Searching for the Social: Corporate Social Responsibility and Economic Regulation Beyond the State

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Abstract

The politics of “corporate social responsibility” (CSR) have been suggested as a way to help respond to some of the governance gaps caused by globalization. However, CSR struggles with the question of how critical it can be, and particularly whether it can condemn market agents as subjectively antisocial. CSR is thus perpetually caught between critics on the right who dismiss its real-world seriousness, and critics on the left who worry about its co-optation by the imperatives of business. Both camps suggest that focusing on workplace subjectivity is irrelevant and distracting. Meanwhile, “on the ground”, activists plainly do just that. The question is what is lost, in terms of effective governance, when we deny that it is useful to challenge organizational personas and managerial subjectivities. To assess this, I deploy a governmentality analysis to pick apart how CSR politics typically weave together two distinct ways of thinking about regulation. These two “political rationalities” facilitate
different discursive framing techniques and different political practices. I argue that CSR’s more critical politics often flow from what Foucauldian scholars call “the social” or “social government”. “Social government” champions a sense of our interdependence, and often targets the subjectivities of market agents as a way to extra-legally address market abuses. However, theorists have been lamenting the decline of “the social” for decades. What explains the continuing vitality of these supposedly irrelevant politics? I show that recent critical manifestations of CSR politics draw from under-theorized non-state modes of “the social”, and are hybridized to fit an increasingly marketized world. These “social” politics can help us build theory about CSR phenomena, as these politics draw much of their normative power from implicit critiques of managerial subjectivities, and reflect only ephemerally any supposed social rules.
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1. An Extended Introduction

A dissertation is written, and rewritten, over a period of years, but the first draft of this introduction was begun on something of an auspicious day: April 20, 2014. That date falls 100 years to the day following the Ludlow massacre. The Ludlow massacre, captured in labour-movement political rhetoric by Mother Jones (Nies, 2002 (1977)) and Upton Sinclair (2002 (1919)), was an attack by security guards on striking miners and their families near a coal mine in Colorado. The mine is now tapped out, and almost everyone has forgotten Ludlow. But Ludlow, in some fascinating ways, echoes today for those interested in the governance of business in a globalized world featuring weak or uninterested state authorities.

The mine at Ludlow was operated by the wealthy and influential Rockefeller family. The still-incipient state government of Colorado needed the tax revenues and steady supply of coal, and thus supported ownership during the strike. Society at large was generally apathetic, as it was uneasy with both parties. The Rockefellers were uninterested in compromise or dialogue, having proudly pledged, on the basis of protecting individual free contract, their principled refusal of engaging with organized labour (McMartin, 1998). As Ludlow was a company town, there was no independent police force, and the state quickly ran out of funds to pay the mediating National Guard. Anarchic violence, generally initiated by Rockefeller security guards but reciprocated by labour, begat more violence, and the end result was dozens dead, including 11 children. The American Federal government was forced to intervene due to the national public outcry at the Rockefeller violence, worker suffering, and state inadequacy (Gitelman, 1988; Martelle, 2008).
We might think this to be a tragic but irrelevant story from long ago, but important post-colonial considerations aside, is this history really all that different from contemporary conflict at mines such as the Freeport-McMoran Grasberg mine in New Guinea (Michaels, 2011; Montlake, 2012), or Barrick subsidiary Acacia’s North Mara mine in Tanzania (York, 2011, 2013; McVeigh, 2014)? There, the mine operators enjoy the considered support of the host states, but the routine low-intensity violence required to keep those mines free of interference from locals impoverished by those mines has provoked outrage among civil society groups, both domestically and in the Global North (Montlake, 2012; York, 2013). Taken a bit further, are the recent public controversies over companies’ “social responsibility”, such as those over the sweatshops utilized by multinational retailers including Nike (Bullert, 2000; Knight and Greenberg, 2002), H&M (Alderman, 2013; Rupp, Dudley and Shannon, 2013), and the Gap (Denning, 2013; IndustriALL, 2013a) all that structurally different from the controversy over the Rockefellers at Ludlow? In some important ways yes, but in some important ways no.

See in all of these cases how wealthy and powerful companies offend the sensibility of otherwise apathetic spectators, as the companies appear callous to the predictable and seemingly preventable suffering of stakeholders. See how states are, for whatever reason, generally uninterested in intervening. See also how many of the business practices creating the actual suffering (in these cases, violently evicting trespassers from private property to facilitate business operations, and employing low cost labour from the Global South subject to lower safety standards), are actually tolerated, even endorsed, by most audiences most of the time – until they suddenly are not because matters are deemed to have gone too far. See
finally how in all of these cases, activists followed the same repertoire of political practices: they sought to anthropomorphize the firms, and in particular to publicize the fundamental normative issue as being the antisociality of firms, as represented by high-profile decision makers: Nike had Phil Knight (Bullert, 2000; Knight and Greenberg, 2002), Gap had Glenn Murphy (Vina, 2013), H&M had Karl-Johan Persson (Tietz and Amann, 2013), Barrick had Peter Munk (York, 2012), and at Ludlow activists had John D. Rockefeller Jr. (Sinclair, 1919).

Moreover, take all the following points that conceptually link 2014 with 1914. Just as 100 years ago, organized labor is marginalized in most advanced economies, creating the lack of an effective counter-balance, both within firms and within the national political sphere, to business (Burawoy, 2010; Wallerstein, 2000). State fiscal interventionism, following Keynesian economics, enjoyed a temporary resurgence after the 2008 economic crisis, but still seems poorly matched to an increasingly globalized world economy (Fraser, 2009). States are relatively adept at keeping the peace, but are increasingly unsure about how interventionist they can be in demanding corporate compliance with regulation, or in punishing corporate malfeasance, due to fear of losing investment, employment, and tax revenues (Stubbs and Underhill, 1994; Gilpin, 2000; Smith, 2010). Despite a worldwide series of popular protests by the lower and middle classes from 2011 to 2013, including the Occupy movement, showing a global restlessness regarding the egalitarian promise of market capitalism, the much vaunted state regulatory backlash to the financial industry’s pervasive irresponsibility has been insufficient (Acharya et al, 2010; Ashkenas, 2012), as have most wealthy states’ political efforts to reduce inequality (Milanovic, 2010; Piketty, 2014). Just as
the Rockefellers championed in 1913-1914, an ethos of free contract and individual competitive agency – reformulated and reconfigured as part of what we now call neoliberalism – has taken root in most elite business and government audience discussions of business and society, along with arguments linking that market subjectivity to market efficiency and aggregate welfare gains (Mizruchi, 2013; Shamir, 2008). Finally, consider how empirical research increasingly suggests that elite audiences have disproportionately influential views on economic regulation, while everyday citizen opinion is generally bypassed (Gilens and Page, 2014) – unless regulatory issues are inordinately publicized and politicized (Culpepper, 2010).

All of this has led many observers to speculate that we have, perhaps unwittingly, entered a “New” or “Second” “Gilded Age” (Bartels, 2009; Hacker and Pierson, 2010; Lieberman, 2011; Krugman, 2014, Reich, 2014). By this count, business has “won” its structural struggles with states and labor, just as it had in early 20th century America (Marens, 2012). This standpoint is a fundamental perspective of this dissertation: some of the claims above are disputed by reasonable scholars, but each statement is reasonably supported by the evidence and held by a healthy proportion of observers. Together, these findings craft a general viewpoint for thinking about governing business: that 2014 structurally looks an awful lot like 1914, and that perhaps the egalitarian welfare state is not the natural order of things to which we can easily return (Razin and Sadka, 2005; Fraser, 2009). If true, this requires us to imagine regulation beyond the state frame, if only as a regulatory supplement to entirely worthwhile efforts at reforming the state system (Fraser, 2009).
In that vein, today’s similarities to Ludlow do not need to end there, with the unmitigated triumph of business over the state and labour. Examining 1914 can also help illuminate ways forward for governing business today, which is why Ludlow is so fascinating and important even today. If “winning” the struggle with state regulation and organized labour meant being able to violently break the strike at Ludlow with complete legal impunity, then for John D. Rockefeller Jr. it proved a pyrrhic victory. Ludlow’s carnage, and the stark contrast of the wealthy Rockefellers killing the children of poor miners, infuriated Americans (Martelle, 2008). The American public judged that the Rockefellers had gone too far, and it turned out that social norms have a regulatory effect even when states turn a blind eye – an insight familiar to both economic sociologists (Stehr and Adolf, 2010) and institutional theorists (Suchman, 1995; Matten and Moon, 2008) alike. Following Ludlow, while never supportive of independent organized labour, the Rockefeller family used less grandiose language in suggesting how firmly business should defend the principle of free contract, and they began to seek out greater worker input (Tone, 1997; Whitaker, 1977). The legacy of Ludlow continues to be debated today (Gitelman, 1988; Martelle, 2008), but two legacies seem important and enduring. The first and best-known is that Ludlow contributed to greater public support for pro-labour legislation. There were few direct legislative outcomes stemming from Ludlow, outside of important local reform that weakened Rockefeller control in Colorado, but the outrage and political impetus is sometimes said to have indirectly helped labour activists push towards the eventual New Deal (Gitelman, 1988; Martelle, 2008; Whitaker, 1977).
I am more interested here in the other, less known, legacy of Ludlow. In the years after Ludlow, John D. Rockefeller Jr., whose “public reputation, always controversial at best, had taken a beating” (Martelle, 2008: 214), was at least somewhat chastened. Whether or not Rockefeller was ever truly shamed is unknowable, but he “realized he needed to appear concerned about the miners” (Lewis, 2014), if only “to dispel the bad publicity” (Tone, 1997: 114). To help do this, Rockefeller recruited the labour lawyer (and future Canadian Prime Minister) William Lyon Mackenzie King to conduct a comprehensive assessment of Ludlow’s fallout and how best to proactively manage the family’s political and reputational exposure going forward (Marens, 2012, 2013). The resulting conceptual innovation, drawing on Progressive-Era ideas of capitalist philanthropy, was the field of “industrial relations”, which propagated the often-paternalist idea of the “social responsibilities of business” (Marens, 2012, 2013). This concept ultimately became the widely used, and often derided, discourse of voluntarist “corporate social responsibility” (CSR) (Marens, 2012, 2013). The Rockefeller foundation went on to act as an early organizational champion of CSR scholarship, in a time when those ideas were criticized as anti-market and secretly socialist (Acquier, Gond, and Pasquero, 2011).

The discourse of proto-CSR “social responsibility” was always at least quasi-paternalist, and was sometimes entirely paternalist, as management retained the formal right to dictate terms, and the managerial inclination was to portray Rockefeller concessions as enlightened generosity (Marens, 2012, 2013). This was a rhetorical finesse that employees frequently contested but which sometimes worked exactly as Rockefeller and King intended (Tone, 1997). However, these concessions were also meaningful material benefits to
employees’ lives (Tone, 1997; Kaufman, 2008). While there were thus pernicious elements of the Rockefeller/King plan, it also represented a series of substantive concessions due to the industrialist recognition of labour’s potency and social norms’ hold on their behavior (Tone, 1997; Whitaker, 1977). Proto-CSR’s voluntariness was thus only strictly voluntary in a formal sense; substantively, it functioned on a fluid spectrum of voluntarism, compromise, and outright coercion as ownership and labour contested each others’ narratives of workplace right and wrong.

This characterization resonates with the CSR debates today. In many ways, then, 100 years later, neither the social and regulatory problems exemplified by Ludlow, nor the possible interventions to address those problems, are all that new. Once again, we face the question of how to govern powerful corporations in a context of weak or uninterested state authorities. If substantive and meaningful state policy is at hand, then I would heartily endorse scholarly and activist efforts to get that state policy right. I wish those efforts well, and I believe the civil society advocacy I suggest in this dissertation would help create energy and momentum that can aid in those efforts. In the interim, however, while that state reform remains relatively hypothetical, I would like to focus in this dissertation on understanding the contested but formally voluntary business responses to society. I want to, in a small way, help us get CSR right.

Getting CSR “right” is important as it is, of course, no panacea. If it was, CSR would have helped solve more problems in its first 100 years of development and deployment than it has. That this discourse of nominal beneficence emerged out of attempts to gloss the murder of children by the agents of oligarchs is the height of bitter irony, and should be
reflected upon by anyone inclined to deploy CSR discourse. I put this in such a stark manner to show that my hopes for CSR, while sincere and even enthusiastic, are made in light of an urgent awareness that CSR discourse can be co-opted and even cynically deployed. After all, institutionally inflected theory teaches us to expect claims to be frequently co-opted by the more materially powerful agents in an engagement (Piven and Cloward, 1979; Baur and Schmitz, 2012). But every discourse and institution is subject to contestation if political movements are ready and able to do so, and CSR discourse features fascinating affective and rhetorical resources that lend themselves to comparatively critical-to-business, pro-stakeholder, contestations. The difference between CSR discourse that helps prompt real change and CSR discourse that merely muddies ethical waters will partially depend on scholars and activists arguing for more incisive understandings of what it means to be socially responsible.

CSR’s potentially critical nature can be seen in how it contains an internal reference to an implicit placing of business within a wider social frame (Carroll, 1999), as well as an implicit reference to some sort of restraint being the price of responsibility; even if that restraint is voluntary and ultimately beneficial in the long term to the restraining agent. Having stemmed in part from egalitarian language of “social responsibility”, it also invokes and reaffirms the existence, and importance, of values that are not strictly economic, or at least not easily captured and generally valued in everyday economic activity (Matten and Crane, 2005). CSR, or at least relatively critical variants of CSR discourse, thus place a kernel of latent criticality at the heart of economic subjects and then of economic institutions:
what’s wrong with everyday businesspeople, and everyday businesses, that they have to do business differently in order to be socially responsible?

This renders CSR, at least potentially, a far more critical discourse than observers might initially suppose: indeed, it is no coincidence that elite business audiences are increasingly moving towards deploying “sustainability” and “creating shared value” (otherwise known as “CSV”) as discursive alternatives to the far more potentially-critical CSR. Standing here 100 years after Ludlow, today’s elite consultants would probably not advise “the social responsibilities of business” as their ideal frame for talking about business and society; experts increasingly deploy either “sustainability” (which is generally less critical in usage than CSR, but at least retains some critical aspect), or “CSV”, which explicitly attacks CSR’s criticality, or “wishful thinking”, as prone to “driv(ing) further the wedge between society and business, to the detriment of both” (Porter and Kramer, 2014: 150). In many elite discussions of business and society, the alternative to CSR is thus not greater state regulation – it is an alternative discursive framing of the issues that does away with social obligation and restraint entirely in order to focus on win-win scenarios that everybody can agree upon (see, critically, Shamir, 2005; Banerjee, 2007, Hanlon, 2008; Gond, Kang, and Moon, 2011). I thus often agree with critics of CSR who argue that CSR is

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1 See, by way of anecdotal evidence, that the world’s elite business and society consultancies now avoid using “CSR”: Boston’s FSG uses “Creating Shared Value” (CSV), Guelph Ontario’s “Shared Value Solutions”, an elite boutique consultancy to extractive clients, has placed CSV in their name, and the UK’s SustainAbility have done likewise with “sustainability”. Generalist consultancies are more abstract in their terminology, but still generally avoid mentioning CSR per se: Bain consults on “Sustainability Reporting and Corporate Responsibility” (Bain, 2014), and McKinsey describes “social innovation” and “sustainability” as subsets of its “social sector” consultancy (McKinsey, 2014).
prone to being captured by business (most powerfully put in Fleming and Jones, 2013), but
my reply is not to abandon CSR politics, but rather that some important normative and
positive work is thus to be done within the business and society literature to shore up a
particularly critical variant of CSR discourse against its discursive competitors.

We have covered a lot of ground in a few short pages. I have sketched out, very
quickly, a sense of the problem, a sense of the context, and a sense of a partial solution worth
exploring. I argue in this dissertation that a certain form of CSR politics, namely civil society
pressure discursively rooted in social obligation and solidarism, can be helpful in certain
circumstances in holding firms to greater account for stakeholder welfare. This is an
emphatically normative stance, but it is rooted in positive observations. Specifically, I also
show that a variant of these discursive politics is already at work, and that understanding
CSR politics as sometimes operating in this manner provides important contributions to the
positive theory, thus permitting us to better understand the actual politics on the ground.
Finally, I will argue that the presence of these politics “on the ground”, especially as within
certain critical manifestations of CSR or “corporate citizenship” discourse, should give
pause to certain scholarly schools studying late capitalism and neoliberalism, most notably

\[2\] It is common for business and society theorists to suggest that CSR and its related discursive alternatives such as “corporate citizenship”, “creating shared value” (CSV), “corporate responsibility”, “corporate accountability”, “sustainability”, and even “business ethics” are relatively interchangeable. I disagree, except in regards to “corporate social responsibility” and “corporate citizenship”, which carry very similar connotations except for how corporate citizenship refers to politics more explicitly while in CSR politics are more implicit.

\[3\] I will discuss neoliberalism below, but given that neoliberalism, as a term, is often misused, I thought it important to mention early on exactly how I will use it. Following scholars such as Will Davies, I see neoliberalism as the political project of encouraging an “ethos of competitiveness”, including in traditionally non-market spheres (Davies, 2014; Davies and Gane, 2013).
the Foucauldian governmentality school, which currently have an unfortunately linear and fatalistic view of the world. According to that school, politics of solidarity and social embeddedness are in decline, and neoliberal values of competitive individualism are in the ascendency (Dean, 2010a, 2010b; Clarke, 2007; Rose, 1999). I aim to show that this narrative ought to be complicated – that social embeddedness and politics of solidarity remain, and are even being amended to better suit a neoliberal world. Critical CSR politics, where it exists, ought thus give us some small added measure of hope, as well as clues for how to move forward in holding firms to account.

In the rest of the extended introduction to follow, I first lay out the existing literature on CSR politics, and situate my project within a significant literature gap. We need studies of CSR phenomena that are appropriately clear-eyed about the essential roles that power plays in shaping norms, but which still retain sensitive to the possibility of real successes by activists. One scholarly perspective that thus recommends itself is the governmentality school, a Foucauldian-inspired set of scholars working at the intersection of political theory and political economy. They have worked extensively to understand how civil society groups have historically placed normative demands on economic agents within liberal market systems. To push back against governmentality’s general fatalism, I suggest we excavate a significant optimist streak within the governmentality school that has for some reason recently been left dormant.

In the second section of the extended introduction, I show how we can do this. To facilitate this, I set out governmentality theory, and governmentality’s core ideas, in a “key concepts” section. It is here that I elaborate the dissertation’s primary analytic lens: I argue
that much of today’s CSR politics can be fruitfully understood as a contemporary manifestation of “social” politics. “Social” politics, which were extensively used for much of the 19th and 20th centuries, especially but not exclusively in egalitarian welfare states, were a mode of thinking about mediating the conflict of suffering citizens and the economy that retains free market relations but which overlays them with prosocial expectations of solidarity. I then finish with an extended chapter overview, to show how this project progresses and to place each chapter in context.

1.1 The CSR Politics Literature At A Glance – Between Global Governance Optimism and the Political Economy Dismissal: the Need for New Perspectives

1.1.1 CSR as Politics

This dissertation looks at CSR politics, where firms are challenged by stakeholders for their action or inaction on given issues, and suggests that the standard mainstream business and society accounts of the issues should be positively and normatively supplemented by another perspective that used to hold considerable scholarly sway. The CSR literature is vast, partially due to its innate interdisciplinarity: substantial literatures examining business’ reaction to society can be found in political science, management, sociology, development studies, and beyond. Summarizing the state of the research is thus virtually impossible, in that it is so heterogeneous and diffuse, but I specifically direct the reader to two rightfully lauded monograph surveys: David Vogel’s The Market for Virtue
(2005), and Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee’s more critical Corporate Social Responsibility: The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly (2007), as well as the excellent recent Oxford Handbook on CSR (eds. Crane, McWilliams, Matten, Moon, and Siegel, 2008). Wide-ranging and fruitful relevant literature reviews can also be found in Sassen’s many works on the intersection of globalization, business, and government (1998; 2006), Carroll’s examination of CSR’s conceptual evolution (1999), Culpepper’s Quiet Politics and Business Power (2011), and Spiro’s overview of transnational non-state legal approaches to corporate regulation (2013). These are all excellent studies that show some of the breadth of perspectives being taken on the fundamental question of how to regulate firms in spaces of either state lack of interest or state incapacity. An important, somewhat contrasting, perspective can be found in Gong, Kang, and Moon (2011) and Vallentin (2013), who show how CSR often represents a way for states to subtly advance their social and economic agendas.

This dissertation looks at one subsection of the larger CSR discussion – the extent to which CSR is political: how it flows from politics and how it has political effects. This is thus not an examination of all CSR; much of CSR phenomena is essentially depoliticized and routinized such that it never becomes the subject of public interest or contestation (Shamir, 2005; Hanlon, 2008). However, scholars are increasingly looking at how CSR emerges in fundamentally political contexts, and acts in irreducibly political ways. I thus follow the Scherer and Palazzo (2011, 898-901) formulation of “political CSR”⁴, where business moves

⁴ A quick note about terminology: instead of “political CSR”, I use the similar but less specific term “CSR politics,” as my primary interest is not necessarily in the political aspects of CSR, but in the contested politics of firms engaging society.
beyond mere private compliance with governmental rules and takes on public performances of citizenship as well as added responsibilities for rule-creation, institution-building, and service-provision typically associated only with states. Building on this perspective, I am interested in CSR insofar that it constitutes the contested vocabulary through which corporate responsibility politics are negotiated, politicizes what was formerly private, and makes business and its various roles in society matters of public debate.

There is a rich debate on these issues, as the business and society literature is finding it increasingly important to ponder how business is taking on: aspects of citizenship (Matten and Crane, 2005; Neron and Norman, 2008), responsibility for poverty alleviation (Margolis and Walsh, 2003), responsibility for regulatory design (Braithwaite and Drahos, 2000), responsibility for institutional design (Hsieh, 2009), responsibility for taking the lead in public dialogue (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007), and even the criticism for systems-level problems when conflicts arise (Levy, 2008). On all these subjects, the driving observation is that firms, especially multi-national corporations with operations in many countries, are taking on roles which they previously had not, thus raising debate about the normative and regulatory division-of-labour that had previously existed under welfarist nation-states: what form should firms take in the 21st century and how should they relate to states and stakeholders?
1.1.2 Concern #1: Global Governance Optimism

The highly influential work of Andreas Scherer and Guido Palazzo, who coined the term “political CSR” (Palazzo and Scherer, 2006; Scherer and Palazzo, 2007, 2011; Scherer, Palazzo, and Baumann, 2006), thus helpfully sets the stage for this analysis, but many observers with backgrounds in critical theory (broadly defined) (Edward and Willmott, 2008; Kuhn and Deetz, 2008; Whelan, 2012; Willke and Willke, 2008) and post-colonial theory (Banerjee, 2007, 2010) have concerns. Scherer and Palazzo’s work helpfully sets up the general vocabulary and frame of reference for discussing CSR’s political aspects, but it has also acted as the leading substantive perspective for how to actually understand how those politics function. Scherer and Palazzo’s argument is that we should understand CSR through the global governance literature, and due in part to their efforts this has become an influential mainstream model in the CSR politics literature. Scholars following this lead generally see CSR politics as comprised by civil society groups working to create new rules for corporate behavior through “multi-stakeholder processes” (Rache and Kell, 2010; Russo and Tencati, 2009) and “soft law” (Gjolberg, 2011), with activists punishing laggard firms who break those rules (Doh and Guay, 2006).

These readings all dovetail with normative theorizing from the deliberative democracy perspective (Palazzo and Scherer, 2006; Scherer and Palazzo, 2007) to create the view that collaborative, communicative, processes, typified as much as possible by

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5 The influence of this model can be seen, in part, in how the 4 papers that developed it (Palazzo and Scherer, 2006; Scherer and Palazzo, 2007, 2011; Scherer, Palazzo, and Baumann, 2006) total more than 1700 citations at the time of writing.
deliberation, are normatively and positively necessary to bring business and claimants together to solve the world’s problems. With this view, business, let loose by the governance gaps created by globalization and state regulatory hesitance, are being reined in by new definitions of what is and is not acceptable behaviour (Scherer and Palazzo, 2011).

Effectively, the *de facto* mainstream model for understanding CSR politics has become a deliberative-inflected account of global governance at work. This prompts the question – is CSR a manifestation of deliberative democracy and incipient global governance?

I’m not sure of the extent to which it is. There is a lot to this view, and it sometimes works well at both positively describing CSR politics and suggesting normative interventions⁶. To a certain extent, some sort of global-governance institution-building is definitely at play, as we do see ever-more substantive standards initiatives, where guidelines are set for corporate compliance (Doh and Guay, 2006; Rasche and Kell, 2010). Moreover, we do need better lines of communication between business and civil society. To the extent that this is what we are talking about, who could disagree? But the conceptual model of CSR acting as global governance, as found in discussions of actual CSR issues, sometimes seems over-confident, and it thus sometimes, in my opinion, misunderstands the nature of the politics at hand and then possibly prescribes imperfect normative interventions. For instance, do we really need more MSIs (Rasche and Kell, 2010), if the ones we have so often take up years of civil society energy before failing (Huijstee, 2012)? More pointedly, do we really

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⁶ For instance, see Scherer, Baumann, and Schneider’s (2013) article on improving corporate governance, at the board level, to better feature deliberative norms. This work seems fascinating and fruitful.
need to demand greater deliberation in CSR debates to add greater “rigor” (Palazzo and Scherer, 2006: 75) to the discussion of business and society?

Part of the issue is one of general confidence in the state of contemporary civil-society politics. For the relatively ambitious, deliberative-democracy inspired, global governance or “soft law” narrative to be positively and normatively reliable, we would typically expect to see reasonable levels of three things: companies being open to earnest deliberation, relative background equality between communicative counterparts (stakeholders and firms), and relatively predictable assertions of what actions are deemed right and wrong. Otherwise, the foundational conditions for successful deliberative politics would not necessarily be in place (Fung, 2005).

None of these seem extant much of the time in CSR politics: the politics of CSR are often far more ephemeral, chaotic, and strategically-pursued than the mainstream theoretical models focused on deliberation and rules would suggest. First, most observers would not characterize major corporations and their activist counterparts to have roughly equivalent background resources (among others see Banerjee, 2007, 2010; Blowfield and Frynas, 2005). Secondly, determining whether an individual, or organization, is earnestly open to reciprocal deliberation is in some sense impossible – nobody knows the content of another’s heart – but in the absence of strong evidence to the contrary we can see that relying on earnestness is problematic, especially since firms have explicit organizational mandates to pursue shareholder returns (Sundaram and Inkpen, 2004; Karnani, 2011). This is why deliberative theorists have typically been hesitant to theorize corporate engagement as a site for
deliberative theory’s application. And, finally, actually gauging extant norms on behaviour is surprisingly difficult, as I will discuss below in this introduction.

As anecdotal evidence for the challenge that deliberative politics faces for understanding corporate responsibility engagements, consider very briefly the examples with which that this introduction began – one of which is historical (the Rockefeller controlled Colorado Fuel and Iron at Ludlow), and most of which are contemporary. None of Colorado Fuel and Iron (Tone, 1997, Martelle, 2008); Gap (Taubner, 2013), H&M (Taubner, 2013), Barrick (York, 2011, 2013), or Nike (Knight and Greenberg, 2002) were particularly attractive deliberative counterparts at the initial outset of their stakeholder engagements, and none are transparently deliberative even today. All five firms rebuffed stakeholders for years before being aggressively campaigned-against in conspicuously uncivil and hardheaded manners (Ibid). All of these five targeted organizations made subsequent changes in how they engage stakeholders. In these cases, was the most important factor in firm engagement the suddenly improved dialogue with stakeholders, or was it the advocacy that achieved that new openness to dialogue and compliance in the first place? Significant potential drawbacks

7 The major exceptions are of course Archon Fung, Dara O’Rourke, and Charles Sabel (2001), as well as Fung in particular (2003, 2005), but these are exceptions that largely prove the rule: these scholars speculate that deliberative politics could help raise labour standards, but they do not argue that conditions are currently strong for potential deliberation. As a result, these scholars suggest heavily restrained (but still interesting and potentially fruitful) deliberative interventions that mostly focus on improved communications flows, and downplay emphasis on the possible legitimacy or validity of particular discussants or their views.

8 My purpose is not to criticize these firms, but to highlight the conflictual tone that their engagements with stakeholders initially took.
to the deliberative perspective thus exist from a positive standpoint, given the conditions on the ground. At the least, that positive theory should be complemented and placed in context.

Moreover, significant normative problems could also exist. Keeping in mind political theory’s many critics of deliberative democracy, who worry about deliberative expectations’ constraining effect on marginalized stakeholders (Kohn, 2000; Young, 2003), observers studying CSR worry about how deliberative expectations can ultimately in many cases serve corporate interests (Banerjee, 2010; Edwards and Willmott, 2011). The deliberative inspired “Political CSR” literature’s focus on improving dialogue can help integrate marginalized voices into the public conversation about firms’ operations, which is normatively promising, but this focus has also been used to police NGO advocacy (Baur and Palazzo, 2011). What if CSR politics are so troubled, and firms so intransigent, that uncivil politics are necessary?

More foundationally, what do these deliberative interventions do to help activists achieve their goals, in truly dire situations made up of powerful, tough-minded organizations that are culturally resistant towards either engagement or compliance? It seems rather little, though we should be cautiously optimistic that future deliberative-inspired research, focused particularly on understanding corporate engagements with activists, could return some fascinating results.

I do not mean to suggest that deliberative theory, carefully applied, cannot accommodate cases like these. Nor do I wish to contend that deliberative theory cannot teach us certain important lessons about improving these cases. Rather, all in all, given the difficult conditions we can expect in many contexts for CSR politics, adopting a straightforwardly deliberative lens simply seems unnecessary. As an approach it should be
placed in better context than at present. This suggests the need for extant deliberative-derived theory about CSR politics to be put into conversation with other theoretical perspectives which are perhaps better aware of how power disparities shape CSR engagements, and more open to conflictual politics. This will provide a more holistic account of corporate social responsibility engagements between claimants and firms.

1.1.3 Concern #2: Soft Law As The Conceptual Imagery For Understanding and Encouraging Normative Expectations

Another, more fundamental, question arises regarding the global governance concept of “soft law”, and whether it helps us understand CSR phenomena. Specifically, can we understand CSR as a form of “soft law”? The concept of “soft law” is challenging to define, as it emerges out of opposition with standard “hard” law. It generally denotes norms that carry increased senses of “obligation, precision, and delegation” (Abbott and Snidal, 2000: 422) when compared to general social expectations, but which are neither fully formalized nor easily enforceable. In effect, the concept of “soft law”, applied to understanding CSR politics, suggests that CSR norms are more regularized than everyday social norms, but are not yet fully legally binding. This perspective is increasingly debated in the CSR literature (Horrigan, 2010; Scherer and Palazzo, 2011; Scherer, Palazzo, and Baumann, 2006; Sobchak, 2006; Steurer, 2010). Thus, we should ask, do CSR expectations today actually bear similarities to the law? Are CSR violations (and subsequent punishments), similar to violations of the law (and legal punishments)?
The law seems an awkward image for understanding the new normative expectations being placed on firms. The image of the law surely has its place, especially when we consider the most advanced standards-setting initiatives such as the UN Global Compact and the Forest Stewardship Council (Rasche, 2011; Rasche and Kell, 2010), but the imagery of the law surely over-determines our expectations as well. Take, for example, the paradigmatic question of garment industry sweatshops, which form the primary empirical subject matter of this dissertation, and are one of the most discussed sectors of the world economy in terms of normative quandaries. Let us ask ourselves: is it currently acceptable, as a matter of existing public norms, for firms to source through sweatshops? On the face of it, the answer would be a clear no: a recent survey of North American consumers found that worker treatment was important to 94% of respondents (Blumgart, 2013). In addition, firms are clearly reluctant to admit to sourcing from sweatshops (Bartley and Child, 2014). We could consider this evidence of the existence of some sort of rule or law.

But in fact these “rules” only exist chaotically, and in an abstract, unreal sense. Almost nobody, be they factory owners, retailers, or consumers, actually acts in accordance with a nominal “rule” against clothes made in factories featuring long hours, low pay, arbitrary workplace punishment, or lower safety standards. Better and worse conditions do exist in the worldwide garment industry, but by and large almost all major retailers source from factories that could fairly be described as sweatshops9 (Blumgart, 2013), almost all

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9 Some firms might take issue with this statement, but most garment factories in the Global South feature brutal conditions, and even given the very few that do not, almost no retailers are able to fully guarantee their supply chains (ie., that unauthorized 3rd party sourcing does not occur with regularity). This plausible deniability is considered by many observers to be by design (Atal, 2013; CBC News, 2013b).
firms are largely unaware of the conditions in their supply chains (Alderman, 2013; Chen, 2013), and most expert NGOs (let alone everyday consumers) are generally unable to say with any certainty which factories must be avoided as particularly problematic (Clifford and Greenhouse, 2013). Most garments, including the ones you the reader are wearing right now, are thus either sourced from factories that most individuals would presumably consider unacceptable, or well could be except by chance (Blumgart, 2013). Virtually no one, at any point in the mainstream supply chain, from factory owner, to retailer, to the average citizen in the Global North, can thus honestly say they make real efforts to avoid implicating themselves in the sweatshop phenomenon.

We could thus say that almost everyone violates the “rule” against poor worker treatment. In this sense, then, sourcing from sweatshops, with their degrading conditions, lowered safety standards, weak labour rights, and physically demanding work, is not actually much of a rule at all. Relatedly, we should also consider how empirical research is increasingly finding that actually sourcing in particularly bad conditions has almost no effect on whether or not a firm is challenged by civil society. As Bartley and Child put it: “how do particular social actors become social movement targets? The most intuitive answer—that they simply engage in objectionable behaviors—is deeply flawed” (2014, p. 3). What matters instead are broader structural and cultural factors such as firm prominence, the firm’s financial success, whether a firm is attempting to aggressively rebrand itself, the extent to which a firm is respected by its business audience peers, and the extent to which firms make claims to social responsibility (Bartley and Child, 2014).
My point is not that normative expectations do not exist or do not matter – they clearly do. My question is what shape those norms take and what function they serve. To revisit the sweatshop example, firms are indeed reluctant to admit to sweatshop sourcing, bruising campaigns against major retailers occur with regularity (Spar and LeMure, 2003), and those targeted retailers do make significant concessions that immensely improve the working conditions of garment workers (Bartley and Child, 2014; Blumgart, 2013; Spar and Lemure, 2013). My point here is rather that those norms are ephemeral, are largely aspirational, and crucially do not seem particularly targeted at delimiting acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Beyond employing child or slave labour, which almost everyone agrees is completely unacceptable, there are very few strong norms against specifically forbidden labour practices or behaviors. Casting these ephemeral, amorphous, norms as precursors to future non-state “law” seems to read into the evidence two things: first, we read into today what might or might not occur in the future, and secondly, we read into civil society politics the form we expect norms to take, which is the (state) law. What we have, instead of incipient laws, is rather a general sense that sweatshops are normatively bad things, a general sense that conditions should be better, a general sense that firms (and consumers) are currently not doing enough to address those issues, and an activist propensity to targeting firms based on primarily cultural and structural factors.

I would argue that these politics are not actually emblematic of the law, at least in any organized sense. There is almost no formalization or precision to distinguish these norms from broader social expectations – if this is “soft” law it is rather “soft” indeed. Moreover, these norms do not seem particularly focused on specific unacceptable acts, which is
generally the focus of a “rule” based legal regime. A properly drawn up legal regime based
on principles of the rule of law would generally mark certain acts, or behaviors, as
unacceptable, and would be more or less neutral to the cultural and strategic position of the
offender (Dawson, 2009). What we see here is more or less the reverse – actual behaviors are
less important, and cultural standing is more important, in predicting society’s attention,
concern, and anger.

Rather, what these on-the-ground politics seemingly resemble is more of a
recognition of extant suffering as well as an amorphous recognition that cultural, or even
subjective, change needs to occur; both in the corporate cultures and personal subjectivities
of businesspeople, as well as within the minds of consumers, as well. By cultural and
subjective change, I mean that society seems to be demanding the performance of certain
prosocial\(^{10}\) values, both in the corporate cultures of firms, as well as in the subjectivities (or
interior cognitive and emotional lives) of corporate executives. Whether companies are
culturally benign, and made of seemingly benign executives, seems to be an important factor
in predicting the extent of stakeholder focus and stakeholder anger.

Effectively, this amorphous but powerful need for cultural and subjective change is
being directed at large, culturally relevant, companies in light of a given tragedy or given
problem (such as poverty or deforestation), and those high-profile companies are being
lobbied to display new values. Rather than as an extension of the law, these norms and

\(^{10}\) I use “prosocial” for its neutrality. In the literature it carries two linked notations – as a given value demanded
by society, and as a general sense of an agent who is other-regarding along with being self-regarding (Suchman,
1995).
regulatory campaigns seem to function as cultural (and subjective) supplements to the law, where new normative expectations of prosociality are being placed on market actors. I explore these ideas in better detail below in the key concepts section, as well as in the body of the dissertation – particularly chapters one and four.

The global governance literature, and its attending imagery of CSR soft law, has much to offer; its thinking on organizing multi-stakeholder and standards-setting initiatives (Rasche, 2011) seems potentially quite fruitful. The imagery of rules does help activists and scholars think about advocacy in a variety of ways; particularly in institution-building. Moreover, the garment industry seems to be a particularly under-governed sector of the world economy, and thus possibly a particularly challenging context for the “soft law” model (Atal, 2013). All of this being said, however, we do seem to need other lenses to complement the imagery of the law or rules. This recommends a lens for CSR politics that permits a relatively flexible reading of CSR governance, as agendas seem to be advanced though a variety of manners, and according to a variety of logics about how political change is secured.

Specifically, we need a lens that makes room for governance strategies that aim to shape cultures or subjectivities. It seems that more than one set of objects is being targeted for normative change: norms of culture and subjectivity are being challenged here just as norms of behaviors are\(^{11}\). This distinction is important: the metaphor of rules focuses our

\(^{11}\) I should note that given that the global governance literature is so vast, many scholars from that perspective do work on cultural and subjective governance. See for example Rosenau and Czempiel (1992) and Held
attention on delimiting acceptable and unacceptable market practices, or market behaviors. But there has always been a second, shadow, mode of weak market regulation that aimed to formally allow a wide range of behaviors but to focus instead on acceptable and unacceptable market subjectivities or market values (Dean, 2010a; Durkheim, 1984 (1893); Rorty, 1989; Stjerno, 2005). Essentially, as governors we can try to shape the rules of the market, or we can try to shape the identities of those who act within those rules. Moreover, this flexible lens should be keenly aware of how norms can function in subtle, ambiguous, ephemeral ways: society might be blithe about many of the normative quandaries posed by the market, but this does not necessarily mean that companies are not making real concessions that meaningfully change the lives of many workers due to the propagation of these ephemeral norms.

1.1.4 Concern #3 The Critical Dismissal of CSR – What Is Being Lost?

If we accept much of the above; that we need a flexible and clear eyed account of CSR politics that pays special attention to power relations, market culture, and market subjectivities, then a set of scholarly schools, following thinkers such as Gramsci (1995), Foucault (1990, 1995), and Giddens (2001), all recommend themselves. And, indeed, scholars influenced by those schools have been prolific in discussing CSR politics. Scholars influenced by Gramsci include Levy (2008), for scholars influenced by Foucault, see (1999). My focus here is first whether the global governance literature is the best lens for understanding these power flows in CSR politics, and secondly, whether the deliberation-focused, proto-legalistic, subset of that literature, which predominates in the CSR politics literature, is a particularly fruitful form of global governance thinking for the CSR literature to take.

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Lipschutz (2005) and Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes (2007), for the influence of Giddens see Luo (2006), and for post-colonial treatments of CSR see Banerjee (2008, 2010). All of these are fascinating works well worth thinking through.

There is a general trend that follows these treatments, however, which is that most of these works are fundamentally suspicious, even dismissive, of CSR. This makes some sense: those who follow the CSR discussion will have noticed how some CSR theory can take on an uncomfortably optimistic stance towards CSR’s transformative potential. CSR advocates can also have something of a sanguine blindness to how CSR advocacy can put a normative halo on smart win-win business decisions that, as Karnani points out, firms would likely have done anyway (2011). When we add this to how CSR’s legitimizing function in the eyes of the public could help forestall state regulation (Tone, 1997)\(^\text{12}\), we can see why scholars suspicious of business, and sensitive to power, are wary of CSR politics. I share many of these concerns myself, and as a result I think it best to adopt a relatively critical account of CSR politics, but one that takes into account when, and how, activists often drive the political agenda and secure real gains.

This dismissal of CSR by critical voices, however, creates a strange structural imbalance to the literature, as it mirrors CSR’s dismissal (especially in the past) by the establishment.

\(^{12}\) I respect the general thrust of this argument, but I would also point out that while there is a long history of firms compromising to reduce the pressure for regulatory reform (Tone, 1997; Sassen, 1998, 2006; Culpepper, 2010), in most of these cases there was no easy regulatory win at hand that was somehow discarded by activists. Reform and compromise within the market are often either social movements’ objective or a second-best outcome that is preferable to an alternative where no gains are secured at all (Tarrow, 1996; Tarrow and Tollefsen, 1994; Vogel, 2010). In any case, I leave the ultimate question of political strategy to agents “on the ground”.

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business audience. Those critics on the right argue that CSR is hopelessly naïve (Crook, 2005; Porter and Kramer, 2011; Sundaram and Inkpen, 2004), and misunderstands the fundamental division of labour between business and state government essential to good government (Freeland, 2010; Friedman, 1970; Porter and Kramer, 2011). Critics on the left say the exact same thing: that CSR is hopelessly naïve (Blowfield and Frynas, 2005; Shamir, 2005, 2008; Kuhn and Deetz, 2008; Hanlon, 2008; Fleming and Jones, 2013), and misunderstands the fundamental division of labour between business and state government they think essential to good governance (Ibid). That these are mirror images of one another is fascinating. Where these competing visions essentially disagree is in regards to whether or not CSR represents a challenge to business-as-usual; specifically regarding businesspeoples’ subjectivity as well as the profit orientation of the firm: those critics on the right argue that it is a substantive challenge (and that this is a bad thing)\textsuperscript{13}, while those critics on the left argue that it is generally not (and that this is a bad thing).

But what if that challenge is happening, but only ambivalently\textsuperscript{14} or partially? What if firms are being basically challenged (however paradoxically) to both stay the same (by retaining the market function and their profit-orientation) and to change (by taking normative concerns into account)? This seems evocative of much CSR advocacy, and I explore this

\textsuperscript{13} I should note that Karnani (2011) is nuanced on this question. His position is essentially that business’ cultural and subjective norms are challenged by CSR, but that this challenge is utopian and likely to fail.

\textsuperscript{14} I use the word “ambivalently” here not to denote a lack of interest or will, but a lack of authoritave, commanding, decision-making rationale. Moral, and business, imperatives can each be powerful and mutually conflicting, creating both a divided will as well as a decision-making rationale that cannot be confidently and clearly communicated. I explore this in more detail in chapter four.
dynamic in chapter four, arguing that CSR politics, in focusing on demanding subjective attention to both profit and prosociality, functions as a Derridean supplement, or a troubled discourse, riven by internal paradox, that addresses a larger intellectual incoherence (namely, how to demand and conceptualize business’ voluntary responses to society within a profit-seeking market). To the extent that this is true, then both camps are right, but of course that means that both are missing part of the puzzle. Meanwhile, the large centrist mainstream of the CSR politics literature, which is largely intrigued by the prospects of CSR, argues that the old division of labour between business and state government has been to some degree eliminated, and that businesspeoples’ norms (and the firm’s profit orientation) have to some degree been challenged (Doh and Guay, 2006; Matten and Moon, 2008; McWilliams and Siegal, 2003; Vogel, 2008). This majority reading seems mostly right. Unfortunately, this inquiry often lacks the careful analysis of power, and concern about marginalized stakeholders, which critical observers generally bring to bear.

There are a few relatively optimistic scholars working through critical theories in the business and society literature; for instance, see Crane, Knights, and Starkey (2008), Muhr and Loacker (2009), as well as Roberts (2003). But there are not enough. What this structural gap, of a general lack of critically trained-but-optimistic voices, creates is a specific lack of critical voices speaking to the issues that mainstream business audiences think is happening: that firms are somewhat successfully being lobbied to alter their shareholder-value mandates, and that firms are being asked to do something essentially impossible by combining their shareholder-profit-generating mandate with something more amorphously prosocial (Karnani, 2011). How are we to positively conceptualize, and normatively advise, regarding
these power flows, where activists are working to shape workplace mandates, workplace
cultures and the workplace subjectivities of businesspeople?

Instead of arguing that those ambivalent, awkward challenges to those “business as
usual” norms are insufficient, I hope to help conceptualize them in this dissertation so that we
can better speak to their positive functioning and normative possibilities. Critical theorists,
broadly defined, have had great success in recent years charting the abstract flow of power,
from powerful agents in society, such as the state or large firms, to weaker agents such as
everyday citizens. A consistent theme has been that power relations do not have to be
obvious, coercive and immediate to have effect (Dean, 2010a; Foucault, 2008; Giddens,
2001; Gramsci, 1995; Rose, 1999). Let us use critical theories, specifically those from
Foucault and Derrida, to chart the abstract flow of power by civil society activists governing
business in similar ways. The governance may be amorphous, ephemeral, and rarely entirely
satisfying, but that does not preclude it being meaningful and of significant possibilities.

1.2 A Governmentality Perspective: Theoretical Background and Key Concepts

1.2.1 What is the Governmentality Perspective?

Governmentality, a concept which links abstract visions of society and politics to
specific political practices, can help here. Governmentality analysis, which emerged from
Foucault’s consideration of liberalism and power in modern society, has been used to great
effect in political economy, political theory, and sociology to chart how liberal and neoliberal
understandings of government have shifted responses for welfare away from state intervention and towards more indirect and subtle modes of governance (Rose, 1999; Dean, 2010a). As a lens, governmentality links abstract ways of thinking about politics with choices of tangible political practices. At its most distilled, governmentality analysis helps focus our attention on how different ways of thinking about politics enable or foreclose the possibility of deploying certain political practices – governmentality thus seeks to complement authority-centric and institution-centric investigations of political phenomena with the equally crucial roles of political culture and political ideas in determining how we go about governance.

Past research in a variety of fields, including “governmentality studies” but also empirical political science, has found that both states and activists follow generally consistent thought patterns or “repertoires” for securing their agendas (Tilly, 2006), based on their perceptions of what has worked in the past (and why), as well as what is normatively acceptable (and why). For instance, a committed neoliberal might be less likely to consider partnering with a state institution than might someone else – less out of conscious ideological positioning than simply that the idea may not occur to her, or the idea might seem to be linked with certain predictable and unacceptable problems.

This analysis does not need to be abstract or draw from the realm of high politics. As an example, take the administrative question, familiar to teachers of every subject at every level, of how to improve participation in class. Even a matter as prosaic as this involves a host of linked questions. The teacher must consider options for encouragement, for punishment, and for effective (and publically defensible) measurement. The teacher must
follow departmental policy, or a departmental teaching philosophy, that might either suggest or limit options. The teacher will consider what has worked, or not worked, in the past. The teacher will consider the specific subject, level of study, and whether a specific given class is inclined, or disinclined, to participate in a given way. The teacher will consider why participation is even important, and will have to weigh benefits and costs. Will evaluations improve or suffer? Will the departmental administration have an opinion on any of this? Ultimately, all of this has to be thought through. All of this is subject to background ideas of efficacy, legitimacy, how administration “ought” to work, and how good teachers who are smart with their time achieve their best, most efficient, results. Moreover, many teachers will draw on set programmes of thought for how to teach – these expert accounts have already thought all these issues through, and will transmit similarly organized accounts of good conduct to those teachers seeking advice. We can thus see that certain background programmes of thought, some explicit and some more implicit, help structure administrative decision-making.

A governmentality analysis thus permits us to chart and question how certain CSR phenomena, especially at the level of certain institutionalized practices, reflect deeply embedded assumptions about what is valuable in society and what governance techniques function most effectively. In this way, governmentality is deeply complementary to institutional theory’s essential place in CSR politics scholarship\(^\text{15}\) (see, among others, Powell

\(^{15}\) If Scherer and Palazzo’s global governance and deliberative account of CSR politics is the most influential comprehensive account of CSR politics, the institutional theory CSR theory, developed by scholars such as mentioned here, is arguably the most influential middle-range positive theory in the literature.
and DiMaggio, 1991; Doh and Guay, 2006; Detomasi, 2008; Campbell, 2007; Matten and Moon, 2008; Suchman, 1995), and I would like to underline how these approaches work together so well. Both approaches are fascinated by the interplay of institutions and norms. Whereas institutional theory, speaking broadly, reflects on how institutions isomorphically change to better reflect background conditions, and thus reflects on how given situations come to be, governmentality analysis examines how institutions and norms form feedback loops, with ideas about governance initializing the looping process – here, ideas come first and drive change. Governmentality analysis thus resembles “new institutionalism” subfields such as “new governance” (Conley and Williams, 2007), “discursive institutionalism” (Schmidt, 2008), and the institutional logics literatures (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008), but with two added emphases: a) on how political logics reflexively question their own premises and then organically change over time, and b) how political logics often fail in their proposed administrative goals but succeed in prompting other, previously unforeseen changes, thus creating perplexing ideological blindspots (Biebricher and Vogelmann, 2012).

Governmentality has traditionally been used most effectively to interrogate various strains of liberalism, which all trade to varying degrees in political techniques that seek to shape economic life while still assuring the public formal freedom of individuals and firms (Rose, 1999). Attention to the strength of economic efficiency arguments, which demand formal freedom for firms, as well as to the ambivalent commitment of liberal states to communal welfare, helped governmentality scholars identify how states (and non-state actors as well) were achieving their agendas less through formal interventions, and more by shaping the formally free (and generally economic) choices of others to assure given outcomes (Dean,
2010a; Rose, 1999). For instance, see how the 1970s and 1980s saw a widespread shift in government social-services agencies suddenly using “empowerment” language, and less “aid” or “alleviation” language, thus highlighting citizens’ agency (and responsibility) to overcome their circumstances. Governmentality studies helps us see this as an attempt to rhetorically (and intellectually) ground poverty in the formal choices of citizens, and to recast government’s welfare-supporting responsibility as its having to help empower those citizens, and not as the responsibility to provide for them (see Dean, 2010a: pp. 19-21).

Governmentality studies’ informal slogan has thus become that liberal rule primarily works through “the conduct of conduct” (Dean, 2010a: p. 21). “The conduct of conduct” is the shaping of the decisions of others. Liberal politics, according to this view, is largely typified by vast formal choice, but relatively narrow substantive choice (substantive choices which are often narrowed by canny state and non-state governors). For liberal societies, according to liberal observers, this has two significant perceived benefits. First, the comparatively clumsy hand of centrally organized government is restricted\(^\text{16}\), while the local decision-making power of individuals and civil society is relatively maximized. Secondly, this arrangement reduces the humiliating direct compulsion of governance, thus minimizing resistance, smoothing governance, and maximizing the government’s ability to secure its agenda (Rose, 1996; Dean, 2010a).

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\(^{16}\) I am agnostic on this point. This is from a nominally ideal-typical liberal perspective.
1.2.2 Three Key Concepts for Governmentality Analysis

Prior to considering how governmentality analysis can help us understand CSR phenomena, there are three conceptual terms that we should define so that they can be employed without confusion. They are terms that are broadly deployed by governmentality inspired scholars, and they are organized in somewhat hierarchical fashion, from the micro-politics of practices to the higher-order politics of state (or other actor) agendas. These definitions are compiled by reference to Rose (1999: pp. 98-136) and Dean (2010a: pp. 66-69 and 270).

1. **Political Agenda**: An agenda is a relatively organized political vision for what a governing agent, institution, or organization wishes to secure. It will have taken into account sought-after political goals, how potentially incompatible goals should be prioritized, as well as an idea of the acceptable costs to securing those goals. Examples of political agendas could include state institutional programmes such as a drive to lower the rate of smoking, an NGO agenda such as Greenpeace’s campaign to limit deforestation, or an individual’s agenda to secure certain private interests.

2. **Political Rationality**: A political rationality is a relatively organized, historically specific, way of thinking about politics. Political rationalities are formed by the intersection of shared vocabulary, shared normative imagery, shared institutional knowledges, shared histories, and significant agreement about the efficacy and legitimacy of deploying a range of
political practices. Examples of political rationalities include the police state, the Christian pastorate, the egalitarian welfare state and neoliberalism. The term “political rationality” has a host of counterparts through the literature – it is roughly equivalent to “mentalities of rule”, “rationalities of rule” and “political logics”. It is also roughly equivalent to the term “governmentality”, as we could speak equally of “liberal governmentality” as well as “liberal political rationality”. I use “political rationality” to avoid the dual use of “governmentality” in the literature, which (more frequently) has “a governmentality” as a way of thinking about politics (ie. that there are many different historically specific governmentalities) as well as (less frequently) the specific usage of “governmentality” to effectively denote liberalism.

3. **Political Technology**: If a political rationality is a way of thinking about politics, a political technology is a way of doing politics. Technologies constitute the specific ways and means of accomplishing agendas. Political rationalities link agendas with technologies. Technologies include historically specific practices, as well as historically specific institutions such as calculations, trainings, and terms of art. Technologies are enabled or foreclosed by the political rationality deployed by a given agent in securing a given agenda. Examples of technologies might include practices such as encouraging speeches, exchanges over social media, or canvassing the vote. Examples of institutions as technologies would include standards-setting initiatives, new performance measurements, or standardized ways of reporting information.
1.3 Governmentality and CSR

CSR is a prime candidate for governmentality analysis (Spence and Rinaldi, 2012; Vallentin and Murillo, 2012). CSR fits perfectly within the expectation of finding, in a liberal context, the formal formulation of voluntary action amidst a wider setting of substantive compulsion – most firms’ changes in their responsiveness to society are in some sense responding to changes in their external environment (Matten and Moon, 2008; Gond, Kang and Moon, 2011). In keeping with the “critical dismissal of CSR” mentioned above, the majority of governmentality-inspired research of business and society has to date critiqued CSR as, effectively, a corporate-controlled and sanitized tool for legitimizing business activity (Hanlon, 2008; Shamir, 2008). Banerjee sees some hope for CSR, but argues it consistently defers to the neoliberal expectations of business (2008, 2010), while Lipschutz (2005) argues that the profit-imperative limits how effectively CSR can replace state-delivered regulation, thus making CSR a weakened version of what once existed. These views should give us all pause – if CSR is indeed corporate controlled and then limited by competitiveness considerations, then its possibilities are indeed quite narrow.

But what about the manifestations of CSR that challenge those expectations? We might agree that they are the minority of cases – that much of CSR focuses on easy problem-solving and cheery progressivism. But some CSR discourse is normatively rooted in sincere concern for others and deeply felt demands for change. Companies do not always control the framing of political engagements. Specifically, to use one of the conceptual terms above, companies do not always set the agenda. We should thus keep open the possibility that
activists can set the frame for political contestation, and that they can sometimes choose the political rationalities and technologies that they will deploy. I would argue that CSR phenomena where activists set the agenda have not yet been studied thus far using a governmentality approach\textsuperscript{17}, and thus in the spirit of Spence and Rinaldi (2012), Vallentin and Murillo (2012), and Vallentin (2013), this study looks to develop plural and comparative understandings of CSR politics through the study of new and different political rationalities. What political rationalities animate these politics?

\subsection*{1.3.1 CSR as Possible manifestation of “Social” Politics}

I would expect there to be many demanding formats for CSR politics where activists set the agenda – for example, some CSR politics might focus on environmental conservancy, other politics on welcoming new, previously marginalized, voices into managerial discussion to make for a more respectful corporate-community relationship, and others still on various other demands for business to change (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2008). This plurality of civil society politics suggests a plurality of different modes of engagement, and a wide array of normative frames deployed. The social theory literature, however, has consistently lamented the decline of a certain historically important type of advocacy and politics, as its decline has

\textsuperscript{17} In chapter one I discuss Vallentin’s comparative analysis of various Danish state CSR-encouragement programs. This research comes the closest to what I pursue here, but for various reasons we return different results. The two studies thus complement each other nicely, for reasons I elaborate upon there. I just wanted to note this possible exception early on.
made broad-based coalitional change particularly difficult (Baudrillard, 1983; Castel, 2003; Clarke, 2007; Dean, 2010a, 2010b; Rose, 1999). This nominally declining mode of advocacy has historically travelled under a variety of similar names. It has historically been called “the social” by Foucauldian-inspired social theorists such as Gilles Deleuze (1979), Jacques Donzelot (1979, 1984, 1988) and Giovanna Procacci (1993), as well as by the political theorist Hannah Arendt (1998 (1958))\(^\text{18}\). Governmentality theorist Mitchell Dean calls this mode of governance “social government” (Dean, 2010a: p. 146), Boltanski and Chiapello call it “the social critique” (2008), and to decenter the expectation that political agendas are necessarily set by states I use the broader term “social politics”. All of these terms generally refer to the same political concept: how certain economic phenomena are marked out as morally suspect due to their effect on wider society, and that moral failure is marked out as a target for public intervention.

Defining “the social” is challenging, as it is a famously ambiguous concept. Hayek called it “a weasel word” (1988; 116) and Margaret Thatcher argued against it as a category of thought, saying that “there is no such thing as society” (Dean, 2010a: 177). But we can see “the social” in how it appears and operates in determinate ways. “The social” conceptually emerges out of implicit contrast with the economic (and vice versa) (Dean, 2010b; Rose, 1999: pp. 102-103), with a particular emphasis on how the economic affects welfare, for either better or for worse: for example, the social ramifications of layoffs might include

\(^{18}\) A note on Arendt: my usage here draws from some of Hannah Arendt’s positive insights into “the social”, but I recognize that, normatively speaking, I depart considerably from Arendt’s view. I discuss this in better detail in a special note below.
predictable local increases in substance abuse and depression, and the social benefit of a housing development might be the linked refurbishment of a local public park. “The social” has, typically, referred to the public ramifications of private economic suffering: individual suffering that is pushed into public space often stimulates compassion and pity that force societies to rethink their suppositions (Donzelot; 1988; Procacci, 1993; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2008). This poses a problem within the liberal market: we, living under liberal conditions with no significant alternative to the market in sight, presumably want to retain the market system, with its formal freedoms, neutrality before the law, and individual property rights. These institutions help generate economic welfare we enjoy. But how can we justify to ourselves the systemic and predictable suffering that the market causes? At the foundational level of organizing principles, how can a polity be legitimate if it lets large numbers of people suffer – wouldn’t we want to choose another way of organizing ourselves?

19 I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Nedelsky for pointing out that the term “the social” is of course contested. “Social” It is also a word with a number of related but non-identical definitions, depending on the usage. The imagery of connectivity and iterative exchange, such as in “social media,” is not particularly important here. What is essential here is how a group of people (who this would be is also often contested) is publicly implicated in private suffering, and that certain public actors ask us to recognize our moral and economic interdependence. This composite account of “the social” is broadly representative of a large number of political and social theorists (see Baudrillard, 1983; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2008; Castel, 2003; Clarke, 2007; Donzelot, 1988; Dean, 2010a, 2010b; Procacci, 1993; Rose, 1999; Steinmetz, 1993).

20 The public’s focus on the social is usually centered on suffering, but as with the example of the park, the social can refer to positive descriptions of welfare as well.

21 I note here that I am largely agnostic on many of these issues. For what it is worth, I generally think that the liberal market is quite good at generating economic welfare, but that it is predictably imperfect at distributing that welfare and in preventing abuse of the marginalized. I see no preferable systemic alternative on offer, but am open to considerable reforms of the market and polity we happen to have.
Many societies, most notably the 20th century welfare states, have turned to a sort of ambivalent and attenuated collective solidarity to remedy the worst of an individualistic market’s effects, thus staking a middle road between “the image of social revolution on the one hand and the image of unfettered competition on the other” (Rose, 1999: p. 135). This attenuated solidarity historically manifested itself in social safety nets and the technology of social insurance, where states assured citizens that minimum levels of citizen welfare would be respected, and that everyone would be receiving benefits for which they had paid premiums, thus simultaneously obscuring and defending these policies’ redistributive effect (Donzelot, 1984, 1988; Procacci, 1993). These interventions were primarily palliative: social insurance, workplace compensation schemes, and social welfare policies such as public education or public housing do not guarantee the dignity of a job, nor do they undermine individual property rights or market contract relations. However, these interventions do signify a common bond of interdependence between citizens, as well as an assurance that in the case of the market’s vagaries, the worst of any suffering would be curtailed out of respect for that bond (Dean, 2010a, 2010b, Donzelot, 1984, 1988; Procacci, 1993; Rose, 1999).

“The social” thus always involves aspects of morality, but it is not interchangeable with the concepts of morality or “the common good” broadly speaking. “The social” pertains to our concern for welfare, and refers to our moral obligation to attend to that welfare. The social is thus only weakly related to broader aspects of morality that might refer to demands for freedom, attributions of disgust, perceptions of legitimacy, workplace alienation, or other moral questions that are not necessarily implicated in everyday understandings of economic welfare (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2008). For example, Boltanski and Chiapello (2008) note
that “social” sentiment, with its affinity for greater communal cohesion, can actually undermine other moral imperatives that want to emphasize greater individual autonomy and greater creative output. In their view, factory worker and creative industry worker likely perceive different predictable problems in the liberal market, each likely seek different remedies, and each likely use different arguments using different background ideas to frame their discussions. “Social” arguments are thus best suited to cases where moral arguments draw as clearly as possibly from observations of suffering. A secondary, generally weaker, form of “the social” draws from observations of antisociality that could be thematically linked to someone’s suffering, namely some sort of economic egotism or economic bullying (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2008; Dean, 2010a). In practice these two streams of social sentiment usually follow one another, but they do not necessarily have to.

While fundamental responsibility for welfare has traditionally rested with states, social sentiment’s call to solidarity has also historically manifested itself at the level of individual citizens and individual organizations, as citizens are asked to think of the common good and act accordingly (Rose, 1999: 120-121). This individual and organizational-level “social responsibility” has historically been particularly relevant in contexts where states were weak and unable to guarantee even minimum welfare, such as the early 20th century United States (Rose, 1999: 120-122). Restraint and care for others, especially in crisis situations, was demanded then as part of a good citizenship that, if followed, would lead to progress that would result in benefits to all (Dean, 2010a: pp. 61-75, 140-155). As part of the cultural change required to advance this pro-welfare (hereafter as “welfarist”) agenda, Individuals and organizations that historically resisted this pressure were censured as selfish
and irresponsible (Dean, 2010a: pp 61-75; Rose, 1999: pp. 133-136). In this way, normative expectations were placed on individuals and firms; not to fundamentally change market relations, nor to deny that firms are primarily intended to serve ownership, but to weave solidaristic, mutually beneficial, bonds on top of those market relations. The historical objective of these bonds was to make society, and the workplace, more responsive to suffering than they would be in a purely formal and individualistic arrangement.

Upon the pressure of the global competitive market and, especially, growing expectations of neoliberal competitive subjectivity in both individuals and firms (Binkley, 2009), this “social” critique, and “social” palliation, of market relations is said to be on the wane (Baudrillard, 1983; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2008; Rose, 1999). We see a similar expectation of neoliberal competitive subjectivity within CSR discourse so that business audiences might be better disposed to hear CSR proposals (Banerjee, 2007, 2010; Hamann and Acut, 2003). These calls for increased sensitivity to corporate realities have recently started becoming so powerful that Fleming and Edwards warn about the possible “end of CSR” (2013), as a CSR debate entirely devoid of criticality, founded entirely on competitive subjectivities and completely co-opted by corporate expectations, would obviate the need, purpose, and appeal of CSR in the first place.

According to the Foucauldian literature, the political rationality of “social liberalism” is now effectively irrelevant beyond isolated strongholds of solidarity discourse which act as residue of the past (Binkley, 2009; Clarke, 2007). Baudrillard (1983) and Rose (1999) say that the social is “dead”, while Dean (2010a, 2010b), is somewhat more hopeful of the state collective bond in the abstract, but agrees with them that the welfarist invocation of palliating
suffering is now largely irrelevant. I discuss these debates in more detail in chapter two. But wouldn’t it be interesting to find widespread use of this “social” thinking, about responsibility for welfare, in normative engagements today? Of particular interest would be normative demands that eschew the neoliberal expectation of competitive individualism, and instead demand that we recognize our socially embedded nature, and that we recognize some measure of interdependence (Dean, 2010a, 2010b; Davies, 2014). Specifically, neoliberalism (as opposed to the social liberalism of many egalitarian welfare states, as well as of “social” critique (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2008)) demands competitive individualism from people so that they would better secure their interests, and also makes the related meta-demand that we all agree with “methodological individualism”; namely that effective governance demands that all other people, outside of the family unit, are best understood as competitive individuals22 (Dean, 2010; Vallentin, 2013). Finding phenomena in CSR advocacy that pushes back against this narrative of social liberalism’s decline would be fascinating.

If CSR discourse often featured some of this “social” normative imagery, where businesspeople and nominally competitive organizations were asked to partially suspend their competitiveness and instead potentially care for others, this model of CSR would not be neoliberal, nor would it be a CSR completely captured by firms. It would be a way of thinking about CSR politics that asks firms to restrain themselves for the common good, and

22 The intense reflexivity of this sentence highlights the reflexivity of the content.
which retains the market system while demanding the ambivalent\textsuperscript{23} suspension of individualism (or firm profit-seeking) when necessary. As far as various critical models of CSR might go, this is fascinating for a variety of reasons. Firstly, this potential model of a critical CSR is promising because it seems plausibly consistent with extant CSR discourse – which I will expand upon in chapter one. Secondly, this model of governance happens to be rooted in a rich discursive and institutional history, upon which we could draw to both help reimagine CSR advocacy, as well as help institutionally innovate to solve stubborn and predictable problems. A glimpse of this rich discursive and institutional history can be seen in the Ludlow example with which we opened this extended introduction. It is fascinating how similar Ludlow and today’s examples happen to be: that clear rules for conduct remain elusive, and that suffering proves so inflammatory in particular cases despite society’s general apathy in others. Presumably we could learn from the political rationalities of those historical activists: sometimes we act today as if social movements and civil society campaigning are somehow new, but of course they are not.

To that end, it seems that it would potentially be worthwhile to start charting the critical strands in CSR politics - particularly those interested in cases which a) fit especially poorly with neoliberal expectations of competitive individualism or b) feature calls for restraint and/or a rejection of the competitive/egoist profit-motive for both firms and organizations. Those CSR politics might feature “social” politics, and possibly a “social

\textsuperscript{23} Ambivalent, here, is not intended to convey a lack of urgency. Rather, it conveys how there is no authoritative or satisfying answer to the question of whether or not these demands for solidarity actually violate the presumed profit mandate of firms, as any response to those demands would be at least potentially out of instrumental reasoning.
liberal” or “welfarist liberal” political rationality. I argue in this dissertation that they often do. A study of these politics in context might then help uncover the extent to which “social” politics exist in CSR, and the extent to which they can be drawn upon to construct new regulatory processes.

1.3.2 A Note About Hannah Arendt’s Reading of “The Social"

I should mention how this, essentially post-Foucauldian, reading of “the social” relates to Hannah Arendt’s famous reading of “the social”. They are generally in agreement in regards to the positive theory, and they are in strong disagreement in regards to normative questions. I ultimately favour the post-Foucauldian reading, for the reasons I lay out below, but we should take Arendt seriously on these points.

Positively speaking, Arendt’s account of “the social” in many ways strongly prefigures the Foucauldian one. The political theorist Linda Zerilli notes how Arendt avoids actually defining the social, and describes Arendt’s “social” realm as “a kind of enlarged ‘housekeeping’ where the public/private distinction is dissolved” (Zerilli, 2005: 2-3). This mirrors exactly the Foucauldian reading of how “the social” emerges when formerly private, generally economic, concerns become publically relevant. Arendt was particularly concerned about “the rise of the social” where our private needs (namely welfare) begin to be pursued through public life. Arendt believed that this had a number of largely negative normative effects. Firstly, she was concerned about the comparative rise of the political principle of
equality at the time (1998(1958): p. 41), which seemed potentially homogenizing. Secondly, Arendt argued that suffering prompted pity, which was problematic because it predictably resulted in calls for either generosity or vengeance – neither of which, she said, were ennobling (1998(1958); 2006(1963). Thirdly, Arendt highlighted the downwards spiral that social thinking placed on the reputations of political actors, as our focusing on our peers’ generosity (or lack thereof) instituted a litmus test of virtue – selflessness – that ultimately showed everyone a hypocrite. Finally, Arendt was also concerned that the “socialization” (1998(1958): 44) of politics would limit our ability to act freely in public, as social expectations work to compel “a certain type of behavior” (1998(1958): 40).

In all of these respects, Arendt found these effects to be threats to freedom. At their most concrete, the concerns here were that “the social question”, if allowed into mainstream politics, led either to passive acquiescence to the paternalistic welfare state (1998(1958): 40-44) or a mean-spirited vengeance reminiscent of the French Terror (2006(1963): pp. 78-80). In a more abstract sense, Arendt was concerned that the elegant freedom enabled by public plurality would be extinguished by the proliferation of means-ends instrumental thinking into public life (Zerilli, 2005; 3-5).

So Arendt is deeply critical of “the social”, and the question is thus why we might disagree. It is fascinating, of course, to see how tightly this account of means/ends instrumentality (and calls for virtue), leading to bureaucratic control, mirrors that of Foucault’s account of disciplinary institutions (Foucault, 1975). But we, ultimately, are not disciples of either Foucault or Arendt, but rather readers who wish to learn from them and then act in the world. The post-Foucauldians have no problem seeing in the welfare state both
a hyper-administrative and capricious institution of power as well as our collective aspiration for a better life typified by common cause and greater egalitarian welfare. Both readings have their insights, depending on the context at hand, and neither should be rejected out of hand. I think this type of cautious, subtle, plural stance would be a healthy one for us to adopt in considering the “social” politics of CSR. While we should learn from Arendt’s critiques of “the social”, we as readers do not necessarily share the normative framework motivating Arendt in her work. In fact, considering how idiosyncratic Arendt’s normative account happens to be, it is quite unlikely that many would share that normative standpoint without serious reservations. Arendt’s objective of securing an open, pluralist, public realm, wherein citizens could spontaneously demonstrate their free selves, is greatly appealing. This primary normative objective, however, comes at a cost: Arendt’s constant disparagement of our discussing necessity (be it bodily necessity or economic suffering) has earned her trenchant critiques from both the feminist (Pitkin, 1981, 1998; Honig, 1995; Dietz, 2002) and post-Marxist (Wellmer, 2001) literatures as unresponsive to the concerns of many people. As Zerilli puts it, an “ungenerous but not entirely inaccurate” (2005: 3) critique of Arendt would be that her efforts to purify the public realm of means/ends discussions purges her politics of “anything we could possibly recognize as political” (2005: 3). This seems indeed somewhat unfair, but it does illustrate the competing issues at play.

Zerilli’s preferred, more generous, reading, is that discussing how best to resolve “social” issues is presumably somewhat acceptable in politics for Arendt, but that we must be wary of importing the “instrumentalist” attitude into politics, such that public life is mere labour intended to secure our interests (2005: 3-4). A relatively gentle version of this, more
restrained, reading of Arendt seems potentially quite fruitful: while greater welfare and greater protection for the otherwise vulnerable is an entirely laudable political agenda to advance, at least in my mind, we should all be wary of the anti-political and anti-democratic impulses that these politics could enable.

1.4 Moving Forward

1.4.1 Chapter One

This dissertation features four main chapters. In chapter one, an extended case study, I explore the civil society response to the Tazreen and Rana Plaza factory tragedies of 2012/2013. These tragedies – a fire and building collapse, respectively – occurred in Bangladeshi garment factories that supplied major multinational clothing retailers including Loblaws, Walmart, Benetton and the Children’s Place (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). The resulting moral outrage in the Global North prompted a sustained shaming campaign against these firms as well as the development of two multi-stakeholder initiatives designed to improve worker safety in the Bangladeshi garment industry: the “Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety” and the “Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety”. Firms were thus, in some sense, being governed by civil society groups, and the result was a significant improvement in work conditions for hundreds of thousands of workers. My specific interest in this case study is in charting and exploring the historically specific ways of thinking about governing economic agents, or “political rationalities”, that were at play in these CSR politics, and then asking three questions. Firstly – what historically
specific political rationalities were taken up by activists in these politics, and how? Secondly, how have these rationalities been amended to fit new circumstances – do political practices and discursive deployments perfectly resemble past manifestations of those political rationalities? Thirdly, can we transfer insights from these successful campaigns to suggest how other civil society groups might benefit from deploying similar discourses and political practices?

Using both depth interviews and extensive secondary data collection, I find that civil society groups, rooted in labour movement concepts of interdependence, social obligation, exploitation, and solidarity, deployed a recognizably “social” politics, which demanded restraint from business and thus sought an ambivalence regarding the supremacy of the profit-motive. This social politics existed alongside other politics, more mainstream and better consistent with neoliberalism, which left untouched the competitive individualism of businesspeople and firms. I focus on isolating and understanding the more critical “social” politics, which has been amended from welfare state ideal-typical social politics to better fit a context (the Bangladeshi garment industry), where the state is a comparatively irrelevant actor (in the Bangladeshi case, this is due to both a lack of institutional capacity, as well as hostility to activists’ pro-labour agenda). Instead of resembling welfare-state welfarism, which sought to extend and improve state institutions or state law to palliate suffering and help mediate the conflict between labour and business, this contemporary politics isolated the discretion of wealthy multi-national firms as the locus of achievable change. To advance this change, activists sought to place public responsibility for worker welfare on highly branded retailers (and, to a lesser extent, on consumers).
This “social” politics thus historically resembles those progressive-era politics of early 20th century America, where industrialists were made somewhat responsible for the welfare of their employees, and where these politics often turned on questions of prosocial citizenship (Rose, 1999: pp. 120-121). In a globalized world of relatively weak (or uninterested) states, this focus on advocacy through civil society makes sense from an institutional perspective – if states are not liable to be helpful, advocacy has to look elsewhere. One significant difference from progressive-era politics, however, is that the most salient political relationship has been shifted from the employee-employer relationship to the branded firm-consumer relationship. I also find that activists seemed to reach for increasingly vivid and personal “social” criticisms when negotiations were floundering, and that while a clear causal relationship cannot be concluded, those particularly dramatic criticisms of firms seem to have had an important effect in bringing about firm compliance, suggesting a role for politics that publically challenge the subjectivity of businesspeople and the profit-orientation of firms.

1.4.2 Chapter Two

The case study in chapter one helps illustrate how many of the broad narratives at play in the literatures surrounding CSR politics are potentially problematic, and helps set up the following theoretical chapters, which consider how so-called “social” politics might help better theorize responses to corporate abuses. Chapter two engages the idea, prevalent in the Foucauldian governmentality literature, that the political imaginary of "the social" has fallen
into disuse and presumed irrelevance (Clarke, 2007; Dean, 2010a; Rose, 1999). By this thinking, public demands for organizations to be “responsible to society” have been replaced by more individualistic, less emancipatory, language, such as “responsiveness to community” or “being sustainable” (Dean 2010a; Rose, 1999). This new language is less helpful for activists interested in crafting broad-based coalitional support. The language of “society” discursively draws in a wider audience, carries connotations of class and solidarity, and has a long history of symbolic associations (particularly from the labour movement) upon which activists can draw. Moreover, the imagery of “society” helps underwrite a fundamentally different regulatory politics – specifically one that demands that economic actors demonstrate their good citizenship and recognition of mutual interdependence through occasional restraint that helps promote communal welfare.

But what if the “social”, in terms of imagery, isn’t “dead”, but rather the state (and only the state) has been curtailed, either in its capacity to promote welfare or in its interest to do so? What if social politics, instead of travelling through the agenda and institutions of the state, now increasingly features non-state actors with their own agendas? If this is the case, instead of focusing on restoring the state’s interest in welfare, new challenges to neoliberalism and powerful market actors might feature “social” politics, but might eschew the state form – something the large Foucauldian political economy literature has never really considered. Doesn’t the case study of chapter one suggest something like this is exactly what is going on in some contexts? There, we see “the social” is alive and well, just in significantly different form than previously explored in the Foucauldian literature. This chapter will argue that the governmentality literature has, to date, almost entirely focused on
analyzing changes in the delivery of state government agendas – and for whatever combination of reasons states are indeed deploying less “social” discourse and “social government” than they did in the past. Non-state actors, however, have their own agendas, and they are in fact deploying “social” imagery in ways to underwrite specifically “social” politics to promote those welfarist agendas (namely promoting different types of welfare). Discourses such as CSR and “corporate citizenship” are offered as examples of post-national social politics, advanced primarily by non-state actors with their own agendas, with important hybridizations between "social government" and neoliberal governance.

1.4.3 Chapter Three

While the previous chapter engaged the possible social government of corporations primarily on the level of discourse and imagery, and primarily within the Foucauldian theoretical literature, this chapter shifts the perspective to the more tangible CSR literature, and focuses on the level of regulatory practices. This chapter is much more interested in the actual politics “on the ground”. I argue here that the CSR movement has always waffled on the issue of whether or not activists should criticize market egoism or the shareholder-value theory of the firm, and that recent influential articles seem to suggest an increasing chill towards those who would “drive further the wedge between society and business” (Porter and Kramer, 2014) by criticizing firms’ profit-seeking. I show that efforts to downplay CSR’s criticality – especially regarding whether claimants should criticize the institutional profit-motive and businesspeople’s subjectivities – also works to delegitimize a key mode of CSR
politics: “social government” or “social politics”, which often works best through the targeting of subjectivities. Social politics has been an historically effective way of challenging organizations who fail to protect and promote welfare (Dean, 2010a; Rose, 1999). I suggest that CSR’s "social" dimension will primarily show itself, in economic discussions, in the censure of those perceived to be subjectively "antisocial" due to their neglect of our collective interdependence and our collective responsibility for the welfare of the weak. CSR thus regulates both antisocial behavior as well as antisocial subjectivities.

While these two regulatory objectives often overlap with each other, and tend to support one another, they are often best arrived at through different political rationalities that feature different governance practices. Because the regulation of subjectivities typically functions through different practices than the regulation of behaviors, each mode of governance requires different background resources. Because of this, for certain types of activist organizations or networks “social politics” should actually fit very well as a political rationality for strategic reasons. The wider governmentality and institutional theory literatures have independently found that the organizational costs of various activist practices are a key factor in determining which practices organizations should choose in order to pursue their politics. Neoliberal politics often work best through practices that demand considerable resources and which feature considerable costs. This places poorly resourced networks of claimants at an inordinate disadvantage, as they are compelled to adopt various neoliberal assumptions and operate in the context of a less favorable political rationality. “Social” politics, by contrast, can sometimes be pursued more frugally, as they often require
less institutional support. Keeping the criticism of economic subjectivities as an acceptable political practice thus helps certain marginalized groups assert their agendas.

1.4.4 Chapter Four

The final chapter examines the contestation of economic subjectivity as an essential, and unanswerable, question at the heart of the notion of corporate social responsibility. It uses Derrida’s notion of supplementarity, where troubled terms emerge to speak to problematic situations, as a lens to examine the eternal debate regarding whether CSR is a coherent and useful discourse. I suggest that CSR’s usefulness stems from an essential ambivalence that critics mistake for incoherence. Critics from both the left and right often critique CSR for being either surreptitious socialism, on the one hand, or the thoroughly neoliberal tool of cynical business interests, on the other. Of course, these charges are mirror images of one another. Both charges stem from observations about how CSR refuses to authoritatively answer the question as to whether market agents must restrain themselves. Similarly, CSR evades the question of whether for-profit firms are just and proper institutions. CSR demands prosociality at the same time that it also retains the market form and demands market success. Derrida’s work on supplements shows that we often create uncertain meanings out of irresolvable double-negatives to temporarily address conceptual problems. I argue that CSR is one such supplement – it demands both general profit-seeking and the possibility of beneficence to create the vocabulary that serves both activists and firms: CSR permits firms to articulate the need to both “do well” and “do good”, and permits
activists to demand the same. CSR thus works functionally much better than it does conceptually, as it lets both activists and businesspeople articulate how firms should aspire to prosociality while still retaining the market system (and its general shareholder-value mandate). Conceptually retaining both elements, however, is necessary to prevent the concept from falling apart and becoming unhelpful to both activists and their business counterparts.

In a sense, this last chapter, though it draws from Derrida while the prior three draw primarily from Foucault, contains the simplest and deepest distillation of this dissertation. I agree that CSR is unsatisfying. CSR is frequently co-opted. To minds who seek out certainty and order, CSR conspicuously gives little guidance for determining exactly what might or might not be normatively required in a given situation. Moreover, CSR is indeed but a pale imitation of effective state regulation. All of these charges are true. But CSR also exists for a functional reason – we need a discourse through which to articulate the normative responsibilities of businesses beyond the law. CSR fills this role. It is evasive and unsettling in this role, but this is because most audiences want elements of two extremes that cannot be easily reconciled: most audiences want a market system of generally shareholder-value-maximizing firms, and most audiences also want some sense of prosociality from those firms. How exactly to talk about, and then how exactly to go about best achieving, this balance between general egoism and limited benevolence is the question. I wish activists pushing for greater state regulation of the economy all the success in the world, but in the meantime I find it fascinating that we’ve completely forgotten that this inherent tension, between the liberal market system of self-interested firms and the predictable problems
caused by that system, is hundreds of years old. What is comparatively new is the sense that the welfare state is increasingly unable to palliate those problems. So wouldn’t we ask ourselves what worked, however imperfectly, in past pushes for greater corporate accountability to stakeholders, and see if lessons from then could be amended to inform our speculation today?

For instance, one activist truism, one hundred years ago, was to publically tie ownership to the policies of management that caused suffering to workers, thus putting a wealthy face to the problem and isolating business’ discretion as the source of any normative crisis (Alinsky, 2010 (1971)), Sinclair, 1919). The managerial truism, vice versa, was to distance ownership from the normative errors of management, to frame those errors as essentially cognitive and inadvertent, and to then rehabilitate ownership’s public persona through charitable works and workplace benevolence (Whitaker, 1977; Marens, 2012, 2013). Today, the mainstream business and society literature increasingly declines both truisms as slightly gauche, saying that real lasting change comes through collaborative business-NGO partnerships (Dieglmeier, 2011), that public benevolence and public accusations of ruthlessness are at best first steps to more structural change (Visser, 2011; Zadek, 2004), and that ownership’s public persona should be irrelevant (Porter and Kramer, 2011). But there is a cost to the business and society interface in our marginalizing these sorts of practices. CSR, if purified of its criticality to suit business, will simply stop being an effective avenue through which NGOs can pursue their agendas. That would be a shame to those NGOs and the people they represent. But it would also represent, down the line, a shame to many market actors. After all, if the discourses of nominally-voluntary firm reactions to society are
abandoned by the more credible civil society groups, due to how they have been purged of any ability to truly challenge businesses, exactly how will those social energies and political agendas be pursued? Presumably not through nominally-voluntary means. CSR exists, and has existed, in its ambiguous and ambivalent fashion for almost 100 years because it fulfills a specific discursive function at the intersection of business and society. It lets society ask for something, and lets firms display something, that ought to be impossible: the benevolent, gentle, firm.
2. Chapter One - Corporate Social Responsibility and the “Social” Critique Following the Bangladeshi Factory Tragedies of 2012/2013

No words can describe the horror of the criminal action of the manufacturers, brands, employers’ groups BGMEA and BKMEA, and the regulatory authorities for their greed for profit, at the cost of precious human lives, injuries and misery to thousands. Roy Ramesh of IndustriALL Global Union, speaking at Rana Plaza, Dhaka, Bangladesh, April 26 2013. (IndustriALL, 2013a).

Three weeks after a building collapse in Bangladesh that killed more than 1,100 workers, several of the world’s largest apparel companies – including the retailing giant H&M and Inditex, owner of the Zara chain — agreed on Monday to sign a far-reaching and legally binding plan that requires retailers to help finance fire safety and building improvements in the factories they use in Bangladesh. New York Times, May 13, 2013. (Greenhouse, 2013)

On November 24 2012, a fire broke out in the Tazreen Fashion factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The trapped workers found that the fire exits were deficient and that the windows had been barred to prevent theft. 112 people died. The factory had been producing clothes for global retailers, including Wal-Mart and Sears, and had been the subject of prior safety concerns (Yardley, 2012). Five months later, on April 24 2013, as industry officials struggled with a response to the Tazreen tragedy, the Rana Plaza factory, also in Dhaka, collapsed. The building was structurally inadequate, had been poorly inspected, and managers had disregarded employee complaints about visible cracks in the concrete walls. More than 1100 people died in this second accident; the official death toll stands at 1129 but controversy remains and the exact toll will likely never be known for sure (Burke, 2013). The
resulting worldwide furor was intense; criticism in the developed world came from trade
unions (IndustriALL, 2013a, 2013b; UNI Global Union, 2013), non-governmental
organizations (NGOs) such as the Clean Clothes Campaign and the War on Want (Clean
Clothes Campaign, 2013a; War on Want, 2013a), various national governments including the
American government (Mozena, 2013), from the media (New York Times, 2013; Toronto
Star, 2013), and from religious leaders including Pope Francis (Buenos Aires Herald, 2013).
The effect was to put the garment industry under siege by politicizing the issue of
Bangladeshi factory safety, and to press for change through that political pressure. To
scholars of social movements (Della Porta and Diani, 2009; Soule and Olzak, 2004), human
rights campaigns (Kobrin, 2009; Levy, 2008), and “Political CSR”, where attributions of
corporate responsibility are seen to take on political dimensions (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007,
2011; Whelan, 2012), this would be unsurprising. It should be similarly unsurprising that
much of this political advocacy traded in the language of “corporate social responsibility”. In
the aftermath of a tragedy such as this, we would expect companies to be held to account.

What was somewhat surprising, however, was the specific political language and
practices used by these actors to frame and pursue this advocacy. NGOs mounted sustained
shaming campaigns that saw firms criticized by thousands of activists, some on the internet
but others in traditional activist protests, as “greed(y)” (Cyran, 2013; Eidelson, 2012),
“exploitative” (Oxfam, 2013), excessively interested in “profits” (ILRF and USAS, 2013)
and “unjust” (Chen, 2013; Paquet, 2013). This forceful, generally negative-in-tone, and often
quite personal advocacy followed a pattern that is, in the business and society literature,
increasingly considered out of vogue and divisive (Dieglmeier, 2013; Porter and Kramer,
2011, 2014). It was also seemingly quite successful, raising questions as to why the literature often downplays this type of advocacy in favour of partnerships and collaboration (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Bondaroff, 2014). There is relatively little major business and society theory that can help us understand this advocacy and why it took this guise, beyond as emotional activism to be rationally transcended (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007), or perhaps as attention-seeking opportunism in a case where the public is suddenly paying attention due to a crisis (King and McDonnell, 2012). This presents a problem, because while these suppositions might be true in some sense, neither really considers the advocacy on its own terms, or why this advocacy is so personal and emotional while other advocacy, following other crises, is not: what function does this emotional content, and this disruptive ad hominem advocacy, play that might explain why this case featured so much of it? In sum, we lack sufficient positive theory to meaningfully understand the politics of major CSR crises.

This case study charts how, in the developed world, the politicization of sourcing from Bangladesh worked simultaneously through two usually complementary, but sometimes competing, ways of thinking politically about economic suffering. The first was a less moralized, less personal, advocacy focused on making for-profit companies recognize that consumers were angry at their behaviour, and that companies had to respond or else society would censure them. This politics left open the possibility that company errors were largely cognitive and not indicative of deep moral crisis. The second, more critical, mode of advocacy cast this as a tragedy borne of individual and collective moral failure: specifically, the subjectivity of individual businesspeople at wealthy garment retailers was identified as
antisocially self-interested, and those retailers were identified as antisocially self-interested organizations.

This chapter then isolates and analyzes the more critical, more personal, strand of thought as currently underexplored in the business and society literature and of potential use in better understanding critical CSR politics. It does this through an in-depth case study of the discourse and political practices deployed, in the Global North, to advocate for improved factory safety in the Bangladeshi supply chains of Global North retailers. This case study, which includes depth interviews with both civil society leaders as well as members of industry who engage those advocates, captures some of the vocabulary and reasoning behind a civil society-based regulatory movement that resulted in hundreds of newly compliant firms and a pair of multi-stakeholder frameworks that should significantly improve factory safety in thousands of factories for hundreds of thousands of workers (IndustriALL, 2013b, 2013d; CBC, 2013b).

In the maelstrom of anger and frustration prompted by Tazreen and Rana Plaza, we saw firms buffeted by calls for change. But what were they asked to change? Two things. Retailers were asked to change their buying behaviors, which was to be expected, but companies were also asked to change who they were: firms were publically challenged regarding their values and how far their commitment to shareholder value might override moral imperatives. At the least, firms and their employees were asked to demonstrate their values and appropriately conflicted interior emotional lives; that they were essentially good organizations staffed by good people, all wrestling with the tough question of what to do.
In other words, the Bangladesh Factory tragedies brought out the overt politicization of economic subjectivities, and problematized whether firms and businesspeople were acceptably moral on the level of their inner personal and organizational lives. In a business and society literature where critical scholars are increasingly concerned by the increasing “economization” of CSR (Gond, Kang, and Moon, 2011; Shamir, 2008; Ungericht and Hirt, 2011), where the demands of business audiences force the alignment of CSR activities with instrumental firm strategy, and the marginalization of demands that cannot be so aligned, these politics stand apart. They stand apart by explicitly dismissing “business-case” arguments (see, Karnani, 2011; Porter and Kramer, 2006, 2011, and critically, Carroll and Shabana, 2010), about the limits of what reasonable CSR campaigners can ask for.

These critical politics did this by casting Rana Plaza as first and foremost a moral issue, where suffering was being caused not because of cognitive or institutional failings (although those were acknowledged to be significant), but rather because businesspeople and firms, who had the discretion to act differently, refused to do so because of their subjective (and in the case of the firm, cultural) antisociality. Businesspeoples’ workplace subjectivities, as well as the corporate cultures of firms, were thus identified as morally salient: activists argued that Rana Plaza and Tazreen were caused by “ruthless” (Chen, 2013; Al Jazeera English, 2013) firms made up of “pitiless” (Firstpost, 2013) executives, just going about business as usual. Notice how much more disruptive these subjectivity-centric politics are than the behaviour-centric politics: suddenly, the mandate of for-profit firms, as well as the idea that businesspeople should follow the dictates of their employers, are both implicitly challenged.
In this way, these responses to the Bangladesh factory tragedies are a “polar case” (Eisenhardt, 1989), which show the continuing relevance of a old strain of CSR politics that challenges convenient “win-win” (Banerjee, 2010; Fleming and Jones, 2013) interpretations of what constitutes responsible business, and which can thus help build theory about various forms that critical CSR politics might take. This theory could help activists in their advocacy, as well as members of industry in their engagements with stakeholders, through better understanding of their shared political environment. Moreover, this strain of CSR politics seems to exist in less high-profile form throughout much of the business and society interface, is strategically meaningful to firms, and can help normatively ground CSR in a politics critical enough to retain credibility in the eyes of activists and stakeholders.

So how can we pick apart the two modes of governance mentioned above; the emotionally urgent but comparatively uncritical politics focused on certain unacceptable behaviors, and the more critical politics focused on anti-social subjectivities? The post-Foucauldian “governmentality” literature makes a lot of sense as a lens here. Governmentality studies, which charts the evolution of historically specific ways of thinking about governance and the effect that political ideas have on tangible political practices, has recently emerged as an influential perspective on CSR politics (Banerjee, 2007; Lipschutz, 2005; Shamir, 2008). However, with only a few exceptions (Spence and Rinaldi, 2012; Vallentin and Murillo, 2012; Vallentin, 2013), governmentality-inspired research has consistently critiqued CSR as little more than neoliberal window dressing – a pale imitation of real state regulation, bought and co-opted by the firms that draw up the policies ((Banerjee, 2007; Lipschutz, 2005; Shamir, 2008). There is a lot of credibility to this view:
CSR often takes that shape, and seems to be increasingly purging its critical substance, as the business and society interface becomes more and more committed to competitiveness and efficiency arguments for corporate responsibility over more normative alternatives (Banerjee, 2013; Blowfield and Frynas, 2005; Fleming and Jones, 2013; Hanlon, 2008; Kuhn and Deetz, 2008). Moreover, we should note that even the relative optimists such as Murillo, Rinaldi, Spence and Vallentin have yet to articulate exactly how CSR discourse could challenge neoliberal expectations of competitive individualism and economic reasoning dominating the public discussion of how to organize the interface of business and society.\footnote{I should note that Vallentin (2013) does discuss some fascinating politics that might be a challenge to neoliberalism, but exactly how much of a challenge they constitute is unclear. I discuss this question below in the results section of this chapter.}

But there is an old and deep regulatory tradition within broader egalitarian left-liberalism that nobody has ever applied as a lens to understand CSR phenomena, and it is far more critical and potentially challenging to business than the convenient “competitive agenda” (Fleming and Hanlon, 2009) or “win-win” (Banerjee, 2007, 2010; Blowfield and Frynas, 2005; Hanlon, 2008) CSR politics that are typically deployed by either national governments interested in fostering economic growth or firms interested in proactively managing their political exposure. Governmentality analysis is well aware of this regulatory tradition. In fact, it has been searching for any contemporary manifestations of this tradition for 15 fruitless years.
2.0.1 Can CSR Politics Be “Social” Politics?

The old and deep regulatory tradition that I am referring to is known to the the Arendtian and Foucauldian traditions as either “the social”\(^\text{25}\) (Arendt, 1998(58); Rose, 1999; Dean, 2010a)\(^\text{26}\) or “social government” (Dean, 2010a, 2010b). To signal how governance may not necessarily flow from state authority or state institutions, I use the somewhat less freighted “social politics”.

“Social politics” has historically revolved around the public relevance of private suffering. According to both Arendt and the Foucauldians, “the social” emerges at the intersection of economic suffering and economic success, where private economic problems emerge into public view and become public (and thus political\(^\text{27}\)) issues of right and wrong (Dean, 2010a, 2010b; Donzelot, 1984, 1998; Procacci, 1993; Rose, 1999). Social politics thus politicizes what was formerly private, makes economic suffering a moral issue of public salience, and makes wider society ask itself who should be held responsible for economic suffering. That this happens is not axiomatic: plenty of economic systems, featuring plenty of

\(^{25}\) I define “the social” and “social politics” in the introduction (pp. 36-39), as well as in chapter two. One way of defining “the social” would be that “the social” conceptually emerges out of implicit contrast with the economic (and vice versa) (Dean, 2010b; Rose, 1999: pp. 102-103), with a particular emphasis on how the economic affects welfare, for either better or for worse. For example, the social ramifications of a factory closure might include predictable local increases in substance, and the social benefit of a condo tower might be greater funding for a local library. “The social” thus denotes a mode of moral sentiment related to our collective responsibility to attend to economic suffering. (Donzelot; 1988; Procacci, 1993; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2008).

\(^{26}\) A note about Arendt’s critical use of the term (1998(58): pp. 38-46). I admire Arendt’s groundbreaking positive theory on “the social”, but I take a very different normative view, as I am primarily interested, normatively speaking, in reducing economic suffering. I discuss these issues in more detail in the extended introduction.

\(^{27}\) As a supplementary note regarding Arendt’s possible influence on these issues, please note that my use of “political” here is intended in a general fashion, and not in an Arendtian fashion.
suffering, have not been particularly challenged by questions of moral propriety – we might take slavery’s historical existence in many countries as an example of this. So a key question for any emergence of “social” politics is whether economic suffering can be described as a moral violation of some sort: grinding structural poverty, without easy solution or clear abuser, is generally seen as less politically salient than suffering that is caused by a discernible agent (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2008; Goodin, 1987, 1988). There are many possible ways that this attribution of moral responsibility could unfold: for instance, social theorists have often noted that the poor themselves are often blamed for their conditions, most often due to their supposed laziness (Dean, 2010a: 82-88; Procacci, 1993). If this happens, moral sentiment in support of those who are suffering can easily dissipate.

But during the 19th and 20th centuries, especially in liberal democracies, egalitarian-minded groups often grounded their “social” politics in a certain image of association and public virtue (Amoore and Langley, 2004; Dean, 2010a, 2010b; Scholte, 2007), where citizens banded together to protect one another out of a common bond. This image of what binds citizens together, such that they might transform their interests towards the benefit of the collective, was generally assumed to be the nation-state, although class was another key unifying distinction, at least in some cases (Stjerno, 2005). This idea of “society” grounded the idea of a common debt that we all share as members of this group, due to our interdependence – that our wealth, security, and well being come from the opportunities of being in this group, and as such, we must work to support the common good (Donzelot, 1988, Stjerno, 2005: 1-24). Acting to support the group, and to recognize this interdependence, thus creates a duty (and privilege) to solidarity. It is thus possible to
conceptualize of social “violation” as the violation of the duty to support one’s fellow members of society out of this solidarity. This duty to solidarity is generally contested, and has historically manifested itself in a variety of ways, but the generally normative grounds of a) the nation-state or b) some sense of shared class, have historically been essential (Ibid).

Which leads us to the problem: globalization has, at least to a certain extent, undermined those normative grounds of the nation-state and traditional class consciousness (Dean, 2010a, 2010b; Rose, 1999; Stjerno, 2005), thus undermining the sense of normative violation, and then thus undermining the “social” politics themselves. If people do not think that, for instance, Bangladeshi workers are members of their normative group (whatever that may be), then a robust normative sense of violation is unlikely (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, 1997), making for an anemic response. Governmentality theorists have argued that, because of this, that the “the social” is on the decline to the point of possible irrelevance: that public responses to private suffering are either going to happen less often, as suffering will be less morally salient, or that any public sentiment will be so different as to no longer meaningfully resemble formerly “social” politics. Rose believes the former: that public sentiment has been eroded, and politics are now much more individualistic (Rose, 1999: 100-136). Dean believes the latter: that we are still bound together, and our private lives are no less publically relevant than before, but he believes our concern for suffering and sentimental support for one another are on the wane: that perhaps now “social” politics are fundamentally post-welfarist regime of the social (Dean, 2010a: 202).

But these narratives seem problematic in understanding the heavily critical, moralizing politics of Rana Plaza. Don’t these politics seem, on first view, to deem the private suffering
of Bangladeshi garment workers to be of public salience in the Global North? Don’t these politics seem to care for their welfare of those workers and condemn members of the garment industry for some sort of moral violation that caused this suffering? But we can also immediately see how this subject matter fits awkwardly with the standard governmentality analyses formed out of analysis of 20th century nation-states: Bangladeshi workers are not clear members of the same class or nation-state of the consumers and activists from the Global North. The grounds of the normative in-grouping, and thus the moral bond, are clearly different here. So how can we understand these politics? Are they social after all? A research question emerges out of this puzzle – does “social” politics exist in the CSR politics of Bangladeshi factory safety, is it effective, is it significantly different than past manifestations of “the social”, and what implications might that have for theorizing CSR’s more critical, more moralizing, strands?

The central argument of this case study is that the politics of CSR in regards to Bangladeshi factory safety made (and continues to make) heavy and seemingly effective use of the “social” critique, that this politics seemed to be extremely successful in bringing about significant change, and that this is a polar case that can help illustrate and unfold critical strains of thought running throughout much of CSR politics that have been insufficiently explored. Right alongside a thoroughly neoliberal and mainstream politics that assumes firms’ self-interest and hopes to create change by communicating consumers’ anger, so that firms will feel pressure to change their organizational strategy in light of new information, runs a more critical CSR politics. This “social” politics condemns exploitation and greed, demands ambivalence and restraint regarding the pure profit-motive, and challenges firms to
temporarily sacrifice financial return in service of communal progress and the common good – with a larger financial penalty waiting in the wings for laggards. I do not claim that all critical CSR politics takes this “social” form, as many sources of normativity exist that inform many disparate critical CSR practices. Rather, I claim that this is a significant and underexplored mode of CSR’s criticality. This “social” politics is irreconcilable with most understandings of neoliberalism (and mainstream business audiences) due to its language of restraint, exploitation, and greed, and fits awkwardly with the current thrust of mainstream business and society literature, which focuses on growth, dialogue, and mutually beneficial problem-solving (Fleming and Jones, 2013).

Seeing post-Rana Plaza CSR politics as “social critique” of the status quo can hopefully thus help excavate the more critical lines of thought that have always been part of the CSR conversation, yet which have lately been somewhat set aside as old-fashioned and divisive by both scholars (Deiglmeier, 2013, Porter and Kramer, 2011, 2014; Sundarem and Inkpen, 2004), and the business and society consultancy industry. Laasonen, Fougère, and Kourala (2012) argue persuasively that the recent literature has, for whatever reason, overwhelmingly theorized conflict and ad hominem moral criticisms as regrettable temporary stages in forward-moving progress towards collaborative firm-NGO partnerships, and that this suppresses the possibility that this sort of adversarial, fraught politics (and possibility thereof) might be essential to much of business’ compliance with civil society’s demands.

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28 Please see footnote one in chapter one (p. 9) for an overview of how consultancies are now moving away from CSR language towards discursive alternatives such as “shared value”, largely out of concerns for sounding too critical.
Perhaps setting these politics as, at best, a temporary and regrettable stage in a movement towards truly-meaningful collaboration was a mistake. If an old way of doing things - namely, a mode of CSR politics based on firm accountability to stakeholder demands, which challenges economic subjectivities, urges temporary restraint, and which thus leaves open the issue corporate profit-seeking – helps both activists and firms navigate an iconic disaster such as Rana Plaza, perhaps it should be retained and investigated to see what it can contribute to a broader, more critical, understanding of CSR and CSR politics.

This case study has three subsequent sections. In the first section, I introduce my methodology, where I lay out the procedures I followed for the case study here. The second section is the case study results, where I lay out the findings, and use them to generate a number of themes – some of them intuitive but some less so – which firmly situate the post-Rana Plaza politics of CSR within a “social” tradition of regulation. I argue that this is a strong “polar case” of “social” political CSR, albeit one where “social” politics is importantly different due the globalized context without standard nation-state communal frames. I then compare these findings with other rationalities of government found in CSR and elsewhere. Building on these findings, in my discussion section I argue that this is a rich political rationality, or way of thinking about politics, that could help us understand and revitalize CSR’s critical strands. In effect, if the politics of Bangladeshi factory safety is a “polar case” of “social” CSR, understanding it can help us understand and hopefully promote the criticality and sociality already embedded in the wider CSR movement.
2.1 Method and Context of the Case Study

2.1.1 Method Selection

The task presented here is to better understand the politics of CSR, particularly in those cases that seem to be critical in ways that challenge mainstream business’ self-conception; cases that feature claims of “greed”, calls for restraint, and a problematization of employee and firm-level subjectivities. This research seeks to do so through the analysis of political rationalities: how are these activists thinking about politics? What is the intended target of advocacy? What is being problematized, and how? What practices are being pursued, and how? And as a follow-up to all of these questions, why? All of these questions point to the interior thinking and lived experiences of activists, as well as a linked but conceptually secondary interest in the thinking and experience of members of targeted companies, as understanding governance arrangements involves an understanding of those being challenged. For these reasons, particularly given the prevalence of “how” and “why” questions being asked, a phenomenological approach is most appropriate, thus recommending a qualitative approach to data collection and research (Merriam, 2009; Prasad, 2005).

Qualitative research recommends itself in this case because of its emphasis on the consciousness of agents, and the ways in which ideas are inevitably lived through a first-person point of view (Prasad, 2005). Speaking to people directly, and hearing their own views on why CSR politics are the way they are, is essential for understanding the CSR
phenomena, especially given that efforts here will be made to link this CSR advocacy to historically specific modes of enacting governance. Agents’ private and subjective interior views on the phenomena must be understood to properly situate the analysis. We thus need to understand the “meaning, structure, and essence” (Patton, 2002; 104) of agents’ subjective understanding of their CSR advocacy. I thus chose to conduct depth interviews with activists, as well as a smaller number of members of industry who engaged directly with these activists. In doing this, I was able to develop insight into the “social politics” that were being deployed to secure greater CSR, and especially insight into how activists and, to a lesser degree, targeted members of industry, understood the political thinking at play.

This investigation, however, is not primarily structured around understanding individual views and experiences, nor the individual subjective views of participants. That is a part of the research and analysis, but it cannot be the entirety of it: political rationalities act on subjectivities and are reflected upon by individuals, but politics also (even primarily) occurs out in the world in intersubjective space. Work on institutional logics (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008) and governmentality (Dean, 2010a) teaches us that our uses of political ideas and rationalities can often be almost unconscious as well; agents may be unaware of the full range of allusions and impressions that a deployed discourse might evoke in the wider public. In addition, power is often said to be most efficiently deployed when it structures spaces to shape outcomes with a minimum of awareness on the part of the governed when it happens (Lukes, 2005; Nealon, 2009). So the challenge of understanding CSR as a site of dynamic political rationalities, each recommending various political technologies or specific practices, is to capture both the subjective experience as well as the intersubjective performance and
public propagation of those political ideas (Rose; 1999; Dean, 2010). This required the
collection and analysis of a wide variety of secondary documents, to understand the
deployment of various rationalities in specific contexts, including press releases, web pages,
news reports, facebook updates, and even youtube videos. It also suggested the use of
participant observation if at all possible, which it was in this case, to see how agents go about
consolidating support and then pressing for change – what rationalities and ideas do agents
draw upon to frame their politics, and how do they go about doing so? What is the public
performance being intersubjectively enacted by each of these agents? These observations
helped stimulate ideas about what might be happening in various situations, and while are not
the primary material considered in the case study, they were valuable in initially assessing
the advocacy and how different constituencies talked about CSR politics.

The wide variety of prospective sources, and the need to draw all these perspectives
together into a relatively coherent singular study, suggests the use here of a case study
approach. Case studies are most effective when used to show the depth and richness of data
on a certain issue, especially when research features mixed methods as in this study (Yin,
2003). There is of course a certain trade-off, as with the selection of any given method: the
research questions here, regarding what rationalities of rule were deployed to advance CSR
in the context of the Bangladesh fires, and what that means for CSR politics more generally,
demand rich and deep investigation. This case study accomplishes this, and helps build
theory and insight out of its findings. The inevitable trade-off comes in regards to how this
study focuses on one case, and reasonable researchers may ask if an alternate format,
considering multiple cases in lighter depth, or less-phenomenological approaches, could have
secured broader findings. In my opinion, the purchase of broader findings here would have come at the expense of the richness of the case, and the contribution of this research is less a claim of generalizability, than an illustration of a phenomena that is currently underexplored through the use of an extreme or polar case that helps us build theory about that phenomena, as per Eisenhardt (1989, p. 537) Pettigrew (1988) and Yin (2003). That theory can help us build an understanding of the extent to which the observations are transferable to other contexts (Eisenhardt, 1989)). In this sense, this case is primarily illustrative (Yin, 2003), with a contribution in that social politics, a major category and theme of contemporary social theory, is alive, well, and underexplored in CSR politics. That said, this study also hopes to be somewhat explanatory (Yin, 2003) as well – it hopes to explain why Rana Plaza was such a rich example of “social politics,” and to suggest what that means for a wider range of CSR contexts.

2.1.2 Research Site

This study selected its case in a purposive manner, with “theoretical” sampling (Glaser and Straus, 1967), where the objective is to extend theory by exploring CSR in conditions that are structurally likely to feature “social politics”. As Pettigrew (1988) noted, given that most phenomena is actually quite challenging to capture in a deep, rich, and convincing fashion, it can be advisable to actively choose cases where themes most observable - what Eisenhardt calls “polar” or “extreme” cases (1989). The objective is not to claim that extreme cases are representative of general conditions, but to explore why the
phenomena manifested itself the way that it did in this context, in such a way to build theory that could be tested or explored in the future.

With this in mind, the case of CSR advocacy, for improved factory safety in the Bangladeshi garment industry, was selected for two reasons. Firstly, the case study research was originally undertaken in June 2013, just following the Rana Plaza disaster and the beginnings of the Accord and Alliance movements to improve factory safety. The cleanup was still ongoing, the Accord and Alliance each had their first few members, and the results of the CSR advocacy were still in flux – would the weaker Alliance cannibalize support for the Accord? Would either movement reach a critical mass? Would consumers or civil society groups lose interest? These outcomes were unclear. What was clear was that this would be a major story in CSR activism, perhaps the single most significant CSR issue of the year, and would feature a wide wealth of firms and political actors: states, trade unions, NGOs, MSIs, and others. In addition, crises are known to contribute to real change in industries – especially crises with normative stakes that challenge the status quo (Weick, 1988; Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). This would thus be a rich case, with real normative and financial stakes, unfolding in real time. Previous theoretical research had suggested that CSR could feature various features of social politics, but would the post-Rana Plaza CSR politics of factory safety make use of those resources? Would the politics of factory safety in Bangladesh deploy social discourse and conspicuously “social” technologies?

Once this question was asked, about whether the politics of factory safety might feature heavy use of “social” politics, the observation was made that Bangladesh Factory safety is actually a strong candidate, on a purposive sampling basis, to be an extreme or polar
case study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003) for building theory about social CSR politics. This is because Bangladeshi factory safety featured structural conditions that, historically, have prompted social-politics discourse and practices out of complainants. As discussed above, social politics is typically heightened in cases where agents who have capacity to change outcomes are confronted by bystanders over the suffering of third parties. Consistent with the “moral intensity” and “stakeholder salience” literatures (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, 1997), bystanders are disproportionately moved by the suffering of those they can see, and blame falls disproportionately on those who are linked by a fairly close chain of causality, and who have the capacity to remedy the issue. Rana Plaza featured these markers – rich, capable, organizations were seen on television and the internet to be causing the suffering of others. This all suggested that social politics might occur in the politics of Bangladeshi Factory Safety – and the ways in which it did, or did not, would help build theory about CSRs relationship with “social” politics.

2.1.3 Data Collection

First, I collected a broad sampling of secondary evidence pertaining to the issue of Bangladeshi factory safety. For the purposes of the case, I selected November 24, 2012, the day of the Tazreen factory fire, to April 24, 2014 (one year’s anniversary of the tragedy of Rana Plaza) as a time frame for the collection of secondary evidence. Both time limits were necessary but somewhat arbitrary. The bulk of the case rests on reactions to the Rana Plaza collapse (April 24, 2013), but the earlier disaster at Tazreen was essential in moving forward
the NGO activism and MSI work through the incipient Accord such that upon news of Rana Plaza, activism and dialogue took place within previously established networks, and with considerable expertise. Placing Rana Plaza in a wider context was essential here – indeed, the politics of CSR on these issues preceded even Tazreen, as Bangladeshi factories have been a recognized problem for years (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013c). That said, Tazreen and Rana Plaza were, in the words of Ineke Zeldenrust of the Clean Clothes Campaign, “game-changers” (Taubner, 2013). The later time limit was simply a function of the research moving to the writing phase – new activism, focused on compensation and upcoming anniversaries of the two tragedies, continue. There has been remarkably little letup on firms over time.

Secondary data collected included news reports, press releases, website statements and similar content produced by individuals, civil society groups, or firms, social media content on a variety of platforms (including images), and YouTube videos of demonstrations.

In order to gain insight into the rationalities or logics at play in these politics, I attended in person 3 meetings of a North American informational tour by a high-profile advocate for Bangladeshi factory safety – Ms. Kalpona Akter of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity, and observed two others online. From contacts first originating at those meetings, I also collected 26 depth interviews - 21 with activists as well as 5 members of industry who worked closely with those activists. The imbalance between the two populations is due to the fact that the primary emphasis here is on the perceived experience of those engaging in advocacy. The perspective of those being challenged is important, but in a secondary fashion – in the politics of post-Rana Plaza, firms exhibited little ability to set the political agenda nor the ability to successfully frame the normative issues. Those powers rested with the civil
society groups holding them to account. To study these issues, therefore, the emphasis was on understanding activists and their engagements with industry. The 5 members of industry interviewed here are individuals who, during snowballing recruitment, were referred to specifically by activists as fascinating and reflective people whom they had engaged with over these issues, and whom I should consult with.

The informational tour was selected as an important research site because it acted as an important focal point for activist groups interested in these issues in North America. Ms. Akter’s tour was supported by a broad coalition of civil society groups, and was designed to stimulate attention for these issues. It resulted in protests at stores (IRLF and USAS, 2013), rallies (Sinclair, 2013), considerable media coverage (Greenhouse, 2013), and meetings with policy makers (Akter, 2013). Observing some of these meetings would thus be a good place to observe the politics first hand. In addition, these meetings acted to stimulate recruitment. Given that these meetings were supported by a broad coalition of civil society groups representing those groups concerned with Bangladeshi factory safety, recruitment there was deemed a good way to start sampling activism on these issues. There, I recruited 12 activists for interviews, including 4 who worked professionally for civil society groups as campaigners, as well as 8 who were active in a volunteer capacity. This formed the beginnings of my sample for the interview component. At the end of each interview, I would invite the participant to suggest people with whom I should make contact for future recruitment (participants were not informed, either way, whether I chose to contact those individuals).
In the end, upon a series of snowballing processes, my sample ended up including 6 members of industry (all recommended as being thoughtful and reflective by activists, thus presumably providing a rich but potentially non-representative subsample). Of the 20 activists, 12 operated in a volunteer capacity, most in fairly significant roles but with varying levels of organizational affiliation with NGOs and trade unions, and 8 in paid campaigning positions. The 26 participants operated in 7 countries: Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These 26 individuals thus represent a relatively broad and representative cross-section of developed-world civil society advocacy on Bangladeshi Factory Safety. This diversity was somewhat purposive – in following the principle of saturation, sampling ended when new topics were exhausted in the conversations I was having. This began to occur around the 20th interview. Within the iterative process of assessing each interview against the body of data that I had amassed at that point in time, when topics began to saturate, I also began to seek out new people, from new geographic places and with new expertise, whenever snowballing made this possible. To that end, I made a conscious choice around the 15th interview to move away from labour union-affiliated activists to the extent possible, as they seemed to be perhaps overpopulating my sample, and conversations with them began to saturate fairly quickly. That said, I did conduct a few more subsequent interviews with such individuals whom I had already recruited, and they were helpful despite increasing levels of saturation.

One subgroup where saturation was not reached was with members of industry at targeted firms – some such individuals did participate, but most targeted firms were reluctant to participate, and those that did, did so through singular spokespeople. These were
fascinating interviews, but more access would have been preferable. That said, the primary interest here was in the experience of activists, not firms, and the interview component is itself one component of a larger case study, so this partial shortcoming is only in regards to a comparatively minor issue, which I note here to be complete.

All participants were assured complete anonymity, to facilitate their speaking frankly, without strategic intent or biases, and without fears for repercussions of any sort. Individuals, and the organizations they may be affiliated with, are referred to here with pseudonyms, and with only general levels of information, such that they cannot be identified.

2.1.4 Interviews

Based on an understanding of the wider social theory, where the “social critique” (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2008) and “social” politics (Rose, 1999; Dean, 2010) has previously been studied, I had hypothesized that social politics might well occur in CSR contexts. This helped me formulate an approach to the interviews such that the major themes that I was interested in would be best explored in a participant-led, semi-structured way. I was primarily interested in the ways in which participants would frame the political problem and the range of possible solutions – based on what criteria could individuals and civil society groups go about addressing the safety of Bangladesh Factories? Based on this starting-point, I developed an interview protocol to guide my interview process. This protocol began with the survey, or “grand-tour” question of “if we have to look at one thing
in Bangladesh to change, so that these tragedies wouldn’t happen again, what would that be?”

This survey question was chosen because it could be taken in either a retrospective and responsibility-searching way, or could be answered in a fashion that focused on pragmatic problem-solving and advocacy going forward. Participants could take the discussion either direction, especially at the outset. Most interviews ended up covering both responsibility or liability questions as well as how to go about securing gains, as each question ultimately implies the other. Regardless of their answer, I tried to get participants to assess why they thought this way, thus hopefully shedding light on how they thought of effective, legitimate, CSR politics. The objective was to keep the flow of the discussion generally unstructured and led by the participant themselves, as each individual was encouraged to focus on the issues they found most important, but the fundamental inquiry remained the same (Yin, 2003). When topics of potential interest came arose, I asked probing questions to have the participant spend more time on that issue, thus hopefully unfolding the topic in a more fulsome manner (Yin, 2003). Finally, though the hope was to have the participants lead discussion to the extent possible, when conversation went off-topic, or ground to an awkward halt, I would ask thematic, open questions to restart the conversation on important topics, particularly ones they had previously mentioned in passing.

Almost all participants discussed corporate responsibility or sustainability issues in an implicit manner, and many raised the topic explicitly. When participants raised CSR implicitly, I sought to have them speak to the issue of CSR in an explicit sense. For instance, I might ask, following their mentioning making firms change their behavior “do you mean
CSR by that, or do you mean something else?” Other prompting questions that I asked midway through the interviews, if these issues had only been raised implicitly, would be “what does CSR mean to you” or “does CSR cover what you are talking about here, or is that the wrong way to describe it?” I did this to make participants consider and speak to CSR discourse intentionally, but sought to have them do so having already described their ideas about responsibility and needed change, such that I wasn’t putting ideas on the table, but was asking them to compare their own ideas to an existing public discourse that everyone had heard of. I would have considered highlighting participants who happened to be unaware of CSR discourse, but this did not occur; CSR was well known, and every participant felt comfortable speaking to both the issues in general and in regards to CSR more generally. Upon saturation, I concluded the interview process, transcribed the interviews, and moved towards analysis.

2.2 Case Study Results

This study started with the research question of: does “social” politics exist in CSR politics of Bangladesh Factory Safety, is it effective, and what implications might that have for wider CSR politics, particularly its more critical variants? To answer this larger research question, I address each clause in turn. I begin with a brief background section, so that the analysis is placed in context. Then, I show that “social” politics was an important political rationality in civil society’s governance of major brands’ stances towards the issue of Bangladeshi factory safety. This was deployed in the demands for firms to join the union-led
Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, then in lobbying for firms to depart the rival business-led Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, then finally in calls for brands to make compensation to survivors and families of Tazreen and Rana Plaza. Secondly, I will argue for this politics’ effectiveness. As in any case study, drawing causal relationships is challenging and should only be done in a restrained way. That said, the evidence suggests that many of the agents involved, from civil society to national governments to firms, recognized that some of the important terrain would be social themes of suffering and exploitation, subjectivity-centric advocacy including attributions of greed and (by contrast) prosocial commitment, solidarity, and the problematic profit-motive mandate of firms. Moreover, civil society turned to especially intense invocations of the social critique when the stakes were highest, and that usage seems to have important success in securing compliance from first-mover firms, which helped prompt wider acceptance. I then distinguish features of this manifestation of social politics from classic accounts in the political theory literature, as well as other governmentality-analysed accounts of political rationality in the CSR literature, showing this to be both deeply indebted to 20th century welfare liberalism and as well as significantly amended to fit civil society politics in a weak-state context.

2.2.1 Background

This case study is primarily interested in the discourse used by activists pursuing corporate change, and does not claim to comprehensively describe the politics of Bangladesh Factory Safety. That project would be fascinating but enormous. A general survey, however,
might help situate the analysis for the purposes of this research. The Bangladeshi ready-made garment (RMG) industry is immense – at USD 17.9 Billion in exports for the year ending 2011, it constitutes roughly 5% of the world’s garment total, and roughly 10% of Bangladesh’s GDP. Through these revenues, the industry employs roughly 3.6 million, of which three quarters are women (for all figures see Ahamad, 2013). The Bangladeshi RMG sector has seen rapid growth over the last decade due to the rise of wages in China, making that market less globally competitive, as well as changes in tariff regimes worldwide, especially of the EU, US, and Canada, which all combine to make Bangladesh an extremely low-cost producing country (Theuws et al, 2013). Bangladesh also features relatively attractive geographical positioning near a number of major shipping routes (McKinsey, 2011). Over the past decade, Bangladeshi wages have increased, but so has the country’s industrial and infrastructural sophistication, leading to a sustained competitive advantage within a highly competitive global market (McKinsey, 2011). As interview participant Adam, a sourcing consultant to the fashion industry, put it, Bangladesh is now a full-service sourcing destination, offering retailers everything from simple t-shirts to complex structured jackets and dresses, all while still featuring some of the least expensive labour in the world (Interview Adam, 2013).

Partly as a result of this rapid growth, the safety situation in Bangladeshi factories has become increasingly worrisome. Factories are being hastily built, and despite governmental regulations that are somewhat adequate on paper, these regulations are rarely enforced, reflecting a widespread concern that the industry features structural domestic problems in addressing factory safety (Interview Cyran, 2013; Interview Victor, 2014). The country
desperately needs the export revenues created by the industry, the factory owners are affiliated with the governing party in problematic ways, the government lacks sufficient numbers of properly trained inspectors, and even if those inspectors existed they would require significant wages. This poses a litany of reasons for the Bangladeshi government to avoid putting fire and safety on the agenda, despite workplace tragedies being frequent as a result (Interview Cyran, 2013; Theuws et al, 2013). Domestic labor organizations are generally perceived to be growing in power and sophistication but are still very weak - something that is not helped by tight state regulation of unions and occasional state violence towards activists (Theuws et al, 2013).

These widespread problems have made Bangladeshi factory safety an area of considerable concern for labor groups and human rights organizations for many years. As one veteran NGO campaigner, pseudonym Quentin, emphasized: “Tazreen and Rana Plaza did not take place in a vacuum. We never would have (had) all this success unless it all fit as part of what was already going on” (Interview Quentin, 2014). Labor groups such as the AFL-CIO, IndustriALL Global Union, International Labor Rights Forum, and UNI Global Union have all spent significant sums of time and money in recent years trying to organize the sector to limited success (IRLF, 2013; Theuws et al., 2013). This organizing has helped give added voice to Bangladeshi civil society representatives, especially labor activists. The most high-profile of these advocates is Kalpona Akter of the AFL-CIO subsidized Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS). To coordinate some of these actions, the Europe-based, labor-funded, Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) has become the de facto headliner of an umbrella group of mutually collaborating civil society campaigning groups.
This umbrella group of NGOs all collaborate to varying extents, and along with the organizations mentioned above, also include, the War on Want, the UK’s Trades Union Councils (TUC), the Workers’ Rights Consortium, United Students Against Sweatshops, Avaaz.org, Change.org, SumofUs.org, and the Maquila Solidarity Network (see, for example, the organizational signatories to this CCC petition: Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013). Most, but not all, of these groups receive funding or logistical support from organized labor, and had together been working in 2011 on pushing firms towards a safety agreement that was formulated primarily by the CCC (Eidelson, 2012). This 2011 agreement failed when firms realized it would result in their paying for expensive factory modifications (Eidelson, 2012). This failed agreement ultimately formed the basis for what would become the CCC formulated and union-backed Accord on Fire and Worker Safety in Bangladesh in May 2013.

It was into this highly volatile and charged context that we must place Tazreen and Rana Plaza: state and NGO agendas that were diametrically opposed, weak labour counterparts to local business, and brands that were deferring responsibility for safety onto local factory owners. These tragedies changed the dynamic, and placed urgency on an issue that had a political infrastructure already in place. The question immediately became: would major retailers take responsibility for worker safety by signing the CCC Accord? (Greenhouse, 2013; Toronto Star, 2013; Interview Quentin, 2013) Each of Tazreen and Rana Plaza featured extremely concerning underlying facts that emotionally raised the stakes. To put it frankly, at Tazreen workers were burned alive because owners had barred the windows to prevent employee theft, and Rana Plaza orphaned 800 children – these tragedies were truly grotesque (Jones, 2014). After Tazreen, with the political impetus brought about by that
tragedy, the CCC and a group of major retailers set a date for revived negotiations under the mediation of the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ). This date happened to fall on April 29, 2013 (Taubner, 2013). Rana Plaza occurred on April 24th, 2013, placing the firms in a high-profile emotional bind - they would have to negotiate factory safety while the media was showing images of bodies being pulled from the rubble. It also did not help firms that May is, for many publically traded firms, the month for mandatory Annual General Meetings, thus exposing firms, executives, and major investors to added publicity.

In response to Rana Plaza, the NGO groups, following the tripartite lead of the CCC, IndustriALL, and UNI Global Union, coordinated to place pressure on firms. Protests were held around the world (IRLF and USAS, 2013; IndustriALL, 2013; Clean Clothes Campaign 2013b, 2013c), and criticism came in from establishment audiences such as the Pope (Buenos Aires Herald, 2013) and major media including the Toronto Star (2013) and New York Times (New York Times, 2013; Clifford and Greenhouse, 2013). Petitions were drawn up and shared online that included the work email addresses of retailing executives, thus overwhelming email inboxes (Avaaz, 2013; IRLF and USAS, 2013). Seeking to take advantage of this momentary attention to these issues, the CCC placed a firm deadline for agreements: May 15, 2013, and the three main claimant organizations (CCC, UNI, and IndustriALL) more or less dictated terms to retailers – the proto-Accord that had previously collapsed would form the basis for any future agreement (Taubner, 2013). Negotiations would be less about what firms were signing, and more about the treatment they would get from civil society now and in the future: the three groups set about to break the logjam of nervous firms by essentially offering the publicity and plaudits of leading the process.
forward, as firms that took on the risk of agreeing first would receive additional plaudits for their leadership (Taubner, 2013). Firms that joined late would enjoy less effusive praise, and laggard firms would be attacked.

After some delay, and the last minute intervention of a weaker rival agreement drawn up by the Gap, the largest RMG buyer in Bangladesh, Hennes and Mauritz (H&M), announced their support for the Accord (Greenhouse, 2013) on May 13, and were immediately followed by six other firms within the day, and then another 7 on May 15. Within weeks, 40 firms had signed, and at the time of writing more than 150 retailers, covering more than one third of the Bangladesh garment industry, have signed (Accord, 2014). The Accord promises to extend significant fire and safety protection, along with increased recognition for Bangladesh labor, to thousands of factories employing millions of workers (Accord, 2014; IndustriALL, 2013).

Following the May 15, 2013 deadline, NGO activism shifted to incorporate two other political priorities, alongside the effort at securing additional adherents to the Accord. Firstly, the civil society groups worked to delegitimize the rival agreement “Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety”, an American plan led by the Gap and Walmart. The Alliance has many of the same features of the Accord, but is not subject to binding arbitration (which the Accord is, even at early stages), and as such can be departed at any time by firms. The Alliance has also less integration with organized labor than does the Accord, and as such is thought to be less likely to demand compliance on some of the more expensive changes that might be needed (Clifford and Greenhouse, 2013; Interview Fred, 2013). The Alliance is thus perceived to be much more “business-led” than the Accord, though it does have some
mechanisms for worker, NGO, and Bangladesh state input (IndustriALL, 2013; Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013; Greenhouse, 2013). The NGOs have arguably had less success in delegitimizing the Alliance than they had in securing adherents to the Accord: both the Gap and Walmart remain within the Alliance, and only a handful of North American firms (most notably Canada’s Loblaw and the American PVH, which includes brands Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein) are in the Accord. That said, efforts to undermine the Alliance have helped bring the Alliance generally closer to the Accord than many observers initially feared (Economist, 2013). The two initiatives now work to standardize their approaches to inspections and remedies, and to date many of the fears of Accord activists have proven unfounded (although it is still an early phase in these processes and the future is unknown).

The third and final strategic effort by civil society has been to set up a compensation scheme for victims and families of Tazreen and Rana Plaza. As the question of the Accord and Alliance have somewhat faded from urgency, the new campaign emphasis is increasingly on commemorating the anniversaries of the tragedies with protests and campaigns that highlight how these tragedies have left being suffering that has not yet been addressed. In late 2013, a small, under-resourced compensation fund was struck up under the aegis of the International Labor Organization (ILO), and a handful of large firms, including Inditex, Loblaws, and Primark, have agreed to contribute to this effort (Toronto Star, 2013). Reports suggest that less than half of the needed funds have been secured, and the strategy seems to be to ramp up pressure on retailers towards the April 24, 2014 anniversary of Rana Plaza (IRLF and USAS, 2014; Toronto Star, 2014).
Taken as an overall survey, this case suggests a long period of institutional work amidst relative political dormancy, where firms and civil society (especially labor-affiliated NGOs) worked diligently on coming to an agreement with relatively little success. Then, in the aftermath of a pair of iconic and emotional disasters, the world’s attention was harnessed to secure some truly impressive prosocial results – despite the unease (even hostility) of the Bangladesh government, and despite the initially steadfast disagreement of firms (Greenhouse, 2013; Taubner, 2013). Within this broad narrative, what were the political rationalities deployed? How did these NGOs think about politics and thus go about securing results?

2.2.2 Neoliberal Political Argumentation In Bangladesh Factory Politics – Doing Good In Order to Do Well

Much of the advocacy after Tazreen and Rana Plaza, while deeply emotional and urgent, was entirely consistent with the expectations of mainstream business audiences. This study does not focus on this political rationality, reminiscent of the neoliberal models found in Banerjee (2008), Lipschutz (2005), and Shamir (2005, 2008). These neoliberal models all presume firm competitiveness as a boundary condition, where normativity must be easily recoded in market terms to demonstrate how those norms are relevant to firms’ strategic success. Despite this neoliberal model not being the primary concern of the chapter, it is important to note and chart that political rationality as it manifests itself in these campaigns, often by the same agents who otherwise do deploy “social” politics, before we move on to
the social critique itself. The neoliberal and “social” political rationalities were each deployed to varying degrees by NGO campaigners. In fact, they were sometimes intertwined – a speaker might encode part of her speech in business-friendly competitiveness language that focuses on mutual problem solving and collaboration, and another in the language of restraint, moral obligation, and care.

This neoliberalism-consistent advocacy was clearly intended to be heard and appreciated by firms, who could respond to that normative message within the unchallenged paradigm of strategic organizational decision making and instrumental reasoning. There is of course an important benefit of this approach for claimants, as neoliberal and mainstreamed arguments are perhaps more likely to be taken seriously by firms (Fleming and Jones, 2013), and might thus transmit important information and arguments in more efficient manners (Porter and Kramer, 2011). In addition, civil society groups who make mainstream arguments are more likely to be respected by those firms in the future, thus making partnerships more likely (Baur and Schmidt, 2013). These benefits come with drawbacks, namely in that NGOs can be seen as co-opted (Baur and Schmidt, 2013), but these benefits are significant and should be taken seriously.

For an example of business-friendly argumentation put alongside social critique argumentation, see the press release by IndustriALL (a relatively strong and aggressive global union) on May 21, 2013, targeting Gap and other retailers:

Investors warned, ahead of today’s Gap AGM, the company is out of touch on Bangladesh Safety Accord and risks shoppers’ anger. 40 leading worldwide retail brands have agreed to sign up to the safety deal but Gap, along with Walmart, has declined.
IndustriALL and UNI Global Union say the door is still open for Gap to sign up to the multi-stakeholder accord but time is running out as the 45 day implementation programme begins. The recent factory tragedies, including Rana Plaza, Bangladesh have graphically illustrated the urgency of multinationals, such as Gap, taking responsibility for the safety of workers producing their garments.

IndustriALL Global Union General Secretary, Jyrki Raina said:

Gap has a reputation as being ethical with strong leadership in corporate social responsibility. Today it has a golden opportunity to show this reputation is genuine and not just a part of its US$600 million PR campaign. Gap should act and join the Accord. It is not yet too late to reassure investors and shoppers it’s ready to do the right thing. (IndustriALL, 2013)

This argument contains undertones of more aggressive messaging, emanating from a social critique perspective, that could challenge Gap’s self-concept and interior cultural life; for example whether Gap’s CSR campaigns are mere PR, and whether Gap is “ready to do the right thing,” which implies that it is not. However, the primary argument here is entirely reconcilable with instrumental reasoning and does not require any subjective or cultural change at Gap. Gap executives (or institutional investors, as this release coincided with Gap’s annual general meeting) could read this press release and could hear IndustriALL’s normative claims recoded in purely instrumentalized ways – that they should “do the right thing” because there are significant financial penalties should Gap decline to do so. A neoliberal market purist might lament “shoppers’ anger”, but they would agree that consumers’ anger, no matter how misplaced, should for strategic reasons be attended to by firms. It was in this vein that IndustriALL framed their core argument: that investors should be aware of IndustriALL’s organizing and then govern themselves accordingly. Through this press release, aimed at Gap’s investors, IndustriALL is effectively showing, in an aggressive
but entirely mainstream way, that they are marshalling pressure that even the most cynical perspective would have to respect.

This argument also conspicuously suggests that progress is being impeded by an easily resolved cognitive or informational issue – that Gap is “out of touch” and unaware of the intensity of their consumers’ anger, and that should Gap realize this fact they would presumably be happy to comply. This argumentation thus helps reaffirm the narrative of a conflict that can be reconciled while still retaining the idea of profit-oriented firms staffed and owned by competitive individuals, and is thoroughly consistent with the problem-solving CSR favored by business (see, critically, Laasonen, Fougere, and Kourala, 2012). The targeted issues are Gap’s policies, and the NGO is aiming to secure change by identifying the market drawbacks of those policies while also marshalling added attention (and thus added market costs) towards those policies. Normativity here is secured by civil society’s identifying normative problems, by raising the larger market’s attention to those problems, and then by collaborating with business to solve those problems through a “multi-stakeholder accord” (usually called a “multi-stakeholder initiative” or MSI) – in this case the Accord. Normativity here is not contingent on moral beneficence, nor is the profit-orientation of firms a structural problem here. Rather, the structural problem is essentially cognitive: that “out of touch” business is not suitably responding to its social responsibilities as defined by its consuming audience.

We find this understanding of neoliberal politics, which focuses on casting disputes as cognitive failures, capacity failures, and communications breakdowns, fairly frequently produced throughout the politics of Bangladesh safety. This trend fits squarely with what
CSR’s critical interlocutors are nervous about in that mainstream interlocutors often demand no structural or cultural change, and accept aggressive business’ premises for how the market ought to operate (Fleming and Jones, 2013). This press release also threatens to represent what critics from mainstream business, such as Karnani (2011), might call CSR’s “irrelevant” side (2011: 105-107) – ie. isn’t this just business as usual, where firms react to market pressures? The strong advantage of these politics, to find a silver lining in the “deradicalisation” of CSR (Shamir, 2005), is that by focusing on coordination and capacity failures within a presumption of general ethicality, these politics make collaboration and change easy for managers to accept. As one (otherwise quite strident) activist put it, sometimes “if you use loaded expressions…then (executives) are just going to feel defensive….then they can’t hear you” (Interview Beatrice, 2013). These politics, based on acceptance of that neoliberal rationality or logic – that the market should be governed by the dictum that market agents are generally instrumental, that nothing is inherently wrong with this as long as markets are properly structured, and that public demands of market agent beneficence are therefore needlessly blunt instruments that are likely to harm the productive power of the economy - do not run that risk.


Some activists, by contrast, were happy to challenge these premises. For them, problematizing the moral subjectivity of market forces, be they individual consumers,
individual executives, or the collective of subjectivities and anthropomorphized cultural forces that make up firms, was a key strategy for achieving change. Social politics, as discussed above, have traditionally been deployed by class-conscious activists who are angered by predicable suffering within a liberal market (Rose, 1999; Dean, 2010a). With the rise of the welfare state in the 20th century, “social” activists (who typically supported social democratic political parties such as UK’s Labour Party, France’s Socialist Party, and the American Democratic Party) (Donzelot, 1984, 1988; Rose, 1999; Dean, 2010a) generally accepted the truncated moral responsibilities of business. These relatively-limited corporate responsibilities were in exchange for relatively-effective state regulation and state assurances of egalitarian-distributed economic growth, such as through the high rate of middle-class wage growth, and high marginal tax rates in North America following the Second World War (Piketty, 2014) or the institutionalized corporatist compromises with labor installed by many post-war states in Europe (Matten and Moon; 2008). In most welfarist, or “social” liberal, regimes some mixture of these ideals were advanced, although this risks overgeneralization. But the primary responsibility for welfare, in welfare states, was always with the state – only a brutal state would accept excessive suffering, and states thus had a responsibility for welfare. That responsibility for welfare was twofold: firstly, to prevent, through regulation, the emergence of excessive suffering, and, secondly, to palliate suffering that did exist through a safety net (Donzelot, 1984, 1988).

Does this regime resonate in the politics of Bangladesh Factory Safety? Yes - however, it is not a perfect fit because of the general irrelevance of states to the question of who bore responsibility for welfare. Every governmental regime, though they might draw on
historically specific political rationalities, is ultimately different as it is amended by agents to suit a given context. The politics of Bangladesh factory safety moved (at least temporarily) political emphasis from the worker-employer relationship to the consumer–employer relationship, and the role of state power shifted from guaranteeing regulatory and palliative minimums to merely anchoring a web of civil contracts. State responsibility for welfare was effectively absent. The Bangladeshi state was initially seen as complicit in the disasters, as it supports a generally minimal regulatory environment to encourage investment (Cyran, 2013). Moreover, the Accord and Alliance movements further undermined the Bangladeshi government’s responsibility for assuring the welfare of its citizens, at least in the eyes of consumers and activists in the Global North. Instead of being asked to guarantee minimum standards of welfare, the Bangladeshi government was asked to operate as one stakeholder among many, and states from the Global North were asked to act as final guarantors of arbitration clauses. Activists determined what would constitute sufficient concern for welfare, and this responsibility was placed on Western retailers. Failing to heed this responsibility was deemed, by activists, to reveal firms’ antisocial values, and campaigners sought to remedy the situation by calling for far greater social solidarity – of consumers as well as firms – with victims and workers.

**Problematized Object: The Subjectivities of Economic Agents.**

In the neoliberal, “deradicalised” (Shamir, 2004), politics of the examples above, the subjectivities of market agents does not matter. This is essentially by design: moral exhortations and cutting admonishments are said to only drive partnerships apart, making agreements more challenging, and as such are discouraged (Porter and Kramer, 2014 in reply
to Crane et al, 2014). But what if firms have already been fully briefed on everything civil society has to say, and still have no wish to collaborate? What if firms are not interested in collaborate problem-solving, explicitly because, in this case, doing so would be too expensive and would therefore contravene their organizational mandate to advance shareholder value? What if firms didn’t see this as a win-win? To NGOs and other civil society groups who had tried, and failed, to bring about a successful MSI in 2011, and who did not perceive an emphatic reaction by retailers to the gruesome Tazreen disaster in November 2012, the stubborn resolve of virtually all major western retailers to not collaborate was apparent in April 2013. As such, it was not clear, even after Rana Plaza, that anything was about to change (Taubner, 2013; Interview Quentin). Given this context, the limits of business-led CSR built on collaborative problem-solving and improved communication would have been clear. The primary consideration, for activists, would thus have been: how could the issue be best politicized, to bring greater pressure to bear on retailers?

In these conditions, explicitly problematizing the subjectivities of Western retailers emerged as a key political objective. This focus on problematization of subjectivities occurred in parallel with the problematization of sourcing practices. We should perhaps not be too surprised by this. The effectiveness of negative personal attacks can be overstated, but political activism at all levels has consistently found that destabilizing the personal narratives of political actors, and undermining the group-signifiers and projected self-understandings of political organizations, to be an important element of political campaigning (Lau and Rovner, 2009). Challenging others’ performance of a self-understanding is a mainstay of
political strategy, as well as of social theory more generally (see how the weak problematize
the performed subjectivities of the wealthy in Scott, 1985, 1992 and Bourdieu at al, 1999),
and so it emerged in these politics as a site around which CSR campaigners sought to
organize. Alongside the critique of company policies, these NGOs would critique company
values as well as the revealed values of employees who worked there. By challenging
subjectivities, campaigners sought to turn firms’ anthropomorphized subjectivities into
objects for inspection, judgement, and censure. As such, the intention was not necessarily to
actually change firms’ self-understanding, interior emotional lives, and corporate culture,
although that was hoped for. Rather, the intention was to challenge the presumption that
firms could act egoistically, even in instances of intense suffering, and that firms did not bear
a moral obligation to act. Acting antisocially and displaying egoism had to become publically
unacceptable, or at least problematic. Ultimately, firms could react to that new reality
however they wished. Firms could react strategically, and merely perform as theatre the
public recognition of this moral obligation. The moral legitimacy literature has long
recognized the cynical performance of nominal prosociality as a risky but entirely plausible
reaction to outside norms (Suchman, 1995). That said, the public acceptance of those moral
values and problematized subjectivities would create a web of cognitive dissonance that, over
time, would presumably push some of these firms towards deeper, more authentic, change
(Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, Ganapathi, 2007).

But this is to get ahead of ourselves. What does challenging economic subjectivities,
as a political technology, actually look like? How did it manifest itself after Rana Plaza?
Antisocial Subjectivities in Firms and Executives: Greed and Other Epithets

At its most distilled, challenging subjectivities meant that campaigners (and sympathetic onlookers) sought to anthropomorphize firms and then sought to designate them as antisocial predators requiring retaliation unless they committed to rehabilitation. Take these seven public statements for example:

“Before the collapse of Rana Plaza, which killed over a thousand people, most of them textile workers, there was the fire that killed a hundred at the Tazreen factory. A major cause is western companies’ greed for profits.” - Journalist Olivier Cyran, Le Monde Diplomatique (English) (Cyran, 2013).

Walmart’s greed and arrogance appear to be boundless...This is a company that siphons billions in subsidies from US taxpayers, that has made billions in profits on the backs of Bangladeshi workers, then scoffs at the notion that it should be asked to pay one dime to protect those workers from dying in factory fires while they sew Walmart clothes.” Scott Nova, Workers’ Rights Consortium (Eidelson, 2013).

“The Savar tragedy is a reminder of the hidden cost of cheap clothes…this remains a dangerous, low paid and exploitative sector…It is people like these who are paying the price for the cheap clothes that now fill so many high street shops across the world. They pay this price by risking their lives working in unsafe buildings, for long hours, often in terrible conditions, for terrible wages. A combination of poverty, greed, corruption and political interest leaves them incredibly vulnerable.” - Gareth Price-Jones, Oxfam (Oxfam, 2013).

“No words can describe the horror of the criminal action of the manufacturers, brands, employers’ groups BGMEA and BKMEA, and the regulatory authorities for their greed for profit, at the cost of precious human lives, injuries and misery to thousands” - Roy Ramesh, IndustriALL (IndustriALL, 2013).
(Upon visiting Rana Plaza) “This is a monument to greed.” Sujeet Sennik, former designer at Walmart (CBC, 2013b).

The time has come to transform the apparel sector of Bangladesh. All of us … owners, workers, government, buyers, international organizations, friends and partners of Bangladesh … all of us must work together to ensure that the horrors of Tazreens Fashions and Rana Plaza are never repeated. Indeed, working together, we can transform Bangladesh’s apparel sector. To ensure that these tragedies have not been in vain, to ensure that these tragedies are never repeated, to ensure that Brand Bangladesh is a Preferred Brand, we must first understand the cause of these horrible, deadly disasters. I believe these disasters were the result of greed, corruption and ignorance. Greed, corruption and ignorance in these two disasters snuffed out the lives of 1243 innocent Bangladeshi women and men who had sought nothing more than to provide a decent living for themselves and their families, injured and maimed hundreds more, many grievously and permanently, devastated thousands of Bangladeshi families, who had done no wrong, who had committed no offense. Such is the legacy of unfettered greed, corruption and ignorance. US Ambassador to Bangladesh Dan Mozena (Mozena, 2013).

Children’s Place, you can’t hide, we can see your greedy side! Demonstrators outside Children’s Place headquarters, April 11, 2014. (Sibayan, 2014)

As well as these two excerpts from interviews:

“Western companies force the factories in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, China, etc. to produce goods at the cheapest price. For the factory owners they have no choice but to say yes. This means they then exploit their staff, making women work 18 hours a day in unsafe buildings…(all) trying to meet disgusting quotas for (the) greedy western companies…(and) Because these countries have no decent labour laws it's easy to force unjust working conditions. So as bad as the (factory) owners are it's our companies like Gap and Walmart that drive the sorry tale.” (Interview Winston, 2014).

Colin: (Having raised the issue of a high-profile lawsuit to drive publicity regarding Rana Plaza)
You have to threaten (retailers) all the time with a big stick. "Okay if you don't give your money to the workers you'll have to spend anyway on the lawyers." You get bad publicity all the time because of the law case. Every day there'll be an article in some publication saying what a bastard you are. Exploiting workers. It'll defer to the law case.

Author: What message...is there a message that you think hurts companies the most? In these ads or in these campaigns?

Colin: Yeah. That they are exploitative, criminal, negligent plunderers, greedy bastards. They hate that. (Interview Colin, 2013).

The first thing that stands out is that these statements are inflammatory, and are beyond the bounds of both mainstream CSR activism as well as everyday polite society. But we should not dismiss these statements as irrelevant outliers. All of these speaking individuals are public figures who are active on the issues, and while the latter two are shielded by pseudonyms and generic descriptors due to the nature of the interview process, five of the seven public statements are made by high-profile representatives of high-profile organizations, while the sixth is a whistleblower of a major firm: Walmart. The seventh public statement was the chant promoted by demonstrators representing (and led by) a major union: United Commercial and Food Workers (Sibayan, 2014). So while these statements are outliers in a certain way, they do form a part of a coherent discourse with real heft that was advanced by NGOs, states, and journalists alike. A comprehensive accounting of the instances of each element of social discourse is beyond the scope of this case study, but to

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29 I apologize for the strong language here. It is somewhat representative. A surprising number of interview participants, both from activist and industry backgrounds, used intemperate language when describing their counterparts.
illustrate the pervasiveness of this discourse (emphasizing exploitation, economic immorality at the level of subjectivities, and the requirement of greater solidarity) a compilation of more than 65 instances of social critique can be found in Appendix A. This compilation should not be seen as exhaustive, but rather as a partial exhibition of larger trends.

The normative core of the discourse, in these instances, was greed. We will see below other related epithets as well as related normative attributions of exploitation and extant suffering, as each enforces the normative power of the other. Greed, however, appears to serve as the apotheosis of the social critique when responsibility is applied to a market actor. Every statement above contains the attribution of greed, applied to major western retailers (Ambassador Mozena’s comments are vague about exactly who has been greedy – the suggestion is everybody involved in the value chain). Defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “inordinate or Insatiate longing, esp for wealth; avariciousness or covetous desire” (OED, 2014), its use implies a contravention of norms that reflects a deeper failure of virtue or personality – particularly disregard for others (Lasnik, 1995). Usage thus denotes a considered opinion that there are extralegal norms on the limits of ambition or desire within the market system – people cannot be greedy if their ambition does not contravene any given limits. We can thus immediately detect a fundamental departure here from the neoliberal paradigm based on an efficient market based on competitive individualism. There, ambition should be recognized and left alone – neoliberals generally believe that ambition is insufficiently manifested in society, not in surfeit (Binkley, 2010). In addition, these contravened limits are extralegal. None of these speakers are blaming retailers for breaking the law – everyone knows that laws formally existed but were not being enforced, so that is
not the issue. The law effectively did not exist here. The contravention was of norms. But of what?

What campaigners are problematizing in these statements is the mindset that, within a quasi-failed-state with no effective regulation, all market relationships are normatively acceptable. Market actors who pursued such relationships, with the predictable result of poor worker safety and subsequent suffering, are deemed to have gone too far: they are “greedy”. The normative assertion is that only someone subsumed by greed would endanger weak agents to such predictable suffering.

We should note that though “greed” is the de facto normative touchstone of the “social” critique, there are other subjective aspersions that also collect around a coherent single charge. For example, see these statements (again, for additional statements see Appendix A):

“Perhaps refusing an insulting payout is the strongest challenge to the callousness of multinational companies that workers can raise. In an industry that ruthlessly devalues poor people's lives to chase ever-higher profits, the most valuable thing workers have left to fight for is their dignity.” Michelle Chen, In These Times (Opinion Column) (Chen, 2013).

“Walmart is a pioneer, and also the most ruthless, practitioner of a sourcing model that has now come to dominate the apparel industry” Scott Nova, Workers’ Rights Consortium.

“These huge global companies continue to show callous indifference to the lives of the thousands of workers who toil for their Bangladesh contractors and subcontractors.” Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation. (ITUC, 2013).
“Familiar brands now stand accused of exploiting poorly paid workers with a callous indifference to their safety” Economist Magazine. (Economist, 2013).

Eleven of the brands and retailers sourcing from the factories involved in the Tazreen and Rana Plaza disasters joined high-level compensation meetings, facilitated by the ILO as a neutral chair, on 11-12 September in Geneva. Many other major companies failed to attend, showing total contempt for the 1,900 workers who were injured and the families of over 1,200 workers who were killed making their products. IndustriALL/CCC Joint Press Release. (IndustriALL, 2013).

(asked who bore primary responsibility for Rana Plaza and Tazreen): It’s totally, absolutely, no one else, the corporations. The central global immoral corporations that have absolutely no concept of anything but the modern life and it’s basically right centered in there. There’s no one else. They’re the ones making the decision in the boardrooms of wherever. They can be in Germany, they can be here, they can be wherever. They’re a small group of people, they’re single minded, they’re single minded blokes … and they go wherever they can find a lowest bottom line. They prefer their feeding frenzy, they’re sharks so that’s it. There’s no one else, no one else. Then they go where there’s massive poverty. They go where they have a view and an eye for social evil and social … they go where there’s desperate people. (Interview Eric, 2013).

These statements include similar epithets and aspersions. Michelle Chen refers to the “callousness” of multinational companies, and argues that the industry “ruthlessly” devalues human lives. Scott Nova also deploys the word “ruthless”, this time in describing Walmart. Sharan Burrow argues that firms are exhibiting “callous indifference”, and the influential Economist magazine repeats the term, noting that this phrase is being used by groups censuring firms. IndustriALL and the CCC, to sharpen the significance of firms not meeting to negotiate, characterize the inaction as “showing contempt”. Finally, in perhaps the most inflammatory statement of the case study, “Eric,” a veteran labor activist who has worked on
various campaigns and who has travelled many times to Bangladesh, immediately ties the whole issue of Bangladesh factory safety to corporate subjectivity. By the second sentence of his interview the issue of “immoral corporations” is raised, and by the eighth he declares “they prefer their feeding frenzy, they’re sharks so that’s it. There’s no one else (responsible).” It’s clear, to Eric, that corporate subjectivity and the “single-minded” profit-imperative of firms, in a weak state context with “desperate people,” is the issue that must be challenged for these tragedies to cease. In less pointed terms, the others agree.

We can see here that “ruthless,” “callous,” and “sharks” are all discursive relatives of “greedy.” All refer to being single-minded in ambition, and not taking the rights and needs of others into account. It would be challenging to be a “ruthless” firm without also being a “greedy” one, and a “shark” who “prefer(s) a feeding frenzy” is presumably both “greedy” and “ruthless”. That said, these are not all perfectly interchangeable – activists deploy the one that best fits their thinking. “Callous” is more passive than “ruthless”, and less tied to desire or ambition than “greedy.” Moreover, showing “contempt,” though pertaining to subjectivity, is not the same as greed or ruthlessness. IndustriALL and the CCC, through using “contempt”, are making a more particular, though related, claim than those deploying “ruthless” or “greedy”: they are claiming that firms are showing contempt in this particular context to this particular group of people (victims of the tragedy and their families). We can infer a certain ruthlessness or certain greediness from this assertion of contempt, but the attribution is temporary. In this moment, IndustriALL and the CCC would presumably agree that these firms were projecting a certain ruthlessness and greediness – why else would they show contempt to these suffering claimants?
What all of these epithets share is the argument that corporate subjectivities of targeted firms are defective, and in a particular way: these firms are self-interested to such a degree that they disregard others and thus create suffering and subsequently neglect to address suffering where it happens to exist. These self-interested firms thus contravene the norms of society in ways that are emblematic of antisocial individuals – hence the anthropomorphization inherent in all these statements, as well as the conspicuous dehumanization through the use of “sharks.” These firms are being described as if they are predatory, aggressive, aberrant people who sit outside normal society and who victimize vulnerable agents. But why?

Agents are choosing these labels as a way to frame the discussion. The implication seems to be that this focuses attention on the ways that firms are offensive and deserving of retaliation. All of these statements are discursively deployed in somewhat heuristic manner – managerial decisions are generally not described as “ruthless” or “callous”, so the discursive effect is to draw in the anthropomorphized connotations of “ruthlessness” or “callousness,” so that the audience compares the similarities of these contexts to more general usages of those terms. Retailers might think that they are being retaliated against because they refuse to sign the Accord or make restitution, but this is not quite correct. The matters of the Accord and compensation are in a sense temporarily bracketed and set aside. Instead of retaliating against firms for not joining the Accord, the audience is also encouraged to retaliate because these firms acted ruthlessly, or showed contempt, towards vulnerable people, resulting in suffering. Emphasizing these factors, and characterizing transgressions in this manner, is a recognized strategy in the social psychology literature for amplifying moral intensity and
thus prosocial retaliation against perceived antisocial agents (Michell, Agle and Wood, 1997), and is exactly why Arendt worried so much about its use, as it threatened to mobilize people to angry, classist ends (2006(1963): pp. 78-81). It is easy for people to rationalize business transactions – after all, there are many good reasons not to attend a given negotiation with stakeholders, or to resist powerful arbitration clauses in a contract - and many observers will understand that. It can be more challenging, however, to rationalize being antisocial and predatory. Raising the issue of subjectivities as a way of framing the issues helps accomplish this for activists.

**Problematization of Shareholder-Value Imperative and Suggestion of Restraint**

This problematization of economic subjectivities, along the lines of firms being “greedy” or “ruthless,” dovetails with a tightly related issue that activists were also intent on raising after Rana Plaza – that firms’ profit-orientation was problematic. See the following five examples (again, please see Appendix A for other examples of this language):

“Disney’s decision to pull out of Bangladesh is shameful and should not be emulated. Global companies have made huge profits by using Bangladeshi factories for years. Now is not the time to walk away...But what is really appalling about the Disney decision is their lack of compassion for workers. In the aftermath of the horrendous Tazreen fire last November, labor activists scrambled to find out what brands had product in the factory. This is a morbid, yet critical task after each tragedy because the legally mandated compensation for a workers’ death or injury in Bangladesh is woefully inadequate, and therefore brands have a moral obligation to pay their fair share and ensure decent compensation for the victims...It flies in the face of Disney family members’ generous contributions to charity in other fields. This is a reaction not to be emulated. We continue to invite Disney to help the workers in Bangladesh through paying its fair share into the victims’ fund and by making a real commitment to being socially responsible.” Liana
Gap Inc may say, as it does on its website, that 'For decades, we’ve been paying increasing attention to the processes that make up our supply chain, and even to the lifecycle of a given garment. But when push to comes to shove, none of that matters. The chief executive confirms that protecting shareholder value is what is driving decision making...dealing with moral and ethical issues flowing from the death of 1,127 workers in Bangladesh doesn’t seem to be urgent or even relevant to the American firms. Instead, it’s shareholder value and business as usual. Steve Denning, Forbes (Denning, 2013)

“…They don’t want to share their profits with anyone…” Kalpona Akter, Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) / AFL-CIO (Akter, 2013).

“Your ethics and behavior is as important as making a profit. You have a choice to make.” Nadja Kassam, Clean Clothes Campaign (Kassam, 2013).

“Because of cut-throat competition, suppliers refused to make renovations….because of big-business negligence and a desire to sell-and buy-the most at the cheapest price, warnings…were ignored.” Cost of Fashion Campaign (Cost of Fashion, 2014).

All of these statements problematize the organizational profit-motive and the idea that the free market establishes the appropriate level of various criteria, including fair wages and sufficient worker safety. Most of the other statements considered above, as well as within Appendix A, also make this argument. Rather, the assertion is that “cut-throat competition” or “business as usual” create the conditions for this predictable suffering to occur, and that, as Kassam puts it, firms have “a choice to make.” This links the essential question of economic subjectivities, namely whether they can be publically destabilized, or must be
assumed to be competitive, with the equally conflicted question of whether publically traded firms should be expected to deviate from their profit-seeking mandate. The two questions essentially presuppose one another, and an authoritative “no” on either one forecloses discussion regarding the other (beyond a formal broadening of business’ mandates, as with the new “Benefit Corporation” incorporation movement – see Reiser, 2011 for an overview).

These politics ask us whether “business as usual” should be tolerated, and underline that firms make choices that reveal their subjectivities.

These sorts of questions are asked throughout most CSR engagements – but they are often limited by the competitiveness boundary, which argues that firms are only going to accept changes that create convenient “win-win” conditions, and that to ask for more is effectively utopian (critically, see Banerjee, 2007, Fleming and Jones, 2013). What’s essential here, though, is that the willingness to destabilize the expectation of competitive (or mandate-compliant) subjectivity through explicitly moral argument destabilizes the competitiveness boundary at the firm level. These political actors, who are willing to call firms greedy or ruthless, are also willing to argue, as Foxveg and Gearheart put it, that

“brands have a moral obligation to pay their fair share and ensure decent compensation for the victims...We continue to invite Disney to help the workers in Bangladesh through paying its fair share into the victims’ fund and by making a real commitment to being socially responsible” (Foxveg and Gearheart, 2013).

This is an unabashedly normative argument that dispenses with the expectation of shareholder supremacy, and instead reconfigures “socially responsible” away from creating
added mutual benefit to being in accordance with “moral obligation.” The social politics of
Bangladeshi factory safety intertwined a series of arguments regarding why firms ought to
join the Accord and pay compensation to victims, and many of those arguments included
strategic warnings (and promises) of what retailers might expect should they decide to
comply or not comply. These social politics are not anti-strategic or naïve. Rather, they go
beyond those considerations to also include pure normative demands – there are penalties
waiting for hostile firms, but firms ought not simply comply out of strategic reasons. They
should comply because it is both strategically beneficial and morally imperative. Here, the
“win-win” of CSR is recoded from “doing well by doing good” to “doing well and doing
good.” Moral obligation for firms is, here, not contingent on instrumental concerns – if those
align then they are happy coincidences.

Despite this moral orientation and willingness to challenge the status quo, these
campaigners do not suggest structural innovations on the market system. Consistent with
most social-liberal politics, firms are not asked to authoritatively declare a new corporate
mandate and ethos (the Benefit Corporation movement and other worthwhile endeavors
aside). Rather, these politics aim to simply destabilize the competitiveness-assumption, such
that prosociality can be demanded and displayed without being dismissed as unreasonable.
The intent here is not to provide a comprehensive alternative to the profit-oriented firm that
companies might adopt. Rather, the status-quo is noted and deemed unacceptable. It is up to
firms to figure out how to go about their business without causing suffering.
In the absence of a structural remedy, and given the intensity of stakeholder outrage at the suffering caused by Tazreen and Rana Plaza, the suggested recourse for firms is local restraint. As sourcing consultant Adam puts it:

With this kind of (low-wage) context, companies obviously are going there to save money, they know they have cheap labor (in Bangladesh). The first thing (to consider) is the market drive behind that which is one of the big issues behind it and there’s obviously no single way to just change things. For me, the main question is the difference between using this difference (in labor costs) as it ranges between western communities, whatever, and in this case is the Southeast Asian communities. You can use this in the positive way or you can kind of, in my eyes, misuse that by overdoing it. If you go to Bangladesh you have the lowest wage already. Maybe at least you could not try to make it even cheaper, cheaper...If we are in (wealthy country redacted), and I’m talking here to somebody who’s going to sell me something, I’ve got to try to squeeze the last bit out of him but within the context that I know this guy is more or less on an eye level in terms of independency more or less, but in the country like Bangladesh it’s so obvious that if you come there with a bit of more money you are in a much better position to make a contract and to, I don’t know the name, to dictate the prices …

The first thing is for me, what is the market drive doing and do we have to follow the same kind of market rules in this context then we do it in the context while if European companies do business with American whatsoever. I don’t know, I think that morally we could make a difference in focusing there. (Interview Adam, 2013)

Adam’s problematization of the “market drive,” while vague and indeterminate, seems to encapsulate quite well the standpoint of most activists who deployed moral obligation arguments. The debate over Bangladeshi factory safety virtually never featured arguments that retailers should leave Bangladesh (in fact, Disney was pointedly critiqued for doing so (Foxveg and Gearheart, 2013)), nor that retailers should stop pursuing lower input costs, nor even that retailers should act for the benefit of the common good. Rather, the normative intervention here is targeted to remedy, as much as possible, the situation within the market structure that already exists.
That there were very few appealing structural solutions on offer in the Bangladesh scenario, beyond participation in the expensive Accord, speaks to how a bifurcated message emerged to push firms to comply. Civil society sought to make it appealing for firms to join the Accord, and to make it painful not to join the Accord. But in the absence of a clear strategic benefit from participating in this broad, industry-altering, effort, firms were asked to join out of social beneficence, or a sort of restraint. Firms were effectively asked to start restraining themselves from the most aggressive forms of competition on labor prices: the profit-seeking firm was seen as generally good, in that it employed many people and helped Bangladesh develop its broader economy, but the profit-seeking impulse or “drive”, could be taken too far. In effect, these politics suggested that firms could exhibit their lack of greed or ruthlessness by restraining their profit-seeking impulses in certain local conditions, by joining the Accord, and by making compensation to victims and their families. By focusing on subjectivities and discretion, activists thus recognized the dearth of easy structural solutions on offer while also arguing that, regardless, companies “had” to comply.

The Result of Greed and Ruthlessness: Exploitation

The objective counterpart to subjective greed and ruthlessness is exploitation. The different concepts do not completely translate, but they generally refer to the same moral transgression. Ruthless market agents are likely to create exploitative conditions, and exploitation is likely to create public attributions of greed or ruthlessness towards those exploitative agents. Put differently, most of the time, exploitation is perceived to partially
stem from greed or ruthlessness on the part of powerful firms or individuals. An authoritative and rigorous conceptualization of exploitation remains elusive, though most observers agree that it involves transgression of market norms due to a power imbalance between two parties (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2008; Cohen, 1979; Elster, 1983; Goodin, 1987, 1988).

Exploitation discourse was routinely deployed after Tazreen and Rana Plaza in order to push firms both to restrain themselves from unduly taking advantage of extant market conditions as well as to join the Accord and thus help modify the industry-norms under which future business would take place. See, for example, these statements (others can be found in Appendix A):

…there can be no uncommitted passengers (amongst retailers) because the stakes are too high. We are talking improving the working conditions and lives of some of the most exploited workers in the world. Jyrkki Raina, IndustiALL, speaking about why retailers should join the Accord (IndustriALL, 2013e).

The best way to avoid future Rana Plaza-type disasters and end the exploitation of Bangladeshi workers is to encourage the establishment of independent trade unions to monitor and protect workers’ rights. The government has belatedly begun to register unions, which is an important first step, but it now needs to ensure that factory owners stop persecuting their leaders and actually allow them to function. Brad Adams, Asia Director, Human Rights Watch. (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

There is a sort of genuine cost advantage (in Bangladesh) that could be exploited, and then there is the exploitation of that, if you like. Peter McAllister, Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI). (Talaga, 2013).

Western companies now depend on inspectors to uncover hazardous work conditions, like faulty electrical wiring or blocked stairways, that have exposed some corporations to charges of irresponsibility and exploitation after factory disasters that killed hundreds of

It’s a very, I think, theoretical and critical piece of the campaign, or of how and when to use language... like exploitation I think is a good (term), because it actually accurately describes the situation where you’re generating surplus at the complete and utter disadvantage of somebody. We know that that’s a way that companies continue to make money, and we just accept shareholder profit as something that is an entitlement piece, that that’s how the market works. But we don’t seem to be able to wrap our heads around that the underbelly is being able to exploit someone somewhere. Interview with Katherine, a professional labor campaigner who was working on supporting the Accord (Interview Katherine, 2013).

After the four corners fashion victims story aired about Rana plaza many Aussies were outraged. A Facebook group called ethical work was formed, and I began with them. It was put together through members of a real union called Australian unions. We were outraged because companies making millions were exploiting people. Rana Plaza exposed things people knew but had not thought about – the fact it was totally preventable was hard to take, and images of women with lost limbs and the dead were sickening. Interview with Winston, a labor activist and creator of protest web sites (Interview Winston, 2014).

What all of these statements share is a sense that the market reality of workers in Bangladesh is unjust due to their treatment by those who employed them. None of these statements suggest a non-market alternative, but they all suggest that the status quo market should be changed on a local or temporary basis: the market, in this industry at this time, creates significant and predictable abuses, and as such the traditional firm mandate should be broadened. Jyrkki Raina of IndustriALL and Brad Adams of Human Rights Watch argue that the solution is to empower workers – either through the Accord system or improved Bangladeshi state labor rights. The suggestion is that changing these underlying conditions would help workers assert their interests, resulting in a retention of the same formal market
relation but under fairer substantive conditions. Social pressure is thus deployed here to make retailers participate in this new market regime. Peter McAllister of ETI suggests that firms should restrain themselves from abusing the “cost advantage” of sourcing from Bangladesh, and notably uses almost the same terms as Adam did when discussing firms’ “market drive” (Interview Adam, 2013): taking advantage of the opportunities in Bangladesh is a good thing that aids both retailers and Bangladeshi workers, but going too far tips over into “exploitation.”

Taken together, along with the many other instances of “exploitation” language found in Appendix A, these statements closely resemble the formulation of exploitation found in Robert Goodin’s work on vulnerability (1987, 1988) and Robert Mayer’s work on discretionary exploitation (2007). Goodin argues that our social responsibilities emanate from the experience of suffering and status of vulnerability of those we engage with. Similar to a more restrained version of Iris Marion Young’s Social Connection model of responsibility, where we each bear responsibility for the justice of the structural processes wherein we participate (2007), Goodin argues that when we engage in relationships with peers who happen to be extremely vulnerable, our engagement with them creates moral demands for us to both not abuse their vulnerability, as well as to aid them if possible (Goodin, 1985; 34-37). Mayer, similarly, argues that when faced with vulnerable agents who possess a minimum of power, an agent with discretionary power not to take advantage of that vulnerability is morally wrong (Mayer, 2006). As Goodin puts it, exploitation here exists because powerful agents are not respecting their obligations not to take advantage of this desperate labor pool. The way to avoid exploitation is “to suspend ordinary rules of behavior
in dealing with those particularly vulnerable to (us)” (Goodin, 1988; p. 187). In other words, it cannot be business as usual.

This is not a radical denouncement of the market system, but a special, bounded breach of norms due to market agents refusing to suspend typical market norms. Hence my description of “local” and “temporary” restraint: in Goodin and Mayer’s language, taking advantage is never acceptable anywhere (and so this language can be confusing), but from the perspective of the market system, and from agents acting within that system, exploitation occurs in certain extreme circumstances, where the general rules of the market suddenly no longer apply because conditions have become so dangerous. In this sense, the moral violation is a refusal to recognize that, in these extreme local conditions at this time, the market system ought not to entirely apply, and restraint should be, in the here and now, exercised.

But this raises the issues that Mayer struggles with: isn’t any sweatshop industry so inherently competitive that the element of discretion is removed? Aren’t retailers essentially as structurally powerless as the workers in the factories (Mayer, 2007; 610-615)? Mayer suggests that this sort of exploitation, what he calls “structural exploitation” (614-615) is wrong but perhaps not as blameworthy as discretionary exploitation, as any alternative is presumably worse for workers than the exploitation itself. Without the power for firms to do differently, charges of exploitation might lose their normative power.

In some ways, however, Katherine and Winston’s statements are the most fascinating, and they speak to this reality. Both statements fundamentally accept the market system, but they raise the cognitive dissonance that market realities can evoke, and point out that this is
the starting point for thinking about activism. Both highlight how we know about economic
abuses in a hypothetical sense, but the reality of “the underbelly” can be shocking, and they
point to this outrage as a fascinating moment. For Katherine, emphasizing exploitation is a
moment that challenges the status quo rationalization of the higher-order paradigm of the
market. For Winston, witnessing the horror produced by substandard safety standards,
alongside a business relationship that caused those standards, awakened his network’s
political interest – something that had formerly been hypothetical became concrete and
immediately unacceptable. Moreover, they both highlight how charges of exploitation
always discursively highlight the relative positions of the exploiters and the exploited –
absent an abusive relationship characterized by implicit discretion the situation is mere
structural poverty, a lamentable fact with no easy solution. Charges of exploitation based on
contrasting fortunes and capacities is what politicizes the situation. In governmentality terms,
the existence of contrasting fortunes and capacities renders this lamentable suffering a matter
of discretion, and thus moral failure. This moral failure not only heightens moral sentiment,
but it also renders the situation publically salient: if we, as a public, care about human
welfare, and this welfare is being caused by a certain group of people’s moral failure, how
are we going to collectively respond?

Focusing on concrete facts, and highlighting the disparity of retailers’ financial
resources in contrast to workers’ vulnerability and suffering was thus a key strategy for
campaigners. This question of discretion immediately implicated questions of retailers’
subjectivity. Take, for example these statements:
…with over 1 Billion $ in net profits in 2012…”Gap (says) ‘we are committed’, but behind this seeming rosy picture that Gap tries to paint, the company is leaving workers to fear for their safety. Jury Prize Citation, Public Eye Awards (Public Eye, 2014).

The disregard of the absent brands for the plight of workers in Bangladesh whose lives have been destroyed by the avoidable accidents at Tazreen and Rana Plaza is shocking in the extreme. Empty promises and direct untruths since the Tazreen fire and the Rana Plaza collapse all so that these Western multinationals can avoid making payments that amount to a minute percentage of turnover. Monika Kemperle, IndustriALL (IndustriALL, 2013).

The problem is that my clients are driving down prices more and more. Do they want people to work for nothing? European brands sell at a sevenfold mark-up — they multiply the price they get from us by seven, or even ten. There is no limit to their desire for profit. Longstanding clients can leave us overnight if a competitor undercuts us by 10 cents. The hypocrisy is breathtaking. George Paquet, sourcing consultant in Bangladesh (Cyran, 2013).

CEO Jane Elfers makes $17 million a year – more than double the $8 Million that the Children’s Place owes to the victims of the Bangladesh Factory Collapse. Tell Children’s Place to Pay Up! International Labor Rights Forum and United Students Against Sweatshops (ILRF and USAS, 2014).

Since the beginning, low wages and an ever-growing, ever-more-desperate labour pool have fuelled the factory owners’ profits in a race to the bottom. Rick Westhead, Toronto Star (Westhead, 2013).

“(Having been asked who bears responsibility for Rana Plaza) I think the wealthy, those that have power in that kind of economic order. They’re far more powerful than the poor. Whether it’s Loblaw, Canadian Tire, Mark’s or Walmart or Fairweather’s, I think all those companies are looking to make the most money they can…The Bangladeshi companies that take on the work want to make lots of money too, and I know there are lots of very rich people in Bangladesh as well who run those factories and can cut corners and can run them at low cost which usually means less health and safety regulations, less sturdy buildings, less fire escapes, all those things. They have power too because they’re wealthy and they have power in Bangladesh. And there are lots of other poor people in
Bangladesh or people who are prepared to do low wage jobs. (Factory owners) can then offload that cost to the poor, and the poor are the ones working in the plants that are not built to standards perhaps and standards that are safe. The savings (retailers and factory owners) get by not reaching those regulations that that risk is transferred to those working in those plants and sometimes they collapse. That’s the cost to save human lives. They’re also paid by very little wages and other substandard conditions. Health and safety is one way, well anywhere, that companies can save money. They can simply have a less well provisioned workplace or a less modern workplace and a less safe workplace. That’s just a way to save money. Interview with Jeffrey, a veteran labor organizer who was working on supporting the Accord. (Interview Jeffrey, 2013).

All of these statements tie institutional profit-seeking to moral transgression, with capacity as the hinge. In effect, these statements all seek to argue that the powerlessness that Mayer wonders about does not exist in the Bangladesh garment industry, as the competition is fierce, but the global retailers are not actually at risk of failure in the same sense as factory owners and Bangladeshi workers. Whether or not this is true is largely immaterial here – what is essential is that this is what campaigners were arguing and how they sought to frame the public debate. All of these statements, as well as many more in Appendix A, point to the relative power positions of both workers and retailers, and then point to the high profit margins within the industry, as evidence that retailers have the discretion to minimize the suffering of factory workers.

This argumentation is consistent with Goodin and Mayer’s accounts of what gives the worst forms of exploitation their particularly intense moral power, and thus seems likely to amplify the moral intensity of the transgression in the eyes of audiences (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, 1997). See how the high-profile “Public Eye Awards” mentions Gap’s high net profits, how Monika Kemperle of IndustriALL asserts that the needed changes would require
a “minute percentage of turnover”, and how the ILRF and USAS point to Childrens’ Place’s high executive pay. All of these emphasize retailer’s fiscal capacity. Westhead, reporting on conditions in Bangladesh and the effect of these types of arguments, summarizes everything in a single line: the desperation of workers is fuelling profits (in this case of owners but implicitly of retailers as well). The assertion is that these conditions are not the inevitable outcomes of structural forces, but the result of actual choices, which could have been made differently, by powerful organizations. These firms are thus painted as being deserving of censure: not only because they have policies that civil society groups abhor (although that is part of it), but also because they have deliberately, and freely, chosen policies that will predictably result in suffering.

**The Solution: Temporary Restraint and Social Solidarity**

So how does civil society, in these politics, hope to remedy some of the suffering inherent in the Bangladesh ready-made-garment (RMG) industry?

*Temporary and Local Restraint:* Firstly, we see a call here for temporary and local restraint by firms. Firms (both western retailers and Bangladeshi factory owners) are being asked to restrain themselves from imperiling workers. But this restraint is not comprehensive or structural, as firms are not being asked to restrain themselves in all labour conditions, or even necessarily in Bangladesh all the time. We’ve seen a sustained set of politics here that oscillates in between accepting and rejecting the free market. Neither perspective, of
orthodox free-market capitalism and orthodox anti-capitalism, makes sense here. This is important to underline. This is a politics that repeatedly (and aggressively) attacks retailers as “greedy” or “ruthless”, and which oftentimes either explicitly problematizes the profit-motive of multinationals such as Walmart, H&M, or the Gap, or implicitly suggests this by noting those firms’ high profits alongside calls for change. In that respect, these politics undermine the core of the (neo)liberal market: that individuals are competitive, and that it is through competition that markets properly increase and distribute welfare. The themes of restraint, greed, exploitation, and intolerable power differentials all seem reminiscent of historical socialism (at least in its social-democratic liberal fashion).

But these politics have almost no interventionist role for states (many of these civil society groups also lobbied states to make tariff changes, but these were ultimately of secondary importance) (Taubner, 2013; Yardley, 2012), and activists specifically do not call for key industries to be formally run on cooperative or public-interest principles. So these politics suggest an arrangement with elements of both liberalism and quasi-socialism: markets are to be free, and firms will be generally profit-seeking, but principles of care and restraint are called for in these times and places30. As per Goodin, the usual norms governing interactions in the market can be now said not to hold (at least among certain audiences) regarding fire and building safety in Bangladesh (1987, 1988).

30 Again, I use the term “temporarily” to follow the exploitation literature’s (Goodin, 1987, 1988; Mayer, 2007) focus on the norm that there are times and places to suspend normal market logics.
Moreover, we might expect, in a provisional sense, that following Tazreen and Rana Plaza that this moral obligation to temporarily suspend aggressive profit-seeking now extends to other markets with similar structural imbalances, where labour is so weak that it cannot avoid agreeing to dangerous work conditions. Any near-term future disaster that resembles Tazreen and Rana Plaza will undoubtedly result in comparisons with the Bangladeshi experience, as well as heightened moral outrage, just as Tazreen and Rana Plaza each reinforced the tragedy of the other and highlighted how this suffering occurred despite being predictable. Wider society has thus identified these conditions as ones where everyday market logic ought not to hold. To the extent that firms respect these local norms, civil society will praise them – hopefully making strategic sense for those firms, thus making temporary restraint a long-term strategic opportunity – which is exactly what firms saw in the Accord (Greenhouse; 2013). These partnerships thus create a CSR “win-win” (Banerjee, 2007), but here the formulation is based on (temporary and local) restraint, and in any case the social propriety of proper worker safety is deemed morally obligatory irrespective of whether or not attending to the issue makes financial sense for firms. The demand for temporary and local restraint thus flows from a general stance: that firms should respect minimum standards of worker safety, and that a failure to do so demonstrates a moral failure; of individuals as well as of organizations’ corporate cultures.

Whether or not firms are acting out of moral obligation, strategic advantage, or reactive fear of censure is ultimately unimportant, and to be sure these conditions would for many firms overlap. The political rationality emblematic of social-welfare liberalism seeks to secure broad-based welfare gains based on a strong economy. If some agents unilaterally
decide to temporarily restrain themselves in order to better respect social norms and secure legitimacy gains simply for strategic reasons, then this is all to the good. This critical strain of CSR thus hopefully attends to Banerjee (2008), Hanlon (2008), and Shamir’s (2005, 2008), concerns: here, criticality actually exists, as CSR is defined as doing what is morally obligatory, not what is morally possible within the constraints of the profit-motive and competitiveness agenda.

*Social Solidarity with Workers and Victims:* Above and beyond the question of making firms restrain themselves, the larger campaign effort made by civil society in these politics was to mobilize social sentiment to stand in solidarity with workers in Bangladesh as well as victims of the tragedy and their families. This campaigning for greater solidarity had two goals: to make consumers and retailers each stand with workers, and to make consumers and retailers stand with victims. Firm solidarity was tightly related to calls for restraint, and in some ways was conceptually secondary to the larger solidarization project: making a critical mass of consumers and onlookers mobilize in support of workers and victims, such that this issue would become a major concern for firms. Take, for example, these statements:

> As labor rights advocates in the US, it’s important to also stand with our brothers and sisters abroad. No one anywhere should die for fashion. Kung Feng, International Labor Rights Forum and United Students Against Sweatshops (ILRF and USAS, 2013).

> …I feel so grateful that so many people who aren't directly connected to Bangladesh are here because we need that international solidarity… Zakia Afrin, International Labor Rights Forum and United Students Against Sweatshops (ILRF and USAS, 2013).
…never forget the garment factory collapse in Bangladesh, one of any, many worker’s
tragedies which has happened since the garment industry has existed. Solidarity with
struggling garment industry workers all over the world. Safer working conditions and
better pay needed now! (Shameless Magazine, 2013)

…As Bangladesh workers pull the bodies of their friends from ruin of Rana Plaza, people
half a world away wearing the clothes they sew should not turn their faces away. They
need real knowledge about how their shirts and blouses are produced, and who produces
them. Rather than the image manipulation of Social Accountability International and its
competitor, the Fair Labor Association, they should demand the truth, and then use their
power as consumers. They should drive companies guilty of industrial homicide out of

We’re putting together a special rapid response team to amplify Sumi and Kalpona’s
voices while they’re in the U.S. If you sign up, we’ll ask you join some simple actions
over the next three weeks, like sharing things on social media, making phone calls to
corporate offices that are refusing to meet with the women, and otherwise helping spread
the their message to the world. This rapid response team is critical to making sure Sumi
and Kalpona aren’t ignored. But ultimately the choice is yours -- are you ready to step up
and stand with Sumi and Kalpona (two high profile Bangladeshi labour activists)? Sum
of Us Call for Volunteers (Sum of Us, 2013).

Join workers and consumers around the world in a day of action on April 24, 2014, to
stand in solidarity with garment workers in Bangladesh. One year after the Rana Plaza
building collapse killed at least 1,135 people in the worst garment industry catastrophe
the world has ever seen, concerned citizens around the world will demand that apparel
brands and retailers pay full and fair compensation to the victims of the Rana Plaza
collapse, the Tazreen factory fire, and other apparel industry disasters. International

IndustriALL and UNI, the two global unions jointly working to make the garment
industry in Bangladesh safe and sustainable, will stand with survivors and families of the
dead at Rana Plaza today for a candlelit vigil at sundown. The two unions are shocked
that still after six months Primark is the only brand to have paid anything to the victims.
IndustriALL and UNI Press Release (IndustriALL, 2013).
Sending a letter to Walmart, doing something however small sometimes represents at least something you can do. It’s symbolic if not real. It’s an action. You're taking a position for making that commitment and doing something to honor that commitment. I think that’s pretty powerful as an activism piece and solidarity piece. Interview with Jeffrey, a veteran labor campaigner (Interview Jeffrey, 2013).

(asked why the labor movement was taking a lead in this activism) ... I’m guessing it’s the same thing that affects a lot of consumers; just the horror of that factory collapse at all those fires. It’s just so shocking. The unions do have a long history of solidarity. If it wasn’t South Africa it was Poland. It was the civil rights movement. In equal rights for women and diversity and racism campaigns; they’ve all taken that on. Interview with Beatrice, artist and activist (Interview Beatrice, 2013).

These statements all refer either explicitly, or implicitly, to the need for greater solidarity with workers in Bangladesh and the victims of past tragedies. The International Labor Rights Forum and United Students Against Sweatshops use this language explicitly – calling for greater “solidarity with garment workers in Bangladesh”. IndustriALL, UNI, and Sum of Us, by contrast, deploy the term implicitly through the use of “stand with”, where members of the developed world are asked to “stand with”. In both senses, the idea is that to help remedy the situation, it is important for workers in Bangladesh to be supported by counterparts in the developed world. Explicit use of the term “solidarity” was also frequently used by organizations emanating out of historical roots in the trade and public union sectors. Take, for example, the high profile individual Bangladeshi labor activist, Kalpona Akter, who following Rana Plaza has travelled virtually full time to speak to various audiences in the developed world about Bangladeshi workplace safety. Ms. Akter’s formal position is with the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity, which is affiliated with the AFL-CIO’s Solidarity Center outreach program (Solidarity Center, 2013). When Ms. Akter travelled to Canada, she
was hosted by the Maquila Solidarity Network and the Solidarity fund of major unions including the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) (OPSEU, 2013). Many of the agents involved thus clearly perceived their general activities as being informed by the notion of solidarity, and a relatively coherent set of ideas, centered on mutuality, interdependence, and common interest helped ground activism.

The concept of solidarity is, like exploitation, heavily debated in the social theory literature. That said, from early social theorists such as Durkheim (1984 (1893)) to modern theoretical perspectives including Elster (1989), Habermas (1996), Giddens (2001), and Rorty (1984), there are some common themes that emerge as part of what solidarity is, as a phenomenon, as well as what agents typically aspire for it to be. Durkheim’s famous formulation of organic solidarity, held that solidarity served as a social bond that helped hold society together in the face of degrading capitalist industry and anonymizing modern society (1984 (1893)). Durkheim’s model, as does most contemporary theories of solidarity, posited that as citizens reflected on their complex interactions with each other and the economic system, they would come to understand and appreciate how we all live interdependently – that none of us can live well on our own, and that we are all beholden on various levels to the economic system we participate in. This would underwrite a type of political altruism, where groups of people would compassionately support other people in need based on a perceived commonality and sense of empathy between them. Ideally, the reduction of suffering becomes intrinsically important for those experiencing that compassion, and this altruism becomes a way of politically engaging the world (Rorty, 1984, Stjerno, 2005). Essentially, given that this case study involves perceived state failure (or at least lack of state interest),
many social theorists specifically locate the importance of solidarity in those instances where social order breaks down and juridical processes lose their effect (Elster, 1989, Rorty, 1984, Stjerno, 2005), as solidarity can help societies hold together in times of distress, and can underwrite social retaliation against agents who are taking advantage of the vacuum of power.

Exactly how that bond between different people is built, however, is complex and heavily debated. Durkheim’s focus on economic reflection is imperiled in a globalized world that features less and less points of contact with the people who produce the goods we consume (or who buy what we produce) (Stjerno, 2005), and different theorists hold out hope for different sentiments to drive this normative impulse. Habermas hopes for improved communication and more inclusive political networks to bring new narratives of human achievement and human suffering to new audiences, thus creating the possibility for tighter social cohesion with non-traditional counterparts (1996). Similarly, Stjerno (2005) hopes for better communication networks to facilitate role-taking and greater empathy between citizens, as he holds out relatively little hope that traditional reflection founded on workplace engagement with the economy will adequately stimulate common feeling and robust compassion. Rorty, in the same general vein, points out the historical primacy of the arts in facilitating this reflection, as artists can bring experiences of the other to life, thus demanding a normative reaction from audiences (1989).

On some level, despite the variety of avenues here for stimulating reflection, compassion, and thus political altruism, all of these themes were significantly represented in the politics of post-Rana Plaza. Take this public statement by the trade union United Food
Canada’s leading voice for retail workers, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW Canada), is offering its condolences to the families of the garment workers who were recently killed in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and partnering with Loblaw Companies Limited to lead the effort for a higher standard of scrutiny, accountability and health and safety protections in the global garment industry.

“We join the world in sending our deepest sympathies to the families of the workers lost in this horrendous event,” says Wayne Hanley, the national president of Canada’s largest private-sector union, UFCW Canada, in offering condolences to the families of the 500-plus workers who died on the job when their workplace, Rana Plaza, collapsed on April 24.

“The products made by workers in Rana were handled by UFCW Canada members every day, and we feel an especially strong connection to these workers and their families,” adds Hanley. Thousands of UFCW Canada members work at Loblaws selling many products including Joe Fresh items, which were once made at the Rana Plaza complex.

“Since the tragedy, UFCW Canada has fully mobilized its contacts around the world – and in Bangladesh in particular – to support any and all efforts to assist the families of the killed and injured workers, and to join the global community in calling for immediate measures to prevent this kind of tragedy from ever happening again,” says Hanley.

The UFCW is widely seen as a leading force in the global movement for the universal recognition and establishment of labour rights – including fundamental health and safety protections.

"As Canada’s leading voice for retail workers, UFCW Canada is willing to partner with any employer who is sincerely committed to improving the situation in Bangladesh, and we must commend Loblaw for demonstrating leadership and responsibility in the wake of this tragedy by accepting our offer to assist with NGOs, and by promising to improve inspection standards, and to provide badly needed relief to the devastated families,” says Hanley (UFCW Canada, 2013)

This statement corresponds quite well to both the classic Durkheimian concept of organic solidarity, as well as Stjerno’s concept of empathic-grounded solidarity. Despite being thousands of kilometers away, and despite their workplaces being quite different, the
Canadian retail workers felt connected by their relative places in the Loblaw supply chain. They even underline how UFCW members “handle” the goods made at Rana Plaza, and this acts as an emotional touchstone to ground the two groups’ commonality and thus UFCW’s activism. We could read this skeptically, and indeed any press release is a poor proxy for actual sentiment, but the inclusion here of this argument was not necessary. Someone, somewhere, at UFCW evidently found this argument illuminating and helpful for thinking through why UFCW would want to push management to partner with them in addressing the situation.

This is especially fascinating given that, if anything, UFCW and Bangladeshi interests are nominally at odds. Superior production margins in the vertically integrated Loblaw supply chain (ie. Loblaws both makes and sells its own clothes) make point-of-sale workplace disruptions by UFCW especially costly, thus creating greater room for UFCW to extract rents for members. For UFCW, an especially profitable Loblaws presents a Loblaws that is especially motivated to keep local storefronts open and satisfied. UFCW’s outreach thus works against their objective self-interest. UFCW does not use the term “solidarity” explicitly, but in effect this is exactly what they engaged in: political altruism based on an empathy and interconnectedness grounded in a recognition of the supply chain’s predictable abuses. Numerous other invocations of empathy and interdependence to ground calls to solidarity can be found in Appendix A.

Similarly, another important theme found in the case study was the important role of alternative journalism and art in advocacy. This finding was unexpected, although Rorty’s work (1989) on the key role of artists, who create the conditions for greater solidarity by
bringing new and emotional narratives to audiences, should perhaps have led me to expect it. However, it did not and this finding was emergent. The advocacy following Rana Plaza was deeply emotional, and sought to convey to people in developed countries the suffering and vulnerability of victims and workers in Bangladesh. But to be most effective in communicating this reality, a surprising number of artists (and journalists) turned to artistic representations of life “on the ground” in Dhaka. First, as a general tendency, it should be noted that journalism was clearly searching for a way to fairly describe the situation while still successfully conveying the visceral reality they, as journalists, were seeing. I do not mean to suggest that journalists had the same goals as did campaigners, but in a bounded sense they did: both journalists and campaigners thought it a matter of public interest that members of developed countries be exposed to the realities on the ground in Bangladesh. As an example of this trend, see the trend towards using documentaries to tell this story: even long-form written journalism evidently failed to capture the reality of Bangladeshi conditions, so many television stations, including Al-Jazeera English (2013), the Canadian CBC television (2013b), ABC-Australia (2013), and the BBC (2013) all turned to the documentary format, to capture what they felt audiences had to know. These documentaries were developed by journalists who felt the critical element was for audiences to, as best they could, experience lives unlike their own. All four documentaries focus on the grounded experience of workers in the factories, the suffering caused by the Tazreen and Rana Plaza tragedies, and mention retailers’ presumptive social responsibility as well as the Accord and Alliance initiatives as possible ways forward.
This journalistic interest in portraying the visceral reality of the Bangladeshi RMG sector was also echoed in explicitly-political alternative media. This finding was also emergent – these were still nominally journalistic in standpoint, in that they sought to communicate the truth, but they made no strong claims to balance or fairness: these interview subjects sought to advance civil society’s campaigning efforts through art. Interview subjects Leonard and Steve were active filmmakers, each working on developing separate explicitly-political film projects that were intended to place, in the future, with alternative TV networks. Steve’s was somewhat more journalistic in framing, but was intended to drive advocacy through hard hitting exposition that sought to challenge audiences. Steve’s project was about filming western-world reactions to humanitarian tragedies around the world, and was intended to help inspire and empower viewers to undertake solidarity actions in their own communities to address those worldwide problems:

“we want to tell the story of the world’s everyday people…when we started this project (the alternative press client) came to us and said he was intrigued with our concept of the 99%ers, and asked ‘do the 99% in the USA or Canada or wherever know that there are 99%ers around the world?’ You know, the 99% here in the USA, or Canada, who are suffering…and they are…are still relatively speaking much more prosperous than the 99% around the world. You know, witness Bangladesh….so we went around the country witnessing community activists making their communities better and making a difference both here at home and abroad, and we wanted it to be a hopeful piece about what everyday activists can do in response to big problems. I want Bangladesh or sweatshops to be part of this going forward…

…There are people all around the world who recognize that we are all part of the same family, that we have the same roots. We all bleed, we all smile, we all cry, we all want a certain amount of prosperity, and to be able to enjoy our families in a certain amount of peace and comfort. So we wonder how people in the West…how they can live in basically obscene prosperity that is basically based on slaves living in horrifying conditions somewhere…is beyond me…because now we can’t claim not to know anymore. I mean, how long did it take after that factory collapsed in Bangladesh that we knew what had happened? And what 1300 people snuffed out, what to make cheap, cheap jeans? So that’s where the solidarity part comes in. I think what we need to do is say to
ourselves, first, yeah I’m not doing that great economically, but if I’m not buying something fair trade, then how can I justify, you know, the cheap price I paid for it?...I just believe that people now, with the internet and more media, have the chance to develop solidarity and really understand that our sisters and brothers are all over the world. We just might not meet them all, but that’s no reason to accept the living conditions that we ask people to survive in. Interview with Steve, alternative media filmmaker (Interview Steve, 2014)

We can thus see here how an explicitly political journalistic enterprise is part of a wider effort to promote solidarity. Solidarity is facilitated here by recognition of the interdependence of consumers and producers within the value chain – just as UFCW members had felt a special connection to the workers in Bangladesh, Steve and others like him feel a special connection as well borne out of consuming something that others have labored on in terrible conditions. Just as discretion within retailers’ purchasing conditions is consistently emphasized in civil society advocacy towards firms, Steve highlights his own discretion: “yeah, I’m not doing that great economically, but if I’m not buying something fair trade, then how can I justify, you know, the cheap price I paid for it?”. Reflecting on the interdependence between himself and the workers, where his “cheap price” is created by “the living standards that we ask people to survive in,” Steve connects with how “our sisters and brothers are all over the world. We just might not meet them,” and sees this as part of developing solidarity and common cause with people he might otherwise not often think of.

This graying of the line between journalism, politics, and art is repeated in other, more explicitly artistic projects that sought to put audiences in the standpoints of Bangladesh garment workers. Take, for instance, Interview participant Uriah’s theatre troupe. His troupe operates with an explicitly political objective, and a distinctively participatory approach.
Troubled by Rana Plaza, they took the Bangladesh RMG industry as the inspiration for the Winter 2013/2014 season (Interview Uriah, 2014). Their theatre production brought audiences up on stage so that individuals would be forced to imagine working in a sweatshop and enduring the indignities suffered by workers there. Artist Beatrice, an experienced artist with a long history of success, has a similar plan, but with the plan of executing a large, interactive, art installation during an art festival. Her plan is to have audiences sit at machinery, learn about simple sewing, and produce garments. Participants would then have their work critiqued, would learn about the quotas demanded of average workers in Bangladesh, and would be told the wages they would have earned during their time there. The hope was for participants to be overwhelmed by the physical duress of actually making standard quotas, and to gain a better understanding and compassion for the garment workers who make their clothes. The installation would focus on working conditions, but would include information about past fire and safety tragedies and the ways forward (Interview Beatrice, 2013).

As mentioned above, there are a host of overlapping conceptions of solidarity and how best to develop it, but these themes of individuals reflecting on economic interdependence, witnessing suffering, recognizing capacity, and developing bonds of commonality expressed through political altruism (including retaliation against antisociality) are all emblematic of solidarity phenomena (Rorty, 1989; Skoljaer, 2005). Most advocacy advancing Bangladeshi labor rights and building safety was focused on rallying pressure against firms, but the vector through which this pressure was put of retailers came through grassroots pressure – from in person protesters (IRLF and USAS, 2013), as well as a number
of networked web projects, including petitions and email campaigns, that sought to push these issues onto the agenda of companies. In this way, then, pressure had to flow through the economic role played by most grassroots individuals – consumption. This solidarity advocacy, then, oftentimes travelled through the politicization of consumption, a political strategy with deep roots in CSR as well as the labor movement more generally (Rose, 1999, Stehr and Adolf, 2010).

Take these statements, first by Irene, a middle manager of a targeted firm who was on leave to work with the firm’s union on solidarity work, and then by Katherine, a veteran campaigner at a major public sector union. Both worked in their professional labour capacities to support the Accord movement:

Irene: The progressive movement, its major challenge is to create message or have some kind of resonating conversation with the general public. Increasingly the general public sees their role in societies through the lens of being a consumer. It’s something that we constantly try to do and we have mixed success with it…

…We tend to have success that boils down to a basic question of fairness. We have success when we frame it through the reality of the growing path between fabulously wealthy and the working poor or even the rest of us. Ultimately that’s a challenge for consumers. Consumers have to let these corporations know that it’s… they’re not interested in paying and saving 50 cents on a six pack of tube socks mean some 10 year old’s going to get squashed by a burning building. That's what it boils down to and it’s really a challenge more for all of us than just some of us, if that makes any sense to you…

…Labor, I think, and (Irene’s union) in particular is doing a really good job of engaging the public on these basic issues of fairness and empowering them with the knowledge that as consumers they can have a real impact on what these corporation, national or internationals and stand for and what they do and how they treat people. At the end of day, it’s going to be up to us and every time we pull out our credit card at one of these stores to have an impact on whether or not these corporations actually do the right thing.

Author: Okay, you said here a really interesting line that the people see themselves through the lens of being a consumer so they only see the price of the tube socks, right.
If not as the lens of a consumer, is there another lens that we should think of ourselves or that the labor movement should try to engage people as?

Irene: At (Irene’s union), and the labor movement as well, a big part of what we are doing is really trying to develop a citizenship….The labor movement, really led by (Irene’s union), is doing everything it can and with some success in trying to further cultivate just being a good citizen. From there I think that’s where the whole consumerism piece kind of takes off. Interview with Irene. (Interview Irene, 2013).

And:

Author: You used the word solidarity. Can you speak to that a little bit? That’s really interesting.

Katherine: I use that because you’ve probably interviewed lots of people who aren’t a trade unit, but within labor that’s one of our values, a core value. It really has to do with understanding the role of the collective. That what generates social change is its ability to empathize, and to also collectively organize ourselves together so that when there’s an injury to one, people perceive that as being an injury to themselves, to all.

Author: Hmm.

Katherine: In terms of our organizing amongst our members within The Union, that term is a call to action, it’s a rallying cry to again, try and make that connection. Going back to the connection between production and consumption, that if we’re going to be consumers - we’re foremost citizens, but if we’re going to be consumers in that store, we ought to care about the producers on the other end. Interview with Katherine. (Interview Katherine, 2013).

This language of consumption and politics goes to the core of what activists were trying to do: they sought to politicize consumption and thus drive pressure towards firms. Katherine ties it explicitly to notions of solidarity and empathy, along with the bifurcation between consumption and citizenship – that “we’re foremost citizens, but if we’re going to be consumers in that store, we ought to care about the producers on the other end”. She hopes to make consumers act more like citizens, and less as consumers, by enlarging what a
consumption decision involves: in this case care for producers and an individual perception that an “injury” has been incurred and this this ought not to happen. Irene, similarly, argues that the “progressive movement” has to work against society seeing itself primarily as consumers, as a narrow view of consumption will inevitably harm producers. Instead, she argues, progressives need to keep pushing to develop notions of citizenship within the purchasing moment.

2.2.4 Restraint, Solidarity, Compassion, and Welfare: Social Liberalism in a Non-State Frame

By politicizing consumption in accordance with principles of solidarity, both Irene and Katherine believe that individual purchases can result in real political power. Along with the above politicization of economic subjectivities at the level of the firm, these efforts aim to instill principles of restraint and care within nominally economic activities through diffused power networks –mostly involving the internet, but also involving in-person political protests as well. What draws these two lines of advocacy together is, along with how both ask nominally economic agents (consumers and firms) to display their broader subjectivities, is how this language and political strategy is emanating out of, and entirely consistent with, historical labor advocacy rooted in class-conscious politicization of production and consumption. This history of advocacy focuses on politicizing consumption, especially regarding suffering by producers, in order to provoke compassion and then care for welfare through solidarization: consumers should act like (weakly) altruistic citizens. Firms, by contrast, are asked to respect social norms, even if this requires restraint that is not
immediately instrumentally advantageous. This is a fully coherent political rationality, rooted in a rich history.

For an example of a single political campaign that deploys all of these strategies at once, see the protest website drawn up by the International Labor Rights Forum and United Students Against Sweatshops in their advocacy to have VF, a large parent company that owns a series of retailers including Timberland, Nautica, and North Face, enter into the Accord process (ILRF and USAS, 2014). The website is aimed at targeting North Face’s brand in particular, and asks for viewers to push their institutions (especially universities) to reject VF brands as suppliers for institutional contracts. An annotated screengrab of the website is included below as APPENDIX B. In a single webpage, the ILRF and USAS a) refigure North Face’s tagline from “Never Stop Exploring” to “Never Stop Exploiting”, b) ask for students to make their universities “show they care about the workers who produce their clothes,” c) highlight VF’s high profitability and high CEO compensation (thus showing capacity to make different choices) immediately juxtaposed with descriptions of Bangladeshi suffering, d) highlight VF’s presumed subjectivity through anthropogenic language, and e) highlight VF’s profit motive as a key reason why the tragedies occurred (ILRF and USAS, 2014). This is thoroughly “social” analysis: a given problem is identified (firm profit-motive and lack of subjective scruples), the analysis is emotionally heightened by activists’ amplifying the subjective and discretionary element, this problem is placed within a historical narrative of class and exploitation, and western consumption is politicized to drive pressure on firms. Everyone, from VF to North Face to American university students, is thus
asked to display their subjectivity, and their values, through their market relations. Egoism and lack of sufficient respect for our communal interdependence is then critiqued.

These politics are not entirely consistent with prior social critiques or manifestations of “the social”, however. The vast changes brought to the economy and industrial relations by globalization are relevant here. Most importantly, these factories featured no previously existing institutional compromise between workers and factory owners (or retailers) that would guarantee a minimum of welfare in the case of tragedy. In most welfarist contexts, employee safety has been generally removed from the direct employee-employer relationship and is instead placed primarily at the state level (Gunningham and Johnstone, 1999). This is because, typically, neither employers nor employees in fact want firms to bear the responsibility for employee safety, as in the actual event of tragedy, many firms cannot bear large liability payouts (Donzelot, 1984). Relying on firms to compensate families results in everybody imperiled: firms worry they might be undercut by negligent rival firms or that they might have to bear huge payouts, and suffering families might find themselves abandoned by bankrupted firms. Most democratic states cannot allow this sort of injustice to occur without it threatening the legitimacy of the state itself (Donzelot, 1984). As a result, most liberal democratic countries have therefore created payout-capped workplace insurance funds as well as relatively strict state workplace regulation. Workplace safety, to a great extent, has thus been generally bracketed, to the extent possible, as an issue in most welfare states, through state intervention and institutional forced compromise.

With globalization, much of this arrangement no longer holds, despite the “demand” for welfare protection remaining strong, as images of suffering are transmitted to developed-
world audiences in the Global North, prompting anger (Boltanski, 1999). After Rana Plaza, the intolerable occurred, but no state stepped in and no extant or mutually convenient institutional compromise existed to alleviate the worst of the suffering. The factory owners were bankrupted, workers only received a pittance of compensation, and the Bangladeshi state made only small efforts to alleviate suffering. Western states pledged small amounts, but they did not feel responsibility for Bangladeshi worker welfare. There was no state imperative here to develop a robust compensation plan, no state imperative to properly regulate worker safety, and no state imperative to create a mediated institutional settlement – all the typical “social” responses to worker safety, which would traditionally have considered the vagaries of firm reputations and direct industrial relations inadequate to address this notoriously stubborn issue.

This case thus provides a window into what social politics could look like when social sentiment remains without standard processes for problem-solving. Setting aside domestic Bangladeshi politics, which are not the focus of this case study, audiences in the Global North were furious: they witnessed at Tazreen and Rana Plaza economic immorality and institutional failure (Chen, 2013; Clifford and Greenhouse, 2013). They then shifted fundamental responsibility for welfare from states to firms. Seaching for capacity in an admittedly competitive market, campaigners identified major retailers, not factory owners (who were bankrupt and who had been aggressively bargained with by retailers in the first place), nor the uninterested various states who were deemed hostile, incompetent, or irrelevant. Activists wanted better Bangladeshi state regulation and greater Bangladeshi state respect for labour rights, but most civil society groups saw this state responsibility as a
secondary issue (Cyran, 2013; Akter, 2013). Fundamental responsibility for welfare – for preventing suffering in the first place, as well as for alleviating it were it happened to manifest itself – fell to major retailers from the Global North: they were the ones who were profiting from this predictable suffering, and they were the ones who had the ability to choose a different course of action (Economist, 2013). These retailers were identified as the only agents in the economic system (other than individual consumers) who had the actual ability to do differently\textsuperscript{31}.

There is relatively little precedent for this dynamic in traditional welfarist or “social” politics: traditionally, the primary two relationships worth shaping have been the relationships of workers with the state, and the relationship of workers with factory owners (often mediated by state labour law) (Donzelot, 1984; Rose, 1999; Dean, 2010a). In a globalized, dispersed value chain based on temporary sub-contracting, the on-the-ground relationship of workers with factory owners suddenly means much less than it once did: factory owners often lack the competitive ability to make the required concessions. A much more diffuse and chaotic politics is thus required; one that highlights the worker-retailer link, as well as the worker-consumer relationship.

\textsuperscript{31} The one significant possible outlier here is the Bangladeshi state. It has the capacity to better execute its responsibilities in regulating labour organizations, and was seen as problematically pro-business in fundamental orientation (Cyran, 2013; CBC, 2013b). But activists also looked at the Bangladeshi state with a certain understanding; the garment industry is a major employer, and regulating the massive industry in a sufficiently careful and responsive manner is possibly beyond its institutional capabilities (Interview Victor, 2014).
In a structural sense, these politics most resemble the industrial-relations quasi-paternalism of the American roaring 20s, where firms found it challenging to manage their social relations, despite having thoroughly evaded state regulation:

for business in the early 20th century United States, ‘responsibility’ meant, first and foremost, being viewed as a responsible employer. Having outmaneuvered organized labour and blocked or defanged virtually all governmental attempts at workplace regulation, it then became the responsibility of the leaders of the new corporate giants to manage their workplace power in the interest of productivity, labour peace and, ultimately, social legitimacy (Marens, 2013: 455-456).

In other words, “victory can be the source of new headaches for the victor, and the triumph of one institutional arrangement over others eventually generates its own contradictions” (Marens, 2013: 461). The American corporate titans eventually felt it necessary to unilaterally smooth out the roughest edges of their economic arrangement, as society was ready to blame them for problems involving their largely dependent workforces (Marens, 2013). For retailers based in the Global North, Bangladeshi worker safety is that sort of headache: in some senses strategically minor, but real nonetheless, as the price of operating without state regulation and without functional labour counterparts is a heightened social expectation for welfare-protection. Marens reminds us that CSR, as a concept, was largely developed by John Rockefeller II as a way to respond to public outcry after the Ludlow massacre (Marens, 2013; 466). We should recognize in this two things: first, an added historical reason to be skeptical and wary of CSR ideas that are clearly manufactured by firms, as well as the recognition that even the largest, most formally autonomous businesses have to be wary of being linked to predictable suffering – if the Rockefellers can be made to make concessions, then presumably so can anyone.
This said, the politics of Bangladeshi factory safety are ultimately different from roaring 20s American managerial CSR in important ways as well. Firstly, the concepts are all borne of historical labor advocacy, and in this case labour and civil society set the agenda – they did not secure all of its intended goals, but it secured many of them and dictated the terrain upon which the politics would be negotiated. Where Marens (2013) and Kinderman (2008, 2010) see American managerial CSR as largely a tool where corporate America’s past triumphs are legitimated in controlled ways, these recent manifestations of CSR politics were as reactions to grassroots anger that was thoroughly outside managerial control. These politics, with their themes of exploitation, personal subjective failings including greed and ruthlessness, and requests for restraint, are incompatible both with the expectations of traditional business audiences as well as with neoliberalism more generally. This case study thus shows us the deployment of an old, “social government” (Rose, 1999: p. 131) political rationality amended to a new non-state frame: instead of pushing firms to quasi-paternalistically dispense benefits to workers, these politics demanded that firms enter into a legally enforceable MSI that would raise the cost of sourcing in Bangladesh, as well as a compensation plan for victims and their families. These politics thus temporarily undermined the premises of the global market: that firms should act competitively, and that this aggressive competitiveness was legitimate. These politics made plain that networked grassroots activists and NGOs would harass firms until they reacted accordingly and showed a recognition for how they had caused predictable and unacceptable suffering.

These results resemble little else in the vast governmentality–inspired literature, most which is predominately interested in CSR’s neoliberal manifestations. However, the “social”
politics in this case study do thematically resemble the “inclusiveness regime” deployed by the Danish social-democratic government and studied by Vallentin (2013) in his research on the Danish state’s various CSR-encouragement policies. Most importantly, the Danish regime did include themes of solidarity and moral obligation. The politics in the case study here, however, are much more aggressive and much less conciliatory – Denmark’s social democratic CSR was never intended to threaten firm outcomes, as “it does not seek to force CSR upon businesses but urges them to contribute via economic incentives and by appealing not only to their sense of solidarity and societal obligation, but also their self-interest” (Vallentin, 2013). The politics of Bangladeshi factory safety are not limited to encouragement and incentivization. Due to the dearth of structural solutions and the perceived intransigence of firms, these politics were actually something of the reverse: “negative” motivations, be they demands for restraint (Foxveg and Gearheart, 2013), threats of boycotts (IndustriALL, 2013), threats of bad publicity (Chen, 2013), the personal demonization of key executives (Avaaz, 2013), and the intentional overloading of executives’ work email addresses (ILRF, 2014), all took center stage. The market itself was temporarily destabilized.

In this case study, civil society understood that firms’ strategic thinking demanded everyone’s attention to firms’ bottom lines, but for civil society preserving firms’ profitability at pre-engagement levels was simply not a concern. The thinking of activists was always to make firms accept a “second-best” future typified by lower profitability, and that making this happen would require some sort of force. The lines of continuity and divergence, between this manifestation of “social” politics and Vallentin’s Danish social-democratic model, suggest a common rootedness in social-democracy and the labor movement at the
level of an historical political rationality. However, this political rationality was deployed to different ends, in different contexts, with different actors. Vallentin does not suggest this, as his scholarly objective lay elsewhere, but his model seems a gentle, narrow and beneficent variant of “social” government focused on increasing welfare. We might perhaps expect a politics of this sort in the context of a wealthy welfare state with robust institutional ties to domestic business, creating a considerable institutional interdependence. Perhaps the politics of Rana Plaza are in a sense the other end of the economic and political spectrum, where institutional ties are absent, the suffering is so extreme, and the abdication of state responsibility is so stark, thus requiring much more robust political problematization by civil society.

The Effectiveness of Social Politics

We’ve seen at length that the politics deployed by civil society following Tazreen and Rana Plaza emanated from an historically important political rationality that Foucauldians call “the social” or “social government” (Rose, 1999: 135). “Social” politics, typically rooted in class-consciousness and in politics that seek to improve the welfare of society (and especially the welfare of the society’s weakest members), provides a framework for thinking about politics, identifying political problems, and then formulating responses (Castel, 2003; Rose, 1999; Dean, 2010a, 2010b; Procacci, 1993). In this case study, the typical “social” diagnosis and remedy: state recalcitrance and better state mediation and regulation, were institutionally impossible due to the weakness (and hostility) of the Bangladeshi state.
Western civil society groups thus shifted responsibility for worker welfare from the Bangladeshi state and to the multinational retailers who were purchasing the garments, and who had the capacity to make changes without going bankrupt. Diffused shaming techniques juxtaposed retailers’ capacity and Bangladeshi worker suffering, and demanded that retailers (and consumers) each perform their subjective values, thus placing ambivalent brackets around the shareholder-profit market theory of the firm. Egoist market relations were not forbidden, but rather interwoven with the expectation that in particularly dangerous cases, such as the Bangladeshi garment industry, that wealthy firms would restrain themselves from abusing the situation. This is classic “social” government, amended creatively to the 21st globalized world.

But is this advocacy effective? The mere existence of a political rationality is only so interesting – perhaps this was a temporary return to an old-fashioned kind of politics that will continue to disappear, as many think (Clarke, 2007). What would be really interesting is if this politics seemed to be particularly effective: that despite the inevitable backlash from those who believe NGOs should be conciliatory and problem-solvers, as well as those who believe market failures are primarily cognitive failures that have nothing to do with the profit motive or the market system (Deiglmeier, 2013; Karnani, 2011; Porter and Kramer, 2011), that these politics actually secured something impressive. What would be especially impressive, and important, would be if these politics secured gains that positive, communicative, problem-solving advocacy did not.

I am convinced of the more limited claim: that these politics helped secure important objectives, and I cautiously suggest that we should consider the more expansive claim: that
these politics worked in ways that others did not. The Accord and Alliance are two of the most important MSIs in CSR history: they have been described as “landmark”, feature innovative arbitration clauses that are inspiring other future agreements, and most importantly seem poised to secure better worker safety for millions of workers (Greenhouse, 2013; IndustriALL, 2013e). These benefits will ultimately only be realized in time, but for the time being almost everyone involved seems confident that they will generally come to pass, and that is all that could be hoped for. The question is whether these “social” politics contributed to this success. Demonstrating causality is always challenging, and should be done only with restraint – a great many structural factors, for instance Rana Plaza’s inordinate media attention and the fact that this media attention happened to fall during the annual general meeting (AGM) season, surely contributed significant momentum to campaigners. But these politics appear to have deeply worried firms in specific ways. I’d like to highlight two episodes from the civil society campaign against stubborn firms to show that these politics helped frame the issue in ways that proved particularly constraining for firms. The first shows the success of NGOs in setting the agenda – if not in securing all their desired gains. The second makes a stronger claim: that conspicuously “social” critique may have helped rescue the Accord process from being cannibalized by the Alliance, and may have helped compel the first mover firms to agree to the Accord. Basically, I suggest that the discursive resources facilitated by “social” imagery helped save the Accord.
2.2.5 The Politics of Condolence and Commitment: Firm Performances of Subjectivity and Cultural Values as the Basis For the Assuagement of Anger

Following Tazreen and Rana Plaza, activists and sympathetic onlookers sought to frame the tragedy as the predictable outcome of specific choices by sourcing firms, thus greatly amplifying targeted firms’ perceived moral responsibility for the suffering that Western audiences were witnessing through the media. This strategy largely hinged on the issue of capacity (that firms had the financial leeway to make different choices without having to exit the market), which prompt the question of firm subjectivities (or, as others might put it, firm values): did firms and executives have the emotional mores and values that could permit them to go beyond a singular commitment to profit-seeking, thus permitting discretion in cases such as these? Activists, as seen above, thus sought to problematize these nominally aggressive or “ruthless” firm subjectivities, asking audiences to attach blame to these characteristics, and asking firms to change.

What’s fascinating, however, is that firms did not necessarily evade this attempt at framing the issue. Both activists and firms often agreed to put firm subjectivities front and centre, as matters to be asserted and contested. Take the following statements, where firms sought to perform a certain sense of prosocial subjectivity – namely, that these were thoroughly decent corporate cultures made up of thoroughly decent individual human beings:

32 Shifting from firms to individuals makes this language challenging. Yet this is exactly what we do – we anthropomorphize firms and judge them accordingly. That said, it is generally best to refer to firms’ cultures and individuals’ subjectivities, as ultimately firms lack objective subjectivities. I discuss this in more detail in chapter three.
We continue to express our condolences to those affected in Savar, Bangladesh and we are deeply saddened by this tragedy. Our priorities are helping impacted employees and their families, and driving change to help prevent similar incidents like this in the future.

In Savar, we are aligning with other apparel retailers to support local efforts and provide aid and resources. We are sending senior representatives from Loblaw Companies’ sustainable supply chain team will be en-route soon to meet with local officials in Bangladesh to get a precise response on what caused this tragedy. We are committed to supporting local authorities in the rescue and care of affected families. When we have more details, we will share with you.

We are committed to finding an approach that ensures safe working conditions, drives lasting change in the industry and help prevents other tragedies. To that end, on Monday, April 29, Loblaw Inc., is joining other retailers and the Retail Council of Canada in an urgent meeting of its Responsible Trade Committee to discuss how to address this unfortunate situation and be a part of the solution. Loblaw has engaged with the Federal Government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their assistance in our efforts. We’ve engaged with a number of organizations including Canada’s Maquila Solidarity Network and their executive director Kevin Thomas to gain input into potential solutions, as well as international audit companies.

Loblaw Inc. vendor standards are designed to ensure that products are manufactured in a socially responsible way, for a safe and sustainable work environment. Our audits align with those of industry around the world, but we recognize that these measures do not address the issue of building construction or integrity. Loblaw is committed to finding solutions to this situation by expanding the scope of our requirements to ensure the physical safety of workers producing our products.

We don’t have all the answers today, but we are taking steps to drive change, and to finding solutions to ensure safe working conditions at the production facilities with which we do business. Loblaw Press Release, April 26, 2013. This was two days after the Rana Plaza tragedy, and just prior to the main NGO response, although all of the umbrella NGOs were beginning to respond. (Loblaw, 2013).

All of us at Gap Inc. are deeply saddened by the tragedies that have occurred in the Bangladesh apparel industry, and our hearts go out to those affected. We have been asked by friends, family and customers about the recent events in Bangladesh, and want to clarify that Gap Inc. did not have a business relationship with any of the factories in the building that recently collapsed, nor did we work with any of the factories where a fire has occurred in the last year. Gap Press Release, May 10, 2013. This was in the midst of the reaction to Rana Plaza, and in the run-up to the May 15 NGO-declared deadline (Gap, 2013a).
(Describing a web video) Angela Wasmer, Director, Global Public Affairs, Gap Inc. discusses our commitment to social responsibility, following the signing of an Accord by a number of European brands aimed at making improvements in Bangladesh factories. We did not sign this Accord, but not because we aren’t committed. For American companies to support this agreement, a different approach to dispute resolution provision is required. We know that many of you are concerned about safety and working conditions in Bangladesh factories. Help us drive lasting change by learning more about these important issues. And we’d love to hear your thoughts. Gap “We Are Committed” May 19, 2013. This was a response, by Gap, to the recent May 15 deadline to sign the Accord (Gap, 2013b).

The company is shocked and deeply saddened by this appalling incident at Savar, near Dhaka, and expresses its condolences to all of those involved. Primark confirms that one of its suppliers occupied the second floor of the eight storey building, which housed several suppliers to the garment industry making clothing for a number of brands. Primark has been engaged for several years with NGOs and other retailers to review the Bangladeshi industry’s approach to factory standards. Primark will push for this review to also include building integrity. Meanwhile Primark’s ethical trade team is at this moment working to collect information, assess which communities the workers come from, and to provide support where possible. Primark, April 26, 2013. (Primark, 2013).

First of all, I’d like to thank all of those who reached out to us over the past several weeks. To us, this confirmed that you care about the same values we care about. It also tells us that we were right in taking, from the very beginning, a highly proactive approach to seeking real, long-term solutions to the problems affecting the garment industry in Bangladesh, starting with the need to guarantee the safety of factory workers.

What happened at the Rana Plaza in April was a human tragedy of huge proportions. It will leave a lasting mark in the hearts of everyone, as it has done with everyone at our company. And this is the reason why we immediately joined forces with other industry participants, including NGOs and trade unions, to form the Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Accord and, separately, in a very short time launched our own program in partnership with the Bangladesh-based NGO BRAC, the largest non-governmental organization in the world also recognized as the leading NGO on sustainability.

Much has already happened since those early days in the aftermath of this tragic event. The Accord has moved into its implementation phase. Meanwhile, our program with BRAC is already assisting both those injured in the collapse of the Rana Plaza building with their medical needs, including limb replacements, as well as helping the families of the victims with their long-term requirements. Nevertheless, we realize that more needs
to be done by us and all parties involved, including setting guidelines for how to compensate the victims of such tragedies, and we fully intend to play a role in this effort as well.

Regarding compensation in particular, over the last couple of months we actively participated together with other stakeholders to discussions aimed at setting forth a multi-stakeholder framework within which this issue could be effectively addressed. In the end, the majority of companies and several other industry participants felt that the meeting called for this week in Geneva would not do so, mainly due to lack of clarity around the objectives as well as the nearly complete the lack of involvement allowed to several key stakeholders. As a result, we decided to focus our efforts and resources in working directly with those affected by the Rana Plaza disaster and their families so that we can provide them with concrete help while they need it the most. At the same time, we remain committed to playing a role in finding an industry-wide, multi-stakeholder approach to this issue - much like the Accord did for fire and safety.

I look forward to providing further updates regarding our progress in Bangladesh, where we aim to launch additional, concrete initiatives in the near future. In the meantime, thank you again for telling us that you care. Biagio Chiarolanza, CEO of Benetton. September 11, 2013. (Benetton, 2013).

These 5 statements represent the considered points of view of 4 major firms, each with a slightly different but high-profile relationship to the civil society politics that occurred after Rana Plaza. Broadly speaking, Primark and Loblaws have been leaders in both the Accord process and compensation plan, Benetton has been a leader in regards to the Accord but a laggard concerning compensation, and Gap has been a laggard on both, having championed the Alliance and having eschewed participation in the structured compensation process. As a firm that had not sourced at either Rana Plaza or Tazreen, Gap felt that it was perhaps less responsible than other firms, and wanted a less legally binding relationship with NGOs than the umbrella of NGO groups were willing to consider. These differences aside, all four firms had been targeted by subjectivity-destabilizing civil society politics.
To begin with, though, notice how all four firms deploy subjective and anthropomorphizing language to articulate how they want their firm to appear to audiences and stakeholders. Notably, the firms use consistent language to distance themselves from everyday business. Loblaws “expresses its condolences,” underlines that “we (they) are committed” to driving change, and adds that they are “deeply saddened” by the tragedies. Gap is also “deeply saddened”, and explains their non-compliance regarding the Accord as “not because we aren’t committed”. Primark tells us that they “are shocked and deeply saddened” and “expresses its condolences”. Benetton, finally, thanked stakeholders for “confirm(ing) you care about the same values we care about”, that the tragedy “will leave a lasting mark in the hearts of everyone, as it has done with everyone at our company”, and that “this is the reason why we immediately joined forces with other industry participants, including NGOs and trade unions, to form the Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Accord.”

We can take the commonalities here as simply representing standard public relations language in the aftermath of a crisis, but this should also not be overstated, as firms could presumably communicate their positions in relatively neutral language less loaded with meaning. This begs a question – why is it so important, at the very moment that activists are hoping to anthropomorphize firms in order to amplify normative critiques, for firms to anthropomorphize themselves as well? There are a few clues here, but one way to understand these statements is that in the absence of an easy, tractable, problem with an equally easy, cheery, win-win solution, that firms are pushed to justify themselves in a more emotionally open manner in order to show that they are not the ones responsible for the imperfect situation going forward. One common thread in all of these statements is that, for the
speakers, the medium term future is unknowable. None of the firms knew, or even know today, if the MSIs will succeed or if another major tragedy might occur in a factory sourcing their clothes. These firms are emphasizing their generally prosocial subjectivities in order to create room to maneuver by deflecting the worst of audience anger – all of these firms are emphasizing their common wish to contribute to solutions while decrying the lack of easy answers. By firms emphasizing their subjectivity, I do not necessarily mean that firms are exactly like people – they don’t actually have subjectivities - but rather that they are groups of linked people, thus making up organizational cultures, which present a certain composite face, or persona, to the world. We can thus think of problematic (or beneficial) organizational cultures, made up of problematic (or generally good) people, performing a set of values for an audience, thus suggesting to that audience how those firms will respond to future events.

Another, similar, common thread is that declarations of “commitment”, which in the place of actual legal agreement in the Accord or the compensation plan, works to show audiences that the firm is open to agreement but just needs to be put in a situation to do so. Effectively, firms are using their performed subjective prosociality (ie, that these are good organizations made up of good people) to reframe the issue of capacity in a more advantageous way. The most fulsome argument here is Benetton’s. Their CEO affirms their values, seeks to create common bond over them with audiences, specifically argues that Benetton joined the Accord because of those values (and conspicuously not out of strategic concerns), and then asks for audiences to recognize this performed prosocial subjectivity when considering the topic of the compensation plan. This is effectively a reversal of the standard activist critique – instead of activists pointing out that these declined agreements
(such as the Accord) are possible, and that the inference is that these firms are “ruthless”, these firms are instead arguing that given they are a beneficent firm, then these declined agreements must have been intolerable and uncooperative.

These common discursive strategies seem to indicate an awareness that perceived capacity and perceived subjectivities are in practice intertwined. We could thus suggest at a minimum that both activists and firms are aware of these interplays, and that both draw upon these framing strategies when deemed strategically useful. There are hints, however, that this dynamic is being primarily driven by activists, and that firms are reacting out of concern for their valuable brands. The language of “commitment” is especially interesting here. At the time of the statements, both Gap and Benetton had been aggressively lobbied by civil society. Gap, in particular, had been targeted by an umbrella group of NGOs, headed up by the CCC and Avaaz.org, the left-wing petition organization (Avaaz, 2013). The Avaaz petition, which will be considered below, included social language such as “your companies and other multinationals profit from cheap labour, and can do much more to reduce the dangers of the places where your products are made”, had hit hundreds of thousands of signings at the time of the Gap replies of mid-May 2013.

Gap’s response, while not what activists wanted to hear, was quite interesting. The statement above (Gap, 2013b) was posted May 19, 2013, so 6 days after the onset of the Accord movement and four days following Gap’s missing the May 15 deadline to sign the Accord. At this time, the proto-Alliance had been dealt a severe setback with their failure to entice many leading European firms to discard the Accord in favor of the less-stringent North American alternative (Taubner, 2013). Avaaz and other groups, which had already
successfully lobbied the largest European retailers, including H&M and Inditex, were turning from the newly compliant major European firms to focus on the still recalcitrant North American firms, especially Walmart and Gap (Avaaz, 2013). Gap’s response on May 19 was significant and, in its own way, reflective. The statement above came from a whole new website put up May 19th, separate from Gap’s extensive standalone CSR website (interestingly, this new Bangladesh-safety-only website only eventually became integrated with Gap’s wider CSR communications policy). This website was titled “we are committed”, was located at “www.wearecommitted.com”, and was entirely focused on defending Gap’s choice to decline membership in the Accord and instead champion the Alliance. The fundamental issue, effectively, was the extent to which Gap and activists could trust each other: Gap was afraid of the arbitration clauses in the Accord, and wanted audiences to understand their concern for Bangladeshi suffering, as well as their subjectively positive disposition towards the issue – except for the arbitration issue. Pushed into a situation where their public subjectivity and past failure to show restraint was a public issue, Gap evidently felt it necessary to argue for their subjective ability to do so in the future – hence the focus on Gap’s “commitment” as well as its openness to criticism (“we’d love to hear your thoughts”).

Gap’s response within the register of subjective commitment shows that activists successfully framed the political issue as a matter of subjective will – a question that was being judged by activists on whether or not firms agreed to join the Accord. To activists,
“commitment” meant signing a agreement with powerful arbitration clauses. Gap was forced to respond on the same terms, and instead sought to change how “commitment” would be judged: instead, Gap seemed to be suggesting that commitment could be signaled through engagement in dialogue – both on the web and in formal talks. Fascinatingly, Gap’s efforts at this engagement included a cultivated comments section, where audiences were asked to comment on Gap’s position and reasoning, which were then engaged by Gap public relations staff. In the subsequent 673 comments, of which 652 were by audience members, responses were overwhelmingly negative, and included extensive use of “social” vocabulary. Critical comments included 81 criticisms of Gap’s profit-seeking, 41 attributions of “greed” or derivative words, 25 critiques of Gap’s morals or morality, and 21 attributions of exploitation. Gap’s moderators ended their engagement exercise after only a few days and 21 responses.

In the months that followed Gap’s decision to forego agreement with the Accord, civil society took specific pains to critique Gap’s efforts at projecting a performance of prosocial subjectivity. For example, the high-profile “Public Eye Awards,” which awarded Gap their 2014 Jury Prize for irresponsibility, specifically criticized this effort: “Gap (says) ‘we are committed’, but behind this seeming rosy picture that Gap tries to paint, the company

33 Interestingly, the strength of these clauses is much debated amongst activists. Opinions ranged from them being ironclad to being virtually unenforceable. One informed observer’s belief was that the intention was partially to force firms to think twice before leaving the Accord, as a possible arbitration case would raise barriers to exit (Interview Fred).

34 Note: many of these counted instances were made together within the same forum comments, and some web users made many comments.
is leaving workers to fear for their safety” (Public Eye Awards, 2014a). At the ceremony itself, presenter Liana Foxveg of the IRLF added “the jury, without hesitation, shames Gap for its monstrous and disingenuous business practices…what’s the worst kind of irresponsible company? One that portrays an image of being a leader in responsibility while actively undermining real social responsibility” (Public Eye Awards, 2014b). Gap’s subjectivity and credibility thus remained an important element of the ongoing political dynamic. Now, we should emphasize that these are all singular anecdotes that do not show clear causality, but they are evocative of Gap trying, unsuccessfully, to engage social critique on its own terms, the debate having been framed that way by activists.

2.2.6 H&M and Avaaz - Diffused Social Politics in a Networked Age

Despite civil society being successful in politicizing and framing the issues after Rana Plaza, Gap ultimately did not sign the Accord. So the above example is fascinating in that it shows how both activists and firms saw the subjectivity of firms and executives as important terrain upon which to contest CSR issues, but it does not necessarily speak to how successful “social” discourse might or might not have been in driving the advocacy. There was another case, however, where “social” advocacy might have played an important role in securing compliance. That case was the umbrella group’s lobbying of H&M, Bangladesh’s largest purchases of garments.

In the fullness of hindsight, and speaking more than a year since H&M took on the mantle of being the first firm to accept the Accord following Rana Plaza (a handful of
smaller firms had previously accepted the terms of the proto-Accord drawn up in 2011), it is easy to forget that H&M’s participation was at one point in significant doubt. This is important because H&M’s decision to adopt the Accord is generally credited with the Accord’s widespread adoption amongst European retailers who source in Bangladesh. In the days following Rana Plaza, retailers (even generally reputable and responsive ones such as Loblaws and H&M) wondered aloud about the difficulty of remedying the problem of Bangladeshi worker safety (Loblaws, 2013a; Gap, 2013a). But while addressing the suffering of victims and preventing future tragedies would take tremendous institutional labour by firms and NGOs, the way forward was clear: the proto-Accord, which had been discussed in 2011 and which was on the agenda for an already-planned meeting slated to occur a few days later in Germany (Taubner, 2013). The fundamental problem was not a lack of information, but concerns over cost and whether a critical mass of sourcing firms could be compelled to share in the cost of administering the initiative (Interview Quentin, 2013; Taubner, 2013).

H&M was not initially on board with the Accord. As late as May 10, 2013, just 5 days before the CCC declared deadline and 3 days prior to their acceptance of the Accord’s terms, H&M was publically opposed to the agreement (H&M, 2013a). So what caused them to switch? Most observers believe it was because of the pressure put on H&M by civil society (Alderman, 2013; Greenhouse and Yardley, 2013; Taubner, 2013). But why did H&M, and not another firm – much less one that actually sourced from Rana Plaza - cave to external pressure first? Many of these same observers believe that an important contributing factor was the joint Avaaz.org / Clean Clothes Campaign petition drive, where the CCC provided support for Avaaz’s aggressive denunciation of H&M. The petition and associated
social media support was launched May 3, and by May 10th had 875,000 signatures (Greenhouse, 2013). The final tally was more than 1.2 million (Avaaz.org, 2013). The petition asked H&M to produce “guilt-free clothes,” and that “as citizens and consumers,” the undersigned were asking H&M to sign the Accord, as the current situation had H&M “profit” while they could have rectified the situation (Avaaz.org, 2013). This is all standard social imagery – the same as in the Gap petition above (the petition started off focusing on H&M, and eventually was refocused on Gap).

Associated with this petition, however, was a brutal advertisement that Avaaz and the CCC unsuccessfully sought to place in a Swedish economic magazine. The magazine refused the advertisement on the grounds that it was distasteful, which created a public debate centering on freedom of speech issues in Sweden (in the process describing and debating the advertisement’s imagery) (Sveriges Radio, 2013; Taubner, 2013). The advertisement, which is included as Appendix C, is aggressive, personal, transgresses most civility norms, and draws exclusively from social imagery of exploitation and personal greed. I point the reader to Appendix C, but the fundamental argument is that H&M’s CEO, Karl-Johan Persson, is photoshopped next to a grieving Bangladeshi woman, and is asked to take responsibility for both her suffering as well as for future standards. The advertisement juxtaposes the woman’s suffering with Persson’s wealth and happiness, and makes the link between consumers, producers, and Bangladeshi workers, thus aiming at fostering reflection on the interdependence created by the value chain. The advertisement further argues that these deaths are in order to create “industry profits.” It then closes with the statement “your customers really, genuinely care about the women of Bangladesh. And we hope you do too.”
(Appendix C). This is, from beginning to end, social critique discourse: we see the problematization of H&M’s CEO’s subjectivity, we see the invocation of “care” (which is evocative of solidarity), and we see the problematization of firm profit-seeking. The advertisement does not discard the market system, but rather temporarily suspends it, saying that these were predictable deaths which occurred because the market did not value the safety of Bangladeshi workers, and arguing that by contrast H&M should display a certain generosity of spirit or risk future reputational retaliation.

The furor over the advertisement, along with news reports of the petition’s surprising success, peaked around May 10th (Sveriges Radio, 2013; Greenhouse, May 10, 2013), the same day that H&M signaled its continuing discomfort with the Accord. What media did not know at the time was that the competing Alliance had started to organize, and was reaching out to H&M and other retailers to suggest that the Accord was a poor investment of time and energy, that early adopters would be stuck with high costs, and that a less strenuous standard might be preferable to all (Taubner, 2013). Accord officials were optimistic but nervous (Taubner, 2013). Suddenly, however, on May 13 H&M broke ranks with other firms and publically signaled acceptance of the Accord (Greenhouse, May 13, 2013). This put pressure on other firms to follow suit, which they did: the retailing giant Inditex agreed a few hours later, 33 other large firms joined in the next 48 hours, within a few weeks critical mass had been reached with 70 large company signatories, and by the one year anniversary more than 150 retailers covering roughly 1/3 of the Bangladeshi industry, employing almost a million workers, had joined the Accord. Together with the Alliance, which has proven to be a
relatively meaningful initiative as well, more than half of the Bangladeshi garment industry is slated to be made much safer than it was prior to Rana Plaza.

Did this petition and advertisement, using conspicuously social discourse, save the Accord? It is impossible to know for sure, but I believe it did. Hundreds of firms were being pressured, and the defections of any two or three major firms from the wary consensus would have likely had a similar effect as H&M’s defection. However, observers seem to think that this campaign, within the chaotic context of dozens of NGOs making dozens of arguments, struck a very deep nerve. Most of the news stories of H&M’s acceptance of the Accord mention the Avaaz petition in particular (AP, 2013; Greenhouse, May 13, 2013). The New York Times’ Liz Alderman argued that despite H&M’s protestations to the contrary, “it was clear that after the April 24 Rana Plaza disaster, pressure was mounting on H&M…to make good on past promises to help improve labor conditions in Bangladesh”, and the petition and associated advertisement were cited as evidence of this “worst kind of publicity…a brash human rights ad (that) went viral” (Alderman, 2013). As journalist Mischa Taubner, who attended the German negotiations that served as an inadvertent backdrop for this drama, puts it: “A large economic journal rejected the ad, leading to a loud echo on the internet. And suddenly, H&M was ready to negotiate with Jyrki Raina (of IndustriALL)” (Taubner, 2013). H&M, for their part, rejects this interpretation, but also cannot account for why they capitulated on all of their negotiating points over those fateful few days.

In the end, all we know is that in a crisis atmosphere, when retailers were wavering on which route to choose, activists turned to particularly intense social imagery to animate
their most ambitious advocacy efforts, and that they seem to have been successful in making firms sign terms that they were previously unwilling to commit to:

Today, companies like to emphasize how much they welcome the agreement. H&M executives never miss an opportunity to mention that they were the first to sign. But that does not change the fact that the corporations came out of the negotiations as the losers. In the end they had to sign something that they had always refused\(^{35}\). (Taubner, 2013)

There are a myriad of reasons to generally agree with those who preach civility and mutually advantageous problem-solving – with the Porter and Kramers of the world. But in this case, those conditions were not on offer: any solutions were either going to be insufficient or expensive in ways retailers had always resisted in the past (and continued to do so for more than two weeks after Rana Plaza). In a context such as this, why not move to a more contentious politics?

We can thus see some of the potential harm that could be caused by our dismissing these less constructive, more pointed politics. That said, we should recognize that while “social” politics may have been influential in securing the success of the Accord, those same tactics were not universally successful. As mentioned above, the H&M advertisement was reformulated, with similar images and the same arguments, to target Gap, which continued to champion the Alliance. It is worth exploring why this may be the case – social politics is clearly no panacea, so what conditions could explain its success in one case but not in

\(^{35}\) My thanks to the ethicist Thorsten Busch, who helped me with the translation of this German language text.
another. The answer seems to lie in how these discursive politics take place in institutional contexts. Firstly, there are reasons to consider H&M especially vulnerable to these politics: as a family company run by executives who value their public images, H&M had been trying for some time to market itself as a responsibility leader (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013e). These same type of personal reputational considerations may have driven the high profile executive Galen Weston’s decision making at Canadian firm Loblaws. By contrast, Gap’s leadership is lower profile and their prosocial claims have historically been restrained.

Secondly, there was always a significant concern in North American quarters about the legal liability possibly posed by the Accord’s arbitration clause (Alderman, 2013; Greenhouse, 2013). The Accord could thus be seen as especially problematic for North American firms – although the extent to which this was true was heavily debated by skeptical interview subjects (Interview Colin, Interview Zach).

In addition, these discursive politics need to draw from real normative sentiment for them to have real power, and perhaps the most important distinction between the European and North American firms was simply the background local magnitude of the sentiments that drive social politics. Northern Europe is known to be relatively committed to social democratic values of obligation and solidarity (Stjerno, 2005), especially compared to American audiences – though the distinction here is not necessarily as pronounced as we might assume. Taken together with the important institutional contexts, it seems likely that the Accord’s success, and lack thereof, largely followed local cultural support for the Accord’s egalitarian values.
2.3 Discussion: Is this a Portable and Transferable Model?

I have sought above to show that the politics of Bangladeshi safety made twinned use of both neoliberal and social politics. Agents (including trade unions such as IndustriALL and UNI) made heavy use of neoliberal politics – these politics assumed individual competitiveness, as well as firm commitment to shareholder supremacy and the firm’s profit motive. These politics sought to demonstrate the issue’s material salience (Mitchell et al, 1997) to firms, and to mobilize consumer anger to make the issue even more important to firms. These politics thus never actually threatened the market system within which firms were operating, nor fundamentally destabilized NGO relationships with those firms, as these engagements were personally and institutionally respectful even if firms and civil society happened to disagree. Taken from a Foucauldian perspective, these were always economic claims – right was recoded in pure market terms and stripped of its juridical content as well as much of its normative force.

These social politics were, by contrast, heavily juridical and normative, in content if not in form. Specifically, they cast non-state juridical aspersions on economic activity, and sought to problematize the subjectivities of market agents, thus implicitly destabilizing the market system and firm shareholder supremacy model. I have sought to show that none of these destabilizations were categorical – almost nobody argued that markets were not the best primary way to coordinate economic activity. Instead, the destabilizations were partial, temporary, and ambiguous: these actors, now, are acting improperly by not taking other
factors into account during their economic negotiations. In problematizing the issues this way, and in recommending the problematization of subjectivities, particularly with a view to citizenship, social responsibility, and restraint, these social politics drew heavily from historically specific political rationalities about how best to organize and regulate economic life.

We should be clear-eyed about the idiosyncratic nature of this example, and how this could limit the transferability of the insights generated here. Very few CSR crises are as powerful as Rana Plaza. From the perspective of the scale and intensity of the suffering, the media attention it generated, and even the political infrastructure that had accumulated following the Tazreen tragedy, Rana Plaza is both a CSR “perfect storm” as well as something of a social critique “ideal” case or “polar” case (Eisenhardt, 1989). CSR contexts that feature less suffering will feature less ideal-typical reactions – for example, it seems unlikely that environmental damage, unless it creates specific harm to specific people, will prompt a social response. Environmental damage typically does not create attributions of exploitation – and while not all social politics rests on perceptions of exploitation, ideal-typical cases generally do. “Social” CSR politics are thus more likely in cases that feature recognizable relations between profitable, capacious firms and specific, vulnerable, sufferers. Value chains, as well as CSR issues that focus on workplace issues, are thus perhaps an ideal-typical context for these perceptions. Other non-ideal but plausible contexts are ones where capacious firms harm customers or bystanders, such as in cases of product safety or the extractive industries. Charges of exploitation are problematic in these cases, but charges of ruthlessness or greed are not, nor are demands for restraint out of concern for welfare.
Moreover, the fundamental challenge of all social-movement research can be found here as well: we only study the winners, where social movements succeed (Bartley and Child, 2014). Perhaps social politics has drawbacks in certain conditions that did not occur here.

2.3.1 Social Politics in Wider CSR – Implications for Theory Building

Can this model be portable to a wider range of CSR cases? Yes – in fact, this model helps explain the normative power of a range of structurally odd CSR cases that feature juxtaposed suffering and capacity and a sense that firms should better promote welfare. These cases are currently misunderstood, even downplayed, by the mainstream literature, suggesting the need for added positive theory.

Take, for example, the influential, and cosmopolitan, business-and-society literature, where the standard account of activist-firm relations is that firms lose legitimacy when they break society’s rules for conduct, and that NGOs act as watchdogs to police these rules (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007, 2011; see, critically, Laasonen, Fougère, Kourala, 2012). I have already discussed my concern that the “soft-law” narrative of CSR over-determines our analysis, by reading state institutions and state modes of thinking about regulation into a currently chaotic and ephemeral political arena. For instance, does this model of CSR as “soft law” make much sense when applied, for instance, to the horrible situation at Barrick’s

36 For more on this, please see the extended introduction.
North Mara gold mine, where state police routinely kill scavengers who are trespassing for access to waste-rock (York, 2011, 2012, 2014)? Bracketing a range of important problems, especially involving colonialism and the state’s responsiveness to community concerns, what rules exactly are Barrick breaking by asking a brutal and inept local police force to remove trespassers?

Cases such as these are important because they are normatively powerful despite lacking an incisive analytic charge of exactly what rules Barrick is breaking. Barrick’s presence on the land, while controversial within the local community, is not particularly controversial in wider audiences: the Tanzanian state is excited about the prospect of employment for locals, the state stands to benefit from the royalties and tax revenues of a productive mine, and few dispute Barrick’s legal claim to the mine grounds. Moreover, virtually nobody disputes that force is required to secure the area, since the value of waste rock and desperate condition of locals is more or less agreed upon, and virtually all observers agree that there are real security issues at play in North Mara (York, 2011, 2013). We should also note that using violence to expel uncooperative trespassers is fairly routine practice around the world. So what rule exactly is Barrick breaking? Observers currently describe this as an ongoing “human rights” violation (Globe and Mail, 2011; York, 2011; York, 2013), but that language seems designed to normatively indict despite a vagueness to the charge. My purpose is not to defend Barrick, but to suggest that the language of rules has its limits.

The social, deployed carefully and in conjunction with a separate decolonial analysis, seems helpful in the case of North Mara and other, similar, extractive scenarios that feature intense suffering juxtaposed with financial capacity. Barrick is a huge, profitable, company,
and in this case its operations have displaced a local community from its traditional life. Its operations also create the incentive for trespassing, and then for police officers to arrest those trespassers (Globe and Mail, 2011; York, 2011; York, 2014). Moreover, Barrick seems generally unwilling to make significant concessions to reduce conflicts between the community and police. No wonder the public of the Global North has little stomach for the inevitable conflict, and loss of life, that ensues when Barrick enters such a community without making a strong effort at securing local acceptance, without making large local disbursements to promote local welfare, and without minimizing violence. To put this in subjective language, Barrick seemingly does not care if its operations create predictable violence and suffering. The social critique analysis of “Barrick is ignoring its normative responsibility to protect and promote the welfare of those negatively affected by its operations,” is, to my mind, a helpful complement to a cosmopolitan or human rights alternative, especially in regards to predicting the responses of observers.

Broadly speaking, North Mara and Rana Plaza seem to provoke widespread attributions of moral failure, and, crucially, these attributions have almost nothing to do with specific behaviors. If we look at the critiques of H&M, the Gap, and Benetton in the case study above, the most damning judgements by civil society had relatively little to do with those firms actually sourcing in particularly bad conditions: in fact, H&M and the Gap had not sourced at Rana Plaza at all, yet they were criticized more fiercely than any other firms. We should not be surprised by this, given that Bartley and Child (2014) remind us that civil society criticisms rarely track actual bad behaviors. Rather, criticisms track the size and cultural salience of firms (2014). That occurred in this case study as well: the largest sourcing
company in Bangladesh and second largest garment retailer in the world (H&M), as well as the third largest retailer in the world (Gap) were the two firms most prominently targeted. The second largest garment retailer, Inditex, only avoided targeting by immediately following H&M into the Accord. Rather, these firms were targeted because they were large, influential, and culturally perplexing to activists: both firms (H&M and Gap) cultivated the perception of an ethical and pro-social corporate culture, which aggravated activists when those firms refused to comply (Interview Zach).

Moreover, all that activists demanded was entry into the Accord (and, later, small payments into a compensation fund). Actual behavioral demands were minimal. Activists never demanded exit from Bangladesh, nor any end to what we might call “sweatshop” sourcing. Rather, firms were asked to join the Accord process, and to commit to incremental improvements that were primarily related to health and safety of employees. In reality, firms were not asked to stop sourcing from sweatshops, nor to stop any practices, but rather to contribute to progress of the overall sector. A “soft law” reading of this agreement reads the outcome (a new legal document), into the politics (the demand of quasi-voluntarist acquiescence). These are not incompatible readings, but they are subtly at odds with one another.

What these politics of factory safety really seem to reflect is not the existence of some sort of law, but the widespread existence of a highly attenuated norm of reciprocity. Instead of using political theory, and state-centric models of authority such as the law, to understand CSR politics, maybe we should think about what civil society politics would look like in cases where a multitude of governing agents perceive a lack of reciprocity, or rather a lack of
sufficient regard for our fellow human beings. We need added positive theory on these points
to better complement the “soft law” narrative. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to
fully explore this phenomena, as it likely requires a book project all of its own, but two
things seem clear. Firstly, this phenomena, as it centers on workplace subjectivities and
supposes bonds of interdependence and reciprocity, seems firmly within the tradition of “the
social”. But can the “social” tradition survive in a seemingly neoliberal world? Is this but an
isolated remnant of a politics still destined to irrelevance? Secondly, this phenomena seems
to operate through the political technology of “normalization”, meaning that CSR politics
seems to demand that we anthropogenize corporations and treat them as troubled
subjectivities. What are the possible benefits, and costs, of doing so? I turn to these questions
in chapters two and three, respectively.
3. Chapter Two – The “Greatly Exaggerated ‘Death of the Social’: Economic Regulation Through ‘the Social’ and Beyond a State Frame

This chapter is interested in better understanding contemporary manifestations of “the social question” (Arendt, 2006: 49) and in particular contemporary manifestations of “the social” (Castel, 2003; Rose, 1999; Dean, 2010a, 2010b) a category central to how some scholars study economic regulation under liberalism. By “the social,” I do not mean society per se, but rather the ways in which we invoke communal solidarity to attend to economic and moral problems without fundamentally altering the individualistic premises of our economic and political institutions (Rose, 1999; 98-112). Typically, political interventions invoking “social” language function at the margins of liberalism, as the liberal commitment to individual formal freedom sometimes needs to be temporarily suspended to promote general welfare, as the alternative would be a crisis situation that could demand even more illiberal structural changes. “Social” interventions thus invoke social embeddedness, and concomitant social responsibility, to justify treating people in mildly illiberal ways, for both better and for worse. For example, British authorities blanket high-crime neighbourhoods with civil court ASBOs (Anti-Social Behavior Orders) to regulate behavior without having to involve the criminal courts, and state social workers try (often gently, sometimes intrusively) to support those who have been left behind by the economy but who the state will not directly employ. In both cases legal formality and formal freedom is strained or suspended so that a liberal regime can attend to problem cases of insufficient welfare.
“Social” politics work through generally communal sentiments, but the overarching polity, judiciary, and economy all remain more or less individualist – few “social” policies prompt structural change, though they can have powerful palliative effects, such as with the success of social insurance regimes across most of the OECD. The social thus provides an imperfect vocabulary of solidarity and responsibility, as well as some corresponding political techniques, through which that activists can attempt to hold governments and businesses to account while still respecting the underlying premises of the liberal economy. For activists who wish to demand relatively wide-ranging change without exposing themselves to charges of radicalism, “social” politics have historically been held out to be a useful perspective within which to operate – such as how social democrats in many counties have brought in elements of socialism without actually calling to change most of the fundamental premises of the market.

Unfortunately, many scholars informed by the “governmentality” school believe that with the retreat of the welfare state, “the social” lies on its figurative deathbed. Meanwhile, even those who disagree have been unable to persuasively argue how it remains viable or relevant. This chapter argues that “the social” is not dying, but is changing to fit a globalized world and post-state economy. While it has indeed been diminished in some ways, it remains an important – even crucial – potential political rationality for those who wish to govern the economy within a liberal frame. By political rationality I mean an historically specific way of thinking about governance (see Dean, 2010a; 268). This rationality, though historically specific, is changing to suit a globalized world. The objective of this chapter to chart this change, and thus to start to recapture what a post-state, contemporary, social government
would have to offer to activists and regulators: the prospect of broad-based coalitional governance of the economy, with a motivating imaginary stemming from our shared communal debt to one another. This social debt, and this sense of interconnectedness, underwrites demands for mutual responsibility.

Everyday political life is rife with allusions to our embeddedness in society. This is particularly the case in situations that require that we address the problems created by economic inequality or economic dislocation. It is fascinating how often “social” is an implicit contrast for the individual market. For instance, as a Canadian I carry a social insurance number, which facilitate a wide array of social programs – many of which act as palliatives for economic problems. Most center-left political parties in OECD countries take pains to recognize the economy’s inequalities, and emphasize their contrasting commitment to “social justice”. Similarly, activists work tirelessly to ensure that human rights protection comes to eventually encompass “social rights,” in the same way that it currently protects political rights. And if things come to worst for people, they might have to turn to the state for direct financial support – what the British commonly call being “on the social” (Rose, 1999: 99).

What these examples of political language all share in common is that they seek to govern, and remedy, problematic economic activity through the lens of “the social”. “The social” has been a political mainstay for more than a century, but scholars have recently begun to question its continued usefulness as a theoretical (and practical) category. Namely, the apparent diffusion of society, along with the globalization of the neoliberalized economy, has left many to search for an alternative discursive construction. Specifically, many
Foucauldian scholars, such as Nikolas Rose (1999), have followed Jean Baudrillard (1983) in lamenting the “death of the social”. In the spirit of Mark Twain, this chapter will argue that reports of this death are greatly exaggerated. Rather, “the social” is not dead, but is now found in different forms to account for a new political frame, new roles in society for certain institutions, and new, more entrepreneurial, workplace subjectivities or identities.

Most importantly, economic problems are increasingly contested in civil society campaigns and multi-stakeholder initiatives, and less in national politics, so the places where we used to find social politics feature much less of them than before – but this does not necessarily mean that the social is dead, just that it is not where it used to be found. To put it differently, globalization and neoliberalism are increasingly pushing economic regulation outside of the nation-state frame (Fraser, 2009), and with this have imperiled various state programs and national political debates that historically traded upon the construction of “the social.” But I would argue that perhaps the most significant casualty is less “the social” as a way of thinking about responding to problems, and more the Keynesian welfare state that previously advanced those politics.

In fact, we will see that alongside the retreat of the welfare state, other researchers have charted the rise of three new political discourses, namely corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporate citizenship, and social enterprise. These discourses (or rather, major variants of them) operate firmly within the political tradition of “the social” – something that I illustrated in chapter one’s case study of the CSR politics in response to the Bangladeshi factory tragedies of 2012-2013. What’s different with these politics is that the institutional and regulatory practices facilitated by these discourses are not typically mediated and
distributed by the national state in robust ways\textsuperscript{37}. As such, they bypass most of the traditional welfare state political apparatuses and technologies\textsuperscript{38} whereby the national state formerly sought to regulate the economy, and thus where regulation has been traditionally imagined to exist. This helps explain why Foucauldian governmentality theory has been, to date, relatively uninterested in their operation\textsuperscript{39}, as they might appear to be privatized and corrupted versions of ‘real’ social politics\textsuperscript{40}. Furthermore, this all helps explain why governmentality scholars have perceived the decline of “the social” where others might see evolution and change within the “social” tradition.

This theoretical chapter thus seeks to make three contributions. The first, and more straightforward, is to gently push back against those, such as Baudrillard and Rose, who have argued that contemporary life is marked by a sustained shift away from “the social” towards a narrower and more individualistic politics characterized by either competitive individualism or at best the bonds of local community. In some sense this is correct, as the social is indeed evoked less today than it was at one point, but “the social” remains an


\textsuperscript{38} I use “technologies” in a sense similar to Nikolas Rose (1999: 52), where knowledge attaches itself to a practice in order to secure a desired given outcome. Speaking plainly, if a political rationality is a way of thinking about how to govern, a political technology is a specific informed practice of how to govern. I elaborate on this, and other Foucauldian vocabulary, in the extended introduction.

\textsuperscript{39} This is not to say that governmentality-inspired social science has completely neglected this topic. Shamir (2008), Roberts (2003), and Vallentin and Murillo (2012) have all examined corporate social responsibility through a governmentality lens, albeit not in ways suggested by this paper.

\textsuperscript{40} This is effectively Shamir’s perspective (2008).
important discursive reality that aptly captures the resulting tensions that emerge out of the tension between liberal, formal, freedom and economic inequality. The potential discursive contrast between “the social” and “community” is not a distinction without a difference, as only “the social” contains within it the same connotations of class and broad injustice, and only “the social” carries with it the implicit image of progress underwritten by a coalition that demands change. As governmentality theorists, and those drawing from them, seek to chart out post-national economic regulatory schemes, properly placing social technologies and practices alongside community-inspired alternatives will be increasingly important.

Secondly, this chapter will argue that if the social remains a useful way of thinking about, and remedying, economic problems, we should be wary of recently increased efforts to enforce norms of of “real-world”, instrumentalized, rationality on the arguments made by activists. “Social” government often involves instrumental thinking by both governors and the governed, but it travels through conspicuously normative and idealistic arguments. It is increasingly criticized in civil society and managerial circles to engage in explicitly normative advocacy, and particularly so in cases where people or organizations are challenged for acting selfishly or egoistically. These critiques are increasingly being dismissed as divisive, unserious, and broadly out of step with reality (Kallio, 2006) (see, as an extremely influential example, Porter and Kramer’s 2011 work on ‘creating shared value’, which has almost 3000 recent citations). These dismissals are rooted in the broad assertion that real, constructive, advocacy works in multi-stakeholder partnerships that recognizes that firms, and everyday people, are competitive institutions and individuals who should be treated as such, as to argue otherwise is to effectively deny reality.
I argue this question is not nearly as settled as large elements of the political economy, governmentality, and business and society literatures might otherwise assume, and that the recognition of “social” politics as existing in CSR, corporate citizenship, and social enterprise can help conceptualize how this alternate political rationality continues to rely on the imaginary of solidarity and interdependence that challenges neoliberal competitive individualism. Our giving up on idealism is not costless: it risks us having to give up on political strategies and practices that are well suited for certain circumstances – namely, when companies with high profile brands are deeply recalcitrant, when companies are uninterested in dialogue, when extremely weak actors have to challenge the strong, and when weak actors have to make arguments that are likely to fail in the court of general public opinion. In these cases, unsettling firms’ self-understanding can be useful, and even more tangibly, accusations of greediness, callousness, or indifference (all accusations that infer moral judgement and moral possibility on the parts of firms) can damage firms’ reputations in emphatic fashion.

Thirdly, this chapter suggests that various categories used by governmentality scholars are starting to change and hybridize in ways not foreseen in the literature – an important implication for future research. “The social” is counter intuitively shown to be partially reconcilable with neoliberalism’s expectations of subjectivity, or identity, which demand that individuals take on an entrepreneurial disposition. If this is true, then this suggests the need for governmentality analysis to start challenging its expectations of what governance will resemble going forward.
This chapter will thus have four main sections. In the first section, we will introduce governmentality analysis, “the social,” and why the governmentality school has been so interested in it. In the second, we will consider how neoliberalism has eroded the welfare state compromise that traditionally depended on “the social” as a zone for widespread intervention. We will then see how and why some scholars, such as Nikolas Rose (1996: 327-329), have called this the “death” of the social, and we will then assess two preliminary attempts in the literature to subsequently re-imagine how “the social” would appear in a post-national world (Lazzarotto, 2009; Dean, 2010a). All three accounts feature considerable insights, but none is ideal. This will set the stage for the third section, where we will examine corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship, two new political discourses that operate firmly within “the social,” but not within the state in any meaningful way. These discourses carry with them a hybridized sense of individual subjectivity that pulls from both state welfarism and neoliberal workplace dynamism or entrepreneurism. This will suggest implications for how we might imagine post-national economic regulation, particularly when working within a governmentality perspective, which we will consider in a discussion section.

3.1 Governmentality and “The Social”

3.1.1 Governmentality

Prior to setting out what exactly we mean by “the social”, we should briefly recall what Foucauldian scholars denote by “governmentality,” and specifically why it is relevant
to questions of economic governance such as here. Governmentality, in its broadest meaning, refers to the organized ways in which we consider governing ourselves and others (Dean, 2010a: 267-270). Examples of a governmentality, or what I prefer to call a political rationality, would include the church pastorate, raison d’état, the police state, classical liberalism, the welfare state, and neoliberalism. A governmentality perspective focuses our attention on how ideas and assumptions frame how we think about solving problems in society. These ideas, regarding such issues as the proper sources of authority, appropriate public subjectivities to encourage, our responsibilities to one another, and what governance techniques reliably work at achieving efficient compliance, all help form contexts within which governors rule. Our actual practices of rule, and specifically our power relations, are thus influenced by backgrounded expectations that tend to coalesce in systemized ways.

3.1.2 Liberal Governmentality and Challenges in Governing the Economy

There are many extant governmentalities, but Foucault focused on one governmental tradition as he sought to understand modern moves away from formal models of juridical, or repressive, rule, towards more diffused and productive models of power. As he charted the increasing rise of civil society politics, the decline of state regulation, and the increasing economization or “marketization” of governance relationships, Foucault sought a model of government that moved away from his earlier work on institution-centric disciplinary power (Dean, 2010a). Power and domination still existed, just not in the same forms as previously,
and so Foucault started to look for a movement that explained this shift in governance – a shift that if anything has deepened with the globalization of the economy.

Foucault’s interest in liberalism stemmed from its focus on efficiency in governance. Foucault considered all extant alternatives, including socialism, to feature significant shortcomings in how they operationalize abstract political power into concrete governance relationships (Foucault, 2007: 91-92). Specifically, illiberal regimes were perceived to feature inappropriately conflictual accounts of how power might achieve desired ends. For instance, coercive (illiberal\(^{41}\)) state regulators are often very successful at securing any specifically sought-after end, but are also unfortunately prone to damaging any relationships the state might have with those they interact with. For example, see how the authoritarian regime in Bangladesh supports the local garment industry’s international competitiveness through the suppression of the labour movement there. This has the benefit of lowering production costs, but a liberal perspective would point out how this comes at the expense of destructive local politics which often interfere with daily business (Cyran, 2013; Oxfam, 2013). A liberal perspective would be concerned at this conflict.

Liberalism’s modest horizons and commitment to formal freedom, by contrast, seem to feature a governmental model whereby the state inflicts the least harm on its population,

\(^{41}\) Many state regulators are in the final analysis coercive. The question is to what extent this represents an unfortunately necessary deviation from principles. The subset of the liberal tradition considered here would consider coercion unproductive, unfortunate, and to be strictly limited whenever possible.
and thus, indirectly, on itself\textsuperscript{42}. While Foucault had previously been studying the worrying manner in which totalizing institutions might shape human behavior, Foucault’s work on liberal governmentality marked a phase wherein he shifted towards considering fields of action that seemed freer and more open, yet which still continued to return generally favorable results to those in power. Observing these successful flows of power, Foucault argued that liberalism, under the right conditions, seemed to offer a relatively symbiotic power relationship between the state and society that simultaneously permitted both a stronger state and a stronger society. Thus, all normative judgements aside, most governmentality theory suggests that liberalism is likely to prove more durable than all extant challengers (Foucault, 2007: 91-92). Liberalism’s flexibility and efficiency thus make it the most fascinating political rationality (or, rather, family of related political rationalities) to study in order to understand modern rule. To that end, I make no specific claim about liberalism’s overall desirability here, except to point out that liberalism seems durable in the ways that Foucault saw it as durable, and that it is likely to persist in most developed countries in part because of this. As such, this chapter’s horizons are intentionally limited to considering various forms of liberalism, and how they facilitate civil society-based regulation of business.

\textsuperscript{42} This is of course a controversial argument. To work as an argument here, it must only hold in a thin sense: that liberalism’s reluctance to infringe on formal freedoms results in social perceptions that the state is relatively harmless, resulting in less resistance than might occur in more invasive states. Liberals themselves might argue the point in a thicker sense: that aggregated welfare is highest in a liberal state, though that welfare is distributed unequally. I do not take a position on this statement.
Foucault held that liberalism’s emphasis on efficiency, and its suspicion of government’s effect on society, created an internal dynamic of reflection and reconstitution that continually demanded that interventions respect the underlying reality experienced by the governed (Dean, 2010a: 63). For instance, recent experiments with behavioral economics and “nudge” choice selection (Sunstein and Thaler, 2009) stem from the recognition that people are not entirely rational, but also from the recognition that it is stubborn and costly to insist that citizens act in rational ways. Rule is thus possible for liberals, but it is best if it channels the formal freedom of the governed, which prevents costly (and potentially dangerous) applications of force and violence.

With this, liberal theorists implicitly see government as “the conduct of conduct” (Gordon, 1991: 2) where state, and possibly non-state, governments oversee a variegated population of individuals and groups, each with their own circumstances and interests. In these situations, it is impossible to compel uniform compliance without expending large amounts of energy, but it is comparatively easy to set policies that encourage most members of the population to act well by their own formal choice. Liberalism’s core position, according to Foucault, thus stems less from any commitment to freedom, and more from a general recognition that perfect governance is impossible at best, and is dangerous at worst. With this, a perpetual epistemological and practical critique exists at the heart of liberal governments, as they seek to govern best by governing least. If they do this, the state will economically prosper, and the state will enjoy relatively peaceful relations with its subjects.

This state of bliss, however, is incomplete and temporary. Despite liberalism’s political virtues, economic liberalization tends to result in profoundly negative outcomes to
certain sectors of society. Put differently, a liberalized economy usually leads to state prosperity and higher aggregate welfare, but it also leads to predictable inequalities and systemic abuse: unemployment will be higher than most observers would like, firms and individuals will manipulate regulations and standards as best they can, and powerful companies will have far greater market power than most employees or stakeholders. Put simply, some people will be left behind, and others will be put at risk. These economic disparities often result in deep political divides (Dean, 2010a; Foucault, 2007; Rose, 1999).

With this, then, we see that liberalism has a serious set of internal problems that it must attend to. Overall, it seems to be a generally successful way of structuring relationships. Unfortunately, however, its negative economic effects on the marginalized are often so severe that they can threaten the success of the overall venture, as seen in the violent, trans-national social reactions of 1848 and 1917-1919. The signature challenge of any liberal government is thus to find ways to reconcile the economic (and normative) advantages of formal freedom with the concrete needs of the everyday marginalized citizenry.

43 At this point it might be helpful to underline again that I, following Foucault, make no particular normative judgement on liberalism’s many supposed advantages and disadvantages, nor on its general suitability as a way of life. My assessment of “successful”, again following Foucault, stems from the observation that liberalism has, overall, tended to endure where installed, in part due to the epistemological and practical skepticism considered here.

44 These events occurred in the distant past, but they are not unthinkable today. In a much less violent way, the 2011 anti-austerity and anti-corporate demonstrations of the Occupy movement bear many similarities to these earlier waves of protest.

45 It is easy for us to overemphasize the marginalized status of those who demand social intervention. In reality, almost everybody in society is negatively affected by economic externalities, if not direct abuse. For example, both the unemployed ex-smoker, as well as the marathon-running, upper-middle class asthmatic, both call for industry to stop creating high levels of smog. Their background circumstances might be very different, but both feel that the liberal economy produces unacceptable externalities which unjustly cause them harm. Donzelot
Specifically, if liberal rule depends on the formal freedom of the governed, the interests of the marginalized pose a significant problem – how do we channel the freedom of those who are left out of the economic system in the first place? How do we efficiently achieve these interests if the market has not done so already? Importantly, this problem cannot be simply wished or argued away; liberal political economy itself holds that interests, while malleable, are concretely held: the marginalized are not wrong to want a better life, and they are not necessarily wrong to work towards alternatives to the market that might threaten the overall liberal venture. This problem is then amplified by the realization that liberalism’s emphasis on formal freedom and rule of law robs it of the ability to make laws that treat different citizens in formally varying ways.

As Giovanna Procacci puts it, liberalism’s model of the social contract of equal citizens places liberal authorities in a conceptual bind when considering the public implications of private inequality. Specifically, formal freedoms enable a system with predictable abuses, such as corporations abusing their power, but without the ability to treat certain types of citizens differently than others, liberal states are caught between either not attending to those abuses, or doing so by creating a strong state that intervenes broadly, and thus presumably inefficiently (Procacci, 1993: 24). One common case that encapsulates many of these points involves Indigenous groups, mining firms, and private investment in mineral rights. Most national governments wish to encourage investment in mining makes this point clear in his account of how social liberalism proved so appealing to mainstream French society during the interwar period (1988, pp. 395-427).
prospecting and operations, and for this reason mining companies tend to have legal authority to damage private property, and even expropriate private land, should underground resources be found near that property. The typical but controversial remedy is for mining firms to have to make generous compensatory payments. This is a fraught but successful policy in most countries, but it frequently fails when the local claimants are Indigenous – for the simple reason that market value (however generous) for spoiled property, and a symbolic payment for inconvenience, is completely unacceptable to many Indigenous people and many Indigenous communities. Alternative solutions are possible, and should be encouraged, but there are few easy answers. So how can liberalism attend to predictable outlying cases such as this one, where pro-market policies create social problems and formal equality before the law offers few remedies?

3.2 Two Models of Liberal Prosociality

This conundrum, of how to keep liberalism’s benefits while mediating its predictable failures, leads us to a puzzle. It is a puzzle at the heart of liberalism, and it is even more so a puzzle at the heart of globalization. How are we, as citizens, supposed to think of regulation in a world that demands efficiency and formal freedom? At the heart of things, it is a

46 I use the terms “prosocial” or “prosociality” as a blanket descriptors for normative acts (or normative dispositions) that broadly benefit society, and less the agents themselves.
question of how to integrate arguments of efficiency and economy with arguments of norms and justice. The two groups of ideas intersect, but they can never really influence one another: economic growth is wonderful, but increases in aggregate welfare do not in themselves forgive normative wrongs, and no matter how benevolent a policy might be, that does not in itself make the policy any more affordable. The two modes of thinking thus intersect, but they are ultimately irreducible to one another (Foucault, 2007: 298-305). So in a polity, we have to manage situations when these two categories come into conflict, despite our wanting both: we want a maximally efficient polity, and a maximally just polity, and the best we can do is to try to achieve as much of these things as possible. There will, however, be an interesting tension in any tradeoff: how can we make significant regulatory space for the market to flourish, while protecting the most vulnerable in society? Can we empower regulators without harming the local economy’s competitiveness and thus society’s welfare?

There are many answers, some more plausible than others, to these questions. Holding ourselves to possibilities within liberalism, however, there are two main regulatory models, flowing from two different political rationalities, that we can try applying in order to secure remedies for predictable abuses. The first, most prominently considered (and criticized) today by regulatory scholars, is neoliberal indirect steering, and the second, less considered, possibility is social government or welfarism. Following below is a short sketch of each.
3.2.1 Neoliberal Indirect Steering

Neoliberalism emerged out of opposition to the welfare state (Harvey, 2007: 21-29). A response to the expensive governance of mid 20th century liberalism, which delivered welfare to otherwise vulnerable citizens, neoliberalism argues that these interventions are misguided, prone to failure, and frequently coercive. Central to neoliberalism is the argument that polities are economically competitive, and that it is only be reducing governmental interference that states will remain strong (Foucault, 2007; Harvey, 2007; Rose, 1999). There is no authoritative definition of neoliberalism, but most definitions include three elements: firstly, neoliberalism argues for entrepreneurial, competitive, individual subjectivities, as only these people will secure their interests in the world, and the polity is better off for it. Secondly, neoliberalism argues that the market metaphor should be extended to most or all sectors of public life, as this will result in more efficiency in people securing their interests. Thirdly, neoliberalism argues for methodological individualism, based on the expectation of individual strategy – if you want to understand the world and then make successful predictions, assume people will act strategically, and that these spontaneous interests will drive phenomena (Foucault, 2007: 220-236).

This regulatory sketch might seem initially hostile to prosociality, but this is not quite the case. A neoliberal governmentality would suggest the above, but it would agree that we, as individuals, determine our own interests, and our interests might run normative or somewhat benevolent – what some call “disinterested interest” (Foucault, 2007: 301). As a result, it is possible to build a neoliberalized model of prosocial activism: in civil society, a
group of individuals may spontaneously coalesce to employ their freedoms to secure their interests in the world. For example, I used to (inadequately) support a small mining injustice charity. I attended a few of their meetings, gave some advice, encouraged some of their advocacy, and donated a small amount of money. Understood neoliberally, it is entirely consistent to argue that I find it in my interest to have this charity go out and contest Canadian mining injustice. I also derived some pleasure from hearing of their various successes, and I liked to indulge myself by thinking that my small contribution made a difference. Given that I define my own interests, nobody has the standing to tell me I’m wrong to claim them, nor that I should not push hard for them. And if we agree with neoliberal economists such as Gary Becker (1968) that my actions are simply economic investments of time and effort in outcomes I desire, then my political actions are themselves economically legitimate, even politically legitimate, expenditures of my energy. Indeed, if I did not support this NGO, perhaps because it seemed inconvenient to take the subway all the way to the meeting, I would be acting inappropriately anti-competitively, as my laziness would have meant my not pursuing my desired interests. After all, the market only prices mining companies’ behaviour properly if those companies price my activism into their operations – indeed, perhaps this charity having just enough funds to pressure a given antisocial firm ends up tipping the scales in some important way (Dean, 2010a; Foucault, 2007; Rose, 1999).

The above functions according to neoliberal governmentality: this way of thinking about governance instills in me (at least to a point) the expectation that I must privately intervene in the world to secure my private interests, it flows through my voluntary
participation in a civil society organization, it presumes that market life is ruled by economic
decision-making, and because of this it suggests a concrete course of action: I must work to
place costs on the behavior I find problematic. Specifically, it emphasizes that the economy
is a system with pushes and pulls of supply and demand that need to be altered to make our
desired option more attractive to relevant decision makers – in short, as an activist I need to
work to place a downward pressure on the current implicit demand for mining antisociality.
In fact, I need to work to create a negative demand (Becker, 1968). If I do this, what I’ve
done is worked to create the proper price for behavior, which maximizes welfare and
satisfaction, while respecting everyone’s formal freedom as well as the rule of law.

From a neoliberal perspective, this is an optimal outcome, and as such it can help
provide a potential model for civil society activists. We can see, however, some important
potential limitations. Firstly, for many people the concrete advice is not particularly helpful.
We might be encouraged by this model to go out and volunteer for civil society groups, but
that advice never really moves past everyday common sense. There are some potentially
powerful ways in which extremely well resourced organizations, particularly states, could
harness neoliberalism’s regulatory insights, as it lends itself to behavioral economics, where
free choices are institutionally structured in certain ways to cause formally free agents to
happily choose certain outcomes, but these regulatory schemes require far more institutional
support than even those enjoyed by many countries (Thaler and Sunstean, 2009). Meanwhile,
for everyday civil society groups, there remains relatively little helpful advice to be had,
other than to go out and work hard for what we believe in. Secondly, this model limits our
ability to critique our peers for their values and subjective approaches to issues – as
neoliberalism presumes individual competitiveness, suggests that this competitiveness most efficiently allocates resources in a market, and argues that only self-interest reliably motivates people, this model effectively polices activists by demanding that they refrain from calls for benevolence or restraint. In fact, see how Porter and Kramer’s work on “creating shared value” holds all of these positions in its critique of obligation-centric CSR (2011).

3.2.2 Social Government, or Welfarism

There is another, older, tradition of legitimate prosocial responses within liberalism. Namely, while liberalism recognizes the formal freedom of citizens and the categorical division between the public and private realms, interventions are permitted, and even encouraged, when social problems are considered to be public matters of moral order which threaten to harm overall welfare. The liberal push to economic efficiency can come to undermine the overall liberal project if it results in deprivation and subsequent widespread anger. In this scenario, reminiscent of anti-poverty policies ranging from robber-baron philanthropy to French solidarisme to welfare state social programs, prosocial acts or policies might be required to start remedying those economic injuries. As suffering polarizes politics, liberalism often seeks out ways to compromise between these adversaries without changing the underlying structure of the economy. In this way, the thinking goes, it might be possible

47 This section draws from the governmentality literature, which draws from a variety of different research sites to make broad claims regarding how liberalism tends to structure relationships in various situations. As such, this section tells a story that, while generally correct, is rarely so cut and dry “on the ground”.
to make the best of a bad situation, as the liberal political frame is retained, the productive capitalist economy is retained, and everyone’s functional role in society is retained, but the worst economic harms are alleviated (Donzelot, 1984, 1988).

For instance, we can see how social outreach programs, funded by businesses, help accomplish these goals in this way: to take an outlying example, banks are increasingly donating technical expertise and funds to aid in development programs with financial-services characteristics, such as micro-lending (Scotiabank, 2013). There is no straightforward or immediate payoff for banks in doing so, but it appears to have real payoffs for some communities, as financial services are expensive and out of reach for many. Meanwhile, these initiatives garner these banks some much needed goodwill during an era of widespread dissatisfaction with financial organizations. In a fell swoop, these banks draw linkages with people previously (and still) marginalized from traditional financial firms, and the banks show their potential usefulness to society, as well as their own recognition that they are part of a wider web of interconnectedness. All the while, though, the underlying realities of the banking sector remain unchanged. This is a meaningful endeavor, but it is not a structural change.

These mediating interventions, and the underlying demand for them, are often called “the social” (Arendt, 2006; Dean, 2010a, 2010b; Rose, 1999). This frame draws on imagery of a shared embeddedness or interconnectedness, and thus shared emotional debt to each other (Ibid), helps activists articulate the desperate economic necessity experienced by the marginalized due to liberal policies. At the same time, it also heightens scrutiny on the moral disposition and decision making of market agents. Defined by Mitchell Dean as the “the
plural and heterogeneous forms of interventions that cross and connect various formally separate public and private spheres in response to, and sometimes in opposition to, the effects of a liberal governmental economy” (2010a: 270) “the social” thus acts as a surface for potential interventions. In the banking example, the surface for social intervention becomes whether or not these banks recognize that they are a privileged group in a needy world, and whether they are willing to work to make the world a better place. Notice how the surface for intervention has changed: in neoliberal indirect steering, personalities or subjectivities are generally assumed to be irrelevant, as individuals are presumed to be more or less individualistic and competitive. As such, pressure must be put on the “environment” in which behavior takes place, so that behavior changes. Here, in social liberalism or welfarism, behavior is important, but it is immediately linked to questions of identity or subjectivity: are these banks good? In this model, people (citizens, activists, even employees themselves) ask each other: are these people, who work at this company, selfish or generous people?

Through these “social” interventions, political agents such as the civil society groups, individuals, or states, work to assuage the problems of liberal rule. Moreover, while “the social” works primarily though alleviation of hardship, it can also at times put pressure on agents to make real changes. “Social” interventions typically avoid structural change, but on occasion they can provide impetus towards more lasting, structural changes. This is because the painful realities attended to “social” politics serve to highlight various ways in which liberal governments and market agents might prevent certain predictably negative effects of certain market behavior. For example, it is one thing for Nike, H&M, and the Gap to take pains not to source clothes from sweatshops, but if we agree that sweatshops are a problem
worthy of our concern, then what does is it mean if these companies are uninterested in participating in various multi-stakeholder initiatives that might make a lasting difference? The social, though usually thematically focused on attending to suffering, and thus generally unsuited to motivating structural change, can nonetheless help bind people together such that they can undertake more ambitious political projects as well.

The “social”, as an emergent reality that flows out of implicit contrast with the economic, thus accomplishes at least three things at once. First, it helps bring certain political-economic problems into greater focus. Second, it provides specific technologies for intervention (namely the critique of market subjectivities). Thirdly, and it provides the vocabulary to help activists lobby states (and powerful organizations) for lasting change. True to the Foucauldian insight that new governmental technologies depend on the emergence of new knowledges and rationalities, these governance techniques are not possible, at least in their given forms, without the social frame provided by the social imaginary of interconnectedness and communal responsibility (Donzelot, 1988; Rose, 1999). Basically, the ability to challenge corporate greed or corporate indifference depends, at least implicitly, on the idea that market agents are in at least some small way interdependent and in debt to one another as human beings in society. Otherwise, what are we complaining about when firms act greedily, aggressively, or indifferent to suffering?

Importantly, social interventions were historically not all aimed at the state. As social imagery and social rhetoric draw from the suffering of others, the existence of suffering in society makes it more likely that some will be deemed morally suspect. Social inquiry pays special attention to the moral dispositions of market actors, and not just political
organizations but also market organizations such as companies. This moral inquiry attaches to both the weak and the powerful, as members of society try to alleviate problems within given legislative and economic constraints. As such, individuals fall under increased scrutiny, as society searches to understand what responsibility individuals might carry for various bad outcomes. For example, within regimes that champion freedom of contract and low minimum wages, unemployment has been deemed at least partially a function of people not wanting to sell their labour at low market rates, making poverty, in theory, at least partially due to laziness (Rose, 1999: 120-144). Criticizing laziness and other perceived moral defects (particularly selfishness, of which laziness is often seen as a variant) is thus one way of remedying public problems while not violating the internal terms of the liberal market regime.

The overall challenge for the social, however, has been that the conflicted principles of liberalism, which claims to value the substantive welfare of the populace but which generally subordinates those issues to the imperatives of the competitive world economy, are not resolved. To take our banking example, a bank’s benevolent actions might well make the world a better place, but they do not really resolve the issues at play. Formal legislation can always do this, but usually (in liberal thinking) at considerable costs. In the wake of the 2008 financial crash, presumably more regulatory oversight would actually be a value proposition for many countries, but part of the reason the subsequent regulatory reforms have been so mild has been that regulators are afraid of losing high-paying finance jobs to competing jurisdictions (Acharya, Cooley, Richardson and Walter, 2010). Scotiabank and other banks participating in micro-financing is of course irrelevant to the overall issue of regulatory
oversight, but perhaps we could suggest that the same surface for regulation as in that example – questioning whether banks are dangerous organizations full of selfish people - is actually a somewhat useful starting point for a conversation that could prove useful. If the answer to that question is a “yes”, then in the complete absence of meaningful state reform, then perhaps working to change those dispositions and subjectivities at the banks could be a useful, though limited, place for regulatory politics to take place. For what little it is worth, many banks seem aware of this: HSBC makes their corporate orientation, or perhaps corporate subjectivity, a central issue in their ethical reports: “enterprises should not only look after the interests of their customers, shareholders and employees, but also be responsible for the long term impact of their operations as well as meeting the expectations of today’s society” (HSBC, 2013). What thinking about problems this way does not do, however, is set out clear principles for action that actually resolve these tensions: this social regulation still features a company in an absence of sufficient state regulation, and still legally organized to maximize private gain.

The social thus operates as a temporary remedy that tends not to resolve the fundamental issues at play. For example, social insurance does not guarantee workers steady employment – it only makes sure they do not go hungry while businesses are temporarily closed, leaving it an open question why the state, or company, agrees that the situation (perhaps of seasonal work and endemic unemployment) is acceptable. The “social” thus

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48 I choose this example knowing full well how inadequate it must seem. However, the alternatives are not much better – state regulation of finance is an international crisis, with no jurisdiction confident that it has sufficiently regulated the industry. My point is rather that these strategies must in some sense supplement one another.
creates situations where the palliation of the predictable abuses of the economy implicitly criticizes the liberal status quo, as a given situation is seen as both unavoidable and unacceptable, with no permanent solutions on offer (Donzelot, 1988).

“The social,” then, can be understood as something of a tolerated arena for ambivalent dissent. What proves interesting, however, is that this dissent occasionally threatens the liberal bona fides of the regime itself. Specifically, liberal regimes struggle to properly account for the irrationality, and social embeddedness, of market actors without jettisoning the economic rationality that theoretically sustains the market itself. In particular, the recognition and expectation of social embeddedness can manifest itself in the newfound collective expectation for what governmentality scholars call a sort of “social responsibility” (Rose, 1999: 121) or “social citizenship” (Rose, 1999: 123). This sense of social responsibility is liberal, but ambivalently so, as it leaves as a completely open question how self-interested individuals should be, or how instrumental various institutions should be in their decision making. The liberal market is retained, but market agents find their subjectivity challenged: as we will see in chapter four, it is publically unacceptable to be purely selfish, but it is also unclear if altruism on the part of firms is what audiences want.

These discourses, of “social responsibility” or “social citizenship” draw from the imaginary of “the social” to posit that market actors are much more than atoms of interest, but are, rather, embedded in society, and should be treated as such. In such cases, the moral disposition of market actors (a matter of public interest), is judged in a way similar to the
unemployed (and supposedly lazy\textsuperscript{49}) individual considered just above, as social activists demand that firms (and individuals) temporarily suspend their self interest when it threatens other social goods. Market subjectivities are thus socially regulated to serve the common good: the lazy individual should suspend their self-interest and should stop collecting scarce social insurance dollars, and get a job, while firms should suspend their self-interest when necessary and think of the common good. With this, “the social” can take on “a kind of anti-individualism” (1999: 118). In response to economic rationality, the “social” alternative is not economic irrationality, but rather “social rationality,” where the wellbeing of the collective is put forth as a principle for ethical decision making, and thus for how members of society will assess moral performance (Donzelot, 1988: 413-415).

We can thus see that “the social” performs a very important function within the liberal tradition, as its flexibility and ambivalence permit a wide range of possible interventions (or non-interventions), all the while retaining the liberal state’s nominal commitment to formal freedom, the rule of law, and limited government. Given that this chapter takes as an assumption that most liberal polities will continue to greatly value those commitments, regulating the global economy through civil society pressure seems likely to generally follow either neoliberal indirect steering, on the one hand, or “social” governance, on the other.

\textsuperscript{49} I feel it necessary to underline that I do not hold this belief. This belief is widespread, however, and interesting for our purposes because it is “social” in construction but primarily conservative in content, which helps illustrate how social liberalism is not necessarily wedded to the left, although it can sometimes appear to be.
But what happens to individuals, firms, or states when the demands of economic and social rationality prove difficult to reconcile? As mentioned above, efficiency arguments and normative arguments never really resolve themselves – value judgements are inevitable in these cases. Evidently, there must exist times and places where accommodations can be hard to reach. From a “social” perspective, the most constructive avenue to take is not to hope for one side to vanquish the other, as neither is acceptable – for instance, big business might prefer to never pay taxes, but they would prefer to still have roads, and they would prefer to operate in a stable, properly funded, state. Similarly, and in a sense more tellingly, organized labour, even after the hypothetical social-democratic revolution, would not demand, say, $100/hour minimum wage legislation, because this would simply drive most employers out of business, thus harming many everyday citizens. Rather, the preferred situation is one where the worst outcomes are prevented from coming to pass, while people muddle through.

This is exactly the approach adopted by the welfare state, a specific instantiation of “social” government that altered some important regulatory approaches previously employed by classical liberals. Within a robust welfare state, the robust apparatuses and technologies of the state took over collective responsibility for both the economy as well as for social problems (Dean, 2010a: 44-60). Thus, the welfare state took the dilemmas posed by the conflictual stances of economic rationality and social rationality, and pushed them to confront one another at the level of national (or at least regional) politics, and not at the level of civil society or individuals. This had numerous effects. Firstly, it substantially depoliticized of the issue of whether market agents are expected to be morally good or socially responsible. By taking collective responsibility for both organizing the economy as
well as for attending to social problems, the welfare state took away much of the urgency that classically liberal regimes placed on this issue – instead of regulating subjectivities, the emphasis was placed on securing progress that served the common interest (Donzelot, 1988: 410-412). Returning to the Scotiabank and HSBC bank example, their subjectivities would be relatively unimportant if they were enmeshed in stringent state regulations – then, we might even encourage those banks to be aggressive, so that we could perhaps enjoy more affordable mortgages and credit cards due to more efficient industry competition.

Secondly, the welfare state’s existence had a profound effect on determining the locus of economic regulation. Where previously all market agents had to wrestle with the competing pulls of the economic and the social, and where previously this resulted in fairly robust public accusations of private impropriety, the welfare state approach took much of the oxygen out of that issue. Instead, economic regulation was expected to exist at the level of the national state and national politics. With this welfare-state division of governmental labour, welfare state social liberalism (particularly in the Anglosphere – this varied in some European welfare states) expected firms to act according to economic rationality, while both firms and individuals expected the state, when necessary, to act according to social rationality, thus regulating economic activity in the name of the social. This uneasy truce, dubbed by some the “social question” (Arendt, 2006: 49) was underwritten by the idea that not only was a compromise important in order to avoid catastrophe, but that limiting contestation would benefit everyone through growing the economy – through progress. Put differently, the welfare state, with its clear demarcations of responsibility, and its intention to hold both economic and social agents to account, offered both sides of “the social question”
the benefits of progress. Thus, while economic rationality and social rationality tend to come at one another’s expense (particularly because each term, on some level, historically defined itself through rejecting the other – see Dean, 2010b), the welfare state’s stability and predictability suggested that it might grow the economy in such ways that it could effectively attend to various social problems. With this arrangement, we see the high-water mark of social democracy, and, not unrelatedly, the high-water mark of “the social,” understood as a way of understanding political problems and proposing concrete solutions centered around shared interconnectedness, communal responsibility, rigid public roles for institutions, individual docility to state and industry authority, and the temporary restraint of self-interest alongside faith in communal progress.

3.3 Neoliberalism and the Apparent ‘Death of “The Social”’

Almost thirty years ago, Jean Baudrillard diagnosed a new absence in our collective imagination. He argued that we seemingly no longer posed our political problems in the frame provided by “the social,” as the nation seemed less and less relevant to government, while the state seemed to provide fewer and fewer opportunities for collective action. While the early date prevented Baudrillard from posing this problem as one that neoliberalism and globalization had to speak to directly, Baudrillard nonetheless argued persuasively, if idiosyncratically, that there was a certain new irreality to what had formerly seemed more concrete and indispensable (Baudrillard, 1983: 86).
More than a decade later, Nikolas Rose built upon Baudrillard’s analysis to assert the supposed “death” of “the social” (1999: 327-348). In this piece, Rose made substantial use of contemporary social theory, including Foucault’s work on governmentality, to place this decline in a casual chain, and thus in a richer and more convincing account. According to Rose, globalization and neoliberalism have undermined the social in two ways. Firstly, Rose argued that these twinned social forces have damaged the apparatuses and technologies that have traditionally facilitated the power flows that have historically drawn from the social. Put differently, the welfare state has been significantly dismantled, and this has impinged upon the politics that flowed through those welfarist institutions. Secondly, Rose also argues that globalization and neoliberalism have undermined the social as a way for activists, or scholars, to consider political community – as a group of people who come together out of their shared interconnected natures and shared common debt to one another. The social has thus been undermined as both a set of institutions as well as as an imaginary. This chapter’s analysis, found in the next section, will argue that, broadly speaking, Rose’s first point holds, but that the second does not – or, at least, only partially holds. Taken together, this means that the social has been weakened and displaced, but that it remains a viable, and important, “plane of thought and action” (1999: 327).

Broadly speaking, I actually disagree with very little of Rose’s account. In fact, almost everything contained in both the famous 1996 article, as well as in the influential 1999 monograph *Powers of Freedom*, is well founded and well argued. Moreover, Rose takes all the requisite care in making clear that simplistic arguments finding for sharp divides, between various technologies within complicated political traditions, are likely to be
“misleading” (1996: 330). That said, problematic methodological choices end up inadvertently threatening some of his conclusions, including the argument that the social is “no longer a key zone, target, and objective of strategies of government (1999: 327)”. Given that Rose’s conclusion rests on the above two arguments, and given that this paper will disagree with one of those arguments, it should be unsurprising that these methodological problems emerge here (although they will be dealt with more precisely below).

Speaking plainly, governmentality theory contains within it a wide array of tools and ideas with which to analyze liberal rule, but they tend to only tell one specific story very well. Namely, almost all of the most interesting governmentality work has emerged out of analyses that have charted how the collapse of the welfare state apparatus, often with the support of many state critics on the left, has not led appreciably to any less governance, nor any more freedom. Specifically, neoliberalism’s perpetual critique of state rule has rhetorically undermined state delivery of various programs, but Rose points out that states have merely shifted to various market mechanisms to discharge their duties, meaning that the same power flows exist as before, only they are deployed in different ways. For instance, instead of deploying social workers to carefully, but paternalistically, usher the employed through government skills training programs, governments might simply mail vouchers, valid at any number of competing private training centers (1999: 88-90). Here, the state seems to have retreated, but it still advances its agenda all the same. Citizens might feel freer, but they also find that their nominal freedom is channeled in certain directions – perhaps the above vouchers only work at training centers that provide certain types of retraining that happen to correspond to the state’s confidence in certain labour markets. Rose’s work, in both the
“Death of the Social?” and *Powers of Freedom*, tells this one specific narrative; as the state has declined, wide-scale interventions have simultaneously declined, as has the language of the social. To Rose, who does not witness the social to be particularly useful anymore in discharging state responsibilities, this indicates the “death”, or at least irrelevance, of the social.

From another perspective, however, we can see that this disagreement is largely a matter of scope – Rose’s scope is not primarily determined by various discursive formations, nor is it primarily interested in charting economic regulation in and of itself. Rather, Rose is telling an important but very specific story. This story, however, is actually not the story of the social as an imaginary, but rather the story of the death of the welfare state. Rose does additionally juxtapose the recent rise of the more limited, more local, and less emotionally evocative, frame of community to that of the social. For example, businesses that make mistakes can be problematized in two ways – firstly, the mistake was one of social responsibility, or secondly, as a lack of respect for the community. “Community” is an entirely valid normative ideal, but Rose, and others, argue that its claims are much more local, less amenable to coalitional politics, and less evocative of class (1999: 167-193). “Community”, then, might be something of an increasingly individualized, and even less moralized, way of making claims on economic actors.

This comparison of normative vocabularies is thought-provoking, but apart from charting the social’s decline, there are fairly few arguments for why “community”, and not “the social”, might prevail going forward. If we are going to determine that the social, and not just the welfare state, is dead, we would presumably need to see a sustained move away
from the social in other, non-state, regulatory situations. Specifically, we would benefit from seeing examples where social imagery is being eschewed for community imagery in situations where the state bears no responsibility, power, or particular interest, in outcomes. Placed in governmentality vocabulary: what about non-state agendas? Have they seen a comparative rise, or decline, of “the social”? We do not see this analysis. For example, in cases where civil society groups lobby each other to make changes to their policies, do we see “social” language, “community” language, or both? We don’t know – there are only two non-state-agenda examples within *The Powers of Freedom*, and neither explicitly employs either social, or community, language. To be fair, I am sure scholars could provide some fascinating case studies that speak to the rise in community imagery. My point is rather that this is not the objective of Rose’s analysis. Rose’s primary objective is to explain a shift in governance at the level of the state. We have no evidence one way or another regarding the success or failure of social imagery in non-state situations.

This insight is very softly made in Mitchell Dean’s *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, a text which is often compared to Rose’s *Powers of Freedom* in that they both helped set the stage for the recent surge of interest in governmentality studies. There, Dean argues that the social is not dead – after all, we still depend on programs such as social security and still employ social workers, and when we discuss those programs we employ conspicuously social imagery of alleviating economic hardship due to our communal responsibility for our neighbours in society (2010a: 200-201). What we need, however, he says, is a better account of the social that would make sense the absence of the welfare state. As such, Dean calls for us to develop a “post-welfarist regime of the social” (2010a: 200).
According to Dean, this will require that we look for situations where governments no longer have to govern through a unified discrete society, as well as a notable decline in public support for welfare-provision (2010a: 201). More constructively, Dean suggests that any such regime is likely to use the market to discharge its duties, as the more comprehensive power apparatus enjoyed by the welfare state is no longer accessible. Specifically, Dean argues that a post-welfarist social is most likely going to feature situations where markets permit individuals and civil society groups to effect a cultural transformation over a problematic group, something he calls “governmental consumerism” (2010a: 203).

This clearly approximates, in many ways, the direction in which this chapter is heading. Dean’s analysis, however, ends up stopping short. He never actually finds the post-welfarist social because he is still, albeit to far lesser degree, captured by the theoretical scope that captured Rose. In particular, Dean is still primarily interested in charting the evolution of state power – he nods towards “multiple agencies” replacing a unitary apparatus, but it is entirely unclear as to whether this denotes non-state actors, or merely a collection of different, perhaps temporarily employed, agents implementing a state organized operation. In the absence of details on this point (of exactly who Dean is discussing) it is difficult to speculate. More importantly, however, Dean’s analysis still retains the quasi-welfarist assumption that the state retains primary responsibility for attending to collective problems. This is, overall, an interesting normative question to debate. It has not, however, totally broken with the welfare state frame, and Dean rarely considers non-state agents. Moreover, Dean’s focus on a “post-welfarist” social shows that he agrees with Rose that common concern for welfare is declining – so it certainly does not explain or capture the welfare-
centric politics considered in chapter one’s case study of the politics of Bangladeshi factory safety: those were welfare-centric, and deployed classically “social” language. With this, then, Dean’s analysis seems promising but ultimately reverts to telling the story of neoliberal reform of the state. He is open to exploring how social politics could manifest themselves in the future, but he expects them to be generally neoliberalized and generally due to the state agenda. In the end, Dean leaves it to future commentators to add detail regarding whom will hold whom socially responsible for what, and why, in a post-welfarist social, but his approach would definitely miss the material we consider in this dissertation.

To reply to Dean and Rose, then, we seem to need to study the imaginary of “the social”, and less the institutions that used to deliver the state social agenda. To help do this, it seems potentially fruitful to borrow from Maurizio Lazzarato (2009), another influential governmentality scholar interested in post-national understandings of the social. Specifically, Lazzarato suggests that it could be useful to analytically distinguish between the discursive and non-discursive formations of the social (2009: 111). Put simply, discursive formations intervene on what we can think, and non-discursive formations intervene on what we can do – this seems analogous to the approach followed here in this dissertation, where we suspended our expectations about which institutions ought to deliver a social agenda, and followed “social” language in the case study. Given that the social is, as Rose puts it, a “plane of thought and action,” (Rose, 1999: 227) any comprehensive treatment of the issue will have to attend to both. However, it seems that the decline of the welfare state is most keenly felt in regards to what people can (or now cannot) do in society – our patterns of thinking have changed with neoliberalism, but our patterns of exercising power have changed

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much more significantly. For example, our ability to condemn bankers as greedy continues, despite the increasing lack of the type of census data that would tell us just how much bankers in given regions and given subfields get paid, and the extent to which they exceed the national average. Our capacities here appear to have eroded faster than have our ways of thinking about the problem. As such, there is a danger that perhaps we are missing the social at times because we are charting the power relations, and not the imaginary.

Thus, in a bid to properly identify a post-national regime of the social, we should do two things. Firstly, we should pay special attention for cases that do not feature lingering legacies of state sovereignty, where the state’s responsibilities but which are being discharged in different manners, and through market mechanisms – these cases are potentially distracting. Instead, we should look for political campaigns where primary responsibility for economic malfeasance (and alleviating remedies) are assigned to individuals or groups, as mediated through by a perceived social reality. Even better, this should be an example where the state has neither the responsibility to intervene, nor the inclination nor power to do so. When we do this, and thus look for economic regulation truly within civil society instead of within the state, suddenly the social appears all around us.

Secondly, we should focus on discursive manifestations and aspects of the social. In other words, we should search for the social imaginary as it is deployed in the world today. To do this, we can perform a short thought experiment. What would we expect to find in new social regulation of the economy, out in civil society? As a rough, and somewhat overlapping list, we should find:
A. a discourse employing “social” language, for example “social responsibility” or “social citizenship”

B. an explicit normative appeal to our interconnectedness in society,

C. an explicit normative appeal to our communal responsibilities to one another,

D. a backgrounded intuition that the market creates unfairness, injustice, and unnecessary need,

E. the agreement that formal freedom and the market are necessary, but that social solidarization is also necessary,

F. a censure of selfishness, and the demand that individuals (and organizations) weigh self-interest or economic rationality with the common good or social rationality.

G. Ambivalence on the issue of self-interest. The expectation that most people are mostly self-interested, but that we also recognize our social responsibilities.

H. A discourse that trades in images of individual social responsibility or citizenship, understood at least partially as selflessness.

I. A strong belief in communal progress, and that the pains of temporary selflessness or restraint will be repaid by collective success.

So, can we find civil society politics that trade in these ideas? Yes. Corporate Social Responsibility politics features all of them. The politics of Bangladeshi factory safety featured all of them.
3.4 Corporate Social Responsibility, Corporate Citizenship, and the Post-State Social

In his history of corporate social responsibility (CSR), Gerald Hanlon (2008) finds a fascinating trend. CSR, as a concept and political discourse, has existed for decades, but it only gained critical mass in mainstream society somewhere around 1990. What could explain a sudden but rapid increase in popularity at that point in time? Hanlon, and others⁵⁰, believe that CSR and similar discourses have prospered because of the void left behind by the retreat of the welfare state. According to this argument, as globalization and neoliberalism have undermined the traditional state regulatory apparatuses surrounding the economy, political actors suddenly found this discourse useful in conceptualizing the moral virtues, or failings, of market actors. This appears to be consistent with what we know about oscillations within liberal governmentality between state-law and civil society moralization technologies: previous moralization movements have seemed to correspond with contexts featuring particularly weak state institutions, most notably gilded age and roaring 20ies America (1999: 118-120).

CSR, like many political discourses, is notoriously difficult to define, let alone comprehensively satisfy in real life. Broadly speaking, many scholars follow a generally

⁵⁰ This understanding is increasingly widespread. See Palazzo, G. S. and Scherer A.G. (2007), Lipshutz (2007), Shamir (2004), and Vallentin and Murillo (2012) for similar accounts.
negative definition, where CSR is defined out of a rejection of pure economic rationality, in favour of a general backdrop of various social goods. For example, the standard definition of corporate social responsibility is commonly recognized to stem from Keith Davis, who argues that it denotes “businessmen’s decisions and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm’s direct economic or technical interest” (1962: 76). The expectation is thus threefold; that firms are wrong to only act self-interestedly, that firms should address more of their negative externalities, and (crucially), that if they do not act “responsibly,” then moral opprobrium and negative incentives will follow.

With CSR, we thus see a reintroduction of social rationality into the motivation and decision making of large corporations, creating a new set of surfaces to for political agents to govern. Specifically, the appearance and regularization of CSR lets political agents ask tough questions of actors who otherwise might appear to be essentially private and of marginal political interest. CSR, as a discursive formation, thus aids activists such as as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as they intervene into economic matters which firms might otherwise consider none of their business. With CSR, as well as with its parallel discourse of “corporate citizenship” (see Matten and Crane, 2005), the moral disposition of firms, as well as the moral decisions they make, become political matters. The importance of motivations, and thus of subjectivities of both managers as well as that of organizations as a whole, becomes important: firms might be following the letter of the law in a given instance,
but if they are acting greedily\textsuperscript{51} or antisocially, then the firm can be criticized on those grounds. These discursive formations help activists hold firms to account.

Within CSR, as with within all “social” governance, the fact that market subjectivities are being contested and moralized does not necessarily mean that it operates solely by persuasion. Subjectivities are problematized through explicitly normative language (such as “greedy” immediately above), but that problematization occurs on the level of public personas. Whether or not this moralization campaign is authentically internalized by firms is ultimately a secondary consideration. It would be wonderful for activists should that occur, but it is not essential. What is essential is that public pressure is mobilized through those normative arguments, and that both activists and firms act as if those normative arguments are all plausibly true. If everyone acts as if they are indeed a plausible set of normative arguments to make, then the governance is able to function. This need for seemingly authentic benevolence introduces seemingly real normative ideas into apparently strategic realms. Indeed, the strategic nature of the normative arguments are not lost on those participating in a CSR dialogue, but everyone in the scenario also publically professes to agree that these prosocial norms are valid and necessary (McWilliams and Siegel, 2007). As a result of all this, CSR works to undermine firms’ substantive freedom – they are legally free to do whatever they wish to do, but suddenly there are these new expectations in society and potential costs of noncompliance. This mix of formal freedom with underlying

\[\text{\textsuperscript{51} This language of greed is jarring, but it is popular with activists. See the treatment of “greed” and “ruthless(ness)” in chapter one.}\]
substantive unfreedom is typical of liberal governmentality, and even more typical of social liberal governmentality.

With the above laid out, it seems clear that corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship often operate firmly within the imaginary of the social. Both discourses permit new ways of political thinking about nominally private economic activity. Both discourses posit the importance of restraining oneself from anti-social selfishness, and just as with the social, this impulse is tied to public responsibility and notions of citizenship. Moreover, both discourses also work to facilitate civil society efforts to hold market forces to account. Importantly, we also see what Dean predicted; that with the entrenchment of neoliberalized expectations of how to problem solve in contemporary life, CSR and corporate citizenship advance their campaigns through market incentives. As such, this seems to be a relatively straightforward extension of socially liberal political technologies to fit a new – or at least different – type of regulatory politics.

3.5 Social Government in a Neoliberal World: Workplace Subjectivities and Hybridization of the Social

This is not to say that CSR and corporate citizenship are entirely understandable in the traditional categories of the social. In fact, CSR and corporate citizenship go beyond illustrating the presence of the post-state social, and instead point to the emergence of some completely new forms of civil society regulatory politics. These are essentially variations on an historical theme: CSR accomplishes the regulatory goals of activists through the historical
technologies of social government, specifically through problematizing the subjectivities of managers and the perceived subjectivities or personalities of companies, but it does so in a strange way. Specifically, CSR and corporate citizenship seem to feature a hybridized sense of the appropriate workplace subjectivity for individuals to adopt. This hybridized workplace subjectivity combines a recognition of social embeddedness with neoliberal entrepreneurialism – something that is not previously discussed as a possibility in the literature.

Workplace subjectivities are important because they affect how we interact with our economic institutions. In the analysis above, this chapter argued that with the decline of the welfare state, we should see some subsequent changes in the institutional division of labour within states. The genius of welfare-state social government lay in how it sublimated the various tensions of society to the abstracted realm of national politics. This model had many features to recommend it, and chief among them was the fact that it offered certainty and simplicity for members of large institutions due to a strict division of regulatory labour – in order to make the state as dynamic as possible, each sector of society was expected to defer to the state on urgent normative issues, and to restrain itself from contravening explosive social norms, but otherwise to pursue its own interests relatively single-mindedly. Thus, the job of industry was to create wealth, the job of organized labour was to protect workers and extract wages, and the job of the state was to mediate between economic and social rationality through administrative and political interventions when necessary (Donzelot, 1984, 1988).
With the decline of the welfare state apparatus, this institutional division of labour is now largely obsolete. Following this insight, the CSR example above shows us that we are also seeing an updating of what constitutes an appropriate workplace subjectivity. Specifically, welfarism’s division of labour depended on widespread docility to authority (Binkley, 2009). Faced with an everyday, low-level, ethical conundrum at work, members of the welfare state would find a series of gentle expectations that downplayed their efforts to attend to that problem. Strong, effective welfare states encouraged individuals to believe that the state ought to take care of many normative problems, that conflicts were best handled by state authorities, and that as an individual “your” job was to contribute to your organization’s (socially important) mission, not to solve other social issues that were best attended to by the requisite organization (Donzelot, 1988). Importantly, this docility did not extend to national (or regional) politics – it was there that welfarism channeled people’s political energies. Put slightly differently, welfarism sought to align industry with normative expectations, but it also tended to expect that industry was already aligned with normative expectations in the first place – the mark of a sophisticated and functional welfare state was that these issues were generally already attended to (Binkley, 2009: 65-71) and if it was not so aligned, that there were dedicated people to ensure legal and normative compliance, making individual civil society interventions out of place and even potentially inappropriate (Donzelot, 1988).

For instance, returning to the banking example above, our expectations of whether regulations are sufficiently in place greatly depends on our confidence in the strength and resources of the state. Today, we fully expect high finance to be a destabilizing effect on the economy – something even most regulators would privately agree with – but we refrain from
applying regulations because the finance jobs might leave for other jurisdictions. Within a (granted, hypothetical) powerful welfare state, however, this expectation does not hold in quite the same way. Presumably the state is strong, and presumably it is regulating the banks properly. These are admittedly assumptions made in a thought experiment, but they track real observations made in welfare states: that national politics takes up more of the political activity, that more decisions get made at that level, and that members of institutions are somewhat more docile, especially at work, as a result.

This is not to say that welfarism downplayed activism – that activism merely got channeled to the level of national politics. In any case, welfarism is typified by the prosocial subjective tendencies mentioned earlier (propensity to temporary renunciation of self-interest, feelings of social responsibility), but it is also highly typified by docility to authority within institutions, as well as in some civil society contexts when normative questions are presumed to have be settled (Binkley, 2009: 65-71). This docility, which historically served the welfare state well, in that it creates individuals who adjust themselves to their workplaces, can be a problem in a neoliberal, globalized, world. Docile subjects are more likely to be taken advantage of, which is a problem, but even more problematic is that they are less likely to serve as prosocial change agents, as they have been gently socialized to not “rock the boat” at work (Ibid, 68-69). Perhaps what’s needed in the world today, by contrast, is not docility at work (and politics in formal channels) but fundamentally decent people with an entrepreneurial spirit (Dean, 2010a). What’s important to note here, though, is that entrepreneurism, especially at work, is typical of neoliberalism, and not ideal-typical social liberalism. This stems from neoliberals believing that individuals have to go out and secure
the world they want for themselves (Foucault, 2007: 259-261). To have the courage to go out and secure those interests (so a neoliberal perspective would have it), we need to exchange our docile workplace selves typical of welfarism or social liberalism, for the confident, dynamic, entrepreneurialism of neoliberalism. Importantly, entrepreneurialism here features no particular egoism, but rather simply a willingness to challenge others, to take risk, and to demand certain outcomes in the world (Binkley, 2009). I am ultimately agnostic on many of these issues, but I would note that sociologists have noted a widespread trend towards citizens feeling that their political agendas now have to be pursued in civil society or in the workplace, and not in formal politics, as formal politics is increasingly seen as ossified and irrelevant (Beck, 2000; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2008). To the extent this is true, the docility and loyalty-supporting functions of social liberalism are an impediment to that activism, while the encouraging, entrepreneurial aspects of neoliberalism are a resource perhaps to draw on. The aspect of neoliberalism that is problematic, from a responsibility perspective, is not the entrepreneurialism, but rather the exhortations to competitive individualism (Foucault, 2007; Dean, 2010a).

This process of partially neoliberalizing our subjectivities has the effect of partially neoliberalizing social government. Specifically, it highlights how there are not one but rather always two senses of responsibility at play in social governmental campaigns such as CSR or corporate citizenship. Until now, the literature has focused overwhelmingly on the sense of responsibility that firms (or individuals) should feel for the good or bad things they do. CSR speaks primarily to this sense of social responsibility. But within civil society politics there is
always another responsibility, where citizens\textsuperscript{52} have to take responsibility for whether or not their polity is going to work out – that things are going to be ok and that they are making sure of this. Donzelot argues that the welfare state’s rigid division of labour, with strict institutional roles for industry and labour, suppressed these ideas: as employees, we were expected to support the firm, thus showing loyalty, and we should advance most of our political agendas through state politics (Donzelot, 1984, 1988). Nothing in here explicitly works against civil society regulation of businesses, but implicitly it suppresses it: people are diverted away from direct political contestation towards national politics, the state, not individuals, holds primary normative responsibility, and employees of firms are heavily encouraged to show docility and loyalty to their companies (in a way that has since been lessened with the decline of the welfare state and the rise of what Beck (2000) calls sub-politics).

After globalization, however, this model no longer holds. As individuals, we must now hold firms to account. After all, if we do not work to regulate the world, who will? This encourages an entrepreneurial, assertive, perspective unto the world. Overall, then, the effect is essentially one of making institutional roles, as well as workplace subjectivities, much more fluid than they used to be. While the welfare state originally featured docile workers (who could have ferocious fights with management through labour negotiations, but who ultimately held deep, decades long relationships with companies), with the debate of

\textsuperscript{52} I use the term “citizens” here to import normative connotations of embeddedness, typical of social government, into the conversation. I am more or less uninterested here in state politics.
economic and social rationalities made at the remote level of national or state politics, the
post-national social features much more entrepreneurial individuals (both within target firms
and without), who make sure that these rationalities are put into conversation within our large
individual institutions. This is a hybridization of political technologies that the literature has
not yet discussed.

3.6 Implications for Future Research

This chapter sought to make three contributions to the scholarly debate. The first was to
argue in favour of social government as a political rationality that continues to exist, and that
continues to hold promise for regulating the economy. I would agree with Baudrillard and
Rose that the social is less prevalent than perhaps it was at one time, and that the imagery of
community has displaced “the social” in some contexts. For instance, TD Bank’s “Corporate
Responsibility” report actually switches back and forth seamlessly, as the company aims to
“contribute to the economic and social development of the diverse communities we serve”
(TD Bank, 2011). More specifically, “social” language seems to remain more moralized,
while “community” language seems to continue to be more exclusive, and less broad-based
in appeal. For instance, the tech company CGI grounds its CSR activism in appeals to
community, but here the communities are conspicuously plural, and implicitly linked to
CGI’s operations and sales: “…we are close to our clients and our communities….we are
committed to contributing to those causes that benefit the well-being of our communities
(CGI, 2013)” This is a perfectly decent and humane statement, and if true it reflects very well on CGI, but there is an implicit exclusivity here that suggests that CGI is not beholden to everybody, just those communities where it operates. As such, Rose could be right to say that in some cases this shift in vocabulary could undermine some coalitional politics.

That said, the social is not dead, and it remains a discursive resource for activists. The case study of Bangladeshi garment worker safety helped to illustrate this. “Social” talk offers activists (and managers who wish to communicate with them) unique connotations of class, of interconnectedness, and of a shared coalition that demands change. It is thus a particularly powerful set of ideas to use to animate various practices of rule. That said, even once we’ve demonstrated “the social’s” continued existence and relevance, social government may not be an ideal strategy toolbox for every context. Its interest in moralizing market subjectivities and faith in progress can appear idealistic or even naïve to some, which leads many critics to believe it should be left aside in favour of relatively cold-hearted neoliberal interventions, which do not even attempt to persuade or moralize firms – instead, they simply coordinate resources to try to induce a change in behavior (as an example of this, see the neoliberal politics of garment safety considered in the chapter one case study). On this point, this chapter sought also to demonstrate that the social’s extensive reliance on agent moralization (both sincere and rhetorical) suggests ways in which idealism (even if only deployed strategically) can be an important approach to civil society regulation. Efforts to underline activists’ level headedness by eschewing most normative content risk our prematurely discarding various technologies that might be important to given activists (or firms) in various given situations. As we have seen here, both the contexts that regulators have to work
within, as well as the technologies they are able to deploy, are both so variable that keeping an open mind seems important. Thirdly, and most mundanely but perhaps most importantly, this chapter also sought to demonstrate that various liberal governmentalities are mixing and recombining in new ways unforeseen in the literature. In particular, this chapter’s work on the hybridization of workplace subjectivity shows the potential for governmentality theory to explore the many ways in which various governmentalities might be combined in the future. The literature suggests that neoliberal and social subjectivities should not be so successful in recombining this way. The approach here, which draws its insights from considering the concrete world, suggests that there are exciting new ways for observers to dream about governance.
Let’s imagine something terrible has happened, and that a company is to blame. There are many troubling stories in the news these days to choose from – it could be perhaps Walmart engaging in union-busting (Izzo, 2011), a restaurant chain advocating against the gay and lesbian community (Severson, 2011), forestry companies cutting down rainforests (Greenpeace, 2010), or a tech company using scantily clad models as de facto props at a trade show (Gollum, 2013). These are all problems worthy of a response: the status quo is unacceptable, and members of society want things to change. But before we go about organizing ourselves to try to make those demands, it is worth asking what exactly we are upset about, and what we blame for that unacceptable status quo.

What is exactly the specific problem in these cases? What is it at issue that we want to change? Is it the union busting, regressive social politics, burning of rainforests, and sexist marketing? Yes, it is, largely. At the same time, however, at issue is also a question of what sort of companies, staffed by what sort of people, would do such things? We imagine the people in these companies making these decisions, we see the spokespeople justifying or downplaying these decisions after the fact, and we get angry at these people and these firms.
for being antisocial. We get angry at these companies for being antisocial companies full of antisocial individuals – the individuals’ antisociality thus defining the anthropomorphized company in the eyes of the judging public, and then the company’s public persona also then defining those employees. We thus judge these companies, both for what they do, but also for what (and who) they are. After all, on some level, if these people and companies were not so antisocial at the levels of corporate culture and employee identities, then presumably these individuals and companies would not do the things they do.

There is no perfect way to label how we anthropomorphize, moralize, and judge organizations for their displayed values and identities. I suggest the term corporate subjectivities, which is intended to emphasize how we are identifying the moral, emotional, and cognitive interior experience of the organization, as well as that of firm employees in their workplace lives. By corporate subjectivities I thus mean primarily the aggregated persona that the firm projects out to the world, but also then by extension the actual emotional and cognitive workplace experience of employees that make up the company. The relationship between the public persona and the corporate culture of firms is not identical, but they do often roughly track one another in everyday practice, at least in the eyes of the public. Companies’ public personas are thus a useful heuristic for understanding corporate

53 I use “antisocial” here to mean simply an adjective that denotes something that contravenes the expectations of society. I use it intentionally because of its neutrality.

54 For the term “subjectivity,” I follow the generic definition offered by Robert Solomon: “pertaining to the subject and his or her particular perspective, feelings, beliefs, and desires” Soloman, Robert C. “Subjectivity”. In Honderich Ed. The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy. 2nd Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2005. This definition of subjectivity is thus very close to those of identity and personality, with each term emphasizing different aspects of mental life that are informed by the others.
responsibility issues, as well as for holding companies responsible. These personas can be
used to focus attention on the aggregated character of its individual employees: reform of
which would in time reform the publicly judged persona (Rupp, Ganapathi, Aguilera and
Williams, 2006). Terms related to corporate subjectivities would thus include corporate
culture, corporate identity, corporate values, corporate personality, and corporate ethos. As
consumers, and as workers, we have imperfect appreciations for these experiences, but they
do in some sense exist, and we regularly go through life functioning as if they do. We act as
if a shared understanding of a firm’s emotional and cognitive inner life reflects something
real, as if it can help us predict its future actions, and as if it can perhaps be changed for the
better.

Take, for example, the investment bank and financial services company Goldman
Sachs. Goldman Sachs has a different identity, disposition, set of values, and workforce than
would your local credit union. We would expect the two financial institutions to act
differently in a given normative situation, though perhaps this expectation would be
inaccurate. In any case, see the folklore that has surrounded Goldmans after the 2008
financial crisis, including the famous “Why I am Leaving Goldman Sachs” public letter
which made pointed reference to Goldmans’ “decline in…moral fibre” (Smith, 2012).
Nobody in the financial or general press was confused about what the writer of that letter
could have meant by that phrase, nor how this could possibly have been the case (Smith, 2012). Moreover, consider the relatively famous “Goldman Sachs Elevator Gossip” twitter
feed (@GSElevator), which details the fictitious workplace gossip of an outrageous and
dissolute workforce. At the time of writing, Autumn 2014, @GSElevator has 690,000

223
followers. While undeniably witty, the account only broke out from industry-specific amusement into wider consciousness because it exaggerated an already-present sense of a troubled organization made up of troubled people.

That said, the characterization of Goldman Sachs being problematic because it is made up of problematic people is fluid and categorically inconstant, making analysis challenging. The exact issue of where subjective fault (and blameworthiness) lies can be sometimes elusive in these cases. Does the fault lie with the companies themselves, or rather with the businesspeople that make up that firm? The answer seems to depend on which characterization appeals to the speaker. Regardless, we should raise the issue directly to be clear about the categories and concepts we are using. For whatever reason, we as judging bystanders do not limit ourselves to essentially cultural critiques, where we criticize a company for the characters (or personas) of its businesspeople. We also go a step further to anthropomorphize the firms and then critique them directly as morally flawed, thus collapsing the substantive distinction between a cultural critique and moral critique. In chapter one’s case study of CSR activism in response to Rana Plaza, we saw a fluid back and forth among activists, who sometimes deployed cultural critiques of the industry as well as of individual firms’ employees\(^55\), who sometimes deployed direct moral critiques of companies described in unitary terms\(^56\), and who sometimes collapsed the categories entirely, both

\(^{55}\) E.g., “Perhaps beneath all the rubble of the collapsed Rana Plaza, you'll find buried the pitiless hearts of garment retailers who profit unjustly from unsafe working conditions.” (Firstlook, 2013)

\(^{56}\) E.g., “Walmart is a pioneer and also the most ruthless practitioner of a sourcing model that has now come to dominate the apparel industry” Scott Nova (Al Jazeera English, 2013).
describing the firms’ unitary moral discretion as well as hinting that this unitary moral discretion was affected by the underlying personal morality of executives\textsuperscript{57}.

Take the last example, where the passage includes: “the answer is for Hudson’s Bay to sign the Accord, ok? And they know they should sign it. They know that if they have an ounce of morality they will sign the Accord” (Sinclair, 2013). Is this a moral critique of individuals? Is this a cultural critique of a group? The language pierces the corporate veil to implicate those individual executives, but never abandons the original target for criticism: Hudson’s Bay, which is suggested to be normatively deficient in a subjective sense. That creative ambiguity and fluidity between the usual categories of individual and group morality is, on the ground, not problematic. In fact, it seems useful to Sinclair to suggest that Hudson’s Bay, as an institution, is capable of moral thought and capable of moral transgression – categories we typically associate with individuals. Similarly, revisiting the example of Goldman Sachs, the financial journalist and polemicist Matt Taibbi coined the image of Goldman’s as “a great vampire squid, wrapped around the face of humanity” (Taibbi, 2010). Why reduce a firm of thousands to this singular image? Essentially, describing Goldmans as single predatory animal simplifies the imagery for Taibbi while communicating to his readers both a)what Taibbi believes Goldmans’ future behavior will metaphorically resemble, and b)that Taibbi believes these problems are deep-seated, essentially at the point of subjective identity.

\textsuperscript{57} E.g., “the answer is for Hudson’s Bay to sign the Accord, ok? And they know they should sign it. They know that if they have an ounce of morality they will sign the Accord” (Sinclair, 2013).
In this sense, the categorical differences between individuals and groups, while sometimes useful to our thinking through the issues, serve only as pragmatic hindrances to the advocacy “on the ground”. As such, this analysis focuses on the functioning of the governance (which collapses the practical distinction between the employees of firms and the firms itself), and simply notes this collapse in passing. Essentially, this analysis discusses a predominantly cultural critique that often operates on individuals and in individualistic terminology, and which moves back and forth across those categories.

4.1 Two Objects of Criticism

These two objects of criticism, of what companies do, and of who companies are, obviously tend to overlap – we typically know “bad” (or good) companies by the “bad” (or good) things they do – but they are not necessarily the same thing. Behaviors (what people and companies do) and subjectivities (what people and companies are) are not necessarily contested in the same ways, and are not necessarily remedied in the same fashion. For instance, if the tech company was to simply stop using scantily clad models due to public outrage, society’s poor opinion of their firm would not simply end with that change in policy, although it might help. A cessation in the behaviour would surely be welcomed, but it would not speak to a concern (and judgement) formed in the minds of the public audience: that the company was, and presumably still is, unacceptably sexist. The remedy in this case could not be just a cessation of the sexist behavior: before taking a job at that firm or buying their products, many observers would have to see evidence that their corporate culture had
changed. A seemingly heartfelt statement, showing a change in corporate values and how they think about these issues, would thus be an important element of any remedy.

I ask this question because the activist NGO community, and the CSR community in particular, has always held these two approaches to activism in mild tension. That tension is often productive: debating how best to think about problems and remedies can prompt new insights, and each approach has its place. But the tension does exist. Emphasizing the regulation of strategic corporate behavior comes at the risk of implicitly accepting corporate egoism, while emphasizing efforts aimed at corporate and managerial subjectivities risks activists being perceived as radical, aggressive, and insufficiently collaborative. Recently, however, we have also seen concerted efforts within CSR circles to shift activist attention away from focusing on corporate or managerial subjectivity, towards focusing on the specific acts, particularly unwanted behaviors, that companies can improve upon (as an example of this, see Porter and Kramer, 2011, 2014; see, critically, Laasonen, Fougere, and Kourala, 2012, and Tallio, 2006). This new pressure is occurring largely because moralized activism which contests corporate subjectivity is often perceived to be anti-capitalist, and thus either unserious or naïve in an economic setting. It would be thus far more convenient, according to many CSR commentators, for everyone to stipulate that most firms reason essentially instrumentally, that this is basically acceptable, and that this is a non-issue. In any case, there is an increasing push to delegitimate activism that rests on the contestation of corporate

subjectivities – that previously mild, productive, tension is at risk of being dissolved into a new consensus of legitimate and illegitimate political messaging.

To better understand this recent change in CSR politics, I suggest we employ governmentality analysis, which studies governance relationships through charting participants’ understandings of how governance actually works. Governmentality analysis looks for “relatively systematic way(s) of thinking about” (Dean, 2010a; 268) governance: who tends to govern who, the institutions and techniques to employ, and the objectives to secure. These systemized ways of thinking about governance can be called political rationalities (Ibid, p. 42) and different people in different contexts employ different political rationalities, with subsequent effects. Simply put, if you have different expectations of how politics works, you will employ different political strategies in your advocacy, and the politics “on the ground” will change as a result. For instance, civil servants in a neoliberal state, a welfare state, and a police state will all approach problems such as crime in very different ways, and this is partially due to how they think about crime in different ways: the neoliberal might loudly increase penalties to install a deterrent effect, the welfarist might address social root causes of crime, and the police state might install a more effective surveillance regime. So what if CSR activists are employing a certain political rationality, or perhaps a mixture of such rationalities? What does that tell us? For starters, charting how activists employ different rationalities of rule in their politics could help us understand if it is important that these different ways of thinking about governance continue to be deemed legitimate. What do we gain, or lose, by delegitimizing a given way of thinking about activism?
The CSR literature\(^{59}\) has recently taken interest in Foucauldian analysis, and in governmentality analysis in particular. Unfortunately, the analysis has been, to date, relatively one-sided, as governmentality-inspired observers have generally assumed that corporate and managerial subjectivities are fairly fixed (Lipschutz, 2005; Shamir, 2008). Given CSR’s consistent ambiguity on the key issue of activists actually demanding non-egoist decision making in firms\(^{60}\), and given that governmentality researchers tend to be political realists (Frankel, 1997)\(^{61}\), it seems intuitive to many that CSR politics will be determined by the inevitable imperative for firms to make profits, and that this will be apparent to all involved. That explicit economic self-interest acts as CSR’s rationality of rule might thus appear an almost foregone conclusion. By this reading, CSR seems to offer, at best, the vocabulary through which activists and firms can strategically negotiate appropriate behaviors and various incentives for change (Lipshutz, 2005). This corresponds quite well to one of the two types of regulatory politics mentioned above: the regulation of corporate behaviors.

\(^{59}\) I focus here on corporate social responsibility (CSR) research, but much of that overlaps with other, similar, approaches to business and society relations: sustainability, positive organizational scholarship, corporate responsibility, corporate citizenship, etc. These labels are not perfectly interchangeable, but they sometimes can be.

\(^{60}\) Much of this paper will revolve around the question of whether CSR does, or does not, endorse the principle of shareholder profit supremacy. Broadly speaking, it sometimes does, and sometimes does not, but market agents overwhelmingly tend to cultivate ambiguity on this issue. This is largely because either limit position is socially unacceptable to many, as it displays either excessive idealism or distasteful cynicism (and thus latent anti-sociality). For a more expansive consideration of this issue, please see chapter four.

Broadly speaking, this governmental picture, set forth by CSR scholars inspired by the work of Michel Foucault, assumes three overarching themes in CSR governance. First, that firms are categorically self-interested and competitive, and that this matter is considered settled within companies, within activist groups, and within the public at large. Second, that the specific object of governance is the unacceptable behaviors of firms. Third, that the primary governance relationships are essentially private: they involve self-interested groups and individuals at a sub-state level, with the national government generally absent. Taken together, these paint the picture of what Foucauldian scholars would label a neoliberal governmental profile, where actors are expected to act competitively, the state is minimally involved, and normativity primarily manifests itself as upwards (or downwards) pressures from civil society on the essentially strategic behaviors of market actors (Rose, 1999). Within this regulatory frame, often dubbed “neoliberal indirect steering” (Lipschutz, 2005), CSR acts as civil-society based regulation of our peers’ formally free behavior, achieved relatively efficiently through our making them agree to change that behavior because we reveal it to be in their best interest to do so.\(^\text{62}\)

But wait a moment. We know that somewhat sincere, or at least supposedly sincere, companies exist (Collier and Esteban, 2007; Hemingway and MacLagan, 2004). We also know that some of these companies often change their corporate cultures and the workplace identities of their employees because of outside moralized pressure from activists. In this way we can say that some activists do problematize subjectivities, and that they can have an

\(^{62}\) See chapter two for a deeper examination of neoliberal indirect steering.
impact on corporate subjectivities. The above model, pegged to a fixed competitive
subjectivity where firms are expected to be self-interested, does not explain these politics. So
what does?

This chapter hopes to unpack and present an alternate history of CSR politics that
better explains these other politics, as then we can better assess what would be gained or lost
if we shifted entirely away from a moralized, subjective, approach. This alternate history of
CSR politics, which is explored initially in the case study of chapter one, is social liberalism
(or, by some accounts, welfarism). It functions through moralized appeals to market actors
that retain the market system, but which place business within social expectations of
responsibility, duty, restraint, and the recognition of our general embeddedness in society.
Here, temporary restraint and compromise is occasionally demanded so that society can
move forward together. For an example of social liberalism in action, see how activists
criticize large bonuses for banking executives. A key complaint by these activists is that the
executives have lost perspective and have given in to “greed,” which is said to have
systemic effects given the structure of financial compensation in the industry. Criticisms on
the grounds of greed, or similar attributions of bad character, are judgments that individuals,
and companies, are failing to respect their duties to their peers in society. These CSR politics

63 For a more fulsome discussion of neoliberalism and social liberalism, see chapter two.

64 E.g., MacParland, K. “Europe Finds It Difficult to Part Bankers From Their Bonuses.” National Post. May
21st, 2013. Accessible at: http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2013/05/21/kelly-mcparland-europe-finds-it-
difficult-to-part-bankers-from-their-bonuses/ See also: Jones, A. “Outrage as Report Reveals Soaring Pay For
UK Executives” Irish Independent, June 10, 2103. Accessible at: http://www.independent.ie/business/outrage-
as-report-reveals-soaring-pay-for-uk-chief-executives-29332921.html
do not assume agent egoism, but rather explicitly (if ambiguously) contest it – it is not necessarily acceptable in modern society to declare oneself as only motivated by strategic and egoist considerations.

Through exploring this alternate model of CSR politics, which can work alongside neoliberal indirect steering, this chapter hopes to suggest two things. Firstly, that CSR politics fits only partially into a neoliberal frame, and that we need a more pluralistic governmentality analysis: rather, CSR activism also sometimes functions according to a socially liberal set of assumptions. As such, CSR analysis that is shoehorned into a neoliberal frame misses key elements of the regulatory picture. I thus suggest that strategic advice for CSR activists that draws on purely neoliberal ideas suffers from a lack of a wider perspective. In particular, analysis and advice drawing purely on neoliberal assumptions misses the second argument of this chapter: that alongside the regulation of presumably strategic behaviors lies the simultaneous (and often successful) regulation of corporate subjectivities – the identity that a firm projects to the world, and that partially dictate its activities. This is overlooked in many models of CSR politics.

From the perspective of understanding CSR governance, the main implications, first and foremost, are that instead of primarily casting CSR as fundamentally neoliberal, we should understand it instead as broadly liberal, with neoliberalism and social liberalism each waxing and waning depending on the context: agents might be usually strategic, but are not always so, and corporate subjectivities are socially contested as a matter of public import. Within a pluralist liberal governmental profile political interactions will feature significantly more explicit normativity than within an ideal-typical neoliberal alternative. Specifically, the
subjectivities of market agents can be challenged within a paradigm that features a willingness to zealously censure antisocial levels of self-interestedness.

Implications also exist for the governmentality literature. The governmentality “mainstream” has tended to adopt a fairly pessimistic view of the globalized economy. This concern is well-founded, but it has often led to somewhat legitimate charges of political fatalism (Frankel, 1997). Much of this has revolved around the idea that with the fall of the Westphalian/Keynesian welfare state, and with the rise of the global market, we have lost the tools needed to protect individuals from the harsh vagaries of the new economy. In addition, scholars such as Baudrillard and Rose have argued that we are also seeing a related shift away from normative appeals to social solidarity, and that “social liberalism” is thus increasingly irrelevant. If, by contrast, CSR sometimes operates the way presented here, it presents the beginnings of an answer to the question of what post-state manifestations of the social might look like – which should provide us with a more holistic understanding of the strategic options open to activists.

The remainder of this chapter will proceed in three parts. In the first section, I will briefly introduce, and argue for, a pluralistic approach to governmentality analysis, which seeks out “patterns of correlation” in governance arrangements by expressly looking for heterogeneity and complexity within overarching campaigns (Collier, 2009). To facilitate this attention to the possible heterogeneity of power strategies and rationalities within an overall

65 Rose, 1999. See also chapter two.
political regime, I briefly sketch out, in Foucauldian terms, the strategic possibilities open to activists hoping to wield regulatory power. To do this, I set out the two separate, but connected, “modes of subjection” (Bevir, 1999: 66), by which Foucauldian scholars have tended to understand domination in society. These two modes of subjection, namely discipline and subjectification, in turn engender an interest in three co-penetrating and overlapping techniques of wielding power: individual discipline, normalization, and environmental intervention. Understanding these categories should help us better understand the underlying logics and practices of CSR politics.

The second section of the chapter will seek to map key elements of the current CSR debate on to these analytic categories, thus demonstrating that critical elements of the political CSR debate have yet to be properly considered at the level of concrete practices. There, I will argue that the mainstream CSR literature tends to privilege an implicitly disciplinary account of CSR politics, and is increasingly open to exploring the ways in which activists can intervene on the transnational institutional environment – each of these technologies is compatible with everyday business and explicitly “bottom-line” argumentation. This chapter will seek to gently push back by arguing for the importance (and utility) of this third technology, normalization: where people seek to govern their peers by governing not what they do but what they believe and what they are. Throughout this section, I will make reference to an illustrative real-world example where an activist group, Greenpeace, has woven all three technologies into an overarching governance campaign that has proven wildly successful.
Following this, the chapter will conclude with a brief discussion section. There, I will consider the implications of this analysis; namely, that despite normalization’s many real-world drawbacks as a strategy, it is nonetheless one that seems well institutionally suited to many CSR contexts. If this is true, then the lack of attention, and even outright hostility (Tallio, 2006), to the moralizing that underpins this mode of CSR politics could be problematic for many activists. In effect, these arguments about legitimate political messaging is likely to harm certain activist groups that are institutionally disposed to benefit from employing normalization as a political technique in their advocacy. In addition, the analysis suggests directions for future research. This analysis suggests new avenues for practice-centric research from a governmental viewpoint, on exactly how civil society groups go about regulating market subjectivities.

Prior to beginning the argumentation, a brief note on the scope of the chapter. There is evidently a lot going on here. There are ways of thinking about politics to set out, governance techniques to tease apart, and links to draw between the two categories – which ways of thinking about politics suggest which techniques for securing compliance? The slightly sprawling nature of this piece follows from the point it is trying to make: that within CSR practice, and within post-national economic regulation as a whole, there exists something of a subtle chasm, all riding on the issue of whether people believe that firms can be usefully criticized for their self-interestedness. On the one side we have neoliberal prosocial governance, which avoids disappointment and manipulation by keeping its horizons low: it secures compliance by either structuring markets to passively limit agent choices, or by having agents go out and secure their interests through quasi-coercive indirect action though
market incentives. The competitive individualism within neoliberalism suggests the objects of governance to be problematized (certain bad behaviors that we do not like) and the typical means to do so (action on market incentives, and institutional work to create large steering institutions such as the UN Global Compact, which links firms and stakeholders so that they have to take stakeholder concerns into account) (Rasche and Kell, 2010). Individual discipline and environmental-structuring interventions (through modifying large institutions to structure the business environment) are thus generally compatible with fixed, egoist, corporate subjectivities. Normalization, however, is largely precluded here – after all, if subjectivities are fixed as self-interested, and if moral pleas are naïve, then there is little room here for normalizing as a way of securing compliance.

On the other, less studied, side of the chasm, we have activists who still believe that firms can be usefully criticized for their self-interestedness. As a result, we have these two political techniques (individual discipline and environmental structuring) joined by a third, where agents secure compliance through the contestation, or normalization, of subjectivities. This overall strategy, emblematic of so-called social liberalism (Donzelot, 1984; Dean, 2010a), thus presumes that subjectivities can be challenged, and suggest new means to do so: the public propagation and contestation of norms (primarily through more multivariate, comparatively ephemeral, institutions or networks, such as through the social media, and civil society newsletters or listserves). This approach carries significant vulnerabilities, but it also features certain strengths as well – particularly for activists who lack access to sophisticated institutional resources, because as we will explore below, both individual discipline and environmental structuring require far more institutional support than does
normalization (Nealon, 2008). If you are a weak activist group, and you wish to quickly, clearly contest corporate malfeasance in a way that cannot be easily explained away, calling them selfish, greedy, or uncaring is often a practical political strategy. And if you think that sounds unimportant, recall that in the politics of Bangladeshi factory safety, most of the most structurally and culturally relevant firms, such Gap, H&M, Walmart, and Inditex, had at best tenuous links to the Rana Plaza factory complex, and had fairly plausible explanations of how their sourcing policies might be better than the industry standard. During their campaigns to improve Bangladeshi factory safety, activists repeatedly found themselves sidestepping exactly why H&M and Gap were relevant to the Rana Plaza narrative, because actual ethical violations, and actual information about actual H&M and Gap factories, were in comparatively short supply. But pointing out, for instance, that firms were unwilling to put safety ahead of the bottom line was a comparatively easy charge to substantiate (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013a, 2013b; IndustriALL, 2013).

And that’s why this messy story is important, as the more that observers criticize any perceived idealism in CSR activism as naïve and unproductive, the more we undermine efforts at normalization. There are significant benefits from discarding idealistic language of social embeddedness and duty: the business community see activists as more serious, firms are more likely to see how they could benefit from compliance, and as a result the widely held belief is that companies are more likely to embark on collaborative initiatives with NGOS that deploy this language (Doh and Guay, 2006). But there are costs too. The more we delegitimize the challenging of corporate self-interestedness, we are also marginalizing the precise governance strategy that has historically been crucial for weak actors in institution-
poor environments (Scott, 1985, 1992). For them, contesting subjectivities can have real 
results – and it all depends on keeping the question of corporate subjectivity open.

4.2 Governmentality, Neoliberalism, and the Need for a Pluralist Reading of 
CSR Government

4.2.1 Searching for the Relations of Power in the CSR

As mentioned above, governmentality analysis is increasingly popular within the 
social sciences, and in particular the business and society literature. Interest in 
governmentality (and especially liberal governmentality) stems from Foucault’s observation 
of the essential consideration of the transaction costs of wielding power. Many nominally 
powerful organizations are actually less powerful than they might appear, because deploying 
their power comes at the price of greatly depleting their resources – for instance, many 
community groups could successfully blockade the factories they deplore, but tend to refrain 
from doing so because they only have so many volunteers who are willing to be arrested for 
trespass or mischief. That tactic thus works in extreme circumstances, but only a small 
number of times. Put differently, most large organizations can do absolutely anything they 
want; they just cannot do everything they want, because wielding power is expensive to that 
power. Governmentality analysis thus helps frame governance decisions as essentially ones 
of efficiency (Nealon, 2008; 45-50).

As Jeffrey Nealon puts it, the paradigmatic governmental question when considering 
regulation becomes not ‘does it work?’, but rather the economic question: ‘what does it
State-centric interventions that demand time-sensitive (and specific) outcomes feature extremely high transaction costs. For instance, see how every Canadian and American spends a number of anxious nights in April hunched over calculators and spreadsheets, just in order to determine exactly how much to pay their government in income tax. There are real costs to this policy: income tax season results in lost employment time, widespread anxiety, and lost leisure time, as well as considerable anger directed at the state itself. These costs all acts as deadweights on both the state and society. There, those transaction costs are acceptable to the Federal, provincial, and state governments, but the exhaustive and coercive regulatory strategy followed by the IRS and CRA is not followed, for instance, in regards to childhood nutrition. Proper childhood nutrition is an important state policy outcome, but it is not seen to justify a similarly invasive (and expensive) intervention in society. For policy prescriptions that feature comparatively lower payoffs, or for policy actors that have few institutional resources with which to pursue those outcomes, choosing an appropriately efficient portfolio of political technologies becomes essential. The ‘cheapest’ interventions are found to be those that work by their encouraging individuals to decide to do, voluntarily, what the agent wanted them to do, as then there is no need for costly violence or explicit coercion (Rose, 1999).

Governmentality analysis’ signature contribution to the academy has thus been to unmask the ways in which liberal, and especially neoliberal, polices have in many cases deepened the power relations they were thought to remedy, as enthusiastic leftist activists saw a paternalistic and capricious welfare state dismantled in favour of an neoliberal one that, even worse, held the poor actively responsible for their fates (Rose, 1999). Prefiguring
our engagement with business and society politics, this narrative of neoliberalism is evidently seductive within a CSR context. We might criticize the state for frequent inaction on important issues, but the marketization of regulation through CSR might simply recode normativity in market language and market logic, thus undermining prosocial norms in general. Without overly generalizing, this has been the primary response to CSR within governmentality analysis: that CSR activism should not be relied upon as a regulatory option, because it operates through corporate agency, and as such only operates according to strategic logic (Banerjee, 2007; Lipschutz, 2005; Shamir, 2008) (See, critically, Vallentin and Murillo, 2012, and Vallentin, 2013, as important partial exceptions to this trend – although they do primarily study CSR politics’ neoliberal leadings).

Unfortunately, this reading of CSR governance as mere neoliberal steering is only part of the story. It might well be representative of a great deal of CSR politics, but there is also other rationalities at play. For instance, the above model, of neoliberal politics, assumes that market subjectivities are essentially fixed: market agents act competitively, and it is both inappropriate and naïve to expect anything different. Most companies are indeed primarily motivated by “bottom-line” thinking (Carroll and Shabana, 2010) – and as a result this expectation seems appropriate as a rationality of rule: to govern firms, activists should motivate them to act freely, and that motivation will come about when firms see that it is in their strategic best interests to do so. While this is an entirely defensible position, we see, every day, political arguments and techniques that work differently: activists work to problematize corporate subjectivities while companies intentionally project the public image of a certain subjectivity. For instance – all of the examples at the outset of this chapter
correspond to cases where either the activists at play, or the companies, invoked as publically relevant the subjectivities of the firms: Chick Fil-A’s proudly evangelical corporate charter is criticized by activists and then defended by the company (Severson, 2011), Walmart is called greedy by union officials (Rushe, 2012), Timberland affirms to do the “right thing,” not just the smart thing, in the Amazon (Schwartz, 2011), and the sexist tech company fought something of a mild culture war about the role of women in tech culture (Hyperblog, 2013).

We can assume that, to a certain extent, all of this is coded rhetoric aimed at securing strategic ends. But these arguments only work as long as people believe the arguments to be sincere, or at least plausible. If people see these invocations of subjectivities to be plausible, and they clearly do, then the words have meaning and power, and everyone involved in the politics has to treat them seriously (if perhaps not sincerely). As such, the politics of subjectivity carry a distinctly different rationality of rule: these are interventions in the cultures, or subjectivities, of firms, as well as the individual subjectivities of employees and managers. Activists and managers project and contest these public personas as a way of projecting what they want people to believe about the company and the people who work there. In this way, corporate subjectivities are always somewhat awkward – we argue about a persona as a way of arguing about the aggregated characters of the people at the firm.

Corporate subjectivity is thus neither exactly the same as corporate culture, nor is it exactly the same as a corporate persona – it is effectively the anthropomorphized corporate culture, made up of a multitude of individual subjectivities, that appears to outside audiences as a public persona.
Faced with this analytic messiness, it is clear that governmentality analysis needs to be pluralist in orientation: CSR is not simply neoliberal, and does not operate on only one type of object (behaviours). To best understand CSR politics, we need an approach that looks for heterogeneous rationalities and technologies, operating simultaneously.

4.2.2 A Pluralist Approach: Setting the Stage for Analyzing CSR

To achieve this pluralism, I borrow freely from Stephen Collier’s (2009) treatment of governmental analysis, which suggests that we can “examine how existing techniques and technologies of power are re-deployed and recombined in diverse assemblies” (Collier, 2009, p. 79). If we adopt this approach, we can look for supposedly heterogeneous practices sitting side by side, which is important for our purposes because CSR seems to simultaneously feature both neoliberal and social liberal governmental arrangements.

To do this analytic work, however, we need to set out our Foucauldian vocabulary in more detail than previously done in governmentality-inspired analysis of CSR, as we need to be clear and schematic about what we are talking about. Within the Foucauldian literature (both primary and secondary) we can fruitfully chart at least three overlapping major technologies of power. These categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, nor necessarily exhaustive, but they are well agreed-upon concepts that will allow for us to show the conceptual linkages necessary to better understand the phenomena. By “technologies of power” I mean the concrete families of practices, following specific strategies, that go about
securing that compliance (Dean, 2010a; Rose, 1999; Rose, O’Malley, and Valverde, 2006)).
These conceptual categories correspond in rough but meaningful ways to the “real-world”
ways of thinking about government that animate governmentality analysis. Thusly, prior to
analyzing CSR, it is necessary to very briefly set out these conceptual categories, as they will
form the analytic vocabulary underlying our study.

*Technologies of Power:* Foucault’s work on governmentality highlights three main
technologies of power, all of which frequently build off of one another and thus often overlap
and co-participate: discipline, normalization, and environmental controls (Foucault 2007;
Nealon, 2008). As such, divisions between categories, while illuminating, are always
mildly arbitrary in that the categories commonly overlap – a disciplinary practice will often
have normalizing implications, etc. Nonetheless, each collection of technologies has its own
predictable tendencies. Discipline tends to have effects that primarily constrain the
individual’s capabilities, regulatory normalization tends to primarily result in subjective
effects, and environmental interventions have a primarily formal effect: they structure fields
of action in such a way as to make individuals or groups decide amongst a relatively narrow
set of options.

*Discipline:* while underlining again that every governmental technology is always
imperfectly manifested in the real-world (no political campaign features every aspect of a so-

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66 There is a large secondary literature on the distinction between discipline and regulatory normalization. Foucault then pointed out how “discipline-normalization” is itself conceptually separate from efforts at “modifying the terms of the game”, where agents act on the environment within which others make their decisions (2007, p. 261)
called “ideal” technology such as discipline), discipline is usually emblematic of the power that large, powerful, institutions hold over individuals. In considering the high transaction costs of coercion or violence (which prompt damaging resistance), discipline trains the capabilities of individuals (or organizations of individuals) with mild punishments to render them docile and reluctant to exhibit unwanted behaviors. Discipline then creates knowledges of these problems, creating new norms of what should constitute appropriate behaviour going forward (Foucault, 1990; 1997). Armed with these knowledges, disciplinary powers generally seek to separate troublemakers out from general society, thus creating sub-groups that can be further trained or punished as necessary. Finally, in a reflexive moment, disciplinary authorities will engage in institutional work intended to perfect the institutional regime undertaking this surveillance and training. The hoped-for result is an institutional arrangement that charts individuals and their individual behavior with such precision that those individuals consider it not worthwhile to behave poorly (Foucault, 1990).

For example, consider how workers in many factories (and even in some retail stores) are made to ritually “clock in” at the exact moment that they walk on to the workplace floor, and then to “clock out” the moment they break for lunch or for the day. This practice is demanded for a number of reasons, but its regimented nature is at least partially to train the employees to focus and to subconsciously change the way they work. Being aware of the time, stopping, checking in, letting the factory know you are there (and thus underlining how you know they are watching), and then walking out on to the floor, work becomes something more urgent and formal. In this way, although the employees’ views on work remain consistent (if anything, the practice is alienating), the employees are trained to act differently.
To function in this way, discipline tends to focus on the small ways in which people may be made to feel like they have no choice but to comply – the employee above simply cannot be casual about when they work, and punctuality as well as added level of focus become habit.

By marking and training individuals, discipline thus alters what they can do – it affects individuals (and organizations) at the level of capabilities (Nealon, 2008, p. 43) - and reveals to individuals new ways that they can behave. It creates new expectations for behaviors that help reveal exactly the stakes in continued malfeasance. We can thus also see discipline’s docile individuals in the effects that corporate codes of conduct can have on managers: with the clear enunciation of expectations, training seminars that reinforce these lessons, and then institutionalized surveillance efforts at ensuring compliance, managers who would otherwise be tempted to act poorly might be convinced to follow the firm’s expectations for behavior, in large part because it seems inevitable that misconduct will be punished, and that compliance will be rewarded (Foucault, 1995).

*Normalization*, by contrast, works quite differently. It first emerged in Foucault’s analysis as a sort of diffused variant of discipline, and functions by society holding people to general standards of character. Early industrial capitalism had developed disciplinary techniques quite quickly due to large institutions such as the church and factories, which permitted intense control over parishioners or employees. In order for the 19th century emergence of “macro” discipline (normalization), society required improved public discussion and new coordinating institutions. This is because its norms travel beyond any one institution, and instead function all through society. This proved helpful in policy terms, though, as public figures had always remarked that many policy issues evaded disciplinary
responses because of the extensive institutional resources they required. For instance, how might we employ discipline to control, say, insufficient recycling, when the issue is insufficiently important to merit expensive surveillance or policing? Similarly, how might we get people to refrain from intoxication given the inability of the state to control who enters and leaves private homes? Discipline, with its interest in individuals, individual acts, and intensive training, is poorly suited to contexts such as these, because specific malfeasance is rarely documented and our capacities to intervene are weak. Indeed, as we will see in the next section, discipline works effectively but perhaps inefficiently when applied to a CSR context, while regulatory efforts aimed at normalization feature cheaper returns (Foucault, 1997).

For an example of normalization and why it can be useful, consider how many people believe that in order for countries to prosper in the globalized economy, we need a culture of entrepreneurship, and a “risk-taking spirit” (Casselman, 2012). How do you advance this agenda using a disciplinary apparatus? You simply cannot without an expansive, invasive, state. Instead, you traffic in ideas about the types of people we all should be, and you do it through vast civil society networks, where each application of the norm has an extremely small effect. In this case, the explicit message here is that success will flow from entrepreneurially applying oneself to a calling, but there are also implicit messages about the risks of patience, and the potential pitfalls of being loyal to your existing peers (Binkley, 2009). All of these ideas travel through society, and over time they have an effect, resulting in a change on the people who hear these ideas and who feel it speaks to them. Here, individuals are just as free on the levels of their physical bodies and physical capabilities as
before – nothing is inevitable as it is with discipline, as nobody will ever intervene (or even know) if a given young person declines to act entrepreneurially. Instead, normalization achieves its agenda by people change because they’ve had their expectations, thoughts, and desires change. In the case of subjectification, and the case of entrepreneurial young people, the young people have been (partially) molded to suit those social expectations.

In open, fluid, cases such as these, normalizing power attaches itself at the level of groups or populations, not the level of individuals – in the example above, the Wall St. Journal isolates “workers” and “entrepreneurs” as the groups of people that need to be reformed. Normalization hopes to use “light” touches on many people in order to secure as many gains as possible, as inexpensively as possible. To achieve this, normalizing power tends to employ discourse to traffic in the language of normality in order to have small applications of power, from throughout society, repeatedly reach given populations of individuals. As a result of this difference, the abstract and chaotic nature of normalizing governance demands different policy prescriptions (and expectations) than would a disciplinary counterpart. The results are usually far less impressive, and any given individual is prone to noncompliance, but given the very low cost any compliance achieved renders the campaign comparatively successful (Nealon, 2008).

Importantly, though, normalization is not mere persuasion. It is a form of power, after all. This is because people will hold each other responsible should they refuse to comply with the norm. At a certain point, normalization thus achieves real force, even though each application started off at the level of norms that might have seemed fairly voluntary. Normalization thus evades a simple question of whether someone is free to decline
agreement or not. Ultimately, norms that are adopted by society end up carrying powerful coercive effects.

To see this all in action, consider the question of how can we improve rates of public recycling? We all profess to deem recycling important, but achieving higher rates of recycling is a surprisingly stubborn public policy problem. Insufficient rates of recycling is not something municipalities can expect to remedy through observation and discipline, as the necessary institutional apparatus does not exist and would cost too much to install. For instance, it would be an administrative nightmare to have waste collectors test each bag of waste for recyclable material prior to accepting it at the curb. From a disciplinary perspective, this could actually work quite well: the state employees are already at your house once a week, they know who you are, and they can assess your compliance. But the transaction costs here would be prohibitive: the waste collectors would fall behind, waste would go uncollected, and any levied fines would provoke considerable anger at the city. Due to this state of affairs, municipalities almost never pursue that course of action (although in truly exceptional cases they sometimes do).

So if disciplinary technologies require institutional backing that is not always on offer, what can we do? In the case of recycling, almost all municipalities independently promote strikingly similar, and low key, normative campaign to secure maximal compliance at the lowest possible cost. Municipalities have settled on an iconic bright blue recycling bin, which every home is given or is expected to buy. Then, we have all heard, for more than thirty years, about the importance of individuals taking personal responsibility for their share of the society-wide recycling project. Of particular importance, for our purposes, is exactly
what is being governed in a regulatory campaign. For instance, almost everybody hopes society as a whole recycles. But normalization is most successful when it governs subjectivities and not behaviour: we get angry at non-recycling, but to improve recycling rates overall we need to change the number of recyclers. Normalizing power asks: what sort of people fail to recycle? There are actually some easy answers: among others, the culprits would include lazy people, selfish people, distracted people, and exhausted people. Perhaps people who refuse to recycle are the sort of thoughtless people who do not value their communities, their neighbors, or who value their busy lifestyles more than the environment!

These are not particularly pleasant comments. As citizens, though, we get bombarded everyday by messages of just this sort, and normalization works to establish that our problems are not just what we do, but what we are and show ourselves to be. I note in passing that the recent municipal ad campaign to promote proper waste disposal in Toronto had the tagline: “Littering says a lot about you”, with garbage arranged to say things like “lazy”, “selfish”, and “lowlife” (Johnston, 2014).

To extend the example, consider perhaps why you yourself recycle. Speaking for myself, I do not recycle as much as I do because I think recycling is a particularly urgent matter, although it is an issue that I do care about. But let’s say my personal commitment to recycling only secures 50 or 60% compliance, while I currently operate at 80 or 85% compliance. I operate at this relatively high level because whenever I do not, it is immediately apparent to the people I live with, and I would rather they think highly of me. Crucially, what’s being governed here is not simply my behaviour, it is my personality or subjectivity: I recycle at a high rate because I wish to display a prosocial subjectivity to my
peers, and wish not to be perceived as either lazy or antisocial. This subjectivity is displayed as a persona in precisely two moments: when I throw recycling into the blue boxes at home and at work, and even more powerfully when I display my blue box, full to the brim, each week in front of my house. It is never clear to me how much this is authentically internalized into my value system – each week in the winter I grumble about lugging the bin in the snow – but my motivations are both partially authentic and partially out of fear that I might be found out as secretly ambivalent about the environment. To an extent, though, the lessons are slowly sinking in, and judging by my improved performance as the years pass I suppose my compliance is becoming ever so slightly more internalized.

Normalization thus works internally, through the reflection of the subject, as well as externally – it works to stimulate the censure of those who feature antisocial selves. This distinction can be overstated, as every self exhibits itself in observed behavior, and every behavior displays a self that performed the act in question. That said, most successful normalization campaigns look for us to understand exactly what causes malfeasance: in many cases we believe that malfeasance is found to be done by those who are maladjusted and poorly socialized, who deserve suspicion even if they have not done anything yet (Dean, 2010; Rose, 1999). Thusly, just as the linchpin of discipline is norms of behavior, the linchpin of regulatory power is norms of subjectivity: through discourse, states and civil society groups traffic in discourse surrounding exactly what sort of people we should be, what sort of people we should live with, and what sort of people we should work with (Nealon, 2008). At the very least, in the absence of true changes to subjectivity, normalizing power demands that we put forth our best selves, if only as something of a mask or
performance (Nealon, 2008). Without going into premature detail, it is this technology, featuring most or all of these predictable institutional effects, that is currently neglected in the governmental CSR literature.

*Environmental interventions* are also important techniques for securing compliance, but they can be somewhat minimized in many policy discussions, due to their being so indirect in their application that they can be difficult to operationalize in many contexts. Environmental technologies aim to guide groups or populations towards better outcomes through a sort of behaviorism, as formally free choices are structured in certain ways to privilege certain outcomes (for instance, as with recent research into the popularity of opt-out instead of opt-in pension plans) (Thaler and Sunstein, 2009). More tangibly, agents might reach out to affect the environment around an actor in order to affect what that agent might do. For example, if a well organized urban neighbourhood, in the throes of intensification, faces a stubborn problem of local developers working loudly far too early in the morning, perhaps that neighbourhood should, so to speak, make sure that their interests are factored into the developers’ self-interested decision-making.

For instance, what in a developers’ political environment predictably induces changes in behaviour? One key issue is smooth municipal permitting. And one key issue of municipal permitting is the predictability of community outrage. But how can everybody involved predict community outrage or community buy-in? One way would be for the municipal permitting process to formally include community group support as a matter of regulatory importance, and for community groups to set up a clear code of conduct for developers, with their support in the permitting process pulled if this is not followed. Instead of coercing the
developers directly, and instead of demonizing them or their behavior in normalizing terms (although presumably this could happen as well), a key element of this strategy is that the neighbourhood would actually rarely need to interact with the developers (something that would likely please both parties). Indeed, they would share no clear relationship at all – the primary conflict remains between the developers and the municipality. With a permitting process policy change such as this, the effect would be to restructure the market to make it function more optimally by better taking the neighbourhood’s interests into account: the neighbourhood achieves its purposes, the municipality has a better idea of where the neighbourhood stands, and the developers presumably decide to stop working early in the morning faced with the full costs of their behavior.

In the Foucauldian literature, environmental interventions are central to neoliberal governance, as they encourage the interplay of market forces: everybody should be able to competitively pursue their interests, and we will better allocate resources and maximize utility should we all endeavor to “set the terms of the game” that encourage market activity. Within a CSR context, we can see a suite of environmental interventions that governments (or powerful private actors) might make, such as institutional work where concerned consumers are placed in better conversation with firms (thus creating new market relationships where none existed previously), putting each party in interplay with one another (Vallentin and Murillo, 2012).

67 Please note that I use this in the sense used by Hayek and Polanyi, not the sense used by Rawls. See Foucault, 2007: pp. 172-176.
Examples of this would also include recent efforts by both activists and powerful mining companies to create a transparency database for TSX listed mining companies, where companies would disclose payments to governments. This regulatory change would make it much harder for mining firms to hide inappropriate payments to corrupt regimes. Interestingly, in this case many firms are pushing for the mandatory database, because they believe it would help them market Canadian miners more persuasively to skeptical financial markets. This initiative is still extremely controversial in mining circles, as the larger Canadian producers reportedly actually want activists to hold their smaller Canadian peers to account – they see their relative lack of bribery to be a potential advantage. But that competitive advantage, both in comparison to other countries and within the Canadian industry, is only created if activists have access to this data. To do this, the Canadian miners are working with activists to do this institutional, market-building work. If successful, these activists and companies will have made a real difference (Revenue Watch, 2012).

To pursue these sorts of interventions, however, typically require extremely high institutional resources, of a sort typically far beyond most non-state actors. Indeed, we can see above that a collection of multi-billion dollar companies, working for years together with sophisticated NGOs, has had only partial success. As such, most CSR activism would not take place through these sorts of environmental interventions, except perhaps through slow evolutions in some high-profile extra-state institutions, such as new CSR ratings agencies (Vallentin and Murillo, 2012). Where it does occur, however, this will have an outsized effect.
4.3 Neoliberalism, “The Social”, and CSR

4.3.1 CSR and the Political Technologies of Government

With this, we can see that all three technologies feature significant importance to CSR. If we think of how individual firms are targeted and shamed by high-profile non-governmental organizations (NGOs), who then partner with the firms to improve social performance (such as when the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) partnered with the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange to address labour problems (Bittman, 2011), then CSR clearly holds a disciplinary disposition. Similarly, the literature is increasingly considering how firms are thinking of markets as moralized, with market actors constantly altering their public personas (and presumably their actual thinking and dispositions) based on how they think they are being seen by their peers – an essentially normalizing story (Stehr and Adolf, 2011). Moreover, these relationships are perpetually being changed by new institutional realities, such as CSR ratings agencies (e.g. Corporate Knights’ “Clean Capitalism” Rankings)68, that are being created to make firms respond to previously externalized costs. As Vallentin and Murillo put it, current analyses that limit CSR to a single rationality or technology “gravely underestimate the complexity of the field” (Vallentin and Murillo, 2010, p. 161)

68 See Corporate Knights’ website at: http://www.corporateknights.com/
That said, let’s perform a thought experiment. Within the CSR field, who is the primary driver of change? Namely, who is it that acts as the prime mover here? On some level, the process begins with individual citizens who form a networked audience, reacting to news of corporate social responsibility (or a lack thereof), as they provide the power that ultimately reaches the firm (either through opprobrium, as with the CEOs who suddenly receive thousands of irate emails, or simply though economic sanction) (Swartz, 2010). Meanwhile, many NGOs and national governments perform important coordination functions, by bringing these multitudes of people to bear on an issue, but no single organization is able to act as a sort of overarching coordinating institution within CSR, beyond a few iconic groups on a few bedrock issues – the exceptions to this rule would only include iconic NGOs such as the WWF, Greenpeace, or Amnesty International, and they are only influential speaking to their core issues. In the end, our positing the whole of the market as the agents of change might seem slightly unhelpful, as each individual’s action is so small as to have little effect, but the dispersed nature of this downward pressure on firm irresponsibility is telling – any governance here will have to be one that works primarily (or at least often) through discourse and norms about what is an what is not acceptable, as CSR activism will be likely to feature inconsistent information-gathering capabilities and weak coordinating resources.

Because of CSR politics’ dispersed nature, discipline often seems an awkward fit within the CSR debate – CSR features no overarching institutions (such as a factory or a religious order) that have the capacity to reliably coordinate training or surveillance. Moreover, CSR has been repeatedly critiqued for its inability to convincingly articulate exactly what ought to be deemed acceptable or unacceptable, making determination of
responsible or irresponsible behavior very difficult in a wide range of cases (Lipschutz, 2005; Loir, 2008). In fact, much of the fascinating institutional work being done today around CSR, codes of conduct, and reporting standards seems oriented towards extending our collective ability to discipline firms. Put bluntly, in most extant CSR contexts we currently do not know what firms are doing, we cannot precisely say what they ought to be doing, we do not have the ability to train firms beyond our demanding good conduct, and the firms generally know it. For example, after the grueling international consultations leading to ISO 26000, the new harmonized CSR standard where people and companies in different countries should be able to assess their counterparts’ social performance, we still do not have any ability to certify behavior as compliant with the standard - the objective standards section of the ISO was ultimately discarded (ISO, 2012). It turns out that measuring social performance is extremely complicated. From a disciplinary point of view, this is obviously quite problematic, although it should be said that the future holds considerable disciplinary promise, should certain institutions such as ISO 26000 become more powerful and elaborate over time. Once compliance with ISO 26000 becomes straightforward to verify, firms will more urgently fear being found out – at which point they will see compliance with the standard as inevitable.

Similar to the above account considering CSR through a disciplinary perspective, environmental interventions are equally difficult to formulate for most everyday CSR politics. There is a lot more CSR research to be done on the nexus of the market, the state, and civil society, particularly given that the state has the unique ability to organize the market (Vogel, 2005), but the underlying reality remains that most CSR sentiment, and most CSR politics, has little to do with state interventions or even state interests broadly construed.
(Hanlon, 2008; Matten and Moon, 2008; Scherer and Palazzo, 2007). This is not to say that CSR does not rely upon environmental technologies, but relatively few NGO actors in CSR circles have the ability to meaningfully reset the “rules of the game” (Foucault, 2007, 261).

Indeed, this thought-experiment and overview has been intended to highlight how schematically, even without the details of a real-world governance campaign, we can reasonably predict that normalization will feature heavily in any sustained CSR campaign. Given the general incompatibility of most CSR contexts with either discipline or environmental intervention, namely because of CSR’s diffused power structure, general lack of background resources, lack of information-gathering apparatus, and lack of coordinating institutions, normalization increasingly recommends itself as a governmental strategy of choice. Specifically, civil society groups that lack high levels of institutional support could presumably still organize themselves in such a way as to weakly (but insistently) demand a change in the norms of subjectivity that are perceived to be problematic within the economy. For instance, take how relatively weak labour activists have deeply wounded Walmart through their sustained attacks on its corporate persona (Diermeier, 2008), resulting such that it has created a change at that firm (although that change has been very uneven – labour abuses continue to occur despite Walmart’s recent efforts to more ethically source their products) (Izzo, 2011). This seems to be something of a change at the level of corporate subjectivity: Walmart itself has found itself becoming toxic to segments of the public, and this has prompted what appears to be a real pause and period of reflection at the company. Now, importantly, Walmart has never really changed any of its most controversial behavior – the union-busting continues. However, it has leveraged its ethical sourcing policies and
disaster relief efforts to convey “warmth,” (Diermeier, 2011), which when communicated with “authenticity” and “emotion” has positive “reputational value” (all ibid). This narrative of rehabilitation is shot-through with the language we usually apply to judging people’s characters.

In this way, with almost no cost to those promoting the campaign, CSR can be discursively deployed to undermine the ideas that purely self-interested business is socially necessary, that it is acceptable for individuals act amorally at work, or that it is acceptable for firms to act completely self-interestedly. The benefits of this political approach are twofold: firstly, in the absence of strong institutional support, regulatory normalization is relatively resource-independent beyond the large numbers of people needed to make a public impression (Nealon, 2008). This plays to the strengths of many civil society groups: as we will see in a case considered in the next section, groups such as Greenpeace draw upon wealths of normative authority when they demand that firms operate sustainably, and they can be disadvantaged in cases where they are forced to argue the facts “on the ground”.

Secondly, in a case such as CSR, the disciplinary emphasis on governing behaviors could often prove problematic, as individual behaviors are at times less the issue in the eyes of third party spectators than the general disposition of the firm in question. Relatedly, by targeting subjectivities for governance, normalization achieves gains that have effects across a series of behaviors. Here, slow and steady governance focusing on the character of firms can remain effective when activists shift from one morally problematic issue to another – Walmart’s supposed callousness might have been established in regards to labour issues, but that reputational vulnerability is being leveraged by those with environmental agendas.
That said, normalization’s drawbacks are also considerable. Most notably, regulatory normalization is not based on principles, but rather on the intuitive, relative, spectrum provided by the perceived normality of a population. If firms stick together to act similarly to one another, and avoid the most spectacular of offences, it can thus be difficult to peg any one firm as antisocial. Relatedly, when critics contend that CSR features an excessive interest in painless win-win scenarios (Banerjee, 2010), and that this might minimize CSR’s critical content, they have a point: when firms all work this way, and all determine win-win scenarios as laudable, they work to collectively insulate themselves from censure due to a perception of normality (Suchman, 1995). When we add this to the fact that normalization campaigns are inherently less organized and less responsive in the first place (when compared to well-resourced disciplinary campaigns), then we can predict that most time sensitive demands are perhaps better packaged within a disciplinary approach, if that is possible.

Relatedly, a normalizing approach tends to be susceptible to temporary misdirection, as displays of good intentions are often taken in the place of substantive good behavior, a phenomenon sometimes captured by the term “greenwashing” (Lipschutz, 2005). This fits the Walmart example exactly – after all, Walmart continues to pay poorly, and continues to undermine organized labour. Strictly speaking, how is disaster relief relevant to Walmart’s labour practices? The lack of specificity provided by character-driven politics leaves open this sort of response. It is entirely possible that a major campaign by organized labour has chiefly resulted in a host of unrelated prosocial policies at Walmart.
4.3.2 CSR as Social Government

With all of the above, it seems appropriate to argue that while CSR features a complex array of political technologies, in many cases normalization will best “fit” the underlying facts at hand. Alongside this schematic analysis, however, lies an alternate reason to emphasize CSR’s profound interest in regulating subjectivities. Specifically, the CSR literature is discursively rooted in a historically specific way of attending to economic problems that has primarily operated through the government of subjectivities; namely through the appeal to ‘the social’ and the censure of antisociality.

In its frustrated search for exactly what businesses and businesspeople are to be held responsible for, the theoretical CSR literature has tended to eschew strict codes of behavior or universal principles, since only principles so abstract as likely to prove unhelpful could be universally relevant. In contrast to a set of principles, CSR scholars have largely followed observers such as Carroll in formulating CSR around a negation – specifically, CSR has generally defined itself as going “beyond” economic interests to concern with social responsibilities (Carroll, 1979, p. 500). A more precise vocabulary simply does not work, as the conceptual starting point is an unacceptable status quo: that many companies would do anything legal to advance their shareholders’ interests, no matter the effects on wider society. This might or might not be true, but it is surely unacceptable to flaunt this out load – the vast majority of companies equivocate when the question is put to them in that way. But what does this mean for us going forward? The negative structure here provides a clue: we are not told to do something, but to go “beyond” “economic and legal obligations” (McGuire, 1963,
What we are told here is what we are not to do: we are not supposed to believe that economic and legal demands are normatively sufficient. Companies are free to think this, and even to equivocate on the issue, but there is a good reason why almost no large companies will openly argue that their shareholders deserve every last dollar of produced value, and this is because it is politically suspect to do so. What’s the value in needlessly antagonizing your critics? It is thus better for companies to equivocate, to avoid the issue, and to act in a way that satisfies both their business and ethical imperatives.

With this, CSR’s roots go deep into what Foucauldians call social government (Dean, 2010). “The social” refers to a specific set of technologies that have historically been used to attend to economic failure. Defined by Mitchell Dean as the “the plural and heterogeneous forms of interventions that cross and connect various formally separate public and private spheres in response to, and sometimes in opposition to, the effects of a liberal governmental economy” (2010, p. 270) “the social” thus becomes a surface for potential interventions that neither entirely endorse, nor reject, the underlying premises of liberal capitalism. Liberal regimes often struggle to properly account for the irrationality, and social embeddedness, of market actors without jettisoning the economic rationality that sustains the market itself. The recognition and expectation of social embeddedness can manifest itself in the newfound collective expectation for what governmentality scholars call a sort of “social responsibility” or “social citizenship.” (Rose, 1999, p. 123).

In other words, when faced with no other satisfying governance technology, such as national law or effective coordinating institutions, social government can engage in cultural reform regarding how we interact in the economy. In cases of inequality and need, the
identified problem is that while the liberal market is a good thing, a market composed of selfish people is not. Social government (and CSR) thus asks market actors to both retain (and reject) market norms of self-interest – the essential question becomes the appropriate level of self-interestedness to project out as a persona. On the one hand, an insufficiently self-interested company will be deemed fanciful and undisciplined, but by contrast an overly self-interested company will be deemed selfish or greedy. Self-interest is critical to the operation of the market – nobody in social government or the CSR movement meaningfully disagrees, and in this sense critics such as Shamir (2006) have a point regarding CSR’s ambivalent challenge to the profit motive. The profit motive certainly remains. But it remains alongside its implicit negation: that people should not be antisocial, as antisociality is a private condition with public effects, which makes it rightly subject to sanction (Procacci, 1993).

The profit motive of market subjectivities is thus both affirmed and denied, creating a normalizing relation, just as with the scholarly definitions of CSR considered above. Moreover, we can see how this might play out in real-world management life: win-win scenarios, where social goods help firms, benefit everybody, and are an important part of CSR’s continued development, but firms have to be a little careful about overemphasizing the business case aspect of their decision making. Rather, firms usually obscure the exact reasoning behind their choosing to perform prosocial behavior, and instead suggest that it is a
wonderful luxury to not have to choose between financial and social performance\textsuperscript{69}. This ambiguity serves a governmental purpose: it permits firms to communicate to stakeholders their prosociality, while it also permits firms to communicate to markets their capitalist bona fides. This ambiguity might be unsatisfying in many ways, as it suggests a certain hypocrisy, but it does not conclusively undermine CSR’s critical potential. Rather, that critical potential is partial: self-interest is condoned, but antisociality is not, and perceptions of what constitutes selfish antisociality can change depending on underlying circumstances. Within discourses of social government such as CSR, this ambiguity is critical, as the only thing worse for collective welfare than the profit motive run rampant is no profit motive at all.

4.4 Social Government in Action: A Short Example

This chapter began the analysis by arguing against a unitary approach to analyzing CSR using a governmentality analysis. Governmentality analysis is highly interested in neoliberalism’s expansion across sectors of society, but neoliberalism is not as hegemonic in reality as it might first appear. Rather, actual politics “on the ground” is remarkably messy. An analysis looking to criticize neoliberal conditions is therefore liable to assume neoliberal thinking into inappropriate contexts, returning unhelpful analysis. In that spirit, my hope in

\textsuperscript{69} See Schwartz (2010) as an example of this. He never categorically affirms, or denies, that he would have many the prosocial decision had it not been judged to be a good business decision. He actually hints at both possibilities.
this short section is to illustrate how a pluralist analysis, which looks for heterogeneous patterns with multiple rationalities at play, and which does not privilege one form of power relation over the others in the analysis, might return superior findings. Moreover, I would like to illustrate the argument that CSR tends to feature a variety of simultaneous rationalities of rule, with the normalization of antisociality an important element of overarching governance campaigns.

Let us take the example of Greenpeace’s multi-year anti-deforestation campaign, which has used corporate social responsibility language since 2005. One of the world’s pre-eminent environmental NGOs, Greenpeace has identified preventing deforestation as one of its six overarching advocacy campaigns, and has devoted considerable resources towards these efforts (Greenpeace, 2012). In its campaign, Greenpeace has identified corporate reputations as a key driver in any systemic change, saying that “top name brands are driving (the deforestation)” (Greenpeace, 2009), and that firms must “be true climate leaders” by declining to buy products sourced in sensitive areas (Greenpeace, 2009). Having identified firms as important players in deforestation, Greenpeace’s overall strategy has been to coordinate the power of their supporters to bring pressure against firms that refuse “to do the right thing” (Greenpeace, 2009). Their role is thus primarily as mediators: Greenpeace provides information, and coordinates the work of others, to help activate large numbers of advocates and consumers. As a secondary role, Greenpeace seeks to set the terms of the debate.
4.4.1 Greenpeace’s Disciplinary Abilities

Through their activities, Greenpeace demonstrate considerable disciplinary capacities: they have the ability to frequently identify malfeasance (as well as those responsible for the malfeasance), to demand that firms change their behavior, and to work with firms to help them realize exactly which transgressions were unacceptable and how so. For instance, it is not uncommon for Greenpeace to be genuinely more informed about environmental conditions in firm supply chains than the buying retailer (as I show below with the example of Timberland in Brazil). This “on the ground” capacity is largely due to the NGO’s laudable openness to partnering with local groups who feature local expertise, as well as due to Greenpeace’s well-resourced nature, which permits the group to hire impressive full time campaign and technical staff. The institutional resources and professionalism featured in Greenpeace’s reporting, as well as in their media operations, are remarkable and are not typical of most peer NGOs (See Greenpeace, 2009b, as an example of their investigative capacities).

Greenpeace’s substantial resources thus make them a fascinating, if slightly idiosyncratic, CSR agent. For instance, when Greenpeace decided to combat deforestation in Brazil, their Brazilian partners highlighted the relatively unknown problem of slash and burn cattle grazing for the export of beef and hides. These members, in the field, were then able to chart problematic cow hides from Amazonian Brazil to regional buyers, national wholesalers, and then to firms such as Nike and Timberland. This news seemed to come as an actual surprise to Timberland, as Greenpeace appears to have understood the Timberland supply
chain in a much more detailed fashion than did Timberland’s head office (Greenpeace, 2009b; Swartz, 2010). This information was delivered through tens of thousands of irate emails (Swartz, 2010), resulting in quick compliance. Nike and Timberland each agreed to participate in a certification scheme for hides, thus ensuring that problematic hides would no longer enter their supply chains (Swartz, 2010; Telegraph, 2009).

The above gives us a very disciplinary approach to governance: a problematic behavior is observed at the point of occurrence, the offender is punished, the offender is educated, and the disciplinary institutions are extended through new buy-in from the governed. Greenpeace thus found itself even more institutionally capable following the engagement than it had previously: a sign of a very successful governance engagement.

### 4.4.2 Greenpeace and Asia Pulp and Paper: Normalization in Action

Alongside this behavior-centric approach, however, lay a separate set of arguments that were aimed at contesting corporate subjectivities and corporate reputations, particularly those that seemed more reluctant to comply than Nike or Timberland. For instance, over the course of a parallel 6 year campaign against Asia Pulp and Paper (APP), Kimberley Clark, JBS, and YUM, Greenpeace dealt with these more problematic firms on much more subjective and moralized terms than as with Nike or Timberland. While Nike and Timberland were criticized for something that they were doing, these companies were also criticized for moral transgressions emblematic of antisociality within those firms. The rationale behind the
different advocacy strategies seems to be twofold: firstly, Nike and Timberland’s malfeasance was clearer to detect and define, making a disciplinary approach more institutionally plausible. Secondly, Nike and Timberland were happy to comply with Greenpeace’s demands when these problematic policies (and resulting anger) were brought to their attention (Greenpeace, 2009b; Schwartz, 2010).

To respond to the less engaging firms, Greenpeace repeatedly critiqued these firms’ credibility and public reputations, calling Sinar Mas “notorious” (Greenpeace, 2010), and pointing out that Kimberley Clark was more interested in “greenwashing” than actually reducing its rates of deforestation (Greenpeace, 2006). With regards to Brazilian leather giant JBS, Greenpeace even suggested criminality, calling their report on JBS a “crime file,” and labeling JBS and its peers “criminals” (Miller, 2012). With these firms, which had demonstrated a refusal to comply, the comparatively neutral language applied to Nike and Timberland was discarded. Instead, moralistic language, at the level of corporate subjectivities or characters, was greatly emphasized.

For instance, Greenpeace argued that activists need to “stand up to corporate greed” (Greenpeace, 2012c), and that industry positions were a “lie” and an “extraordinary greenwash” (Greenpeace, 2011). Over time, Asia Pulp and Paper (APP) became the focus point of the advocacy, due to its unique mix of an extreme environmental footprint, destructive policies, and inflammatory rhetoric. Focusing on APP, Greenpeace cast the political choice, as being between “our precious natural heritage” and “the greed of
destructive pulp and paper companies\textsuperscript{70}\textsuperscript{70} (Greenpeace, 2010). Extending the argument further, Greenpeace argued that companies’ reputations ought also to reflect the company they keep, saying that we, as citizens and consumers, should not only censure firms for their problematic supply chains, but also because those supply chains reflected who those firms were to be. This guilt-by-business-association was then applied to firms who continued to buy paper products from APP. Greenpeace Canada thus pushed for Canadian firms to boycott Asia Pulp and Paper, saying “this is not the sort of company we want doing business here in Canada” (Greenpeace Canada, 2011). What is critical here is that these are not disciplinary statements, and behavior is not primarily at issue (although it is important): here, firms are being anthropomorphized, shamed and normalized. Greenpeace is establishing a range of normal and appropriate corporate identities, and is challenging those firms who exceed the parameters of what is desired. In order to get at the question of what firms ought to do, firms are also being regulated based on what they are.

Greenpeace’s governance of firm subjectivities has a number of effects. First and foremost, it has altered the approaches of many firms to wider responsibility issues, as it no longer became enough to source ethically, but responsibility also demanded that firms demonstrate commitment to wider sustainability and social responsibility objectives (Greenpeace, 2010; Swartz, 2010). Importantly, some firms simply no longer wanted

\textsuperscript{70} The consistent use of “greed” here goes back to the foundational question of how self-interested we want our companies to be, and whether the profit-orientation of firms should be limited in certain contexts. This language is reminiscent of the “greed” language found after the Tazreen and Rana Plaza tragedies – there, greed was more tightly linked to abuse, suffering, and exploitation, making the charge possibly more predictable and possibly more powerful. That “greed” was also regularly deployed on an environmental issue is fascinating.
anything to do at all with an antisocial company such as Asia Pulp and Paper (APP), with many companies such as Mattel dropping them as a supplier entirely, despite APP’s incipient and potentially credible plans at the time to offer non-rainforest products (Greenpeace Canada, 2011). This last point is fascinating – the giant Indonesian firm APP, with vast tracts of pristine rainforest, appeared to offer Mattel a range of completely acceptable products from alternate sources. However, these significant concessions were insufficient, as Mattel found that it would be impossible to associate itself with values such as APP’s (Los Angeles Times, 2011). Here, diffused normalization makes the best sense as an explanatory model, not neoliberal indirect steering (although the latter model of governance does explain many elements of this story), as APP was effectively unable to respond to concerns by simply changing its policies – it also had to communicate a change in values to better reflect society’s expectations of how it should conduct itself.

One question that comes to mind when considering Greenpeace’s usage of such moralized language is: why did Greenpeace do so? Why didn’t they just stick to arguing about deforestation – why change the argument slightly so that suddenly the discussion revolves around the identities or subjectivities of APP and other firms? Above in this chapter we discuss normalization’s low institutional requirements, but Greenpeace is quite sophisticated and very well funded. Moreover, Greenpeace had built well-organized networks in Indonesia and Brazil to monitor the situation there. So the institutional-resources story cannot be the only story here. A complementary explanation could be that Greenpeace deploys this moralized language of identity and subjectivity in part because its conflictual tone and no-compromise attitude is helpful in securing continued support from members and
donors, a dynamic scholars have observed with other conflictual NGOs (Doh and Guay, 2006; Hoffman, 2009). The analysis here, however, seems to suggest something a bit messier (although donors are an important part of the story).

When we look at Greenpeace’s deforestation campaign, from 2006 to 2013, we see arguments in moralized, subjective, terms clustered around four types of political messages: when Greenpeace needs to describe their mission (2012a, 2009b), when Greenpeace needs to describe APP (or other targeted firms) to the media in a single talking point\(^\text{71}\), when Greenpeace appeals to their donors\(^\text{72}\), and when Greenpeace needs to criticize one firm for doing business with another firm that they are trying to isolate\(^\text{73}\). What these four messages all share is that they need to function emotionally, and concisely. As such, none of these tasks best lend themselves to fulsome discussions of the issues surrounding APP – in every case, the forum is not ideal for a proper discussion, and Greenpeace needs a piece of imagery to act as a heuristic, or rhetorical shortcut, for what they might say if they had more time. In these constrained cases, how do we summarize the problem with companies such as APP? One strategy is by framing the issues as ones where these companies are antisocial, and that


\(^{72}\) E.G “We're on the look out for forest criminal, Asia Pulp and Paper (APP)” Greenpeace 2013a: http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/en/campaigns/forests/appforestcrimes/

\(^{73}\) Please see Appendix D for these examples drawn from Greenpeace. 2013b. “Down to Zero” Accessible at: http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/publications/Campaign-reports/Forests-Reports/Down-to-Zero/
they need to be reformed (see in particular the language used in the attached Appendix D to see how pointed Greenpeace can be on this point).

4.4.3 Does this Normalization Work Through Authentic Subjective Change?

While a group such as Greenpeace would undoubtedly prefer that normalization would achieve authentic subjective effects, as seemingly has occurred at some point with Timberland (Schwartz, 2010), authentic change is not strictly necessary for the normalization to be a success. Governors can always settle for the performance of a set of values, which, while inauthentic, publicly reaffirm those values in ways that ensure they go on to reproduce themselves within a network over time. Ultimately, we can never know the motives of an agent. We will never know if firms such as APP, or the people who work there, really care about the environment. However, Greenpeace as a regulator can be pleased if it modifies norms throughout an industry, or within a given network of agents, such that members of the network feel compelled to acknowledge those norms. This is what happened in Greenpeace’s governance of APP. Through its networked power, Greenpeace held APP responsible for how they showed themselves to be, which resulted in some of APP’s clients excluding it from economic relations due to its perceived antisociality.

In the case of APP, Greenpeace’s long campaign finally bore fruit in early 2013, with APP’s pledge to end deforestation (Greenpeace, 2013b), a commitment that has been verified by the arms-length Forest Trust organization (Forest Trust, 2013) and which is being
independently audited in an ongoing fashion by the Rainforest Alliance (Mongabay, 2014). Greenpeace tends to avoid engagement work, as it fears the appearance of co-optation, but it continues to conduct outreach on this issue through the brokering performed by the Forest Trust, and it is generally pleased with APPs progress. That Greenpeace trusts APP (even with these verification procedures) is astonishing, given that APP has broken agreements in the past (Mongabay, 2011, 2012). So why do these NGOs now believe APP has changed? Essentially, along with APP’s contracting with the respected group Forest Trust, part of the goodwill is due to how APP has begun to act in a new manner consistent with a new corporate identity and corporate culture – at least in regards to the deforestation issue. Take, for instance, this recent analysis from an environmental journalist covering a meeting of NGO and industry representatives:

…My initial take away from the discussion is that sentiment toward APP in the NGO community is generally improving as a result of its forestry conservation policy and its apparent greater openness. The tone from major APP critics, RAN and WWF, was considerably more conciliatory than I expected, although neither group is yet willing to give APP the benefit of the doubt by giving the "green light" to buyers. Meanwhile APP is willingly admitting to mistakes, inviting criticism, and engaging key groups like peat experts from Wageningen University and the Rainforest Alliance as an independent auditor. While it may be easy to dismiss this is a clever marketing or public relations exercise, in my view, these are very significant developments. (Butler, 2014)

This passage shows a more open, more engaging, demeanor, which is surprising given how negative relations between APP and NGOs had become in 2011-2012. Was this change authentic? It is impossible to know. But in the interim, how much does it matter? This is how an authentically changed executive at an authentically changed firm would hypothetically conduct themselves. The above might be a performance, but at worst it is a performance that
re-affirms these NGOs moral authority to hold APP to account, as well as the norm that APP should be a humble, open, firm that takes the environment seriously.

The perceived change at APP has led a *Guardian* author to write that APP represents “the most dramatic turnaround of any global green villain” ever seen and an encouraging sign that huge environmental challenges can be tackled” (Carrington, 2014). The sustainability website Triple-Pundit echoed this subjectivity-laden language to describe APP’s decision to end deforestation in its value chain, saying that “APP has made a significant move to pull itself off the ‘bad guys’” list and, pending execution, join the ‘good guys’” (Godelnik, 2013). This enthusiasm is probably going too far, but very few civil society campaigns ever secure the kind of gains secured here by Greenpeace, and we should ask ourselves why it is that an NGO that elite audiences generally see as uncouth and divisive is the one group able to prompt such change. Moreover, this change came after particularly vivid and aggressive subjective critiques.

Ultimately, APP stands as an example of successful normalization. The normalization is textbook for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was amorphous and chaotic in its application – normalization always works over time, in this case over many years, with each application of power acting in addition to those of the past (Foucault, 1982, 1990). If the above account seemed to lack a linear narrative, that could be at least partly because the engagement itself lacked linearity and a convenient narrative arc. For instance, APP was only one important

74 Note, again, the anthropomorphized and implicitly subjective language.
corporate target, among many, for Greenpeace to pursue early on in the campaign.

Greenpeace started setting norms within the consumer-goods retailer network in 2006, and started building its network with activists who were thinking about these norms in these ways. But APP only came to pre-eminence within the campaign when it reacted angrily to Greenpeace’s criticism in 2010. Following a Greenpeace report that named APP among other firms as problematic, APP referred to the criticism as a “stunt” (Asia Pulp and Paper, 2010), thus demonstrating both a corporate belligerence as well as a corporate sensitivity to criticism – both of which could be exploited. Greenpeace then focused much more on APP, presumably as a way both to reform APP as well as a way to drive attention to deforestation issues. Secondly, while Greenpeace’s technical reports were always impressive, the last three years of the advocacy were increasingly emotive and subjectively-driven, with declining emphasis on demonstrating specific transgressions by APP. Remember – at a given point, even APP’s assurances, offered to Mattel, were insufficient (Los Angeles Times, 2011). What was required was APP to change its commitment to the collective effort to end deforestation. Effectively, a subjective change was required: APP had to become the type of firm that would humbly engage NGOs as in the above quote.

In these ways, APP stands as a great example of normalization that functions through largely “social” language: we saw greed language and other anthropomorphized language applied to environmental firms, as well as advocacy challenging APP’s profit motive. In this way, APP actually stands as a fascinating counterpart to the case study of chapter one. There, we considered social politics in the reaction to the Bangladeshi factory tragedies of 2012/2013, and argued that they represented a “polar” case, which could help us build theory
about civil society “social” politics (Eisenhardt, 1989). We saw then that social politics was more likely to attach to highly branded firms in cases that featured extreme suffering, as branding helps all information (both positive and negative) attach to companies, while suffering drives classic “social” sentiment (Donzelot, 1984; Dean, 2010a, 2010b; Procacci, 1991). Fascinatingly, APP fits awkwardly with these criteria. APP is not well described as highly branded in a classic sense – the firm is essentially labelled as a foreign commodity company, and is largely unknown to most consumers. In addition, APP’s deforestation features few clearly suffering victims.

It is thus worth considering why this is the case: why do social politics exist here? Weren’t environmental firms featuring weak branding the paradigmatic case where social politics were improbable? To speculate, it first appears important to note that the social politics are indeed less intense in this example than in the reaction to the Bangladesh tragedies: while most of the typical components of social politics exist in this advocacy75, they are less urgently made (though, “greed” and “villain” do appear prominently). This might be due to the lack of classic social sentiment: the typical construction and frame of the advocacy could exist, as a political rationality of how to address a certain type of advocacy problem would remain in circulation, but the intensity of the advocacy would be lessened. Moreover, the perception of APP being only slightly branded might be misleading. APP might not be well known among most consumers, but it does have a certain brand – if only

75 Problematization of the profit motive, anthropomorphization, and the demand for restraint out of obligation all exist here. What we do not see is an immediate juxtaposition between capacity and suffering. See chapter one for more on how these phenomena tend to appear alongside one another in “social” politics.
due to Greenpeace’s activism – and among environmentally aware people that brand is presumably quite negative. Moreover, amongst executives at retailers such as Mattel and Staples, who have to avoid commercial contact with APP to avoid incurring criticism from the environmental movement, APP’s connotations are very negative. It would be premature to think that any commodity firm could be negatively branded, as was done in this case, but what the APP case shows is that, given enough NGO advocacy, social politics seems viable across a wider range of contexts than initially considered.

4.5 Discussion

This chapter pursued two major arguments, each of which offered a meaningful contribution to theory: it recommended a pluralist approach to governmentality analysis in CSR contexts, which, when adopted, returned counter-intuitive results that ran against the expectations of most extant governmental CSR research. CSR relies heavily on an ambivalent social critique of the market that manifests itself in an ambivalent critique of market subjectivity. In that sense, this chapter has operated at a high level of abstraction. A pluralistic analysis, however, offers significant opportunities for future real-world scholars of business and society to pursue analysis of exactly how civil society governs firms, and thus how firms might best navigate these claims.

If future scholars adopt a self-consciously heterogeneous analysis, and then pursue that analysis with finely grained empirical precision (unlike here, which is primarily
conceptual) the returns should be significant. From a practical perspective, this approach offers us the ability to understand underlying patterns of behavior that might otherwise be hidden. It helps us understand why firms are so often willing to enter into structured dialogue: if the governance is of the firm’s subjectivity (and its reputation), then participating in formal dialogue can be just as important as following any subsequent agreement, since it signals a willingness to listen and presumably a willingness to act well – two signals that help alleviate the harm from how the firm was not acting well in the first place.

The business and society literature has, to date, featured very little practice-level analysis, and this research helps us see the beginnings of what that work would look like: what are the micro-political practices that make up political CSR? Here, this chapter has suggested that managers and policy-makers would greatly benefit from research that analyzes political CSR from the perspective of trying to understand its political rationalities. Extending that thinking might give managers a better understanding of their activist peers, or, depending on the situation, some insights into how to better advocate for change within their organization. Substantial managerial insights might potentially be built out of this analysis of governance and how it intersects with institutional theory – an intersection that has yet to be properly explored. For instance, the preliminary finding of the analysis here suggests that much of the CSR literature has recently tended in a disciplinary direction, as corporate subjectivities have largely been marginalized by most critical sustainability scholars as naïve and insufficiently serious (Banerjee, 2007, 2010). But this may not be the whole story: if efficiency is indeed the most important institutional criteria from a long-term governmental perspective, then many CSR contexts might well be well suited to a campaign featuring
subjectivity-centric activism, as it requires less institutional support, requires less information on corporate activities, and features fewer transaction costs. As such, the many recent high-profile efforts to put explicitly moralized arguments “off the table” as naïve and unconstructive (See Porter and Kramer, 2011, 2014; and critically, Kallio, 2006) might well be providing hasty strategic advice: the calculated political move for many activists might be to ask explicitly for moral change, and the savvy manager might well be the one who agrees graciously to all sorts of seemingly irrelevant performances of that prosociality.

In just the same sense, a pluralist approach offers critical scholars significant opportunities as well. It provides critics of firms the ability to better see what sort of power regimes tend to flourish, and which sorts of governmental technologies tend to fail, in given contexts. A pluralist approach also helps us see that critical work relies on a rich array of participating institutions, some of which can be better buttressed and sharpened in order to maximize their ability to help shape firm subjectivities and behavior. Perhaps most important of all, however, the technology of normalization at the heart of social government underlines the importance of understanding CSR’s implicit criticality: society’s inclination to sanction perceived antisociality can only be evaded for so long – a lesson for firms to take to heart.
Recent years have brought with them a marked increase of interest in corporate social responsibility (CSR). This interest has emerged in a variety of spheres; from academic study to managerial practice, from non-governmental organizations to concerned consumers, CSR has captured our collective attention. Specifically, some have suggested that CSR may become a significant remedy to the imbalance that many see in our contemporary economic order, where we find it difficult to harness commercial efficiency while minimizing harmful externalities and inequality (Cragg, 2000; Epstein, 1987, 2000). Similarly, others hope that CSR language might enable both managers and activists to better negotiate the business and society interface (Carroll, 1979; Tencati et al., 2004; Van Marrewijk and Werre, 2003). Just below the surface of this optimism, however, lies a deeper set of conceptual concerns that refuse to go away.

These concerns center on two interrelated problems. Firstly, CSR has been poorly defined. This is consistently noted in the scholarly literature (Carroll, 1999; Loir, 2001; Van Marrewijk, 2003). Most researchers who have attempted to define CSR, such as Carroll (1979), have developed comprehensive definitions, as in his widely-adopted four-dimensional conceptual model, which conceptualized responsibility in terms of the “economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations” (p. 500) of society. The virtue in this inclusive approach is that these holistic definitions permit a treatment of most, if not all, of the relevant issues at play. One concern, however, is that this approach operates at such a
level of abstraction that it does not necessarily answer many of the difficult questions about how corporate (ir)responsibility will be, or even should be, perceived by observers in specific contexts (McWilliams and Siegel, 2001). More tangibly, the frustrated search for a precise definition with demarcated categories has left ambiguous how different activities (e.g. philanthropy, government mandated compliance, internal codes of conduct, stakeholder engagement, etc.) all might be (mis)understood in terms of pertaining to CSR. This lack of a tight conceptual center has caused many to criticize CSR, and even to ask if this is really best understood as one concept or instead as rather an umbrella term for disparate normative and non-normative theories that are perhaps more helpful independent of the CSR appellation (Loir, 2001).

A second problem that troubles CSR is closely related to the first. Namely, one of the chief concerns regarding CSR is its inability to authoritatively resolve the fundamental tension between the corporate profit motive and social expectations that firms should be theoretically willing to act altruistically in given situations. Throughout CSR’s history, theorists, activists, and businesspeople have all struggled with how to conceptually reconcile demands for prosociality with the requirements of long-term maximization of shareholder value. This has greatly complicated the search for a proper definition for CSR, as it widens the scope for what might be variously considered either responsible or irresponsible corporate activity. This has also greatly frustrated the study of CSR politics – for instance,

76 I use “prosocial” to denote activities that are perceived to benefit wider society and not primarily the agents themselves. This distinction is drawn from the organizational legitimacy literature, where activities that benefit agents (or those acted upon) are found to be legitimate by those individuals, but in a different fashion than those activities that are commonly believed to primarily benefit wider society (Suchman, 1995).
does the appellation of “CSR” only pertain to obviously selfless acts, or does it also pertain to coerced compliance as well? Is there a hierarchy at play on a definitional level as well as a normative one? Is a secretly instrumental approach to CSR politics categorically different from an authentically sincere one? Does this distinction matter?

This is not to say that the profit question has been suppressed in the literature. In fact, it runs through the debate, and diverse positions have been proposed on the issue. Some agree with profit’s categorical supremacy (Friedman, 1970; Jensen, 2002; Sundaram and Inkpen, 2004), while others firmly dissent (Donaldson and Dunfee, 1994, 1999), and observers can find arguments proposing any number of distinguishing categories in between (e.g. Drucker, 1984; Lantos, 2001; McWilliams and Siegel, 2001). Moreover, a large number of researchers have worked to illustrate how corporate social performance can actually benefit corporate bottom lines in many circumstances (for an overview, see Orlitzky, Schmidt, and Rynes, 2003). This subset of the literature has returned important findings, but it also diverts attention away from the underlying normative (and analytical) question of what we expect that firms are to do when social performance and financial performance come into conflict. CSR researchers, who seek greater conceptual clarity on normative and analytic issues, thus must ultimately be open to moving beyond this “win-win” descriptive research, as enlightening and politically promising as it might be.

This inability to categorically reconcile profit-seeking and prosociality has undermined CSR in the eyes of many scholars and practitioners. One general perspective dismisses the current approach to CSR as impractical fantasy (Friedman, 1970; Jensen, 2002; Levitt, 1958). Conversely, another deems it insufficiently critical, as some have recently
argued that CSR is actually little more than a legitimating ideology for neoliberal capitalism (Banerjee, 2007; Hanlon, 2008; Shamir, 2005). Rather than trying to resolve this debate, I contend below that CSR’s conceptual instability is actually necessary for its functional success as a political discourse, and that this suggests an amended orientation to CSR conceptual research.

The tension between corporate profit-seeking and prosociality, and thus of CSR’s definition as a whole, can be productively unfolded by reading the debate through the philosophy of Jacques Derrida. Derrida’s work on literary theory and ethics has been noted as a potentially fruitful lens for CSR (Jones, 2003, 2007; Rasche, 2010; Rendtorff, 2008), but to date this has not been fully explored. This chapter will argue that CSR frequently acts as a Derridean ‘supplement,’ that is, a type of perpetually ambivalent discourse which assists other discourses which seem insufficient and troubled. Supplements function by simultaneously both adding to those troubled discourses as well as implicitly substituting in for them. CSR does this by reaffirming corporate profit-seeking, at the same moment that it also demands that firms exhibit prosociality, or apparent selflessness. While problematic in some ways, this internal contradiction between profit-seeking and prosociality reveals CSR’s ingenuity and promise because it does not deny the conceptual (or political) importance of either element.

77 I use the term “discourse” as per the definition found in Hall (1997), where discourse is “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing – a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (p. 44).
If, as according to Derrida, the meanings of concepts only exist in contested relation to one another, then we should be less concerned than we are that CSR lacks a tight conceptual definition. In fact, it would be foolish to try to suppress this internal tension between profit-seeking and prosociality, because this ambiguity permits us to functionally supplement profit-seeking capitalism with CSR in the first place. CSR can be understood as an attempt to amend capitalism by both adding to it and also substituting in for it, as CSR demands attention to social concerns while retaining the capitalist frame of predominantly profit-seeking organizations. CSR thus simultaneously both protects and critiques capitalist corporate orientation – a fruitful contradiction that I argue would be undermined should the “undecidable” tension regarding profit and prosociality be decided either way.

Drawing on the above analysis, this chapter will seek to make two contributions. Firstly, it will argue that CSR can be better understood through a Derridean lens, which emphasizes a differential account of meaning. Secondly, this chapter will argue that we should preserve CSR’s definitional ambiguity. Structurally, this chapter will proceed in four parts. In the first section, I will better explore the two interrelated challenges that CSR faces today. In the second, I will briefly introduce the Derridean vocabulary and general approach mentioned above. Third, I will then examine the CSR debate through this Derridean lens. It is here that I will argue that CSR’s harshest critics go too far in their distrust of its critical abilities, and that we should be wary of trying to master CSR through demanding an authoritative definition. I will then conclude with some ideas for further study that might benefit from understanding CSR as a supplement. Specifically, if CSR is indeed a
supplement, then we should pay more attention to the tangible ways in which CSR, as a lived discourse, both affects, and is affected by, the contexts within which it is deployed.

5.1 Problems Defining CSR: The Profit Question

Members of the academic community, as well as managerial practitioners, have repeatedly expressed concern over the challenges in defining CSR (Okoye, 2009). Even vigorous proponents of CSR have admitted that there is a striking lack of consensus surrounding what we should include and exclude under the umbrella term of CSR (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007). Carroll remarks sympathetically that “the concept of CSR has had a long and diverse history in the literature” (1999, p. 291), while Vogel points out the pervasive “ambiguities” (2005, p. 4) that surround our uneasy use of the phrase. Wood also highlights that extant definitions “are not entirely satisfactory” (1991, p. 691), an opinion that is also found in other, similar, accounts (e.g. Amaeshi and Adi, 2007; McWilliams and Siegel, 2001; McWilliams et al., 2006).

The principal problem that scholars have encountered is that there is simply an abundance of essentially positive activities (or inactivities) that have been given the CSR appellation, as CSR has evolved out of a variety of contexts of practice. Without an ordering set of principles to guide theory and practice, the result has been that people “present views on CSR that align with their specific situation and challenges” (Van Marrewijk, 2003, p. 96). With this, we might consider cultural philanthropy to constitute corporate responsibility in
one situation, labor practices in another, and environmental controls in the third, all under the same term but in slightly different ways that may or may not prove reconcilable. To conceptualize within this situation, researchers have tended towards large, comprehensive theories (Carroll, 1979, 1991; Lantos, 2001; Wood, 1991). As a result of this, many of the seminal theories in the field have become simply “too broad in…scope” (Banerjee, as quoted in Van Marrewijk, 2003, p. 96). In a sense, the literature has tended towards conceptual holism at the expense of theoretical precision.

We can see that the tension in corporate orientation, between profit-seeking and prosociality, forms an essential fault line that runs through many of these definitional issues. CSR, understood as a normative discourse with attending practices, has evolved out of a number of independent contexts, but those contexts share a certain history, where uncertainty about the relative supremacy of shareholder profit alongside other criteria introduces a contradictory set of principles into CSR (and thus into contemporary business.) Specifically, the extent to which a for-profit corporation should act prosocially, and thus the question of how to authoritatively prescribe the right set of business motives or personal dispositions, becomes the ‘undecidable’ tension that haunts CSR to this day. This will be better articulated once we introduce Derrida, but it is important to chart this here in everyday CSR practice. For example, should we consider legally mandated diversity or environmental programs to be CSR? Similarly, are profitable public-private partnerships part of a firm’s commitment to CSR? Are managers who advocate these programs being sufficiently responsible, or are these programs only a small part of a larger question of what it means to be responsible? (De la Cuesta Gonzalez and Valor Martinez, 2004).
The answers here largely hinge both on how we approach the so-called profit question, and, consequently, how we define CSR. For instance, if profit does claim sole priority in corporate orientation, programs such as these would likely form much of what one could expect from a laudable firm. Most treatments of CSR, however, find “win-win” cases like these ones encouraging but insufficient (Donaldson, 1983; Matten and Moon, 2008). Likewise, managerial questions about how to best rank and then administer a business’ social priorities heavily depend on the question of why the firm is engaging in these activities in the first place. These issues are important to many ethical theories, particularly deontological ones, which observers have used to formulate CSR definitions. These cases thus demand at least an implicit treatment of the profit question when considering how best to attend to ethical dilemmas (Donaldson and Dunfee, 1994). In this way, how we evaluate CSR programs, as well as the motivations that prompt them, requires that we consider how corporate profit fits alongside other social objectives.

Taken to their logical conclusions, the two apparent positions, namely an “ethical” approach to understanding CSR that limits profits and a business case that does not (Jones and Wicks, 1999), each result in a heavily criticized theory that proves unhelpful for comprehensively understanding CSR politics. In the former, we get accusations of implicit utopianism, whereby corporations are presumably expected to use the capitalist system to generate wealth, but are then expected to altruistically distribute that wealth to make sure they minimize externalities and promote general welfare (Jensen, 2002). According to Van Marrewijk; “too often, CSR is regarded as the panacea which will solve the global poverty gap, social exclusion and environmental degradation” (2003, p. 96). This, of course, is not
foreseeable in the near future, and would fundamentally threaten the capitalist order if extensively adopted, thus potentially threatening the very institutional arrangements that are so successful in producing wealth in the first place. For instance, the highly popular recent article from Porter and Kramer (2011), argues that CSR’s ethical utopianism leads to an unproductive emphasis on personal feelings and symbolic victories, and that only the discipline of the market will achieve the highest aggregated welfare gains for wider society – they say that CSR’s emphasis on personal morality gets in the way of capitalism’s efficient functioning.

Whereas this first perspective sees CSR as undermining capitalism, CSR has faced criticism from the other side of the debate as well. In recent works, Hanlon (2008) and Banerjee (2003, 2008) have arrived at analyses of CSR that seriously challenge its legitimacy as an emancipatory project. They suggest that we should view “discourses of corporate citizenship, corporate social responsibility, (and) corporate sustainability as ideological discourses that are intended to legitimize the power of large corporations” (Banerjee, 2007, p. 52). Central to both accounts are two simultaneous findings: a) that CSR fulfills a legitimating role for business in society (Banerjee, 2007; Hanlon, 2008), something that is deemed necessary for contemporary neoliberal capitalism to expand as it has over the recent past, and b) that there is no reason to expect that CSR will result in any activity that seriously threatens long term profitability. Rather, all we can reasonably expect are “win-win situations starting with the assumption that it (a given CSR activity) makes good business sense and enhances shareholder value” (Banerjee, 2007, p. 61). According to Hanlon, we must recognize that “any managerial radicalism is stillborn” within a CSR paradigm which refuses
to consistently challenge corporate profits (2008, p. 160). From this perspective, CSR is a “praxis of evil” (Banerjee, 2007, p. 60) that trades upon society’s naïveté and ignorance to advance private interests.

How can these general standpoints be reconciled? I argue that elements of either point of view, of CSR as impractical fantasy or pernicious ideology, may well hold depending on the context at hand. In many cases, the criticism of CSR being ideological hits a bit too closely to home. CSR is indeed sometimes advanced by business to head off state regulations (Kaplan, 2014), and in others we could argue that activist ideas of CSR-activism saving the day only serve to divert our collective attention from the essential, unromantic, work of holding our state governments to account (Heath and Potter, 2005; Kinderman, 2012). Putting these concerns together, we can easily see these critics’ points – CSR’s appeal to activists might actually be a problem, if it means that other, more plausible, political reforms are not completed, either because CSR advocacy was chosen instead, or if CSR phenomena made citizens complacent about the problems they otherwise would have politically attended to. From the other perspective, sometimes CSR advocacy really is utopian and unrealistic – in these cases Porter, Kramer, and other business-audience critics have a point, too.

That said, neither generalized standpoint captures the totality of CSR politics phenomena. As a result, we run the risk of mistakenly dismissing the discourse’s potential (or, real weaknesses) should we find either critical perspective to be unproblematic when applied broadly. The ideology argument is sometimes quite perceptive, but there are drawbacks with taking it too far. In the broadest sense, it is entirely possible that any apparent solution to the challenge of globalization will be ideological: for instance, nation-
state or global governance political work can equally be charged as the work of false consciousness (Acharya, 2014; Frank, 2004), if we happen to think genuine change comes from elsewhere. Are the keen young staffers currently preparing for the 2015 Canadian federal election, or the 2016 American presidential campaign, simply deluding themselves that their work will actually affect the issues they care about? To an extent, yes. But if taken too far, charges like this of ideological false consciousness are implicitly fatalist. For this reason I prefer to generally trust in the political judgment of actors “on the ground”. I trust those people to know best about how to go about pursuing their agendas. That general standpoint having been said, sometimes CSR policies truly are ideological, and in those specific cases, where they can be seen to exist, I agree we should denounce them as such.

What we do not want to do, however, is dismiss the efforts of determined stakeholders and responsive firms who are making actual progress: in these cases, attributions of ideological intent or false consciousness would be unhelpful. In the end, the question of whether specific CSR phenomena is “ideological” or induces false consciousness rests on our considering evidence we simply do not have access to when we consider CSR abstractly, as here. The relevant questions are all open ones. Are state remedies, or other alternatives, on offer in a given context? Does CSR advocacy encourage, or undermine, other avenues of activism in this context? We simply cannot know. Mostly, these questions depend on the context at hand.

CSR seems to make the most sense when we incorporate elements of both the critical and business-audience perspectives to our understanding of business and society relations. Simply put, broad elements of society believe that businesses have to change…without
fundamentally changing. This ambivalence helps explain why the large majority of CSR theorists and practitioners have struggled with the fundamental question of corporate profit; effectively deferring the decision for another day in order to keep the question open. In this way, we can start to see how CSR operates as what Derrida calls a supplement, where a confusing (but necessary) concept oscillates between two, internally contradictory, constituent principles.

5.2 Derrida and the Ambivalences in Meanings

Derrida is commonly recognized as one of the leading philosophers of the late 20th century for his work on literary theory as well as questions of ethical and political life. Scholars have lamented that Derrida never considered business ethics, and that business ethicists in turn have almost never considered Derrida (Jones, 2003, 2007). The principal exceptions in the latter case include Kerlin’s (1998) use of Derrida to reinvigorate stagnant business ethics debates, Jones’ work (2003, 2007) on Derridean contributions to how business ethicists should reconceptualize responsibility, and Andreas Rasche’s work on the limits of CSR standardization initiatives (2010). Notably, Jones suggests that business ethics has to date largely neglected contributions from postmodern philosophers such as Arendt, Derrida, Jonas, and Levinas (Jones, 2003, 2007). Jones suggests that these contemporary theorists, including Derrida, provide an essential set of perspectives on business ethics and CSR that deeply illuminate how our framing of the debates might well be insufficient.
Although some disagree with this view (e.g. De George, 2008), Jones makes a viable case for drawing more extensively from these scholars. Of particular importance for this chapter is the Derridean perspective on the social construction of meaning out of difference.

In the current work, I make use of certain elements of Derrida’s thought to unfold the issues at play. I do so in such a manner as to be relevant to contemporary CSR theorists by showing how CSR’s ambiguity is critical to its functioning as a lived discourse that addresses specific social concerns. The hope is thus to provide a reading that facilitates greater understanding of everyday lived CSR, by highlighting its internal logic and deep ties to the material conditions of local context. Broadly speaking, I do this by making specific reference to Derrida’s early work on the social construction of meaning through difference.

In the below subsections, I will briefly introduce some Derridean concepts and vocabulary (i.e. logocentrism, différance, undecidability, and the supplement), so that I can later put them into conversation with debates in the CSR literature. That treatment of the business ethics literature will argue that CSR, as a discourse, is a supplement. As a supplementary discourse, it emerges to aid our continued engagements with the ‘undecidable’ question of the profit-motive’s tension with prosociality, where either definitive stance is deemed unacceptable, so a third option that simultaneously affirms both proves conceptually helpful. Preserving this important perspective requires that we resist the ‘logocentric’ urge to collapse CSR’s internal inconsistency, as well as the similar impulse to subordinate CSR to other discourses that have the illusion of greater stability, but which lack the same ability to express what people mean to say. These ideas theoretically overlap in
crucial ways, but they all stem from a fundamentally differential understanding of how meaning is socially constructed, which Derrida calls ‘différance’.

5.2.1 Logocentrism and the Critique of Western Metaphysics

Derrida’s primary concern is to expose and challenge the unconscious violence that lies within much of the Western philosophical tradition. In a reading that engages with Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, Derrida charts a psychological impulse to order and dominance that runs through the canon as far back as the classical Greeks. This impulse seeks to subjectively master the outside world, both intellectually as well as physically (Spivak, 1976). This task, however, is ultimately impossible, as the radical unpredictability of the world defies our efforts to construct stable concepts. The disorienting complexity we encounter prompts us to nostalgically seek a return to an imagined prior moment of conceptual origin and simplicity (Derrida, 1976).

In this way, our expectations for truth and knowledge work to create certain types of meanings in the world, as stable meaning is derived from these falsely imagined original thoughts that are pleasingly “simple, intact, normal, pure, (and) standard” (Derrida, 1988, p. 93). Thus, Western metaphysics understands legitimate knowledge and meaning in regards to this privileged prior moment that never actually existed. Truth is understood to be stable and pure, while instability and contingency are marks of abnormality and mere deviation from true prior concepts.
According to Derrida, this ordering process installs philosophical dualisms that seek to sustain the integrity of some concepts by subordinating others. Thought is thus structured in dualities that privilege purity and presence: being vs. nothingness, nature vs. artifice, life vs. death, good vs. evil, truth vs. error, etc. In every case, the meaning of the second term exists in subordinated relation to the first, where the first is conceptually prior and deemed to be fully present in the here and now (Cooper, 1989). The second term, however, is constructed as merely a deviation or, more properly, a deterioration of the first: nothingness is the absence of being, artifice the corruption of nature, etc. (Derrida, 1988). Furthermore, Derrida argues that this dangerous process is often conveniently forgotten so that we come to think of this structuring as natural and self-evident. In fact, neither term is conceptually stable, and even the dominant term can only be understood in fluid relation to its opposite (Jones, 2007). Here, meaning is continually reconstructed out of the differences between terms: being can only be fully understood if we understand nothingness, just as our understanding of truth depends on an understanding of error. Put differently, evil is constructed out of the not-good, but Derrida argues that we similarly know good as the not-evil. Western philosophy often acts to suppress this finding, and thus reifies an untenable image of immediate pure presence as its purpose. Derrida dubs this “logocentrism,” after the Classical Greek privileging of speech over the written text due to the former’s perceived authority due to its having the speaker present (Derrida, 1976).

Readers may well take issue with Derrida on these points, especially that this is the primary process by which meanings are created. The argument for this chapter only demands agreement in a weak sense, that meanings (specifically regarding corporate responsibility) are, or can be, partially created out of a differential process.
The problem, in these cases, is that this authority is a false one, as we are in effect privileging one meaning (of the speech or text) at the expense of all the others in order to feel a greater sense of control. The danger of logocentrism in regards to conceptual CSR research is thus that it might induce scholars to either discard CSR as a useful discourse, or, to inaccurately assert instead one partial understanding of CSR as indicative of the concept as a whole. This drive can be seen in the CSR debate, as its conceptual fluidity frustrates many scholars who crave a simplicity and stability that cannot be achieved, thus threatening the integrity of the concept. To anticipate the analysis below, CSR, as an unclear and ambiguous discourse, thus risks being (falsely) reinscribed as conceptually subordinate to corporate profit-seeking, as some may see its internal incoherence as underlining the profit-motive’s relative credibility and authority.

5.2.2 Difference and Différance

Another important concept in this analysis of CSR is that of Derridean ‘différance,’ an idea that I draw on in the next section to argue that CSR cannot easily be authoritatively defined. Drawing on linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, Derrida (1976) argues that fundamental to language is an inability to demarcate stable and independent concepts. Saussure finds this through his investigation of language as a system of signifiers and signifieds, in that we use words to signify phenomena. The signifier corresponds to a mentally formulated signified, but this process is imperfect, as there is always a conceptual gap between the word that we
use and the phenomena that we wish to denote. Even within a single mind, the ever-changing nature of the world demands that every use of the signifier corresponds to a slightly different intended signified, if only because the individual’s mind and perspective has changed in the interim (Derrida, 1973). In a plurality of minds using language to communicate, this lag between what we say and what we mean to say (and to be understood as saying) is greatly amplified. Thus, language is perpetually haunted by the imperfections that it seeks to expunge. These imperfections undermine the authority of signifiers to stable meaning, which leads to conceptual tensions that we are motivated to resolve. In other words, they prompt the metaphysical impulse to order.

Extending Saussure’s reasoning, Derrida argues that fields of signifiers are all in fluid tension with one another, as there is nothing foundational about any of them. In this way, signifiers have to be understood as structured by difference both in themselves (the perpetual difference between the signifier and the signified,) as well as in between each other. For example, each time we use the signifier “table,” we do so with a unique image in our minds as to what we mean. When we communicate with others, our functional use of “table” is usually successful. But this process is never entirely conceptually successful, as each of us has a different image and set of criteria in mind for “table,” all of which are held in fluid tension with other signifiers: the signifier “table” at some point emerged as “not chair,” “not sofa,” and “not bookcase,” and this differential process is perpetual as language evolves.

79 Again, this chapter’s argument does not require full agreement with Derrida on these points, but only that these processes are at play in many CSR contexts.
Each signifier’s meanings can thus only be properly understood in unfinished conversation with the other signifiers with which it lives in productive tension – we might fruitfully try to explore these tensions, but they are never conclusively resolved (Derrida, 1976).

Derrida’s “différance” is a more inclusive approach to meaning that combines these elements of both a) to differ, and b) to defer. In this way, the multiple meanings that can be found in given words are given room to emerge and be (imperfectly) discovered, as différance recognizes that each use of a word is unique from the instances that preceded it. Thus, the authoritative meaning of a word is continually deferred in order to make room for the meanings that continue to elude us. Efforts to objectively define, and master, words, such as with CSR, may do so at the expense of this fruitful plurality of meanings (Derrida, 1973).

Now, in theory these issues apply to all concepts – all words should be explored in this way. But CSR is actually a special case, because there these multiple, unstable, meanings are exaggerated. As we will see below, CSR is a phrase and discourse in crisis, precisely because it has recently emerged out of difference in such a transparent manner.

5.2.3 Undecidability

The notion of ‘undecidability’ is very closely related to différance – indeed, the two concepts often overlap. In both cases we find authoritative meaning deferred in order to permit us to properly appreciate the multiplicity and impermanence at the hearts of concepts. Returning to the suppressed dualisms mentioned above, where the perception of stable
presence is created out of the subordination of one term to another, différance works to expose these false unities for what they are, which is in fact twinned terms that help mutually define one another. For example, instead of error being the absence of truth, truth and error should be understood to mutually depend on one another for meaning. Thus, to properly understand either term demands that we recognize this fluid process of give and take (Derrida, 1976).

According to Derrida, the undecidable is a moment where these dualisms are further challenged, as an element in the text refuses to conform to either pole in the dichotomy. I argue below that the tension regarding profit-seeking and prosociality within CSR is itself undecidable. The undecidable is something that presupposes the dichotomy yet resists it, as it can’t be understood in relation to only one pole, as both polar meanings are contradictorily present in a single term (Cooper, 1989). Take the example, for instance, of our determining the supposed naturalness or artificiality of a set of nutritional vitamins. Some cases might appear to be straightforward ones, but in others we might have no principles by which to distinguish between whether or not the vitamin is a natural or artificial one – either decision is problematic and partial. Here, the undecidable oscillates between the two standpoints according to a variety of pragmatic factors:

undecidability is always a determinate oscillation between possibilities (for example, of meaning, but also of acts). These possibilities are themselves highly determined in strictly defined situations (for example, discursive – syntactical or rhetorical – but also political, ethical, etc.) They are pragmatically determined. (Derrida, 1988, p. 148)
Thus, the undecidable vitamin both problematizes the dichotomy of nature and artifice as well as it helps us explore how nature and artifice are both contested concepts that depend on one another for their meaning.

We can also see how the undecidable is inescapably political, as it helps structure meanings and actions in contexts that evade straightforward analytical language. The undecidable demands a difficult decision and stance based on the context at hand, yet it also demands of us that we conceptually retain both poles of the dichotomy – a given vitamin might be pragmatically deemed natural or artificial, but it is always conceptually both. To categorically deny either pole in a dualism would be to do conceptual (and thus political) violence to the issue at hand, and the undecidable helps us remember this in difficult political discourses such as CSR where theoretical simplicity is elusive but the desire for simplicity remains (Derrida, 1992).

5.2.4 The Supplement

The final concept that is needed for my analysis is the Derridean supplement. Tightly tied to both différance and undecidability, the supplement is a new term (or discourse) that emerges to address a perceived insufficiency in an existing term (or discourse). For Derrida, a discursive insufficiency can prompt a desire, and a supplement will often attend to the desire by introducing a “regulated contradiction” that poses as a troubled unity (1976, p. 246). The supplement does this through a double-movement. Here, the new term adds to,
well as replaces, the original term. The original term is deemed both deficient (it makes us desire an improvement) as well as indispensable (as the new term is partially derived out from it). Both movements of the supplement are necessary to its operation: a supplement cannot simply act in one fashion or the other, or else it will fail to satisfy the desire. In the analysis that follows this short section, I contend that CSR is a supplement of this type, and its definitional fluidity is due to this perpetual double movement, as CSR serves to both affirm as well as implicitly critique corporate profit-seeking.

It is worth noting that any supplementary process is fiercely contested. This double movement of addition and substitution creates the conditions for an uneasy set of conceptual relationships. The first term (profit-seeking) here has not been discarded wholesale, and so it lives in continual tension with the supplement (CSR). When the supplement acts to extend the original term, it is viewed as a necessary addition. When the supplement seeks to replace the deficient term, however, proponents of that term will label the supplement dangerous and parasitic. This charge can metaphysically resonate due to the fact that the supplement is clearly not an independently coherent concept (Derrida, 1981). Returning to the example of the vitamin, or perhaps better the nutritional supplement, we can see that the vitamin can be understood to be both an augmentation of our natural potency, as well as an artificial intervention from outside the body. Both meanings are necessary to understand how vitamins attend to the deeply rooted desire to banish our natural limitations, which requires the affirmation of both our untainted natural vitality as well as of the vitamins’ necessity. In this way, the supplement will always play with what constitutes the respective insides and outsides of a term – the vitamin here is an outgrowth of natural health that attends to its
deficiencies, but it is also a problematic challenger to it that points out our natural inadequacies (Derrida, 1976). Similarly, CSR acts as both an organic extension of market life in response to a changed environment (Carroll, 1976), as well as a socialist jettisoning of market discipline (Friedman, 1970).

These two movements are often hidden from one another, but it is only by recognizing both sides of the supplement that we can understand how these structures sustain some of our political discourses. The metaphysical impulse to order tends to regard these “contradictory unit(ies)” (Derrida, 1976, p. 245) as illogical and frustrating, but this critical perspective can become unhelpful, as without both elements of the supplement the discourse would simply fall apart. This discursive outcome would carry with it certain real-world costs, as we must remember that the supplementary discourse has emerged to attend to a specific desire. Put plainly, the supplement exists for a reason. We prefer not to live with only one of the two conceptual poles here.

Supplementary terms and discourses are complex structures of thought that resist satisfying theoretical ordering, yet to suppress their internal différence would be to simply privilege a certain, partial, understanding of the term at the expense of all others. Supplements have emerged due to desires prompted by deficient discourses, and as such they are observable phenomena that help regulate certain conceptual fields. In the following section I argue that business ethics is such a field, and that CSR is a supplement that carries within it a “regulated contradiction” (Derrida, 1976, p. 245) which helps articulate how members of society expect firms to navigate the business-society interface.
5.3 CSR as a Supplementary Discourse

This section will look at CSR through the lens of Derrida’s work on the differential construction of meaning, as outlined above. The purpose here is to illuminate the vital role that CSR’s ambiguities actually play in its continuing viability as an ethico-political discourse that many individuals currently find useful. This ambivalence between profit-seeking and prosociality is critical to CSR’s functioning in a world that desires that we amend capitalism without discarding its productive powers and competitive advantages. Thus, CSR is what Derrida would call a supplementary discourse; it regulates corporate behavior, however imperfectly, by simultaneously affirming the necessity of both capitalist profit-seeking as well as prosociality.

Specifically, I first show how CSR has been constructed out of a productive tension between for-profit and not-for-profit approaches to corporate orientation. Secondly, I argue that CSR should be understood as a supplementary discourse that embraces the contradictions that emerge out of the undecidable profit question. This conceptual ambivalence might well disqualify CSR as a sound concept in the eyes of some theorists, but this recognition of the undecidability of profit is essential to CSR’s functional role as a viable ethico-political discourse that delivers concrete results for many activists and concerned businesspeople. I then consider this line of analysis as manifested in a well-known case study of CSR, where all the stakeholders involved find it in their interest to finesse the issue of corporate profit by deploying either side of the supplementary discourse, depending on the expectations of their audience.
5.3.1 CSR: Constructed between For-Profit and Not-For-Profit

Is shareholder value supreme beyond basic legal compliance? To what degree should corporate profit be set aside in favor of stakeholder concerns? (Jones and Wicks, 1999; McWilliams and Siegel, 2001). The continuing uncertainty concerning the place of self-interested profit has greatly exacerbated the difficulty of providing a clear definition of responsible corporate conduct. We know that doing good things is generally good, and that doing bad things is generally bad, but the motivation behind these acts, and how those corporate orientations affect policy outcomes, matters a great deal. It helps structure the normative field of action, and how we understand the actions of our peers. Any understandings of responsibility must take into account some sense of corporate motivation or corporate orientation – something I label corporate personality in an earlier chapter here. Hence, defining CSR, for many observers, will partially derive from understandings of the relative roles of profit-seeking and prosociality in decision making.

Derrida’s theory suggests to us that any effort to develop a stable and authoritative definition of CSR is structurally inclined to undermine the discourse as a whole by falsely privileging either profit-seeking or prosociality. As an alternative, however, Derrida’s work on the social construction of meaning through difference also helps us identify a common theme in the CSR literature that can aid in reconstructing an important aspect of CSR’s underlying logic. By unfolding this insight, we can begin to deepen our understanding of how
CSR is constructed and then deployed in society. Specifically, we find that the ambiguity created by the productive tension between profit-seeking and prosociality underwrites the logical structure of the CSR discourse.

Returning to the CSR literature, we can see that while CSR admittedly does not provide a set of general principles to authoritatively indicate responsible corporate behavior, we can find instead a consistent set of negative statements: we can see what CSR is not. Namely, the closest thing to an ordering principle in CSR’s history has been the statement that it refers to “businessmen’s decisions and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm’s direct economic or technical interest” (Davis, 1960, p. 70).

Here, CSR is organized around a differentiation that contains an implicit negation: CSR is for the corporation to go beyond the already assumed value of shareholder self-interest in its decisions in order to attend to wider social concerns. CSR is thus to act in some way contrary to the commonly accepted parameters of corporate life; specifically the expectation to relentlessly seek maximal profitability. McGuire similarly finds that social responsibility entails “that the corporation has not only economic and legal obligations but also certain responsibilities to society which extend beyond these obligations” (McGuire, 1963, p. 144). It is particularly interesting for our purposes how often various prominent scholars employ the specific word “beyond” in their formulations (e.g. Carroll, 1979, p. 500; Conley and Williams, 2005, p. 1; Davis, 1960, p. 70; Davis and Blomstrom, 1966, p. 12; 80).

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80 The gendered language here is from the original.

If CSR means to go beyond profit-seeking, though, then what is the substantive limit on society’s expectations for CSR? Are corporations expected to do away with self-interest altogether? The literature here is similarly united in saying no. CSR scholars and activists have been remarkably consistent in accepting the reality of contemporary economic life, where there is a certain appetite for prosociality, but almost none for the conversion of corporations into anything resembling not-for-profits. The expansive articulation of CSR, then, is not corporations as “not-for-profits,” but rather the far more limited demand that business should respect prosocial norms expected by wider society, which may or may not impinge on profitability (Carroll, 1976; Sethi, 1975; Wood, 1991). None of these theorists demand a consistent stance against profit-seeking, but they all require that corporations consider other factors than profitability in their decision-making.

What we have here, then, is a Derridean example of meaning being constructed out of difference. CSR is primarily constructed as “not-just-profit.” But it is not “not-for-profit,” either – CSR itself presupposes the capitalist corporate frame, which demands that firms should remain commercially viable and thus profitable. Broadly speaking, CSR can be found
between for-profit and not-for-profit.\textsuperscript{81} It is simultaneously both but neither: corporations must act well and must do well. There is an important school of thought in CSR that has tried to argue that the two strands here go hand in hand; that to act prosocially will generally help profitability over the long term (e.g. Pava and Krausz, 1996). This argument, however, generally evades CSR’s central concerns and conceptual history; if a given ethical practice is good for the bottom line, then it will presumably be adopted as everyday practice without much struggle. CSR has emerged out of the expectation that socially acceptable outcomes are often at odds with shareholder supremacy, and while the convergence of the ethical and business cases for various good practices is to be hoped for, this does not undermine the finding that CSR often demands choices between maximal profitability and maximal prosocial outcomes. CSR aims and hopes for both, but it realistically expects neither. The question then becomes: what could be the purpose of such an contradictory discourse?

5.3.2 CSR as a Supplement to Profit-Seeking Capitalism

In his history of CSR, Hanlon makes an important observation: CSR might have been coined in the 1950s, but it only gained critical mass somewhere around 1980 and then really came into its own in the 1990s. What could explain this slow rate of public acceptance?

\textsuperscript{81} Derrida’s mechanisms importantly work through negations, but given that these negations then produce (misleadingly) positive signifiers it would be unhelpful to continue with these double-negatives. I will therefore change “not-not-for-profit” to simply “for-profit,” thus reflecting common usage of these terms.
According to Hanlon, this lack of interest in CSR through the 1950s, 60s, and 70s corresponds closely to the relative successes of Fordist capitalism. Fordism held that the firm and labor should be placed opposed to one another, but within a strong state structure that would order the economy, guarantee minimal welfare, and adjudicate grievances. In this way, the Fordist state could guarantee a generally successful economic arrangement, as the disruptive radicalism of early 20th century labor was constrained. In exchange, firms were compelled to be relatively generous to unionized labor, and the state stood comparatively ready to intervene against corporate abuses. This structural triad of capital-labor-state thus achieved a certain level of social cohesion and legitimacy in the developed world from the 1930s to the 1980s (Hanlon, 2008).

That arrangement has been weakened through globalization. In a world of liquid capital and transnational production processes, the state’s ability to direct the economy has been heavily undermined (Sassen, 1996). There are now consistent worries about the state’s ability to regulate corporate behavior, as aggressive regulation that is perceived to threaten profitability will threaten foreign direct investment and thus national economies’ international competitiveness (Fraser, 2009). With this we have seen the decline of Fordism and the linked rise of neoliberalism, where surplus wealth and aggregate individual welfare are sought through the elimination of barriers to productive self-interested activity (Hanlon, 2008).

The global ascendency of neoliberalism has brought in lockstep with it the public’s increased interest in CSR (Hanlon, 2008). Despite its many successes, neoliberalism has also fostered numerous destabilizing social effects, including widening inequality, stagnant
wages, and a sense that the average citizen increasingly lacks protection from the dangerous vagaries of the system (Bourdieu et al., 1999; Fraser, 2009). Concerns such as these have led some to cry out for revitalized state intervention, but this remedy appears unlikely to materialize. Neoliberalism has its advantages and disadvantages, but what is most striking about our current dilemma is that we have so few structural alternatives (Kerlin, 1998). The welfare state is imperiled, communism is dead, and there are no viable challengers to neoliberal capitalism on the scene – even after the grassroots success of the Occupy movement. There is simply no evidence of widespread appetite in most states for a different production regime. There is indeed evidence, however, that people are worried about the excesses of the regime we have (Hanlon, 2008). I argue that CSR, understood both as an increasingly popular discourse and as an attending set of new practices, is a manifestation of this growing concern; a finding that other scholars, using separate but parallel analyses, have noted as well (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007).

Given the widespread concerns about capitalism, along with the lack of viable challengers to it, we thus arrive at a critical juncture. The question becomes less which arrangement to choose, and more how to best live with the one we have. CSR emerges here. A Derridean reading of this situation would argue that the neoliberal capitalist system lacks the stability and prosocial bona fides of its predecessor, and this has prompted newly

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82 For instance, in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis, this remains very much the case. Apart from minor adjustments to certain securities regulations, the much vaunted coming state backlash against neoliberal auto-regulation seems to have almost completely dissipated. This is a far cry from the first half of the 20th century, where similar banking crises led to sustained calls for widespread changes in the economic architecture (Galbraith, 1997).
widespread concerns and thus a desire. This aspiration is not for a new arrangement, but rather for an amendment of the one we have. CSR is an expression of the desire for a more humane capitalism. That desire was present but largely suppressed under Fordism, and it has intensified under recent conditions.

According to Derrida, instabilities and insufficiencies in discourses prompt desires (Derrida, 1976). The insufficiency in neoliberal capitalism is not so critical as to prompt society to discard it in the near future for an alternative, but the widespread desire for better corporate behavior remains (Kerlin, 1998). This desire is problematic, though, because it contains contradictory demands. We wish to employ neoliberal capitalism’s productive powers in a fiercely competitive world, but we also want corporations to work towards prosocial outcomes. Both of these demands are widely observable phenomena, as neoliberalism’s ascendency continues while calls for CSR and business ethics continue to grow (Hanlon, 2008).

Observers sometimes lament CSR’s conceptual tensions, and there is much to these criticisms. It might be worth asking, however, if it is similarly incoherent for communities to demand both the current production regime, which provides a competitive stance for local firms on the world market, as well as a greater sense of corporate prosociality. Given the dearth of plausible structural alternatives and the documented inability (or lack of interest) of states to substantively intervene in the market (Fraser, 2009), it is not clear that it is. This is not to say that either demand will be easily satisfied, but these twinned political goals are likely a reasonable aspiration given the contemporary situation. In this sense, a responsible approach to the business and society interface will likely eschew idealism, as well as the
metaphysical impulse to conceptual simplicity, for an attention to specific dangers or opportunities in particular contexts (Geuss, 2008). Does a given corporate practice threaten the local community? Does a given activist demand threaten local economic activity? Are given compromises acceptable to both the firm and its stakeholders? What can and should be done if they are not?

CSR as a Derridean supplement works in just such a fashion. CSR is a supplement that has emerged to attend to this desire for a more humane capitalism by simultaneously affirming both capitalist profit-seeking as well as prosociality. Derrida reminds us that apparent contradictions are easily accommodated in our minds “as soon as it is a matter of satisfying a desire” (1976, p. 245). Society wants vibrant capitalist economic activity, and society wants corporations to act more prosocially. CSR is a discourse that brings these two demands together within a single supplementary signifier. Firms in various contexts are thus required to work towards relatively prosocial outcomes, within a capitalist frame, by acting “responsibly.”

That said, supplements are always ambiguous at their core. Supplements are ambivalent in that they are always both an addition to the prior term (here, profit-seeking capitalism) as well as an implicit substitution for it. Capitalism can be seen here to be indispensable but flawed. CSR, as a supplement, works to add to capitalism but also to implicitly substitute in for it. As an addition to, and thus extension of, profit-seeking capitalism, CSR presupposes the importance of corporate activity, and good conduct is demanded within that given arena. It is in this sense that CSR often acts as a legitimating force for capitalist corporations (Banerjee, 2007; Hanlon, 2008; Shamir, 2005). As a
substitution, however, CSR also works to implicitly condemn capitalism, as a more prosocial attitude to decision-making is demanded of firms.

For CSR to remain viable, as a discourse, it must always be plausibly both this addition to capitalism as well as this implicit substitution in for it. Should either conceptual pole be suppressed, the supplementary discourse will fail, and the most likely outcome will be a situation where the prior discourse (in this case capitalist profit-seeking), is temporarily reinvigorated by the failure of its supplement, which highlights the prior discourse’s relative stability and solidity. As such, CSR’s supplementary logic carries within it the significant possibility that it could be recycled back into a hierarchical dualism with profit-seeking, as we know the challenges and strengths of an egoist market, and that general arrangement makes sense to us. Seeing the CSR movement struggle with appearing utopian, or seeing managers struggle to explain what CSR means, could refresh market expectations by showing that all the alternatives have problems of their own. Given the market’s widespread acceptance in society, such crises of legitimacy are likely to bolster market liberals, not CSR moralists. That said, however, the profit-motive’s socially perceived insufficiencies remain, and it is only with a fluid and supplementary treatment of CSR (or another supplementary discourse like it), that those concerns can be addressed directly.

This double movement, of both addition and substitution, marks how Derridean supplements function differently than standard accounts of supplements, which focus solely on how they act by addition. By way of contrast, see Rasche’s (2009) account of CSR as supplement to legal regulation, which specifically rejects that CSR has a substitutive function, at least in relation to the law (p. 522). I rather move the focus of analysis from regulation to corporate orientation, adopting a Derridean framework, to capture why many pro-business observers (e.g. Friedman, 1970; Sundaram and Inkpen, 2004) see CSR as corrosive to traditional corporate values. Rasche later adopts an explicitly Derridean lens towards supplementarity (2010), but the analytic focus there is on ethical standardization initiatives and codes of conduct, not CSR in and of itself.
5.3.3 CSR as Contextually Determined: The Necessity of Definitional Ambiguity to CSR’s Functionality

The tension between profit-seeking and prosociality, with which we began the chapter, thus becomes the irresolvable issue around which CSR organizes itself. This is not to say that people do not make decisions regarding the relative supremacy of corporate profit-seeking, but it is to say that any such decision is partial, incomplete, and tied to the context at hand. Given that society desires both neoliberal capitalism as well as prosociality, any given decision regarding the role of corporate profit-seeking will appear problematic from at least one, and probably both, of these two conceptual poles. Everyday life, however, will of course demand decisions of just this sort, and this helps explain the existence of many different understandings of what it means for firms to act responsibly. In these situations, it is not that the supplementary discourse is confused, but rather that it operates in a determinate oscillation between the two poles of the undecidable – in this case corporate profit-seeking and prosociality (Derrida, 1988). Different people in dissimilar contexts will arrive at diverse determinations of what CSR is, or should be, based on the situation at hand. These individual decisions will be made according to pragmatic determinations: the discursive environment, political or economic forces at play, local power relations, etc. With this, the perceived suitability of calling a given practice CSR, or, conversely, of demanding a certain practice under the banner of CSR, will be socially constructed based on material contexts, in keeping with how CSR is always a lived discourse.
The problem with supplements, such as CSR, emerges when a given decision is reified and deemed authoritative, as it actually does not represent the discourse as a whole, but rather the discourse as manifested in a particular context. If any given decision is insisted upon as legitimate and authoritative, then the supplementary discourse falls apart (Derrida, 1976). To illustrate, let us take a well-known, and controversial, example of CSR.

Of particular recent interest has been the role of CSR in attending to dangers found in global clothing supply chains. The case study of chapter one looks at a still-unfolding case: that of Rana Plaza. In addition, let us also look at a case that has found itself largely settled, where we can better assess the results of the advocacy, and which has proved influential in the field: Nike. Nike, a wildly profitable company that heavily depends on inspirational branding campaigns, had sales decline in the late 1990s and early 2000s following accusations that its subcontractors exploited workers (Locke et al., 2007; Vogel, 2005). There, the context dictated that Nike’s resources and high margins should permit the absorption of the costs of substantial remedies, which activists insisted upon and the firm agreed to. It remains uncertain, however, that Nike’s CSR programs have proved financially beneficial to the firm in the end (Vogel, 2005).

We see in the Nike case an interesting example of a firm reacting to CSR activism with fairly robust CSR programs, including participation in standards-setting initiatives and the funding of independent auditors for the Nike supply chain (Locke et al., 2007; Vogel, 2005). But what would happen should we insist that the decision in the Nike case is authoritative and should act as an exemplar to CSR as a whole? The discourse would fall apart, and the specific manner in which it failed would depend on how we think the CSR
programs influenced profitability. If we believe that the benefits that accrued to Nike through its CSR programs did not outweigh the resulting costs, and thus presumably that other firms must act similarly benevolently irrespective of the circumstances, then CSR is open to charges of unreasonable idealism. On the other hand, if we think that Nike’s CSR policies led to a net profit through positive publicity and increased operational efficiency, then this becomes yet another “win-win” scenario that Banerjee (2008, p. 61) warns us against. Specifically, he argues that if that sort of activity is supposed to be emblematic of CSR, then it is not clear how much emancipatory potential the discourse would have left. In that case, CSR discourse would suffer from critics correctly dismissing it as little more than a convenient public relations strategy.

These two contrasting possibilities are of course the problems with which we began our analysis. Crucially, they only emerge if we insist on authoritatively deciding the undecidable profit question - as opposed to understanding that each decision is pragmatic, contextual, and ultimately problematic. Leaving the Nike example’s profit question ambiguous permits us to hold it up as an impressive instance of a corporation responding to critics, then doing good and doing well under the banner of CSR. In fact, we can see that while the Nike example cannot satisfy critics’ conceptual concerns, the Nike case does in fact continue to succeed on functional grounds, as people continue to happily use ‘CSR’ as a productive way to denote a certain type of corporate behavior that is imperfectly exhibited by Nike.

For example, Nike continues to be cited as an important CSR case study in both the academic literature (e.g. Lim and Phillips, 2008; Werther Jr. and Chandler, 2004) and
popular press (e.g. Murray, 2010). More importantly, both practitioners at Nike (Nike, 2010), as well as the activists who continue to challenge them (e.g. Knorr, 2007), feel comfortable communicating their relative positions in the language and vocabulary of corporate social responsibility. Theoretical demands for an authoritative definition of CSR, or policy regarding profit-seeking, thus run the risk of disrupting the functional uses of CSR mentioned here, as the variability of the discourse is what permits agents to creatively contest what it means to be socially responsible in a given context.

Specifically, it is not clear how those connected to the Nike situation would benefit from greater clarity on the issue of corporate profit, as it serves the best interests of all the stakeholders involved to keep the profit-question ambivalent. For instance, activists might well hope, and demand, that Nike exhibit various moral values, but they also want the firm to react to pressures on revenues (Knorr, 2007). Activists might have wished to hear emphatically normative reflections from Nike, indicative of sincere subjective and corporate-cultural shame, but they never insisted on moral imperatives being authoritatively declared as the specific reason Nike was making the changes that it made. Similarly, Nike’s social responsibility report (Nike, 2010) walks the habitual fine line by simultaneously endorsing both prosociality and profit-seeking, if only because if forced to openly choose a position, management would suffer either way. On the one hand, if Nike were to widely acknowledge that CSR is only a strategy intended to defuse activist pressure, it would lose much of the credibility and goodwill that, for Nike, could presumably be the whole point of the endeavor. On the other hand, it is understandably rare for executives to freely publicize that large CSR outlays are not expected to be worth their cost to shareholders, as this could be problematic.
on both managerial and corporate governance grounds. Examples to the contrary do indeed exist, but most managers and firms generally hope to finesse the issue by selectively emphasizing either the business, or ethical, cases for their policies, depending on their audience (Conley and Williams, 2005), while always mentioning both.

We can fruitfully critique “win-win” reasoning, per Banerjee and Hanlon – and this is often appropriate. However, an optimistic way to look at “win-win” discourse is that this reasoning expands what is possible for firms to pursue. Imagine how difficult it would be for H&M, APP, Nike, or others to justify themselves, in cases of their responding to social concerns, without recourse to this language. Justifying socially-beneficial policies would not be impossible without win-win language, but it would be challenging. Those justifications would rest either on the firm being strategically threatened by social pressure (which may exist but which firms are loathe to admit for a variety of reasons), or on sincere normative values that are difficult to justify managerially to shareholders. These firms all used “win-win” language to discursively smooth things over, thus making agreements more plausible.

In the end, an important question is how best to expand the realm of the possible. We should critique CSR, and CSR’s propensity to “win-win” reasoning, in conditions where this reasoning leads to complacency and where it limits corporate concessions to easy policies that firms might have done anyways. However, in other cases, this reasoning helps firms better respond to vulnerable stakeholders, and in those cases we should accept it as the uncomfortable and strange functioning of a deeply troubled discourse. Predominately self-interested firms often need to obfuscate why they are acting in the apparent public interest. CSR, which both affirms and undermines profit-seeking, facilitates this process by providing
the supplementary vocabulary needed in order to leave the question of profit deferred for another day, while also permitting the vigorous contestation of corporate behaviour by activists.

5.4 Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter started by considering a set of definitional concerns in the CSR literature, on the one hand, and a related set of diametrically opposed, yet potentially valid, critiques on the other. Given the situation, it is perhaps unsurprising that some scholars in the CSR literature have called for concepts or theories that might better synthesize and organize the competing issues at play (McWilliams and Siegel, 2001, 2006; Wood, 1991). To a large extent, this can indeed be helpful and constructive, as placing theories in conversation with one another has paid important dividends. That said, however, a Derridean analysis suggests that we should resist the impulse to try to intellectually master the business-society interface by creating an artificially stable concept or theory that offers all of the answers.

CSR’s ambiguity is often frustrating, but the alternative is to excise either profit-seeking or prosociality from its meaning. Either result of this process would be unsatisfactory given the widespread contemporary demand for both. In addition, of these two contrasting prospects, it is far more likely that prosociality, not profit-seeking, would be excluded from the definition of a simplified CSR or simplified alternative. When supplements break down under the gaze of logocentric scrutiny, they overwhelmingly tend to revert back to the
(misleadingly) original term, in this case self-interested profit-seeking (Derrida, 1981).

Indeed, we are already seeing this happen. Many scholars believe that CSR is becoming increasingly beholden to the “business-case”, or profit-oriented, frame for CSR, and that the moral case is being marginalized as unproductive (Shamir, 2008; Banerjee, 2010). The more this happens, however, activist critics simply dismiss CSR altogether as co-opted (MISN, 2013) – something that clearly frustrates activists, as well as those firms that wish to make a good impression through their CSR activities.

Nowhere is this clearer that in the recent high profile Porter and Kramer article (2011), which has proven fantastically successful – with a host of Fortune 500 companies, such as Nestle and Unilever, endorsing the concept, and more than 2300 academic citations in three years. The original article effectively functioned as a polemic against utopian frames for CSR, and argued that a generally utilitarian account of Creating Shared Value (CSV), predicated on market egoism and aggregate welfare, would be preferable to the moralized, implicitly conflictual, approach shared by many CSR activists. Here, we see one of CSR’s conceptual poles under siege, and the result would be an account of CSR, or rather of CSV, that appears confident and worldly to a business audience, but self-interested and convenient to many stakeholders. From a Derridean perspective, CSR’s ambiguity is exactly what permits CSR to achieve results as a powerful emancipatory discourse - it implicitly condemns the status quo and thus demands that corporations do better. CSV collapses this ambiguity. Instead of demanding better, CSV appears to only suggest that many firms could do better, as it reduces almost all normative issues to effectively cognitive ones, as some
firms fail to recognize that they could improve their strategic positions through solving problems for society.

CSV offers real benefits to some managers and stakeholders, as it frames normative issues in language that speaks to a managerial audience. After all, what firm does not believe that it delivers value to consumers? But this straightforward approach comes at a cost: when corporate orientation and individual managerial motives are deemed irrelevant, when firms argue that they should be judged by their aggregated effect on the world, and when firms assert that their core business operations are what create that value, then stakeholders would be right to feel implicitly pushed aside. CSV does suggest that value should be shared, but it also firmly asserts that market relationships, including through companies known for a “hard-nosed approach to business” (Porter and Kramer, 2011: 4) are the best ways to organize economic life. The Derridean analysis here, however, suggests that firms risk losing some of their ability to finesse their stakeholder relationships, as the moral imperative to responsibility is set aside and replaced by the seemingly accidental shared enjoyment of the value created by business. When firms do something wonderful, is it really ideal to clothe these activities in a CSV guise, which suggests that firms made no specific sacrifice, and that they have no special normative relationship with these stakeholders besides a problem-solving one? And in the midst of a normative crisis, will a past featuring “value-creating” projects establish the same normative bona fides for an embattled firm hoping to convince the public of their sincerity and trustworthiness going forward?

CSV is still very young, so we do not yet know if these are valid concerns. We have not yet seen CSV’s long term effects on stakeholder relations. But the analysis here, and an
appreciation for why CSR sticks to its internally contradictory premises, suggests that CSV is liable to feature certain predictable challenges. Specifically, with the spread of CSV language we can expect that activists will find themselves increasingly less able to demand change, and that firms will find themselves less able to persuasively portray themselves as normative agents. In addition, we can also expect firms to be somewhat less able to justify their normativity when it does occur. To many, this is a trade worth making if it secures business sector agreement; but what is interesting here is that jettisoning normativity and moral reasoning could ultimately undermine firms almost as much as it undermines the activists. That impulse to normativity, where we wish to live in a good world full of good people, remains: it is simply no longer spoken to in this alternate discourse of CSV. CSR faces its own challenges, but its partial organization around corporate motivation helps ground its politics on exactly these issues, and on exactly these normative impulses.
6. Directions for Future Research and Conclusion

6.1 Directions for Future Research

6.1.1 Towards A More Diverse Governmentality Studies Literature

Along with the more concrete objective of problematizing the mainstream global governance and “soft law” accounts of CSR politics, this dissertation also had the intention of gently pushing back against some tendencies and narratives in the “governmentality studies” literature – namely a political fatalism borne, in part, out of an overly narrow focus on neoliberal state reforms of the past 25 years. These arguments, introduced in the extended introduction and developed in more detail in chapters one and two, suggest opportunities for future research to advance the “governmentality studies” literature. I do not mean to minimize in any way my intellectual debt to these authors and texts: the number of times each scholar is referenced, even if in mild disagreement, is a testament to how much this dissertation draws from their work. Much of the most fertile work being done on the comparative challenges, and opportunities, for society’s reactions to the neoliberal market is being done within this literature. Scholars such as Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee (2007, 2010), Clive Barnell, Paul Cloke, Nick Clarke and Alice Malpass (2010), Thomas Biebricher and Frieder Vogelmann (2012), Partha Chatterjee (2004, 2008, 2011), Will Davies (2006, 2013, 2014), Mitchell Dean (2010a, 2010b), Nicholas Gane (2012, 2014), Laura Spence and Leonardo Rinaldi (2012), and Steen Vallentin (2013) are all asking fascinating questions about the limits of neoliberalism and where social bonds might be reinvigorated – and they have all been inspired by this lens, just as have I.
This dissertation, which returns quite different results than most governmentality inspired research, points to a need for greater diversity of viewpoints within the governmentality studies literature. In fact, it is telling that most of the above scholars actually do not study primarily in political or social theory, but rather in related fields such as geography, management, and political economy, and yet their work is particularly vibrant and rife with insights for political and social theory. This is almost assuredly because their investigations into the limits of neoliberalism are informed by a plurality of real-world perspectives and widely varying scholarly interests, which have all prompted new views on why governmentality studies is relevant and what it has to say. In this sense governmentality analysis is endlessly interdisciplinary. Yet the core political and social theory of the governmentality studies literature remains heavily Anglophone (granted, with a significant German-language constituency\(^{84}\)), and draws almost exclusively from a relatively narrow set of case study examples from the Anglosphere\(^{85}\); specifically, relatively recent state reforms from the UK, the United States, Australia, and Canada (Burchell, Gordon, and Miller, 1991; Dean, 2010a, 2010b; Dean and Hindess, 1998; Hindess, 1996; Rose, 1999; Rose, O’Malley, and Valverde, 2006)\(^{86}\).


\(^{85}\) Lemke notes this as well. See (2007) pages 45-46.

\(^{86}\) I note in passing that while this dissertation was inspired by its observations of CSR phenomena to take a wider, more diverse, view of governmentality analysis, it too ultimately falls short of this ideal in some ways. This dissertation studies phenomena drawn largely from the Anglosphere, and in particular with a Canadian focus, as this is where I live and study. The benefit of hindsight suggests that this was not ideal, and that rich opportunities exist for future comparative research in non-Anglosphere contexts.
This relative lack of diversity in viewpoints, and in subjects of analysis for constructing the core theory, is problematic for a variety of reasons, not least that we know from the “varieties of capitalism” (Hall and Soskice, 2001) and institutional literatures (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008; Matten and Moon, 2008) that economic institutions can evolve to operate somewhat organically within background institutional and cultural contexts, meaning that a given political rationality, however coherent, might well operate in different ways in different contexts. We should not expect the discourses or practices of political rationalities like welfare liberalism, neoliberalism, or beyond to act entirely similarly across contexts, without at least a certain level of translation to account for how liberalism and the market manifest themselves in different times, places, and institutional contexts. We desperately need more empirical study, drawing from more diverse cases that study non-state agendas and non-Anglosphere institutional contexts, to get a more coherent idea of which findings and concepts are transferable to broader contexts, and which are relatively idiosyncratic. For instance, as this dissertation draws primarily (but not exclusively) from Anglosphere examples, future comparative governmentality-inspired research would be helpful to strengthen the claims that these findings can be transferred beyond the Anglosphere. As of now, without that comparative work, those claims must be very cautious.

A more diverse governmentality literature might well spur significant changes to the core theory, which seems somewhat paralyzed, waiting for re-invigoration. What does it say that

87 See Briebicher and Vogelmann (2012) and Davies and Gane (2013) for governmentality scholars who recognize this inertia and propose ways forward.
this powerful lens, adopted by hundreds of scholars, still returns time and again to the same two stories of a) state institutions being colonized by neoliberal ideas of competitive subjectivity, so that the marginalized are made to take responsibility for advancing their interests, or b) state institutions achieving their agendas by structuring fields of action such that third party civil society groups autonomously but predictably further state ends? Has governmentality analysis got anything else to teach us but to watch out for those two state-centric, pessimistic, narratives?

I think it does. In late 2013, a major conference was held to investigate governmentality and “the social” in the 21st century (Blencowe, 2013). The presentations appear to have been rich and of great scholarly promise. However, the presentations generally explored the meaning of “social” governance by following how organizations are fascinated by charting, understanding, and shaping human relationships and interconnectivity: here, sociality was effectively value free and best understood as an individual’s place in a series of networks. This working definition of sociality seems fruitful and potentially quite important in a world of big data, perpetual connectivity to the internet, and widespread immersion in social media. But, as the sociologist Claire Blencowe points out, there was almost no treatment of what used to motivate and typify “social” governance in the first place: namely, concern about suffering brought on by the inequalities inherent in the liberal market, and welfare attended to in light of our perceived shared interdependence and communal bond. As Blencowe puts it: “generally the speakers didn’t say much, however, about the…difficult question of what the positive, ‘socialist’, aspects of the new social might actually look like or how we could identify them” (Blencowe, 2013). This describes perfectly the typical stance of the literature.
I have great sympathy with this challenge, and I think a partial solution – or at least a prompt to new research – is rather straightforward, and that is to adopt the approach used here in this dissertation. If we are to identify and understand the distinctly welfarist (or quasi-socialist) aspects of the 21st century “new” social that still exist following the decline of the welfare state, we can chart the political forms that deploy that imagery, and then begin the analysis from there. But this will largely require us, as scholars, adopting new perspectives and studying new phenomena, partly because few state governments in the Anglosphere deploy arguments using classically “social” imagery of greed, exploitation and communal interdependence. But this does not mean that that imagery is gone, just that we need to look for it in new places.

For examples of the promise of this approach, take the work of Partha Chatterjee and Steen Vallentin – both of whom are influenced by governmentality but neither of which are primarily focused on challenging or clarifying the lens’ concepts. They are focused instead on understanding, respectively, the grassroots rejection of state-corporate partnerships in India (2004; 2008), and Nordic states’ CSR agendas (2013). Both describe phenomena where norms of inclusiveness, interdependence, restraint, and concern for welfare are demanded by affected groups and placed on state and corporate counterparts. Both describe situations where institutional mandates, and organizational decision-making rationales, are partially obscured to permit organizations wider latitude in decision-making, and thus more

88 Although sometimes they do – see, in response to the Rana Plaza collapse, the U.S government’s statement criticizing the industry’s “greed” (Mozena, 2013). This was classically “social” criticism.
harmonious relations between states, firms, and community groups (Chatterjee, 2004; 2008; Vallentin, 2013). These seem to be cases where “the positive, ‘socialist’, aspects of the new social” are front and center, ready to be studied and analyzed to see how closely the “new” social, insofar that there actually is a “new” social, reflects the “old” social\(^89\). However, neither case study is best captured by our beginning with the social metaphor of a network, nor does either take place in the Anglosphere. Opening ourselves up to alternative perspectives, away from the Anglosphere and away from focusing on the state agenda\(^90\), will help provide new opportunities for understanding sociality in the 21st century – both in its networked meaning, as well as in its evocation of a communal bond of interdependence.

6.1.2 Towards a More Granular Understanding of CSR Discursive Politics “On The Ground”

This research also points towards the need for more granular research about the actual everyday discursive politics of CSR, and especially greater sensitivity to CSR being a lived discourse that makes best sense when deployed in context. The current leading theories of CSR politics, namely those drawing from theories of global governance and deliberative

\(^89\) I compare my findings to Vallentin’s work in chapter one (ie, they are similar but non-identical in some important respects). I do not compare my findings to Chatterjee’s, as that would require a whole separate study because the contexts are so different. Doing so in the future could be potentially fruitful, however. What Chatterjee describes as “politics of the governed” does seem evocative of “social” governance in some important ways, in both imagery and in how the institutions he describes happen to function.

\(^90\) I should note that Vallentin’s work (2013) is much closer to the governmentality mainstream, as it does focus on European state politics. I discuss this in more detail in chapter one. Chatterjee’s work is more of an outlier, as he describes effectively anti-state (and anti-business) advocacy.
democracy, have many contributions to make, but those accounts often seem distant to the everyday politics “on the ground” (Banerjee, 2010; Edward and Willmott, 2011; Wilke and Wilke, 2008). At high levels of abstraction, those schools seem unarguable: society does seem to be asking firms to change, new norms are being formed, and better communications processes or opinion-formation institutions such as multi-stakeholder initiatives would help in many situations. But the closer we get to the actual politics, the less those theories seem to be helpful: CSR politics are often riven with starkly unequal power relations (Blowfield and Frynas, 2005; Levy, 2008), many (perhaps most) engagements already feature reasonably efficient communications flows, and many attempts at MSIs fail due to insufficient commitment from business (Fransen, 2012; Fransen and Kolk, 2007; Moog, Spicer, and Böhm, 2013). So focusing on improving the quantity or quality of communication, either by exhortation or institutional design, seems only helpful to a point. Rather, what most activists appear to need to be successful in securing their interests is to mobilize greater support from wider society (Soule and Olzak, 2004). Mobilizing this support might, or might not, have anything to do with deliberation, better communication with firms, or recourse to multi-stakeholder initiatives – however well designed. Closer to the ground, away from concerns about civility, respectability, and whether a given approach to CSR politics might be offensive to the broader public (Baur and Palazzo, 2011), the politics seem messier, more ephemeral, and more personal. This lack of clarity regarding the politics that help prompt change suggests a need for future research.

A wide literature already exists, of course, regarding social movements (see, among many others, Della Porta and Diani, 2009; Peet and Watts, 2004; Piven and Clowhard, 1977;
Soule and Olzak, 2004; Tarrow and Tollefson, 1994), but much of this is disconnected with the CSR literature. There is an important and exciting recent effort to that link “social movement” theory with analysis of CSR engagements (Bond, 2008; King, 2008; King and Pearce, 2010; King and Soule, 2007; Soule, 2009), but these are still early days in that essential research to get a better understanding of what governance techniques work best to hold firms to account. In particular, most of this work lacks close attention to discursive framing techniques, as well as in-depth understanding of firm-stakeholder struggles over what makes for legitimate dissent (Joutsenvirta, 2011).

Looking back on the research programme laid out in this dissertation, my fundamental hope for CSR politics research going forward is that scholars follow Banerjee’s injunction to rebalance the literature away from studying the “supply” side of CSR politics (i.e., intra-organizational questions about how and why firms work to become more responsible), towards the “demand” side of the CSR equation (i.e., society’s demands for firms to change) (2010). We seem to know a lot more about how or why firms react to demands than we do about society’s demands themselves, or how society might want different competing interests to be prioritized or balanced in any actual solution (Crane, Palazzo, Spence, Matten, 2014). For instance, taking the matter of the ready-made garment industry and lowered safety standards; we have a good idea of what workers representatives want, and that is a start, but do we have a good account of what citizen-consumers in the Global North actually want?

The easy answers: that consumers and observing individuals either want, or do not want, sweatshop-free clothes, seem blithe. Observers witnessing coverage of Rana Plaza
were genuinely horrified while wearing, at that moment, their Bangladeshi-made garments. We can see this as hypocrisy (which to an extent it is), but it also represents genuine sadness at the state of the world. The reality of what observers in the Global North want is much more complex than most theories of business and society have laid out. I have sought to show, specifically in chapter one, that understanding CSR activism, in the wake of incidents like Rana Plaza, as society’s responses to anti-social behaviour misses much of the phenomena. Specifically, what was being targeted for judgement and possible change was also corporate subjectivities, and that this made a certain amount of sense given that nobody really wanted any structural change. Moreover, this also made sense given a)that NGOs lack sufficient institutional resources to reliably track behavior, as well as given b)that the labour and communitarian movements have a history of partially defining the moral issue of exploitation not in relation to specific rules of behaviors being right and wrong, but rather as the abuse of extreme and unusual conditions. In these extreme situations, “normal” acts are suddenly no longer normal, but rather are exploitative and abusive, and the target of normalization is the subjectivities that would decide to abuse that power relation.

Suddenly, social science finding that activists target the particularly powerful (Walmart, Gap, H&M), and ethically preening (H&M, Gap, and Benetton) makes a lot more sense, as not only are these companies culturally important to stimulate change (Bartley and Childs, 2014) and morally fascinating as hypocrites (Best and Lowney, 2009), but that these firms are particularly galling in that they could stand to act differently. This helps explain how Gap and H&M, which had no financial dealings with Rana Plaza, were blindsided (Brownstone, 2014; Maheshwari, 2013) by how they became targeted for criticism: they saw
their culpability as nil, as they had no direct ties to Rana Plaza. What acts had they done wrong\textsuperscript{91}? Meanwhile, observers saw wealthy, powerful, companies unwilling to commit to doing business differently in a particularly brutal labour market, thus frustrating attempts to improve conditions. The Gap and H&M thus became just as guilty – even moreso, given their wealth and ethical posturing – as those who actually sourced at Rana Plaza the day of the collapse. This case study, and its account of civil society targeting corporate subjectivities for public censure, helps supplement the idea of CSR activism being about corporations breaking rules. But the gulf between these findings and the mainstream of the business and society literature begs the question of how well the literature actually understands the worldwide “demand” for CSR – particularly the “demand” from deeply critical constituencies. We need more research on why some firms are targeted, and how, and why others are not. This dissertation has some insights that match up well with the empirical literature, thus perhaps permitting some future theory building, but the fundamental question of whether we truly understand society’s demands of business remains.

Despite thousands of articles and hundreds of academic books about CSR, we still lack even basic knowledge about some foundational political questions, especially regarding business and society’s discursive politics. It is troubling that this is the case. For instance, consider the issue of how there are so many different discourses to discuss firms reacting to society’s demands for change. The choice of labeling metaphor that a firm, or a claimant,\textsuperscript{91} I also note, in passing, that both the Gap (Maheshwari, 2013) and H&M (Brownstone, 2014) articles are fairly sympathetic to the companies on these points. Focusing on actual behavioral transgressions, and not on motives or rationales behind decision-making, seemed fruitful for these companies in their dealings with media (granted, this makes sense given they had no connection with Rana Plaza).
might insist upon for framing an encounter ought to be very important for the political success of the encounter (Benford and Snow, 2000; Connolly, 1983; Tilly, 2006). For instance, is corporate reaction to society best described as a matter of “corporate social responsibility” (CSR), “corporate responsibility”, “corporate citizenship”, the “triple bottom line”, “conscious capitalism”, “sustainability”, “shared value” (CSV), or good old “business ethics”92? Each metaphor presumably carries with it a unique variety of discursive effects, and both theorists and practitioners seem sure that the vocabulary matters “on the ground” (Neron and Norman, 2008a; 2008b; Van Oosterhout 2008; Wood and Logsdon, 2008) yet there is virtually no extant empirical research about what those different discursive effects might be.

For instance, we might assume that “sustainability” discourse carries special environmental connotations that “CSR” or “business ethics” might not, thus presumably heightening audience expectations that a firm ought to take the environment into account in its decision making. But we do not actually know if this is the case: perhaps audiences would have the exact same environmental expectations of firms upon hearing about a firm’s “CSR” or “business ethics”. Significant theoretical work has been done to determine what connotations given discourses could or should have (Bendell, 2004; Matten and Crane, 2005; Neron and Norman, 2008; Waddock, 2004), but almost nobody has asked what discursive effects these discourses do have. We can only presume that the politics travelling under these

92 Matten and Crane’s (2005) work on corporate citizenship, and Jem Bendell’s (2004) work on corporate accountability, each do some of this important work, but both articles have their primary interests elsewhere.
discourses change according to which labels are used, a finding that would be consistent with wider discussions of discursive repertoires (Tilly, 2006) and political framing (Benford and Snow, 2000), yet there is virtually no empirical evidence of that specific to business and society engagements.

How has a literature with thousands of articles never asked these types of questions? Moreover, this is far from the only unresolved major political question facing business and society scholars today: we also lack sophisticated insight into why activists and managers, to the extent they can choose the discourse through which they communicate their positions, choose the discourses they do. Again; we can only presume. Part of the issue is that business and society research, an innately interdisciplinary field, has always fractured along disciplinary lines: the huge number of organizational theorists interested in CSR issues generally focus on organizational change internal to the firm, management strategy theorists focus on aligning CSR to the corporate mandate, philosophically-trained ethicists generally ask themselves what ought to be required of firms, and political economists are generally fascinated in linking CSR to corporate and state agendas. None of these backgrounds naturally lend themselves to this task of linking political theory to on-the-ground reporting of political CSR realities. There are undoubtedly many people working outside of these silos, but these are all-in-all strong background reasons for why the study of actual CSR politics, and the study of what claimants actually demand, how, and why, remains under-theorized.

This type of under-theorization is a mistake and a missed opportunity. It is a mistake because it leads to weak positive theory that lacks explanatory and predictive power (ie, as argued in the extended introduction and chapter one – most of the received wisdom about
activists targeting firms tends to be overdetermined). These theories are not incorrect, but are rather metaphors, imported from state politics and then imposed from above to capture the phenomena, that capture certain aspects of the social demands put on business at the expense of other aspects of those demands. Seeing CSR politics as “social government” deploying “social” imagery helps complement those theories to create a more holistic account of CSR politics. But this is not enough – we need more work on why claimants, be they professional activists at powerful NGOs or concerned everyday people in the community, put their demands in the ways they do, what they actually want to see change, and what they think is holding them back from greater success in securing their agendas.

Moreover, this under-theorization at the level of actually understanding CSR politics as lived discourse is a missed normative opportunity because it means that businesspeople insufficiently understand how they are embedded – whether they like it or not – in a wider society. We need to ask ourselves: are truly critical or disruptive voices ever really heard by business audiences reading today’s business and society literature? Business and society researchers have asked in the past if CSR theorists, and CSR practitioners (be they activists or managers), in effect operate “in parallel worlds” (Conley and Williams, 2006; Waddock, 2004), rarely to ever meet. Scholarship, let alone managerial practice, cannot be responsive to actual demands of actual people if we as scholars insufficiently ask people what they mean by, and what they think about, “corporate social responsibility”. Does today’s business and society literature properly understand the moral imaginaries motivating CSR politics? I am unconvinced. I certainly do not see the empirical research, or positive theory, that shows management scholars or businesspeople the deep and palpable anger at corporate abuse that
many stakeholders feel. The distrust and woundedness of social movements such as the Occupy Movement? are essentially absent from the literature, as if they are not really important next to the essential subject of how to convince firms to react to those demands. Yet if you scratch an inch deep it is all right there, ready to be seen, understood, and engaged with. Managers, just as at Gap and H&M, ignore it at their peril.

6.2 Conclusion

At root, helping in some small ways to give voice to the “demand” for CSR was the objective of the dissertation. It should be immediately apparent that governmentality, with its long and rich theoretical engagement with regulating the liberal market (Dean, 2010a; Dean and Hindess, 1998; Lipschutz, 2005; Rose, 1999) and its canny understanding of how an emphasis on voluntarism could conveniently conceal underlying compulsion, was, and still is, an essential lens to better understand this phenomena. But it was equally apparent that the usual governmentality narrative, of the onward march of neoliberalism, had to be problematized for governmentality analysis to be useful in considering these issues. That new problematized narrative, laid out in chapters one and two, of a hybridized “social”

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? I would not want to suggest that these feelings best describe Occupy, but they were important strains of thought and affect that ran at the core of the movement. They don’t in any way undermine how Occupy was also joyous and emotionally open in ways that most protest movements are not.

? Again, there are a few important exceptions to this: see, among others; Banerjee (2008, 2010), Bendell (2004), Fleming and Jones (2013). But these are relatively isolated voices, and are particularly under-represented at top journals and presses.
governance that retains the imagery (and many of the practices) of labour movement appeals to solidarity, but which is amended to better suit largely neoliberal contexts, can help us better understand those so-called “radical” voices that business elites see as trading in “wishful thinking” (Porter and Kramer, 2014; 150) in promoting CSR. More to the point, in the face of critics who see CSR as “misguided” moralizing (Henderson, 2001), or see in CSRs perpetual ambivalence about how to reconcile the profit-motive with social demands an evasion that just “muddies the waters” (Freeland, 2010), understanding CSR politics as often adopting a “social” mode can help us situate those activists in long-successful political traditions worthy of time and respect.

After all, if activists’ strategies, discourses, and practices are pulling from a hundred years of institutional knowledge, including but not limited to that of the labour movement, should we assume that their asking companies, sometimes very nicely, to show they care is ‘misguided’? Perhaps, but we should also consider how activists’ being open to that seemingly-naïve possibility of the companies actually caring about stakeholder welfare also serves to highlight, to observers, corporate cultures and businesspeople’s subjectivities as matters of public interest. And if stakeholders lack sophisticated resources for tracking and measuring corporate behavior on a given matter, just as activists did in the case of the Bangladeshi garment industry, which features thousands of factories and rampant grey-market subcontracting, then credibly targeting behavior can be challenging. In the case of

95 See Clean Clothes Campaign (2013e) for an example of this tactic.
Rana Plaza, charting actual corporate acts was not as damning for companies as activists would have liked.

And what did happen to work more or less as hoped? Claiming causal relationships should be done with restraint, but in both the case study of reactions to Rana Plaza, as well as the case example of Asia Pulp and Paper’s (APP) palm oil sourcing policy, two campaigns that can credibly be called the highest profile business and society controversies of 2012 and 2013\(^{96}\), respectively, the politics of corporate anthropomorphization, and the personal criticism of executives’s subjectivities, seem to have proved quite useful. In both cases, well briefed and hostile firms were targeted as anti-social corporate cultures, where anti-social businesspeople worked – for more detail, see chapters one and three. These campaigns were vulgar, uncivil, and sometimes advanced through borderline illegal means. They also seem to have worked; and in the case of H&M, the claims of anti-sociality followed, from beginning to end, a “social” script featuring the juxtaposition of worker suffering with executive wealth, the invocation of interdependence through the supply chain, and a simple challenge for H&M and its chairman to display its caring. If activists had followed the mainstream account of how to advance corporate responsibility, which focuses on creating institutional supports for dialogue, fostering trust and interpersonal rapport, and on prompting better communication

\(^{96}\) This might seem excessive, but it is not. APP is one of the largest pulp and paper companies in the world, and carries extensive holdings in particularly sensitive ecological settings (known as HCVFs: High Conservation Value Forests, and HCSs: High Carbon Stock areas). APPs subsequent efforts to end deforestation of HCVFs and HCSs in its supply chain has been hailed as a major breakthrough that protects Indonesian rainforests as well as large amounts of carbon stored in the earth (especially in peat stocks). See chapter three for more detail. H&M’s compliance helped lead to the success of the Bangladesh Accord for Fire and Building Safety, which now covers thousands of factories and almost a million workers. See chapter one for more detail.
flows, these advertisements would not have run, and who knows what would have happened. Could Avaaz and the CCC have produced such a startling advertisement without “social” imagery to draw upon?

Finally, this dissertation also sought to support and protect the essential ambiguity, about whether CSR demands sacrifice of the profit motive, that lies at the heart of so much CSR advocacy. Other observers – both from the critical left (Banerjee, 2007, 2010; Hanlon, 2008) and establishment right (Friedman, 1970; Porter and Kramer, 2011; Sundaram and Inkpen, 2004) have always perceived this as a weakness, as if CSR cannot make up its mind. If CSR is always evading the question of sacrifice, then we can forgive those who would see, in it, a lack of principle. But this is still a mistake. As shown in chapter four, CSR allows us to imagine, and thus demand, something that might well be impossible: a world of benevolent firms which are responsive to society while also generating plenty of return for investors. CSR allows this conceptual impossibility by uniting within one discourse two mirror-image ideas: the benevolent firm, and the self-interested firm. This might sound absurd in the abstract, but in practice it works to enable a series of important dynamics: activists have a discourse through which to demand change, executives have a normative discourse to champion but also a range of instrumental arguments with which to persuade skeptics within their firms, and firms have language by which they can project their prosocial values while publically hedging as to whether or not a given CSR policy will actually return financial value to stakeholders. All of these processes are more or less possible without CSR discourse, but none function ideally without it. For instance, in every case immediately above the engagement is made easier by our making motives behind decision-making unclear:
activists can ask for change without plainly demanding painful sacrifice, while firms can respond to society while portraying those reactions as voluntary “win-wins”.

Some observers might see this as evasive or unprincipled. Yet the proof of every pudding is in the eating, and despite the widespread popularity of CSV arguments that firms should move “beyond trade-offs” (Porter and Kramer, 2011: 4), and instead should proudly state that they only pursue social objectives that return strategic benefits, where are the large firms that actually do proudly state that they refuse to restrain themselves in cases of predictable inordinate distress? They simply do not exist. Firms always retain the fig leaf of being open to hypothetically restraining themselves. Now, recognition of this fact does not constitute a great moral victory, but it does show that norms of obligation do have a certain value, and that norms of subjectivity do still retain some power, even today. The studies here have sought to actually show much more than this – they sought to show that norms of subjectivity, specifically those founded on ideas of interdependence and restraint, are important avenues by which activists seek to secure their agendas when engaging firms. Moving forward, whatever your objective, be it to better understand CSR politics phenomena, or be it to support relatively marginalized CSR actors, recognizing this functionality built on evasiveness and ambiguity, and targeted at businesspeople’s subjectivity as well as firms’ institutional mandates, will be essential.
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### Appendices

*Appendix A: Table of Selected “Social” Public Discourse Regarding Bangladeshi Factory Safety: November 2012 to May 2014*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/ Speaker</th>
<th>Organization, Civil Society Movement, or Media Outlet</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Target of Comment</th>
<th>Quotation</th>
<th>Theme(s)</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akter, Kalpona</td>
<td>Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) / AFL-CIO</td>
<td>June 5, 2013</td>
<td>Walmart</td>
<td>“…They don’t want to share their profits with anyone…”</td>
<td>Challenging Subjectivity of Economic Agents, Ambiguous Challenging of Profit-Motive (without suggested alternative)</td>
<td>Eidelson, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akter, Kalpona</td>
<td>Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) / AFL-CIO</td>
<td>October 24, 2013</td>
<td>Major Retailers</td>
<td>“It’s shocking that companies that were expressing their profound grief after the Rana Plaza tragedy are now failing to turn up to compensation talks…it brings into question the brands’ sincerity in helping workers who suffered death and injury while</td>
<td>Challenging Subjectivity of Economic Agents; Challenging the Projected Performance of Subjectivity by firms; Emphasis on clear line of responsibility; Emphasis on consumers’ interdependence with workers.</td>
<td>Al-Mahmood and Passariello, 2013</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Major Retailers

These callous companies are failing accept their responsibility to pay compensation, even while many of the survivors are unable to work and are unable to afford the medical treatment they need for the burn injuries and bone fractures that they sustained as a result of these companies’ negligence."

Challenging Subjectivity of Economic Agents; Emphasis of Suffering

Major Retailers

“These huge global companies continue to show callous indifference to the lives of the thousands of workers who toil for their Bangladesh contractors and subcontractors. There have been dozens more factory fires in the months since the Tazreen tragedy, and now hundreds

Challenging Subjectivity of Economic Agents; Ambiguous Challenging of Profit-Motive (without suggested alternative; Emphasis on Capacity of Firms; Emphasis of Clear Line of Responsibility

International Trade Union Confederation, 2013
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Source Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economist Magazine</td>
<td>May 4, 2013</td>
<td>Major Retailers</td>
<td>“Familiar brands now stand accused of exploiting poorly paid workers with a callous indifference to their safety”</td>
<td>Highlighting of (Perceived) Exploitation; Perceived Challenge to Subjectivity of Economic Agents</td>
<td>Economist, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kemperle, Monika</td>
<td>March 14, 2014</td>
<td>Major Retailers</td>
<td>“Since the beginning of negotiations we got commitments that brands will pay...Now we will see how serious brands are when we launch the Donor Trust funds on March 24.”</td>
<td>Challenging Firms’ Projected Performance of Subjectivity</td>
<td>Aulakh, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avaaz.org</td>
<td>May 3, 2013</td>
<td>Major Retailers</td>
<td>Online petition, signed 1.2 million times: “As citizens and consumers, we urge you to immediately sign...”</td>
<td>Challenging Subjectivity of Economic Agents, Ambiguous Challenging of Profit-Motive (without suggested</td>
<td>Avaaz.org, 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
an enforceable Bangladesh fire and building safety agreement, or risk fatal damage to your brand image. The agreement must commit you to pay for routine, independent inspections and safety upgrades for your supplier factories. Your companies and other multinationals profit from cheap labour, and can do much more to reduce the dangers of the places where your products are made."

| Kassam, Nadja | Clean Clothes Campaign | Feb. 12, 2014 | Mr. Rahel Sohel Rana, owner of Rana Plaza | “…we are humans like you…I want you to think about all the money you have. You are rich…Being fair is the way to care…Your ethics and behavior is as important as making a profit. You have a choice to make. | Challenging Subjectivity of Economic Agents, Challenging Profit-Motive of Firms, Call to Solidarization/Empathy (of firms with victims), Juxtaposition of Suffering with Capacity (petition sits alongside images of suffering). | Kassam, 2014 |

| Progressive | Progressive | May | Consumers and | "As Bangladesh workers pull the Invocation of solidarity (of Progressive Magazine, | | | 391 |
Retailers bodies of their friends from ruin of Rana Plaza, people half a world away wearing the clothes they sew should not turn their faces away. They need real knowledge about how their shirts and blouses are produced, and who produces them. Rather than the image manipulation of Social Accountability International and its competitor, the Fair Labor Association, they should demand the truth, and then use their power as consumers. They should drive companies guilty of industrial homicide out of the world’s markets.”

“Public Eye Awards 2014”

Public Eye Awards January 23, 2014 Gap Jury Prize Citation for “Hall of Shame” and “2014 Winner”… Gap as ”perpetrator”…”with over 1 Billion $ in net profits in

Challenging Subjectivity of Economic Agents, Challenging Profit-Motive of Firms, Juxtaposition of Suffering with Capacity.
| “Public Eye Awards 2014” | Public Eye Awards | January 23, 2014 | Gap | “the jury, without hesitation, shames Gap for its monstrous and disingenuous business practices…what’s the worst kind of irresponsible company? One that portrays an image of being a leader in responsibility while actively undermining real social responsibility” | Challenging Subjectivity (and challenging the projected performance of subjectivity) of Economic Agents/Firms | Public Eye Awards, 2014b |
| “Orphan’s Place” | United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) and International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) | February, 2014 | Children’s Place | “Children’s Place: Our Parents Died at Rana Plaza Producing Your Clothing…Children’s Place has Blood on its Hands” | Juxtaposition of Suffering with Capacity; Call to Empathy/Solidarization (of firms with victims) | Orphan’s Place, 2014 |

2012…”Gap (says) ‘we are committed’, but behind this seeming rosy picture that Gap tries to paint, the company is leaving workers to fear for their safety.”…”
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<td></td>
<td>“…because of cut-throat competition, suppliers refused to make renovations….because of big-business negligence and a desire to sell-and buy-the most at the cheapest price, warnings…were ignored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean Clothes Campaign</td>
<td>Clean Clothes Campaign</td>
<td>September 12, 2013</td>
<td>Non-Signatories of Compensation Plan for Rana Plaza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“…key brands turned their backs on workers’ plight….showing total contempt…9 brands showed good faith…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifford, Stephanie and Greenhouse, Steven</td>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>September 1, 2013</td>
<td>Western Retailers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Western companies now depend on inspectors to uncover hazardous work conditions, like faulty electrical wiring or blocked stairways, that have exposed some corporations to charges of irresponsibility and exploitation after factory disasters that killed hundreds of</td>
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<td>Challenging Subjectivity of Economic Agents/Firms</td>
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<td>Clifford and Greenhouse, 2013</td>
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<td>IndustriAL Global Union, 2013</td>
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<td>Olivier Cyran</td>
<td>Le Monde Diplomatique</td>
<td>June, 2013</td>
<td>Major Retailers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liana Foxveg</td>
<td>International Labor Rights Forum</td>
<td>May 6, 2013</td>
<td>Gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liana Foxveg and Judy Gearheart</td>
<td>Internationa l Labor Rights Forum</td>
<td>May 2, 2013</td>
<td>Disney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>October 10, 2013</td>
<td>Consumers/Stakeholders</td>
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woefully inadequate, and therefore brands have a moral obligation to pay their fair share and ensure decent compensation for the victims...It flies in the face of Disney family members’ generous contributions to charity in other fields. This is a reaction not to be emulated. We continue to invite Disney to help the workers in Bangladesh through paying its fair share into the victims’ fund and by making a real commitment to being socially responsible.”
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<td>Anna Gedda</td>
<td>H&amp;M</td>
<td>May 19, 2013</td>
<td>Consumers/Stakeholders</td>
<td>“we were devastated by the incident in Bangladesh…we really have a genuine interest in making sure this leads to improvements on the ground.”</td>
<td>Alderman, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad Adams</td>
<td>Human Rights Watch</td>
<td>February 6, 2014</td>
<td>Consumers/Firms/Bangladeshi</td>
<td>“The best way to avoid future Rana Plaza-type disasters and end the exploitation of Bangladeshi workers is to encourage the establishment of independent trade unions to monitor and protect workers’ rights. The government has belatedly begun to register unions, which is an important first step, but it now needs to ensure that factory owners stop persecuting their leaders and actually allow them to function.”</td>
<td>Human Rights Watch, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Action</td>
<td>Internationals</td>
<td>March, 2013</td>
<td>Consumers/Workers/Companies</td>
<td>“Join workers and demand action.”</td>
<td>Internationals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
consumers around the world in a day of action on April 24, 2014, to stand in solidarity with garment workers in Bangladesh. One year after the Rana Plaza building collapse killed at least 1,135 people in the worst garment industry catastrophe the world has ever seen, concerned citizens around the world will demand that apparel brands and retailers pay full and fair compensation to the victims of the Rana Plaza collapse, the Tazreen factory fire, and other apparel industry disasters.”

“North Face: Never Stop Exploiting (play on North Face: Never Stop Exploring)…1134 workers were murdered in April 2013…North Face and its parent company, VF, have spent years

Call to Solidarization (of consumers/citizens with victims and workers); Challenging Subjectivity of Economic Agents/Firms; Challenging the Projected Performance of a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peter McAllister</td>
<td>Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)</td>
<td>October 24, 2013</td>
<td>Major Retailers</td>
<td>&quot;There is a sort of genuine cost advantage that could be exploited (in Bangladesh), and then there is the exploitation of that, if you like.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monika Kemperle</td>
<td>IndustriAL Global Union</td>
<td>September 12, 2013</td>
<td>Non-Signatories of Compensati on Plan for</td>
<td>“…the disregard of the absent brands for the plight of workers…is shocking in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Nova</td>
<td>Workers’ Rights Consortium (working with the CCC)</td>
<td>Septemb er 12, 2013</td>
<td>Non-Signatories of Compensati on Plan for Rana Plaza</td>
<td>“It is past time that…their families receive assistance from the international brands and retailers that profited from these workers’ labor. It is shocking that not only have hardly any brands committed to any concrete level of assistance, but even more so that most of the companies implicated in the disaster did not even bother to show up to discuss helping the victims.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Nova</td>
<td>Workers’ Rights Consortium</td>
<td>December 6, 2012</td>
<td>Walmart</td>
<td>“…Walmart’s efforts to evade accountability make a mockery of its pretensions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

extreme. Empty promises and direct untruths…all so that these Western multinationals can avoid making payments that amount to a minute percentage of turnover ”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Gap</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Call to Solidarization/Empathy (in regards to)</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zakia Afrin</td>
<td>ILRF and USAS</td>
<td>May 25, 2013</td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>“…I feel so grateful that so many people who aren't directly connected to Bangladesh are here because we need that international solidarity…”</td>
<td>Call to Solidarization/Empathy (in regards to citizens and consumers with victims)</td>
<td>ILRF and USAS, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kung Feng</td>
<td>San Francisco Jobs with</td>
<td>May 25, 2013</td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>“As labor rights advocates in the US, it’s important</td>
<td>Call to Solidarization/Empathy (in regards to</td>
<td>ILRF and USAS,</td>
</tr>
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</table>

402
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Justice (working with IRLF and USAS)</strong></th>
<th>to also stand with our brothers and sisters abroad. No one anywhere should die for fashion”</th>
<th>citizens and consumers with victims and Bangladeshi workers)</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primark</strong></td>
<td><strong>Primark</strong></td>
<td><strong>July 2013</strong></td>
<td><strong>Consumers/Stakeholders</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Primark was shocked and deeply saddened by the events in Savar on April 24, 2013”</strong></td>
<td><strong>Projected performance of subjectivity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Primark, 2013</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jyrki Raina</strong></td>
<td><strong>IndustriAL Global Union</strong></td>
<td><strong>May 21, 2013</strong></td>
<td><strong>Gap</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Gap has a reputation as being ethical with strong leadership in corporate social responsibility. Today it has a golden opportunity to show this reputation is genuine and not just a part of its US$600 million PR campaign.”</strong></td>
<td><strong>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations</strong></td>
<td><strong>IndustriAL Global Union, 2013</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Roy Ramesh</strong></td>
<td><strong>General Secretary, Bangladesh, IndustriAL Global Union</strong></td>
<td><strong>April 26, 2013</strong></td>
<td><strong>Major Retailers, factory owners, government officials, and trade groups.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“No words can describe the horror of the criminal action of the manufacturers, brands, employers’ groups BGMEA and BKMEA, and the regulatory authorities for their greed for”</strong></td>
<td><strong>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations; Implicit Critique of Profit-Motive Model of Firm</strong></td>
<td><strong>IndustriAL L, 2013</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean Clothes Campaign</td>
<td>Clean Clothes Campaign</td>
<td>May 25, 2013</td>
<td>WalMart, Sears, Disney and others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ineke Zeldenrust</td>
<td>Clean Clothes Campaign</td>
<td>September 4, 2013</td>
<td>Walmart, Benetton, and Mango</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to come to the meeting and Mango still dodges responsibility. Walmart, the biggest company in the world, whines that it can't keep control of its supply chain. Hundreds of families have lost breadwinners, while the workers who survived have been horrifically injured and lost their jobs, not to mention the psychological impact of these disasters. They deserve better.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clean Clothes Campaign</th>
<th>Clean Clothes Campaign</th>
<th>May 15, 2013</th>
<th>Walmart and Gap</th>
<th>“Gap and WalMart refuse to sign the Bangladesh Safety Accord, undermining any ethical commitment they made. How many people have to die before CSR becomes more than a PR tool?”</th>
<th>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations</th>
<th>Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clean Clothes</td>
<td>Clean Clothes</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>Benetton</td>
<td>Benetton, if you weren't sourcing</td>
<td>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations</td>
<td>Clean Clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign</td>
<td>Campaign</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Economic Agents/Organizations</td>
<td>Denning, 2013</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29, 2013</td>
<td>from the collapsed factories in Bangladesh, what are your labels doing in the debris? Come forward and take responsibility now</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Denning, Steve</td>
<td>Forbes</td>
<td>May 23, 2013</td>
<td>Gap Inc may say, as it does on its website, that 'For decades, we’ve been paying increasing attention to the processes that make up our supply chain, and even to the lifecycle of a given garment'. But when push to comes to shove, none of that matters. The chief executive confirms that protecting shareholder value is what is driving decision making...dealing with moral and ethical issues flowing from the death of 1,127 workers in Bangladesh doesn’t seem to be urgent or even relevant to the American firms.</td>
<td>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations; Challenging the projected subjectivity of Firms; Ambivalent Critique of Profit-Motive of Firms</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Instead, it’s shareholder value and business as usual...Even if we accept the abhorrent logic that urgent moral and ethical issues aren’t relevant to business decisions..."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Organization/Collaboration</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jyrki Raina</td>
<td>IndustriALL (and collaborating with CCC)</td>
<td>May 16, 2013</td>
<td>Non-Signatories to the Accord</td>
<td>“…there can be no uncommitted passengers because the stakes are too high. We are talking improving the working conditions and lives of some of the most exploited workers in the world”</td>
<td>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations, Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean Clothes Campaign</td>
<td>Clean Clothes Campaign</td>
<td>March 21, 2013</td>
<td>H&amp;M</td>
<td>“Conscious H&amp;M? Not really...We call on H&amp;M to live up to its ‘conscious’ claims”</td>
<td>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum of Us</td>
<td>Sum of Us</td>
<td>January, 2013</td>
<td>Walmart and Sears</td>
<td>“…fighting for people over profits…are you ready to step up and stand with Sumi and Kalpona (two Bangladeshi)</td>
<td>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations. Call to Solidarization/Empathy (in regards to Sum of Us, 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Quote</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sum of Us</td>
<td>Sum of Us</td>
<td>March 2014</td>
<td>“corporations” “what we stand for:… Fair treatment of workers and the right of every human being to make a living, safely and ethically, for themselves and their family;… Business models that put people and the planet first instead of being driven by shortsighted greed.”</td>
<td>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations; Ambivalent Challenging of Profit-Motive of Firms (model is explicitly critiqued, but with no alternative)</td>
<td>Sum of Us, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Sinclair</td>
<td>British Columbia Federation of Labour</td>
<td>November 25, 2013</td>
<td>Hudson’s Bay Company “it’s gotta end, Canadians won’t tolerate it, Hudson’s Bay should do the right thing and sign the Accord…the answer is for Hudson’s Bay to sign the Accord, ok? And they know they should</td>
<td>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations</td>
<td>Sinclair, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Company/Source</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Reference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jim Sinclair</td>
<td>British Columbia Federation of Labour</td>
<td>November 25, 2013</td>
<td>Hudson’s Bay Company</td>
<td>“sign it. They know that if they have an ounce of morality they will sign the Accord.”</td>
<td>Sinclair, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theuws, Van Huijstee,</td>
<td>Clean Clothes Campaign, SOMO – Centre for Research</td>
<td>March 2013</td>
<td>Multinational Retailers</td>
<td>“look at these pictures...1100 dead....can you imagine this happening here, in Vancouver? I can’t....these clothers were for us. When they went to work that morning, they went to work to produce the clothes so that Canadians could put clothes on their backs...Canadians don’t want blood on their clothes.”</td>
<td>Theuws et al., 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overeem, Van Seters,</td>
<td>Multination</td>
<td>al Corporation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Calls for Solidarization/Empathy (of consumers and citizens), Calls for Recognition of Interdependence.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Message</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loblaws</td>
<td></td>
<td>April 25, 2013</td>
<td>Consumers/Stakeholders</td>
<td>“…we continue to express our condolences to those affected by this tragedy in Bangladesh and we are deeply saddened…we are committed to supporting local authorities in the rescue and care of affected families…Loblaw is committed to finding solutions….we are committed to taking the necessary steps to drive change.”</td>
<td>Projected performance of subjectivity by a firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loblaws</td>
<td></td>
<td>April 29, 2013</td>
<td>Consumers/Stakeholders</td>
<td>“We are committed to keeping you aware of any new developments…our priorities are helping the victims and their families, and driving change to help prevent similar incidents in the future…our heartfelt condolences continue to go out to those in Savar, Bangladesh.”</td>
<td>Projected temporary ambivalence about the profit motive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Segment</td>
<td>Message</td>
<td>Source</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 3, 2013</td>
<td>Loblaws</td>
<td>Consumers/Stakeholders</td>
<td>“we continue to express our condolences to those affected in Savar, Bangladesh, and we are deeply saddened by this tragedy…our priorities are helping victims and their families, and driving change to help prevent similar incidents like this in the future…Joe Fresh Creative Director Joe Mimran and Loblaw Chairman Galen Weston are committed…”</td>
<td>Loblaw, 2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 14, 2013</td>
<td>Loblaws</td>
<td>Consumers/Stakeholders</td>
<td>“The Accord aligns with and addresses the Company’s commitments to a new standard that all of its control brand products must be made in facilities that respect local construction and building codes. Loblaw will maintain its promise to have its own people on…”</td>
<td>Loblaw, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Quote</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pope Francis</td>
<td>Roman Catholic Church</td>
<td>May 1, 2013</td>
<td>Retailers and Factory Owners</td>
<td>“Living on 38 euros ($50) a month - that was the pay of these people who died. That is called slave labour… Not paying a just wage, not giving work, only because one is looking at the bottom line, at the budget of the company, seeking only profit - that is against God… think of how many, and not just young people, are unemployed, many times due to a purely economic conception of society, which seeks selfish profit, beyond the parameters of social justice”</td>
<td>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations; Ambivalence regarding profit-motive of firms (alternative presented as wider conception of roles in society)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gareth Price</td>
<td>Oxfam</td>
<td>April 26, 2013</td>
<td>Consumers/Citizens</td>
<td>“The Savar tragedy is a reminder of the… Consumer and politician”</td>
<td>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Oxfam, 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

hidden cost of cheap clothes...this remains a dangerous, low paid and exploitative sector...It is people like these who are paying the price for the cheap clothes that now fill so many high street shops across the world. They pay this price by risking their lives working in unsafe buildings, for long hours, often in terrible conditions, for terrible wages...A combination of poverty, greed, corruption and political interest leaves them incredibly vulnerable. This need not be the case. When it comes to the garment industry, as consumers we are involved and with involvement comes responsibility. We can make choices that will make a difference. So too can retailers. The

| Jones | hidden cost of cheap clothes...this remains a dangerous, low paid and exploitative sector...It is people like these who are paying the price for the cheap clothes that now fill so many high street shops across the world. They pay this price by risking their lives working in unsafe buildings, for long hours, often in terrible conditions, for terrible wages...A combination of poverty, greed, corruption and political interest leaves them incredibly vulnerable. This need not be the case. When it comes to the garment industry, as consumers we are involved and with involvement comes responsibility. We can make choices that will make a difference. So too can retailers. The | Agents/Organizations; Implicit critique of profit-motive of firms (suggests it goes to far and corrodes standards out of greed); Call for Solidarization/Empathy (of consumers/citizens with workers and victims); Emphasis of interdependence through involvement in the value chain; Creation of consumption as locus of displaying values and asking for similar displays of subjectivity from firms. |
The easiest thing is to choose not to see the story behind the brands, but we can also choose to buy clothes that are the products of transparent and non-abusive supply chains. Retailers can choose to do the same.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Going to Work</th>
<th>Going to Work/Trade Union Congress (TUC) / Labourstart / IndustriAL</th>
<th>April-May 2013</th>
<th>Major Retailers</th>
<th>“Cash-strapped UK shoppers aren’t the problem…corporate greed keeps wages low. Help tell multinationals to pay more…Better pay and safety in Bangladesh is affordable…Don’t be guilt-tripped into thinking that poor wages and dangerous working conditions in Bangladesh’s textile industry are because western consumers…want cheaper clothes.”</th>
<th>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations; Ambivalent critique of profit-motive of firms (suggests it goes too far and corrodes standards).</th>
<th>Going to Work, 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bob Chant</td>
<td>Loblaws</td>
<td>October 24, 2013</td>
<td>Consumers/Stakeholders</td>
<td>“…we express our condolences…we continue to be deeply committed</td>
<td>Projected performance of subjectivity by a</td>
<td>Loblaws, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Quote</td>
<td>Source</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bob Chant</td>
<td>Loblaws</td>
<td>November 22, 2013</td>
<td>Consumers/Stakeholders</td>
<td>“We believe we have a moral obligation to support the workers who are producing our products. Our chairman has voiced disappointment that more brands haven’t stepped up.”</td>
<td>Projected performance of subjectivity; Moral Obligation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen, Michelle</td>
<td>In These Times (Opinion Column)</td>
<td>May 29, 2013</td>
<td>Major Retailers</td>
<td>“Perhaps refusing an insulting payout is the strongest challenge to the callousness of multinational companies that workers can raise. In an industry that ruthlessly devalues poor people's lives to chase ever-higher profits, the most valuable thing workers have left to fight for is their dignity.”</td>
<td>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations; Ambivalent Challenging of Firms’ Profit Motives</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rick Westhead</td>
<td>Toronto Star</td>
<td>October 21, 2013</td>
<td>Western Consumers (audience)</td>
<td>“Since the beginning, low wages and an</td>
<td>Juxtaposition of suffering and capacity;</td>
<td>Westhead, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Source</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scott Nova</td>
<td>Worker’s Rights Consortium</td>
<td>August 26 2013</td>
<td>Walmart</td>
<td>“Walmart is a pioneer and also the most ruthless practitioner of a sourcing model that has now come to dominate the apparel industry”</td>
<td>Al Jazeera English, 2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georges Paquet</td>
<td>Garment Industry Intermediary in Dhaka</td>
<td>June, 2013</td>
<td>Major Retailers, especially H&amp;Mf</td>
<td>“The problem is that my clients are driving down prices more and more. Do they want people to work for nothing? European brands sell at a sevenfold mark-up — they multiply the price they get from us by seven, or even ten. There is no limit to their desire for profit. Longstanding clients can leave us overnight if a competitor undercuts us by 10 cents. The hypocrisy is breathtaking. At the same time as...”</td>
<td>Cyran, 2013</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Shameless Magazine | Shameless Magazine | September 19, 2013 | Joe Fresh/Loblaws | “Joe Fresh = Joe Death… never forget the garment factory collapse in Bangladesh, one of many, many worker’s tragedies which has happened since the garment industry has existed.

Solidarity with struggling garment industry workers all over the world. Safer working conditions and better pay needed now! |

Call for Solidarization (of consumers/citizens with workers and victims) | Shameless Magazine, 2013 |

the management of H&M were meeting Sheikh Hasina (Bangladesh’s Prime Minister) to demand better working conditions in Bangladeshi factories, their subordinates were negotiating a 15% price reduction from suppliers. Their attitude is ‘We don’t care how you do it — just make it happen’.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UFCW Members</th>
<th>UFCW Members</th>
<th>April 11, 2014</th>
<th>Children’s Place</th>
<th>“Children’s Place, you can’t hide, we can see your greedy side!”</th>
<th>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Organizations</th>
<th>(Sibayan, 2014)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sujeet Sennik</td>
<td>Former Designer at Walmart, designer of garments produced in unsafe Bangladeshi Factories, including possibly Rana Plaza</td>
<td>October 11, 2013</td>
<td>Walmart and similar firms</td>
<td>“(Upon visiting the remains of Rana Plaza)...this is a monument to greed...people know about this now. It can’t continue like this.”</td>
<td>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations</td>
<td>CBC, 2013b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto Star (unsigned editorial)</td>
<td>Toronto Star</td>
<td>October 25, 2013</td>
<td>Major Retailers</td>
<td>“…the move by Loblaw clearly carries the most weight and has the potential to make a real difference in the lives of the workers most directly affected by the Rana Plaza disaster, by far the deadliest accident in an industry notorious for putting little value on the lives and safety of its labour force…” Loblaw deserves at least modest applause for joining Primark in doing something</td>
<td>Challenging the Performed Subjectivities of Firms; Implicit critique of profit-motivated firms (insufficient “value” placed on lives).</td>
<td>Toronto Star, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Quote</td>
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<tr>
<td>Firstpost (Editorial)</td>
<td>May 14, 2013</td>
<td>Major Retailers</td>
<td>“It took 1127 deaths in Bangladesh to find retailers’ hearts…sometimes it takes a tragedy of enormous proportions…to bestir the conscience of multinational corporations and brand-labels that profit from low-wage sweatshop culture… Perhaps beneath all the rubble of the collapsed Rana Plaza, you'll find buried the pitiless hearts of garment retailers who profit unjustly from unsafe working conditions.”</td>
<td>Challenging the Subjectivities of Economic Agents/Organizations, Firstpost, 2013</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| UFCW                           | May 3, 2013    | Major Retailers            | “UFCW…is offering its condolences…to...Projected performance of subjectivity (by)…UFCW, 2013
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workers – Canada (UFCW - Canada)</th>
<th>products made by workers in Rana were handled by UFCW members every day, and we feel and extra strong connection to these workers and their families…UFCW is ready to partner with any employer who is sincerely committed to improving the situation in Bangladesh, and we must commend Loblaws for showing leadership and responsibility in the wake of this tragedy by accepting our offer to assist with NGOs, by promising to improve inspection standards, and to provide badly needed relief to the devastated families.”</th>
<th>union and union members), recognition of interdependence and call to solidarization/empathy (of union members with other workers within a supply chain), Role of economic subjectivities (here, UFCW is appreciative of Loblaws’ performances).</th>
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<tr>
<td>William Atwood</td>
<td>Illinois State Board of Investment</td>
<td>May 14, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weston, Galen</td>
<td>Executive Chairman of Loblaw, Inc.</td>
<td>May 2, 2013</td>
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<td>Investment, for putting workers at some crazy risk,”… “I would hope Wal-Mart will look real seriously at rethinking their approach to these procedures</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Original screengrab taken May 8, 2013.

As the original (unannotated) image was intended by its authors to be presented in a web browser, this annotated image happens to run just under 51 inches long and just under 14 inches wide. This is not easily transferable to a document format, though I believe the visual aid is worthwhile. To preserve and present the entire image in a document format, I have split the image into 5 smaller images that can each fit on a document page if shrunk in accordance with the maximum legible document width of 6.25 inches (8.5 inches minus margins). There is a small loss of the image in this way, but it does not impede the presentation of the salient information. The images are shifted towards the left-hand side of the document so that if a printer or document reader cuts the images, the salient information is not affected. The images begin on the next page.

At the time of writing, the original image can still be found at the original website: www.northfacedeathtraps.com. If possible, I suggest seeing the website in the original, contiguous, state to get the best idea of how the image (and advocacy) works as a whole.
A CONTRACT TO END DEATHTRAPS
NO ONE SHOULD DIE FOR FASHION

North Face and its parent company, VF Corporation, have spent years evading responsibility for worker safety to maximize profit at all cost – even the cost of a human life. As a result, since 2015 more than 1,800 garment workers have died in preventable factory disasters.

Together with Bangladeshi workers, students on more than 150 college campuses are declaring that they’ve had enough. United Students Against Sweatshops is calling on North Face/VF Corporation to take responsibility for the safety of their workers and sign a contract to end deathtraps — the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh.

After months of campaigning by USAS and its union allies, more than 100 companies, including American Eagle, H&M, and Adidas, have
signed the Accord. However, VF Corporation, the largest branded apparel manufacturer in the world, has refused to sign.

Join us in taking action to end this senseless string of industrial disasters in Bangladesh. Join us to End North Face Deathtraps.

LATEST NEWS
UPDATES FROM THE FRONT LINES

STUDENTS LAUNCH CAMPAIGN TO END NORTH FACE DEATHTRAPS
FEBRUARY 13, 2014

SCHOOLS THAT HAVE REQUIRED LICENSEES TO SIGN THE BANGLADESH SAFETY ACCORD
Duke University
University of Pennsylvania
New York University
Temple University
Columbia University
Pennsylvania State University
Georgetown University
Cornell University

Make your campus next!

THE FACTS
HOW THE NORTH FACE IS ENDANGERING BANGLADESH GARMENT WORKERS

The Company

424
• VF Corporation is the largest maker of branded apparel in the world. VF is the parent company of 35 brands, including North Face, Vans, Timberland, JanSport, VF Imagewear, Wrangler, Lee, and Nautica.

• VF Corporation produces approximately 450 million units per year spread across 36 brands. VF operates 29 manufacturing facilities and uses approximately 1,900 contractor factories in 63 countries. In 2012, VF Corporation brought in $16.8 billion in revenue and $3.06 billion in gross profit.

• Eric Wiseman is the CEO of VF Corporation. In 2012, Wiseman received $14.2 million in compensation.

Worker Safety in Bangladesh

• VF was producing at That's It Sportswear Factory in Bangladesh (owned by Kameen Group), which burned in December of 2010, killing 29 workers and injuring more than a hundred. The factory had illegal construction, no proper fire exits, shoddy wiring, and many exit doors were locked. Workers were trapped on the top floors of the factory. Many jumped to their deaths. VF had repeatedly inspected the factory and yet had completely failed to address the safety hazards.

• In October of 2012, another VF factory, Euranax, which was discussed as a producer of collegiate apparel, burned in Dhaka. This was a major fire, though it did not completely destroy the factory. No one was killed in the fire, but the factory was closed for a holiday—so if the fire had occurred during the workday, many could have died. When contacted about this fire, VF claimed that their own disclosures data was wrong and they had stopped using the factory.

• In August, the Worker Rights Consortium conducted a safety assessment of Optimum Fashion, a long-time VF contract factory producing collegiate apparel. After VF attempted to prevent the WRC from accessing the factory, the WRC’s inspection uncovered a number of very serious safety hazards, all of which constitute violations of university code of conduct provisions requiring licensees to maintain safe workplaces and any of which could result in injury or death to workers. These violations included inadequate means for workers to escape the factory in the event of a fire or structural failure that could facilitate the rapid and widespread propagation of deadly smoke throughout the factory building.

• Despite its sizeable presence in Bangladesh and evidence of mishandling of safety hazards in its factories, VF Corporation has refused to sign the Bangladesh Safety Accord, a legally-binding agreement between brands and unions—now signed by more than 120 brands and retailers—that holds the promise of bringing an end to the mass factory disasters in Bangladesh garment factories.

• Rather than signing the Accord, VF has joined forces with Walmart and the Gap to create a corporate-controlled, non-binding agreement called the “Alliance for Worker Safety.” Unions and labor rights advocates have criticized this program for its exclusion of workers and their representatives and its failure to obligate brands to pay a single cent toward the repair and renovation of unsafe factories.

Crisis of Compliance in VF Corporation’s Supply Chain

• In February 2012, the Hawkins Apparel factory in Honduras, which produced non-collegiate apparel for several buyers, including VF Corporation and Jerry Leigh, closed without paying workers approximately $300,000 in legally-mandated compensation. After the factory closure, the WRC contacted Droney, one of Jerry Leigh’s licensors, and VF Corporation. While Jerry Leigh contributed over $200,000 to pay the workers, VF Corporation refused to pay a single cent of severance.

• On February 21, 2013, union leaders at E Garment, a supplier of collegiate apparel for VF Corporation, were violently attacked during a peaceful strike by thugs in collusion with factory management. Following repeated efforts to press VF to take action, VF agreed to intervene with the factory and told the WRC that corrective action, including rehiring of workers who were illegally fired, would be taken. However, VF did not agree to all of the actions necessary to correct the violations. Shortly thereafter, an agreement was signed between the factory, CCA/YOU union officials and the Fair Labor Association that included provisions that violated...
Cambodian law and university codes. Of note, the agreement illegally revoked the right of the striking E garment workers and union members to return to work when the strike ended.

- VF contracts with factories in Haiti where wage theft in the garment industry has increased to the point where workers are being denied 1/3 of their legally due wages. Earlier this year, Better Work Haiti reported that every single one of the country’s export garment factories was violating the country’s legal minimum wage. While other companies like Fruit of the Loom have stepped up to ensure their factories pay the proper minimum wage, VF has refused to do anything to end massive wage theft in Haiti.

Students and Workers Are Fighting Back:

- Students have successfully pressured Duke University, University of Pennsylvania, Temple University, New York University, Penn State University, Georgetown University, and Cornell University to require its licensees, including VF Corporation, to sign the Bangladesh Safety Accord. In response to the growing university action, eight college-logo apparel producers – Fruit of the Loom, Adidas, Knights Apparel, Top of the World, Utopia Headwear, New Agenda, Cutter & Buck, and Ahead, LLC – have signed the Accord since students’ “End Deathtraps” campaign began in September.

- United Students Against Sweatshops is conducting a nationwide “End Deathtraps” worker tour with Kabora Alper, the leader of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity, and Reba Siddi, a survivor of the deadly Rana Plaza collapse. This tour will expose the hypocrisy of former VF Corporation’s safety scheme and call on universities to cut ties with VF brands, including jansport and VF Imagewear, unless the company signs the Accord.

GET INVOLVED
START A CAMPAIGN ON YOUR CAMPUS TO END DEATHTRAPS
Step 1: Get involved with your USAS local

Students across the country are working to demand that their university apparel be made in deathtrap-free conditions where there are proper fire and building safety mechanisms, including the active involvement of workers and their unions. Find out if your school already has a USAS local by e-mailing organize@usas.org

Step 2: Deliver a letter to your university Chancellor or President

In order to get your university to take action on this issue, it is necessary to inform your university’s president or chancellor of the current safety crisis in Bangladesh and how your university has a stake in making sure that its apparel is being produced in conditions in which workers don’t have to fear for their lives while at work. This can be done by requiring all licensees (companies who have the rights to produce your university apparel) to sign onto the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. Unless they agree to take this vital step, the brand should no longer retain the privilege of producing for your university, as it sends the message that your university doesn’t care about the workers who produce your apparel. Consequently, companies who refuse to sign onto the Accord should have their business with the university terminated.

Step 3: Take action!

Now that you have laid out your asks in a letter to your president, it’s time to follow up with fun and creative actions to help sway your university president to take action. Some ways that we are doing this is through:

Creative letter deliveries
Hosting ‘Worker Tour’ events with speakers from Bangladesh
Petitions
Coalition building
Rallies
Flashing lights
Guest editorials
Street theater
Study-ins

Don’t have a USAS local at your school? Get in touch to start one up!

Check out our organizing guide to find out how you can start up a group at your school and join in the fight to End Deathtraps today!

United Students Against Sweatshops
1155 Connecticut Avenue NW
Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036
organize@usas.org
Appendix C: Avaaz.org Advertisement Regarding H&M

In the past decade, hundreds of women have been killed, crushed, and burned in garment factory fires and collapses. Thousands more have been maimed and injured. They were mothers, daughters, and sisters. All to make our clothes and industry profits.

Let’s come together to end this tragedy. Don’t play the PR game. Sign the legally binding, enforceable safety accord that commits H&M to real action. Because your customers really genuinely care about the women of Bangladesh. And we hope that you do too.

Find out more: avaaz.org/guiltyfiredjacket
Appendix D: Mock-advertisements made by Greenpeace regarding companies who continued to do business with Asia Pulp and Paper.

For original images and context see: “Down to Zero” (Greenpeace South East Asia, 2013)

HSBC:

![HSBC advertisement](image)

Nestle/Kitkat:

![Nestle/Kitkat advertisement](image)
Copyright Acknowledgement

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