, p. 119). A neoliberal ethos supports a life centered around “the market” and “is presumed to work as an appropriate guide--an ethic—for all human action” (Harvey, 2007, p. 165). Harvey believes neoliberalism in the Friedman model is hollowing out civil society and making us actors in a market game we cannot possibly

win, and we continue to buy into ethics and responsibility statements which model themselves on CSR.

Another development against the neoliberal model emerges with Edward Freeman's 1984 classic *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*, popularizing the term stakeholder as a model for an alternative fiduciary demand while also addressing those to whom a company effects. Freeman's definition is simple, yet detailed: "simply put, a stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of a corporation's purpose. Stakeholders include employees, customers, suppliers, stockholders, banks, environmentalists, government and other groups who can help or hurt the corporation" (Freeman, 1984, p. vi). Freeman's idea was to map the various constituencies which were arguing against organizations, to better anticipate their needs or demands. In this way, CSR can again either help them, by creating spaces for dialogue, or hurt stakeholders by simple absorption of their ideas into rhetoric.

Freeman works in a similar vein to Archie Carroll, who dramatically reengineers CSR discussions with his CSR pyramid (1979), which places economic and shareholder returns as the base of the pyramid, a hierarchized version of a business's needs or aspirations. To be a corporation, an intake of monetary assets is a core principle. Carroll also features legal needs, staying within codes of conduct determined by states, then a tier above ethical needs, and finally philanthropic ones. An organization should aspire to ethical and philanthropic ventures, not only for strategic purposes but also, in counter to Friedman, to achieve the higher goals and purposes of the firm (Carroll's pyramid becomes a topic for discussion at the end of this chapter). Carroll, perhaps the authority of CSR, starts to create typologies and a language to discuss the various implementations

of what ‘responsibility’ looks like.

The eighties becomes the backdrop to the development of several new methods and evaluations that current CSR practice and discourse. While the work of Freeman and Carroll develop the social arenas that CSR is responsible for, or has the authority to speak on, another major trend emerges: sustainability. The UN commissions in 1987 the Brundtland Report, labeled *Our common future*, seeking to define “sustainable development,” first bringing this notion of sustainability in its now mentioned and debated form to larger visibility; The Brundtland Report opts for development goals “that meets the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their ends” (cited. in Visser, 2011, p. 115). Measuring systems such as the ISO 9001 and subsequent 14001 distilled elements of the Total Quality Management (TQM) approach, borrowed from Japanese markets, to improve product quality as a strategic advantage. A competing global marketplace spreads different management techniques, which become consolidated as they gain traction in the promotion of strategic interests.

Carroll’s linkage of responsibility to corporate performance starts a shift in CSR literature. This shift can also be witnessed in William Frederick’s move from a CSR1 to CSR2, a distinction in which business is unsaddled with this thorny term of ‘responsibility’ and its recalcitrance to measurement and definition, and into the sphere of ‘corporate responsiveness’ (Frederick, 1994). Responsiveness, as you may remember, being a thorn in the side of Derrida for its untranslatability, here situates the business community in terms of response to issues emerging from the social world. This positions business likewise in a proto-capitalist position of responding to market forces while also

attempting to anticipate them. Carroll extends this further by ushering in the connection between financial data and the perception of ethical companies, moving past CSR2 and into corporate social performance. Here, responsibility begins to be reduced to strategy for profit instead of an end in and of itself, as can be seen in Wood's (1991) article emphasizing thinking of outcomes instead of intentions. Moral argument becomes replaced by the 'business case'.

Such a trend continues, with the idea of CFP of corporate financial performance being accentuated rather than moral intentions and responsibility. Firms were able to measure responsibility by how well they were doing, and the mixture of financial data and ethical action became intertwined and unified. Porter and Kramer offer a practice of CSR harmonized completely with the generation of profit, saying:

"Corporations are not responsible for all the world's problems, nor do they have the resources to solve them all. Each company can identify the particular set of societal problems that it is best equipped to help resolve and from which it can gain the greatest competitive benefit. Addressing social issues by creating shared value will lead to self-sustaining solutions that do not depend on private or government subsidies. When a well-run business applies its vast resources, expertise, and management talent to problems that it understands and in which it has a stake, it can have a greater impact on social good than any other institution or philanthropic organization "(Porter & Kramer, 2006).

A cynical read of this form of CSR is to pursue it only as far as it pertains to your own financial interests, and the fiduciary duties to shareholders. CSR here is void of the larger philosophical concept of responsibility, and this gap between the high-minded rhetoric and the pursuance of capital sets the ground (along with the financial crisis) for brutal critiques to be levied.

This may be one reason why corporate governance becomes a major issue for CSR in the nineteen-nineties, as management began to look both inwardly as well as outwardly, addressing social issues as well as gaps in the supply chain as the parameter of responsibility continue to expand in a more interconnected world. Nineteen ninety-seven sees two major developments: the leaking from Ernst and Young of ‘sweatshop’ practices in Vietnam in the production of Nike’s products, and John Elkington coining the term triple bottom line. Crises such as the Nike’s sweatshop scandal heralded unprecedented consumer backlash at Nike, and greater interest in the sourcing of products. Where, and how, products came to be garnered more attention, and business responded; the creation of the Forest Industry Council, Roundtable on Sustainable palm oil, Marine Stewardship Council, and “...over 100 other codes of CSR” emerge at this time (Visser, 2011, p. 121). Then President Bill Clinton’s Council on Sustainable Development helps entrench commitments to ecologically sound planning from the world’s largest economies, cemented in international law through agreements formed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 (Caradonna, 2014). Each agreement is voluminous, but point toward new parameters to work within, including (at least partial) acknowledgments of the limits to growth<sup>26</sup>. Not only was the state imposing limits on private business, but a collection of states banded together to seek to make more ecologically sound and balanced products.

Thus ‘sustainability’ enters the lexicon and become what ardent environmentalist Bill McKibben called a ‘buzzless buzzword’, one in which took hold of many of the

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<sup>26</sup> A report with a similar title was published in the 70’s by the Club of Rome, arguing for the end to the separation between biosphere and economic sphere, and to curb the unfettered creep of pollution, chemicals, and ‘junk’ into the world (Caradonna, 2014)

debates CSR was engaged in. Sustainability then comes to serve as metonymy, or replace CSR altogether, with its “green” connotation the conceptual center of ethical business conduct. Sustainability then becomes the lynchpin in the promotion of these standards and the functioning of non-state regulatory bodies, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that supply such services. The cornucopia of various reports leads Aras and Crowther (2009) to describe such reporting as ‘simulacra’ in a Baudrillardian sense, especially as such reporting took off in the late nineties; seen as a strategic advantage, reporting exponentially grew but had no real referents in actual corporate activity. Water consumption, recycle-able materials, or even Wal-Mart’s savings on gas in the shipment of products becomes reporting figures that adhere to standards while also helping the bottom line, not solving the problems of global warming and climate change, but incrementally producing better ‘eco-friendly’ products, almost as a continuation of TQM as a strategic advantage.

The diffusion of so many standards led thinkers such as John Elkington to seek normative, or grounded visions of encapsulating the totality<sup>27</sup> of CSR. Elkington’s coinage was a summary of the various developing trends of CSR and his worry over the conflation of terms such as eco-efficiency, a combination of the environmental within the economic. Working for nearly twenty years already in the field, Elkington sought to draw greater attention to normative efforts to regulate ‘cannibalistic’ organizations—naming his text *Cannibals with forks*—where the “cannibals were companies—

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27 This is one explanation for the increasingly growing standards market, with standards acting as products or brands in their own right, seeking to become “one standard to rule them all” (Tolkien, 2012). Elkington’s TBL platform was not meant to capture the entirety of CSR, and he expresses doubts this is possible or can be done, but tries to give coordinates away from the pure financial pursuit.



displaying aggressive, acquisitive behavior in the marketplace—and the fork was the three prongs of the triple bottom line” (qtd. in Visser, 2011, p. 116). The Triple Bottom Line (or TBL/3BL) was focused on the question of “is the business profitable, innovative, and well managed? Is it engaging in environmentally sustainable practices? Does it aid social equality, justice, and the community?” (Caradonna, 2014, p. 184). Elkington’s ethical demand was that business realize more than the bottom, purposefully situating human capital within the economic measurement function. These three ‘prongs’ as Elkington devises, simply demonstrates the preconditions of an ethical organization, and start the conversation in the public about the organization. Elkington’s schema most represents a radical rating system that “...can, in theory, reveal that a profitable company rates quite low in social and environmental performance” (Caradonna, 2014, p. 184). For this reason, along with Elkington’s work on projects such as SustainAbility, this project will focus on the TBL<sup>28</sup> (and the problems inherent within it) later in chapters five, six, and seven.

At this juncture, the material effort of business was often paired with the perception of the business, some authors attempting other normative visions such as ‘philanthrocapitalism’, where the good to be done is carried out by the extremely rich, such as Bill Gates seeking to eradicate malaria in Africa; here even De George would be remiss to criticize such a position.

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<sup>28</sup> One reason for using the TBL, to the exclusion of ratings systems is threefold itself: firstly, an overview of all notable ratings systems is desperately needed, yet outside the scope of this project, an issue I cover more in depth in chapter seven. Secondly, the TBL is not a pure qualitative measure but does, in my opinion, the best at demonstrating the return of economic calculation as the master discourse in using cost-benefit metrics, and thirdly it is “undoubtedly” (Cardonna, 2014, p. 283) the most well-known form. In following Derrida in his critique of Habermas by claiming there is no designated space for ethics, using this formulation opens up a dialogue about corporate ethics to the most people while acknowledging alternative measurements.

Management theorist Sandra Waddock critiques such giving from an organizational perspective, saying while commendable such giving does not “constitute good corporate citizenship (defined in the broad sense) for a company whose impacts are as many and as broad” as the multinationals they are often attached to (Waddock, 2011, p. 82). In a similar vein, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has been a singular voice in critiquing such giving from a Marxist position, arguing that such givers as Bono<sup>29</sup> and Bob Geldoff as “liberal communists” who make such concessions and critiques while also advancing business interests; Peter Fleming points out in *The end of corporate social responsibility*, there are problematic assertions the made by monied patrons in the West, as in Geldoff’s claim of the “social justice benefits of ‘private equity’ in relation to his plans for investing in Africa” (Fleming, 2012, p. 8). As we will explore later in chapter five, there is no gift that does not attach to itself a response, an indebtedness, and it is doubtful that such financiers anticipate a Maussian<sup>30</sup> gift that destroys political economy.

The millennium pushes CSR to new arenas, many in technology, with the arrival of crowdsourcing, social media, and general technological upheaval, more and more stakeholders are able to be mapped as well as involved in various processes, from tweeting at a brand to using dispersed globally connected money-sharing through the web and Internet technologies. Kiva, Kickstarter, and the Grameen Bank all helped involve those in developing countries truly have access to world financial markets, even in a

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<sup>29</sup> Žižek’s critique here appears relevant as Bono graces the cover of *Philanthrocapitalism*, while also being represented as huge success of this form of corporate ethics (2008).

<sup>30</sup> Marcel Mauss conceives of an alternative economy of gift giving, in which certain native cultures would have a potlatch festival in which each member attempted to out-give the other, creating a destruction of the gift-giving economy as gifts excessively became grander and grander in scope. This reset allows the community to continue while having carnivalesque reversal of debts and obligations

small way. The year 2000 sees the Global Reporting Initiative be put in place, an attempt stemming from the United Nations Global Compact to have singular reporting measurements corral the hordes of reporting functions ambling about. The modular structure allows the GRI to update, in five year increments, the parameters of submissions, allowing it to remain responsive to changing global conditions. As Shiv Ganesh comments, the GRI's establishment in '97 and promotion in the 2000's moves it from a "method" to a "...commitment and an ethos, interpreted in sustainable development terms" (2007, 381).

In 2004 B-corps, or 'benefit corporations' are granted official status, designed legally around carrying out a social mission, such as hiring previously unemployable persons (B Analytics, 2018). Combining elements from Paul Hawken's Natural Capitalism institute, the GRI, and impact investing, B Corps seek to translate daily social occurrences into financial capital, attempting to bring venture capital tools to a wider swath of the population. ESG, or economic, social, and governance structures have replaced or adapted many ideas from corporate social responsibility, without fully eclipsing the same debates over territory, voluntariness, and efficacy. However, the 2000's are also a decade kicked off with the WTO protests in Seattle, followed by world shattering events and recognition of global warming disasters such as Katrina<sup>31</sup> (And then later Fukushima), and most importantly, the meltdown of the global financial sector.

This dual nature—neither wholly a theological devotion to helping the world nor propaganda with no connection to reality allows critics of various stripes to enter the CSR

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<sup>31</sup> Palenchar, Hocke, and Heath (2011) point to Katrina as a pivotal moment in risk communication moving toward factors outside the firm, such as health, safety, and environmental quality (HSE) over reputation and financial performance

conversation. As Peter Fleming critiques CSR, it is not just tobacco companies seeking a better image, nor “ethical” organizations such as Fair Trade and The Body Shop; there exists an entire literature debating CSR, academics writing articles, books, and even committing journals, even “prestigious ones like the *Academy of Management Review* are devoting more space to CSR, and the *Harvard Business Review* increasingly features articles on the socially embedded nature of business” (Fleming, 2012, p. 1). A variety of perspectives have tackled CSR, from organizational theory using CSR as a recruitment tactic and the facilitation of corporate culture, to strategic management in the reporting of social accounting. Political scientists, economists, philosophers, public relations, communication scholars, and a host of differing methodologies have examined CSR as an important phenomena to pressing issues in each domain, truly making of corporate social responsibility (and its offshoot delineations) an interdisciplinary object of study.

An easy demarcation would be to view CSR as favored by management and business theorists, and only critiqued from those from the Left due to Marxist, anti-capitalist sentiments. The infamous critique of CSR comes from Milton Friedman, argued from an almost quasi-Libertarian point of view, and several management theorists have critiqued or attempted to acknowledge the failures of the concept while also stressing its positive contributions: Waddock has claimed it may be used as a “smokescreen” (Waddock, 2011, p. 82), while David Vogel in his *Market for Virtue* sees power still remaining in the hands of large MNC’s like Exxon, while renewable energy remains expensive and untapped (Vogel, 2007). Noted critical Public Relations theorist Jacqui L’Etang pines for a more ethically-minded form of business, but cautions against unthinking adoption due to “the motivation behind CSR is largely focused on

communicative, relational, and reputational benefits and compromises its morality” (L’Etang et al, 2011, p. 171). L’Etang, et al describe the similarities that CSR engagements—“winning hearts and minds”—resembles military exercises carried out by military intelligence (L’Etang et al, 2011, p. 180). The hedge in presenting CSR in cocktail form, watered down as ethics with a ‘discretionary move” as Carroll remarks, makes CSR serve two masters, usually the financial side of the operation (Bartlett, 2011, p. 75). As Sabadoz comments on in his push for a more “prosocial” CSR, what sticks out is “the inability to authoritatively resolve the fundamental tension between the corporate profit motive and normative social expectations” (2011, p. 78). A corporation must retain a profit, it must *eat*, but cannot ignore the ‘externalities’ of its actions on the wider community any longer.

The critique of CSR became a flashpoint in the academy in the late 2000’s (although it has existed concurrently with the concept since its creation) with the publication of Bobby Banerjee’s book, *Corporate social responsibility: The good, the bad, and the ugly* in 2008. Dr. Banerjee, writing from within the business school enclosure cites the problematic nature of stakeholder maps as potential stakeholder colonialism, especially in the third world; a voluntary culture of compliance rather than proactive strategies; economic criteria being an absolute standard over environmental and social issues; and the reduction of social responsibility to an accountable, measurable remainder in the form of social capital. Banerjee’s scathing response, that the Mafia has considerable amounts of social capital. So has Al-Qaeda” casts business as a similar nefarious actor upon the world (Banerjee, 2008, p. 74). For Banerjee, the positive aspirations of CSR act against itself, as “the rhetoric of corporate social responsibility

also seems to confuse democracy with capitalism” (Banerjee, 2008, p. 69). The target of beneficial actions of bringing the financial system to those without trustworthy local banks in the Third World is in Banerjee’s configuration an extension of colonialism via digital means.

Banerjee’s contention is that the incremental nature of many CSR activities would dramatically reshape the future of business and up-end what a corporation is. As Sabadoz contends, a fully CSR-ized society “...would fundamentally threaten the capitalist order if extensively adopted—thus threatening the very mode of production that is so successful in producing wealth in the first place” (Sabadoz, 2011, p. 80). It would be illogical for the corporation to castrate itself from the underlying task it has in creating wealth, thus casting in stark repose the fundamental question of the “win-win” or double-sided nature of CSR: for these critical scholars, CSR can never become a fully ethical paradigm, as it would threaten the very ground upon which it stands. Thus we have rhetorical statements on the ethics of corporations that claim a “business ontology” as Fleming claims, that this is the best of all possible worlds and this is where the “deep conservatism” of CSR lies (Fleming, 2012, p. 2). Fleming ultimately asserts that CSR is a “step backwards” in that “solidifying the myth that large corporations (and the consumer culture that goes along with it) can exist in a world where glaciers do not melt or species extinction is not a common thing,” CSR ultimately works against the Good of people and planet (Fleming 2012, p. 6-7). This rhetoric then proves dangerous and calls for critique.

Fleming’s continued screed is that CSR is in fact dangerous in presenting ethical choices to consumers when none exist. We are not enthralled by the corporation in the

same way as say, citizens of Soviet Russia or East Germany were submitted to propaganda, but we do push the harsh realities of environmental decay, poverty, overpopulation, resource scarcity to another realm. Nor does Fleming claim ignorance in the face of such disasters, arguing the business ontology creates an ideology similar to what Zizek(1989) argues in saying:

“the way ideology functions today in the context of ‘enlightened false consciousness’, it is not our direct beliefs that are ideologically controlled but the gap between what we believe to be true and the truth of our actions. We know very well that when we book yet another budget airline ticket online that the environmentally friendly messages are but a silly marketing ploy. We know that the CSR discourse is untrue, *but we act as if it is true* We know that the large supermarket we frequent is exploitative to its underpaid suppliers (who in turn are forced to damage the environment to make a living), but with the help of a few well-placed ‘we are helping the environment’ posters above the endless bank of deep-freezers, we act *as if* we do not know” (Fleming, 2012, p. 88).

Fleming’s point echoes our implication in the consumer society, and our knowledge of the problems we face: the UN reports on climate change are free online, and corporate scandals enter the news-stream at multiple points in any year; malfeasance and fraud are well documented; the workplaces we inhabit for most of our working hours give us little freedom in the direction of the larger company, and we do not imagine them as democracies. Ethical choice becomes sublimated into small decisions about what coffee to purchase, or should I shell out three more dollars for organic food under this scheme.

Why Corporate Social Responsibility then? Or, perhaps more accurately, wither CSR? For Fleming, the ties to power and its inability to precisely define itself leads him to call for “research scholars [to] abandon the use of the term ‘CSR’ (and its surrogates or derivatives) in both theoretical and normative analysis,” and to focus on the potential of

radical concepts, like a deeper commitment to the corporate citizenship model (Fleming 2012, p. 100-101). Steve May opts for a recasting, urging theorists to continue to seek ‘best practices’ or “focusing on common features such as strategies, channels, processes, and audiences,” while also reckoning with “...whether it ultimately produces “a greater good” through corporate influence or whether CSR merely replaces efforts within government and civil sectors that are better tailored to the needs of communities” (2011, p. 103). This pragmatic call still alleviates and ignores the devastating critiques and the urgency for calls for change. Stuck between the status quo and (conceptual) revolution, with third-way arrangements being critiqued as glossed up conservatism, how do honor, remember, enact the ethical charge of CSR?

Sabadoz contends that we resist the “logocentric urge collapse CSR’s internal inconsistency, as well as the similar impulse to subordinate CSR to other discourses that have the illusion of greater stability” as concepts such as Environmental, social, and governance criteria in investing or ESG or sustainability sprout from the same matrices that produce CSR (Sabadoz, 2011, p. 80-81). Before burying CSR, or enshrining it as a new(ish) strategic advantage to be widely adopted without question, this project seeks the chance that Fleming passes on, to point out the deconstruction already at work within CSR, to make “...CSR discourse groan under the weight of its own impossibility” (Fleming, 2012, p. 106). To accomplish this task, this project will read the *aporias*, the paradoxes of CSR to collapse it, and open the door for a future ethical model to emerge. Given this history as such, this project seeks to render CSR as *undecidable*, that we cannot choose between it being a mask for corporate interests or as activism and responsibility organized in the corporate form. This does not situate a nihilism or a



inability to choose, but a hesitation from which a decision can be made. By passing through the ‘madness of the decision’, as Derrida intends, we can fashion CSR as ethical or unethical only after considering it to be both at the same time.

In this, we must ask the question of CSR, one that Dana Cloud, a Marxist rhetorical critic interprets as “to whom must a corporation have responsibility? In the context of constraining global capitalist competition and the priority of profit, to whom *can* a corporation have responsibility?” (Cloud, 2007, p. 228). In this question of relation, we seek to redefine the parameters of the CSR debate, bringing it back to this ethical questioning. In choosing to be critical of CSR, I return to Cloud’s dictum, that “critics of CSR must concern themselves with politics, moving from a discussion of ethics and responsibility to a discussion of justice.

This shift poses a new challenge: to imagine and create a different kind of world entirely” (Cloud 2007, p. 229). Unlike Marxists critics, however, I cannot and do not foresee any immense change to the capitalistic model in the future, while also recognizing the treacherous path acquiescence paves. Such a stance does not wave the flag against the corporate model, nor does it wipe away the raw power of organization and resource accumulation it presents. Although of a binary nature, this project accepts one of the two propositions that Slavoj Žižek presents for the thinking of ethics after the fall of Socialism: the knave, a neoconservative advocate of the free market who cruelly rejects all forms of social solidarity as counterproductive sentimentalism” and the fool “a deconstructionist critic who, by means of his ludic procedures to subvert the existing order, actually serves as its supplement” (Žižek, 1999, p. 46). Here, we choose the route of the fool.

The pragmatic task then is to prepare for a CSR that may never come, a CSR-to-come, a relation between the productive forces of organization and work that does not endanger Others or the environment, and imagines more ethical social relations than the ones currently in practice. This is not to side with incrementalism, but to demand justice in this moment even if it is deferred to the future (a point I will return to in chapter eight). Banerjee's and Fleming's pessimism comes from a devotion to ethical practice, from a hope that practices can be changed. Although many problems abound and seem inescapable, to quote Ursula K. LeGuin, so did the divine right of kings. This project seeks an impossible CSR, although it does not know the route or how to accomplish it. In the next section, I will sketch out CSR's double, in neoliberalism, and highlight deconstructive readings of CSR in macro that will guide and frame the discussion of it as first undecidable, and the productive interaction that ensues from such a reading.

### **CSR and Auto-Immunity**

The situation presented by critics of CSR, whether from a public relations, management, ecological, or rhetorical/philosophical viewpoint, is dire. It is precisely this dire situation that obligates us to investigate CSR and the paradoxes it furnishes. Following the call of Ronald Arnett in *Bonhoeffer's Dialogic Confession*, even when there is no hope, there is a call of responsible action framing a life within direction that keeps meaning alive. The responsible action is finally the take "*stand we take* toward a fate we can no longer change" (Arnett, 2005, p. 36). The battleground, so to speak, of CSR remains the neoliberal marketplace, continually transferring wealth upwards without meeting the demands of those it was intended to help. Despite its troubles, for Arnett, "the marketplace cannot be avoided" and calls for interaction and dialogue with it and

within it (Arnett, 2005, p. 125). From Bonhoeffer to Hannah Arendt, Arnett draws upon modern thinkers to help throw into repose the how the obligation for ‘men in dark times’ are to continue to question, that “this communicative act of deconstruction is the rhetorical reaction of postmodernity (Arnett, 2012, p. 258). However, little of this work has been accomplished. As Campbell Jones decries:

“Depending on where one draws the boundary between business ethics and CSR, one might conclude that, despite the significant body of work on Derrida in management and organization studies and some work in business ethics, in CSR we have almost nothing that has engaged with deconstruction and Derrida. Although widely discussed in contemporary discussions of ethics, one might be led to think that deconstruction has barely touched CSR. “(Jones, 2007, p. 519)

Jones continues to say that even less thinkers have properly engaged with Derrida’s later works, ones Critchley specifically points to as quasi-phenomenological ‘micrologies’ developed around eating, the secret, sacrifice, etc. Derrida’s hyper-specific focus on these phenomenon allows him to explore wider ranging issues such as fraud, democracy, sovereignty, the future, waste, and inheritance while still retain a phenomenological focus. Given CSR’s ability to mutate and transform itself across various contexts and disciplines, this hyper-attentiveness combined with larger concerns becomes a useful steering mechanism in exploring corporate social responsibility and its various offshoots while tracing the ethical importance of such actions.

Jones notes that the best study has been featured in “*Ethics and Organizations* (Parker, 1998c), particularly in the chapters by Letiche<sup>32</sup> and Willmott,” but this amounts

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32     Hugh Willmott has drawn on Derrida to argue for a posthumanist ethics, to challenge the antinomies of good and evil, self and other, and to argue for a business ethics grounded in precariousness rather than a straight- forward politics. Hugo Letiche has drawn on Derrida to argue that any specific assertion of justice is always unjust, and that justice is therefore always singular, situational, and circumstantial. Michael

to two chapters in a larger work attempting to incorporate “postmodernism” in general into organizational theory (Jones, 2003, p. 225). Jones presents two articles (2003, 2007) in a scant oeuvre connecting Derridean concepts to corporate social responsibility. Jones flaunts his appreciation of Derrida, which attracts the second participant, Richard De George (2008), who argues against such a connection. Our other interlocutor is Andreas Rasche (2007, 2010, 2018), who articulates a Derridean framework in responding to questions of business ethics, but oftentimes only sketches an outline of his Derridean foundations. Jones cites “Derrida’s work, from 1989 at the very least, has been profoundly concerned with ethics, and he has offered, following Levinas, one of the most significant attempts to reinvigorate ethical philosophy,” quoting specifically his work in *The Gift of Death* (Jones, 2007, p. 525). Therefore for Jones Derrida represents a continental approach of seriously considering ethics, of employing a postmodern rhetorical interruption in the name of ethics.

Nor does Jones seek to avoid the marketplace of Arnett’s formulation. By returning to the scene of the crime, so to speak, Jones ‘deconstructs’ or reads the deconstruction taking place in the work of Milton Friedman. Jones notes that in the infamous 1970 *NYT* op-ed Friedman recites 48 words *exactly*, but flubs his wider discussion: “in the 1970 *New York Times Magazine* essay he claims that these 48 words describe “a free society”; in *Capitalism and Freedom* these 48 words describe “a free economy.” (Jones, 2007, p. 515). The difference here is the same conceptual abyss

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Kerlin has discussed Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* in some detail in the context of questions for business ethics of the relevance of Marx and the idea of the end of history. (Jones, 2007, p. 519)

Critchley, Fleming, and many others have pointed out, that is, a confusion of free market capitalism being akin to liberal democracy. As Derina Holtzhausen, a PR scholar also invested in the work of Derrida submits, “while the markets are free, people are not” (Holtzhausen, 2013, p. 92). This is not to claim that free markets and liberal democracies *cannot* coexist simultaneously, rather it serves as clarification that they are not reducible to one another. For Jones, Friedman’s flub is not suggestive of some sinister conspiracy at work, and this slippage an insight into it; it is to a certain degree evidence of deconstruction at work in Friedman’s text, that internal errors and inconsistencies abound in *any* text, even ones that reproduce word for word definitions.

Jones, and following his lead, this project, deem CSR to be undecidable. This term has negative connotations (like much of Derrida’s work) and Jones devotes significant space to demonstrate its conceptual worth. He situates this hesitation first as an ethical maneuver, where

“Undecidability is the condition of possibility for ethics, politics and justice, and for responsibility. One is only responsible when one is not sure if one has been responsible. If we have the certainty that we are in The Good, then it has slipped away. This is a thinking that calls into question the reassurances that previously might have been available. It is a thinking, clearly, “without alibi.” No alibis, no excuses. Infinite responsibility” (Jones, 2007, p. 526).

Undecidability then is not paralysis or inaction, but the very basis upon which any (ethical) action can take place. As Jones makes painfully clear, “*undecidability is not indeterminacy*” (Jones, 2007, p. 229). If we have answers before the question, if they are pre-programmed out and calculable, then these are not really ethical answers, they are programmed reactions, like of a computer or a machine. Jones wants us to think through

the possibilities of an ethics that holds onto this moment of undecidability rather than seeking to escape it.

Jones wholeheartedly acknowledges that there are limits to a Derridean ethics, and that it is a total rethinking of ethics, which cannot be applied to every situation. There is no Derridean mechanism to be applied in every case, something new which gives credence and passion to be deconstructed. De George in his reply to Jones situates this moment of hesitation as empty posturing, replying “as the term ‘deconstruction’ suggests, Derrida and his followers were not and are not interested in constructing systems or in replacing existing systems and structures with new ones of their devising” (De George, 2008, p. 80). For De George, this is mere pedantic flourish, and “any attempt to state Jones’ point simply would reduce his complex, dialectical, fluid, and pregnant cogitations to static, flat truisms, or more accurately, falsehoods” (De George, 2008, p. 80-81). De George’s hopes for clear, articulate prose overshadow the binary of philosophy and literature that Derrida constantly crosses over, thereby dismissing the point (and the ethical way of thinking Jones is using) altogether. In this, De George is pre-programmed to distrust deconstruction before he even comes to it, rather than wrestle with the undecidable moment. De George then enacts Jones method for being unethical.

In making CSR undecidable, between neoliberalism and activist hope for a responsible organization, the next sections of this project will investigate various aspects of CSR and the *aporias* that appear in them. In the next chapter I will discuss the paradox of transparency, which has become a privileged mode of address for CSR, where projects and ‘good works’ are typically dumped onto webpages and presented as communication; chapter five then will deal with social accounting and the notion of a

wholly unified and accountable universe, without remainder or secret; chapter six will deal with the problem of stakeholders and organizations, the bounds and limits of an organization and the resistance to hierarchy in modern bureaucracies; chapter eight will detail the intertwining logics of sustainability and globalization, which casts a dark cloud over the looming climate crises; chapter eight will be the passage through the decision and a rumination on whether or not CSR meets standards of ethics, or what a CSR-to-come could look like.

Before moving to these chapters, I want to once more demonstrate the importance of viewing CSR as undecidable through Archie Carroll's CSR pyramid (1979). In viewing the pyramid, Carroll uses shape that stalks through Derrida's writings, as well as one that compels us to think in terms of hierarchy, ascension, geometry, order. Carroll's pyramid places economics as the base, with legal duties, ethical obligations, and philanthropic intensions as the highest. The pyramid pre-programs CSR to view any philanthropy as the highest order, the highest ethics, which cannot be challenged. This displacement of ethics to a second rung ignores the basic economy of responsibility and places a strategic goal as the culmination of practice. This seems to enshrine the idea that CSR is about philanthropy more than ethical duty, making it a mere strategic device. The use of a pyramid also entails a structure that gives authority and promotes a scaling up to an end goal, *telos*, or logocentrism.

The image of the pyramid in Derrida tackles these very questions. Peter Sloterdijk's *Derrida: An Egyptian* profiles the thinker in relation to those he has come across in his life. Constant repetition is the notion of Derrida as Other, as a French

Algerian Jew who was segregated and kicked out of school at an early age for this heritage. Sloterdijk conceives that “whoever chooses exposes themselves to the risk of identification, which is precisely what Derrida was always most concerned to avoid” (Sloterdijk, 2009, p. 39).. Sloterdijk’s most interesting concept though is his defense of deconstruction, as not a pit but an end that regenerates itself constantly, “Could it be that the core impulse of deconstruction was to pursue a project of construction with the aim of creating an undeconstructible survival machine?” (Sloterdijk, 2009, p. 9). And it is this origin in the African cradle of civilization, of Egypt that compels Sloterdijk to write:

“Egyptian is the term for all constructs that can be subjected to deconstruction—except for the pyramid, that most Egyptian of edifices. It stands in its place, unshakeable for all time, because its form is nothing other than the undeconstructible remainder of a construction that, following the plan of its architect, is built to look as it would after its own collapse” (Sloterdijk, 2009, p. 27).

Sloterdijk’s contention that the pyramid remains an undeconstructible edifice which Derrida aspires to not to plunge concepts into a pit to destroy them but to find one structuring premise from which to build from and secure some new ground of thought. Can CSR then, in pyramidal form, ground the organization and practices of a responsible firm?

For Derrida, the pyramid also represents a tomb, which presents an auto-immune function—it shelters death away from everyday life but also warns of its impending arrival. The concept of auto-immunity is a biological formatting of *differance*, and deconstruction itself, whereby the logic of an object, theme, line of questioning unravels itself and proves itself impure under its own claims. Auto-immunity is then the mobilized paradox attacking its host, staging symptoms that call our attention to it.



In Derrida's reflection on Hegel, the pyramid also represents this auto-immune logic through the "*tomb*," or "family crypt: *oikesis*. It consecrates the disappearance of life by attesting to the perseverance of life. Thus, the tomb also shelters life from death. It *warns* the soul of possible death, warns (of) death of the soul, turns away (from) death" (Derrida, 1978, p. 82-3). Entombing CSR, thus takes place in the form of Carroll's pyramid. It is way to bring order to the concept but also to render it semiologically 'dead' or preserved in the instant. For Derrida this specific structure represents the most engrossing form of tombic structure that most mimics writing, or "the sign—the monument of life-in-death, the monument-of-death-in-life, the sepulcher of a soul or of an embalmed proper body, the height conserving in its depths the hegemony of the soul, resisting time, the hard text of stones covered with inscription—is the *pyramid*" (Derrida, 1978, p. 83). Pyramids then consist in structuring or bringing order to phenomena.

For Mark C. Taylor, this structure can only remind us of one possible narrative, that being capitalism. From the signature of the pyramid on the back of the U.S. dollar, "is pyramid is the crypt of the ONE that founds and grounds Western philosophy, religion, psychology, society, and culture" (Taylor, 1988, p. 24). Thus when thinking through the logic or idea of a pyramid, one must cycle through images "from pocket, to crypt, to dollar, to exergue, to eagle, to pyramid, to triangle, to eye, to Thoth, the Egyptian God who invented writing. The course seems errant, and the question of *archetexture* remains obscure" (Taylor, 1988, p. 19). Thinking through the pyramid as tomb, one must also think of the pyramid as structure not wholly united within itself, not being solid throughout, with a myriad of chambers and hidden antechambers, secret passageways and treasure rooms never to be opened. This inherent structure, or 'archetexture' as Taylor

puts it, makes pyramidal logic reveal and trip over itself. Thus, in this formulation, CSR in the Carroll pyramid is full of cracks and holes, a Ozymandias type monument representing capitalist discourse.

To hold these two conceptions together, balanced, that the pyramid suggests capitalist order while also signifying death, and that it is the form that Derrida seeks most to have texts survive and continue to iterate, make CSR undecidable. It becomes a contestable, and therefore *edible* concept with no pre-programmed end in sight, opening it to the future and possible ethical openings. Whereas concepts such as ESG seek to erase profit, hierarchy, and the necessary functioning of organizations from the field of questioning by removing them, CSR holds them together in tensions, rendering them undecidable *yet* digestible. There exists a corpus of scholarship that allows us to trace what is written and respond to it, changing it in the process. The goal of this project, then, is to us CSR as a *mochlos* to find alternative avenues for existence in a neoliberal universe that has foreclosed the future and made profit-generation and disaster capitalism an insatiable appetite.

## Chapter Four:

### Interrupting Transparency

“I have grown to love secrecy. It seems to be the one thing that can make modern life mysterious or marvelous to us. The commonest thing is delightful if only one hides it.”  
— Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

On January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009, newly elected Barack Obama had his White House staff send out a memo detailing a new initiative that would immediately separate his administration from the previous and add what Louis Brandeis called ‘disinfectant’ into the American political bloodstream (White House, 2009). This magical antidote, of course, was transparency, and, Clare Birchall comments in her remembrance of data.gov, a website devoted to accomplishing this task, “the public was told that his administration would be ‘the most open and transparent in history,’ moving away from the Bush administration and a perceived regime of secrecy (Birchall, 2015, p. 185). Transparency, often equated with metaphors of sunlight, truth, communication, information, symmetry, participation, etc. seems to be an unequivocal and universal good in a variety of spheres, from the political (here equated with Obama’s campaign and presidency), the economic, and environmental. However, transparency presents us with a series of paradoxical and frustrating fissures that gives pause from universal praise; if we truly are, as Michael Cherenon, former head of the Public Relations Society of America, “...singing with the windows wide open now,” and there are “no more secrets, no more sneaking around, no more ‘Oh, they’ll never know,’” why is there less trust in political, corporate and social institutions than ever before? (Cherenon, qtd. In Coombs, 2013, p. 223). Are these

scandals<sup>33</sup> evidence that transparency is working, or that the situation is worse than we ever imagined?

This chapter lays out the connections between corporate social responsibility discourse and transparency as one in which CSR disclosures, whether they be economic, organizational, or environmental—follow and contain a specific ideology of communication that is presented as good, just, and efficient, as well as beyond reproach, neglecting the issues of power, intelligibility, and interpretation that necessarily follow. Although Derrida does directly discuss the politics of transparency, several thinkers, including Clare Birchall and Kregg Hetherington, follow or imbue their critique of transparency with a Derridean ethos, insisting that all phenomena in and of themselves are more than what they represent on the surface. Having more access to information does not, paradoxically, grant us omniscience; rather, it further enlarges our potential blinds.

Transparency becomes a useful tool for communicating openness and honesty and building trust between an organization and stakeholders. Concerns over whether your garments were manufactured in putrid conditions under slave labor are met with detailed summaries of supply chains and mission statements on ethical behavior for brands. As Coombs and Holladay (2013) note, “transparency, sometimes called radical transparency, exists because the internet lays corporate actions open to stakeholder inspection even when a corporation seeks to conceal them” (2013, p. 213). For Coombs and Holladay,

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33 At the time of writing, there exists multiple U.S. congressional investigations into whether or not Russia used social media disinformation tactics to influence voters in the 2016 American Presidential election, fallout from Facebook and its entanglement with ‘psychographic’ marketing firm Cambridge Analytica, concern over this firm’s influence in the LeaveEU or Brexit vote, (Birchall, 2017)

transparency remains a check stakeholders may use to request responsible behavior, a surveillance mechanism of ‘always watching’ brands fueled by social media and internet technologies. Coombs and Holladay contend that:

“a pseudo-panopticon is being constructed through the confluence of discourses about CSR reporting and transparency coupled with the purported power of internet-based communication to expose wrongdoing. The assumptions of panopticism lead the public to place unwarranted confidence in corporate CSR reporting. The discourse of transparency creates the impression that CSR reporting is accurate because the internet would be used to expose any irresponsible corporate conduct. The pseudo-panopticon provides a rationale for suspending skepticism of CSR reporting” (Coombs and Holladay, 2013, p. 213).

This ‘pseudo-panopticon’ can help firms realize the business case of CSR activities while helping build trust and relationships with stakeholders. Lars Thøger Christensen and George Cheney add that advent of digital technology and the fallout from the 2008 financial crash places a call upon organizations from stakeholders, where the organization becomes “...where transparency policies, practices, and images are ultimately manifested and tested” (Christensen & Cheney, 2014, p. 72). Transparency, when done correctly, thus embedded or integrated into the day to day operations and *ethos* of the firm.

Organizations also have a decision making role in how they construct transparency around them—absolute disclosure being an impossible task as well as potentially destructive. Given this, and “for a number of practical reasons, including competitive concerns, organizations cannot simply open all ‘gates’ and make *all* facts and material available to *all* audiences. ...thus transparency involves careful *selection* of material” (Christensen & Schoeneborn, 2017, p. 355). Technology brands such as Apple

often keep many of their new products and development in the dark, in order to build hype and desire, while other brands such as Microsoft reveal and walk consumers through the process of development. The level of transparency often changes based on the context, performance, and history of the particular organization. Some firms will present websites with detailed information of how they comply with the UN Global Compact or other regulatory measures, while others, such as GE in which “the reader finds colorful graphs with simplistic reporting, such as revenues, number of employees, and research and development spending across a five-year time period” (Coombs, Holladay, 2013, p. 217). A slew of different factors as well as institutional vision guides what specific policies become enacted.

Typical transparency initiatives include a variety of informational and communication measures, such as “financial disclosure statements, open meetings, reporting regimes, budgetary reviews, audits, dialogue forums, consistency policies, and so on” (Christensen & Cheney, 2014, pgs. 72-3). Given its use in corporate branding, environmental regulation, and stakeholder communication, these regimes of visibility have been appointed to what Burke (1969) has defined as a ‘God term,’ around which all other terms become attached. This is what leads Coombs and Holladay to declare that “transparency is a ubiquitous term in contemporary corporate communications. Transparency can be defined simply as the opposite of secrecy” (Coombs and Holladay, 2013, p. 217). The multiple contexts and varieties of *transparencies*, however, make the term much more complex than such a simplistic definition of non-secrecy; this leads Christensen and Schoeneborn to articulate one of the first paradoxes of transparency, that transparency as a term *is not transparent*; rather, it may “create new types of opacity.

The thrust of argument is that transparency is not neutral; it *does* things. By making certain organizational matters more visible to stakeholders, other dimensions are inevitably kept in the dark” (Christensen & Schoeneborn, 2017, p. 350-1). Thus transparency can be viewed, and subject to the same critiques as corporate branding, as a promotional message.

This is not always a negative ideal, one in where secrecy equals wrongdoing and transparency signifies correct, legal, and ethical conduct. However, transparency becomes an enthymematic shortcut to such discussions, as the term “has become a widely celebrated, yet *unquestioned*, stand-in for responsibility in the current business environment” (Christensen & Schoeneborn, 2017, p. 353). Wells-Fargo, for instance, recently ran a series of commercials in the wake of posting fake accounts to boost their growth numbers, commercials that advocated how much more *transparent* the company had become. This dissolves into a language game of revealing appearances and veils, which, by its very nature, is not transparent, but characterized through masks, lenses, and other forms of distortion. Working from their interpretation of Baudrillard, “scandals and misconduct have been exposed in the raw light of information and communication for decades without producing a marked increase in our ability to *see* into the complexities of organizational behavior,” meaning that although efforts have revealed bad behavior, what real lessons have emerged? (Christensen and Cheney, 2014, p. 82). Most organizations laud the transparency they give to stakeholders, and when secrecy is deployed, it is usually hinted at or communicated in a positive way.

Perhaps it is easier to see the sway (and effectiveness) of this form of communication in its opposite; secret communication, or what scholar Joshua Gunn calls

‘occult’ rhetoric, uses difficult language “to divide and unite readers and that it therefore participates in numerous circuits of power (authorial, authoritative, and otherwise). This element of social discrimination and authority is the core of the discourse of secrecy” (Gunn, 2005, p. xx). This occult rhetoric can be in the form of conspiracies, common paranoias, or banal as hobbies, but also functions to clearly mark those out of the loop or out of the discourse; in corporate sectors, buzzwords often work in the same way. Gunn’s intent in his *Modern occult rhetoric* is to identify how modern audiences in a media saturated age participate as much if not more than our stereotypical view of Puritan witch-hunts: “...that people cannot help but play the game of secrecy, even in our contemporary age of abject publicity—of webcams, work- place monitoring, and “reality television”—because language and its use easily lend themselves to mystery” (Gunn, 2005, p. xxi). Even with digital forms, we are still immersed in language which often presents us with meaning that slips away, oscillates, and refuses to remain put. Even things such as non-financial disclosures already play into this in-group out-group mentality of observers.

This notion Gunn proposes often deals with secret knowledges, languages, technologies where one is able to master and subvert for their own purposes. And it is this technological aspect that seems to give rise to the fetishization of transparency, as Drucker and Gumpert view the need for transparency coinciding “with the rapid acceleration and adoption of communication technology capable of amassing and disseminating data, information has become intertwined with psychological and functional expectations brought to relationships with public institutions and private organizations,” describing the phenomena as a ‘looking-glass’ and conjuring up all the



implications such a term should (Drucker & Gumpert, 2007, p. 494). As has been described in the communicative transmission of disclosures such as CSR reports, the Internet and digital technology has played a pivotal role in this transformation. Such developments lead thinkers such as Laszlo and Zhexembayeva to describe this mentality as the “dynamic, immediate, and substantive force of modern corporate life” (Laszlo, Zhexembayeva, 2011, p. 10). Laszlo and Zhexembayeva situate transparency as being derived from advancements in technology that allow more eyeballs on organizations and any wrongdoing they may be doing.

This perhaps signals why “communication scholars have gradually begun to challenge the assumption that transparency promotes corporate social responsibility” (Christensen & Cheney, 2014, p. 72). The assertion that this ‘radical’ viewing emerges out of technology is a potentially dangerous one, as technology can have miraculous effects, or be put to use by despotic regimes and bad actors in uncalculated and unintended ways. when it is in the vein of accountability or fairness, as an end in itself, then it functions to help the civil sector, business, and governments. When it becomes used for instrumental value, then it trends towards the negative. Technology theorist Evgeny Morozov adds his description of Vladimir Putin, who “orders workers to install web cams at polling stations across Russia, his invocation of transparency rhetoric serves functions other than legitimizing his own stay in power by pretending that Russia’s elections are even more democratic and transparent than those of Russia’s critics” (Morozov, 2012, p. 80). Transparency can easily slide, semiotically, contextually, and politically into surveillance.

Transparency can also lead to populism, thwart deliberation, and increase discrimination. This is especially true of the movement's true counter, which is not secrecy, but surveillance: returning to Drucker and Gumpert, who warn when "the illusion of transparency is cultivated, the traces of surveillance and observation are obliterated" (Drucker & Gumpert, 2007, p. 496). This technological messianism presents problems with instantly advocating or opening up aspects of firms and institutions. It is also erroneous to think that just by having knowledge of problems creates an automatic response and fix to them just by having knowledge—often, knowledge engenders another layer of hurdles to clear in dealing with issues that arise. Not every stakeholder or consumer has the time, energy, or willpower to sift through such large bodies of information.

The issue of surveillance is always tied to transparency, being but another form or rendering of it. Those 'social responsible consumers' that Coombs and Holladay predict with monitoring CSR actions also must make interpretative decisions about the information they receive—if it is too much, they become what Morozov refers to as being *snowed*, a technological euphemism for information overload—or, they receive conflicting reports. Kregg Hetherington in his *Guerilla Auditors* points out this phenomenon as it pertains to Transparency International's audit of Canadian logging in 2004. Corruption was found, rooted out, and systems fixed, yet Canada was downgraded in the NGO's rankings of transparent nations. "In other words," Hetherington states, "Transparency International's political claim is that corruption decreases to the extent that it is perceived by the populace, and yet its measure of corruption suggests that corruption and its perception are equivalent" (Hetherington, 2011, p. 153). Multiple

studies have pointed out the problematic nature of citizens having too much access to government going's-on, and becoming jaded from the excessive description of bureaucracy and inertia. David Heald, a British transparency theorist, defends such a point by claiming "if corruption continues unabated, public knowledge arising from greater transparency may lead to more cynicism, indeed perhaps to wider corruption" (Heald, 2006, p. 37). With corruption gone in Canada's logging industry, shouldn't it be graded as *more* transparent, and *less* corrupt? For whom<sup>34</sup> are such grades for, and what purpose do they serve?

But for advocates of transparency, it is a way of increasing responsible civic life for the individual, and better governance on behalf of institutions. "The transparency ideal," starts Christensen and Cheney, "depicts organizational disclosure signs and messages as neutral and uncontaminated evidence that circulates freely without mediation, alteration, "noise" and other types of unintended effects;" the argument that 'information wants to be free<sup>35</sup>', essentially (Christensen & Cheney, 2014, p. 74). Hetherington, in his anthropological investigations into the aftermath of the Stroessner regime in Paraguay, sees transparency as a post-Cold War moralizing discourse which "in a climate of suspicion of all things representational," presents a new strategy "...to claim, however briefly, that unlike anyone else's one's own representation of past attempts at representing provide a glimpse of the *really* real" (Hetherington, 2011, p. 159). It is a "technocratic language built in the exclusion of the political from

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<sup>34</sup> Hetherington makes a compelling case over Transparency International's annual map of corruption, arguing that it presents those developing nations as corrupt and in need of Western civilizing forces to intervene and promote better governance, environmental law, and transparent practice.

<sup>35</sup> Cory Doctorow has argued against this prevailing notion coming out of technology circles, arguing for the integrity of copyrights and the dangers in floating information.

governance,” seeking to cloak itself as *apolitical*, *amoral*, and neutral (Hetherington, 2011, p. 189). I am not trying to claim that such a project is not worthwhile, or even necessary, rather the ground upon which the ideology of transparency is built represents tainted ground.

It is the dream of transparency to communicate in this fashion, as Hetherington noted above; to become separated nodes of “disinterested producers and providers of information, capable of revealing themselves fully and being able to describe organizational reality in a comprehensive, balanced, and unequivocal manner. ...in this way, transparency becomes a response to demands for accountability,” as well as fulfills stakeholder desires for responsible enterprise and good governance (Christensen & Cheney, 2014, p. 74). It brings to mind again Coombs and Holladay’s rejoinder, ‘why else would GE reveal so much about itself?’ It is an error that is inherently modern, one that reaches back Descartes and is rampant “in western democratic societies, especially, where enlightenment is a founding value,” where such narratives of progress, efficiency, and sight dominate and structure other epistemological systems (Christensen & Schoeneborn, 2017, p. 358). This can be seen today not only in various appeals to corporate social responsibility, but also from technocratic circles and in the work of Jurgen Habermas<sup>36</sup> and the canonization of the ideal speech situation, which removes the messiness of life for undistorted communication. The ideal speech situation and linear

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<sup>36</sup> This is seen clearest in Gianni Vattimo’s critique of transparency and its role with mass media in shaping postmodern culture: Vattimo claims this can be traced to an “ideal of self-transparency, according to which social communication and the human sciences are not merely instrumental but with regard to the program of emancipation but in some way concern its very end and substance, is widespread in social theory today and is typified by the thought of authors such as Jurgen Habermas and Karl Otto Apel” (Vattimo, 1992, p. 18).

view from which such communication arises has much longer history from which to pull from. The historical moment from which we articulate these visibilities often shapes intention and procedure, whether they be digital, Enlightenment, or Cold War aftermath.

### **Transparency and History**

Where did transparency come from? Christopher Hood opines such a history in the moving away from rhetorical traditions, such as Aristotle's, which favors "good governance depends on the skillful and intelligent use of discretion on a case-by-case basis by professionals or morally upright rulers" to more rule or law based forms that act programmatically (Hood, 2006, p. 6). Such ideas start to fall out of fashion with the rise of the Enlightenment, as leaders or rule-makers demands for surveillance or openness from the ruled was offset by rulers "often claiming a cloak of privacy or confidentiality for the way they work themselves" (Hood, 2006, p. 6). Secrecy and privacy were seen as the domain of the powerful, while precariat classes were unable to afford the luxury of such intimacy.

Hood's history paints Enlightenment thinkers as changing the ideology to a more transparent one: Kant's distaste for all things secret, regardless of the consequences to Rousseau's equating evilness with opaqueness. In his *Social Contract*, Rousseau laments how transparency is akin to a returning to pre-Fall state of nature, but one that cannot succeed in civic life. Rousseau details how "books and auditing of accounts, instead of exposing frauds, only conceals them; for prudence is never so easy to conceive new precaution as knavery is to elude them" reducing transparency to a good, but only in the interpersonal sphere (cited in Hood, 2006, p. 7). It is only with thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham, the inventor of the panoptic prison which exposes all of its prisoners to an all-

seeing eye which watches them and, as Michel Foucault<sup>37</sup> so famously elaborated, disciplines them into correct behavior, that transparency begins to take on a civic governance angle.

Bentham's 'On Publicity' details how secrecy itself should never be part of government, that it is the concealing of certain facts that breeds distrust and suspicion. Across the world, at roughly the same time, the New England town hall was engaging in similar experiments with "face-to-face accountability" in local governmental decision-making (Hood, 2006, p. 13). This was the culmination of what Hood saw as the biopolitical move to more "police science" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which "reflects a perhaps more engineering approach to social transparency" (Hood, 2006, p. 8). These multiple veins of transparency, from ordering society to opening the metaphorical halls of power, are different today, relabeled and reinvented for modern purposes. Transparency as a modern good poses a vexing question, which Hood ends his survey: why is transparency universally appealing "...as a ruling idea across so many domains of governance in the late twentieth century, and what explains its diffusion to saturation point as an international catchword over the past twenty years or so?" (Hood, 2006, p. 19).

The current use of transparency does not point directly back to any substantial tradition or coordinates, as Hood's genealogy reveals; instead, transparency takes on a variety of forms in our digital/computer mediated/ accelerated world. Hood's citation of insider trading in financial markets, leading to new legal rules such as the Sarbanes-Oxley act in 2002 or Dodd-Frank following the disastrous global 2008 crash illustrate the

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<sup>37</sup> Foucault of course traces the power relations between the watched and the watcher, which will be commented on slightly more later on in the chapter on stakeholders and organizational democracy.

failure of such directives. Or the fact that the U.S. Department of defense operates some 3,000 websites make its actions more comprehensible, or understandable? (Margetts, 2006, p. 201). It certainly qualifies perhaps as more *transparent*, but even such early inquiry finds such a term at odds with how it is typically deployed. As Lloyd (2005) observes, the former East Germany was a highly transparent society in the sense that citizens were observed by other citizens reporting to the authorities” (Heald, 2006, p. 28). Transparency is often considered a wholly unified and homogenous concept, but the very parameters for which it defines itself are murky and obstructed.

What it does can be divided in terms of goals transparency advocates celebrate: accountability, good governance, and clarity in where products are made and with what materials. This last goal points towards the main issue that transparency inaugurates, which is of communication. This fourth and final dimension also permeates the initial three, making claims at transparency more linear, information dumps than actual negotiation and communication with publics and stakeholders.

### **Transparency’s Relevance to Communication Studies**

Transparency has been regarded as a social good per Enlightenment thought, which again brings us back to Christopher Hood’s questioning of why now succumb to this idea (again) given the problems we face? Shouldn’t we as good postmodernists (or whatever comes after postmodernism), ironize and reject such claims? With thinkers like Habermas drawing on Enlightenment ideas as the basis for reenergized public sphere, there remains solid philosophical footing for ideas such as transparency which cannot be simply whisked away as branding or blue-washing. even obsessive attention to the *measures* and *means* of transparency in themselves. Such goal displacement is shaped by

the growing influence of the audit profession” (Christensen & Cheney, 2014, p. 84).

“The notion of transparency itself is highly ambiguous, suggesting at once insight *and* blindness. Transparency, thus, refers both to *seeing into* (e.g. a clear piece of glass) and *seeing through* (in the sense of ignoring, for instance, when we do not notice the presence of glass at all) (Christensen & Cheney, 2014, pgs. 76-77).

Geoffrey Hartman articulates this question of the postmodern and the transparent, two at first seemingly hostile opponents as counterintuitively working in tandem; Hartman, drawing on the work Gianni Vattimo, describes transparency as filling a void left behind by our exorcism of religious *doxa*, where “*we now have to find ourselves a new darkness*, a principle of non-transparency that would limit the totalitarian temptation to use language and reason only instrumentality, as if communication—like society itself—could and should be totally rationalized” (Hartman, 2002, p. 1574-75). There is still an urge for mystery and the virtues of “oscillation, disorientation, and play,” which can open up new conversations and inventive rhetorics (Hartman, 2002, p. 1577). Hartman’s critique of postmodernism is that it signals *ends* without ever really delivering them, and our rational impulses of quantification, measurement, and science remove the enchantment of the world, allowing a “society of communication” in which we “merge truth and transmissibility” as one holistic venture (Hartman, 2002, p. 1575). Hartman’s critique of transparency comes not as a critique of Enlightenment, but as postmodernism.

This critique itself originates in Vattimo’s *The Transparent Society*, where he declares the mass media plays a decisive role in the creation of postmodern society, but despite claims to more knowledge and information, “they [mass media] do not make this postmodern society more ‘transparent’ but more complex, even chaotic” (Vattimo, 1992,



p. 4). Vattimo however, draws more optimism than Hartman does from this development of a society structured around such an ideology. Vattimo sees hope in a mass media that moves more towards narrative and ‘fabling’ of the world, rather than a techno-determinist equation that solves the problem of experience. For Vattimo, and the question he poses towards thinkers such as Habermas and Apel is one of “*what* will hermeneutics have to say once dialogue has been established?” (Vattimo, 1992, p. 114). Does a fully transparent and unencumbered society need to discuss or talk about anything to one another? Although hyperbolic, such a critique attends to the issue that full transparency, or even unmitigated communication becomes not a blessing, but a curse—a curse that nullifies communication itself.

Yet while Hartman and Vattimo draw parallels between this ideology of vision and postmodern<sup>38</sup> theory, it is perhaps Slavoj Žižek who underscores the direct relationship between transparency and postmodernism. Whereas in modernity there existed veils which we could attempt to see through or beyond, a la the man-behind-the-curtain, in postmodernity we are presented straightaway with the thing; Žižek likens this to the industrial machine in which the various parts could be dissected to reveal how it worked, whereas the contemporary model is the computer screen. This phenomenon manifests in:

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<sup>38</sup> Žižek’s characterization of Habermas’s work submits him to a similar diagnosis, where he is modern, *but also* postmodern: “Habermas is, on the other hand, postmodern precisely because he recognizes a positive condition of freedom and emancipation in what appeared to modernism as the very form of alienation: the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere, the functional division of different social domains, etc. The renunciation of the modernist utopia, this acceptance of the fact that freedom is possible only on the basis of a certain fundamental ‘alienation’, attest to the fact we are in a postmodern universe” (Žižek, 1999, p. 40).

“the central paradox (and perhaps the most succinct definition) of postmodernity is that the very processes of production, the laying-bare of its mechanism, functions as the fetish which conceals the crucial dimension of the form, that is, the social mode of production. ...Like the case of electronic money, removing the material thing only strengthens the hold: the postmodern transparency of the process of production is false in so far as it obfuscates the immaterial virtual order which effectively runs the show” (Žižek, 1997, pgs. 102-3)

For Žižek, the modernist preoccupation becomes the opening of a machine and identifying how it works, how it functions; now, in a postmodern moment, the surface<sup>39</sup> appearance is more palpable, more worthwhile. Transparency then begins to more and more resemble postmodern theory and the play of surfaces. In a re-paraphrasing of Žižek, I understand that transparency often signifies marketing campaigns to clean up improprieties, but I will take them at their word and ignore it.

More so, this emerges not from apathy or psychoanalytic fault, but rather from the very emotive disposition it was supposed to sanction: trust. As Byung-Chul Han in the aptly named *The transparency society* notes, this discourse “grows loud precisely when trust no longer prevails. In a society based on trust, no intrusive demand for transparency would surface. e society of transparency is a society of mistrust and suspicion” (Han, 2015, p. 61). Stanley Fish, in a recent *New York Times editorial*, declared transparency as the mother of the Fake News crisis brewing in the U.S.; these forms of distrust in institutionalized centers of information point toward an amalgamation of problems

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<sup>39</sup> Žižek’s work then follows a similar methodology, jumping into film criticism, pop culture, music, and then moving into psychoanalysis, philosophy, the question of communism and ecology; this reverses typical methodology which defines ground and moves into the abstract, rather than have the abstract define where the ground appears.

colliding in this historical moment, from mass media, to psychic disavowals, to the problem of communication itself (Fish, 2018). Again, transparency advocates a linear model of communication that “...unintentionally reproduces a simplistic communication model according to which senders are compliant information providers, messages are clear and self-evident, and receivers are consistently interested and involved” (Christensen & Cheney, 2014, p. 73). It excludes ‘...secrecy, foreignness, and otherness represent obstacles for communication without borders. They are to be dismantled in the name of transparency” in the name of a ‘frictionless’ communication to be instrumentalized (Han, 2015, p. 9). Transparency can be politicized, weaponized, and deployed in a variety of context for numerous means.

Given a communication ethics lens, Onora O’Neil situates transparency as a useful tool in driving out secrecy, but too easily chases away this darkness without ensuring actual communication has taken place. She continues that transparency may not even constitute communication, as

“Transparency mandates *disclosure* or *dissemination*, but does not require effective communication with any audience. An emphasis on transparency encourages us to think of information as detachable from communication, and of informing as a process of ‘transferring’ content, rather than as achieved only by speech-acts that communicate with specific audiences. This way of thinking may represent the ‘flow’ of information as analogous to a flow of water, which can be ensured or prevented, interrupted or increased, accelerated or cut off, and above all directed by those who control the supply” (O’Neil, 2006, p. 81).

And this is far too often what happens as corporate information dumps that qualify as CSR reporting to stakeholders. Certain activists groups will acknowledge the work done and International bodies and regulations followed, but for the lay person a ninety page

document opposed to taking such tangled discourse at its *surface level* is more preferable in a consumerist manner. This again raises the paradox of transparency, where open information is needed for society to function, but the glut of information makes communication impossible.

From a philosophy of communication standpoint, transparency's desire to represent unmediated truths leads towards a metaphysics of presence, which allows for Chang to move from a critique of phenomenology to a generalized critique of philosophical "hierarchies based on transparency, identity, and totality" (Chang, 1996, p. xiv). As Clare Birchall contends, Metaphysics is precisely the idealization of the epistemological that removes the political in order to make the epistemological a 'proper' subject for philosophy" (Birchall 2011b, p. 76). For Chang, communication does not begin *a priori*, or is natural in any way. Rather, "Solitude and privacy—in short, noncommunication—describe individuals' fundamental mode of being," which transparency leaves unchallenged for its interlocutors (Chang, 1996, p. 40). The challenge then, of *all* communication becomes defeating what Chang calls "the challenge of privacy—a challenge resulting from the encounter of multiple communicative subjects, each characterized as a disparate realm of private meanings and experiences" (Chang, 1996, p. 44). This is the challenge of the third conceived by Levinas, and the challenge of responsibility taken up by Derrida. A signifying object, whether it be a corporate report, a glass façade of a headquarters, or some form of outreach, does not guarantee communication nor responsible form of it.

This leads Coombs and Holladay to plead for a “true transparency,” one which must include responsiveness by the corporation to meet stakeholder needs. There are necessary limits to responsiveness as corporations must *eat*, and even the most ethical organization contains proprietary information and to remain competitive to fulfill legal fiduciary duties. Transparency conceived in its transcendental mode is often “a process of stakeholders holding corporations accountable for providing information relevant to their needs,” while at the same time acting as a receipt that an authentic communicative event has occurred (Coombs & Holladay, 2013, p. 219). Whether or not communication occurs through an 80-page sustainability report on global warming and confers the requisite dread upon the reader, is not an object of concern for transparency. Circulation of information is equal to communication in this formulation. “True transparency” often opts into the same schema of heliocentric, white metaphors where the truth is simply in need of refurbishing instead of being strange, oblique, and humans unable to fully comprehend it. Transparency becomes un-digestible, incomprehensible information overloads that readers cannot trace, deconstruct, or digest.

Corporate communication in this fashion do not qualify as communication, but rather “above the flow of both real and simulated politics: it is made available rather than communicated; it pre-empts or intercepts communication. Its post-political status is claimed not because it leaves ideology behind, but in reference to its presentation as pre-political, pre-ideological” (Birchall 2015, p. 187). Such transparency efforts, then, breed cynicism and skepticism rather than authentic engagement. Any organization which proclaims from the digital heavens that it *is* responsible due action *x*, metric *y*, and program *z* miss the emphasis upon ethics and responsibility that transparent

communication is to promote. Stakeholders, rather than being democratically involved, are captured into discursive webs. The task of being responsible ends with communication, rather than communication as a means to further deepen commitments and actions.

It would appear on this look that a Derridean theory of corporate communications would be nothing more than a convoluted remix of Habermas; however, it is the fact that corporate communications captures stakeholders and funnels them into reports as the only conversation on responsibility functions in the mode of ‘transparency’. Other means of speaking or larger conversations about morals, philosophy, etc., are excluded due to their non-quantifiable, non-pragmatic orientations. Chang’s agenda of sketching out a Derridean theory of communication misses the chance to interact with an oft forgotten lecture Derrida delivers on the fate of cultural identity in Europe titled *The other heading*. While primarily dealing with and wrestling over the notion of cultural identity for an open Europe, Derrida takes time to remark in the early nineteen nineties, or more so warns of:

“For it is necessary that we learn to detect, in order to then resist, new forms of cultural takeover. This can also happen through a new university space, and especially through a philosophical discourse. Under the pretext of pleading for transparency (along with “consensus,” “transparency” is one of the master words of the cultural discourse I just mentioned), for the univocity of democratic discussion, for communication in public space, for “communicative action,” such a discourse tends to impose a model of language that is supposedly favorable to this communication. Claiming to speak in the name of intelligibility, good sense, common sense, or the democratic ethic, this discourse tends, by means of these very things, and as if naturally, to discredit anything that complicates this model” (Derrida, 1992b, pgs. 54-55).

Derrida unites the notion of transparency with ideals of consensus, of Habermas's communicative action, and the problematics of transparency as a medium for dialogue between stakeholders and organizations. This *responsiveness* which is called for by Coombs and Holladay, also points to a certain set of rules for discourse<sup>40</sup> as well as Derrida remarks in "Passions, an oblique offering" that "everywhere that a response and a responsibility are required, the right to a secret becomes conditional" (Derrida, 1992a, p. 25). As we have seen, this secret is not the antithesis of transparency, rather it is its progenitor, its *ground*, the condition of its very possibility. For transparency to situate communication and dialogue, it must first bridge the gap of the secret. We must be able to blink, to miss, to look away—essentially, to not respond to constant pings for information—in order to actually be transparent.

How then to define and implement a better transparency? An answer might lie in Derrida's writings on the university, one of the only other moments he mentions transparency. The vein in which he mentions it comes during an odd and unusual metaphor, describing what becomes of the University as a concept. Derrida defines two types of animals, the human, with soft eyes that need interruption (i.e. blinking) often in order to clarify what we are looking at, and the sclerophthalmic, the eyes that appear on crocodiles and reptiles. For Derrida, the university must not be a sclerophthalmic animal, and neither can transparency (Derrida, 2004: p. 132). Both must learn to blink, to interrupt the gaze, to form a counter transparency to what Pinchevski demands as the

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<sup>40</sup> In *The other heading* Derrida decries the use of the term 'globalization' for its unabashed Anglo-Americanness. He instead suggests *mondialization*, or world-forming as a better French substitute—this idea is presented more thoroughly in the chapter on sustainability. In 'Passions', Derrida becomes notably frustrated with the term responsiveness, which he also notes is untranslatable and particularly American, cornering him into a discursive debt.

“ideal of transparent exchange is to discard interruption as a mode of communication, and communication as a mode of interruption” (Pinchevski, 2005, p. 241) An emerging authority on transparency in this sense is Clare Birchall, whose research examines the questions posed by transparency in the context of transparency itself; while other scholars have viewed it in the light of corporate activity, governance, or better insight into products, Birchall attempts to understand what the large and omnipresent discourse of transparency itself does to our communicative life-worlds, as “transparency has become a sign of cultural (as well as moral) authority” (Birchall, 2011a, p. 8-9). Birchall instead opts for an encounter with secrecy, and what a reexamination of this property could do for our data-driven society.

### **Sclerophthalmic communication and the turn to ‘Secrecy Studies’**

Birchall’s history of transparency resembles and skews close to Hood’s, in that she defines it as an Enlightenment project that starts with the brightening of dark street corners, illuminating the invisible quadrants of social life. Birchall follows Heald in reconstructing a history of transparency study from Michel Foucault and his work panopticism, but also expands on it by venturing into the nineteenth century and the deployment in the west of ‘the open archive’ as it serves to promote a “global system of domination through circulation,” continuing a Foucauldian analysis of knowledge/power being intimately linked (Birchall, 2011a, p. 9). This is constitutive of an entire Victorian and Western colonial enterprise, as:

“Engagements with transparency in the West can also be found in the 19th century, not least the unprecedented investment in public libraries and museums in urban centres, which placed expertise, artefacts and records before the public gaze. This ‘educative transparency’ is perhaps best represented by Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace (1851) because of its connotative and literal



properties: a glass exhibition space to display the technological and scientific advances of primarily the British Empire” (Birchall, 2011a, p. 9).

Birchall is cautious that transparency, given this history of being a force for power, can all-too-easily dip into totalitarian uses, especially given its acceptance—Birchall notes that Patrick Birkinshaw, a law professor writing on transparency in a legal sense—claims it to be an unalienable human right (Birchall, 2011b, p. 62). Our connection to this right, and how it is used by sources of power including state, corporate, and other, becomes a central question of our times.

This Enlightenment drive for transparency is augmented due to immense technological breakthroughs that have occurred in the last century. Christensen and Cheney detail that “not a *new* ideal triggered by contemporary transparency pursuits, but the full manifestation of the modernist conviction that more and better information reduces uncertainty, increases knowledge, and provide a bulwark against corruption fraud, and inefficiency” (Christensen & Cheney, 2014, p. 76). Many transparency initiatives rely on the consumer to passively accept underlying mechanisms of transparency as legitimate, truthful, honest etc. before interpreting the actual ‘transparent’ thing. In terms of digital culture, networked technologies allow for data-dumps, where immense amounts of information are unloaded, making a ‘transparent’ disclosure but in a fashion that makes it impossible to sift through on a human timescale. Birchall citing the idea of ‘data-smog’ where because of the sheer volume of data, the structure of databases, and the criteria of common search engines, much of it remains unseen and unprocessed. That much of the net is so-called ‘deep web’ means that information can be simultaneously transparent and opaque” (Birchall, 2011a, p. 15-16). The incredible

storage capacity of the internet and information technology can help to make corporate and state entities accountable, but what is often neglected or dismissed from the conversation is the requisite reversal that states and corporate entities can also amass detailed information about consumer preference, surveil dissidents, and a slew of other activities, usually with far better resources.

Proponents of transparency seem to neglect the association that transparency functions as what Flyverbomm calls a ‘mediating discourse’ one built upon digital technology that favors “certain communicative practices and phenomena, such as visibility, editability, persistence, and association” (Flyverbomm, 2016, p. 111). Take for instance an online town-hall, or Reddit AMA (Ask Me Anything): these are usually construed as natural, transparent interactions with a person of power, whether they be a political candidate, celebrity, or CEO. Thinking through the socio-material conditions such as navigating and selecting from close to 70,000 questions and comments within an hour,” these events seem more managed and opaque. Flyverbomm’s research points us toward understanding transparency as ‘visibility management’ in light of the digital affordances it runs upon. He stress that without careful attention to the formats, processes of socialization, and other affordances of the technologies and environments.” The tendency is to take them as natural, just, and fluid (Flyverbomm, 2016, p. 115). The discourse of transparency does not separate whatever is made *present* and *clear* magically void of the cultural and social contexts of that thing.

This argument does not render transparency useless, or worse, evil, by any measure, but merely points to the flaw that often it is turned to as a ‘quick fix’ given “...it is considered an easy, technological fix to complex, political and social problems”

(Birchall, 2015, p. 188). This creates a paradox, where to argue for secrecy on the level of the state or behemoth corporate organizations given the variety of scandals that have occurred within our lifetimes appears a futile exercise. Transparency seems *naturally* good or good-intentioned, and to oppose it in the ‘West’ today is to be opposed to progress (conservative in the general sense); corrupt (if there is nothing to hide, why fear transparency?); or anti-democratic (the link between transparency and liberal democracy has become unassailable)” (Birchall, 2011b, p. 62). To go against transparency appears to check boxes against democracy, against progress, against an entire unstated core value system that exists in today’s technocratic, globalized world. Birchall’s reply to this, in the wake of right-wing and fascist parties in Europe and elsewhere gaining more steam, is to note:

“I am not suggesting that all calls for transparency are misguided or that transparency is automatically contaminated by an association with current forms of neoliberal audit culture. And there are salient and pressing reasons as to why the opaque nature of power causes concern, particularly for the disenfranchised. But for anyone serious about marking out a particular space for leftist forms of democracy or politics, the current investment in transparency needs to be questioned and the secret rehabilitated” (Birchall, 2011b, p. 63).

Again, she calls on a field of study loosely translated as ‘secrecy studies’ to better help understand these impulses to transparency and where they go wrong. *It is* a paradox, and therefore hard to uncover and move on from: to critique transparency seemingly means to advocate for unrestricted use of power without any voice speaking back to it, *but* transparency does seem to cloud and occlude some of the speaking through its very discourse.

Birchall is not siding with Donald Rumsfeld in claiming that we have lost the ability to keep a secret' which portends of some future anarchic state to come, but her goal, rather, is to further erode the moral alignments of both secrecy and transparency, whereby secrecy comes to be associated with all that is nefarious (inefficiency, corruption, malfeasance, conspiracy) and transparency with all that is noble (efficiency, accountability, honesty, trustworthiness)" (Birchall, 2017, p. 66). Although Birchall does not strictly engage in a deconstructive method, her work does draw on the legacy of Jacques Derrida and concepts he employs in his late work, including his idea of the "absolute, unconditional secret, mobilized in reference to literature (1992a), death (1993), democracy (1992c) and responsibility (2008), as well as poetry" and from which Birchall draws (Birchall, 2017, p. 70). Although the theory of the unknowable secret<sup>41</sup> looms large in discussions of transparency, another key component to Birchall's reading of "*Glas* (1986), of 'le debris de', which can be translated as 'the leftovers of', but which in mimicking 'Derrida', suggests a singularity among those leftovers unlikely to yield to final comprehension" (Birchall, 2017, p. 70)

Birchall's investment in Derridean theory however stems from his 2001 admiration and 'taste' for the secret: That is, in any communication, any expression of knowledge, something is always "held back." What is held back is in no way held in reserve, waiting to be discovered. Rather, there is a singular excess that cannot fully

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<sup>41</sup> The secret, for Birchall (following Derrida), is not a requisite thing or some information that I am hiding or that one has to hide or dissimulate; it is rather an experience that does not make itself available to information, that resists information and knowledge, and that immediately encrypts itself. (1992b: 201)

come forth. In this sense, there will always be something secret” (Birchall, 2017, pgs. 46-47). For Birchall, who extends this Derridean theory to the information age, there is no guarantee or even ability to have total knowledge, nor comprehend it. This lack, this gap in information necessitates the need for an actual engagement with the Other, opening up a dialogue due to incomplete knowledge. This secret extends beyond information to persons, events, things, and texts. Transparency regimes place faith in the belief that everything has been communicated, and there is no need for mediation, discussion, or dialogue—the building blocks of successful communication.

Birchall’s point is that transparency is auto-immune to itself, that the secret exists in the excessiveness and contamination of language: “a violence is performed in current discourse, therefore, when transparency is advocated as an alternative to secrecy or as a method by which secrets will be eradicated. Secrecy is always already at work in transparency” (Birchall, 2017, p. 71). Transparency too often is overtaken and absorbed into neoliberal market rationalizations<sup>42</sup>, where “Information and knowledge are the currency in these examples; secrecy equals power and transparency weakness. The contemporary liberal championing of transparency has attempted to reverse the terms of this opposition by attributing power to transparency (as an agent of change,

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<sup>42</sup> This can be seen in the paradox of open public data, where neoliberalism “applies market competition to traditionally extra-economic, social spheres, such as health or education. In the figure of the citizen–auditor–consumer–entrepreneur, however, such a feature moves in a new direction. The rationality of the market extends to the democratic contract between representatives and represented itself. We become reliant upon the market to close the circle of democratic representation and the accountability upon which it is based. Only government data that can be made profitable will be delivered to the public in user-friendly forms. Profitability in this case is based on (public) demand, indicating a paradox: the public must already know what it wants in order to receive the applications that can help them understand the data. Accountability is thus limited by the conditions of profitability” (Birchall data.gov, p. 191)

accountability, trust-building and efficiency) and re-inscribing secrecy as a weakness (as a strategy only employed by those whose policies would not bear up to public scrutiny)” (Birchall, 2017:72).

Birchall also identifies transparency’s coordination with certain structures of what she calls ‘neoliberal audit culture’ and help foster market and private forces over any collective, democratic-public initiatives; “given dominant associations of transparency with greater accountability and the public’s right to know, it is important to note its compatibility with an ideology that champions private control of public services, creating pockets of unaccountable secrecy” (Birchall, 2011b, pgs. 65-66). Transparency in this sense is also paradoxical in the form they take in creating and selecting what remains secret and what is laid bare. Public discussion on such choices is usually far removed, both in space and time from such decisions. Apple for instance, champions its iOS encryption capabilities, notably shunning the FBI in the San Bernandino shooter case, but keeps what data they store, new products and development under lock and key (Timberg, Miller, 2014). Other corporate organizations can use a variety of techniques such as “...creative accounting, the release of data incomprehensible to the lay investor or customer, and the hounding of whistleblowers” behind closed doors while remaining ‘transparent’ to prying outside eyes (Birchall, 2011a, p. 14).

Such transparency, as defined by the actors who create it, creates a certain type of citizen-consumer to participate in such a communicative exchange. Birchall’s work on Obama’s data.gov, referenced to start the chapter, here lends a helpful hand: To participate and benefit from this info-capitalist-democracy, the data subject is therefore

called upon to be *auditor* (to monitor the granular transactions of the state in the name of accountability), *entrepreneur* (to make data profitable through apps and visualizations) and *consumer* (as the market for such apps and visualizations)” (Birchall, 2015, p. 186 emphasis mine). Again, Birchall, and following her, this project’s own valuation is not that transparency is some inherent evil that serves as a veil for which the public is deceived. Rather, it is stated as an absolutist good, not to be questioned even under some of the prevailing issues that abound in such a discourse.

A culture of secrecy is often considered closed off, authoritarian, and evil. There is no way to speak truth to power, and we become trapped in a Kafkaesque series of gaslighted attempts to find some source of control, some locus of responsibility. What is often not considered is the opposite, this totally transparent society that this chapter has been attempting to define and characterize. Society needs both secrecy in some areas as well as high levels of public accountability and responsibility in others (notably the public sphere). Negotiating the trend towards making the public things private, and private things public, in terms of data and secrecy follows an all too familiar trend. This neoliberal exploitation takes things such as private data, whether it be in health, banking, or even your average Google search or Facebook profile, and makes it public for thousands of third parties and advertisers that many “users” are unawares about. Public data, whether it be about global warming or government expenditures, routinely becomes more and more privatized through the layering on expertise in reporting or through non-disclosure altogether. Attempts at transparency then, are ironically not as clear as they are often rhetorically presented and is rife with problematic assertions that go one way or another, and demands deconstruction.

Transparency functions as a meta-language for CSR, in assuaging consumers that behind the scenes, contemporary neoliberal capital does function adequately enough that the public ought to support its continuation. Information to support this is dispersed in morsels to keep public trust and faith in the ethical import of business upon the world. Corporate reports often laud transparency as a value-added proposition, that by detailing different activities an organization is taking that defines them as responsible, ethical, or ecologically sound in some way. Elkington's 3BL approach has become a theoretical scaffold upon which transparency rests, but this construction itself is wobbly; transparency in each region of people, planet, and profit holds inconsistency and anomalies.

One of the ways profit has been presented as purely ethical has been through impact investing, such as in benefit corporations or socially responsible investing (SRIs). This investment form cuts out so called 'sin stocks' and replaces them with ethical avenues for the maximization of return. Firms attempt to measure how ethical they behave, viewing it as a market inefficiency and strategic maneuver around smaller competitors. Corporate reporting acts as a central paradox of transparency, with firms spending countless hours amassing transparency reports, while "at the same time, however, the actual act of measurement is viewed as a means to achieve the that same transparency" (Hasselstrom, 2006, p. 166). This creates an existential dilemma and tautological circle for auditors, allowing cynicism to creep in. As Hasselstrom continues, "in order to appear transparent 'the social' has to be defined, standardized, and made into something that can be measured, rated, and ranked" (Hasslestrom, 2006, p. 161).



Measurability becomes the standard over which something is chosen to be displayed or tucked away, making quantification itself a prior level of intelligibility that needs to be crossed in order to be publicized. Measurement is important for any business activity, but becomes increasingly noticeable when applied to non-financial reporting, or SRI's which depend upon calculations and measurement to function. Qualitative data is often smashed, molded, and fit to serve preexisting calculation matrices, as . rating and ranking make cooperation and coordination possible since they tend to simplify, make visible, create, link, and stabilize different relations" (Hasslestrom, 2006, p. 174). Quant becomes a type of governance through numbers in deciding questions of justice, ethics, and other issues.

As Andrea Prat comments on transparency in the economic sphere, "one can attack the link between transparency and accountability it is not necessarily true that more disclosure makes the agent behave better," as firms can develop altered snapshots of performance specifically for reviews (2006, 91). This extends not just to economics but to social and political issues as well. Firms develop creative accounting features or utilize tax havens to help generate growth and increasing profits, all for a rationality that functions more out of self-interest than senses of duty or risk. Hetherington notes how "documents are therefore the place where abstracted representations meet actual, messy contexts, inciting confusion and competing interpretations," that documents signify and are excessive—here, corporate earnings documents signify a variety of issues, chief amongst them the rule of quantification in determining decision making" (Hetherington 2011, p. 8). Transparency acts from a neoliberal set of logics, as David Harvey explains when saying "all agents in the market are generally presumed to have access to the same

information. There are presumed to be no asymmetries of power or of information that interfere with the capacity of individuals to make rational economic decisions in their own interests. This condition is rarely, if ever, approximated in practice, and there are significant consequences” (Harvey 2007, p. 68). Oftentimes the greatest economic gains are gained through secrecy, whether insider trading or speculating and betting on some new endeavor. The market is built upon information imbalances, which transparency through disclosures confuses as a leveling of the field.

Returning to Prat, her anecdote about European Union Central Bank board members, and their repudiation of transparency in decision making illustrates the uneasiness to which organizations publicize information—it springs not from New England town halls and deliberative democracy, but a concern to keep decision-making private and the process itself as a ‘black-box’—unintelligible to the outside world (Heald, 2006). The idea of a black box is something Alexander Galloway points to as a precondition for cybernetic societies, which have “oriented themes of invisibility, opacity, and anonymity, or the relationship between identification and legibility” replacing older concerns (Galloway, 2011, p. 245). Prat’s distinction is that board members in transparent situations have to play for an audience, that with open meetings members can pander and by “taking adversarial stances ...make the decision making process slow and cumbersome” (Prat, 2006, p. 100-101). Open meetings lose pragmatic ability and become instead events that cater to spectacle and outrage for a perceived audience, whether they be investors or the general public. Organizational openness is a, much like community, exists on the condition of who is privy to information and who is not, on an essential immunity—then the limits of an organization have to be drawn. A

truly open organization necessitates exposure to a borderless terrain which is anathema to certain contemporary business practice.

This is why for Derrida, a true democratic society (or organization) has to allow for secrecy, both in the private realm with literature being able to imagine (fake) alternative visions, as well as in the public for actual pragmatic action. As Birchall contends, this is the ground for the democratic project, that democracy “is nothing but the play between openness and secrecy, between belonging and nonbelonging, sharing and not sharing... It is an impossible project: true democracy would create belonging among people who will never belong” (Birchall 2017, p. 47). This is a point David Stasavage elaborates around the idea of ‘political correctness’. If representatives are watched and monitored, they may bend to the loudest minority opinion regardless of private intention, as “political correctness of this sort can lead to a dramatic loss of efficiency in policy choice,” and a “...potential complication for theorists of deliberative democracy” (Stasavage, 2006, pgs. 169, 176). It is also a point made by Flyverbom, in looking at technology companies with “open offices, sharing information, and “defaulting to open” will increase productivity, engagement, and trust among members and have positive impacts on how outsiders perceive the organizations” (Flyverbom, 2016, pgs. 115-16). Oftentimes these default to open projects encourage surveillance in the guise of management of productivity, very similarly to Frederick Taylor’s early management techniques. Secrecy, or some composite of it depending on the case, becomes needed to foster activity.

In the sustainability sector, transparency often manifests in labeling procedures and insight into products. Klintman and Bostrom point to the distance between products

and consumers, where most cannot name most of the ingredients or raw materials in devices, foods, etc. Unlike the medieval town, or even the Old general store, our consumption habits have grown incredibly de-personalized. From this, "...in reflexive modernity, where production processes are often highly dis-embedded from our daily lives, impersonalized schemes for certifying, labelling and auditing products and production processes has been increasingly called upon" (Klintman & Bostrom, 2008, p. 184). Certification schemes attract our eyes and promote ethical supply chains and organic food, as "risks are uncertain, socially and culturally dependent, and since they are evaluated and interpreted in many different ways by actors with diverse ideologies and interests, a more comprehensive transparency must reach far beyond the concrete visibility and direct awareness of the label itself" (Klintman & Bostrom, 2008, p. 179). Certification becomes one more avenue for brands to market themselves.

As a consumer I may be against sweatshop labor but also not have the funds to not buy garments made with toxic chemicals—no label is able to clear any and all risk and alleviate all the moral quandaries of engaging in modern day consumer culture. Transparency does not help solve these problems, whether it be through labeling or open meetings, and can sometimes be dangerous—as Heald pithily writes, transparency can mimic sunlight and be a 'disinfectant', but now in the age of climate change, also a major risk for sunburn and cancer" (Heald, 2006). Transparency is being challenged by a variety of various disciplines, but the power of surveillance, automation, and information that it also carries is best surmised by Garston and Montoya, who in their 2008 volume write:

“We argue that notions of transparency are involved in efforts to fashion, govern, and control human activity in a normative way and are intrinsic to a cluster of concepts and practices that constitute the globalized market rationality. The concept is thus lined to a neo-liberal ethos of governance that fosters individualism, entrepreneurship, voluntary forms of regulation and formalized types of accountability. And since it is inscribed in political, financial, and cultural documents, processes and policies that work towards a certain normative vision and order, transparency is a powerful device” (Garston & Montoya , 2008, p. 283).

Transparency, then, carries with it a structuring ability that makes citizens into employee-auditors, information pundits in a networked society. In a Derridean sense, this type of information allows no time for reading, introspection, reflection, and response. If we cannot carefully engage with the things before us, they can overwhelm us. Thus the excessive responsibility to read every piece of information also becomes too great. Overload and exhaustion can set in, pacifying an interested constituency.

Birchall departs from Derrida in advocating for a more opaque society. She cites the work of Eduoard Glissant, who establishes “opacity [as] the foundation of Relation and confluence” (cited in Birchall 2017, p. 48). In order to communicate, to be in relation with the Other, and then to attempt to act in an ethical manner, demands that we devise an alternative to the current “good” shareveillant subject of neoliberalism” (Birchall, 2017, p. 48). For Birchall, this constitutes an enormous risk, capable of sparking a rhetoric that appeals more to dictators and criminals and removes the work of transparency advocates in making critical information available. Birchall advocates for secrecy despite this risk, as it constitutes “the ethical risk, the ethical possibility, in a leftist commons, is that the self unknowingly sacrifices itself for an Other who identifies with the Right. That is secrecy at work. Secrecy, sacrifice and risk. The risk is what gives the secrecy of the commons a political value” (Birchall, 2017, p. 77). Discourse can

always be co-opted, used as a violence against the Other. Birchall's<sup>43</sup> warning is that as more and more pure information about Others is flooded into the public sphere, it too can be used for violence and is not neutral.

As Simon Critchley has noted, democracy being without foundation puts it at “permanent risk” and needs to be worked with “dirty hands” (Critchley, 2014, pgs. 239-240). The danger we face is in “the representation—or rather, fantasy—of a homogenous and transparent society, a unified people among whom social division or difference is denied” (Critchley 2014, p. 206). In denying the secret, we also deny difference—we deny the ability to have something different, something that is hidden, even though this extends to all things and events. Birchall's citizen-auditor replicates the neoliberal focus on personal responsibility in the nexus of open data, as “it becomes the fault of citizens when anomalies, abuse or corruption are not noticed” (Birchall 2015, p. 191). A transparent society then is one “without friendship or faces,” reducing everything to pure information (Critchley 2014, p. 235). As Briankle Chang notes, philosophy for Derrida “is white, not colorless, and mythological, not rational, because the founding concepts of philosophy are irredeemably metaphorical” (Chang, 1996, p. 53). Transparency operates on this same metaphorical plane where it substitutes for agency, even toying with the idea of omniscience when it functions to obscure as much as it reveals. This paradox is central to CSR discourse and its application.

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<sup>43</sup> Birchall writes, “if the asking of these questions is considered a luxury pertaining only to those who already have ostensibly open and accountable systems, consider this: those states that do not yet have data-driven transparency, but which are looking for models to import, have a strategic advantage over those that already do. (Birchall, 2015, p. 195)

## Chapter Five:

### Social Accounting and the Secret

Tax Law is like the world's biggest chess game with all sorts of weird conundrums about ethics and civics and consent of the governed built in. For me, it's a bit like math. I have no talent for it but find it still erotically interesting' – David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King*

At the heart in the debate over corporate social responsibility is the nagging sense that, even amongst a multiplicity of bottom lines and goodwill initiatives to make the world a better place, we eventually hit the material bottom *bottom* line, the vexing financial question of how a corporation sustains itself. That this question animates or conscripts efforts to shield and cover itself as not pure greed or profit motive, but something else, colors CSR discourse. MNCs, such as Amazon, make billions and fund massive social programs while also eroding public institutions by blackmailing cities for tax breaks in order to move service there. MNC's move headquarters to islands or offshore tax havens, which represents a large sum in estimate of "\$5 trillion, which is equivalent to almost one-third of total GDP" (Preuss, 2012, p. 1). This massive treasure trove reveals a rupture in the language of finance and market rationalization of accounting, which often usurps more philosophically or ethically minded CSR dialogues.

The common CSR answer to such problems would involve demands for greater transparency from corporations such as these, whether they be Enron in the past or Amazon presently, or the next scandal to come in the future. As Nadesan (2011), argues, voluntary transparency campaigns may only legitimate bad behavior, as two decades of financial fraud demonstrate that voluntary enacted or self-policing transparency protocols, or both, are prone to create opportunities for deliberate distortion and

corruption.” The goal of this chapter will be to explore possible solutions not from regimes of transparency, but, as Derrida proposes, from the recognition that fraud is part of our communicative foundation. Using the theme of the secret, which spans across several of his later works, this chapter argues that every financial report is a story framed in a way certain manner, with expectations of a reciprocal return. Nothing new can enter into dialogue through pure calculation, especially in attempting to program the social realm; thus, at the end of the chapter I will turn to Peggy Kamuf’s wrestling with the accounting discipline in higher education and her notion of account-er-ability.

There has been a diffusion of accounting and reporting tools to emerge since the new millennium, from Transparency International to the United Nations Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), to the SA 8000 and Fair Labor Association (Rasche, 2010). Each of these, although having areas of overlap as well as departure, have made possible attempts to quantify or measure the effectiveness of businesses and institutions at social and governance programs. They have allowed new systems of accounting, beyond financial disclosures, to be transmitted to the public as evidence of responsible behavior. As Gray (2002) comes to argue, accounting *can* use tried and true methods to help further create a more accurate picture of what corporations are doing through advanced techniques and inclusion of social and environmental activities.

This can take several forms, as Reynolds and Yuthas (2008) articulate a Habermasian vein of social reporting, where more disclosure moves business and society (together) toward an ideal speech situation; international bodies and frameworks such as “EMAS and ISO require reporting entities to disclose environmental policies or aspects and, in addition, to outline the management structure governing the environmental management



system” (2008, p. 60). Researchers such as Owen and Swift (2001), Sinkovics, Hoque, and Sinkovics (2016), and Lawrence (2007) follow Frederick (1994) in the movement from corporate social responsibility to corporate social *responsiveness*, to finally corporate social *performance*, highlighting the link between positive behaviors that enhance society while at the same time doing the same or slightly better than the last reporting period.

This is also echoed by Neville, Bell, and Menguc’s (2005) analysis that the commitment to stakeholder interests increases financial performance due to stakeholder’s taking stock of corporate reputation when making purchasing or investing decisions. Yet stakeholder involvement is not just a reputational asset to steer companies clear of potential crises, it represents smart financial sense as well; as Matthew Haigh and James Hazelton contend, socially responsible investments are typically better ones from a financial point of view: The first is that SRI funds can and will influence companies to change their operations.

The second is that the financial returns of SRI funds are no different from those of conventional investments in the short-term and are likely to be superior in the long term” (Haigh & Hazelton 2004, p. 61). Business fleeing from Apartheid supporting companies represents the social dictating the economic, and the prevalence and opportunity between social responsibility and financial performance. Gelb and Strawser (2001) argue this benefit as not being entirely ethically motivated, but that “companies have incentives to undertake socially responsible activities and that providing extensive and informative disclosures is one such practice” (2001, p. 2). This leaves open the possibility that this origin example could only occur in light of a discourse of profitability.

Theoretically most of the literature regarding CSR and financial disclosures pushes toward a positive connection where three key ideas form the “basis of the new reporting framework: transparency, inclusiveness and auditability. The first two represent a starting point for the reporting process, and the transparency principle is the masterpiece of accountability” (Moneva, et al, 2006, p. 128). CSR disclosures form on the basis of stakeholders wanting more accountability from corporations on issues such as labor, environment, and social well-being. What is often misplaced in this discussion is the accounting or auditing practice itself. As Tonty Tinker describes, “critical accounting requires a measured literature review” but most criticism of the actual practice ends in “...nothing but slights, belittlement and evasion” (Tinker, 2005, p. 119). While CSR literature has placed the financial-responsible connection as a ‘win-win’ and good for everyone, it hasn’t reckoned with the actual phenomenon of accounting and what that process actually does, and the values associated with it.

Coombs and Holladay’s *Managing corporate social responsibility* (2011) lays out the advantages, but also a few surface abnormalities. Even though transparency and disclosure are treated as Goods, they write, “for CSR, costs and returns can be difficult to define and assess” (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 145). Socially responsible firms seem to do well and profit, but those same indices cannot point to exactly why this occurs, leading thinkers such as Waddock and Graves (1997) to wonder if financially profitable firms are just *perceived* as being more responsible. Thought experiments such as the removal of just one child laborer from the supply chain induces complicated answers, such as “is it enough to specify progress toward social improvement as a return? Can we really place a monetary value on that?” to which of course we cannot (Coombs &

Holladay, 2011, p. 146). An organization claiming as victory the elimination of one child laborer from its supply chain immediately begets a reputational crisis, as the frame of a ‘win’ only signals the existence of child labor and slavery in general.

Businesses will no sooner commit the aforementioned folly around child labor as they would continue to push financial resources into failing projects, as “CSR initiatives may be labeled by some stakeholders or corporations as failures if they do not reach their specified targets. The corporation may be reluctant to report its CSR shortcoming” and appear irresponsible or worse, capricious (Coombs, 2011, p. 140). Corporations have enormous goals to meet just to remain profitable, bringing in the question of why even attempt other benchmarks to be judged upon? What *are* audits, how do they lead to accountability, and how does that effect our views of (corporate) responsibility? Michael Power’s notable text *The audit society* seeks to answer Tinker’s claim that accounting and the accounting profession refuses to critically look at itself. Power claims that the audit process itself is not as scientific as we commonly believe, and as far as classifications go, it retains a *fuzziness* due to “its migration and importation into a wide variety of organizational contexts” (Power, 1997, p. 6). In terms of CSR, it is the movement of auditing and accountability measures from financial transactions and yearly reports, moved into the social, environmental, and philosophical realm.

In his history of the practice, Power lays out an argument that auditing is a very old problem wrapped in the guise of the modern world; his contention that auditing exists wherever there is a gap in trust is perfectly illustrated in the example of movers, where four movers hire a fifth member to assure that no one steals anything from one another (Power, 1997). This is a principle that has moved into CSR discourse, as Coombs details,

“*Assurance* is an established process in accounting. It involves having an outside, independent third party review and verify the information and communication that a corporation is providing to its stakeholders, including government officials,” and identifies the multitude of acronym-al organizations that justify, record, rate, and certify CSR practice (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 141). The veneer of auditing is one of exactness, measurement, and scientific rationality, but in Power’s estimation is more of a dialectical process. The average person, if asked about audits, “will tend to associate it with a search for fraud. And when auditors fail to uncover fraud which subsequently comes to light, these same people will assume that the audit process has failed in some way” (Power, 1997, p. 22). When auditing does uncover misdeeds, it proceeds to enact a ‘dialectic of failure’ “whereby each crisis leads to a further round of institutional change” (Power, 1997, p. 26). The specter of guilt and illegality is raised merely by the mention of audits, as Arnett and Arneson (1999) recall, these unmet high expectations start to form and spread cynicism past representational forms in search of a there *there*, or guilt.

There are also massive pressures placed upon auditors to both find and not find evidence—to be hired again by a firm suggests finishing a positive report, and to continue employment with an NGO or government organization suggests rooting out corruption—all of which complicate the task at hand. Therefore, Power concludes that the

“Audit is never purely neutral in its operations; it will operationalize accountability relations in distinctive ways, not all of which may be desired or intended. New motivational structures emerge as auditees develop strategies to cope with being audited; it is important to be seen to comply with performance measurement systems while retaining as much autonomy as possible” (Power, 1997, p. 13).

Dialectical processes like this obfuscate what audits actually do, especially in the financial sector where they originate, and lead to expectation gaps within stakeholder constituencies. For Power, the audit society is one in which audits do not scientifically prove trust, but rather, they “and their related accounting statements function as labels which must be trusted. They do not form a basis for communication and dialogue” and threaten to make closed societies (Power 1997, pgs. 127-128). Being fit to be audited and passing audits, thereby receiving seals of approval, hardly justify actual benefits to society for Power. “In short,” he writes, “auditing is demanded under circumstances where resources are entrusted but where trust is also lacking and must be restored by the audited activity” (Power, 1997, p. 135). Audits as a phenomenon consists in both “shallow rituals of verification” (Power, 1997, p. 123) as well as highly technical and narrative statements about impossibly large organizations.

Power does not think auditing, accountancy, and other forms of documentation are worthless. Rather, he points out these criticisms in order to better re-orient readers to the central issue of trust that sits at the heart of such a process. As authors Lev and Gu discuss in *The end of accounting*, “today’s auditors avoid straightforward and clear terms like true and correct reports. Rather, they hide behind the statement that the financial reports “conform with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.” (Lev & Gu, 2016, p. 13). Accountancy is built upon measures of trust, all of which revolve around a relationship between third party accountants, acting as verifiers of public goods, corporations, and the public. In James Aune’s rendering, “accountants have long been acknowledged as experts in creating a sense of order. Their view of the world is generally accepted as objective, true, and fair and is indeed a skilled

accomplishment,” one that is not subject to bias, transgression or the messy features of human life (Lawrence, 2007, p. 232). Accountants, in this classical form, are representative of practices that “reflect the commonsense assumption that decisions are best made by leaders who rely on hard facts rather than soft emotions” (Aune, 2007, p. 211). Aune’s rendering highlights a realist tradition that prides itself on easily calculable ‘tough decisions’ as can be seen in declarations by Friedman-esque libertarians such as the late Charles Krauthammer<sup>44</sup>. Decisions, even ones dealing with shifting subjects, still represent ones and zeroes, are mathematical, and can be tallied and shown *as* accountable.

Most of the world, even as Power shows in these ones and zeroes of accounting, is interpretable and open to contention and debate—by constant invocation of reports as evidence of good behavior, CSR reports overstep such boundaries and layers of trust that audits are to create in the first place, leading to a form of accounting where everything is tradable and emptying SD of content by seeking to extend it to everything” (Moneva, et al, 2006, p. 123). Aras and Crowther (2011) that accounting’s main purpose is communicative, but in reinforcing boundaries between management, employees, and those outside the organization it also operates as a tool of power. Accounting being conceived in this manner has been conceptualized by thinkers such as Stanley Deetz, who claims accounting acts as a “disciplinary power that colonizes the organization by creating newly internalized facts and vocabularies that are constitutive of organizational

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<sup>44</sup> Krauthammer opined that nature should be subservient to man, and although he had nothing against the spotted owl or other endangered species, if the choice was between logging or oil industries and the species, he would choose the human endeavor. Krauthammer’s endeavor to publicize such comments reflects Aune’s point about the reflected superiority of the realist mode of address.

reality” (Deetz 1992, p. 280). Rather than a practice that verifies, assures, assuages, and checks, accounting becomes the overall constructive principle for the communication constitution of a corporation, where the corporate report replaces the organization itself as the real,” eliminating any chance to overcome profit motive as the driver of CSR (Aras & Crowther 2011, p. 525). The feature by which we judge responsibility is cached in reporting mechanisms derived from financial transactions, despite auditing being an interpretable practice, the best reports would be those that adhere most to a profitable financial report.

As Deetz (2007) recaps, the values embedded in standard accounting practices remain unexplored, and subject to manipulations from management using them as discourses of control, over third party auditors, employees, and the public. The notion of this expertise excludes those without it from entering into decision making arenas, essentially delimiting agency and action. The reduction of these other aspects of CSR to financial reporting leaves such a discourse only pragmatically tenable under accountability measures. Accountability itself runs counter to certain conceptions of responsibility, which is voluntary, excessive, and always to come, and accountability, which is (in terms of financial reporting) mandatory, measured, and from the standpoint of the present. (Shrivastava, 1995). Movement between these two poles is magnified by Moneva, Archel, and Correa (2006), as they differentiate between *philosophical rights*, which are ever changing and hard to determine, and legal rights, into which auditing and accountability fall; therefore, “*accountability* can be defined as the right to receive information and the duty to supply it” (2006, p. 125). Information does not signify communication, or a deep serious engagement at all—oftentimes the common person can

be baffled by detailed investor reports, and makes decisions related to other factors—if they even pursue reports at all. The common cynical perception is that there are systems in place to create wealth from wealth, something Deetz certifies in discussing how “...regulation inevitably leads to a costly double bureaucracy,” a public one to set up rules, and then private ones designed specifically to evade, transgress, “...find loopholes, and avoid regulation” (2007, p. 270). Accounting then becomes communicatively expedient, as it is exact science on occasion as well as simultaneously flawed.

In wielding yearly or quarterly profit statements, some of which include other social endeavors, organizations declare themselves, or are declared by third parties, *as* responsible. This also reduces a responsible ethics to mere financial or economic measures, all of which can be measured quantitatively. Again, I am not arguing that quantitative measures are of no import and useless; rather, my argument revolves around the idea that responsibility cannot be measured *as* a quantitative value, that it overruns these formats and introduces a grammar of ones and zeroes, used in speculative financial transactions occurring increasingly faster and without context, as well as a bind of success/failure, short term profits/sustainability, disclosure/opacity. As Mark Fisher explains, “auditing can perhaps best be conceived as a fusion of PR and bureaucracy, because the bureaucratic data is usually to fulfill a promotional role,” all of which is useful in a market that is quickly buying responsibility as an intangible asset rather than an end goal (2009, p. 50). If corporations can buy responsible stocks, if responsibility can be measured, then it is not far from being commoditized and sold as well.

This thinking is what led to catastrophic events such as the Enron scandal and 2008



financial crash. Seeger and Ullmer's article 'Explaining Enron' seeks to "illustrate the consequences of attending to a very narrow set of values and stakeholder concerns and the dangers inherent to radical innovation where few established rules or standards are available" (2003, p. 60). In the simplistic view that financial accounting and its relation to CSR activities gives, Enron was an upstanding corporate citizen that continually pushed the boundaries on what was possible by merging more and more different industries under one roof. Any doubt can easily be brushed away by this term of 'innovation' which Seeger latches onto, where fraudulent behavior is neither scandalous or unethical, but a necessity for experimental and creative offerings.

Adherence to the profit motive only allowed upper management at Enron to continue to chase massive rewards. Seeger and Ulmer's analysis points towards a culture of secrecy inside the organization, which used intricate accounting loopholes to "...hide debt and further enrich those Enron executives who ran them" (2003, p. 70). By shoving money into special purpose entities (essentially dummy corporations), Enron executives enriched themselves while pilfering from the actual company coffers. Seeger's example that the company culture shrouded itself in the glow of innovation as cover from inquiry emerges from the anecdote that Jeff Skilling, CFO at the time, called a stock analyst an "asshole" during a public meeting for suggesting that company financial statements were incomplete" (Seeger, & Ulmer, 2003, p. 74). Enron, according to financial reports and CSR indexes that praised charitable donations and commitments to community, represented enough evidence that Enron was ethical while at the same moment Enron was defrauding investors and neglecting legally appointed fiduciary duties. When the company's deviance was revealed, upper management such as Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey

Skilling blamed the very practices that had allowed them to siphon funds and delay crisis, blaming the accounting firm tied to Enron, Arthur Anderson. Typical responses included being unaware of fraudulent practices, but employees recounted how “...actions were explained on the grounds of creating innovation by moving more quickly. They also had the additional benefit of ensuring that no paper trail could be used to determine accountability should a deal go bad” (Seeger & Ulmer, 2003, p. 73). Financial statements are given such a monopoly on truth in that they determine the health of the organization—almost given the aura of life-saving medicine—that the gaps, missives, are quickly pushed away. There are no *aporias*<sup>45</sup> in math.

### **“The Enchanted In-Between”**

Fulfilling the profit motive is important—like quantification, this is not an outright denial of its need—but as the sole excessive driver of an organizations can lead to unethical behavior. The linkage between CSR and financial performance does help put in much needed outreach programs, environmental policies, and more egalitarian hiring practices, all of which help the ultimate bottom financial line. However, as Andreas Rasche argues in a *recent Business of society* article, these sort of programs are “...most urgently needed whenever it does not support the financial bottom line” (Rasche, 2018). Like accounting, bottom lines themselves are difficult to pinpoint, not due to the human element but directly because of the advances in the globalized and liquid nature of the financial system, which is treated in more detail in Brooke Harrington’s *Capital Without*

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<sup>45</sup> Timothy Morton, in a recent podcast episode discussed cantor sets, and the collusion between chaos theory and patterns that can be found in using fractal imaging of a Cantor Set on a computer. Godel’s incompleteness theorem also stands as a paradox or problem in mathematics, but this view is usually upheld.

*Borders.* Her text outlines the tactics and mindset of the wealth management profession. Harrington, through a series of interviews and historical narrative provides a glimpse into a world “... that provides secrecy and legal cover for a variety of activities that benefit the few at the expense of most. These range from criminal acts (such as laundering the proceeds of drug deals or corruption) to strategies that are legal but socially destructive” (Harrington, 2016, p. 132). In thinking through auditing and financial performance to corporate social responsibility, or responsibility in general, Harrington’s profiles start with the offshore tax haven industry, locations such as Panama, the Isle of Jersey, Luxemborg, or the Cook Islands, referenced by Harrington as those of an “...enchanted in-between” (Harrington, 2016, p. 295). These zones of unregulated financial accumulation and secret dissemination act as a parasitic force upon the nation state, sapping what Harrington estimates to be around \$200 billion in tax revenue.

While inflated revenues do help the overall CSR effort, they also (paradoxically) contribute to the problems that funding for CSR goes to fixing. Places like Jersey suffer from what Harrington dubs ‘the financial curse’, where the hollowing out of civil society, combined with the destructive monoculture of the economy” leaves the governing bodies of these legal in-betweens dependent upon repetitive interventions to supplement state services (Harrington 2016, p. 247). The Cook Islands, for example, has become dependent on the financial industry to gain a foothold in the geopolitics of the region, but when pressured by foreign services or governments to give up or reveal certain documents—to be audited, essentially—they must fall back on those same services to provide a threat or check against such intrusions. States then must invent or recoup in some ways the lost tax and support for civil programs lost by the exclusion of hefty bills

from the super-rich. As a result of the “failure of the international legal system to catch up to the realities of globally mobile people and capital” (Harrington, 2016, p. 134). States must chase down wealth as innovative schemes to move it and obscure take funding away from government programs, which then creates a public relations need for these same organizations to prove their essential goodness, leading to private investments in the infrastructure they helped destabilize.

Ingvar Kamprad, the founder and driver behind IKEA, presents a perhaps more concrete realization of this dilemma. While IKEA is considered an ethical company and is a driving force for sustainable practices, such as producing its own electricity for stores or its massive recycling program, it too participates in this circular, paradoxical logic. Although IKEA is native to Sweden, Kamprad set up and used foundations in the Netherlands and Lichenstein to avoid hefty tax bills (as well as solidifying his hold on the company). These foundations, across national borders and sovereignties, allowed IKEA to escape large tax burdens. They also worked to benefit the reputation of IKEA as company focused on social missions, not entirely driven by the profit motive.

In typical CSR parlance this is considered a ‘win-win’, but as Harrington elaborates there are a few losers: first are the states that are unable to recover lost revenue from taxes, and are bombarded by neoliberal policies that further weaken the state as a social safety net, even in strong social welfare countries such as Sweden in the mid ninety-nineties (Harvey, 2007). Secondly, as evidenced by a report in *The Economist*, Kamprad’s charities were actually some of the *least* giving of those surveyed, neglecting the mission they were created for and serving mainly as tax avoidant enterprises (Harrington, 2016, p. 153). So while the state is giving a financial exception for

charitable behavior, this could perhaps be better administrated by some other figure than one driven by making and securing profit.

The IKEA example also points to the failure of the Corporate social performance-financial performance metric, and CSR in general. As Harrington explains, there is a world of difference between tax evasion, which we usually think of and demonize in conjunction with offshore wealth management behavior, and tax avoidance, which is fundamental to the competitive spirit of business in general (Harrington, 2016, p. 153). Parsing the two apart is oftentimes difficult, especially in a globalized system of varying laws and the introduction of these supra-national grey areas. While tax evasion is illegal and prosecutable (although difficult) on an international stage, tax avoidance is not. And while most behaviors that we could deem tautological, such as Kamprad's donation system, they are not *illegal*. They do however create a schism in our understanding of an organization's responsibility. The need for CSR has been created, according to Harrington, in the development of such tactics as offshore tax havens and innovative accounting structures to avoid regulation. She infers:

“The success of wealth managers in freeing their clients from state authority, as well as the decreasing legitimacy of state authority this has created, may account in part for the decline of the ‘old money’ ethic among the rich. The sense of obligation to public service and to model civic behavior has sometimes been mocked as a false front or derided as *noblesse oblige*, but it had real consequences. Testaments to this period on which the wealthy still belonged somewhere are still readily observable in forms such as the thousands of public libraries built by Andrew Carnegie, or of the interstate highway and Internet systems, created in the decades following World War II by a federal government that was able to impose—with little resistance by elites—a top marginal tax rate of 70 to 90 percent” (Harrington, 2016, p. 292).

The loss of *noblesse oblige* has left modern owners of wealth with the ability promote charitable, ethical activities as fulfillment of responsibility while ignoring or sidestepping basic requirements of nation states. This is illuminating of the voluntary nature of CSR and its ties to promotional culture. Instead of obligations required, for which we assess basic moral or immoral results, adherence to *only* the bottom line produces a ROI fueled interest in CSR activities. When only the financial case is considered, “the moral need to address an issue, because *it is the right thing to do*, falls off the agenda. Corporate sustainability becomes a pick and choose exercise, which corporations frame wins whatever way they please” (Rasche, 2018). The business case will be tied to accounting, computation, and appraisals, and not the larger social effects or impacts.

The skimping of tax burdens becomes miniscule when rated as accountable or ‘responsible’ by third party agencies, as well as cheaper for the corporation. For Harrington, such conversations as these around wealth managers and those adhering to the business case ignites “self-defense mechanisms,” for which “... being obliged to honor their debts, pay the costs of government, and otherwise obey the law of the land are offenses to liberty” (Harrington, 2016, p. 136). The real danger lies not in directly advocating for less-than-legal tax loopholes, but in directly viewing corporate social responsibility as return on investment, or financially beneficial. It reduces the social to the economic in a hope that society can be measured and shown in totality as *transparent*. This, of course, fails as social activity is often complicated and subject to multiple interpretative angles (which accounting is supposed to be above, or absent from). The status of these tax arenas bring to light this question of ‘enchanted in-betweens’, acknowledged gaps in the totality of an all-seeing and encompassing system.

“Islands are often taken to embody absolute security, fixity and closure, identified with the sameness of an assumed interiority and insularity,” Stewart Williams proposes, but often they are anything but (2012, p. 219). These enchanted spaces of fraud where a third of the world’s wealth resides unchecked represents the utmost “questions of identity and sovereignty” when it comes to the global market (2012, p. 217). Again we must return to the story of Robinson Crusoe, “one of the first business ethicists” according to Campbell Jones, who this time concerns us for reasons beyond eating and cannibalism (Jones, 2003). Several scholars have connected the ‘Robinsonade’ tale to aspects of business literature (Jones, 2003; Wark, 2015; ten Bos, 2003) and ethical behavior. Rene ten Bos situates Crusoe as *the* first business ethicist, claiming that as soon as he arrives on the “isle of despair,” Crusoe begins to “meticulously start doing the accounts of all events in his new life. However, rather than becoming an ordinary bookkeeper who systematically records business transactions, he becomes, for want of something better, a sort of *moral* bookkeeper keen on recording the good and the evil” (ten Bos, 2003, p. 267-8). Crusoe then represents the first social accounting of its kind as well.

Crusoe is wary of any others on the island, as rehashed before he considers cannibals after him upon discovering tracks, and, upon first seeing Friday, attempts to shoot him and misses, and then sets him to work to recreate the world he had left. Crusoe develops an auto-immune function to the island, as it seen as a contamination which he must rid himself. The moral accounting ten Bos speaks of “exemplifies an uncompromising unwillingness to engage with the island as it is, a shield against the actual experience and an actual engagement with what is in front of him (2003, p. 268). ten Bos describes Crusoe as being afflicted with melancholy, of turning himself into a counting machine in

order to subdue the chaotic environment around him. His point is that today, social accounting does much the same, but with built in biases towards profit and surviving. Business ethicists today “...preserve the robinson-esque’ illusion that catastrophes can be handled, that something can be done, that we need not become overly pessimistic or unhappy with business organizations, in short that redemption is available” (ten Bos, 2003, p. 269). Why not both be withdrawn as well as fitted to such fantastical notions of control, especially on an island, with its fortress mythos, and especially in these zones of calculative control, these enchanted in-betweens of tax havens and OFC?

The Crusoe parallel is an apt one as it does return the goal of accounting. for social action and measurement to bottom line rhetoric. Preuss frames such a dichotomy in simplistic terms, saying of course organizations and MNC’s return to this, format, it being the basic digestive way of being: “after all the fundamental layer of Carroll’s (1979) pyramid of CSR— what are the chances that the company will meet further reaching responsibilities? (2012, p. 2). Profit must be generated to survive, and this project is not here to question the validity of making that—but, transposing it in terms of eating, which assimilates things into the same, coalesces this nexus of cannibalism, profit generation, and ethics—it brings us back to Derrida’s question of how to eat *well*? Crusoe recreates the world he remembers and banishes otherness for melancholic nostalgia. It is a replacement of the same where the otherness of Friday, the island, and the world stand. For corporations who knowingly transgress this exact science, and yet adhere to it like testimony, is this not the same? Does this not confuse the social with other phenomena that be measured appropriately? Social engagements—meeting the Other—represents an incalculable experience that cannot be pre-programmed, an event.



Social phenomena has an excessiveness that exceeds the cost-benefit equation and overruns traditional accounting, which itself has blindspots, as Harrington points out.

One of the more interesting passages in Harrington's *Capital without borders* involves her invocation of Dickens enormous *Bleak house* and the figure of Mr. Tulkinghorn, who Harrington describes as the first instance of a victory of the professional over blue-blooded inherited wealth; that Tulkinghorn's profession as a lawyer and, "by knowing how a families trust is set up, and the secrets within, "...unlike the family physicians, butlers, and governesses who serve the nobles, Tulkinghorn's knowledge of the families innermost workings makes him *their* master" (Dickens, cited in Harrington, 2016, p. 11). Because these rich families have to *account* for their wealth, properties, familial hierarchies and spats, because they account *to* Mr. Tulkinghorn, they unwittingly occupy a subservient position to him. Even though in a subservient position, it is the secrecy that is afforded Tulkinghorn, the intimate knowledges he assembles that gives him a true stake, or some measure of sovereignty. It is not the empty accounting however, that confers such a right, but secrecy, the thing that accounting wishes to erase. In the next section, I move to issues of secrecy, secrets, and Derrida's formulation of the secret to work through the *aporias* presented in accounting.

### **Eating the Secret**

Hypothetical thought experiments often can take the most abstract concepts and place them within a world of phenomenal experience. Oftentimes these thought experiments can help draw on what readers know and push towards the limit of thinking. The conclusion of this chapter focuses on the move from thinking through a world of calculation and verification, of accounting for *everything*, a transparent looking-glass to

one in which the secret is realigned as a potential guardian not of privacy, but of ethics, justice, and responsibility. By breaking with a total (transparent) information regime, secrecy protects an organization's ability to affect change and act responsibly by undoing the linkage to reporting and bottom-line thinking. CSR as lip-service or window-dressing becomes a false idiom, where we speculate on whether or not a company is *truly* responsible, and by what measure, and where they fall on an index or rank for it.

But as Michael Nass (2008) remarks, it is the *as* that deconstruction should concern itself with. Secrecy, like transparency, is not as simple a demarcation of the hidden versus the open, nor is it subject to the easy moral declarations that would follow such a program. Often secrets, or secrecy, is bound together with lying as a joint venture, one foregrounding the other, one, lying, a microcosm of the larger void that secrecy obfuscates. In *Without alibi*, Derrida addresses the problematics of the division between secrets and lies, while at the same moment also warning of the conceptual barriers to these two issues; one, that a history of the lie purports to do the opposite of its subject matter, that is, to *tell the truth about* lying; and secondly, to operate on grounds of the lie in the 'classical and dominant' sense (Derrida, 2002). Secrecy has the ability to shroud, but not all shrouds are unethical.

Postponing the first question, the tangle that secrecy and lying finds itself in, Derrida dresses through Arendt. Arendt's thinking on the public and private (Arendt, 2013) and its collapse into the social anticipates many of the arguments around transparency. As society continues to blur the lines between public space and private space, we lose both. Humanity has become obsessed with *doing* over contemplation, another consequence of the loss of a private sphere. This is not, as one would suppose in

a discussion upon secrecy and lying, aligning Arendt solely with a pre-surveillance state privacy. More importantly, as Arnett in *Communication Ethics in Dark Times* writes, it is a question "...to push for the natural dialectic of private and public life that permits one to witness the need for the deconstruction of modernity. This communicative act of deconstruction is the rhetorical reaction of postmodernity. The rhetoric of deconstruction continues with the existential fact that postmodernity is not hegemonic; ...thus, within postmodernity, modernity continues to live and prosper, maintaining a call for efforts at deconstruction" (Arnett, 2012, p. 258). Such a situation places "Arendt's criticism of modernity ...within a larger body of postmodern scholarship that deconstructs the false pretenses of modernity" (Arnett, 2012, p. 1). The loss of private sphere is a precursor to the erosion of the public one, where modernity, this 'classical and dominant' sense is taken as natural and given.

Arendt's deconstruction of the lie (according to Derrida) then comes from this modernist/postmodernist division; we have the old lies that are meant to deceive, hide, or distract, and the thoroughly modern ones, which are meant to destroy. Arendt's focus harbors the first, a 'conspiracy in broad daylight' in which deception aims "to tell the truth in view of deceiving those who believe they ought not believe it, the credulous ones who believe they are clever, skeptical, or experienced enough to know what has to be believed" (Derrida, 2002:63). In this line of questioning that Derrida moves towards the secret, a "political cryptology" whose "...theme is not that of the secret society, but of a 'society with a secret', whose structure permits a 'conspiracy in broad daylight' that is not a contradiction *in abstracto*" (Derrida, 2002, p. 63). Derrida's point is that society itself has *a* secret, one that cannot be known to itself, and that it cannot abolish without

totalitarian consequences. But what does such a society with a secret mean? And what would such a society look like?

The typology of secrecy and lying together functions towards a transparent regime—get rid of the hidden and the opaque, and deception, corruption, indecency, etc., will disappear. Turning to Sissela Bok, who clarifies and ‘unbinds’ these two conceptions, moves us closer to Derrida’s point on a ‘society with a secret’. Bok takes concealment or hiding as foundational traits of secrecy, while lying involves the willful and intentional deception of another; secrecy also “bespeaks discernment, the ability to make distinctions, to sort out and draw lines: a capacity that underlies not only secrecy but all thinking, all intention and choice” (Bok, 1989, p. 6). Bok warns against initial value judgments of secrecy, to “...retain a neutral definition of secrecy, therefore, rather than one that assumes from the outset that secrets are guilty or threatening, or on the contrary, awesome and worthy of respect. A degree of concealment or openness accompanies all that human beings do or say” (Bok, 1989, p. 9). Whereas for Bok, and Arendt, lying as a negative phenomenon stretches back to at least Kant, secrecy is to be judged for what it accomplishes, not as a purely negative or evil phenomenon.

Bok’s text gives a variety of uses of secrecy: at one venture, she echoes Harrington in pointing out the “...formalization of the professional practices of secrecy and openness. At times the shield of privacy is held up to protect abuses, such as corporate tax fraud or legislative corruption, that are in no matter personal” (Bok, 1989, p. 14), while at other points opting for arguments that “economy would benefit from greatly reduced secrecy. True, they admit, individual firms might suffer, but society would gain as the market came closer to the ‘perfect information’ that encourages

innovation and growth” (Bok, 1989, pgs. 148-9). Whereas lying is categorized as a negative communicative act, secrecy is rendered ambivalent. For Bok, secrecy both protects and harms, as in the corporate sphere, “if corporate secrecy did not exist, this argument holds, it would have to be invented” (Bok, 1989, p. 147), while, at other points (following Weber) she argues secrecy occurs “...whenever there is negligence or abuse to cover up (Bok, 1989, p. 25). Bok’s text weaves through various aspect of secrecy from politics, to government, to whistleblowing, but on a macro level leaves us the problematic question of “is it possible to require both publicity and secrecy? The tension between the two is inevitable” (Bok, 1989, p. 112). Such language is reminiscent of Derrida’s undecidable, and puts Bok’s investigation into the realm of ethics.

In the corporate sphere, Bok appears to side with thinkers like Harrington and Rasche in arguing against collective secrecy, that it is often worse due to “...much of esoteric writing, meant to provide signs of recognition for insiders that will mean nothing to outsiders. Modern bureaucracies have sometimes entangled themselves in extraordinarily cumbersome and self-defeating methods of safeguarding secrets thus recorded: classification of materials, screening processes for those with access to them, barriers to oversight, and retaliation for transgression “ (Bok, 1989, p. 108), with an especially bitter following paragraph decrying public relations. Secrecy often acts to protect the private sphere or property, but when encapsulated in groups, often leads to what she calls ‘risky shifts’ or deviant behavior. Secrecy in this specific instance, the bureaucratic instance, does seem to return us to a ‘classical and dominant’ sense of the lie as written by Arendt, where the banalization of choice leads to evil.

It is a specific form of secrecy that *directly* follows Harrington's expose on wealth management that adds another layer of business operations on top of what CSR must account for. The tautological operation of doing good deeds to account for negative actions such as tax avoidance, that could be considered a respectful deed in the first place operates within and because of (according to Bok) secrecy. She claims:

"most often, however, those who exempt themselves from collective efforts do so in secret if they can, without stating their reasons in explicitly in public or even to themselves ...secrecy, when available, is peculiarly likely to increase the temptation not to cooperate with others to reduce shared burdens. Even where joint efforts are of clear benefit to all, as in working to ensure fire protection or a pure water supply, secrecy has such an effect. It is then a test of the strength of people's altruism and sense of public responsibility. Secrecy then removes accountability, and thus the chance of disapproval or sanctions that exempting oneself from shared efforts while enjoying their fruits would otherwise arouse" (Bok, 1989, p. 107).

Secrecy seems an easy manipulation of communal effort to achieve goals, again invoking the neoliberal spiral of the slow death of public welfare programs only to institute private initiatives in the place of them, passed off as corporate social responsibility. Where does this leave Derrida's society of the secret, when group or bureaucratic secrecy, unbound from lying, only returns to deceptive practice in Bok's estimation?

Following the work of Charles Barbour, Derrida's 'secret' or his communion with it stems from the fact that every speech-act we pronounce is tainted and driven by secrecy, that the possibility of deception, or of an undetected and undetectable secret, conditions or haunts every single relation we have with one another" (Barbour, 2017, p. 13). For Barbour, Derrida's fascination with the secret is closer to his obsession with

testimony, something that conditions his entire oeuvre; as he states in *Taste for the Secret*, his “...concern about testimony, about testament, about leaving something that has a certain form, that appears” is more a concern about writing and interpretation than secrecy in this classical sense (Derrida, 2001, p. 79). To speak at all for Derrida is a promise, a confession, to tell the truth, to want to be believed, to be seen as a unique individual (Barbour, 2017, p. 52). The secret is around us at all times, an always already, due to the lack existing in language to fully confirm or assure what we have experienced; like Blanchot remarking on his own death, “goes for all communication, every interaction, and even experience in the broadest sense. ...every day and everywhere, we are always understanding something that we cannot possibly see, verify, or comprehend—something that is, in Derrida’s words, ‘singular in general’” (Barbour 2017, p. 133). Due to the deleterious effects of language, and the lack of total communication between minds, there is always a secret.

Communication, then, is the attempt to dispel secrecy back to abyssal chamber it ‘classically’ operates from. Barbour’s examination, or the point of his scholarship is that “...namely that society is organized around, not just communication, but also secrecy. Paradoxically, the secret is integral to the social bond” (2017, p. 142). It is this question of the witness, of testimony, that permeates throughout Derrida’s work, from *The Gift of Death* and Abraham’s imposition to a factual retelling of what happens on the mount to, to literature itself, to the invocation to be believed; as Sarah Hammerschlag opines, “the moment one asks to be believed, the moment one pledges to tell the truth, one puts one’s irreplaceability in question through the repeatability of the discourse. Testimony depends upon duplication even as the pledge promises the purity and unity of the one who

pledges” (Hammerschlag ,2013, p. 94). From what Derrida concludes of Baudelaire’s story, we can draw similar line to the responsibility of corporations: “as long as one can *count with and on cash money* to produce effects ...as long as money passes for (real) money, it is simply not different from the money that, perhaps, it counterfeits” (Derrida, 1992b, p. 153). Likewise, as long as corporate social responsibility produces effects, as financial reports and transparency disclosures *produce effects*, they pass as *real* responsibility, or in line with Derrida’s idiom, counterfeit responsibility.

Problematically, we cannot deem corporate social responsibility then a negative or false concept, despite this counterfeit nature, for the secret itself is “foreign to speech—outside of responsibility, a kind of ‘absolute nonresponse” (Derrida, 1992, p. 27). It is, also as Barbour details, part of the very thing holding us together with one another. Derrida’s privileging of the secret violates a constitutional sense of ethics and rights, one that Derrida points out in *The Gift of Death*, and is echoed in Danta’s reading of the secret, that “by concealing the purpose of his sacrificial mission, Kierkegaard’s Abraham betrays ethics since ethics demands disclosure and punishes secrecy” (Danta, 2013, p. 68). CSR discourse, and reporting especially, does not typically operate in the ethical sphere, but the accounting sphere, the sphere of the economic. Are we then, on a much lesser scale, able to judge corporate social responsibility and pass through the ‘madness of the decision’ to decide upon it? Or does it linger between these two realms, of ethics and economics? Derrida’s performative ‘term’ of the secret pushes us toward a realization that secret or transparent, reported or accounted, claims of responsibility whether counterfeit or not circulate the same way. If there is an actual responsibility, it is not something that can be accurately measured by the market, or accounted for.



The marketing of financial reports (Phillimore, 2016; Fleming 2012; Lev & Gu, 2016) and reduction of responsible behavior(s) to calculative measures evades and evacuates the excessiveness of Derrida's responsibility. As Hodge hypothesizes, "connections between fraud and expropriation in political economy, and in intellectual life are hypothesized by Derrida somewhere between *Given time 1: counterfeit money* and ...*Specters of marx: the state of the debt, the work of Mourning and the new international*" (Hodge, 2013, p. 384). The world economic system functions like a language, and has within it embedded convictions centered around certainty, measurement, and infallibility while also demonstrating internal contradiction.

Rather than fully abandon such moments, to concede to hopelessness, Derrida offers a rather odd response in *Counterfeit money*, where Derrida's recombination of Baudelaire's tale of a beggar receiving a coin with Mauss theory of the gift, (I have laid out the finer points of in chapter three). The 'madness' of Derrida's examination rests on the constant speculative interests that occur once the beggar receives a coin, money, which the giver has a specific intention the beggar use it for (to better himself, buy food, or shelter) and which then obligates the beggar to use it; the beggar at the same moment wonders whether the coin is real, if he has been stiffed, and what he is to do with it, and if the giver is honest, is true, is a credible witness to his poverty. In this unlimited speculative and chrematistic circulation, a limit unexpectedly occurs, where Derrida remarks "an interruption opens, in truth it recalls to its opening the space of an absolute heterogeneity and an infinite secret between the two, *between all the two's of the world*" (Derrida, 1992b p. 156). Erasure of economy, of seeking full knowledge between the Other and the self, leads to a more ethical interaction and acknowledgment of the Other

*as other, as secret.* We can never have a total working picture of the Other, a total and totalizing quantification and image of the Other still misses leftovers of the person.

The grounding of the secret as a central aspect of communication is again an effort to protect the alterity and singularity of the Other, an ethical concern at play in all his works. As Dan Boothroyd explains, the secret is not some fact to be searched out and revealed, but a “secret I am obliged to ‘keep’ can easily be misread in terms of a privileging of the secret as ‘privacy’ over the ‘publicity’ of disclosure. It would thus be a privileging of the ethical *at the cost* of the political” to reveal the secret (Boothroyd, 2011, p. 46). Boothroyd finds both Levinas and Derrida advocating for the secrecy of the Other, as something that the *Res Publica* consistently tries to make public, accountable, and controllable. The use of transparency for the destruction of secrets, which on the surface seems a noble gesture, helps multinational corporations and governments “... restore or assert authority against a rising wave of popular mistrust—by offering in one form or another ‘greater transparency’ through the revelation of ‘secrets’ eliminates the sovereignty of the Other, putting into play the ‘mad’ speculative economy that seeks absolute totality (Boothroyd, 2011, p. 54). We can never really know the totality of the Other, or ourselves (as an-Other); but social calculation allows for the reduction to the same, the servitude of Friday, or the eating of secrets.

The privileging of secrecy is to render persons singular and *incalculable*. It is to free communication from the speculative demands of economy. Geoffrey Hartman’s critique of transparency places the added emphasis on the communicative aspect of this “demand for transparency,” which “...leads us to believe in a ‘society of communication’ where the medium is the message, and it tricks us into merging truth and

transmissibility” (Hartman, 2002, p. 1575). Derrida’s rejoinder would be to answer Bok and Power’s question of which dystopian society we would exist in, the totally transparent or the totally secretive, with the argument that we already and have always lived in a society of secrecy, one in which we are constantly attempting to make more tenable, calculable, and viewable. This, turning back to Boothroyd’s analysis, is a futile gesture, as

“No amount of disclosure or transparency, one might summarize, renders the event visible, graspable, or knowable as such—for ‘the event itself’ is not on the record; it is not recordable as such. And if we accept this necessary condition of the *absence of the event from the record* generally speaking, then just how are we to think of responsibility in relation to the informational archive which mediates our relationship to it?” (Boothroyd, 2011, p. 51).

There can be no totality, or total account, of what an organization does, let alone its responsibility. Responsibility is excessive, it outruns attempts standardization, control, and organization. As Rasche points out, auditing standards are both necessary and unnecessary, as “standards turn the undecidable into the decidable, they remove responsibility from adopters and thus should not be considered as a promising way to foster corporate responsibility” (2010, p. 287). The undecidable does not delimit our responsibility as communicators to seek justice and fairness in the marketplace but requests more “serious reflections about how auditors and production facilities can jointly work towards more effective standard implementation (Rasche, 2010, p. 289). The ideal of counterfeit money, or counterfeit accounting, reveals the *aporia* in reporting and accounting, a process into which one is called to account, even if they cannot fully ever accomplish such a feat.

A society of secrecy, then, is not one in alignment with Harrington's tax evaders or a purely market rationality that what is good for the bottom line is good for society as well. Auditing is not the same form of inquiry as phenomenological investigation, although under neoliberal formulas it is treated as closer to truth. Power is correct that a culture of secrecy breeds no trust, and in fact makes society impossible—an impossibility which Derrida, in focusing on the secret as endemic to communication and response—sees already at work in society. Power, along with Rasche and Derrida, all come to similar conclusions, that in auditing “there can be no guarantees of success in relying on such *ad hoc* sources of intelligence and accounting, but they can be distinguished from auditing in terms of a primary orientation to *discomfort*” (Power, 1997, p. 145). An auditing or accounting of discomfort, which realizes it is incomplete as it strives for completion, can lead from the madness of speculative guessing and counter-moves in Baudelaire and the dances of tax evasion and corporate accounting to more phenomenological accounts of obligation and the meeting of responsibilities.

Paradoxical as it seems, the first step toward delegitimizing fraudulent reports may be in fact to accept fraud as common. The risk here is great, as society may further lose control against the liquidation and movement of frictionless capital through proliferated digital technologies. Without the recognition that organizations publicize reports as legitimation for their actions, and the public passivity in accepting reports as guarantors of truth abdicates our responsibility.

## Account-er-ability and SRI's

Although bound up in the same system of neoliberal exchange as the thing it seeks to regulate, accounting and measurement of CSR can still be possible, and is fact *both* needed and unnecessary. Echoing Rasche's claim that the most needed or most urgent time for CSR efforts is not when it matches the financial bottom line, but when it *transgresses* it, Peggy Kamuf (2007) coins the term *accounterability*, a portmanteau of accountability inserted with the Derridean concept of iteration. Kamuf aptly identifies the neoliberal bind that accounting, or quantification of social issues in general, runs into when accounting and audits speak of "proof but of evidence, nevertheless, the accountability discourse begins to slide towards irrefutable certainty, on to the ground of the sure thing, which is, I suppose, what every market investor dreams of" (Kamuf, 2007, p. 38). The collision between auditors and the corruption they chase from the same dream of a totalized information paradigm, where noise is rendered mute and the best decisions can be made. Not only is this counter to Kamuf's Derridean scholarly corpus, it runs counter to the finance industry itself, as it is also rife with these 'enchanted spaces' of offshore tax havens, rapidly shifting capital, and innovative techniques that render funds invisible. For Kamuf, writing a year before the housing crisis, something as unforeseen and impossibly big as the 2008 crash fits within *accounterability*—not the foreseen coming, but the unexpected emergence that is incalculable, and catches us off guard.

What Kamuf's claim of account-er-ability does is offset our preconceived notions of what these statements do; as Waddock (2000) points out, good natured efforts of social investing, from the primal scene of the movement in investors fleeing South African

firms that supported Apartheid, to investing in universities and pension funds—are already submitted to this logic. Kamuf’s article centers around accountability and its enmeshment with sovereignty, as her own university faced greater scrutiny from donors—who, after having donated some large swaths of money, feel inclined to see such an investment work—and the changes to curricula that may come from it. Waddock’s point that negative issue screens can help identify “...issues that certain investors actively wish to avoid because they pose what those investors perceive to be unacceptable or “incalculable risks” to certain stakeholder groups or to society in general” (Waddock, 2000, p. 328) opens accounting to this dimension of the future or *l’avenir*. Although operating in a different register, Waddock’s description of more “holistic” audits (2000) poses evidence in the social investing literature of the problematic nature of accounting.

Even the genealogy of such a term as ‘accountability’ is “A place of overdetermined crossing between calculation and narration, between count, account, and recount,” open to interpretation and human error (Kamuf, 2007, p. 33). Vassili Joannides (2012), taking up Kamuf’s term, finds the deconstruction of accounting always already at work in the profession itself. Joannides combines Kamuf’s deconstructive practice with the insight of Messner (2009), arguing “the accountable person is presented as a moral and responsible self-seeking to witness the truth, so that others have faith in him or her. Traditionally, such truth and fairness can be found in stockholders and investors basing decisions upon faith in financial disclosure,” all of which takes at face value the ability for investors to stand transparent, which, as engagement with social issues, is never fully apparent (Messner, qtd., Joannides, 2012, p. 245). Joannides finds three issues with account giving itself, one of the (financial) self being opaque and not always capable of

reflection; the giving of an account, or the need to give an account opens the self to violence from the Other, in the form of an interrogation; and finally, the introduction of the third or another higher principle who may view my account, without my prior knowledge (Joannides, 2012, pgs. 246-7). This Levinasian articulation introduces iterability or instability into what is considered a firm and solid ground of the financial system, metaphorized as ‘the bottom line’ even in a triple bottom line discourse.

All three of these have real world correspondences that complicate our concepts of accountability. Kamuf’s own example of the university demanding compliance and evidence of her teaching, quantitatively defined in publications, grants, research awards, etc., is related in the backdrop of the humanities profession, where such classifications do not necessarily match the measured phenomenon with reality. The violence done in giving an account, of forced to give accounts speaks towards Joannides concern for “The who, for what and by which means questions have been largely addressed in studies of limits to accountability and transparency and the aporetic nature of account giving. The ‘to whom’ question seems to have been under-explored suggesting general acceptance that account demanders are stockholders or other stakeholders” (Joannides, 2012, p. 245). That as much as CSR may point towards a mutually beneficial collaboration, the financial case *always already* entwines us in service to the profit motive and capitalization. CSR and financial affinity reveals the *aporia* of producing intelligibility *for* capital markets, as auditing as a process not in the confirmation or lack of corruption, but as a driver of financial decision making. *Who* the audit is for, then throws the regulatory or ethical nature into crisis. Following McKernan (2012), Joannides declares the *aporia* at the heart of accounting: accountability is characterized by contradictions as yet unresolved:

while giving an account supposedly constructs the moral and responsible self, by insisting on compliance with social norms, the accountability discourse leaves moral and ethical concerns aside (McKernan, 2012). In other words, argues McKernan, “accountability is the condition of possibility and impossibility of responsibility and morals” (Joannides, 2012, p. 245). The audit, or accountability, can never fully answer, but knowledge of this bind does implicate us to belief, to want to be believed and to want to a keeping of the secret.

## **Conclusion**

A fundamental aspect of corporate social responsibility is the recording of positive initiatives so that they may be further funded. Without evidence that some program is meeting or voluntarily staying ahead of regulations, stakeholder interests, or environmental standards, it will not be widely adopted or continued. Corporations look to such programs both to convey evidence of ethical behavior, as well as build trust. To communicate this, many businesses have turned to international bodies or used accounting standards common to CSR literature to show they have met standards of what we would call responsibility.

The work of Derrida on the secret shows that such attempts at transparency necessarily eventuate in holes or gaps in such testimony, and that attempts at total audits seek epistemological certainty, which cannot be achieved. Even in accounting there are loopholes, discrepancies amongst practices of measurement, and an uncertainty in quantifying ethics itself. Yet we still have a need, a desire for testimony of met responsibility, even if this will always be unmet in its fullest potentiality. Such a bind or



“collapse of patent interaction does not imply the folding of responsibility but instead implies its very beginning. For Levinas, not only does responsibility include the possibility of breakdown, but is in fact constituted upon such a possibility” (Pinchevski 2005, p. 183). Kaumf’s counterability moves us toward an accounting for responsibility that looks to have gaps or permeable edges, to report incomplete statements and invite fraud rather than assert authority, and invite communication rather than designation.

This is not to claim that the social cannot be quantified mathematically, as social science methods can attest to, but that placing human, social activity into terms of cost/benefit and investment/return can never lead to a full accounting of social life. It in fact negates alternatives such as poetics, narrative, philosophy, and other forms of testimony to be realized, opting instead for a false totality that only bends to measurable phenomena. As Hasselstrom describes the logic of SRI is a quest towards better tools, and the “fact that these tools themselves define what they measure is not problematized by the commentators. ‘Social Responsibility’ becomes constructed as transparent, yet tangible, simply through the application of the ‘proper’ tools” (Hasselstrom, 2008, p. 175). Some things cannot be measured, but are force into these boxes and claimed as responsible. Others, such as tobacco or other ‘sin’ stocks, routinely make most ethical companies lists. Derrida’s help in this area on socially responsible investing is the notion of the secret, but also that “there are only islands. Any community is an artificial, deconstructible, construct fabricated out of words or other signs” (Miller, 2009, p. 132). In terms of the global market and calculability, it is presumed transparent, rationale, and accountable, but all too often we wash ashore on these enchanted in-betweens, and the

quest to devour the secret of others in terms of a ledger becomes the primary goal.

## **Interrupting: Blockchain technologies**

Given that this project is writing *with* Derrida, and against the limit of a totally transparent, visible, calculable method of data dumping and information, the text of the project must also be interrupted. Derrida's method, if it does anything, interrupts typical discourses and forces them to reckon with their own inconsistencies. To follow the format of a typical dissertation, when using this theorist and these concepts seems to do injustice in capitulating to a strict, rigid format. Writing out of sequence would create only disorder and incoherence, which is not my goal, while writing wholly within the format also seeks to undermine my stated intentions.

Into this void I propose formal interruptions, anecdotes which transition from one chapter to the next in the case studies of the triple bottom line. By showing that even Elkington's concept is more contaminated than simply "planet, people, profit," these interruptions will focus on an aspect related to the previous chapter that is worthy of investigation in their own right. If we are interrupting CSR as it stands, to question if it is really undecidable, and therefore ethical, we must take into account what Amit Pinchevski admits in "when writing about interruption, the fabric of the text must remain ruptured" (Pinchevski, 2005, p. 100). By rupturing the flow of the text, I hope to focus on issues that run alongside each chapter while also escaping the frame of the triple bottom line.

Each interruption focuses on an unstated aspect of the chapter while bridging to the next; after discussing social accounting in the previous chapter, this interruption focuses on blockchain technology, situated as the culmination in auditing technology and

auditing itself as a technological process. This takes us to the next chapter, a discussion of organizational communication and structure, which in the case of holacracy is based on technological models and seeks to turn employees into pieces of information. The next interruption focuses on stakeholder maps, and concerns itself with Henry Ford's worker utopia in Brazil, which ultimately fails. It explores the negative consequences of investing into workers social lives in hopes of better production. The global scale and postcolonial element transitions us to chapter seven on sustainability, and the global nature of risk in this age, demonstrated through coffee supply chains. The final interruption seeks a meeting with Habermas's public sphere theory, which has been confined to the margins of the project and in need of discussion; Habermas's theory stems from a potential mis-reading of coffeehouse culture, and impacts how we think about the contemporary public arena.

Pinchevski's writings on interruption also bring together several strands of theory that have yet to be unified in the project. By discussing communication, responsibility, and ethics, Pinchevski's writings give a forward momentum and certification for such a mode of writing, as he declares that

"But interruption also marks a unique kind of solidarity with the Other, one that is not characterized in union or identification, rather in responsibility. To discover this orientation in the self is to reclaim the responsibility for ethics, the responsibility for responsibility. Interruption as a form of communication, or communication as a form of interruption, means losing one's identification with oneself and responding to the absolute Other. Being predisposed to communication insofar as interruption, the self may be regarded as an elemental site of interruptions...Interruption thus signifies a certain absence, a withdrawal from presence" (Pinchevski, 2005, p. 96).

Interruption then functions as a way for the text to acknowledge its dis-unity, its inability to one-hundred percent contain and dominate that which it contains. Interruption functions as a fasting from a self-cannibalization, refusing to claim supreme authority or expertise. The following will examine blockchain technology as well as Bitcoin, two paradigms that seek uninterrupted control.

Although existing since 2009, in the last year blockchain technologies—particularly in the form of Bitcoin, Ripple, Ethereum, and other cryptocurrency—have steadily made their way into headlines, in a variety of different contextual manners, from Wal-Mart using some form of the technology in supply chain to opinion pieces framed around using blockchain to make Syria’s Assad more accountable. The term holds mythological power from its sheer newness, and its acolytes fervor in spreading the word about the world changing ramifications of this new technology, as Maxwell, Speed, and Pschetz insinuate in discussing smart contracts, or new forms of journalism in the current disinformation era (2017). Blockchain, and the difference between it and Bitcoin pose an incredible risk, all the power of a digitized archive, one that is steeped in its inception on economics over information. New research on blockchain is still new, but it does allow a return to questions of the archive, memory, and distribution.

Blockchain technology, and its main descendant, the Bitcoin<sup>46</sup>, have created swirling debates about the efficacy and usefulness of such technology. Paul Krugman

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<sup>46</sup> The remainder of this essay will sue Bitcoin and blockchain technology intermittingly, but my intent is to not confuse the two—Bitcoin operates much like a web browser for the Internet, relying on the underlying technology (blockchain). The philosophical or social underpinnings of both products relies on the same precepts, namely, digitizing trust and moving away from institutions, particularly those associated with the state.

has titled Bitcoin as “evil” in an op-ed, citing as a digital equivalent of a gold fetish (Krugman, 2013), while others such as tech investor Marc Andreessen sees it as the main way to combat fraud, fight spam and disinformation, and reach the lucrative market of those two million persons in the world still “unbanked,” or not directly plugged into the financial system (Andreessen, 2014). Blockchain technology attempts to create an *unhackable* store of information based on the work of a diffused public who verify each action or transaction, tied to a single originary and unimpeachable ‘genesis’ block. Each subsequent block is then attached or tied in relation to this origin, and users cannot move or tamper with any block without disturbing or erasing this originary genesis block, theoretically making fraud, money laundering, and falsity obsolete.

What actually is (or might be) the blockchain? Blockchain technology as a basic instrumental tool exists as a distributed ledger where complex computer processes provide proof of a user’s work. As Maxwell et al. continue in their overview,

“The blockchain therefore is an encrypted, cumulative, distributed ledger composed of blocks of transactions that are confirmed by miners, which, for Bitcoin leads back to the first Genesis block whose instance is timed as 18:15:05 GMT on 3 January 2009, signifying the start of the Bitcoin currency. The production or mining of these hashes involves mathematical rules that are highly computationally intensive and expensive. Miners are incentivized by the potential reward of currency within the system (e.g. Bitcoins)” (Maxwell et al, 2017, p. 82).

This by no means limits such a technology to mere peer-to-peer banking or exchange.

Melanie Swan<sup>47</sup>, a blockchain/Bitcoin advocate helped compile a register of a blockchain

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<sup>47</sup> Swan has published a flurry of books and articles about Blockchain tech recently, under the imprint of O’Reilly Media, which media theorist David Golumbia portrays as proselytizers awaiting to

conference, publishing “Towards a philosophy of blockchain” she sees the technology being used “in restructuring the traditional operation of economic, financial, legal, and governance systems,” even perhaps one day serving as our societal memory generations on (Swan, 2017, p. 4). Swan cites computational and statistical science, as well as lumping together the work of Judith Butler, J.A. Austin, Jacques Derrida in her advocacy. Swan’s citation of Derrida is his call to answer Joyce’s yes, but seems an odd compatriot here in such a discussion.

A conceptual debate exists over the very nature of blockchain technology and its uses, particularly whether it exists as a revolutionary technology poised to deliver a ‘web 3.0’ shift, or limited to the financial sector for the moment. Swan quarters it as digital currency for now, with opportunities to expand into multiple arenas. She confesses that “because of Bitcoin, blockchain seems to fit particularly well within the conceptual category of digital money and online payment systems,” but other implementations lay just beyond the horizon (Swan, 2017, p. 6). As Catherine Tucker and Christian Catalini submit in an article in *Harvard business review*, the technology encompasses “a clever combination of economic incentives and cryptography, and ensures that at any point in time, digital records reflect the true “consensus” among the key stakeholders involved” (Tucker & Catalini, 2018). The technology then acts as an impartial accountant, which removes the “...need for trust between players, or the need for a central authority to verify and maintain the records of transactions,” using claims to dependability and efficiency (Tucker & Catalini, 2018). Users of such a system might take heed where the

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cash in (Golumbia, 2016, p. 46). I take Swan’s work with a grain of salt, and also to demonstrate the incredible advocacy push accompanying this new format

local banking system is nefarious, relying on this digital, global one, or might again use it to quickly and quietly store funds away from the state.

David Golumbia inscribes a deeper and more tawdry history to this new technology, arguing that it itself communicates a vision of cyberlibertarinism, which fosters values that do not immediately seem to come from the political right but manifest in a fears of a world monetary system on the verge of collapse from central banking, and an absolutist distrust of the state as “evil” even if private enterprise is committing similar offenses (Golumbia, 2016, p. 2). Golumbia traces a history of distrust in the state’s economic guidance from Milton Friedman’s monetarist policies in the Regan Administration in 1981, to more outlandish evidence such as the late 70’s Joh Birch Society, and current conspiracy peddler Alex Jones (Golumbia, 2016, p. 20). Golumbia’s thesis is while we generally assume hackers as young liberals, the ‘outsider’ mentality also lends itself to extreme right-wing politics, positioning a shadowy, uber-rich class who control world events and disparage ordinary people, beginning with the removal of the Gold standard; to which, the irony is quite large that the replacement of solid currency to paper is chided, but to a digital, ethereal one is celebrated. Bitcoin was developed in a theoretical paper by the pen Satoshi Nakamoto, in an attempt to prove a critic wrong that peer to peer transfers could work a transparent and digital form of exchange. It is important to note that the underlying philosophy under blockchain and Bitcoin enterprise is that people cannot be trusted, but markets, math, and technology can, neglecting that these formats are not mediated by humans as well.



Citing the U.S. commercial code, Golumbia makes the case that Bitcoin—which operates on a blockchain style ledger system—functions not as cryptocurrency as much as it does speculative commodity. As it stands at the time of writing Bitcoin is classified as a commodity, *not* a currency, with Web 2.0 publishers such as Google and Facebook removing ads until better standards are set. For Golumbia, this erases none of the politics behind the such a system which overvalues “decentralization” of money and power, which “as a good in itself too often obscures as much as it reveals, and there are any number of ways in which, despite its technically decentralized nature, Bitcoin functions as a centralized and concentrated locus of financial power” (Golumbia, 2016, p. 65). For Bitcoin to work as a currency, it must be absorbed into the already ‘fallen’ world of banking and contemporary economics, prompting “adoption by the very bankers, financiers, and politicians some Bitcoin enthusiasts loathe so much,” ironically leading to feelings of the “corruptions of the Bitcoin ideal” (Golumbia 2016, p. 67). The new middlemen turn out to be the same as the old middlemen, albeit worse in having to deal with adapting technology.

There emerge two problems: the first is the actual functioning and calcification of Bitcoin into an established system. Bitcoin takes up a gigantic amount of energy, and it takes time for the verification process to occur. Early adopters wanted to move to new Blockchain format, which was debated and shut down, leading to the “...entire Blockchain becoming unstable or too slow to process transactions, a fight broke out about the possible shift to a new version” (Golumbia, 2016, p. 74). The populist drive to access of this global currency is quickly being replaced by speculators, using massive supercomputers to ‘mine’ or perform transactions to acquire more Bitcoin; so much so

that Iceland's electrical grid has severely suffered due to the large amount of digital mining occurring there (Noack, 2018). The energy required to perform these complex 'mining' procedures rival the electricity consumption of nations such as Chile or Ireland in an entire year. Such energy use has been "large enough that it has suggested to some that Bitcoin itself is "unsustainable," as well as unregulated (Golumbia, 2016, p. 29). Golumbia also details how one entity could amass 51% control of the blocks in the blockchain and essentially set the rules to what they want, akin to setting interest rates, tax brackets, and wealth redistribution; this was thought impossible for Bitcoin, but has happened at least once (Golumbia, 2016, p. 29).

What actually concerns Golumbia is the position blockchain, especially in the form of Bitcoin, operates as communicative phenomena, and what it communicates. Bitcoin for Golumbia spreads the ideology that "government and governance in general are outdated, to be replaced by market forces," and are morally *bad* (Golumbia, 2016, p. 23). For all the new uses being attributable to blockchain technology, it hasn't yet solved the problems it is intended to fix *now*, those being fraud, accounting loopholes, and trust between parties on a purely digital platform. This is a dangerous precedent that (ironically) dissolves accountability of the technology while "reinforcing the view that the entire global history of political thought and action needs to be jettisoned, or, even worse, that it has *already been* jettisoned through the introduction of any number of digital technologies" (Golumbia, 2016, p. 74). Want to end war? blockchain. Streamline healthcare? blockchain. Golumbia's worry is the redistribution of power precisely back to those parties which Bitcoin is to draw from, while using populism and technology as an umbrella cover. "Even Bitcoin's own governance structures displayed exactly the

autocracy, infighting, bad faith, and centralization that the blockchain is said to magically dissolved,” essentially proclaiming that no system is without these very human issues (Golumbia, 2016, p. 75). For Golumbia, blockchain seeks to eradicate trust between persons, ‘decentralize’ it by placing it within software. All this really accomplishes is siphon legitimacy from interpersonal relations and add a second layer of trust in a nonhuman auditing tool, which is neither perfected nor carries with it any expectations in and of itself for justice, fairness, accountability, responsibility, etc.

Tucker and Catalini stress the utility of such systems, but also point to the issue they assess as “the last mile” problem. Essentially, digital records are dependent upon physical traces, or people, things, etc. to track, and need external validation. In an example of tracking newborn infants, the authors describe how a baby could have all of its data managed and assessed next to other babies, but still needs a physical human to corroborate that it is the correct baby—digital confirmation still needs an extra material backup. As the authors warn, “if humans get that wrong or manipulate the data when it is entered, in a system where records are believed ex-post as having integrity, this can have serious negative consequences” (Tucker, Catalini 2018). Accounting itself has become increasingly digital, but in neglecting the call from politics, problems of governance, even baby-watching, we reduce ourselves to non-ethical choosing beings, only cogs in a computer mechanism. This ‘last-mile’ problem represents the auto-immune response of such a technology in its claims to total digitality, a virtual space where wicked problems such as being together are evacuated. In order to be human, even in large, Kafka-esque organizations, we must focus on choosing, and a history of choosing that is not erased the

newest technology. Blockchain will not solve human problems of politics, and presents all the issues of veracity that Manucci<sup>48</sup> encounters in 13<sup>th</sup> century Florence.

A question to keep in mind, if such a technology becomes the repository for culture, for human questioning will be the question of the archive. No archive is a total, transparent recollection of each endeavor. Each archive supports itself by exiling certain things. If the blockchain becomes our future Library of Alexandria, it will do so by structuring each interaction, each looking after a child as an exchange with monetary value. Perhaps Derrida's question would be not what does the blockchain account for, but before whom?

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<sup>48</sup> Florentine merchant Amantino Manucci is often given credit for double-entry bookkeeping in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, although earlier accounts have been discovered in other locations such as Korea. The idea that each account is tied to another is a similar conceit that blockchain technology prides itself on, but is nowhere close to new outside of the digital aspect of it.

## Chapter Six:

### Organizational Democracy and Holacracy

“You know what the trouble with peace is? No organization.”- Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*

Edward Freeman’s monumental *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* first outlined the idea of a stakeholder in regards to the traditional shareholder, and how management techniques and strategy should interpret and communicate to them. What Phillips (2013) calls to attention, and needs perhaps acknowledges, is the pun at the heart of such a term, always signifying the presence of shareholders, even in absence. From Henry Ford, uber-capitalist being sued by the Dodge brothers for trying to reinvest in employees (a vague but important group of stakeholders), to Kodak being sued for investing in a civil rights group as negligent use of *shareholder* dividends (Banerjee 2008, p. 59), stakeholder theory is always fraught with political conceptions. The literature usual represents stakeholders as either a voluntary group that advocates corporations to meet their expectations in return for patronage to that organization, or that stakeholders are implicated and co-opted by those corporations to serve public relations interests.

What this chapter seeks to investigate is the notion of the political that is at the heart of the term *stakeholder*, from its linguistic heritage to its conceptual apparatus in building or framing the modern organization. If we exist in and amidst stakeholder organizations, what does it do (to those organizations) if we interrupt this term of stakeholder? Does the organization still hold? If stakeholders are not shareholders--those

who invest and to whom the corporation is then financially bound to repay--what are they (and what do they want?).

Freeman in his original treatise first labeled stakeholders as those who are involved and invested in the justice of an organization, with how resources are divided up and decisions made; in other words “Stakeholder theory is concerned with who has input in decision making as well as with who benefits from the outcomes of such decisions” (Freeman, qtd. In Phillips, 2013, 25). Grunig and Hunt (1984) simplified this definition into anyone that can effect or be effected by an organization, casting a much wider net than the initial questions of those who make up an organization to a more open and ambitious net, including not only financiers but local communities, suppliers, employees, and customers. In order to draw more voices in, whether for appeasement or actual involvement, stakeholder theory employs varieties of “a dialogic, relational approach in favor of including stakeholder inputs and feedback into corporate decision-making. Inclusion, openness, tolerance, empowerment, and transparency are advanced as normative dimensions of stakeholder dialogue” (Golob and Podnar, 2011, p. 422). This broadened scope aligns with corporate social responsibility in building connections and relationships with those affected by the organization, helping to fend off through voluntary actions potential regulation or inoculating against demonstrations, boycotts, and ill-will towards the organization.

This broadened net however reintroduces the very thing it seeks to partially eliminate, namely, politics. In trying to ease relations between potentially aggressive, or, as Phillips defines them ‘derivative’ stakeholders (Such as competitors, activists, and

media), stakeholder theory contains within it the seeds of a pacifying strain (Phillips, 2013, p. 27). More vocal critics such as Banerjee would refer to the connection between stakeholder theory and CSR a form of stakeholder colonialism that serves to regulate the behavior of stakeholders,” serving only organizational interests (Banerjee 2008:53). This seems complicated given the vague and wide array of potential stakeholders all dominated by one univocal discourse, but does represent a challenging critique. The views from management literature often reflect a softened but similar diatribe, as Heath and Palenchar echo when describing how public relations becomes trapped between “conservative management” and “left or progressive stakeholders” (2011, p. 326). Diversity and balance of thinking in such areas becomes a strategic need.

As such, Aras and Crowther specify that stakeholder theory is “...consistent with a transmission view of communication, [as] these discourses assume predetermined and fixed organizational boundaries that separate internal and external stakeholders” (Aras & Crowther, 2011, p. 435). Stakeholder theory is always already bound up in CSR discourse via the need to express affiliation with the relevant publics that an organization is trying to persuade, inform, and manage. More than simply PR driven from the mouth of an organization, this type of discourse is often obsessed with “...an underlying need to ensure boundaries. Hence, the CSR policy becomes a communicative tool to negotiate stakeholder demands. The policy defines the boundaries of organization-stakeholder engagement by specifying the limits of CSR and warding off demands do not fall within its purview”(Aras & Crowther, 2011, p. 435). Contestation of organizational directives from potentially ‘derivative’ stakeholders are countered with one-way information about

the inner workings of the organization, as Phillips describes how such communication functions *as* the relationship between inside/outside, as

“Information is another vital good that is distributed among stakeholders by the organization. This non-zero-sum subject of distribution also plays a role in perceptions of fairness among stakeholders to the extent that full information contributes to the decision making process among stakeholders. Transparency between the organization and its stakeholders contributes greatly to perceptions of fairness” (Phillips, 2013, p. 26).

Allowing for this peek behind-the-veil allows stakeholders, even ‘derivative’ ones to see if they are being considered in decision-making and the trajectory or course of the organization; as Nadesan argues, “...high transparency is believed to overcome informational asymmetries that enable insiders to make self-interested decisions that might adversely impact “outside” stakeholders” (Nadesan 2011, p. 253). This communication is often theorized as dialogic and cooperative, but often is pragmatically focused on reports, metrics, and large information dumps.

Phillips, in applying Freeman’s theories from an organizational ethics perspective, has addressed the organization as the site of ‘meritocratic’ achievement, and, following Edwin Hartman, finds organizational ethics or *applied* ethics to be the highest form of ethics. As Morsing and Palmas articulate, this form of ethics is no easy task, as “the challenge of strategic management is about ethics and the need to create a satisfactory balance of interests among the diverse stakeholders,” with different levels of contribution, managed through “democratic discipline and communication skills” (Morsing & Palmas 2007, p. 102). The issue that Phillips, an advocate of stakeholder theory, takes is not of communication nor democracy, but of contribution; I will return to



these two terms, communication and democracy, later in the chapter. The first issue is the meritocratic privileging of the individual, as Phillips declares, “it is commonly asserted that stakeholder theory implies that all stakeholders must be treated equally irrespective of the fact that some obviously contribute more than others to the organization,” questions the validity of stakeholder equality. (Phillips, 2013, p. 27). For Phillips, the stakeholder theory of the firm is one in which the highest form of ethics is practiced, but certain ‘hypernorms’ as he defines them (drawing on the work of Donaldson and Dunfee), “lies outside the scope of stakeholder theory as a managerial theory of organizational ethics” (Phillips, 2013, p. 370). Organizational ethics presents a paradoxical situation stemming from *ethics*, as stakeholder theory is emblematic of this higher form and yet unable to reckon with basic moral questions.

A sympathetic reading of stakeholder theory in this meritocratic would articulate the paradox that Goodpaster (1991, 1994) defines between the various moral roles stakeholders hold in any organization, and who should lead the organization; that managers still have legal fiduciary responsibilities to divide up wealth while also addressing the multitudinous input from ‘outside’ sources. “When everyone in the world is a stakeholder of everyone else, the term adds little if any value,” as stakeholders become trapped in a subordinate position to a sovereign board, manager, or founder (Phillips, 2013, p. 34). Phillips develops the ideal that because the state is an overarching ideal which imposes citizenship and rights, while the corporation is a voluntary agreement between private parties that can be chosen amongst by employees based on mission, that the vast history of political and moral philosophy *need not apply* in organizational contexts. Rather, in organizations some stakeholders contribute more to

an organization's specific goals and thus have "legitimate expectations," that merit different needs based on ability (Phillips, 2013, p. 50). This furthers Goodpaster's paradox that all stakeholders need to be heard from in an organization but that the overall responsibility of an organization needs managerial expertise and efficiency.

Phillips argument posits that due to the nature of organizations, stakeholders are treated fairly through the level of contribution they muster and obligations they fulfill; that merely parasitically subbing the corporation for nation state and citizen for stakeholder fails to capture the reality at play. Again, this seems to remove the political dimension from stakeholders, as the corporation is not beholden to the same strictures of the state, yet retains a similar level of sovereignty. Or, as Fleming describes it, "notice the subtle ideological move here: if we can make money by 'doing good', then it stands to reason that *making money is itself a path to goodness* and may be harnessed to remedy some pressing social problems," namely, the amount of governance, decision, making, and participation these anonymous stakeholders can be granted (Fleming, 2012, p. 54).

Crane and Matten first articulate the idea of a 'stakeholder democracy' in their (2005) article where democracy means, for most, a Western style of governance that promotes hearing multiple voices or parliamentary representation, but that the concept of democracy is always a contested one, as in some parts of the world, democracy arrives on the back of a Tomahawk missile (Crane & Matten, 2005). As Moriarity (2014) laments, the idea of stakeholder democracy was initially adopted and then abandoned, due to a variety of factors, of which he supplies two directly and a third implicitly. His initial foray sees organizational democracy as too inefficient, as democratic processes *cost* a

great deal and take time as well as shareholders or managers having the required expertise to make decisions for large, complex firms. Moriarty concludes his assessment stating that stakeholder theorists came to decide that democracy is not “important to their theory, and (b) too radical. That is, stakeholder theorists may have come to believe that stakeholder theory’s goals could be achieved *without* giving stakeholders formal, binding control over corporations,” a notion supported by the larger business community (Moriarty, 2014, p. 832). This is a larger issue not covered in this chapter, but one that can be tied into the day-to-day needs of an organization, or cost, or overarching philosophical ambitions, or some combination of all three.

Moriarty’s condemnation exists as a simple question: “we might wonder: exactly which persons qualify as stakeholders? ... This question is difficult, but it is one that stakeholder theorists must answer whether or not they endorse stakeholder democracy. For they must identify the persons whose interests should be balanced and who should have input into firm decision making” (Moriarty, 2014, pgs. 829-30). Power cannot be evenly distributed and decision-making made transparent if we do not know *to whom* it is for. Although transparent, such communication then becomes non-dialogic, representing what Jodi Dean calls ‘communicative capitalism’ where “...instead of engaged debates, instead of contestations employing common terms, points of reference or demarcated frontiers, we confront a multiplication of resistances and assertions so extensive that it hinders the formation of strong counter-hegemonies” (Dean, 2005, p. 53). Stakeholder theory, and the satisfying of the ‘gap’ that exists between stakeholder expectations and organizational activity rests on communication. Fleming describes “dialogue, compromise and consultation are the key virtues of stakeholder theory,” but ones that can

easily be used to benefit one ‘stakeholder’ group against another (Fleming 2012, p. 50). The introduction of unlimited third parties into the dialogue necessitates the recognition of the existence of a political element, but one that is often tossed aside. Under the current trend in corporate social responsibility reporting and discourse, “it seems we are all potentially stakeholders. This may sound empowering, but how do the people involved conceptualize the stakeholder relationship, and how do various discourses shape these conceptualizations?” (Parsons, 2008, p. 122). Recognizing who are stakeholders are is not important just for organizations trying to map them, but for society in general in deciphering who these transparent messages are for—as Matten (2004) states, the audience is never really ever considered, due to the information transfer to stakeholders, this vague, amorphous thing being transmission based and perfect.

### **Iron cages and Crystal Balls**

The next section of the chapter seeks to delay the question of democracy in order to focus on techniques employed to facilitate transparent management of stakeholders, and how this practice of stakeholder management removes politics, and therefore chances of democratic/stakeholder leadership, from the purview of an organization. Weber’s oft used term of the ‘iron cage of bureaucracy’ is eschewed in management literature today, instead seeking the fulfillment and empowerment of employees in the corporate structure. From companies like Google having open floor plans and giving employees time and amenities to the removal of titles, exciting new thought has brought in peer-to-peer and transparent hierarchies, in order to do away with hierarchy altogether. As Kenneth Burke has stated, humans are goaded by hierarchy in a system, and it must exist in some fashion

(Burke, 1966). What then to make of the tech sector and the moves made there of non-hierarchical, transparent management initiatives? By focusing specifically on Zappos flirtation with holacracy, we can see how the paradox of not only stakeholders but transparency eliminates the chance for democracy by attempting to relegate politics from the organizational zone.

The management system holacracy seeks to build on the idea of a ‘flat’ hierarchy where the productive potential of employees are multiplied due to a free structure and the removal of management as a barrier to accomplishing tasks. Seeing management as an impediment to unbridled creativity and focus, such structure(lessness) pushes employees to realize potential on their terms, the organization acting as incubator for human development rather than attempting to fashion people into a specific form of worker. As Andre Spicer recounts in an article for *The Guardian*, many agencies have replaced a search for concrete skills for fuzzy values such as “passion, enthusiasm, and flexibility,” while many employees in newer sectors such as tech see “no hierarchy, their boss is their buddy, and work is fun” (Spicer, 2018). Workplaces such as Google or Facebook, with no formal dress code and fun activities for employees to engage in have circulated into media representations, often parodied alongside terms like ‘millennial’ as frivolous exercises in organization.

The idea of a flat hierarchy, however, has been established as a pseudo-structure by a number of organizations, and is a rejection of the scientific management that has been inculcated into corporate America and globalized business for some time. Stretching back to Frederick Taylor’s (1914) timed management studies, the ability to

survey, systematize, and watch employees has been a central tenet of organizations, or management itself. Attempts to exorcise management from the picture initially should be seen as attacks upon structure and management, but have been ingested into contemporary practice and study, holacracy itself occupying large swaths of issues of *Harvard Business Review* and academic journals. The goal of such a system is for employees to take up the challenge of actually constituting the organization, to not be *given* jobs but to sign up for what they feel passionate about by signing up for task groups, or *holons*: if you love teambuilding, under holacracy you can design and plan weekend outings; more pragmatically minded individuals can volunteer to run communication for an entire department. Holacracy is designed to be a more democratic, open, choice-based system resting upon transparency of the organizational chart. Sign up for the tasks you want, and see what needs to be done in a giant database of available tasks.

First, in looking at how the organization envelops and then dismisses politics with novel and forward-looking technologies of organization, I will take as the primary stakeholder of an organization to be the employee. As Sandra Waddock states, employees should be given special prioritization, since they “quite literally make up the business, hence deserve special consideration, particularly because employees are more directly affected by corporate operating practices than are other stakeholders” (Waddock, 2004, p. 318). Although most business and management literature considers the organization to be a culmination of the assets, people, and functions of a business, thinkers such as Francois Cooren and the Montreal school second Waddock’s appeal that organization is made up *of* people, and people then communicate—this communication

ultimately becomes the practices duties, and functions that most business literature supplants as organization.

For Cooren and the Montreal school, an organization consists mainly in the form of employees as the embodied organizational consciousness. Employees constitute the organization; organizations would not exist without employees, of the persons who day in and day out contribute to functioning of the organization. Cooren questions, “just imagine what an organization would be without the contracts that are signed in its name, the recurring conversations about its present situation or future, the directives that define what members should or should not be doing, or the mission statements that define its *raison d’être*?” (Cooren, 2015, p. 12). Indeed, our conception of stakeholders amounts to vague assemblages, and often neglects the work of nonhuman agents done by employees, composed of documents, intranets, procedures, meetings, and context-specific formats. Weekly meetings, or end-of-quarter inventories, become part of a “formatted queue” that, after implementation “presupposes that every participant will adopt specific methods or conducts (not being too far or too close to each other, moving forward when it is time to do so, etc.) that are meant to be recognizable, identifiable, accountable as appropriate, normal or suitable” (Cooren, 2015, p. 33). In other words, they become *standardized*. Organizational members respond to them, acknowledge them, and, ultimately, follow them. This standardization of practice also standardizes the employee themselves.

The very processes of work also in a way become part of the organization, although not endowed with the same rights, responsibilities, duties, as a living, breathing

person. Organizations are not comprised of just employees and other stakeholders, but also the immaterial labor they produce, including documents, memos, reports, etc. Cooren continues, that a typical failure in “research on organizational discourse typically reduces it to *what employees or managers do* when they produce and use texts, and fails to recognize that texts, on their own, also make a difference” (Cooren, 2004, p. 374). In other words, documents *do* things, they contribute on a large level to organizational viability, and every employee “...action is a form of *tele-* action, that many actors (human, textual, mechanical, organizational, supra-natural) can be said to act in a chain of representations” (Cooren, 2005, p. 22). Cooren description reveals that terms such as ‘stakeholder’ or ‘organization’ itself are contested concepts, begging questions of the “...problem with the term ‘structure’ (as well as nominalizations such as ‘organizations’ or ‘institutions’) is that it functions as a hodge-podge concept, in which scholars include an array of factors, such as material conditions, memory traces, ideologies, power, and control” resulting in ghostly apparitions such as procedures and reporting strictures that no one can account for or defend (Cooren, 2005, p. 87). As we spend most of our waking lives in organizations, the question moves towards deep mistrust or organizational hierarchy; or more simply, why is my boss in charge of me?

This moves organizational discourse to a more critical perspective where questions of power, class, and authority are broached along with a deeper investigation of the organizational environment in general. Such a move toward “...an “applied ethics”, that is, various conceptions about what would be the conditions for a better and fairer society” (Cooren, 2015, p. 47). This application of ethics, again, is considered by thinkers of stakeholder theory such as Phillip and Hartman as the logical *end* of ethics,



having reached its highest form. The major problem here, one that this work has been trying to voice, is that for such problems such as politics in organizations are constant and evolving problems that cannot be solved; a notion that echoes Dana Cloud's analysis of Boeing, where she declares that "workplace democracy is always incomplete, due to the profit motive and hierarchical assemblage, meaning that "true material and participatory democracy in corporate organizations is always incomplete" (Cloud, 2007, p. 223). Moriarty points to the odd fascination with this erasure, as "stakeholder democracy is thus not that much more radical than stakeholder theory itself," yet a certain aversion towards a term like democracy perpetuates itself (Moriarty, 2014, p. 841). We have certain right such as voting and free speech, but either of these can serve as reasons for termination in a given organization.

It would facetious to say that *no* democratic organizations exist—there have often been posited multiple organizations that adhere to democratic ideals, many originating out of the Silicon Valley technological boom in recent years, with Google helming the way of many such reports. Google vaulted itself to one of the most successful companies ever by revolutionizing the way data and information is transmitted and stored. The company culture was espoused as a central component in making the success happen, from a dressed down, relaxed office atmosphere to requiring time for employees to work on their own projects outside of work. Designing the office to have a minimalist architecture, seeming futuristic while also having every amenity possible, from nap pods, foozeball tables, and guest speakers to cooperative work spaces and even acquiring the Grateful Dead's sous chef to cook meals. The augmentation of the Self due to Google's work space and culture contribute to the identity of valuing employees *as* important

stakeholders who contribute to the success of the organization.

The counter argument is that such small amenities do not add up to democratic participation and in fact hinder it. Support for employees, such as hiring a *sous* chef amounts for Fleming to the capture of an employee within the organization, citing the “demographic of the typical Google employee is someone that would buy organic foodstuffs, support issues around bio-diversity and place much importance on a healthy lifestyle,” making the counter to your typical office grind and then commute produced a fast food dependent lifestyle, inevitably sickening the population that it served (Fleming, 76). There have been numerous critiques of Google’s open organizational culture, and the problems that result from it: as Flyverbom and Christensen (2015) point out in their examination of Google, “organizations that allow for decentralized information control, decisions can no longer be made based on formal organizational policies and procedures but must rely on individual judgment and responsibility,” leading to strategic vagueness and ambiguity (2015, p. 398). This form of personal responsibility on part of organizational leaders can further be submitted to critiques of whose ethics, and which reason that ethics scholars have raised.

This is not to advocate for either a purely military style structure nor an anarchic one, but to present the case that employee rights and stakeholder incorporation leads to an *aporia* of democracy—that the elimination of the political sphere from the workplace equates to more rights and freedoms instead of less. Addressing this problem through technicized means erases the human person from the corporation, an auto-immune response that forgets “firms are managed by human beings, with familiar human

limitations, not god-like impartial observers and agents” (Moriarty, 2014, p. 833).

Various attempts have existed to coalesce the person into a machine, from Frederick Taylor’s timing studies to new management techniques that promise to catapult workers into a new space of productivity and success. In the next section, this chapter will examine holacracy, a management structure devised to be completely transparent, and through this transparency better serve workers and the organization. However, all the same problems that descend from regimes of transparency are here compounded with an ‘ethics applied’ of stakeholder-ism of Phillips.

### **Examining Zappos**

Like many tech startups, Zappos was pitched as an idea to be ‘the Amazon of footwear’, a known but yet accomplished feat in the industry. Tony Hsieh had recently sold LinkExchange (a software company) and was looking to become a venture partner in a new enterprise (Eremina, 2017). Through several almost bankruptcies and mixed dealings with third party suppliers, Zappos, a bowdlerization of Spanish *zapatos*, grew into a retail giant. Now absorbed by Amazon, Zappos acts as an exemplar of the specialized digital economy looking to deliver more and more niche services to dedicated consumer bases.

With Zappos beginning amidst the financial crash, as well as having his own personal problems getting started, several issues regarding organizational structure and culture emerge and seem to still inform the company today; the first is Hsieh betting his own non-venture capital that the company would succeed rather than collapse, and many early employees using the warehouses and incubator space at Hsieh’s venture firm as

housing or living space. The second is Hsieh's decision to move Zappos out of the Silicon Valley tech bubble to Las Vegas, NV. The startup took 75 of 90 members, and, upon moving, published an initial treatise on why Zappos was superior due to its organizational *culture*; with "the emphasis on friends and family working environment," Zappos succeeds in Hsieh's eyes due to this competitive advantage and 'one-for-all, all-for-one' spirit that persists from Zappos' early days (Eremina, 2017, p. 42). As Zappos grew, it instituted various reminders and exercises to try and fight against typical bureaucratic creep and retain this advantage; one instance is the computer login system would display a photo of another employee, which you could answer their name and then receive a short detailed bio on that person, all in an attempt to promote this founding credo. Hsieh began to implement a move from traditional hierarchy to holacracy, the idea of transparent, inter-connecting and linked employees who, instead of using the traditional job ladder and hierarchical system, foster this commitment to company ad culture by having networked roles in an organized system of circles, which perform tasks as they emerge from the larger business environment.

Specifically, holacracy arises with software engineer Brian Robertson, who leaves Ternary software in 2007 in order to start selling and implementing the idea of holacracy; like a computer network, the organization can adapt and outflank the traditional problems that arise with hierarchy, and function in *holons* or circles, teams that arise due to emergent needs (Robertson, 2015). Employees from all branches of the organization can fulfill roles and complete tasks as they see fit (in accordance with the overriding constitution, more to come on this issue), and respond to issues as they arise with grounded experiential connections. Robertson places his eureka moment when he almost

crashed a plane, having a sense that a gauge was incorrectly flashing, he pushed on for a solo flight, which almost ended his life with the plane running out of voltage, as displayed by a *correct* gauge; Robertson sees his thinking as flawed, and wants to implement an organizational form that allows this overridden voice of the gauge to be heard with as much fervor and authority as his own (Robertson, 2015). Robertson positions holacracy as an ‘evolutionary’ mechanism and uses multiple biological metaphors, but holacracy seems to be just the opposite—an easily readable and programmable machine with sensors, displays, and inputs.

Numerous reports, from *Forbes* to *HBR* have identified holacracy as a failed project at Zappos. The idea for Zappos was to create a company work culture similar to that of Google and other enterprising tech start-ups that would capitalize on an untapped resource: human capital. Such a restructuring would enable Zappos to keep the best employees as well as situate them within a transparent and clear organizational structure that would maximize their skills. At first, this project succeeded as Zappos, “working within the framework of holacracy, the company achieved a 75% year-on-year increase in operating profit in 2015 as a result of those strategic moves” (Bernstein & Bunch, 2016, p. 5). However, this quickly subsided as Zappos suffered a mass exodus of the same employees who now were to fulfill the role of Robertson’s airplane gauge, to be ‘empowered minority voices’ in the unity of the organizational organism.

The idea of holacracy is to transfer from a business machine to self-sustaining organism that can adapt to its situation and environment, one where all the moving pieces have clearly defined roles (that they joyously perform, as they choose them) and a

communicative harmony from which it observes and diagnoses itself. Zappos itself defines one of its core values not just for customers but for employees is to build “open and honest relationships through communication” (*Zappos culture book*, 2014). Yet Zappos is still a profit driven organization that seeks not only to empower its employees in carting their own way through the company, but also building on that explosive power—One of CEO Tony Hsieh’s favorite oft repeated aphorisms revolves around the immense capability of cities to increase productivity per citizen 15% every time the city doubles in size, but in organizational life, the exact opposite happens, with productivity decreasing. Hsieh’s desire for a return to the startup and commitment fueled early days of Zappos seemed to influence his decision to move to holacratic management, a move that was postponed and delayed, only to end in 2015 with Hsieh’s company-wide ultimatum email—get on board with holacracy, or abandon the ship.

Zappos had a turnover of around 18%, with roughly 6% of those employees taking buyouts stating that it was due to the move to holacracy. One HR vice president complained that even though she was satisfied with her job at Zappos, she had delegated most of her tedious daily duties to new hires, and was in charge of circles and duties that were adjacent to or extended from her previously narrowly defined job; she coordinated a running group that raised funds for a charitable cause, and sat in on human resources meetings, but did little else; her role was not well defined, and a slow feeling of dread about her value to Zappos and increased compensation possibilities seemed distant (Eremina, 2017). In his examination of Valve, the video-game based operators of Twitch, a social network for gaming, Andre Spicer notes that many ex-employees of such ‘flat’ workplaces described it as “neo-feudal” or comparable to high school (Spicer,

2018). While attempting to liberate employees from management systems that burn them out and wear them down, systems such as holacracy do not vanquish hierarchy as much as forget that every organization is haunted by it.

Hsieh, along with other Zappos management detailed through public relations materials the reasons for the exodus and what Zappos represents: one commentator, who appeared across *Harvard business review*, trotted out the idea of Zappos and its role-based ‘no boss workplace’ as akin to a “jungle gym,” where “...you get to chart your own course through that jungle gym of work. What we’re really trying to do is being very transparent about what does it look like if you move in this direction, or if you move in that direction? What are the impacts on you, your compensation, your progression, depending on the decisions that you make?” (Nickish, 2016). Employees on the other hand, both in formal and informal outlets such as *Glassdoor*, raised the fear of ‘not communicating’ due to being perceived as a detriment to the culture, or desiring a more fixed hierarchy to know how and where they could advance to. But aren’t such complaints the ills that a holacratic management system is supposed to remedy.

This issue brings up the formulation that Andreas Rasche describes in his elaboration of paradox in organizations: paradoxical reasoning is reasoning whereby the enabling and constraining conditions of an operation (e.g. a strategic decision) coincide. Paradox implies that the respective operation is impossible because the condition of the possibility of the operation leads, at the same time, to its impossibility” (Rasche, 2008, p. 4). This becomes increasingly problematic for organizations who can only stomach rationalizing or acknowledging one pole or end of the paradoxical logic involved, and

succumb to a blind spot bred by dominant logics. In the case of Zappos, the privileging of culture above all else and deference to the holacratic system. The privileging of startup culture to large bureaucratic organizing; the desire for open communication despite strategic or applied governance; technology as a conduit and transparent medium for remedying this communicative problem. As Rasche points out, however, this move to fashion the company purely on culture is both welcome and problematic: “disorder and chaos do not destabilize organizations but enable them to be formed in the first place” (Rasche, 2008, p. 173). Why does an online retail giant, like Zappos, benefit from such a management style while say, a defense contractor or a banking giant do not?

One issue that Zappos founders signal towards is this idea of a better communicative organization, one that is organic and able to respond better to a changing environment in the new digital 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, as Ethan Bernstein, John Bunch, Niko Canner, and Michael Lee point out, it is important to look beyond the buzzwords that describe these structures—“postbureaucratic,” “poststructuralist,” “information-based,” “organic,” and so on—and examine why the forms have evolved and how they operate, both in the trenches and at the level of enterprise strategy” (Bernstein, Bunch, 2016, p. 5). Again, it is important to integrate Rasche’s assessment of the paradox of strategic management here—there is a problem with strategic management, but we know strategic management works, so—how do we resolve this impasse? Holacratic management at Zappos was supposed to instill “Transparency” which “...enables cross-team integration; all the thinly differentiated roles are easier to find than they would be in a traditional organization” (Bernstein, Bunch, 2016, p. 10). Yet lead-links were based on technological sorting, and the race for roles was slighted by employees as *‘the Beach’*—



where you end up stranded if you do not land a significant role. The free, unstructured play of the jungle gym here starts to resemble more the Darwinian associations we often have for more typical, hierarchical management; hierarchy returns, this time as a (repressed), undocumented fight for economic survival between employees.

One of the issues arising in holacracy revolves around the basic agreements made by workers and bosses, despite the supposed absence of bosses. Without fully developed job titles and duties, compensation becomes increasingly harder to pin and rationalize. For instance, “what would you pay someone who divides her time between developing software, serving as the lead link for a software development team, working on marketing strategy, creating internal leadership training, doing community outreach, and planning events?” (Bernstein, Bunch, 2016, p. 12). Leaving the company with silly titles on a resume may also hinder employment, leaving employees that do not buy in to Hsieh’s vision feeling castled in and yet also breed anxiety about not fitting into the Zappos culture.

Communication has also suffered at Zappos. With the implementation of holacracy, the idea was there was no ‘running it up the ladder’ and waiting for a response days later; software enabled employees to easily discuss with one another the issues surrounding a certain task. However, even though only six percent of employees left, there appears to be a growing issue with employees who stayed that holacracy is difficult to perform, and a certain amount of lip service is being paid to it. Employees may try to reassert control and follow old standards (again, their old boss is now most likely on the same peer to peer level with them), making it difficult to know which system to follow.

With leadership diffused to each and every member, the responsibility *theoretically* is equally shared; employees, being humans and *not* software, however, it is easy to see where differing personalities would scrape and bump up against one another in search of more traditional leadership roles.

Holacracy at its base develops a system based on transparent communication where each employee works together in concert as part of a larger organism; but as neurons in the brain or software in a computer may function in this way, emotional human beings do not. Transparency by itself does not create the camaraderie and ethos of a young startup. As Lars Thoege Christensen and Dennis Schoenborn assert, “...transparency may create new types of opacity. The thrust of argument is that transparency is not neutral; it *does* things. By making certain organizational matters more visible to stakeholders, other dimensions are inevitably kept in the dark” (2016, p. 351). The authors continue, transparency has become a widely celebrated, yet *unquestioned*, stand-in for responsibility in the current business environment,” a notion that points toward this idea of holacracy and its machinic abdication of employees making up the organization. (2016, p. 353). It is easier to read and respond to a machine that display, *transparently*, all of its functions; it is much harder to read the assemblage of multiple humans attempting to work together in concert.

Again, holacracy seeks to work against the ‘iron cage’ of bureaucracy and making organizations nimble and agile systems. Such a rejection of foundationalist versions of hierarchy and organizing, such as Max Weber’s. “according to him, ‘hierarchy’ can be understood as vertical formal integration of official positions within one explicit

organizational structure whereby each position or office is under the control and supervision of a higher one” (Bernstein, Bunch, 2016, p. 7). Weber’s idea, and, to a point, the responsibility of roles in holacracy, point toward the “idea was to liberate individuals from the dictatorial rule of whimsical bosses. Self-managing systems aim to accomplish the same thing, with less rigidity. In that sense, you could think of them as Bureaucracy 2.0.” (Bernstein, Bunch, 2016, 8). holacracy, paradoxically, returns us to hierarchy, but without hierarchy. As Bernstein and Bunch (2016) detail, After Zappos implemented holacracy, 150 departmental units evolved into 500 circles,” with 7.4 duties roles on average (2016, pgs. 8-11). Considering holacracy’s self-designated long implementation schedule, the desire for a robust and energized startup feel does not hold with the implementation of new management system; although successful, holacracy seems to in fact re-inscribe hierarchal oppositions between managers and employees, or ‘lead-links’ and ‘roles’, while obfuscating the traditional hierarchal ladder with an increasingly difficult networked solution. Such new practices come without tradition or ground from which the 6% of employees who had the ability to leave cited.

This becomes a highly problematic organizational structure, where the atypical ladder hierarchy is erased and the new positioning is non-transparent or hidden from employees. This conditionally tips the balance of power to management in being in control of an ever shifting ground where the agreed-upon rules can be distorted and made up as we go. The absence of hierarchy and the replacement of holacracy echoes what Barb Biesecker articulates from Derrida’s *Glas*, where through the re-marking of its semantic void, it in fact begins to signify” (Biesecker, 1989, p. 9). Instead of a transparent organizational structure, holacracy delivers chaos, or shocks designed to send

employees scrambling to find the best way to serve the organization. By removing bureaucracy, a noble effort in itself, holacracy instead removes the political posturing of bureaucratic structures, which may lead to less of an iron cage, but also delivers panoptic chaos, especially to employees. Zappos made smart moves by trying to invest in its personnel, but instead invested in the management system, the opposite of human capital.

This *aporia* reveals the problem that Zappos encountered; Zappos strategy was not to confuse employees, negate profits, and lose them to competitors. Yet they sought to avoid the problem of ‘organizational fatigue’ that appears in many success stories when the need for different types of services bloats the company and leads to less and less face to face interactions. Adding ‘shocks’ to shake the organization awake by introducing crisis-like states makes sense in the techno-capitalist sense of Google or Facebook to ‘move fast and break things’, but not on the larger issue of human interaction and relation, as Naomi Klein has documented (Klein, 2007). Klein traces a particular habit of neoliberal capital in which it uses disasters to create the conditions for easier investment and control; disasters or even bad management creating conditions for outside experts to impose restrictions and their own management activities. Zappos response to such an exodus was to blame the employees for not being flexible, adaptable, and open to change—the very conditions that Spicer pointed out are the vague virtues modern organizations are searching out.

This is not to critique Zappos for what *could* have been—but dealing with typical failures is a responsibility of organizations, or what Rasche comments on as being the “passionate endurance” one must have for paradox, for those things that are undecidable (Rasche, 2008, p. 11). The underlying dictum that organizations must compete to survive

bifurcates industry into the survivors and the damned. Zappos, however, cannibalizes itself, where it ostracized its employees, which under the rubric of CCO is the very fabric of Zappos as a communicative entity. Can this be justified as anything but cannibalism?

It is also the positive promise of Derrida's contribution to organizational studies where we are not entrapped in holacracy, but can use the *aporia* to push for change. Roadblocks such holacracy beg the question of how best to unleash creativity and potential in a competitive marketplace. The opposition to scientific management pushes theory towards these flat hierarchies, but the specter of structurelessness continues to linger, as in the report by Pejtersen et al (2011) that the open-floor plan of offices leads to an uptick of 60% in sick days taken by employees. Such lack of direction points towards an unnecessary burden by employees that leads to burnout. Paradox and problematic management (while at the same time being useful management), then, helps us find the "necessary limits" to our knowledge (Rasche, 2008, p. ix). As Rasche explains,

"This does *not* imply that deconstruction is a waste of time, but that deconstruction uncovers the limits of knowledge we can possibly gain about the nature of strategizing. If we consider these limits as a regulative idea, we can unfold (deparadoxify) paradox. In this way, paradox even incites action because strategists start thinking about how to cope with a puzzling situation.

Practitioners, while working on strategic problems, can proactively consider paradoxes and thus alter the way they deal with strategy context, process, and content" (Rasche, 2008, p. 183).

However, the responsibility and possibility of holacracy functioning in an ethical way, where it achieves this superfluous value of transparency must be met through this transition to something better; to borrow an already borrowed phrase deconstruction in nutshell becomes "...*affirmatively* insisting on the "nonpassive endurance of the *aporia* [as] the condition of responsibility of decision" that Caputo sees in the work of Derrida

(Derrida, 2004, p. 16). holacracy removes people from the decision making process, which again erodes politics and the chance for the applied organizational ethics of stakeholder-ism. This next and final section questions what the political form of organizations *can* be, and the problems, *aporias*, and paradoxes that arise from such a choice. However, it still remains a choice and possibility for employees to engage in and fulfill this promise that holacracy represents.

### **What is (Organizational) Democracy?**

Stanley Deetz's *Democracy in an age of corporate colonization* reframes organizational communication around a Foucauldian<sup>49</sup> perspective of power relations. For Deetz, his phenomenological investigation situates the corporate form has overrun or colonized other forms of life, from the private sphere to all variations of "work" as they can possibly exist. Deetz's excavation of Foucault points to a concern with the overrun of corporate power through surveillance techniques, discipline, and structuration of experience, most of which stem from Foucault's brilliant *Discipline and Punish* (1977), but also in his work on biopolitics and the formation of and protection of life and certain life experiences.

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49 Although the space for a sustained and articulate comment is not available in this space, the connection between Foucault and Derrida here is important, especially in the disagreement the two philosophers had over the notion of madness, which Derrida first pinpoints in Foucault's work in his article 'Cogito and the History of Madness' (1978), which later appeared in *Writing and Difference*. Foucault dismissed these claims as needless textual obsession, most notably in his (1979) article 'My Body, this paper, this fire'. Derrida sees Foucault as misreading Descartes permutation of madness, that by including it within reason he denies madness the ability to exist outside, beyond reason, as Derrida does. An interesting reading of the argument presented above would see Foucault, and possibly Deetz after him, inscribe democracy within organizations, while Derrida positions democracy as something other than organization, which employees can strive towards.

Foucault's work details how the overarching institutions such as prisons, hospitals, and the state order our everyday lives through micro-practices. Deetz's claim that "modern corporations affect society by both their products and their income distribution but also by the practices internal to them" situates the problematic of organizations not just as internal to corporations, but also to society in general in the way these forms 'civilize' us" positions the corporation as institution, like the state, the church, the prison, etc. (Deetz, 1992, p. 17). For Deetz, the corporate form does not only engage and structure our daily lives at work, but all other relations outside of that form—friendship patterns are determined according to work relations, identity becomes tied to stable forms of employment rather than changing life experiences, our most awake and dedicated hours given to work—to a form that "functions today to privilege certain types of knowledge and learning, most importantly to privilege the corporate experience. Rarely do terms such as *practical* or *real* signify anything other than employment concerns" (Deetz, 1992, p. 28). How we organize at work affects our organization and life outside of it, making us *employees* first, and anything else we strive to be an extension after.

Corporations have a fundamental enigmatic bind at their centers in terms of fairness, justice, or as we using the term to point towards a collection of these items, *democracy*. "Significantly, the private/public distinction situates the workplace as an extension of private property conceptually, and often legally, outside the province of democratic theory" writes Deetz, gesturing toward the increasing role the private organization has had in developing public policy, while remaining beneficially absent or at arms length from it (1992, p. 51). As the state retreats from welfare policies to assuage

fears of ‘big government’ or state control, the corporation has entered into this gap; this gap, of course, is where CSR practices originate and legitimate themselves, but also the space where the corporation determines its democratic function, if any. Deetz posits reservations with such corporate governance, saying:

“What can we say, then, of this power that is so masked, a power that normalizes experience rather than provides norms for action, a power that is not up for election, a power that escapes democracy? And given the fragmentation of power sites and the conflict of pulls from competing institutions in the postmodern context, how does the corporation arise as a new center providing the same coordination and relief of tension that the state arose to replace (and suppress) in its time?” (Deetz, 1992, p. 23)

The corporation then is able to cover itself by pointing to the state to allocate its failures, as “corporate irresponsibility demonstrates governmental failure” (1992, p. 35). This lack of trust also effects the internal functioning of organizations, as “the lack of general compliance and inconsistency of enforcement in turn feed greater motivation and legitimacy difficulties. immediate and tangible, and corporations turn to management by objectives” (Deetz, 1992:41). Most organizations *desire* to be democratic, but due to rigid structures of management, never attain such goals.

In order to be productive, to serve stakeholders, management processes implemented from previous work experiences are implemented in order to solve problems, usually at the detriment of the current employee. These processes are deemed neutral even though, as Deetz points out throughout his work, they often have implicit value judgments favoring management, including “most conceptions of communication” which allies itself with a “...reasoning process that favors management and hence,



participate in reproducing this domination” (1992, p. 64). Management is installed in order to better influence and guide employees, yet becomes detached and other from the very *intra*-stakeholders they are to serve.

This bifurcation of management and workers creates problems related to the aims and goals of an organization, with management following different prerogatives perhaps than employees. This separation develops at the very foundation of the organizational communicative process, with managers cloistered away from workers and privy to separate sets of meetings and directives. Deetz asks “why modern society is referred to as the “information” rather than communication society and why it is information theory rather than the linguistic turn,” and how the organization is foundation upon this binary of information and management, rather than communication and democracy (1992, p. 93). Although working from a different perspective and tradition, Deetz’s project “to ground democracy in communication rather than to conceptualize communication in terms of democracy,” resembles Cooren and the Montreal school of CCO, where communication constitutes organizations (Deetz, 1992, p. 92). If communication grounds the organization, and thus defines its character, then the search for democracy in organizations, or, more radically, democracy *as* organization, needs to be located and conceived here.

This is made increasingly difficult by appeals to democratically structured organizations. As Cooren shows in his analysis of the CDA<sup>50</sup>, two employees, Martha

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<sup>50</sup> Cooren conducts an ethnographic study on the nature of meetings to decipher how communication occurs in such a setting. His analysis follows a small-to-medium sized enterprise (SME) to discover that meetings develop a logic and rule system based on the participants in the meeting.

and Phil, are seemingly peers as far as the organization's hierarchical structure appears, and yet the power imbalance here remains. Martha is the 'team coordinator' an oxymoronic title in a supposedly peer group, yet one that structures the interactions of the team. Although structurally similar, Phil and Martha are communicatively opposites, and as Phil is lambasted for a mistake:

“To some extent, Phil's subjection could thus appear even stronger than in the policeman's case in that *no words even need to be pronounced in order for Phil to start feeling guilty of something*. Semiotically speaking, the gaze and posture of his co-workers waiting for him behind the red team's area seems sufficient to set the scene of his improvised trial. This subjection is then confirmed by what subsequently happens in their conversation” (Cooren, 2015, p. 109).

Although structured like a democratic enterprise *in name*, this team still is communicatively determined by a power structure regardless of the imposed managerial equality. This equality or democratic character actually reproduces managerial hierarchy in a more insidious way, as appeals to the structure in place only confirm a reality that is non-operative. Cooren sees here two potentially devastating dilemmas for Deetz's democratic conceptions of the organization, one being when every teammate becomes a potential supervisor, this form of embodiment becomes more invisible, since everyone is now speaking and acting in the name of the team and its interests (and not the organization itself, at least directly)” (Cooren, 2015, p. 111), and the other, that the self-management team denies its origin in that “...it seems a wonderful device to subject teammates to the tyranny of other teammates, a tyranny that is supposed to ultimately serve the organization's interests” (Cooren, 2015, p. 110). Democracy, fairness, and equal participation and stakes are all championed yet never accomplished.

Yet many organizations still attempt to marry traditional structures to changing contexts and new abilities, to achieve Fleming's claim of a wholly emergent organization that is democratic while observant of management and practical objectives. Peer-to-peer organizations, learning organizations, and new management strategies try to move beyond Deetz's focus of Foucauldian power (and biopower), to more technologically and socially progressive forms of control and agency. This is echoed in communication literature on the topic such as Arnett's contention that "biopolitics then becomes imitation, "copycat," losing particularity and specifics," and erases the difference and worth of the social world (Arnett, 2012, p. 228). This is the plight of employees in the information age, but not as biopolitical force, but rather in reduction to similarity and sameness, to mere *code*. Modern management, especially in sectors such as technology, take on this enumeration from cogs in a machine to lines of programming, designed to accomplish a specific task and not asked to do (or participate) in much else.

Representing employees as code can be more easily examined through the lens of protocol. While Deetz seeks out organizational justice from this Foucauldian perspective, many organizations favor the latter, aligning *not* with communication but information. For theorists such as Alexander Galloway, this amounts to submitting to *protocol*, a nebulous concept he defines simultaneously as "a set of recommendations and rules that outline specific technical standards," a code that governs how "specific *technologies* are agreed to, adopted, implemented, and ultimately used by people around the world," and "a technique for achieving voluntary regulation within a contingent environment" (Galloway, 2004). For Galloway, protocol isn't just a useful metaphor for describing how computer algorithms and machine learning functions, but rather "viewed

as a whole, protocol is a distributed management system that allows control to exist within a heterogeneous material milieu” (Galloway, 2004). While Deetz’s focus of management echoing certain voices while silencing others, Galloway’s technodeterminist view is more akin to Deleuze: in his article “Postscript on Societies of Control,” where rather than being subjected to power, this form of ‘protocological’ influence acts like a highway—wherein can drive wherever you want without supervision—but have to maintain speed standards, drive in the same lane, pay tolls, and adhere to the ‘rules’ of the road.

In this sense, this more open nature seems compatible with Deetz’s search, yet runs counter to it; as Galloway states, “while protocol may be more democratic than the panopticon in that it strives to eliminate hierarchy, it is still very much structured around command and control,” and that hierarchical force still exists within such a field (Galloway, 2004). Galloway aligns protocol more with Foucault’s conception of “biopolitics and biopower are Foucault’s terms for protocol as it relates to life forms. They are Foucault’s terms for the statistical coding, the *making-statistical*, of large living masses” that necessarily must comply and observe these given forms (2004, p. 75). Whereas in Deetz’s democratic participation can be achieved through the rallying against management that neglects employee and stakeholder interests, protocological forms of management, which espouse the values workers argue for, leave little room for effective opposition. Galloway’s twist on the dictum *there is nothing that says it can’t be done, but such a pursuit is surely misguided and in the end hasn’t hurt gravity* (protocol) much summarizes the difficulty in arguing against such terms as fun, freedom, or openness.

This is the problematic nature of such management systems and techniques for employees. In an effort to exert more power and say to employees and stakeholders in organizations, power has been decentralized, and yet this decentralization has only codified it even more. In Cooren's relating of the Phil and Martha dispute, neither have a title or hierarchical advantage or position over one another, and yet Phil must relinquish to Martha based on her place in an invisible pecking order, one he can neither lobby nor influence, contradict nor dispute. Although using a different format of description, what Cooren describes in this situation that I continue to return to is a reference to protocol, where the peer network is, at the same time that it is distributed and omnidirectional, the digital network is hegemonic by nature; that is, digital networks are structured on a negotiated difference of certain flows over other flows.

Protocol is this hegemony. Protocol is the synthesis of this struggle" (Galloway, 2004, p. 75). The problem, then is not that organizational form based on this technological 'digitality' is oppressive, but rather "the goal of protocol is totality, to accept everything," including dissent, dispute, and conflict (2004, p. 76). Whereas for Deetz and his Foucauldian conception of power, there is a center, even if panopticism is continually exported and distributed there exist in the organization the possibility for a contested space—for Galloway, protocol and protocological force exists both outside of institutions and also deeply entrenched within them.

Part of the power of protocol is the pre-homogenization that occurs; thinking back to Google, although it has a widely diverse set of employees from all over the globe, it also contains "homogenous social class: highly educated, altruistic, liberal-minded science professionals from modernized societies around the globe" (2004, p. 122).

Returning to Deleuze's highway metaphor, we can go anywhere, as long as you have a car that runs on gasoline, is inspected for emissions and state bodies, and adheres to the speed limit—it is these pre-arranged issues that allow for standardization, which Galloway sees as the “politically reactionary tactic that enables radical openness” (2004, p. 143). This is something Deetz sketches the outmost contours of, claiming in the move to an information society rather than a communicative one, the change of the electronic for the transportation connection changes the speed of decision making. Electronic connections make possible and reward spontaneous, automatic decision making. There exists no time to deliberate about roles, as Phil possibly could in his spat with Martha; such an interaction is coded to favor the organization and *act*, rather than opt for inefficiency and *talk*.

With protocol absorbing contestation through radical openness, it removes communication (and therefore politics, or *democratic* politics) from the field. In a matrix of varying nodes, all decentralized and free to move, yet constrained by the very code of their constitution lies the rub—“*protocol is a circuit, not a sentence*”(Galloway, 2004:53). A non-communicative, technological form of organizing, which if we take the Montreal school ideal of organization as constituted by communication, presents serious obstacles. What these management systems attempt to do is reduce the human person to code, to an automatic, programmed response that is transparent, open, and amenable to shifting controls. This is in direct contrast to the idea of stakeholders, of a possibly empowering and democratic institution of the corporation. As Phillips notes, potentially trying dissuade environmental stakeholders, he also concludes that “only humans can be stakeholders of an organization, because only humans are capable of the necessary

volitionality in the acceptance of benefits of a mutually beneficially cooperative scheme. Stakeholder theory is anthropocentric” (Phillips, 2013, p. 143). The problem these systems make, whether it is stakeholder theory reporting to financial reward systems, or holacracy attempting to be a technological system resembling Galloway’s protocol, of making humans more like code, is to ignore the *human*. Human action entails politics, and a form of organization yet to be conceived.

### **Organizational Democracy (to come)**

Holacracy, following the logic of protocol in making organization a circuit, resembles more Robert Cooper’s elaboration of organizational theory in his claim that the reason for building bureaucracy is the evasion of face-to-face relationships which necessarily involve power and dependency. As Cooper summarizes in looking at the management systems of the eighties, most forms of this flat hierarchical structure can be “seen as forms of evading the power problem by suggesting that relationships can be made unthreatening through some appropriate organizational arrangement” (Cooper, 1989, p. 499). By removing organizational hierarchy and structure, organizations such as Zappos seek to become democratic and enact justice through the removal of politics and justice. Holacracy intends to use organizational transparency to reduce information asymmetries—a noble goal—but one in which the power differential still remains, *necessarily* remains. As Massimo Durante posits, “Stakeholders are not, as such, political actors involved in the governance of the global Information Society, as almost everybody repeats in a mantra,” but rather only become active members in the political process in organizations when “...the reduction of information asymmetries is combined

with the reduction of power differentials. (2015, pgs. 27-28). Transparency does little if nothing can be done from it.

This is something that Chantal Mouffe, in a volume dedicated to answering the pragmatic question of deconstruction (in response to questions of democracy and critiques by Richard Rorty) questions that “a final resolution of conflict is eventually possible, even when it is envisioned as asymptotic approaching to the regulative idea of a free unconstrained communication, as in Habermas, is to put the pluralist democratic project at risk” (Mouffe, 1996, p. 8). Democracy, politics, as much as they infringe on the everyday workings and communicative constitution of organizations, are questions that must be at least reckoned with, and possibly tackled. The reason for such a complication of the term ‘democracy’ for organizations is not only matters of power, as Deetz in his Foucauldian analysis handles, or even the implications of holacracy and information-employee-management, advocating solely for transparency and ‘information symmetry’ as Durante points out; As Jean-Luc Nancy reiterates,

“It is thus impossible to be simply “democratic” without asking what this means, for the sense of this term never stops posing difficulties, almost at every turn, indeed, every time we have recourse to it. Failure to recognize these difficulties—something quite common in political discourse—is as dangerous as the repudiation of democracy: it prevents us from thinking and thus conceals the same traps and monsters, or others still” (Nancy, 2010, pgs. 37-8).

Nancy points out that words such as ‘freedom’ or ‘equality’ become problematic, giving the sense that justice *has* been accomplished, is a completed task, and no action is required. Democracy, then, when equivalent with such terms as these, or human rights, loses its luster, becomes murky, and leaves us perplexed (Nancy, 2010, p. 37). Nancy’s point that the default setting of politics remains barbarity, deviance, madness, which



“usually one ignored, less deliberately than somnambulistically, what could have been learned or inferred from the analyses of, say, Bataille or Benjamin, Arendt or . . . Tocqueville” (Nancy, 2010:8). This is the problematic nature between stakeholders and democracy being linked terms, especially the empty nature of stakeholders in contemporary organizational communication practice.

This is not to say that the work of deconstruction is already accomplished—this is interpreters of Derrida, such as Mouffe and Nancy’s contribution to showing that such terms such as democracy are always in need of clarification and work; in fact, a pragmatic exercise, and not mere theory building. Part of this endless work is the ideal that democracy is essentially aporetic in nature, that is auto-immune, as Michael Nass points out, But, unlike other political regimes such as monarchy, timocracy, or plutocracy, democracy is, we might say, structurally or constitutionally undecidable or autoimmune” (Nass, 2008, p. 133). Nass’s example of the ’92 Algerian elections, which were suspended in order to preserve democratic rule when a majority supported a theocratic party determined to end democratic rule. As Derrida himself articulates, Democracy is the only system, the only constitutional paradigm, in which, in principle, one has or assumes the right to criticize everything publicly, including the idea of democracy, its concept, its history, and its name” (Derrida, 2004, p. 87). Democracy, as outlined earlier in this work, is always *to come*, in process, deferred and future-oriented.

Such a pronouncement, from his late text *Rogues*, one of his last published books, examines the nature of sovereignty and democracy and their essential autoimmune nature. Derrida situates democracy as a concept ‘to-come’, as first elaborated in *Specters of Marx*, it is a goal that is always deferred, existing to be accomplished yet never

realized. Much of democratic discourse, not only in political theory but especially in organizational, situates democracy as a known, calculable, achievable goal. If it does not become co-opted as a management technique, it remains to be situated as a wholly indivisible present or reality, as in Zappos' move to holacracy. For Derrida, this is a falsification, and the reason for such intensive investigation into the inner workings of institutions; that (organizational) democracy is "to-come" not only points to the promise but suggests that democracy will never exist, in the sense of a present existence: not because it will be deferred but because it will always remain aporetic in its structure (Derrida, 2004:86). Management techniques, in particular the ones that seek to take on a technological basis for the movement and collaboration of human beings, act in "invoking a *here and now* that does not await an indefinitely remote future assigned by some regulative Idea, one is not necessarily pointing to the future of a democracy that is going to come or that must come or even a democracy that *is* the future" (Derrida, 2004:90). Whereas Alexis de Tocqueville long ago announced the coming of democracy in America, Derrida postpones any pronouncements, instead proclaiming the need for more work, more sovereignty for workers, more *organization* in organizations.

Flat hierarchical structure repeats the shock of neoliberalism by placing the burden of management on employees, evoking them to commit more and *do* more under the guise of increased freedoms and personal advancement. Thus, when organizations falter, blame is outsourced to specific employees who do not have the necessary skills to remain flexible and productive enough to organizational standards, which manifest out of thin air. The organization is indeed transparent in this sense, as employees cannot discern the outline of its monolith until they wind up walking headfirst into it. Rather than

holacracy, which increases surveillance of workers and demands ever-increasing commitments, employees should require organizational democracy. Democracy is a group activity, with burdens shared by the polity and the course directed not by the self but by communicative engagement with the public sphere.

What could this possibly look like? Is it empty theorizing of political dictates and dogma in the private sphere, in the marketplace? Derrida would assert that no, it is this sphere that democracy perhaps matters most. If we displace our collective will and action to management structures, we neglect any ‘stake,’ any participatory or revelatory chance at action. For Derrida, he places blame on the use of the United Nations Security Council, a select group of nations that determine, and in the name of *democracy*, lead not to democracy but to authority and sameness. He opts instead to stay with and “...to accompany this Kantian concept of a dignity that is incalculable and thus transcends the marketplace at all costs” (Derrida, 2004, p. 133). Organization, above management and technological features, is human organizing, and is dependent upon humans cooperating and working together, making it an issue of the *polis*, not the marketplace. For ethical decision making in organizations, decision making and knowledge must necessarily be separated by “an absolute interruption must separate them, one that can always be judged as “mad,” for otherwise the engagement of a responsibility would be reducible to the application and deployment of a program” (Derrida, 2004, p. 145). The issue of democracy finally returns us to the questions initially raised by Cooren and Deetz, one of decision making and agency in organizations—and who is bequeathed such powers.

## **Decision-making and responsibility**

If by following Derrida's deconstruction of democracy as containing an autoimmune function, then perhaps the answer to democracy in organizations can possibly be contained in the organizational decision making process. Who gets to make decisions, how much input, from employees, stakeholders, however we want to term the 'others' of management, also is important. As Deetz tries to ground democracy in communication, and Cooren implores us to view organizations as constituted, made up by this factor, then it is by communication and decision making that organizations come into being and function. To avoid mere replication of a calculable program, which produces similar results, and similar persons on the biopolitical or protocological level, "a new conception of democracy is needed to meaningfully discuss these issues as not just an issue of voice but as one of representation in public meaning formation and decision making," with an emphasis on the decision making process (Deetz, 1992, p. 53). These programs seek to avoid responsibility by outsourcing it away from the human domain to a self-determining structure, where choice is antiquated.

Cooren raises the specter of responsibility in his writings on ventriloquism, that each time he broaches it other scholars immediately seek "to raise the question of responsibility," where "ventriloquism is a way to abdicate responsibility" (Cooren 2016, p. 26). For Cooren, ventriloquism shares responsibility due to administrators echoing the organization's own desires, which serves in a manner of "multiplying the authors of an action—whether it is a speech act or any other type of act—amounts to saying that these authors should also be responsible for what is happening" (Cooren, 2016, p. 26).

However, this seems a departure from the Derridean ideal that “a “responsibility” or a “decision” cannot be founded on or justified by any knowledge as such, that is, without a leap between two discontinuous and radically heterogeneous orders” (Derrida, 2004, p. 145). The gap between structure and the endlessly open holacracy—or whatever name one wishes to call ‘the tyranny of structurelessness’—still exists as one set of knowledges imposing upon another. It is increasingly harder to be responsible when decision making has been evacuated from the human domain.

This is essentially what stakeholder discourse permits, a thoughtlessness of decision, or worse yet, with programmatic decisions that have been made in advance without context or historical bearing. Cooren here self-corrects somewhat in reexamining that ventriloquism does not simply magnify authority and make decision-making easier with institutional backing, but rather requests more *vigilance* in the handling of decisions, defining

“responsibility as something that always is the *object of a decision*: It is something that we decide to make or something that people decide to endow us with. It can be made a priori, but the decision that leads to this appropriation or endowment has to be taken. ... Multiplying the sources of authority and agency does not mean that we lose the status of author or agent. *On the contrary, it forces us to be more vigilant*. It even forces us to be able to claim or take responsibility for things that we did not even do. (Cooren, 2016, pgs. 26-27).

Decision making in such a schema becomes something that is open to the future and undecidable in the present, in the nature that it cannot be predicted nor accounted for beforehand, while also being undecidable in the notion that someone, even in a peer team, must *make* a decision even if all are equal, opening up an autoimmune response.

No system can complete and mold human beings into automatic decision-makers, although as we have seen there must be some form of organization, it cannot subordinate the human to algorithm, and makes choice not the object of systems but of people.

Although Cooren's ventriloquism can amplify the voice of decisions, it gives little wiggle room in questions of sovereignty and democracy. Organizations, particularly large MNC's seem to swallow most employees, leaving little room for change. With the hierarchy of such organizations made invisible, open combat against such structure becomes meaningless. Thinking through the organization in contemporary capitalism really does consist in thinking from the 'belly of the beast', as employees move up the ladder they become subject to recombinatory enzymes, bacterias, and digestive systems. The invisible logic becomes the inner consciousness of employees. In conflating the workplace with the lifeworld, organization employee technologies of stakeholder capture and become like factory towns.

Management systems, like holacracy are deep investments in ventriloquism where the organization is both aspirational to work for while at the same time exploiting labor, or its most important stakeholder group. Ventriloquism as a guiding principle for thinking multi-voiced organizations comes to dominate the human agents, privileging nonhuman systems of management. Ventriloquism falls into a horror film scenario where the dummy is alive and uncanny, able to speak on its own. It is important to remember the amplifying power employees have in speaking for the organization, rather than thinking voice only comes from organizations. In this scenario, we do not engage in systems but instead are the irresponsible dummy Cooren alludes to, speaking to audiences while being subtly moved from within. Employees, as the people portion of

the triple bottom line, can only achieve a democratic organization through interaction with documents, and systems, but also themselves. Making these nonhuman agents more important stakeholders of the firm than human workers shines a light on the paradox of stakeholder and organizational theory, where all stakeholders are equal, but some (nonhuman, profit-generating) ones are more equal than others.

## **Interrupting:**

### **Ford and Stakeholder Capture**

In the jungles of Brazil there lies the decrepit, rusted out hull of an old company town, one belonging to the Ford motor company. Henry Ford purchased the land in 1928 and named it Fordlândia. Ford's idea was to find an integrated source for his rubber trees to continue producing tires, as well as a social experiment to see if this company town could work in the Brazilian rainforest with American style capitalistic values. Ford's desire to peer into and control his worker's lives outside of work represents an unexpressed desire in neoliberal capitalism, and a pertinent interruption to dialogues about stakeholders and responsible organizations.

Greg Grandin's account of Fordlândia., the jungle paradise set up in Brazil was to become a utopia for workers, with fair wages and Ford's vision of a Midwestern town transplanted into the jungle. However, despite the rampant success of the assembly line and work in America, Ford's project ultimately failed. It can be argued that Ford was a pioneer of stakeholders and corporate culture, having been sued years earlier by the Dodge brothers for attempting to transfer funds back to workers, to make their social lives and the life of the community better. However, when brought to court Ford was found derelict of his fiduciary duty to deliver profits and wealth back to shareholders, and the program ended. Fordlândia. then was a second chance on cheap land purchased from the Brazilian government to create a specific type of worker as well as solve the problem of rubber that was plaguing the supply chain. As Grandin notes, "...the settlement became the terminus for a lifetime of venturesome notions of the best way to organize society," not just for Ford but for the populace at large (Grandin, 2009, p. 8). Ford's



creation becomes an interesting lesson for the connections between business and governance, whether that is between states and citizens or between corporations and employees.

The Midwestern town was recreated almost exactly, with a town square and other accoutrements found in the United States, such as cape cod style houses, Midwestern towns, square dancing, Prohibition, whole wheat bread and soy milk fed to newborns (Grandin, 2009, pgs. 8-9). Ford himself was a teetotaler, and forbid drinking from workers, even if off the clock hours. Fordlândia. was essentially a company town, but one that also attempted to provide for workers and give them what Ford thought was best. Besides the banning of alcohol, there was healthcare and minimal forms of education, most of which workers ignored or didn't take part in. This was acceptable to the management of Fordlândia., but other investments were not—square dancing initially was optional but soon became mandatory, as did a strict diet based on vegetarianism. Such fiats were mandatory because of Ford perceived a lack of work ethic in each laborer, many who refused to work during the middle of the day due to the insufferable conditions of the jungle heat. Ford mandated a 9-5 work day, thinking that it built character and set a man up to become ethical and in good standing to the wider community. Between Ford and the conditions in his camp, there existed a utopian spirit that was never achieved because of the disconnect with the reality actually occurring there.

This may be connected to Ford's reluctance to ever visit Fordlândia., and his stubbornness to not give up on it despite numerous revolutions, two of which chased management from the town and plunged it into anarchy in 1930. The rubber side of

production also suffered from blight, with workers cutting the life sustaining tops of the trees off, beetles and other insects were able to enter into the wounds of the tree and essentially created a famine. Ford continued to sink money into the project, investing a speculated 208 million in adjusted dollars, while also receiving aid from the United States government during WWII to keep a presence in the region (Grandin, 2009). With synthetic rubber becoming a cheap alternative, and Ford's son finally selling it back to the Brazilian government in 1945.

American business interventions in Central and South America continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century—the most famous case being the Chiquita bananas, or the United Fruit Inc. The collaboration between business and government in support of the economic bottom line often pushes out stakeholders when democracy gets in the way of market rationality. When Guatemala elected Allende, a professed Marxist, the CIA and Chiquita conspired to overthrow him for fear of nationalizing the land and destroying United Fruit Inc (Banerjee, 2008b:, pgs. 1549-50). According to Jacqui L'Etang, Chiquita went as far as hiring Edward Bernays to help craft messages. This becomes a “a key objective in all military thinking when dealing with guerilla warfare and guaranteeing the necessary stability for US and British corporations to operate in Latin America,” and for the preservation of capitalist worldview (L'Etang et al 2011, p. 181).

As Banerjee suggests, “the effects of creating a ‘business friendly climate’ are often violent” and coalesce the corporation with the state. CSR campaigns often highlight the commonwealth features that organizations increasingly take on in substitute for the state, while the ignoring the monopoly on violence they also employ. Such violence is oftentimes economic as well, with Shell Nigeria extracting huge swaths of

resources from the country through mining while also depressing the local economy there; as Knudsen (Moon CSR book) reveals, five billion was recovered for the people of Nigeria through the EITI mining agreement, which seeks to track wealth in extractive industries, ensuring host nations are compensated. Shell Nigeria represented 75% of the Nigerian government's revenues and nearly 35% of the country's GNP," in essence granting Shell a fiefdom but for which they were not responsible (Banerjee, 2008b, p. 1555). Other instances, such as Bechtel privatizing Bolivia's water supply in return for a World Bank loan, lead to "200%" increase, ending with the Bolivian government to nix the deal and for "...Bechtel to exit Bolivia, albeit with a \$25 million payout (Banerjee, 2008b, p. 1551). Such negative consequences are outside the scope of an organizations responsibility to constituents.

Kregg Hetherington's hesitation about transparency in Paraguay stems from similar concerns, namely that when the often undereducated *campesinos* found themselves finally on the inside of the "exclusionary economy of documents" (Hetherington, 2011, p. 182), were still met with disdain when questioning those in power. The capitulation of life-worlds to massive MNC's often results not in transparency, better governance, or any social benefit, but privatization of public goods that erodes civil society. The creation of a stakeholder map does not need to be confined to the Global South—as David Harvey points out in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, the restructuring of New York City in the 60s and 70s helped pave the way for neoliberal shock reforms. The discussion of various different lifestyles and opportunities mask the changing political landscape, where "the role of government was to create a good business climate rather than look to the needs and well-being of the population at large"

(Harvey, 2007:48). Harvey sees the seed for neoliberal practices born out from the exodus of Chicago school economists to Latin American regimes, particularly Milton Friedman's association with Pinochet and his residence at the Catholic University of Santiago (Harvey, 2007, p. 7). Such shocks, such as the privatization of telecom in Mexico City, sacrifices the good of the overall community for the private gain of the few.

Boltanski and Chiapello, their opus *The New spirit of capitalism*, portray '90s management literature an obsession with anti-authoritarianism and flexibility, all subsumed under the metaphor of networks (Boltanski, & Chiapello, 2005, p. 84). "In a world 'without borders', in which the firm is 'fragmented', 'virtual', 'postmodern,' how does a firm hold on to managers and employees, they ask? (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005, p. 94). Their solution is in line with Harvey's neoliberal thesis: that through such shocks a new form of employee has arisen, one who seeks to be flexible, *employable*, without job security moving from task to task. This 'new spirit of capitalism' also produces a new spirit of laborer, one who accepts Fleming's 'business ontology' and moves to a discourse of rights. Harvey characterizes this as "Dispossession entails the loss of rights. Hence the turn to a universalistic rhetoric of human rights, dignity, sustainable ecological practices, environmental rights, and the like" (Harvey 2007, p. 178). Stakeholders no longer need to be found, as they are created by the nexus of firms we encounter in our daily lives.

In this way, adherence to 'stakeholderism' is not far from Ford's dream of a worker utopia in Brazil. We are daily molded into behaviors that do not prepare for specific occupations but make us 'flexible' and agile enough to learn new skills in a constantly changing economy. Following Boltanski and Chiapello's discussion, workers

must strive to become employable and fit a certain mindset to achieve this goal. Ford's imposition of a nine-to-five workday erased the locality and specific-ness of Brazil and backfired, but the information society we currently partake in makes us, as Clare Birchall has noted "the burden of monitoring, regulating and translating the transactions of the state moves from the state to the responsabilized citizen: in order to fully participate, we are asked to be auditors, analysts, translators, programmers" (Birchall 2015, p. 190). Thus we must prioritize these tasks in order to achieve employability, not in the eyes of the state but for whatever organization can provide a wage. As Richard Parson notes, "in the new era of the responsible corporation, it seems we are all potentially stakeholders," where corporate activity has overtaken, *eaten* the lifeworld and the two can be synonymous (Parsons, 2008, p. 122). We are all employed or exist in a Fordlândia of some nature.

## Chapter Seven:

### *Mondialization and Sustainable Practice*

“Carbon-fueled capitalism is a zombie system, voracious but sterile.”

--Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*

Much of this text was written in the sheltering warmth of coffee shops, caffeinating late into the night in order to churn out what hopes to be a coherent exploration of what a Derridean view of corporate social responsibility *could* be, in this specific iteration. Often neglected is the idea of where that coffee comes from, how it gets to my lips, and what becomes of this enormous process after my consumption. A trip to the local coffee shop or percolation of Starbucks showcases the frequency and amount of coffee we consume--coffee being one of the most widely traded commodity in the world associated with a long history (Pendergrast, 2010). The supply chains that support this process, a globalized, interconnected network of immense scale, are hard to fathom outside the experience of drinking your favorite latte, which makes coffee, as a largely traded commodity (as well as common, everyday experience) useful for interrogating such a complex structure. Several issues emerge from such processes, including scope, equity amongst parties, as well as the cultural and spatial divides amongst participants. How these products are used, transported, and sourced bring to light questions revolving around a discourse of sustainability, which, as introduced in chapter two, has replaced and grown from discourses of corporate social responsibility.

Sustainable discourse emerges as stakeholders become more aware of the ecological problems stemming from industry, and the calculus of regenerative resources involved therein. In 1987, the UN publishes the Brundtland Report, which focused on

sustainable development as the world recognized the problematic nature of human activity upon the biosphere. However, these notable efforts included foundational social and linguistic issues that axiomatically deterred sustainability as a concept; as Shiv Ganesh comments, “the Brundtland Report made the unprecedented move of subsuming, within a single overarching term, both economic and social development” (2007, p. 380). Environmentalism, already with problems of its own, became tied to development, and business interests under the guise of sustainability. As Munshi and Kurian express frustration with CSR in particular encounters problems when dealing with subaltern or Third World publics, as “corporate” overlooks the many proxies of corporations, including states and financial institutions, “social” ignores the political, including issues of gender and diversity” (2007, p. 438). Often under the banner of ‘sustainable development’ First World nations pursue lax standards in terms of environmental regulations, including the offshoring of toxic waste and hazardous materials or dangerous working conditions<sup>51</sup>.

There have been numerous calls to address the question of sustainability from critical, philosophical and postcolonial perspectives, particularly Banerjee (2008) Robert Cox (2012) and Munshi (2011) who called for “placing the question of justice at the center of the investigation, postcolonial approaches can help highlight some of the deficiencies of CSR” (Munshi, 2011, p. 442). This chapter will bypass a strict postcolonial critique and opt for a macro approach to the question of Planet, which descends into two lines of questioning surrounding both globalization and sustainability,

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51 Places like Agbogbloshie in Ghana, where most of the West’s E-waste and electronics end up, or Alang, India, where Carnival Cruise Line’s *Festivale* resides, tend to resemble hell on Earth as massive toxic waste sites, yet ones in which residents scrap and recycle to attempt to make a living. The various pollutants and fumes have created a health crisis for those living near the area.

or sustainability *as* globalization. More so, from a philosophical discourse, massive supply chains beg the question of *world*, and what world means in both what Ulrich Beck describes as a ‘risk society’, as well as what ecological philosopher Timothy Morton characterizes as ‘hyperobjects’<sup>52</sup>, massive objects we exist inside of and cannot quite make total sense of based on scale, permanence, and effects; taking these two together, we face massive risks which cross borders and are present a new set of problematics based on scale. Sustainability, or planet, (*world* in the philosophical sense) then implies a globalized mentality as well as an ecological or environmental one. Finally, this chapter seeks to pair Derrida’s theories of hospitality and *mondialization* as alternatives to resource-depleting, polluting globalization.

Understanding sustainable discourse, and the problems within it, involves communicative proficiency of the massiveness and interconnectedness of these issues. By understanding the world in which we draw resources and sustenance from *as* Other, perhaps dialogue can move from sustainability as mere continuation of accumulation to more ethical forms of interaction. This can be grasped in the basic interdisciplinary and poetic bent of sustainable discourse, as seen in Laszlo and Zhexembayeva’s *Embedded sustainability*. In a strange book-ending chapter, there is a turn from academic and textbook style of discourse to this new prose-y, narrative driven account of the ‘the world in 2041’, sparked by a dystopian quote from William Gibson and delving into a crystal ball of the future. The account follows a young man’s inner monologue and description

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<sup>52</sup> Morton’s description of the ‘hyper’ departs abruptly from the previous semiotically minded approximations, such as hyperreality. In the work of Umberto Eco (1990), hyperreality encompasses an uncanny surface, such as Disneyland, where every street corner and wax figurine is but an inch-deep, signifying without being anchored to any Real. Morton inverts this in his study, fixating on objects which have such an immense depth that it becomes difficult to interrogate even the surface of them.



of his world as he prepares for an interview, one that will change his life (and make the world a better place!) While ‘one couldn’t think of the private sector anymore,” our titular hero Jake still muses on the power of corporations to save the world and make profits in the process (Lazlo & Zhexembayeva, 2011, p. 193). Even though this world has suffered through economic hardship, wars, lack of resources, all presumably from our current lifestyles choices and neoliberal obligations--“business was now part of the solution; a handful of top companies were helping to restore climate stability and food security—and closing the rich-poor gap by meeting the needs of the world’s poor—among other challenges that had eluded governments and nonprofits for decades” (Lazlo, Zhexembayeva 2011, p. 193). Jake’s interview appears as a ticket to a business-oriented and friendly utopia.

*Embedded sustainability* functions for an overwhelming majority of its length as a business text, full of charts, graphs, statistical analysis, and reference to other academic and trade publications. Why then, in describing the future, the shift to a more literary mode? Especially in the description of an apocalyptic ‘Dark Years’, full of declining air and water quality in Asia, South America, public health disasters in distressed regions globally, category five storms destroying Atlanta and Montreal, and pesticides choking the American Midwest. Even through this *abyss*, as our narrator calls it, there was hope, as people came out the other side more responsible, ethical, and motivated due to “*self-interest*” (Lazlo & Zhexembayeva, 2011, p. 196). Zero-energy buildings, virtual reality, and social safety nets for nine billion people become reality out our individual lack of responsibility for our greed, not our collective inability to curb it. Echoing thinkers such as Slavoj Žižek and Frederic Jameson, is *this* the only future we can imagine?

This theme continues in a coda, where the authors, moving back to a textbook-based discourse, ask us “is a collective moral awakening a necessary part of embedding sustainability in business?” (Lazlo & Zhexembayeva, 2011, p. 218). They issue warnings on how to avoid disaster, but according to this future look, disaster seems inevitable, resembling *almost* melded accelerationist inspired return to neoliberalism, where the public sphere must be destroyed first in order for the private sector to replenish it and make it whole again. The authors continue to bemoan the ‘Earth Firsters’ or what appears like an environmental activist group, that seems out of step with what Mark Fisher (2009) describes as Capitalist realism, where all alternatives are dismissed out of hand.

What to make of this sudden shift, and the notes given on our collective futures? As much as the text preaches the importance of embedding, or implanting moral, sustainable consciousness in organizations, it does so while also acknowledging a foil, an enemy, a problematic element that it cannot fully incorporate, a remainder of activism that remains outside of this grand business endeavor to save the world. This is what is so interesting about the fugue state chapter, of its inability to fully integrate the whole of society, even under the best conditions. Lazlo and Zhexembayeva articulate the end of an ‘us-versus-them’ mentality where business and activism are united under similar concerns, and yet there still remains a core antagonist, an ‘externality’ that resists inclusion, almost in a manner that such a world needs and subsidizes on such criticism. Yet this less than rosy picture of the future still bears this essential class antagonism of an ‘us-versus-them’ mentality despite a ‘business ontology’. Even more, the authors situate this under one of three major trends for the future of business, of increased consumer

expectation, declining resources, and *radical transparency* (Lazlo & Zhexembayeva, 2011). We are perfectly well aware of the claims of activists, and the destruction of the environment, and yet...

What does this say about the neoliberal imagination that it must abandon its expert mode of address for this construction of the future? Couldn't economic rationality and calculation predict a nascent future, but also avoid the potential global ecological doom prophesized by those (Scranton, 2015 & 2018; Purdy, 2015; Nixon, 2011) without the productive drive and responsibility sequestered by business? Transparency arrives here in the manner of a nefarious interdisciplinary project, by which structures of imagination and research are militarized toward some goal. This form of transparency signals the unification of universities, NGOs, government, and activists with business, by allowing consumers to see and participate in all aspects of business activities; put another way, consumers (stakeholders) under this guise pass between a permeable boundary where although outside organizations and disparate from them, are also united and integrated in them, through new technological advancement in communication technology. Bernard Stiegler addresses this as a cooptation of knowledge, where "universities and research organizations are mobilized in the service of an unlimited acceleration of innovation ...which is presented as the very condition of survival—a survival that itself seems, however, no longer possible except in the short term: at the expense of future life" (Stiegler, 2015, p. 203). Thinking is mobilized against itself in the digestive function of the organization attempted to sustain itself, to continue generating wealth and moving into the future.

This type of short term profit at the expense of long term goals represents the basis for the critique of sustainability this chapter proposes; as most CSR discourse has shifted to using the label of sustainability, I look to split sustainability's inner discord into two separate but complimentary motifs—one being the consumption of everything in order to make a (single) bottom line, and sustain into the future, unchanging.

Sustainability means adherence to bottom-line logic, ushering in not the new but the same, and with, as Stiegler claims, “the ‘Market’, ...has become hegemonic, and the name for its worldwide expansion is globalization,” then it will fall under this short thinking (2015, p. 184). Sustainability, both in the global reach of the market and the problems caused by industrialization, exists on a worldwide scale. If we instead aim to think in terms of Derrida's *survivance*, or survivability, we introduce elements of change and evolution to sustainable thinking. *Survivance* is the iteration of the letter, its desire to be used, confused, and passed on—in ways we cannot predict. Organizations opting for *survivance* can adapt and change, imagining different futures from the one prescribed in Lazlo and Zhexembayeva's text.

Beginning to think with *survivance*, perhaps it is wise to follow Donna Haraway's example and ‘stay with the trouble’—that trouble being the actual environmental crisis instead of attempts to waylay and distract from it. Some thinkers have clarified these problems are better utilized under a wholly different umbrella of terms, referring to ecological problems as emerging with the birth of the Anthropocene, a new epoch in geological time where human activity has become a geologic force unto itself. Ian Angus details the historical birth of the Anthropocene, as a measurement of a new epoch created after the Holocene, centering on a few key points: increased erosion exceeded sediment,

carbon dioxide and methane are higher now than in a million years, mass extinctions and deforestation are drastically changing the biosphere, and sea level rises may top out at ten to thirty meters for every one degree rise in Celsius (Angus, 2016, p. 50). Scholars debated the start of such trends, arguing over whether the emergence of agriculture in humans should install this new era, or the melting of glaciers, or perhaps even the Industrial Revolution, as Crutzen suggested. The suggestion came from his work at a German conference in 2007, where he submitted with several other scientists a work entitled the “Great Acceleration” showing the rise in planetary destabilization correlating with human activity (Angus, 2016, p. 65).

Some of Angus’s other reportage display an immense melancholic state of affairs through statistics and measurements, including facts such as twenty-two percent of marine fisheries are depleted; more nitrogen is used in agriculture than is found in all terrestrial ecosystems; half of all available freshwater is in use, with reservoirs being depleted; and finally, that Earth is in its first great extinction event caused by a single biological species (Angus, 2016, p. 35). Angus points to the violence done as the two-degree Celsius threshold will more than likely still spell doom for those in the Global South, from extreme weather events to drought to famine and subsequent war and devastation. The projections, as Angus makes clear these are projections based on *2100ism* (Angus, 2016, p. 105) where reporting is stretched out to the year 2100 even though disastrous effects will continue to take place far after, seems to abdicate some of the severity of the crisis the species faces. The seriousness of these issues fails to be captured with slogans advocating for more recyclable materials or energy conservation rates buried in a report on a corporate website.

The seriousness and all-encompassing nature of such risks prompts social theorist Ulrich Beck to try and conceptualize the danger posed in stark terms. Beck conceives of the world in risk from hazard, risks that have no legitimate causal agent and have been dispersed across the entire globe. Beck conceives of the problem with addressing these risk as one of communication, claiming that market forces of “the invisible hand’ turns into an ‘invisible saboteur’, which cannot, or can only barely, be apprehended, and thus as it were covered by the current categories of legal and scientific hazard assessment” (Beck, 1995, p. 8). For Beck, these risks, or hazards, are tied to a certain rationality that marshals

“orgies of mathematics and science are held in defense of nature. Whole battalions of high-powered economic calculations advance, flanked on either side by dissidents from the natural sciences who wish to invert the formulae from which the hazards have escaped and make possible their recapture. This is indispensable, no doubt. Only thus can institutionalized alarm systems be triggered off. Furthermore, the hazards which undermine our health as much as they seal the fate of endangered bird and plant species can often be brought to public notice only in this way. Only thus can the institutionalized concealment be confronted, on its own terms, with a little of its old truth. Yet it must be said that all these efforts are only a substitute, a strained way of saying, “we do not want to live thus!” (Beck, 1995, p. 42)

Although writing in the mid-nineties, simultaneously the popularization of sustainability discourse, Beck seems to pin his critique on this emerging manner of discussion. It is hard not to realize Beck’s rage and anger in his writing, a disappointment with rationality unable to get outside itself and defend itself from such emergent issues; “even ecology,” Beck decries, as “the spokesperson for nature conceived as a network, is a variant of

natural science, not nature's own articulation of itself" (Beck, 1995:40). These problems present compromising issues for our own systems of thinking.

Given this situation, this chapter will attempt to complicate this notion of sustainability and what it underlies, as a 'hypocritical' discourse that removes communicative hope and replaces it with cynicism, a desperate attempt to hang on to our rapidly changing environs, materially, socially, and ideologically. As Winter underscores, "sustainability describes the relatively recent and hazardous situation that faces the world'. But does it? If recent world environmental problems can be described as 'sustain- ability', then what hope is there for the future?" (Winter, 2007, p. 205). The removal of hope comes from the removal or understanding of the world, both in a philosophical sense and as far as the homogeneity imposed by globalized economic system dictates.

**"The world owes you nothing. It was here first."**

The issue with sustainability ultimately becomes one of communication, based on two fronts: first, it hints at the possible apocalyptic situation confronted with environmental degradation, yet asks us to continue living basically the same life within the same world. It inculcates a sense of fatalism that we must conserve resources *in the very act of consuming them*. This deep ambivalence then prompts questions about what sustainability is and how it is used. One way to consider sustainability is through the work of Timothy Morton, Morton an English literature scholar who has been associated with Graham Harman's Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) movement and the 'nonhuman' turn. Morton resists writing directly to environmental issues, always couching them in a deconstructive reading that introduces the weird, the uncanny back into nature, into

objects—treating them as worthy of study and capable of dignity. On many levels, Morton resembles a postmodern trained Buddhist, one decries sustainable discourse as problematic “for why sustainability fails as a concept has to do with how we are not living in a *world*. It is thus time to question the very term *ecology*, since ecology is the thinking of home, and hence world” (Morton, 2013, p. 116). By thinking through what world means, we can pinpoint problems in sustainability as well as alternative communicative frames for it.

Sustainability sanctions commerce and the market as legitimate while also critiquing it for producing pollution, waste, and toxic material. Such a cognitive dissonance creates feedback loops in our perceptions of the world they live in, thinking that no action can be taken. Morton’s insight is not that *action* is the problem, paradoxically re-sanctioning sustainability as a useful project, but that the core underlying idea of ‘world’ and what ‘worlding’ constitutes that must be addressed. Morton prompts the reader in *Ecology without nature* (2007) why not “just let sleeping ecological issues lie? It sounds like a perverse joke. The sky is falling, the globe is warming, the ozone hole persists; people are dying of radiation poisoning and other toxic agents; species are being wiped out, thousands per year; the coral reefs have nearly all gone. Huge globalized corporations are making bids for the necessities of life from water to health care. Environmental legislation is being threatened around the world;” why write a book nitpicking at definitions of the problem? (Morton, 2007, p. 10) Action seems more attentive to the situation than thought. Yet it is the way of thinking of nature as pristine and primitive, in need of saving that replicates a colonizing discourse of it. Morton draws on his literary expertise to diagnose the problem as stretching back to the



Romantic period, when nature became visible due to its disappearance.

For Morton, “Ecology, if it means anything at all, means being *without* nature. When we drag it front and center, against our ideological interests, it stops being a world in which we can immerse ourselves,” the ideological being never more present than in Heidegger’s depictions of Black Forest peasants (Morton, 2007, p. 204). Nature cannot be killed because it was a constriction in the first place, something that we removed from our daily experience as an ‘over there’ separate, remote. Instead of shame from using a car, Morton suggests an ecology without present, that defers current environmentalism’s clamor for *immediate* change while simultaneously attempting to “mourn the loss of the environment, for that would be to accept its loss, even to kill it, if only symbolically. The task is not to bury the dead but to join them, to be bitten by the undead and become them” (Morton, 2007, p. 201). This new thinking paradoxically allows us to care more for something still existent, as the immediate response needed can be manifested over time.

Morton stresses a more communicative approach to such a situation—current evangelical environmentalism preach action over dialogue and discussion, that the world is ending and something must be done. A simple phrase such as ‘strange weather today?’ cannot be read in today’s climate anxious vernacular as a simple statement, as it forces the specter of global warming into the conversation. Morton, moving from the communicative exchange on something as simple as weather, points out that ‘in an age of global warming, there is no background, and thus there is no foreground. It is the end of the world, since worlds depend on background and foreground’ (Morton, 2013, p. 99). We fail to retain common worlds as we ponder whether the other believes in such dynamic changes to the Earth system, or if they are skeptics. We acknowledge the

problem as a ‘super wicked problem’ of which nothing much can be done.

This fatalism stems from what Morton deems as hyperobjects—massive, immense, unthinkable structures that dictate our normal everyday interactions as well as all future interactions. Global warming is a hyperobject, as is the Internet.

Hyperobjects<sup>53</sup> are *viscous* (they stick to entities associated with them), *nonlocal* (local versions are not *the* version but approximations), have drastically different timescales than humans, interact amongst one another, and are invisible to humans at certain points. Just because we are unaware of changes in the global climate system does not mean that they were not occurring during the Industrial Revolution. Morton departs from typical theorizing of the hyper to formulate a stage of awe at the massive quality of these objects, making it hard to fathom let alone communicate them.

Hyperobjects also permanently displace the human as arbiter of any kingdom. We become *unheimlich*<sup>54</sup>, without a home in the only one we have ever known in this strata. Hyperobjects announce means that humans are not totally in charge of assigning significance and value to events that can be statistically measured. The worry is not whether the world will end, as in the old model of *dis-astro*, but whether the end of the world is already happening, or whether perhaps *it might already have taken place*. A deep shuddering of temporality occurs” (Morton, 2013, p. 16). We cannot save a world that never really belonged to us. Morton suggests that perhaps the end has already

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53 Morton’s *hyperobjects* share a great of similarity with Beck’s definition of hazard: They occupy spatial, temporal, and cross-border problems (nonlocal), Established rules of liability break down (*viscous* in they don’t stick to one agent), Technology can only limit, never dissipate them, and we approach them as if they were like crises of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and manageable in the same way (here Morton’s ideal of nonhuman time scales and interobjectivity back up Beck’s critique).

54 *Unheimlich* is a term originating from Freud in his discussion of the uncanny, which he describes in a manner representing homelessness in the context of returning home. We recognize a place, a thing, a person even as familiar, but also incredibly unfamiliar at the same time.

occurred, several times: perhaps in 1784 with the steam engine; perhaps in 1945 with the Trinity test in NM; perhaps never. Morton's end is strangely more optimistic, as "the end of the world is the end of endings, the end of telos, and the beginning of the uncertain, hesitating futureality" whereas normatively associated with irreversible human destruction (Morton 2013, p. 95). Hyperobjects, by their immense stretching out across time, space, and culture, signal the inability for humans to change from fossil fuels or economic systems, of being masters of their own fate. Hyperobjects become corrosive the derivative "I" that demands the historical moment facilitates them, instead ushering in an uncertainty that demands communicative response from the 'I' to an even wider net of unknowable others, including nonhuman entities. Morton's notion of hope in this scenario is not to blindly accept the forces of destruction, but realize that the world has not in fact ended, and we never truly owned it, and to accept it on its own terms. This point will be revisited at the end of the chapter in terms of a Derridean hospitality to the planet.

For Morton, it is an issue of relation, and therefore communication and thinking which needs to be fixed first before any action taken, as the environmental movement has flooded narratives of apocalypticism at worst, and sustainability at best: as Morton laments "monitoring, regulating, and controlling flows: is ecological ethics and politics just this? Regulating flows and sending them where you think they need to go is not relating to nonhumans" (Morton 2013, p. 110). We may be displaced from the classic notion of the planet as a home and a world, but ignorance of this issue will not complete transformations into a greener society. This issue of communication and worlding is also engaged from a purely deconstructive approach by Jean-Luc Nancy, drawing on

philosophical understandings of what world means in his *Creation of the world, or, globalization*. Nancy conflates the ecological problem to one of globalization as well, placing blame on technology for uniting so much of the world but at the same time subjugating it. Nancy takes a less ecological approach, as a network of satellites and global networked technology remove us from our own specific locale; for Nancy, the world is *urbi et orbi*—everywhere and anywhere. Globalization removes our own understanding. It is the dissipation of this understanding that leads to “domination of an empire made up of technological power and pure economic reason asserted itself” (Nancy 2007, p. 33). Humans then make a sense of the world in which, antithetical to the ‘pale blue dot’s’ normal interpretation, we see the world as something we stand *outside* of, which can be objected and utilized.

Nancy’s idea of world is a reckoning with the otherness of world, and our place outside its center; “world is not a unity of objective or external order: a world is never in front of me, or else it is not my world. But if it is absolutely other, I would not even know, or barely, that it is a world ... As soon as a world appears to me as world, I already share something of it” (Nancy, 2007, p. 42). For Nancy, the fundamental, bottom ground of the concept of world is that it is a shared concept, for world is a world is only a world for those who inhabit it,” and to be within means an acceptance of inheritances and obligations, understandings of others who share beliefs (Nancy 2007, p. 42). This is especially difficult as different technological agglomerations (Nancy’s shorthand for the vast technological apparatus of global infrastructure) present radical realities and worlds to consume. The actual ground of the concept of world is built out of “*ex nihilo*,” or

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55 Nancy here again links the problem of world with philosophy, as the discourse of philosophy, and history, both assign beginnings and ends to discourse that largely don’t contain them—philosophy starts

nothing, and for Nancy “is the genuine formulation of a radical materialism, *that is to say, precisely without roots*” (Nancy 2007, p. 51). It is back to this groundlessness that Nancy seeks to erode the hold of globalization.

Globalization here represents a world that is a bad totality, “an enclosure;” Nancy instead suggests we reopen, worldwide, any struggle against such a totality. Nancy prefers the ideal of *mundialization*, a French alternative to globalization that carries with it more of a historical context and world forming power. Nancy sees world as an empty concept but also one where humans create the meaning—if meaning is dictated through global *nowhere* and *everywhere*-ness, then it dissipates—if rooted in local context and history, it may survive, begin a “process in expansion as Nancy claims (Nancy 2007, p. 2). For Nancy, this project is one purely of communication, as he stresses that “commerce engenders communication, which requires community, communism. Or: human beings create the world, which produces the human, which creates itself as an absolute value and enjoyment of that value” (Nancy, 2007, p. 37). Instead of simulacra of global goods coming without context from nowhere, reexamining not products but our understanding of world and where they come from can change those very habits.

These problems with world, or *worlding*, however should not distract from the real and imminent threats to the material, physical Earth. As much as Morton consoles with his neo/western approximation of Buddhism, and Nancy gives reminds us of the meaning making tolls at our disposal for creating and sharing a world outside of pure accumulation, Beck is quick to remind us of the lessons of Chernobyl, that hazards not

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with Plato, who comments on the teachings of Socrates, who came before him. This *aporia* in the record highlights the arbitrariness of beginning and end that Western identity institutes to serve as ground.

only exist, but are “invisible and universal” (Beck, 1995, p. 64). As Jean-Luc Nancy explains in *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Disasters*, the global world system absorbs any disaster into a paradigm of nuclear risk, of interconnectedness, as:

“From now on there is an interconnection, an intertwining, even a symbiosis of technologies, exchanges, movements, which makes it so that a flood—for instance—wherever it may occur, must necessarily involve relationships with any number of technical, social, economic, political intricacies that keep us from regarding it as simply a misadventure or a misfortune whose consequences can be more or less easily circumscribed” (Nancy, 2015, p. 1-2).

Each new disaster then cannot be taken *as* new: each is connected to the activities of humans on a macro scale. Nor can they be considered natural—as with Fukushima, each disaster now inaugurates a new one, as tsunamis threaten meltdowns, meltdowns threaten oceanic life, which infects supply chains, on and on and on. This for Beck presents an unholy situation as such disasters are still defined and blamed on the supernatural realm, rather than the human sanctioned one.

For Beck, the lack of responsibility for hazards, for disaster in general has to be placed in shared human realm, but, as with the problems of world, are often discarded and ignored. This enters our communication of responsibility for this world into an “...elaborate labyrinth of designed according to principles, not of non-liability of irresponsibility, but of simultaneous liability and unaccountability: more precisely, liability as unaccountability, or organized irresponsibility” (Beck, 1995, p. 61). Echoing Derrida’s essay “No Apocalypse, Not Now” from nearly a decade before, Beck claims the end of the world, or “physical annihilation itself remains an unreal scenario, because the Apocalypse simply cannot be experienced,” and therefore forever abstract (Beck,

1995:84). From this scenario, our communicative worlds take up cynicism as the defining trait of an age of ‘equivalence’ as Nancy puts it. Cynicism, as defined by Arnett and Arneson (1999) being unmet high expectations, seeks to erode our collective willpower even though we remain more connected than ever before in history. This allows us “live comfortably once again. It lays down the burden of defending a now unstoppable naïve industrialism, or of taking up arms against it. One can recline at one’s own ease, or dance at the rim of the volcano” (Beck, 1995, p. 66). Cynicism becomes a productive view to avoiding catastrophe and engaging in normative consumer-driven life.

To question where and how products reach us, and what Morton construes as ‘grey goo’ the capitalist production process that “...sucks in grey goo at one end and pushes out grey value at the other. Its Natural goo, Natural value” (Morton, 2013, p. 113-4). It then becomes easier to be cynical than reckoning with the question of *world*, with the question of the future world and the possible changes to it. Morton tweaks this form of cynicism slightly, arguing that the cynicism is the ideology of our age, but there is an alleged difference in cynicism and hypocrisy—hypocrisy as the knowledge of being caught in one’s own failure, while “the cynic still hopes that if he vomits disgustingly enough, things will change. The cynic hopes: he is not beyond hope—he is a hypocrite. He is trying to escape doom” (Morton, 2013, p. 148). In light of the discussion of Arnett, Arneson, and Beck—this cultural form of putting one’s head in the sand resembles more Morton’s hypocrisy, or as he translates it, “secret doom”—simply hidden doom, a message sent from somewhere obscure. Or a message that is secret in some sense: encrypted” (Morton, 2013, p. 148). Morton connects this version of hypocrisy to *communication*, particularly to Quintillian and the notion of delivery. Cynical

communication here, although removed, still *hopes*, still attempts to articulate a world.

It is this mindset, whether it is deemed cynicism or hypocrisy, that sustainability fits itself. It articulates a world that is certified as ethical, normal, *preferred* even, while ignoring possible alternatives and actual world-building. As Aras and Crowther point out, sustainable discourse, like CSR, has a variety of meanings, one being stasis and continuation. Sustainability, while recognizing the ecological problems and the philosophical bind at the heart of global system that articulates a grey tinted world, falls into the trap of what Beck calls “*Post-histoire*, the illusion of having reached the terminus of history of societies, is in truth the most universally valid law of thought in history” (Beck, 1995, p. 3). Capitalism then becomes the best and only way for solving the very goals it helps create. Morton’s critique is based upon this linguistic and rhetorical turn as “...the common name for managing and regulating flows is *sustainability*. But what exactly is being sustained? Capital must keep on producing more of itself in order to continue to be itself” (Morton 2013, p. 111). Thus, sustainability becomes not a world-building strategy towards a greener, more ecologically balanced world, but management of a world. The next section of the chapter will detail how the communication of this management system becomes flawed through certification, posing as a transparent label of ethical consumerism, while taking off the table the changing of any of these chains; we become like Žižek’s organic grocery buyer, who he condemns, saying “there is something deceptively reassuring in our readiness to assume guilt for the threats to our environment: we like to be guilty since, if we are guilty, it all depends on us. We pull the strings of the catastrophe, so we can also save ourselves simply by changing our lives”



(Žižek, 2014). Protest against this form of globalized system becomes commodified itself.

### **The Undergrowth of Sustainability**

Žižek's condemnation can best be elaborated, and demonstrated in the commodity consumed when I am reading him—coffee! I can sip my morning coffee and read a *Guardian* article where Žižek ridicules a Starbucks campaign, where they claim the coffee they purchase and serve is Fair Trade, ethical, and helping farmers subsist, leading Žižek to pun on their slogan of “when you choose Starbucks, you are buying a cup of coffee from a company that cares. No wonder it tastes so good” (2014). This represents the dual impulse in our consumerist habits, we want to be ethical, but not at the cost of losing the developed amenities of the world. We desire commodities but without the risk, without bearing responsibility: “chocolate, yes, but fat-free; Coke, yes, but diet; coffee, yes, but without caffeine; beer, yes, but without alcohol; mayonnaise, yes, but without cholesterol; sex, yes, but safe sex ...” (Žižek, 2014). Coffee as a commodity remains a locale where the global nature, and the ecological aspect all collide with marketing and sustainable discourse in interesting ways, where we consume not just the product but the narratives about the product, where it is from, how it is roasted, exemplifying our indifference to the world but also our connoisseur-ship.

Coffee is, as Reinecke et al. (2012) point out, the second most traded commodity on the global market in volume, with oil residing as the prime mover of global commodities. She continues that “an estimated 25 million people around the world depend directly on coffee farming for their livelihoods. Two thirds of them are smallholders, with limited market power vis-a-vis a highly concentrated group of

international buyers and facing highly volatile coffee prices” (2012, p. 7), which exposes a series of problem that surround globalization and sustainability discourse. In 1989, after the International Coffee Agreement dissolved, coffee prices fluctuated greatly, as price volatility and income vulnerability emerged as inherent characteristics of a more buyer-driven commodity chain” (Kolk, 2012, p. 80). More and more multinational organizations entered the coffee scene, bringing with them more attention, but also more problems. Given the ecological state of affairs pointed out above, consumers demanded more say and participation in the supply chain of coffee production, to which multiple certification agencies have appeared to fill a legitimacy gap. This section seeks to take up Bacon et al’s demand that such certification be analyzed in:

“a framework that analyzes the coffee crisis as a corporate credibility and public relations problem rather than a farmers’ –livelihood struggle could reveal fascinating new information. For example, applying a critical corporate social responsibility lens (Utting 2007) might reveal how the top ten coffee companies that control more than 75 percent of the industry deployed publicity campaigns, charity giving, lobbying efforts, and self-certification campaigns, supported ethical trade initiatives (Utting 2007), and restructured their supply chains in order to profit from the market opportunities created by the collapse of the quota system within the International Coffee Agreement” (Bacon et al, 2008, p. 347).

How then is a consumer, knowing the state of the world and the ecological problems it faces, supposed to make ethical consumer choices? One way in which coffee products attempt to validate themselves as ethical is through third-party certifications, which point to sustainable principles in the transport, growth, and purchase of the product.

As Gilbert, Rasche, and Waddock (2011) spotlight, A sustainability standard can be defined as a set of voluntary rules to ethically communicate the good works of the firm, it is important to note, as Aras and Crowther, do, that there is no specific definition of corporate sustainability and each organization needs to devise its own definition to suit its purpose and objectives” (Aras & Crowther, 2009, p. 979). They continue that most firms “...seem to assume that corporate sustainability and corporate social responsibility are synonymous” in the pursuit of these standards, and relegate them to accounting measures that are easily measured and manageable (Aras & Crowther, 2009, p. 979). Reinecke, Manning, and von Hagen discuss that “while standards should communicate information about how goods are produced, processed and traded, multiple stakeholder groups including governments, businesses, and consumers have growing concerns that the amount of standards are proliferating to a degree where it is getting confusing,” (Reinecke, et al, 2012, p. 6). From a purely business case, the regulatory load becomes burdensome, becoming the boogeyman Friedman constructed in theory, but acting a Friedman-esque way to acquire capital of its own.

Reinecke et al. point to the drastic rise in certifications, with a 20% annual increase, “establishing a growing, yet increasingly fragmented, market segment for sustainable coffee” (2012, p. 7). There are various sustainable coffee certifications, each one adhering to different focal points and efficacies, all while branded under the umbrella of *sustainability*. There are NGO and third party groups, spurred from activist participation on the environment and social issues; those include “Organic (1978), Fair Trade (1988), SAN/Rainforest Alliance (1995) and Bird Friendly (1996/7)” standards, each advocating for similar and yet divergent issues in the production of coffee (Reinecke

et al, 2012, p. 7-8). While groups such as Rainforest Alliance and Bird Friendly focus mostly on environment, and the minimization of costs and pollution to the local area the coffee is sourced from, other groups, such as Fair Trade, “focuses on *social* issues, including the livelihoods of small farmers and their communities, and access to health care and education. Fairtrade especially emphasizes payment of a premium to farmers adopting the Fair Trade label, and the right of workers to organize for collective bargaining” (Reinecke et al, 2012, p. 13-14). This is not to say that Bird Friendly certified coffee seeks to disadvantage workers, but that it prioritizes a different identity in its practice. Bird Friendly is double certified Organic, as it must be *shade-grown*<sup>56</sup> and fits into many countries established legal codes for what constitutes and what does not constitute organic food.

Not every certification is birthed from activist pressure, as many have been integrated into private firms own discourse about their sustainable efforts, including UTZ Certified (1997), Nespresso AAA Sustainable Quality (2003) and Starbucks C.A.F.E. Practices (2004),” and often “...typically pursue more business-related objectives, such as traceability, and product quality” (Reinecke et al, 2012, p. 7-8). Having the ability to locate where and how coffee was produced allows more integration of the supply chain by firms such as Starbucks, which, in such cases, may opt to bypass certification altogether and rely on place of origin as testament to quality and ethics (Bitzer, et al, 2008, p. 281). Starbucks often collaborates with NGOs such as Fair Trade, but greatly

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<sup>56</sup> Shade Grown is an important distinction in the actual physical production of the coffee, and where it was grown. Shade grown includes being grown in certain style where the elevation and amount of shade given does not disrupt the natural habitat of surrounding animals as well as the flavor and richness of the coffee

exaggerate the amount to which they do, as Fair Trade accounts for a mere “1% to 2% of Starbucks’ total coffee purchases,” and around 50% of their entire stock (Kolk, 2005:230). The adoption of standards, whether from outside partners to internal qualifications, have “...contributed to the rise of standards and fostered their application as competitive strategies” (Bitzer et al, 2008, p. 278).

This development increased starting from the 1990s, as pressure “from NGOs on large transnational coffee corporations increased substantially. In response to NGO campaigns, several coffee companies adopted codes of conduct, started integrating Fair Trade and organic coffee into their commercial portfolio or engaged in partnerships with NGOs and governments” in order to improve brand image (Bitzer et al, 2008:274). Although an NGO, Fair Trade original started as an alternative market mechanism in order to restore the power inefficiency between consumers in the Global North over producers in the Global South. Although admirable adoptions of standards on behalf on large multinationals such as Starbucks, it also “...reveals a rather narrow definition of what sustainability in the coffee chain actually means. It obstructs approaching problems that likewise hinder a sustainable development of the coffee chain: some of the most pressuring issues, such as overproduction and the imbalances in power, remain unaddressed” (Bitzer et all, 2008:277). Sustainability, often associated with CSR, adopts many of the same fundamental issues as its parent discourse, including co-optation by corporate interest, fluff to distract from dangerous processes, or some undecidable in-between?

The certification market acts in a similar way to Žižek's anecdote about a divorcee finding a spy ring in his local park—he begins secretly intercepting messages, decoding them, and filtering in his own messages. After much deliberation, he inserts his ex-wife's new lover as a new target for assassination. After a guilt ridden few days, the man checks the newspaper and is shocked to see his wife's lover has died. He attempts to finally confront the spy ring, which turns out to be a group of adolescent children playing a game—the ex-wife's lover died unexpectedly in an unrelated manner. For Žižek, communication occurs, although “in such a way that one participant knows nothing at all about it while the other totally misunderstands the nature of the game. The two poles of communication are thus asymmetrical (Žižek, 1999, p. 25). Standards often point to ethics and sustainability in much the same way as Žižek's story—meaning to accomplish a goal, but stumbling into instead. Standards viewed as competitive advantages have had similar results in helping reduce emissions and resources, but in pursuit of lifestyles and economies that contribute to the problem in the first place.

A divergent set of questions about the purpose of such standards foregrounds itself: “On the one hand, standards setters present themselves as collaborators, sharing the same political agenda and working towards promotion of sustainable development,” as Reinecke et al describe, while on the other, they appear to be “marketing those standards - just like a brand” (2012, p. 11). There is then an unimpeachable difference in the “ideological roots and philosophies promoting sustainability,” between a Starbucks, which answers to shareholders, investors and market pressures, and Fair Trade and other NGOs, who (seemingly) put mission first (Reinecke et al, 2012, p. 12). Standards can become so successful that they grow to become their own brands, and signify merely for

others in the brand market; as Michael Power comments, “in other words, labels are created for those doing the labelling” (Power, 1997, p. 125). International consumers are reinstated as the focus of such brands, rather than Third World publics living on subsistence wages, as these certification and validation schemes were created to help.

The Common Code for the Coffee Community (4C), a sector-spanning membership association, was founded in 2006 as the mainstream solution to global industry self-regulation. 4C has attempted to validate certain standards and provide entry level into standards market for small producers, as the multiplicity of standards and the fees they accrue become nightmares for producers to keep up, adhere to, and pay for. Whereas Fair Trade can act as a brand itself, well-recognized for its ethical component, and its “...certification develops consumer awareness, it is focused on mainstreaming and thus becoming part of the transnational corporate system rather than changing it” (Jaffe, Bacon, 2008, p. 333). Although it has its roots, as Jaffe and Bacon note, in the civil and NGO sector, along with other groups associated with undoing histories of inequality and colonialism, it still is an imperfect system—Fair Trade rewards growers for production based on the pound, and while this initially a system for helping farmers, ultimately commits them to growing more coffee, which then floods the market and pushes the overall price down—a fluctuation that occurred from ’99-’03 when prices fluctuated from \$1.20 to \$0.45 and then a minor rebound of \$0.65—a more realistic approximation, for instance in the Central American market dropped from \$1.678 billion to \$700 million in 2002, essentially crippling it (Bacon et al 2008, p. 345). Hence the need for some overarching agreement that returns to the basics of Fair Trade’s mission in helping producers participate in beneficial rather than exploitative markets.

This becomes the purpose for 4C, yet another addition into what Reinecke declares ‘the standards market’: different organizations positioning themselves as arbiters of ethics and sustainable practice; this is addressed in Kolks’ (2012) lament that most quantitative studies only address Fair Trade as an industry standard, and when other certifications or standards are addressed, reports are across the board-- Hence, there may be multiple, complementary ways towards a more sustainable coffee market; we lack evidence to back up divergent statements in what is often a heated debate between those who support Fairtrade<sup>57</sup> versus other standards. (2012, p. 83). 4C aims at having less of the massive fees that certification process takes, which often pushes out small-growers and SME’s alike in competition with larger brands, even though 4C also counts these major brands such as Aldi, Kraft, Melitta, Tchibo, and Nestlé amongst its members. Nestlé in particular has rejected the Fair Trade model, using 4C instead and engaged in “...buying coffee directly from farmers, amounting to 14% of its total procurement in 2002” (Kolk, 2005, p. 231). Such broad analyses adds to Jamali et al (2017)’s call that literature on SME’s ‘on the ground’ is often limited and disjointed, and what is needed is more context of historically grown institutional frameworks and national business systems. Hence, moving beyond firm-centered analyses is important to gain a grounded understanding of how CSR expressions are mediated by relevant institutional and

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57 Kolk states that FairTrade often creates more short term benefits in terms of “income and demand-side market creation, others concerning increased supply-side production efficiency and quality improvement” (kolk, paradox, 83), pointing towards (again) an inefficiency in the benefit towards Northern consumers than producers in the Global South, whom typically have most of the value extracted from Northern third parties (i.e. certifiers, supermarkets, coffee chains). This is not to entirely disregard FairTrade, but point to the problematic issues that usually pass over a consumer in the few seconds they take to purchase coffee off a shelf or from a store.



contextual (2017, p. 14). Global agreements such as Fair Trade and 4C seek to undue the resulting market pressures that come with globalized supply chains and value networks.

Power imbalances remain between regulatory agencies, buyers, and producers remains in favor of entrenched structures stretching back to colonial forms and institutions. Kolk notes how for small-growers, “in the end, if coffee consumption does not explode, some producers will have to withdraw from the coffee market and switch to other crops or economic activities,” due to overproduction and increase in coffee quality, an unforeseen consequence of the certification and improvement tactics (2005, p. 234). The same moves that Starbucks, Nestlé, Fair Trade, and others sought to improve image can also spell the downfall of the local communities these global giants sought to protect. This eerily echoes Kregg Hetherington’s portrayal of *campesinos* in Paraguay, who learned the politics of transparency and civil society, only to “remain guerillas in the eyes of the political elites, trespassers against civil society, the public sphere, the rule of law, and therefore against the very idea of rational governance” (Hetherington, 2011, p. 20). As Peter Fleming articulates with Nestlé, original support for international agreements like 4C can easily be ousted in favor of market capitalization, which Nestlé promoted with its Fair Trade certification:

“With fair trade certification, it now was able to place this product in the ‘ethical section’ of the supermarket and have its brand exposed alongside other, less-cynical fair trade companies. Meanwhile, for the rest of its product line, it was business as usual, involving highly exploitative supplier chains that led to environmentally destructive farming techniques and exploited producers. Of course, the Fair Trade Foundation was caught between a rock and a hard place. It could not deny Nestlé certification since it met the rigorous criteria. Then again, it was obviously ludicrous to allow Nestlé to become associated with fair trade in light of its otherwise questionable

trading practices” (Fleming, 2012, p. 91).

Sustainable image is always easier to cultivate than actual practice, which as demonstrated above, is full of paradox, dead ends, and thorny issues. As Aras and Crowther elaborate, the *aporia* remains one of which “sustainable development may well be possible, and even desirable in some circumstances, but it is not an integral aspect of sustainability” (Aras & Crowther, 2009, p. 980). Sustainability fractures into a status quo reformatting with green principles and business as usual, and the desire for an emergent set of practices that signal survival or *survivance*.

Sustainability then becomes a copy or simulation of the desire for more ecologically aware living. This ‘simulacra’ of sustainability, something Boiral (2013) points towards in reference to Baudrillard, how “assurance mechanisms could cover the very absence of such a reality. Thus, sustainability reports and assurance mechanisms could represent a hyperreality conveying signs, data and images without any reference to the real world” (2013, p. 1043). Baudrillard’s citation of the Exxon spill, where executives called to account for the Valdez spill presented twelve thousand page reports represents the problem of information overload in the communication of the fraught term of sustainability (Baudrillard 1983). Even though there exists a multitude of NGO and international activist organizations, “standards setters continue to differentiate their standards to preserve their autonomy and/or demonstrate ideological commitment” amounting to treatment reserved for brand image: we truly enter the hyperreal world of corporate image making (Reinecke et al, 2012, p. 21). For all the discussion surrounding producers *as* stakeholders, they are often the ones that suffer from disruptions, from

overproduction to blight to market saturation. For large industries, such as Nestlé or Starbucks, certification and quality improvement is usually easiest and most profitable for larger coffee producers” through image production and communication than material change (Kolk, 2005, p. 234). Certifications, diffuse and numerous, divert attention from risk and promise a similar tomorrow through purchase.

This simulacra is of a communicative nature, and favors Northern consumers and third parties. This is done mainly through the plethora of certifications, which act to assuage fears of where the products comes from, developed by, and in what manner. No slave labor could be involved if it is stamped and approved by Fair Trade, or some organization! However, the need for certification systems is one of mistrust, given their very existence—as Bacon et al’s (2008) claim, “certification systems are based on the principle of submitting to external scrutiny in exchange for a price premium, given that both intermediaries and consumers are understandably reluctant to pay for such premiums on faith” (2008, p. 356). Producers in the Global South then must adapt to Northern consumer preferences, which “make the farming practices legible to the global certification bodies often make certification requirements “illegible” to their local communities” (Bacon et al, 2008, p. 343). Thus, certifications reflect the transparency paradox where, in a world full of sustainable products, there would be no need for certifications.

Certification then becomes more marketing than regulation. Large organizations, even Nestlé are not clamoring against such impediments on their business, but in fact welcoming them, something David Vogel calls the California effect (2018): large brands are able to institute regulations *as* strategic initiatives against less able to comply

competitors, making a race to the top. The profitability of such certification then becomes an object in need of more attentive scrutiny, especially between the “auditor and the audited company, in an audit process that lacks transparency, and where professional and managerial capture can take place” (Perego & Kolk, 2012, p. 186). This has taken place not only in coffee, but a variety of sectors, as Ben Cashore lays out in his study of forestry and development, occurs in the early 90’s in global forest industry, and then in coffee and other sectors such as fisheries, mining (EITI), apparel, and construction (LEED) (Cashore, 2004). As certification agencies budgets become more based on transnational corporate interest (Bacon et al, 2008, p. 342), conflicts of interest abound. Sustainability certifications then promote quick answers and the choosing between a variety of standards as hyper-norms, making choice increasingly meaningless and difficult.

The certification, while promoting what Cashore calls non-state market driven (NSMD) governance, also focuses its view purely on large, transnational organizations which help to contribute to these certifying organizations. The majority of production goes unviewed, outside the sphere of northern capitalistic marketing schemes. Certification becomes ‘simulacra’, and multiple standards “...all claim to promote sustainability. The differences between them refer to the lack of a universally accepted or understood definition for the core term of ‘sustainable coffee’ which has numerous meanings (Bitzer et al, 2008, p. 278). As Reinecke points out, these standards are in communication with themselves, as “...concept of sustainability is ambiguous and open to debate, a *common sustainability vocabulary* around the pillars of economic prosperity, environmental quality and social equity has helped ‘narrow’ this concept through

learning, imitation and mutual borrowing of standards criteria” (Reinecke et al, 2012, p. 22-23), able to put forward a *sense* of what sustainability means. In discussing such large and massive issues, it is hard to get more than a sense of what these problems entail.

This is the bind that sustainability places upon us, as consumers we demand more care for the environment and ethical products, which in turn forces organizations to respect where and how products are delivered from across global supply chains. Corporate structure often views this as the center of its world and the only interfaces with the external world take place at the beginning and end of its value chain. It is apparent, however, that any actions which an organization undertakes will have an effect not just upon itself but also upon the external environment within which that organization resides” (Aras & Crowther 2009, p. 981). Certification *works* in that it takes a global and ethical perspective to problems of supply chain, but the problem persists of which world they are placing at the forefront of this problematic. The next section will outline the philosophical importance in world, and the issues that ecological degradation poses for this. If sustainability wishes to move past mere management of the planet, it will have to change many of the premises undergird it at present.

### **Derrida and *Mondialization***

Nancy’s work, and the citation of *mondialization* over globalization comes from Nancy’s teacher, Jacques Derrida. Derrida does not directly investigate sustainability, and does not address environmental issues amongst contemporary problems<sup>58</sup> facing the

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<sup>58</sup> David Wood addresses this in the volume *Eco-deconstruction*, citing Derrida’s ten plagues from *Specters of Marx* as having a gap or absence of environmental issues. \_\_\_\_ adds the environment as a possible eleventh plague.

world. Derrida's use of *mondialization* however represents a critique based in language that also reveals a particular ideology that emerges from a globalized society. As Victor Li traces, the global adoption of the Anglo-American word "globalization" not only reveals the *de facto* status of English as the universal medium of linguistic exchange, but also the more troubling ascendancy of a global Anglo-American hegemony or "homo-hegemonization" in which an apparent homogeneity or unity conceals great imbalances of power" (2007, p. 141-2). For Derrida this globalizing process is not neutral, but suggests a 'worldwide-ness that emanates from the Anglo-American West, Europe in particular.

Derrida attempts to reckon with the increasingly global nature of the world and its destruction of native language in *The other heading*. He also grapples with the inheritance that is bequeathed from the European<sup>59</sup> tradition he works from, despite believing himself to be *other* from Europe. What burden, what responsibility is given to us is an "act of memory that consists in betraying a certain order of capital in order to be faithful to the other heading and to the other *of* the heading. And this is happening at a moment for which the word *crisis*, the crisis of Europe and the crisis of spirit is perhaps no longer appropriate" (Derrida, 1992a, p. 31). We have a responsibility to take on such an inheritance, but also to break with it, and forge anew. Derrida is asking his audience here what does it mean to be European in an age of globalization and global identity.

He is also making a pun on the term capital, speaking to all the capitals that make up and consist of Europe, and also the capitalist enterprise in uniting the world under a

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<sup>59</sup> An irony that Derrida marks out, that he speaks for European-ness when he is technically not European, being French-Algerian and ridiculed for his Jewishness at an early age, Derrida remarks that he emerges to Europe from the other side of the Mediterranean

large umbrella of commerce (and communication, a communication that strictly follows patterns modeled on the West). For Derrida, culture imposes unity, and it is European culture that is threatened by a global order, one which wishes to homogenize rather than celebrate these differences. He elaborates that capital cannot instill this worldwide universalism, as regionalisms—in the form of headings, titles, capitals—always introduce difference and heterogeneity.

Such a screed is not ethical in Derrida's eyes, as found in *The Other Heading* when he decries ethics, politics, or responsibility that evades the *aporia* (if those things exist, a question he inserts into his lecture). Derrida is not purely against the magnitude or positives of global, sustainable market, as Marxist criticism would, but rather sees two discourse intertwined, tangled together, that must be considered, to “act in compliance with this double contradictory imperative—a contradiction that must not only be apparent or illusory antimony but must be effective and, *with experience, through experiment*, interminable” (Derrida, 1992a, p. 79). In his “Globalization, peace, and cosmopolitanism” essay, Derrida in rare form directly acknowledges and confronts the excess of capitalism:

“this capitalistic situation (where capital plays an essential role between the actual and the virtual) is more tragic in absolute numbers than it has ever been in the history of humanity. Humanity has perhaps never been further from the globalizing of globalized homogeneity, from the “work” and the “Without work” that is often cited. A large part of humanity is “without work” when it wants to work, more work, and another part has too much work when it wants to have less, or even to put an end to work that is so poorly paid on the market” (Derrida, 2002, p. 380).

Derrida does not look to Europe isolating itself off from the world, or trying to recapture some constructed ‘European-ness,’ but seeks how the beneficial pieces of this system can

be used to help those without access to it, a double commitment, a questioning of “how does one fight this hegemony without compromising the broadening of exchange and distribution? (Derrida, 2002, p. 374). In giving a task of tracing globalization back to its roots while also retaining identity, retaining a sense of world, Derrida creates a potential paradox, this time not through deconstruction but through political action!

A possible solution may lie in his writings on hospitality, which itself already implies a globalism or globalizing feature—to be hospitable is to offer shelter, refuge, service to someone or thing come from without, from abroad. The connection between hospitality in Derrida is echoed by Andrew Shepherd’s work, asking Is the “global village” of the twenty first century really the land of *promise* that many suggest?” critiquing the rhetoric of “freedom” and “openness,” what is increasingly apparent is that in the global village, free and equal access to the market place where goods are bought and sold is an illusion. Far from the well-lit and palatial architecture of the village center, down murky and hidden lanes, one can discover inhabitants with terrible tales of the dark side of village life” (Shepherd, 2014, p. 3). Although omnipresent, globalization is far from transparent, from the massiveness of itself as hyperobject, to the very labeling and certification of basic goods come from somewhere else. Shepherd conclude his text by commenting “that the plight of the human Other is inextricably related to the condition of the non-human Other—eco-systems and the planet as a whole” (Shepherd, 2014, p. 250). The Earth then becomes an Other just as much in danger from exploitation and hostility as workers, or organizations themselves. Hospitality is *for* the Other, an otherness that cannot always be anticipated, where the guest, appearing as a messianic ghost like figure, comes to disrupt and disturb our prearranged and formalized practices” (Shepherd



2014:58). Hospitality emerges out of this as a possible answer not just for sustainability and the massiveness of global supply chains, but for a possible (one of many) answer(s) to this riddle of CSR, in its relationship to communication, responsibility, and where ethical organizational practice can emerge and move forward.

The first linkage to hospitality is Derrida's earlier complaint with globalization on the linguistic level, and his preference for *mondialization*. Hospitality is often given, yet given in a way where rules, imperatives, norms are still in play—you are invited as long as you do not destroy my home, or break any laws, or endanger my family. In this sense, this form of hospitality is then conditional, separate from the unconditional form Derrida aspires to. Like the bind of globalization, then we have “these two hospitalities, a *conditional* hospitality manifested in legal, juridical and political realities, and the transcendent *unconditional* hospitality which is *impossible* upon which it depends” (Shepherd, 2014, p. 61). We often engage in the conditional form, which imposes rules, clarifications, the first being “...translation into their own language, and that's the first act of violence. That is where the question of hospitality begins: must we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language, in all senses of this term” in order to receive them (Derrida, 2000, p. 15). Perhaps it is clearer now why for Derrida, the question of heading, of capital, of title is so very important, as is *mondialization*. This restricts the global seep, the grey goo as Morton portrays it, of sameness that leaks into every pore. All talk, all discussion of globalization occurs in its own idiom.

It is also the question, in a way, corporate social responsibility. CSR, as outlined in chapter two and argued throughout, always held a tension within itself, serving these dual strains that Derrida points are a problematic of globalization itself—to have all the

world working to create abundance and safety, and to distribute that evenly and without negative consequences. Hospitality, in this Derridean sense, “accepts the risk of being wrongly understood, wrongly interpreted, sanctified, demonized, or else interrupted point blank, and thus the risk that the discourse can be driven off its course, to inaugurate a dialogue where nothing was planned” as the late Anne Dufourmantelle demonstrates in her side-by-side reading with Derrida, hospitality has little concern over ‘perception’ (Dufourmantelle, qtd. In Derrida, 2000, p. 34). Corporate social responsibility has struggled for a normative definition, as Meppem and Bourke claim in sustainability (the newest iteration of CSR), The traditionally dominant sustainability narratives are predominantly insensitive to cultural influences, which has led to sustainability being a largely confused and inoperable concept. This occurs due to the perceived need to work within a framework to make problems manageable” (1999, p. 396). To be fully instrumentalized, CSR needed to be institutionalized, whereas the responsibility aspect, the Derridean hospitality aspect of it is interdisciplinary, iterable, mutagenic.

This instrumental operation of CSR into technological *logos* represents another segment of this work: CSR as a tool for corporate interests, of greenwashing, of fluff and PR. CSR is undecidable, it depends upon the actions of the organization in context, and cannot be reduced to greenwashing or activism until it passes through the *aporia* of the decision. When treated as wholly unified body, as a totality, this is when it is ripe for analysis and deconstruction *as* a technological artifice, as a ready-made, as a rhetorical utterance; or as Derrida claims, “it is often techno-political-scientific mutation that obliges us to deconstruct” (Derrida, 2000, p. 45). *The other heading* is where Derrida’s critique of transparency stems from, but in *Of hospitality* he also calls to attention the

very notion of the home, and its siege at the hands of technology that renders us strangers to our surroundings. Again, we enter the realm of *aporia* as “paradox stems from this co-extensiveness between the democratization of information and the scope of the police and politics: as the powers of the police and politicization are extended, so communication, permeability, and democratic openness extend their space and their phenomenality, their appearing in broad daylight” (Derrida, 2000, p. 57). In being made transparent, we, and all those who come, become known entities. Transparency makes unconditional hospitality impossible, not in the Derridean sense of the event, but actually unachievable. Although “the blessing of visibility and daylight is *also* what the police and politics demand” (Derrida, 2000, p. 57), it removes any hope for the stranger, the foreigner, to ever arrive. Their arrival will have been noted and prepared for, resulting not in intrusion but in coordinated meeting. This deprives CSR of ever meeting new publics, new constituencies to arrive and be brought into the stakeholder process, as they will not be new arrivals, but ‘targets’, presorted by demographic and income.

From Hetherington’s *campesinos* learning and playing the game of transparency, or the vague producers of the Global South—these are left vague because each one has a different story, a different name, to which should they arrive they should be greeted. This also makes for sound business sense, as CSR in Scandinavia, as articulated by Morsing focuses around cultural touchstones of “Value collectivism, power sharing, and participative modes of decision making characterize the leadership style across the three countries” (Morsing et al, 2007, p. 88), as well as Lutheran religious backgrounds; alternatively, CSR in Mexico stems from Catholic upbringings, now being professionalized by the Mexican center for Philanthropy or CEMEFI (Chavarria, 2007).

Similarly, as Munshi and Kurian claim, the dissolution of child labor in the Third World Shutting “...without a proper plan to rehabilitate and educate them would only push them and their families to the edge of despair” (2007, p. 441). World, as we have seen, is always contested and interspersed with difference. Rather than trying to make everyone speak the same CSR, perhaps letting the stranger dictate it can have positive benefits (Even if that stranger is speechless, like the Earth). This leads thinkers like Rasche, who to conclude that what is needed “is not more corporate responsibility standards or meta-standards, but more serious reflections about how auditors and production facilities can jointly work towards more effective standard implementation (Rasche, 2010, p. 289). Standards are not useless, but their multiplication and diffusion as strategy weakens their effectiveness.

And it is this notion of surprise, of the unknown that characterizes Derrida’s impossible hospitality. The host can impose rules in a legal-juridico way, but is not really hospitable then in the Derridean sense. The typical notion of hospitality, as Shepherd notes, is the “ability of the host to set limitations on who is welcome, and when they are welcome, thereby retaining mastery and control,” a deterrent in the worst scenario (2014, p. 57). This for Derrida applies to law, however, and not the responsibility of hospitality. *Hostis*, a Greek root of hospitality, roughly translates to a hostile foreigner, which Derrida urges to be hospitable *to*—to leave open the question of the question—namely, *the name* of this foreign intruder, and accept them. This is not to say a host has no power, these rules oscillate between conditional and unconditional—but it is the unconditional that if we want to be responsible we must move towards. As Derrida boils down hospitality, it is “above all, even earlier, the question of the foreigner

as question *come from* abroad. And thus of response and responsibility. How should one respond to all these questions? How be responsible *for* them? How answer for oneself when faced with them? (2000, p. 131). This question, the question of response is the basis of ethical communication. How we answer, how we respond, insinuates communication, not only between ourselves and the Other, but also the standards upon which we communicate. If we simply use standards—sustainable ones, accounting ones, organizational ones—to obscure the Other, we do so in violation of this law of hospitality. If we answer only for and of our own worlds—obscuring the environment, in whatever state it is in, as a dialogic partner, then in that moment, we also break with hospitality.

Derrida's theory of hospitality in context of the global capitalist system is useful in seeing not only the massive ecological problem at hand, but in sifting through world, and the unexpected arrival of the Other from another world—with different sets of presuppositions, ideas, languages. If CSR is really committed to people and planet while making profits, it will have to eventually reckon with what that planet looks like, as the incrementalism that has sustained it as a discourse will still leave marks for future generations to judge. In projecting how our actions will be judged into the future, perhaps we should embrace in the here and now Morton's futural version of ethics, as the only firm ethical option in the current catastrophe as I observed before, is admitting to the ecological catastrophic in all its meaningless contingency, accepting responsibility groundlessly, whether or not 'we ourselves' can be proved to be responsible. But this too is more a leap of doubt than a leap of faith" (Morton, 2007, p. 204). Morton derives this from a remixing that "addresses what Derrida calls *l'arrivant*, the absolutely unexpected

and unexpected arrival, or what I call the strange stranger, the stranger whose strangeness is forever strange—it cannot be tamed or rationalized away,” and that also adopts the time scale of these hyperobjects, opening to the future but also surviving far into the future for generations (Morton, 2013, p. 124). These future persons will be wholly other than us, given the changes we are making to the planet today, something that violates the basic qualifications of the Brundtland charter in altering future generations.

Why, if such standards become mere strategic tools, not treat a Derridean ethics the same way? Derrida’s ideal of hospitality is an open welcoming to the future, in a way that structures a dialogue with a radically changed landscape and persons. Hospitality shatters all hyper-norms but focusing itself as the center of responsible behavior, as Derrida claims, “hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic amongst others... ethics *is* hospitality” (Derrida, 2000, p. 17). To be ethical is to welcome what is strange, foreign, unknown—for business ethics this means taking responsibility the massive risks we build as well as seeking a future that does not cohere to Lazlo and Zhexembayeva’s sustained capitalism. Instead we should look for a *survivance* capitalism, one that is able to sustain itself while also welcoming the Earth that it has treated as stranger and reserve for so long. This iterable version would achieve the call of hospitality in making a world survivable for generations to come.

## **Interrupting: Habermas and Coffee Culture**

Habermas<sup>60</sup> in his *Structural transformation of the public sphere* cites the coffeehouse as one of the premier and revolutionary examples of the emergence of public space in the modern period, where individuals were able to come and debate the political, literary, philosophical, and economic ideas of the day. Habermas bases his goals for the contemporary public sphere upon this historical example, but recent scholarship has tended to deride some of these goals, attempting to break apart the homogenous ideal of the coffeehouse as non-synonymous with the public sphere as constituted in Habermas's account. Various issues concerning gender, class, and even the nature of conversations occurring in coffeehouses obliges a re-evaluation of the historical coffeehouse and what it signifies.

While there are some historical discrepancies between the coffeehouse in this imagination and the grounding vision that Habermas uses for his public sphere, this does not eradicate the validity Habermas's important work for a democratic and open public sphere; rather, it enhances this vision by pointing to the multiple public(s) that can exist in such vision. Habermas sees the public sphere originating in the coffeehouse where individuals were not required to discuss matters of political or philosophical importance, but of their own free will chose to. For Habermas, the coffeehouse is a public arena where individuals congregated to discuss the issues of the day, where civility, politeness, norms of exchange, and listening and learning occurred. In today's media saturated

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<sup>60</sup> Habermas and Derrida share a conflicted scholarly relationship with one another, often challenging each other over the course of their respective careers (as I have outlined in chapter one), in 2003 they work together to publish *Philosophy in a time of terror*, a work analyzing the political landscape after 9/11 where both philosophers find common ground in response to the emergent threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

environment of trolling, disinformation, and deep partisan divides, it is hard not to yearn for such a refuge of thought.

Habermas's bourgeoisie public sphere (Habermas, 1989) evolved from literary salons where those outside of traditional power structures (which, emanating from the Renaissance, was royal families and the extremely wealthy) were able to congregate and discuss important ideas, including critique of those in power. This radical change enabled a public consciousness to build and enquire into the steering mechanisms that governed many of the day-to-day decisions. This new consciousness allowed for more democratic deliberation to take place in an unconstrained way, far from arenas where critique could be measured, recorded, and punished. These new islands of free thought permitted unconstrained or uncontaminated communication to occur between interested parties.

Such a place, however, most likely existed only as an ideal. The eighteenth-century coffeehouse was far from being a diverse locale, hosting predominantly the landed-gentry and a larger emerging merchant class. Citing the over-reliance on the commentaries of Addison and Steele, who published newsletters detailing the on-goings of various houses, Ellis "critiques Habermas for basing much of his interpretation on the *uncritical*, often nostalgic histories of the coffee-houses given by earlier writers such as Macaulay and Stephen – as also deconstructed by Ellis – and for undertaking no primary research of his own" (Laurier, Philo, 2007, p. 17). It is the debt to publications such as *The Spectator* or *The Tattler*—which often served as promotional material for coffeehouses as well as reportage—that Habermas draws his account from. These publications were seen as "being written *from* coffee-house tables after coffee-house



discussion,” reflecting the insider scoop on the dawning Enlightenment conversations taking place there (Laurier, Philo, 2007, p. 9). These publications emphasized the intellectual nature of the places they detailed, as being important and contemporary.

The important issue of literary journalism, and the ‘fourth estate’ must also be taken into account in the development of coffeehouses and the ‘public’. Such publications reinforced the role of such establishments as ‘penny universities’ where one could come and learn intriguing thought wafting through the air with the delicious smells of coffee. However, there also existed a conservative bent, as extreme ideas and revolutionary spirits were downplayed. As Cowan describes, such publications and coffeehouse intellectualism was not “to prepare the ground for an age of democratic revolutions—it was to make the cultural politics of Augustan Britain safe for a Whig oligarchy” (Cowan 2004, p. 361). Hostile to radicalism, coffeehouses represented an establishment mindset, leading Philo and Laurier to underline Benhabib in her extension of Habermas for claiming coffeehouse parishioners practiced a ‘certain’ type of democracy (Laurier, Philo, 2007, p. 11). This certain type of democracy favors the status quo if individuals, and not those seeking entrance.

While Habermas is correct in saying the coffeehouse ideal is egalitarian, the actual practice did not fulfill this hope. Women were never formally excluded from coffeehouses, stepping foot into one was met with claims to impropriety and lewd behavior, a place a woman of good standing would never find herself (Laurier, Philo, 2007, 20). While women were present in coffeehouses, they often existed as workers, and not patrons, coffeehouse goers were typically men and shaped this discursive space into a male dominated one. Oftentimes the conversations were not born of artistic

expression or political matters, but continuations of trading past hours; to discuss matters of political importance was to be seen inviting sedition, or acting as a “fop,” the hipster of its seventeenth-century, possibly even breeding atheism (Cowan, 2001, p. 140). Once arrived, such coffee locales did function in an open, democratic way, allowing no reservations of seats and forcing uncommon persons next to one another into sociality and collegiality. The coffeehouse did help create a public sphere, one that reinforced the gender division between the public male and private feminine spaces, demarcating the coffeehouse as male, public, and intellectual.

As Mark Pendergrast details in his fabulous history *Uncommon Grounds*, women did have an outsize role in the early coffee industry, calling for a ban in England of the coffeehouse in 1674 (Pendergrast, 2010). The chief complaint was that their husbands were becoming ‘Frenchified’ or losing gallantry, and fears of impotence abounded; Pendergrast ties these fears not to some form of mass hysteria, but the fact that men were frequenting taverns, only to use the coffeehouse to sober up before returning home. A year later the King advised a ban on coffeehouses as “places where the disaffected met” (Laurier & Philo, 2007, p. 8). The ban did not last, but signals the political nature of such an emerging public institution and the potential for education, meeting, and discourse that Habermas envisioned; such ideas are not always warmly accepted, as 17<sup>th</sup> century Turkish sultan Murad IV displayed by decapitating anyone caught with the beverage (Pendergrast, 2010). Although a global commodity, the effect of coffee upon the public was not homogenous.

The experience of the coffeehouse even in the same city was heterogeneous and differentiated, even within the same establishment on the same day. Coffeehouses often

catered to specific clientele, as West London shops supported to gentry of Addison and Steele's *Spectator* publications, while others lured those 'disaffected' individuals, which Ellis recounts with descriptions of tales of drunkenness, gambling, debauchery, lewdness and sexual encounters occurring in many of the less salubrious coffee-houses" (Laurier, Philo, 2007, p. 19). Here, the 'low' classes were able to interact with their betters, but not over intellectual matters, more in terms of relaxation and discord over discourse. Habermas's public sphere was one void of violence, a polite, gentle space, counter to what Montag (2000) describes as the unruly street. In counter-posing the street to the coffeehouse, the coffeehouse becomes a refuge for the sheer mass of the street, where "all of society might be there in the street, they can in no way do all of the things that a community requires" (qtd. in Laurier & Philo, 2007, p. 12). Namely, the ability to discern and fortify members to the exclusion, or protection of those on the inside. Thus a border between the inside of the coffeehouse, bastion of Enlightenment, thinking, civil society, is protected from the outside of the street, the mad street, and Others of different classes, races, and genders.

Such a structuring leads Cowan to discredit the concept, saying "when historians can find 'public spheres' in nearly every time and every place, and scholars blithely jettison the original Habermasian formulation" (Cowan, 2001, p. 150). Simply because there have been throughout history examples of public consciousness and meeting does not mean we should discredit Habermas ideal, but again to revisit it and find the various differences within this system that are pushed to periphery. The coffeehouse example is also an example of an extractive industry, taking raw materials from abroad--in Britain, from Ceylon and African colonies, Brazil being the last country in the world to abolish

slavery based on the incredible wealth generated from coffee plantations—and giving them to an exclusive group of buyers who are presented then to themselves, in representations from *The Spectator* or *The Tattler* as egalitarian cosmopolitans signals a slide towards the universal while dangerously ignoring the particular. While Pendergrast argues that coffee in Europe is to this day used to confer hospitality, to act as a signifier of welcome, but often to an already delineated and specific group.

Today coffee is lauded as a function of massive supply chains—what in the last chapter I referred to as hyperobjects—and the way consumers are intertwined with producers, and with farming techniques in harmonization with the Earth. All fits the triple bottom line, all seems above board. However, we should note that coffee is an extractive industry. As Pendergrast details, the English became the fabulous tea drinkers they are due to a blight that wiped out all coffee in Ceylon (modern day Sri Lanka) due to its growth in plantation style rows and mismanagement. Ceylon was converted to a tea exporter, to much chagrin to its inhabitants (Pendergrast, 2010). Such disasters are implied within agriculture, as Mackenzie Wark stakes out in *Molecular Red*, the Soviet-era damming up of the Aral Sea for agriculture depleted it to a tenth of its size, describing such devastation as *metabolic rift* (Wark, 2015). Coffee and the changes it makes to our lives and biosphere also causes metabolic rifts, which again bring us to the *aporia* of eating that Wark leaves us, trapped on Mars, to think about: “extracting a surplus from a recalcitrant nature makes life possible, and this in turn is the condition of existence in Paltonov’s terms, of the soul. But it is no guarantee of one” (Wark, 2015, p. 211). Wark insists we take two steps back and three steps forward in order to not reproduce the

industrial world that birthed the Anthropocene, but something new, that chooses carefully what to reconstruct from the past.

The danger then in lauding the Enlightenment era coffeehouse lies in what Critchley signals as the “representation—or rather, fantasy—of a homogenous and transparent society, a unified people among whom social division or difference is denied” (Critchley, 2014, p. 206). Habermas points towards an ideal that all too often is circumscribed within the Starbucks model of ‘third space’, substituting politics for pure purchasing glee. In dreaming a new public sphere, we must not become lost in nostalgia for this model, which survived based on its difference, based on its hospitality to others and its force in uniting various peoples to sit and talk to one another. Derrida’s quote ‘no democracy without literature, no literature without democracy’ can here be written as no (global) public sphere without hospitality, no hospitality without a global consciousness and public sphere. World problems will need new organizational solutions to hyperobjects that dwarf any public sphere.

## **Conclusion:**

### **CSR-to-come**

"We were making the future, and hardly any of us troubled to think what future we were making. And here it is!" – H.G. Wells, *When the Sleeper Wakes*

"And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,/ Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?" – W.B. Yeats, *The Second Coming*

Campbell Jones writes that "Business ethics holds a great promise. It promises ethics. It speaks of justice. But at the same time it seems compromised to its very core" (Jones, 2003, p. 241). My argument throughout has been that CSR functions as our most recognizable form of business ethics, and that we cannot decide at the present moment whether it functions as a smokescreen and rhetoric for neoliberal market forces that have gained dominance over the last forty years, or as earnest attempt on behalf of MNC's to make the world a better place. By pointing out the gaps and fissures in the 'three prongs' of the triple bottom line, I have hopefully demonstrated that CSR often functions in both capacities, as mere covering for corporate malfeasance and as actually accomplishing some good in the world. Derrida focuses our attention that although we must traverse through this abominable, groundless place, we cannot remain there. The question of responsibility then hangs over us, and compels us to respond to this question of responsibility.

By all accounts, the answer seems somewhat clear. As Visser concludes his text on CSR, it is "failing to turn around our most serious global problems—the very issues it purports to be concerned with—and may even be distracting us from the real issue, which is business's causal role in the social and environmental crises we face" (Visser, 2011, p. 129). Visser however, continues to work within CSR and sees it as a useful concept

despite these failings. Palenchar, Hocke, and Heath (2011) see CSR as knowing when to help, and how to help others: “In this sense, CSR requires the willingness and ability to meet others’ expectations regarding how our actions—what we know, how we act, how we communicate—can add value to others’ longing and efforts for health and safety” (Palenchar et al, 2011, p. 189). Isn’t this the ground of responsibility, of knowing when to help, of knowing how to respond to such calls? Does this make CSR responsible then?

This investigation has pointed towards CSR being irresponsible, which constitutes an appraisal of it as failing the promise of ethics that Jones stakes out. Social efforts are often reduced to accounting measures and metrics that term everything in terms of profit and loss, making the market, that ‘godless’ place in Bonhoeffer’s description, the supreme decision maker. Organizations offer more autonomy and less hierarchy to promote social flourishing of employees, while at the same time peering into employee’s lives more and more. MNC’s in general are creating an inhospitable Earth, which future generation will have to wrestle with in the coming decades. How does messages about volunteer hours, or ethical investing, or carbon restrictions due to help such a situation?

Here I want to echo Fleming in saying that “*corporate social responsibility never really began*” (Fleming, 2012, p. 1). Fleming argues that the central question posed to CSR is “does it create economic value for the firm? Although results of numerous investigations have been inconclusive, the research agenda takes the for-profit firm for granted and implicitly legitimates it as a social institution that is ‘good’ for society” (Fleming, 2012, p. 18). Similarly, Munshi and Kurian preach that CSR fails to address those “glaring omissions: “corporate” overlooks the many proxies of corporations, including states and financial institutions, “social” ignores the political, including issues

of gender and diversity,; and “responsibility” glosses over accountability” (Munshi & Kurian, 2007, p. 438). None of which is secret or kept from the public, as we pretend to ignore those suffering because of the lifestyles provided from a hyper-capitalist consumer society—there in fact might be too much information, giving us overload and foregoing responsibility. What then, if CSR never got started? What to do with it? Critiquing CSR runs the same gambit that Birchall’s advocacy for a society of secrecy does: that the small ground we have gained in creating more responsible enterprises may be lost through critique. Each business does have to *eat*, to make profit, to continue and sustain itself. That is what makes them a business, a thriving entity based on competition and (dare we say) *survivance* to accomplish goals and provide services (Arnett, Fritz, Bell, 2008). The questions of for who and for what still linger in this proposition.

How then, to profit ethically? Is that possible? Returning to Arnett’s call for ethical response in dark times, to do so with hope is what we must return to: “..the philosopher does not trust the darkness of the cave, but it is the darkness that gives opinion, friendship, and community its fabric—one cannot confuse the importance of navigating through life with a snapshot of truth in self-generated light” (Arnett, 2012, p. 187). By staying in the moment, the undecidable moment, we can perhaps sketch possible action to undertake. It is this form of reflection via critique that reengages the ethical mood. “For one to deconstruct the power of artificial light, one must first admit what existence offers before us, that which we endorse and that which we condemn;” and that these proclamations should be handled with extreme care (Arnett, 2012, p. 249). This is the responsibility in determining what CSR is.



Corporate social responsibility has often favored the corporate at the expense of the social world. Simple condemnations do not engage ethical behavior, however, and a responsible enterprise, one that *eats*, that profits but not at the expense of Others, is the desire of this project. CSR is not wholly rhetoric, as examples from Scandinavia such as Novo Nordisk commitment to employee wellbeing and environmental stewardship (while remaining highly profitable) point at the potential for emancipatory work. What I want to theorize, and suggest, is a rumination of yet another of Derrida's concepts, this one from *Specters of Marx*, that of a CSR-to-come. Derrida's messianic horizon that never arrives obliges us to engage in responsible behavior for an organization that may never materialize. By having hope and holding open the possibility for a responsible enterprise, we fulfill an ethical duty to confront darkness and build a better world.

It is of an almost apocalyptic nature that this project has situated the relationship between business, its duty to society and the environment, and the profit motive interfering with a more dynamic and ethical partnership. Derrida in the mid-eighties focuses on apocalypse, tracing its Greek roots back to a revelatory unmasking. "In a Recently Adopted Apocalyptic Tone of Philosophy," Derrida parodies Kant, and discusses his reasoning as emanating from his attempt to discuss closure rather than end, and his "aware[ness] of speaking of discourses *on* the end rather than announcing the end, that I intended to analyze a genre rather than practice it, and even when I would practice it, to do so with this ironic kind [*genre*] of clause" (Derrida, 1982, p. 90). Deploying this form of irony or 'Menippean satire' as Ulmer and Leavey propose is a stylistic tactic to avoid adopting such doom-saying.

For Derrida every apocalyptic document concerns itself with “prediction and eschatological predication, the fact of telling, foretelling, or preaching the end, the extreme limit, the imminence of the last” (Derrida, 1982:80). The aesthetics of parody of adopting multiple discourses at once allows him to forego speaking in such a manner, speaking with the voice of “the last man” which represents “the voice or the tongue itself, the singing or the tone of voice in the tongue itself” (Derrida, 1982, p. 81). There can be no apocalypse, whether or business ethics or even the world, for Derrida, because even in a nuclear apocalypse in which all archives, all containers of knowledge are destroyed there exists some remainder (Derrida, 1984). In a very Menippean sense, waste, from eating, from nuclear testing, from toxic pollution, lives on, remains—it becomes, both textually and physically, *nonbiodegradable*—it refuses to be subsumed in a normal timescale (Derrida, 1989). Such apocalypse has never occurred, and can only be fathomed in the textual realm. Thus such a tone assumes an authority it can never<sup>61</sup> has due to an event that is incalculable, unforeseeable, and almost unthinkable.

Such reflections on apocalypse, Derrida, claims, come from a higher degree of censorship, as they did in the age of John of Patmos when the Roman Empire began crackdowns on seditious material; thus the biblical ‘death/’stay awake’ injunction hints at revolution in its tone, this apocalyptic tone which Derrida characterizes as “nothing is less conservative than the apocalyptic genre” (Derrida, 1982, p. 89). Thus this form of address is geared toward a future responsibility, a future interpretability of a genetic and evolutionary nature. Such conservatisms, as Derrida opposes in *Specters of Marx* hint at

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<sup>61</sup> This can be contrasted with Timothy Morton’s point that the apocalypse has already happened—with the invention of the steam engine or the Trinity test—and also cannot be formulated outside of a textual medium. Morton also pushes for an opening to the future through this diagnoses of past apocalypse.

the futility in claims such as Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' (1992) and the ultimate survival of liberal democracy and capitalism after the fall of the Soviet Union. Derrida's *Specters* begins with the question 'Whither Marxism?' and introduces the story of Hamlet's ghost as a specter that haunts Hamlet and calls for a repayment of a debt, despite Hamlet's protestations to exorcise him. Likewise, we, in this 'end of history' are haunted by the ghost of Marx, and communism, which we cannot push outside our thinking and continually returns in moments of crisis.

*Specters* introduces another Derridian theme, his pun *hauntology*, which suggests that there exists inheritances or ghostly effects from words, histories, events, etc.. As Francois Cooren summarizes from a communication perspective, "communication is spectral to the extent that it consists, in many respects, in *making present, visible, audible, touchable* to the participants what could have otherwise remained absent, invisible, inaudible, untouchable" (Cooren, 2005, p. 16). Not just communication, but history, possible worlds that could have been all linger and remain. In terms of early nineties enthusiasm for the dissemination of liberal democratic values and capitalistic economy, Derrida brings attention back to the specter of communism as threats to this world order already exist at the moment of its crowning, such poverty, global debt, nuclear weapons, and immigration crises.

As Michael Kerlin raises in his article on business ethics and *Specters*, he asks: "don't we need to see the problems raised for people living and working within a capitalistic system before we start asking about the nature of the system and the possible alternatives? After all, it has been confrontation with real problems that has motivated people over the years to propose alternatives in the first place" (Kerlin 1998, p. 1718).

Kerlin's is not a judgment of the capitalistic ethos as much as an *epokhe* and understanding of alternatives before ruling them out—therefore, Kerlin attends to haunting that emerges through the global problems that arise and business ethics has been unable to solve. There are many arenas for hope, as Robert Strand has mentioned in a promotion for his new book, 'perhaps the Nordics can save the world', a notion bolstered in scholarship from Morsing, Midttun, Palmas (2007) has argued that Scandinavian qualities of high taxes for social welfare programs, as well as operational trends of "value collectivism, power sharing, and participative modes of decision making" as well as cultural traits such as "...competence in dialogue, critique, and negotiation; a willingness to engage; and a broad sense of trust" help enable CSR and drive better governance (Morsing et al, 2007, p. 88; 102). Such dark times does not deprive of positive change, but engage the stark realities.

Derrida in *Specters* argues instead that deconstruction poses an opposite alternative to an end of history, or an ahistory, that it exposes discourses that "lock-up, neutralize, and finally cancel historicity" (Derrida, 1994, p. 74-75) Joanna Hodge explicates such a concept in her treatise *Derrida on Time*, saying "the aim is to release the future of what comes from any pre-determination, in advance, such that it might arrive out of future possibilities, not set in place by the possibilities revealed in the past, and thus exceeding the limits set in the past, rather than realizing an outcome already delineated in the past" (Hodge, 2007, p. 143). Thus, our entire idea of time needs to be thrown *out of joint*, to accept the "...the greater challenge of thinking incompatible notions of genesis, of historicity, and of temporalities, the empirical and the transcendental, as co-incidental, but not simultaneous, which thus requires a rethinking of

time and space” (Hodge, 2007, p. 83). Specters also begins Derrida’s dalience with messianism, where Hamlet’s ghost, substituted for Marx’s ghost, is arriving but never does, a *Godot* type awaiting which “...posits an unconditional hospitality of *visitation*, where the guest, appearing as a messianic ghost like figure, comes to disrupt and disturb our prearranged and formalized practices” (Shepherd, 2014, p. 58). CSR is in need of this interruption, to be haunted with the action of its own eating and quest for profitability, for the ‘business case’ in the face of its greater call.

This constitutes a negative, nihilistic call for those operating under the rubric of the business case and cannot change or acknowledge the presence or ghostly effects haunting CSR. Why we must serve the bottom line first instead of these other charges is precisely a question that has been erased from most conversations of CSR, albeit obliquely. This is to deprive the organization of its ability to profit, to *eat*, and represents a form of apocalypse:

“Now here, precisely, is announced—as promise or threat—an apocalypse without apocalypse, an apocalypse without vision, without truth, without revelation, *of dispatches* [des envois] (for the “come” is plural in itself, in oneself), of addresses without message and without destination, without sender or decidable addressee, without last judgment, without any other eschatology than the tone of the “Come” itself, its very difference, an apocalypse beyond good and evil. “Come” does not announce this or that apocalypse: already it resounds with a certain tone; it is in itself the apocalypse of the apocalypse; “Come” is apocalyptic” (Derrida, 1982, p. 94)

A coming CSR, a CSR-to-come, then, does inherently conjure the end of CSR through this apocalyptic discourse. It runs the risk of tuning listeners out due to the immense challenge it requires. It also is incredibly needed in this moment, to broach the discussions of corporate responsiveness and corporate financial performance and return to the question of responsibility.

As John Caputo teaches, deconstruction in Derrida's thought moved toward the ideal of justice in the nineties, culminating in *Specters of Marx*. Justice becomes something that is *undeconstructible*, as it is “not a present entity or order, not an existing reality or regime; nor is it an ideal *eidos* towards which we earthlings down below heave and sigh while contemplating its heavenly form. Justice is the absolutely unforeseeable prospect (a paralyzing paradox)” (Caputo, 1997, p. 131-132). Justice does not belong to this futural category where strategic planning, calculation, and hard work can bring about, what Caputo deems the future present. Justice belongs to the *l'avenir*, the “to come”. Derrida clarifies these two tenses in saying:

“in general, I try and distinguish between what one calls the Future, and “*l'avenir*” [the to come]. The future is that which—tomorrow, later, next century—will be. There is a future which is predictable, programmed, scheduled, foreseeable. But there is a future, *l'avenir* (to come) which refers to someone who comes whose arrival is totally unexpected. For me, that is the real future. That which is totally unpredictable. The Other who comes without my being able to anticipate their arrival. So if there is a real future, beyond the other known future, it is *l'avenir* in that it is the coming of the Other when I am completely unable to foresee their arrival” (Derrida, cited in Derrida, 2002).

This is a future we cannot anticipate, and shouldn't attempt to anticipate fully—not that no pragmatic action should be taken, but that we will be surprised always by the future and its radical possibilities, and our sense of strategy, planning, and prediction will always fail. Justice consists in this way, and is to be demanded in the moment.

This also makes justice impossible. Not impossible in the form that it may never occur, but impossible in the sense that it structures the possible. Justice is always impossible, incalculable, and unforeseeable, but must be demanded in the present

moment. This impossible longing is what Caputo calls an immense straining, as “to desire the impossible is to strain against the constraints of the foreseeable and possible, to *open* the horizon of possibility to what it cannot foresee or foretell” (Caputo, 1997, p. 133-4). In terms of management literature, Andreas Rasche translates this to practice by reiterating “the paradoxes that are uncovered by deconstruction are only impossible in a narrow sense,” allowing new limits, ideas, and practices to emerge (2007, p. 164). Likewise, what deconstruction does in the yearning for the impossible is to chart new territory, that which is unsayable under current regimes of practice and decorum. CSR remaining undecidable can limit action, but by working through this charnel ground can open a wealth of new possibilities, opening to us what Barbour calls knights moves that circumvent the binds that force us into paradox.

Might CSR set its course towards how Pinchevski characterizes translation, “...as necessary and impossible: necessary, since this is the only way one idiom may come into communication with another; impossible, because of the irreconcilable difference put in language, thus making every translation lacking and incomplete” (2005, p. 127). To bring the corporate accounting and transparent information exchange of neoliberalism into context with responsible behaviors for the world is something we must demand, but remains structurally (im)possible.

It is the intertwining of responsibility with these various concepts, whether they be calculation, prediction, transparency, hospitality, or hauntology, that breeds *aporias* and demands for a realized justice. As Derrida contends in *The other heading*, “the condition of possibility of this thing called responsibility is a certain *experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible; the testing of the aporia* from which one

may invent the only *possible invention, the impossible invention*” (qtd. in Patrick, 1997, p. 41). For Raffoul, “responsibility itself is defined as an experience of the impossible,” and because it is impossible is never seen coming, and has the same structure of visitation that messianism and hauntology conjure (2010, p. 5). Thus, “responsibility thus becomes the response to such an absolute arrival,” to that which we do not and cannot expect (Raffoul, 2010, p. 303). Again, this does not eliminate the possibility for a CSR-to-come, but make it all the more needed and pertinent. To be *inhospitable*, to foreclose the arrival of a more ethical form of business that regulates the digestive property of the profit motive is a form of violence for Derrida, although he cannot claim, as De George has accurately pointed out, what comes next. Instead, we have a duty to break with the current laws of CSR, as thinkers like Fleming, Banerjee, L’Etang, Rasche, Kamuf, and Waddock do. Retreating within to the inherent logic of eating (profit-generation) as Porter and Kramer do offer no future or welcome to a difference that inevitably sneaks up behind us and arrives.

For organizations to give transparency into their actions, to account for how well they perform, how beneficial they are to the environment, and the value they add to communities is somewhat misleading. Such communication ignores the specificity and what Edouard Glissant<sup>62</sup> describes as ‘chaos-monde’ of language, which expands out from its source and is contaminated by other languages it touches. Transparent communication, then, “does not conceive of anything universal but in every instance is a substitute for it,” acting as a barbarism which enforces an understanding of the chosen

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62 Glissant is a friend and colleague of Gilles Deleuze, who focuses on his Afro-Caribbean heritage to influence his phenomenological philosophy. His concern over the disappearance of Caribbean languages into a ‘pure’ globalized language represents similar (yet distinct) interventions as Derrida.



language (Glissant, 1997, p. 117). That can be the *arche* of the Anglo-Saxon pointed out by Derrida in *The Other Heading*, is business jargon and ‘buzzless buzzwords’ in general. I return to Hetherington to highlight how the *aporia* of the gift infects transparency, as

“‘The Gift of Transparency’ has a somewhat dissonant, if not outright absurd ring to it. Gifts, after all, are objects that stubbornly refuse to be abstracted from the people who transact them. They entail forms of reciprocity which the recipient back to the giver, and therefore confer power on the person of the giver, unlike transparency, which is predicated on the logic of democracy as political marketplace, and therefore of the transaction of ideas in commodity form. To give transparency is therefore simultaneously to create the grounds for citizens to make informed choices free of political influence, and to bind those citizens into an obligatory relationship with the giver” (Hetherington, 2011, p. 209).

Transparency binds us, *brands* us with the mark of a universal language which demands adherence to certain precepts and ideas. Therefore, it does not accomplish the goals it endeavors to pursue in letting consumers ‘see’ into organizations and decide responsibility, but frames the entire dialogue in a way conducive to business interests at the expense of ethics.

This is the counter to De George’s claim that Campbell Jones and Derridean business ethicists cannot state clearly what they mean because they have no rationale for a future project—we cannot clearly say because we would indict the reader into a regime of interpretation that they did not choose, and we cannot see what is to-come, this apocalyptic revelation of the future. Glissant sees transparency as a move towards the same, as narcissitic reflections in the mirror, where “there is now opacity in the mirror, a whole alluvium deposited by populations, silt that is fertile but, in actual fact, indistinct

and unexplored even today” (Glissant, 1997, p. 111). Accepting these claims allows difference and respect for the Other into the conversation, returning us to Arnett’s challenge to think in dark times; for Hetherington, communication should move away from economic rationality and pursue hope, which, “unlike risk, which reifies the uncertainty of the future in order to make it representable, hope sees the future as nontransparent” (Hetherington, 2011, p. 224). Rather than continually consuming, in both the tactful, deliberate arena of exchange and in the sense of *eating*, conceptual frameworks such as corporate social responsibility must demand new forms of social organization that answer the questions before us, namely, how to consume ethically in a rapidly decaying environment and enmeshed in an economic structure that eats the future to serve to the past.

Hope, then, becomes the feature of a CSR-to-come that dramatically refashions relations between MNC’s and distinct populations across the globe. CSR is haunted the environmental and consumer protests of the 60’s and 70’s, by the WTO protest in Seattle in 1999, Occupy in 2008, and a host of movements and moments gone unacknowledged. As Mark Fisher, following Frederic Jameson, argues, it is hard to conceive of a world after capitalism. A CSR-to-come accepts the market as an object we are bound to, but that relations with drastically need to change. This central question of responsibility cannot be answered with transparency, with the assertion that corporations must make profits and can address social and environmental issues to a partial degree. This project demands justice in the moment while acknowledging the road there is unclear. Such a nomadic wandering should not be met with despair, but with hope. Heidegger despaired and claimed only a god could save us from the march of unfettered technological

progress. Our actions and the question of business's role in the coming years will determine what type of rough beast slouches towards us, the one of environmental degradation and dystopia or some avoidance of that future. As Derrida claims in *Rogues*, grounding represents our attempts to touch bottom and take responsibility, and resembles an event. Our responsibility, then, is to touch ground on something we cannot expect but must take action towards. An impossible task, but an absolutely necessary one.

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