Corporate Social Responsibility?

Human Rights in the New Global Economy

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS   CHICAGO AND LONDON

CHAPTER FIVE

Virtuous Language in Industry and the Academy

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Several years ago I attended a symposium at my university on how to integrate sustainability into the curriculum, a topic of interest to me as an anthropologist who works with indigenous peoples affected by mining.[1] We were told that the university and the corporate world are now aligned in their shared commitment to sustainability. But I wondered why no one mentioned the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, which was making headlines at the time. British Petroleum's confident assertion that "we will make this right" seemed to contradict scientific uncertainty about the long-term environmental consequences of the spill. I also wanted to know what it meant that the business community and the academy were suddenly using the same vocabulary. I was not the only one in the audience with these concerns, but the presentation left us tongue-tied. It is difficult to criticize sustainability, as the environmental values it promotes are widely shared. Yet it is possible to acknowledge the need for sustainability while contesting some of the claims made in its name.

This experience leads me to question the discursive convergence of industry and the academy, which might be taken to imply mutual understanding and commitment. But the recourse to shared language can conceal all manner of difference. Sustainability and corporate social responsibility are examples of what linguistic anthropologists call *strategically deployable shifters.*[2] Ordinary shifters are words or phrases that lack standardized lexical meanings because their referential value de-

pends on the context in which they are employed. Shifters are therefore simultaneously symbolic and indexical.[3] The adverbs *here* and *now* are examples of shifters, as are pronouns. Consider, for example, what have been called the "slippery pronouns" of nationalism, the third-person plural that alternately incorporates or excludes particular categories of persons.[4]

Strategically deployable shifters allow people to communicate across social boundaries and political vantage points.[5] The participants in these conversations understand themselves to be "'talking about the same thing,' when, pragmatically they are not, or are doing so only up to a point."[6] This can be seen in the different ways that people mobilize the concept of sustainability. Contemporary use of the concept can be traced back to the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972, which defined sustainability as the need to "maintain the earth as a place suitable for human life not only now but for future generations."[7] Sustainability was subsequently integrated into discussions about economic growth, including the argument that "for development to be sustainable, it must take account of social and ecological factors, as well as economic ones."[8] For the mining industry, however, sustainability and sustainable development have come to mean something quite different. Thus the website of BHP Billiton, one of the world's largest mining companies, asserts that "sustainable development is about ensuring that our business remains viable and contributes lasting benefits to society."[9] Similarly, despite a historical legacy of destructive environmental impacts, the mining industry now claims to practice what it calls "sustainable mining." Such corporate oxymorons are "intended to ease the mind of an otherwise critical" public by pairing a harmful or destructive practice or commodity with a positive cover term.[10] In the discourse of the mining industry, the relationship between sustainability and the environment has been completely elided, "emptying out" the original meaning of the term.[11]

The differences in how environmentalists and the mining industry define sustainability are more than simply rhetorical. Its status as a strategically deployable shifter allows BHP Billiton to claim that its commitment to sustainability is its "first value" despite the negative impacts of its operations on the environment. This includes its responsibility for catastrophic damage downstream from the Ok Tedi copper and gold mine in Papua New Guinea, where I have conducted research since the mid-1980s.[12] BHP Billiton's environmental record did not prevent the university where I teach from appointing the company to the external board of advisors of its new institute on sustainability.[13] Nor did it prevent the university's school of engineering from prominently displaying the company's logo on its solar car, a prominent symbol of its commitment to the environment. These examples illustrate how sustainability operates as a strategically deployable shifter that provides mining companies with symbolic capital.

The recognition that sustainability is a strategically deployable shifter leads me to ask what is being accomplished socially, politically, and discursively when such terms are invoked to describe, categorize, reform, valorize, or criticize corporate practices. This question is part of a larger study of the dialectical relationship between corporations and their critics.[14] Sustainability is one of a series of concepts that corporations deploy under the general rubric of corporate social responsibility. The virtuous language of responsibility, sustainability, and transparency has become an important resource for corporations in their response to criticism. That these discourses enhance corporate reputations is not simply a corollary of their use, but central to their invocation. Despite their appearance of political neutrality, these discourses also promote market-based solutions to social and environmental problems as an alternative to government regulation. As strategically deployable shifters, the discourses of corporate social responsibility and sustainability facilitate conversations across a range of perspectives while concealing important political differences.[15]

The discourse of corporate social responsibility has also become a subject of academic research in programs on business and management. This literature plays an essential role in "consolidating, validating, and even celebrating" claims about corporate social responsibility.[16] Academic research on CSR is "not external to its object of study," but central to its formulation and legitimation.[17] The promotion of the discourses of corporate social responsibility and sustainability within the academy enhances their credibility and complicates efforts to analyze these terms by conveying the impression that their definitions are well established and widely recognized rather than contested. However, my research on the relationship between the mining industry and its critics provides a productive vantage point from which to ascertain whether the discourse of corporate social responsibility reflects changes in how corporations and markets operate, as its proponents suggest, rather than changes in how corporations market themselves.

These preliminary observations lead to the four questions that I address in this essay. First, why did the discourse of corporate social responsibility emerge at this particular historical moment? I answer this question with reference to the relationship between the mining industry and its critics since the 1990s. This follows the anthropological inclination to study language within specific social contexts. Second, what are the intended audiences of the discourse of corporate social responsibility? Attention to reception helps to identify the goals of the speaker. Third, which actions are identified as demonstrating corporate social responsibility and how might we distinguish between them? Here I contrast philanthropy and reform, both of which are represented as examples of corporate social responsibility. My final question has to do with academic discussion about corporate social responsibility and sustainability. How does the identification of these discourses as strategically deployable shifters help us to understand their promotion and reception within the academy?

The Origins of CSR in the Mining Industry

Why do corporations and industries seek to enhance their reputations by invoking claims to social responsibility? Research on the relationship between the mining industry and its critics since the 1990s offers a historical perspective on the two dominant narratives invoked to explain the emergence of the discourse of corporate social responsibility. The first argument refers to corporate recognition of the need to raise industry standards. For example, one of the goals of the International Council of Mining and Metals is "to act as a catalyst for performance improvement in the mining and metals industry."[18] The alternative "business case" for social responsibility emphasizes the economic rationale or competitive advantage that can be gained by enhancing corporate reputations. The mining company Rio Tinto expresses this view in very specific terms: "Our contribution to sustainable development is not just the right thing to do. We also understand that it gives us business reputational benefits that result in greater access to land, human, and financial resources."[19] Policy changes are presented as a response to internal concerns. In contrast, historical evidence suggests that pressure from external critics was responsible for the mining industry's adoption of the discourse of corporate social responsibility and sustainability in the late 1990s.

For decades, the mining industry managed to maintain a low profile. The industry's lack of visibility is related to the remote locations in which most mines operate, affording them considerable freedom from oversight or interference. In many cases, opposition to mining is suppressed by state or private security forces, reducing the need to respond to their critics.[20] The relative anonymity of most mining companies is also a consequence of the way metals are sold to other businesses rather than directly to consumers. This can be contrasted with branding in the petroleum industry, in which consumers engage directly with corporations at the pump.

The spread of neoliberal economic policies during the 1990s, including the promotion of foreign direct investment, opened up new regions of the world to minerals extraction. Many of these projects are located in marginal areas in which indigenous peoples retained control over lands not previously seen to have economic value and where development has historically been limited or absent. Neoliberal reforms also dismantled state regulatory regimes designed to protect labor, the environment, and the rights of persons displaced or otherwise negatively affected by mining. Consequently, much of the responsibility for monitoring international capital has shifted from the state to NGOs and social movements.[21] Critics of the mining industry increasingly deploy new technologies ranging from the Internet and mobile phones to satellite imaging, enabling them to monitor and report on corporate activity in approximately real time wherever it occurs. They also participate in transnational action networks that forge horizontal ties to their counterparts in other regions of the world and partner with NGOs concerned with social justice, the environment, and financial accountability.[22]

One of the iconic mining conflicts of the 1990s was the political campaign and international litigation against the Ok Tedi copper and gold mine in Papua New Guinea. Since 1986, the mine has discharged more than one billion metric tons of tailings and waste rock into local rivers.[23] Although the people living downstream from the mine faced a steep learning curve, they eventually forged strategic alliances with international NGOs who helped them call attention to the environmental problems caused by the mine. In 1994, thirty thousand indigenous people affected by pollution filed a lawsuit against Broken Hill Proprietary, Ltd. (BHP), the managing shareholder and operating partner of the Ok Tedi mine, in the Australian courts.[24] The case was settled in 1996 for an estimated $500 million in compensation and commitments to tailings containment.[25] When the Ok Tedi mine continued to discharge tailings into the river system, the plaintiffs returned to court in 2000. Pressure from the second case forced BHP to transfer its 52 percent share in the project to a development trust that has already accumulated $1.4 billion in reserves, although only a fraction of these funds reaches the communities affected by the mine.

The Ok Tedi campaign was an example of the politics of space, which links together a variety of actors in different locations. The resulting networks are comprised of individuals, communities, nongovernmental organizations, experts, lawyers, and others. They benefit from the complementary mobilization of resources, discourses of persuasion, access to power, and forms of leverage deployed by their members.[26] The ability to enroll participants in multiple locations makes these networks especially effective in challenging transnational corporations wherever they operate. The decade-long campaign against the Ok Tedi mine helped to usher in a new era in which mining companies acknowledge the need to negotiate with the communities affected by their projects in contrast to the prevailing assumption that the state has the sole authority to represent their interests.[27] It also served notice to the industry that it could no longer afford to ignore its critics, prompting a "crisis of confidence" among mining executives that led to unprecedented collaboration among companies that previously viewed each other as fierce competitors.[28]

However, the politics of space has a critical shortcoming: the length of time required to diagnose the problem, mobilize a network of supporters, and mount an effective intervention. In the Ok Tedi case, the response to the environmental problems downstream from the mine came too late to save the river. More recent protests against the mining industry have shifted their attention to earlier in the production cycle before the onset of mining. These social movements seek to limit the environmental impact of mining by opposing the development of new projects. I refer to this strategy as the *politics of time*. Relatively small mining projects may require investments of several hundred million dollars, and the budget for a large mine may be as much as ten or twelve billion dollars. Investments on this scale generate substantial political inertia, especially after they begin to earn revenue for the state. Consequently, political opposition to mining is more likely to be successful when it addresses proposals for new projects, jeopardizing the ability of the mining company to raise the capital required for construction.

An important example of the politics of time is the burgeoning social movement across Latin America in which communities undertake popular votes—known as *consulta* or referenda—that express support or opposition to proposed development projects, especially new mines.[29] These votes contest the authority of the state to grant mining licenses. The participants generally view these referenda as expressing their rights to democratic participation and their sovereignty over land and territory rather than their participation in a larger social movement based on the politics of time. Nonetheless, the organizers of these actions are familiar with their history in the region. A recent survey identifies sixty-eight consultas on mining projects in Latin America, including Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru, over the last decade.[30]

The first consulta to vote on a major mining project was held in the town of Tambogrande in northwest Peru in 2002; 98 percent of the eligible voters opposed the mine.[31] Three years later in Esquel, Argentina, the members of the largely middle class community voted overwhelmingly against a proposed open pit gold mine located seven kilometers upstream from the town, blocking its development.[32] The first referendum against a mining project in Guatemala was held in Sipacapa in 2005; since then, there have been votes on mining projects in fifty-four municipalities, almost all of which were negative.[33] These referenda demonstrate widespread opposition to mining, although they also seek to limit state interference in local affairs. In addition, they express the rights of individuals and communities to make important decisions concerning their land, territories, and access to water, as well as local livelihoods and health. Although earlier social movements based on the politics of space influenced debates about mining and indigenous peoples, new strategies based on the politics of time represent a more hopeful turn given their potential to prevent other environmental disasters from occurring.

The promotion of indigenous rights to free, prior, and informed consent, or FPIC, is a key resource in the politics of time. FPIC was first established in binding international treaty law by the International Labour Organization (ILO) convention 169 in 1989.[34] The World Bank initially refused to recognize the principle of indigenous consent, arguing that it was too difficult to operationalize and ran counter to established principles of eminent domain.[35] Employing the same acronym but representing a much weaker standard, the World Bank adopted a policy of free, prior, and informed *consultation*. Many other international financial institutions followed suit.[36]

Some of the participants in the mining industry prefer the alternative concept of a "social license to operate," which refers to the existence of broad-based community support. The expression was previously used by the American pulp and paper industry to indicate its need to gain the trust of the public and thereby avoid "costly new regulations."[37] It first entered conversations about the mining industry in 1997, at a time when the mining industry was under pressure from the legal action against the Ok Tedi mine.[38] It is treated as a kind of shorthand for those aspects of relationships between mines and communities that are not directly addressed by government contracts and permits.[39] A key difference between a social license to operate and free, prior, and informed consent is that the purpose of the former is to reassure potential investors that a project meets certain baseline criteria, reducing their exposure to risk, whereas the latter is based on the recognition of indigenous rights and addresses the interests of those communities. The acquisition of a social license to operate is also a voluntary practice rather than a legal requirement.

Lobbying by NGOs and indigenous peoples at the United Nations led to the passage of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, which mandates the principle of free, prior, and informed consent. Such "soft law" standards, while not legally binding, may give rise to new international norms. Even the World Bank has begun to take heed; in May 2011, it announced a new policy recognizing the higher standard of consent for certain projects affecting the rights of indigenous peoples.[40] BHP Billiton's most recent statement of operating principles stakes out a position in the middle ground: "New operations or projects must have broad-based community support before proceeding with development. Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is only required where it is mandated by law. Evidence demonstrating support or opposition to the project must be documented."[41] According to industry observers, although "the debate over FPIC will continue . . . the realization that the game has changed is sinking in. The goal posts are shifting."[42] Paradoxically, however, there is a risk that the protocols for implementing the new standard may result in the transfer of political authority from communities recently empowered to speak on their own behalf to private sector consultants who implement assessments on behalf of corporate sponsors, potentially turning free, prior, and informed consent into the check-box compliance of audit culture.

Thus in contrast to corporate narratives about internal recognition of the need to improve performance and the business case for responsibility, evidence from the study of social movements critical of the mining industry suggests that changes in corporate practice are hard won. Reform should be seen as the achievement of indigenous and NGO critics rather than a consequence of the spontaneous enlightenment of industry executives. Nor is there evidence to support the mining industry's assertion that it has internalized important lessons from its past mistakes and incorporated them into their decision making.[43] Instead, corporate claims to practice sustainable mining should be seen as attempts to reassure critics that their efforts and interventions are no longer required.

The Audiences for CSR Discourse

The next question is concerned with potential audiences for the discourse of corporate social responsibility. In recent decades, reputational risks have become increasingly important to the corporate bottom line. This is related to the rise of shareholder capitalism, which emphasizes share value at the expense of corporate relationships to labor, consumers, and communities.[44] Shareholder capitalism is closely associated with the financial collapse of the last decade, during which attention to share value took precedence over economic performance. It is also driven by increased participation in the stock market by individual investors, which has been spurred by the dismantling and privatization of pensions and retirement plans.[45] Managing shareholder confidence has become an essential component of doing business for publically traded companies. Corporations seek to reassure both shareholders and potential investors by adopting policies on corporate social responsibility.

Another potential audience for the discourse of corporate social responsibility is the consumer. One of the ways corporations seek to reassure consumers is through certification programs that provide commodities with the stamp of public approval.[46] Certification consists of a set of rules or guidelines and a mechanism for monitoring or self-reporting that indicates compliance.[47] But participation is voluntary, compliance is not enforceable, and the sanctions that do exist tend to be informal, including dialogue, peer pressure, and the threat of expulsion.[48] An example of a certification regime in the mining industry emerged in response to concern about the trade in "blood diamonds" from conflict zones in Africa. Corporations may also envision the possibility of competitive advantage in addition to enhancing their legitimacy through participation in these initiatives; for example, support for the Kimberley Process that imposed restrictions on diamond trading had strategic value for De Beers, which controls the bulk of the world's diamond trade and benefited from the resulting reduction in supply, which keeps diamond prices high. The Kimberley Process has gradually been weakened as various parties find ways to circumvent its restrictions. But the anonymity of most metals—as it is impossible to identify the source of the copper wire in our computers or the gold in our jewelry—means that the mining industry is largely immune to consumer politics.

As the history of mining conflicts suggests, another potential audience for the discourse of corporate social responsibility is nongovernmental organizations. The language of CSR helps corporations persuade many NGOs to move from confrontation to collaboration in what the mining industry likes to call "win-win" relationships.[49] NGOs increasingly join arm in arm with CEOs in the boardroom rather than subaltern peasants manning the barricades. This has led to the fragmentation of the NGO community according to their willingness to collaborate with industry. One example of these new collaborations is the way that conservation organizations increasingly align themselves with mining companies, endorsing their projects in return for financial support for conservation set-asides.[50] These partnerships have led indigenous peoples in many areas of the world to regard conservation organizations as their enemies rather than potential allies or partners in the protection of local biodiversity.[51] The proliferation of relationships between mining companies and NGOs has also made it easier for the industry to marginalize organizations that reject corporate collaboration and are skeptical of market-based solutions to environmental problems.

Finally, the discourse of corporate social responsibility may also be addressed in part to labor. For example, Jessica Smith Rolston found that CSR messages at a gold mine in Washington State were directed primarily at its own employees, as the mining company sought to overcome stereotypes about the industry in a region in which much of the labor pool possesses strong environmental values.[52] The multiple audiences of the discourse of corporate social responsibility illustrate the way strategically deployable shifters facilitate interactions that conceal important contradictions.

The Varieties of CSR Work

It is possible to distinguish between two kinds of CSR work: "doing good" through corporate philanthropy and "doing better" by improving corporate practices. A distinguishing feature of CSR is the link between corporate philanthropy and public relations. American businesses have long made important charitable contributions: sponsoring a local sports team, for example, or participating in fund-raising for nearby hospitals. These were seen as demonstrations of the corporation's role as a good neighbor.[53] More recently, corporations have also begun to donate employee labor in charitable undertakings such as house building for Habitat for Humanity, which enhances employee loyalty while building community ties.

Even when operating overseas, local philanthropic contributions have been perceived as a demonstration of corporate responsibility. Given that these donations are not readily visible from a distance, raising corporate profiles in the international arena requires new forms of philanthropy. In particular, global public health has become a key focus for corporate donations. In the last decade, the companies that comprise the Fortune 500 have contributed to campaigns against some of the world's major health threats, most notably HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. These campaigns are often announced in full-page ads in the *New York Times*, such as the two-page ad from Chevron on June 1, 2011, with the caption: "Fighting Aids Should be Corporate Policy. We Agree." A similar ad from the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which lists a number of mining companies as patrons, salutes the winners of the 2007 Awards for Business Excellence with the headline: "Fighting AIDS, TB and Malaria Is Our Business." These contributions help corporations "gain access to new kinds of moral and social resources" that can be mobilized "in pursuit of their economic goals."[54]

The mining industry's attention to malaria is of particular interest. The mining giants Anglo American and BHP Billiton are two of the key corporate funders of Africa Fighting Malaria, an NGO that seeks

to overturn the ban on DDT use. Africa Fighting Malaria is also supported by the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative organization not ordinarily known for its involvement in Third World humanitarian causes. Widespread public concern about DDT can be traced to the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, which described the threats posed to humans and the environment by the use of chemical pesticides in industrial agriculture.[55] Carson's work provoked widespread criticism of the chemical industry, leading to the establishment of the US Environmental Protection Agency, which subsequently banned DDT. The recognition that DDT and other insecticides enter the food chain and accumulate within certain organisms was already well established in the scientific community prior to the publication of her work.[56] The toxic effect of DDT on songbirds provided Carson with the evocative image of a "silent spring" in which "no birds sing," galvanizing popular understandings of the harms caused by industrial pollution. This opened up a critical space for political intervention that facilitated the emergence of the environmental movement in the 1970s and the subsequent efflorescence of environmental NGOs during the 1980s, suggesting one reason why Carson's work remains a target for the conservative movement so long after its publication.

Criticism of the ban on DDT might also be seen as an attempt to put the genie of public participation in science back in the bottle, returning policy making to scientists and their corporate employers. If it could be demonstrated that NGO opposition to DDT use for malaria prevention was misguided, this would discredit NGOs on the very grounds through which they claim legitimacy, the protection of vulnerable populations. The assertion that millions of people have needlessly died as a result of Carson's work seeks to reverse the shift toward public participation in scientific decision making.[57] It may also help to explain why the American Enterprise Institute and the mining industry support Africa Fighting Malaria.

A second focus of the mining industry in promoting its contribution to society is poverty reduction, which is increasingly invoked by mining industry executives as a key objective. For example, the mining industry was determined to make a strong presentation at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa, in order to preempt civil society's ability to advocate for stronger regulatory control over its operations.[58] To this end, the industry commissioned a ten million dollar study of the challenges facing the mining industry.[59] When the final report of the Mines, Minerals, and Sustainable Development project was presented at the Johannesburg summit, Brian Gilbertson, the CEO of BHP Billiton, invoked John F. Kennedy's call to "abolish all forms of human poverty" and Nelson Mandela on the need to fight against "poverty and lack of human dignity" in relation to the industry's contribution to sustainable development.[60] Gilbertson also argued that "the real challenges of Sustainable Development arise when a major project goes awry, when one stares into an environmental abyss. For BHP Billiton, that abyss was Ok Tedi." He praised BHP Billiton's "solution" to the problems downstream from the Ok Tedi mine, the transfer of the company's share in the project to a development trust, but failed to mention the alternative option of staying in Papua New Guinea to clean up the polluted river system. Gilbertson also commended the Mines, Minerals, and Sustainable Development project for having "brought much self-examination throughout the industry."[61]

In contrast to corporate philanthropy, or "doing good," are reform efforts that result in the reduction of corporate harm, which might be described as "doing better." Despite the self-congratulatory tone of Gilbertson's speech in Johannesburg, the mining industry largely failed to raise its operating standards in the decade following the 2002 summit. There are several important exceptions, such as BHP Billiton's pledge not to discharge tailings into the river system in any new project. Its chief competitors, however, refused to follow suit. Rio Tinto, for example, argues that it is counterproductive to make general policy decisions on tailings disposal and continues to address these issues on a case-by-case basis. The problem with voluntary reforms is that noncompulsory measures create free rider problems when corporations that decline to follow the new standard gain a competitive advantage over companies operating according to the higher standards. Given the high cost of environmental mitigation in the mining industry, only the lowest cost producers can afford to operate during an economic downturn, which discourages participation in voluntary reforms.

The mining industry is also largely insulated from shareholder preferences. This is especially true for gold, which serves as an important hedge against the volatility of the stock market because the price of gold is countercyclical with the market's economic performance. Mining company stocks are also relatively immune from the pressures of the "shareholder democracy" in which investors use their voting power to promote corporate reform.[62] One of the most significant innovations in shareholder activism over the last two decades was the establishment of social and green choice investment funds. These funds have generally outperformed the market average due to their popularity and the resulting supply of capital. Consequently, rather unlikely corporations and industries have lobbied for membership, often invoking industry awards for sustainability and corporate social responsibility as their rationale.[63] During the period between the Kyoto accord on global climate change in 1997 and the 2011 Fukushima crisis, when nuclear power received the reluctant endorsement of mainstream conservation organizations concerned about greenhouse gases emanating from carbon-based energy sources, the uranium mining industry sought inclusion in green choice funds. These efforts were subsequently delegitimized by the tsunami that brought Japan's nuclear industry to the brink of disaster. Ironically, stock fund managers invoke green and social choice funds as a rationale for blocking shareholder resolutions by arguing that individuals who do not wish to invest in particular corporations have the option of investing in these more specialized funds. For example, a 1999 shareholder initiative to force TIAA-CREF, the major pension fund for American professors and schoolteachers, to divest its shares in Freeport McMoRan, which owns and operates the controversial Grasberg mine in West Papua, Indonesia, was rebuffed by the management of TIAA-CREF.[64]

CSR in the Academy

Finally, how does the discourse of corporate social responsibility affect academic debates? The issue arises at a historical moment when corporations and the market are influencing the academy in a variety of ways. Universities are increasingly adopting new business models, including the application of "audit culture" to assess research performance.[65] Public universities are required to justify their activities in terms of contributions to local economic growth, with implications for course offerings and academic positions. This includes a shift in resources from the humanities and social sciences to the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. These changes are accompanied by the proliferation of corporate-academic partnerships in the life sciences and other fields, resulting in new research priorities and accountabilities.[66]

Even within the field of anthropology, there has been a rise in demand for our skills by corporations. In the arena in which I work, anthropologists may choose to collaborate with the participants in indigenous political movements, work with NGOs and lawyers, provide expert testimony to multilateral organizations, and so forth.[67] But my colleagues are more likely to consult or work for mining companies than criticize or oppose them. They argue that they are better able to effect positive change by working within these organizations than by addressing problems and concerns from the outside, ignoring corporate mechanisms for neutralizing internal dissent and disciplining employees.[68] This includes the threat of legal action or the termination of their contracts, which prevents anthropologists from making the results of their research available to the public.[69]

Neoliberal confidence in the ability of the market to solve complex problems also influences the role played by the study of business and management in universities, especially in relation to the environment. No one at my university objected when the business school established a new institute to foster sustainable business practices. But the proponents of market-based solutions to environmental problems have not been content with greening their own institutions. The establishment of a joint master's degree program between the business school and the school of natural resources prompted criticism and concern, even though this might be seen as a return to the school's original mission, which was to make more efficient, rational, and productive use of the state's natural resources in contrast to the environmental values that have influenced the school since the 1970s. The advocates of market-based reforms have also sought to promote their views across the campus by helping to establish a new institute for sustainability. The external board of advisors appointed to this institute included a number of corporations with controversial environmental track records, including Dow Chemical, Duke Energy, Shell Oil, and BHP Billiton, the mining company responsible for the Ok Tedi disaster. The acting director of the institute defended the decision to include BHP Billiton on the board to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*: "'There's no pure company out there,' he says. 'I have no reason to doubt that this company has really screwed a lot of people,' just as nearly every other company is 'unjust to people' at one point or another. . . . 'These organizations are part of the problem, and they're also part of the solution.'"[70] In these transformations of the academy, critical attention to the ways in which market forces are responsible for environmental problems risk being elided in favor of promoting the ability of the market to offer solutions, much like the way the environment is

no longer seen as a crucial element of sustainability. Such claims are also presented as though they were politically neutral.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argue that the discourse of corporate social responsibility is a strategically deployable shifter that claims to represent values we all support. CSR discourse extends the power of corporations to achieve their goals through the use of virtuous language. It assigns positive value to one side of political debates about the role of corporations and markets in society at the expense of a critique that calls for greater regulation or other interventions. Nonetheless, the discourse of corporate social responsibility conveys the impression that it is technocratic, professional, fair, innovative, optimistic, and open-minded, whereas the critics of CSR risk being scolded for their "low-minded sentimentality" for believing the worst about corporations and their motives.[71]

It is the task of scholars in the social sciences and the humanities to analyze discursive claims and to study how, when, why, and by whom these discourses are mobilized. But strategically deployable shifters like sustainability and corporate social responsibility have the potential to neutralize their critics, limiting their ability to question these claims. Indeed, this may be the primary objective of the discourse of corporate social responsibility. The only way to demystify such virtuous language is to examine its history, and in particular the concrete struggles through which it emerges in contrast to "just so" stories of corporate enlightenment or the economic rationalization of the business case for social responsibility, the audiences to which it is directed, what it claims to accomplish, and the consequences of its deployment in both industry and the academy.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Charlotte Walker-Said, John Kelly, and the contributors to this volume for an engaging set of conversations. I also thank the linguistic anthropology lab at the University of Michigan, including Alaina Lemon, Michael Lempert, and Bruce Mannheim, for their helpful comments. Bonnie Urciuoli generously provided feedback on an earlier version of the paper presented at a Sawyer Seminar at Indiana University on "Neoliberal Regimes and Institutions of Knowledge Production" co-organized by Ilana Gershon and Rebecca Lave. Wes Shumar and Ilana Gershon also made particularly helpful suggestions at the Bloomington workshop.

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